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"Explains in exquisite detail exactly how to land a tenure-track job. In her gentle but unshakably thorough way, Karen Kelsky shows through the critical topics that need to know, a woman's way to make the most of the inevitable weaknesses of the academic job market without it."

—Adam Rubin, author of *Women's Work*  
"It's tough out there, but no one understands how women's lives are lived better than Karen Kelsky. If you are a graduate student, a professor, or in other words, a woman, read this book. It will change the way you think about your career and the way you live."

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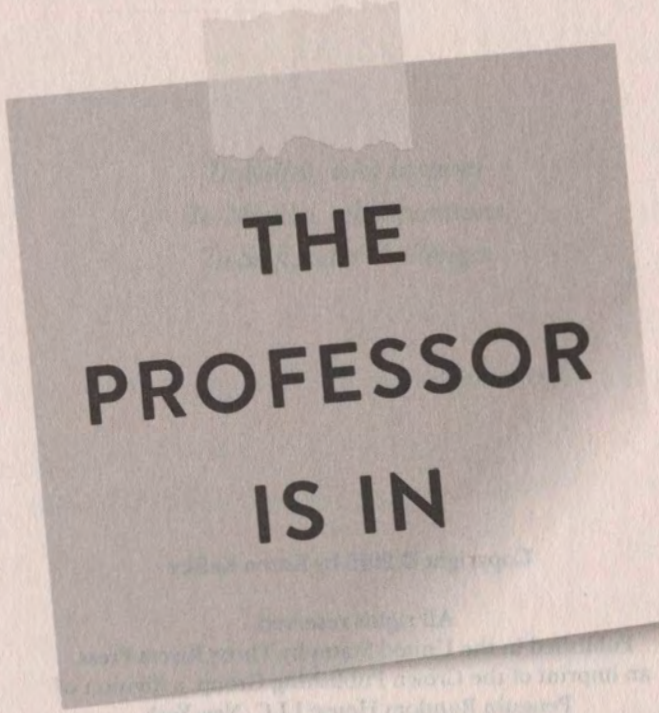
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—Greg M. Laidman, author of *Women's Work*  
"This is the book I wish I had when I was a grad student. It is a must-read for every woman who is considering a Ph.D. career today."

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**THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO  
TURNING YOUR PH.D. INTO A JOB**

**Karen Kelsky, Ph.D.**



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devote your time to the productivity that counts on the job market. And so you can decide when the effort exceeds the return on investment, and when it's time to move on to another career.

Is it strange that I run a business helping others get into a career that I left? Some seem to think so, but I don't. I've been both happy and unhappy in the academic career. Not all campuses or departments are the same, and when you find a good match between your goals and a campus culture, the academic career can be delightful. I know what it means to enjoy an academic job, and I hope that a few lucky individuals still have the opportunity to do that.

For you, the tenure track job is probably still Plan A. You want the job because it's what you trained for and it is a job doing the things you most enjoy, particularly the research and teaching that you've mastered at such sacrifice and effort, over so many years. In this job you get to work with smart, like-minded colleagues. And in this job, once you get past tenure—and assuming that tenure continues to exist—you get unparalleled job security. Millions of graduate students pour their hearts and souls and dollars into graduate school training. The best thing you can do is to learn just how the tenure track job market works, how to plan for it from the first day of graduate school, how to perfect your applications for it, and how to decide when it's time to move on.

While I strongly believe in your ability to leave the academy and do other things (I devote the final part of the book to this topic), I know that you want to make your best effort to succeed in your Plan A. We don't know how much longer tenure track jobs will be around. But they're still around now in small numbers, so if you want to go after one, I support you.

## THREE

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### The Myths Grad Students Believe

Unfortunately, Ph.D. students are largely resistant to professionalization. It seems that many don't want to learn the truth of a collapsing academic job market any more than many faculty want to admit it. Far too many keep their heads firmly in the sand, preferring to fixate on the minutiae of immediate graduate school requirements—the classes, papers, comprehensive exams, and dissertation. They rest all their hopes in the completed dissertation as a magical talisman of scholarly success, unaware that it is scarcely more than a union card—the bare minimum proof of eligibility to apply for the rapidly disappearing jobs that allow for continued scholarly work.

