

Writing a Curriculum Vitae



A *curriculum vitae* (Latin for “the course of one’s life”), or CV, is a comprehensive statement of your educational background, teaching and research experience, and other academic qualifications and activities. In academic circles, the CV is the foundation of any application for employment, funding, awards, fellowships, or grants. A CV can serve other purposes as well, such as providing the basis for an annual review by your employer or for introductions at conference presentations. Many search committees will look at the CVs of job candidates before anything else in screening applications. It is therefore extremely important that your CV effectively communicate the range and scope of your qualifications while highlighting your particular teaching and research strengths. **Because CV styles and norms vary from one discipline to another, you should have your CV reviewed by faculty in your department/field before sending it out!** The Graduate School of Arts and Sciences (GSAS) career counselor also provides critiquing services.

In contrast, a *resume* is not comprehensive. It is a snapshot (usually one to two pages in length) of one’s qualifications intended to demonstrate fitness for a particular position or type of work. A resume focuses attention on an individual’s strongest selected qualifications—not a full history of them—and develops them to fit a specific or general purpose.

Unlike a resume, your CV will lengthen as you establish yourself professionally. A graduate student typically has a two- to four-page document that grows as s/he progresses along the career path. In creating your CV, you should present a trajectory of your life as a scholar, teacher, and researcher from the time you began your academic career. All information on your CV should be arranged in **reverse chronological order**, listing the most recent accomplishment first in each section.

Like a resume, **your CV should be tailored to particular purposes** to highlight your strengths as they apply. Doing so is both wise marketing and common sense. It shows your readers that you think like they do and speeds their effort in evaluating your candidacy. The easier it is for them to screen you “in,” the better your chances of making the cut. Driving readers to search for information can frustrate them and decrease your odds. For example, in seeking employment at academic institutions whose missions and objectives may differ, you should rethink the presentation and arrangement of the information on your CV for each audience. When applying to research institutions, it is wise to list your research, publications, presentations, and awards prominently at the beginning. List your teaching experience first when applying to small liberal

arts schools or community colleges, and showcase any community or academic service on your record.

CVs are also used in some non-academic circles, particularly those with strong research components. If you are uncertain whether to use a CV or a resume, ask yourself, “Am I sending this document to other PhDs?” “Is my PhD required for this position?” “Is my scholarship relevant?” If yes, you should probably use a CV, which provides more detail about your academic background than a typical resume.

Elements of the CV

Good organization and an effective use of section headings guide your audience in assessing your qualifications. Sub-headings in lengthy sections can further facilitate this process. Below are commonly used section headings with descriptions:

Identification (as this section opens your CV, omit the heading)

Include your name (set apart prominently at the top of the first page, using boldface, capitalization, a larger font size, etc. at your discretion), address, complete telephone number/s, and e-mail address. Some people include both personal and department addresses to emphasize their current academic affiliation.

*Citizenship/Date and Place of Birth: In some fields this information is customarily included, most frequently for funding considerations (e.g. for a grant-funded postdoctoral position). In other fields it would be viewed as inappropriate. Follow the norm in your field.

Education

List all institutions, degrees, and graduation dates in reverse chronological order. If you attended an institution but did not earn a degree, you do not need to list it on your CV unless the training you received was vital to your career – language courses taken abroad, for instance. Some postdoctoral researchers include their postdoctoral training here, other include it under their research section; follow the norm in your field.

Dissertation/Dissertation Abstract

You may list the title of your dissertation beneath the information on your doctoral degree, as well as the name of your chair/advisor and/or committee members. Some fields require a longer description (about a paragraph) of the dissertation on your CV, generally under a separate section entitled “Dissertation Abstract,” while other fields expect dissertation