Certainly they are encouraged in this by faculty advisors, who, when confronted with anxious reports from the job hunt, offer the easy evasion “just focus on your dissertation,” a<sup>s</sup> far preferable (for both advisors and advisees) to a hard conversation about an academy in crisis, on the one hand, or flaws in a student's record, on the other.

But on a grander scale, graduate students (particularly in the humanities) are some of the most earnest and uncritical devotee<sup>s</sup> of the Work of the Mind myth. Indeed, they enter graduate school in the belief that somehow the realm of the academic will be a grand departure from the competitive rat race that prevails in the corporate sector. “How wonderful!” they can often be heard saying: “I

can get *paid* (a paltry teaching assistant stipend, but paid nonetheless) to *think* (about continental philosophy/medieval Buddhism/ethnic nationalism/transgender identity/et cetera)!”

Many graduate students resent the message that the point of graduate school might be to prepare for an actual career, because it is the realm of the career and its grasping, self-interested imperatives from which they are so often fleeing.

Consequently, graduate students cling mightily to a number of hoary myths about the academic job market. Here is a partial list:

- “I am judged on the brilliance of my ideas, not on the lines on my curriculum vitae.”
- “I am a beloved teaching assistant and all of my years of TA experience will make me marketable.”
- “I heard of a guy who got a job without any publications.”
- “I’m not ambitious for a high-pressure job so I don’t need a fancy CV.”
- “I’ll be happy if I can just get a teaching job, so I don’t need a fancy CV.”
- “My advisor’s famous so I don’t need to worry.”
- “My discipline is doing fine.”
- “My committee says our department has a great placement rate.”
- “I didn’t go into this for the money.”
- “Those bad things happen to other people who aren’t as brilliant as I am.”
- “My passion sets me apart.”
- “I’m the exception.”

All culminating in a renewed doctrinal affirmation of the Work of the Mind: “The point of graduate school is not to prepare for a job, but to think great thoughts and contribute to human knowledge!”

As one grad student wrote in a review of a workshop I gave at one of the University of California campuses, “Dr. Kelsky’s advice of thinking about graduate school as a means to a job was both helpful and disheartening. . . . While I do agree that thinking long

term about how each thing you do in graduate school will shape your future, I also think that graduate school is much more than a means to a job. Graduate school is a place to explore, discover, and learn with others. It’s a place to talk and debate with intellectuals, innovate, and challenge the limits of knowledge in your field.”<sup>1</sup> She concluded, “The connections that you make in graduate school through getting involved, mentoring undergraduates, and teaching are invaluable. Although these may not show up as a line on your CV, they will shape who you are and help you during your job interview.”

This reviewer is wrong, of course, that “getting involved, mentoring . . . and teaching” are going to “help you during your job interview.” They are nice things, to be sure, indeed valuable things, and should be supported as general good practice. But make no mistake: They are not things that get a candidate short-listed.

It is understandable that graduate students would want to believe that dedication and passion get jobs. Passion is an important component of the graduate school enterprise—without it, how could someone finish a grueling years-long Ph.D. program? And in a different era—the high-growth 1950s and ’60s, for example—passion and dedication may have been the key to success. However, in an era of Olympics-level competition for today’s almost nonexistent tenure track slots, passion counts for the tenure track job market just as much as a passion for running gets a person to the Olympic gold medal podium. In short, it counts only as the motivator for a set of specific skills leading to a narrow set of quantifiable and mostly objective outcomes, in this case publications, grants, targeted teaching experience, and impressive references.

And while you may not be particularly concerned about the objective career imperative at twenty-five, when you are just starting out on your graduate school journey, by thirty-four, fatigued from years of deprivation and often with new household obligations, health expenses, or dependents, passion doesn’t pay the bills. And neither, unfortunately, does teaching, if it’s happening in the adjunct classroom.

One common tactic graduate students turn to in an effort to appear “realistic” while allowing denial to remain intact is a

preemptive rhetorical reduction of career aspirations. This arises in statements such as:

- “I am not too ambitious.”
- “I don’t need much money.”
- “I don’t need a high-ranking position.”
- “As long as I can teach at some small college, I’ll be happy.”

As if a lowered career bar renders the job seeker immune to market forces. This rhetorical move is usually combined with the previously mentioned overinvestment in the value of teaching. Former adjunct Nathaniel C. Oliver described this rationalization as it once influenced his early adjuncting days:

I’ve always been frugal in my spending habits, so the low pay did not bother me much at first, assuming as I did that after a few years of apprenticing, I would be moved up to full-time, as long as my work continued to be acceptable to my superiors. At times, it was difficult to accept that I was teaching a full course load while making poverty-level wages, but again, I assumed that my diligence would be rewarded, not with riches, but simply with a comfortably middle-class job. Like all academics, I have always had big dreams for myself, but I felt that time had made my aspirations more modest and therefore, more attainable.<sup>2</sup>

There aren’t many other words to describe this graduate student stance toward the academic job market than denial. Denial, and a willingly dependent and juvenile subject position. The graduate student in the rhet/comp event described in chapter 2, after all, turned to her professors for “hope.” And the blogger Ann Larson wrote that she anxiously awaited words of “comfort.” But why should tenured professors be repositories of hope or comfort? In fact, Brereton’s message—stick with your program and you’ll get a job—is precisely a message of hope and comfort. The students know that it is profoundly wrong (“the audience murmured in disagreement”) but can’t bring themselves to stop seeking the reassurance. It should be clear by now that asking professors for hope

and comfort is seeking a false reassurance that professors can still, somehow, make everything turn out all right. It’s asking for a bedtime story. It exposes a stance of childlike dependency, not a position of self-reliance.

In a *Chronicle of Higher Education* piece, William Pannacker described the reactions of would-be graduate students to his writing on reasons to avoid graduate school in the humanities:

The follow-up letters I receive . . . are often quite angry and incoherent; [the writers have] been praised their whole lives, and no one has ever told them that they may not become what they want to be, that higher education is a business that does not necessarily have their best interests at heart. Sometimes they accuse me of being threatened by their obvious talent. I assume they go on to find someone who will tell them what they want to hear: “Yes, my child, you are the one we’ve been waiting for all our lives.”<sup>3</sup>

He, too, urged a prompt rejection of this childlike subject position: “It can be painful, but it is better that [those] considering graduate school in the humanities should know the truth now, instead of when they are 30 and unemployed, or worse, working as adjuncts at less than the minimum wage under the misguided belief that more teaching experience and more glowing recommendations will somehow open the door to a real position.”

There is no “safe haven” for Ph.D.’s on the academic job market. Telling and hearing the truth requires quite the opposite of puerile messages of hope. To avoid the Ph.D.-adjunct-debt spiral, you must first face the truth of the collapsing academic economy yourself. You must choose, consciously, an approach that minimizes risk and maximizes return on your investment of time and money in the Ph.D. enterprise. And you must declare independence from any advisor who peddles false hope.

To do this, you must use every year in graduate school to produce a record oriented precisely to the demands of the tenure track market, while keeping an eye open to nonacademic options. This effort should start not in your final year in the program, but much earlier; it is possible to begin preparing for the academic and nonacademic

job market even before you enter graduate school, and to deliberately adapt your strategy as you move through the program. In this way you take an autonomous, adult stance toward your own professional future, rather than putting it in the hands of in loco parentis advisors.

Never forget: Your advisor keeps drawing his paycheck whether you get hired or not. Your advisor pays his mortgage whether you can pay rent or not. Unhappy that your advisor doesn't have your back? Have your own back. Protect yourself.

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**PART II**  
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**GETTING YOUR  
HEAD IN  
THE GAME**

**N**ow that you have a job, you can start to think about the future. One of the most important things you can do is to get your head in the game. This means that you need to be proactive in your job search. You should not wait until you are in a desperate situation to start looking for a new job. Instead, you should start looking for a new job as soon as you have a job. This will help you to stay on top of the job market and to be in a better position to take advantage of any opportunities that arise. You should also make sure that you are always up-to-date on the latest trends in your field. This will help you to stay competitive and to be able to make informed decisions about your career. Finally, you should make sure that you are always networking. This means that you should be talking to other people in your field, both inside and outside of your organization. This will help you to stay informed about the latest opportunities and to be able to make informed decisions about your career.

## FIVE

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### Stop Acting Like a Grad Student!

The biggest challenge for the tenure track job seeker is not finishing the dissertation, churning out publications, or cultivating fancy recommenders. It is transitioning from the peon mentality of graduate school to the peer mentality of the job market. The inability to make this transition is one of the core causes of failure on the job market, and it is one about which most job seekers remain utterly unaware. Approaching the job market from the peon subject position means that almost every word of the job application materials will have a wheedling, pathetic, desperate tone that will render them distasteful to every reader. Substituting emotionalism and pandering—interspersed with overcompensating moments of wild grandiosity—for actual facts and evidence of the academic record renders the application materials worthless for the purposes of securing a job. The candidate is rejected again and again, and has no idea why. She has no conception that it is her entire presentation of self in terms of ethos and meta-message that is systematically sabotaging her chances with each and every application.

The irony of graduate training is this: The better a grad student you are the worse job candidate you make, because a properly socialized graduate student is one who has internalized a subject position of subordination to the will of the faculty. While in the realm of ideas, faculty will allow for—maybe even encourage—a certain

amount of independence in their graduate students, in the larger interpersonal “frame” of graduate training, they expect obsequiousness and deference. This is, of course, never expressed by faculty members and would likely be vehemently denied. Because the hierarchy is thus disavowed, graduate students have little means of recognizing how marked they are by their place in it. Consequently they are unlikely to recognize the ingrained patterns of deference and humility that characterize their written and spoken self-presentation, let alone overcome them.

The problem is, you write and speak like a graduate student. And the problem is, search committees aren’t looking for a graduate student; they are looking for a faculty colleague. They want not a peon but a peer. A collegial, pleasant, and courteous peer, to be sure. But a peer.

This identity misapprehension is just as likely to afflict the Ivy Leaguers as those from other programs. It is the biggest problem that job seekers have.

Here, I sketch the most common ways that you act like a grad student, and sabotage yourself in your job search.

#### 1. You Drone On and On About Your Dissertation

Please stop talking about your dissertation. Nobody really wants to hear about your dissertation. We do not care about your dissertation. By which I mean, the dissertation that you wrote in graduate school. What we care about is what you produce from the dissertation that translates into CV lines.

Remember: Search committees don’t want to know about your dissertation beyond proof that you wrote one and that it’s (soon to be) finished and defended. What they want to know is how that dissertation accomplishes specific goals that serve the hiring department: that is, how it produces refereed publications, intervenes in a major scholarly debate, wins grants and awards, translates into dynamic teaching, transforms quickly into a book (if you’re in a book field), and inspires a viable second project.

In interview situations, learn to talk about your dissertation in

short, punchy bursts, no more than a few sentences at a time. This gives your interlocutor the chance to say, "How interesting! Tell us more about that." To which you respond in another short, punchy burst. Please recall that interviews are dialogues. They are not monologues. Think of a tennis match. They lob the ball, you lob the ball back. Relate all elements of the dissertation to specific elements of productivity, such as participation in debates in the field, publications, grants, and so on.

## 2. You Think People Are Out to Get You in Your Department

Beware paranoia, which is endemic to graduate student life.

With very rare exceptions, faculty barely even think about the graduate students in their departments, beyond asking, once a year, whether any of them will just finish already so the dean can get off their back about their pitiful completion rate. The people in the department want you to finish. Period. Whatever that takes, that's what they want you to do. So just do that, OK?

Paranoia is unattractive, and a major red flag signaling an immature candidate. You may think that your dark insinuations of how your project really offended some people in your department make you look mysterious and misunderstood, but actually they make you look tiresome. Regardless of how you were treated in your department, say nothing but collegial things about it on the market. Because how you talk about your Ph.D. department suggests how you will talk about your future department. And your future department wants a colleague who has a positive attitude.

## 3. You Think People Are Out to Get You in Your Discipline

You're sure that your "radical" perspective/argument/position/stance has earned you powerful enemies in the field. It likely has not. Likely few people are even thinking about you. If you're getting

negative responses to your work, it's likely not because your argument single-handedly overturns the foundational orthodoxy of your field and has inspired widespread jealousy and resentment. It's because the work is not yet good enough. As irritating as many academics are, they generally do respect sound argumentation backed up with compelling evidence. Provide those, and chances are your "radical" perspective will get a hearing. I'm not saying you won't have to fight for your perspective. But it has a good chance of being a fair fight, not a case of your total persecution by the powers that be in your field.

Tales of victimization, such as how your "argument really pissed off some people," at the last conference, will not make you look desirable. They will make you look like a drama queen. And one thing no search committee wants? A drama queen.

## 4. You Constantly Repeat Your Main Point

Graduate students are insecure. This is understandable, because their status is insecure. One outcome of the insecurity is that you tend to pile on examples that "prove" that your topic is a legitimate one. It's the classic dissertation disease of seeing your topic in every single thing in the world. Everyone suffers this to some degree when they are at your stage. Further clues to this issue are phrases in your writing such as, "This is evidence that my topic is an important one," or "thus demonstrating the urgency of research such as mine."

A myopic obsession with your dissertation topic, the overuse of examples to prove its significance, and the pleading insistence on its importance are all hallmarks of immaturity as a scholar and potential colleague. Search committees are looking for a colleague who might be fun to talk to. What that means is someone who is confident that their topic is sound, who gives a reasonable amount of evidence for the topic, and who can show its importance to major debates in the scholarly field. And then who can talk about something else that is actually interesting.

## 5. You Make Excuses for Yourself

This is the one that if I had superpowers, I would reach through the pages of this book, grab you by your collar, and shake out of you. Right now.

Graduate students are so conditioned to dealing with intimidating advisors that they're like the Pavlov's dogs of excuses.

Professor: Hi. How are you?

Grad student: I'm sorry I didn't get that chapter in to you! I got sick over the weekend, but I'll have it done this week, I promise!

Professor: You were sick? Oh, no! How are you feeling now?

Grad student: I have a 102 fever but it's OK—I spent the morning in the library, and as soon as I get through teaching my three sections, I plan to skip dinner and make up for the writing I didn't get done over the weekend!

Professor: Wow, take care of yourself.

Grad student: It's OK! I can write through the delirium!

Stop that! Stop it now!

Excuses are what you make when you start from the default of what you haven't done, or have not yet read. I call this the grad student default to the negative, and I'll return to it later in the book.

For now, when someone on the search committee asks, "How would you teach our intro course?" you do not answer in any of the following ways:

- "I haven't really had a chance to teach a big course before, so I'm not sure how I'd do it."
- "I'm not sure how your department likes it to be done, so I'd definitely follow your lead on that."
- "I taught it last year but it didn't really go all that well, so I'd want to make a lot of changes."

No, those are excuses. Instead, you answer in one of these ways:

- "I enjoy teaching large courses because I get to reach a new set of undergraduates and show them all the things our field can do."
- "I will use X textbook because I find that to be the best one, and I will augment it with some unconventional materials like Y and Z."
- "I will take a balanced approach that introduces the X perspective and the Y perspective. Obviously my own work falls more in the X camp, but it's important in an intro class that the full scope of the field is well represented."

You are the expert. You are in command. Perhaps you haven't taught the intro course before—that matters not. You prepare, so that you can speak about how you will. When speaking of your research, reject the temptation to harp on what you "still need to address." Focus exclusively on what it does achieve. Embrace the positive.

## 6. You Wait for Permission

I could build a new wing on my house if I had a nickel for every client who explained their lack of publications by saying "My advisor never told me to publish." Or who told me they lost a year on the job market because their advisor said they "weren't ready." Or who never went to a conference because their advisor never suggested they should.

If your advisor doesn't do these things, then you have to do them for yourself as best you can. And make no mistake: Ultimately, responsibility for your job market preparation is on you.

Nobody told you to publish? Really? You really never once grasped after eight years in a graduate program, reading hundreds of refereed journal articles a year, that publishing a refereed journal article on the subject of your dissertation might be a thing you'd need to do?



“Nobody encouraged me to go to the national meetings”? Well, why did you wait to be encouraged? You know they’re there! They happen every year! Surely you heard that the faculty were going? And some of your friends?

In a similar vein, don’t ask for permission to apply for jobs. Many candidates are tempted to contact the department or search committee to anxiously explain their record and ask whether they make an appropriate candidate. This is a pointless exercise. If you are eligible to apply for the job, apply for the job. Don’t wait to be given permission by the department. No summary of your qualifications in an email or phone call is a substitute for a comprehensive presentation of your record. And one person’s opinion about your record is not a substitute for the deliberation of the committee as a whole.

The fact is, searches are unpredictable. While the ad may list several specializations, those are not necessarily the specializations that will come to govern the ultimate decision. This may arise from something as simple as the fact that the faculty member who insisted the ad prioritize X, back in the previous spring, is on unexpected research leave this fall. The rest of the search committee, now freed of the imperative to prioritize X, can focus on Y or Z, as they had hoped to all along. Or perhaps colleague Jones, the department’s specialist on China, got an unexpected job offer and abruptly left campus over the summer. Suddenly China looms large as a priority of the department, even though it is nowhere listed in the ad. The combination of possible circumstances is endless. The point is, you don’t know them.

So don’t querulously ask for permission to apply. If you meet the minimum conditions of the job, apply for the job. And don’t wait to be told to prepare for the job market. I hope that your department and advisor are assisting, but ultimately, that is on you.

## 7. You’re Submissive

Graduate students tend to display the classic signs of submission—tilted head (ref: your puppy), bowed shoulders, tightly crossed legs, weak and vague hand gestures, a tentative, questioning tone. You

have a wimpy, cold fish handshake. You avoid direct eye contact. You mumble and mutter and talk too fast, and, above all, you ramble in an unfocused and evasive way. You will often either smile and laugh too much, or conversely be grimly humorless (a sense of humor being one of the first casualties of the graduate school experience).

Few people have all of these traits, to be sure. But most grad students have some of them.

You must square your shoulders, straighten your back, lift your chin, and loosen your elbows. Take up all the space in the chair. You can do this even if you are a small woman because it’s in the body language. See Amy Cuddy’s influential TED talk for tips on how to do this and why it matters.<sup>1</sup> As she famously says, “Our bodies change our minds, our minds change our behavior, and our behavior changes our outcomes.”

Make direct eye contact. Do not, under any circumstances, fuss with your hair, clothes, or jewelry. Speak in a firm, level tone. Women, speak in a lower register if you can—for better or worse, lower tones are the tones of authority. Smile in a friendly way at the beginning and end, but not too much while you’re talking about your work. If a joke arises naturally in the conversation, of course run with it. Search committees love a sense of humor, when it’s displayed in the course of smart collegial repartee. But in general your work is important and deserves a serious delivery.

Beware of mumbling, rambling, and trailing off indistinctly. Your listeners need to know when you have finished speaking, so that they can respond and a dialogue can ensue.

And, lastly, attend to your handshake. If you do nothing else from this chapter, please, I beg you, do this. Get up from your chair, go find a human, and shake their hand. Shake it firmly. Really squeeze! Outstretch your arm, grip their hand with all your fingers and thumb, look them firmly in the eye, smile in a friendly, open way, and give that hand a nice, firm shake. Repeat. Do this until it’s second nature. If it doesn’t feel right or you aren’t sure if you’re doing it right, find an alpha male in your department, and ask him to teach you.

Banish the wet noodle handshake.

Seriously, grad students, butch it up.

graduate students gain experience on a search committee in their department. It gives you the inside view of how a job search is run, and how candidates are discussed and evaluated. I don't have a chapter on service; my advice on service can be summarized in the line with which I started: Don't do too much of it, and don't devote much space to it in your job documents.

## FIFTEEN

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### Getting Teaching Experience

One of the hard truths of the job market is that TA experience counts very little as teaching experience for the purposes of the job hunt. There is an unbridgeable chasm between the work of a TA and the work of a sole instructor, and when search committees review files, they are prioritizing experience as a sole instructor. Now, before you raise your voice in protest against the blatant unfairness of it all ("How can I get my first teaching job if I have to have teaching experience to get it?"), rest assured that search committees by and large do understand that everybody has to start somewhere, and new Ph.D.'s and ABDs may still be desirable hires even without much (or any) record of teaching. However, to strengthen your record for the purposes of the job hunt, you will want to have solo-teaching experience if you can get it. This chapter addresses how.

Start with your own department. Many departments offer their advanced ABDs the opportunity to teach their own courses, precisely for the reasons outlined above. If your department offers this option, take it, and maximize it to teach a course that is either a) closely tied to your own research interests, or b) one of the bread-and-butter intro, theory, or methods courses that every department across the land is always seeking to staff. When you go out on the job market, you will most often be asked about your ability to teach both of these types of classes.

If your department is one of those that uses the term “TA” even when a graduate student is the sole instructor, be vigilant to clarify your actual status as sole instructor in all of your job documents.

Now, if your own department does not provide these opportunities, then you must search elsewhere. Start on your own campus, and see if related departments or campus centers might have openings, or offer competitive awards that include developing and teaching your own course. On one of my former campuses, the gender studies program ran an annual competition for an award that allowed a graduate student to propose, create, and teach an original class (and get paid decently for teaching it).

Once you’ve exhausted the options on your campus, look outside. Cast your net widely to encompass any and all higher education institutions in your area, from elite universities to community colleges. Any solo-teaching experience is better than no solo-teaching experience, even if it is at a low-ranking local college. Get your name on the adjunct/instructor lists for all departments even tangentially related to your area of expertise, on all campuses that you can reasonably reach. Don’t hesitate to call or email the heads of these departments to inquire about possible openings, and don’t forget to inquire again just before the start of each semester. When I was a department head, I was amazed at how often I found myself without a warm body to put in front of a scheduled course, just a few weeks before the semester’s start. On at least one occasion an opportune phone call from a local Ph.D. at the right time proved the solution to my problem.

Of course, you’ll also be perusing the job pages of all colleges and universities in your area.

Beware the grad student-ish tendency to assume that you can’t teach courses outside your area of expertise, department, or discipline. You may feel unqualified to pose as an expert about anything other than your dissertation topic, but when it comes to undergraduate teaching, the fact is, if you can read it, you can probably teach it.

By virtue of your years in graduate school, you have the ability to read and assimilate information quickly, a knack for grasping key points and arguments, a basic understanding of how to organize a

course, and the will to pontificate for hours on end. Ergo, you have all the skills you need to teach virtually any course that is within a wide throwing distance of your field. Can a cultural anthropologist teach biology? Probably not. But depending on her research specializations, she can plausibly consider teaching in sociology, linguistics, religious studies, women’s and gender studies, ethnic studies, international studies, area studies, and perhaps even as far afield as cinema studies, economics, communications, or comparative literature. The classic advice to new university teachers is stay one week ahead of the students. And indeed, many courses have been taught on less. As long as you read ahead of your students, you can handle the class. And don’t forget, Google is your friend. Don’t be afraid to search widely for other courses on those topics, and “borrow” abundantly from your predecessors’ readings and assignments. Don’t worry, you’ll pay it forward later.

What about online teaching? Some online teaching experience is good to have, and if that is all you have available to you, then pursue it. Indeed, increasing numbers of campuses are seeking some online teaching experience for their regular faculty hires. However, online teaching is never the equivalent of face-to-face teaching experience for most tenure track job searches.

What about high school teaching? In most cases outside of the field of education, this will not assist your job search. High school teaching just doesn’t count as university teaching experience, and you can’t really mine it for credibility in a tenure track job search. One possible exception might be teaching at elite prep schools where the Ph.D. is a required qualification. This still would not substitute for college or university level teaching, but it might carry some weight on your record.

If you are on the market without solo-teaching experience, all is not lost. You’ll want to develop syllabi or course descriptions for courses you could teach—both basic introductory, theory, and methods courses, as well as several specialized classes based on your work. Many graduate programs make the creation of a course syllabus an element of their comprehensive or qualifying exams. This is an excellent practice. Even if yours doesn’t have this formal requirement, you can use your exams as foundations for courses.

Just be sure that the syllabus you create is a teachable, manageable one for students, and not a stealth effort to show off your command of a literature. Search committees don't need a recitation of all you've read. They need to know that you can teach a viable class.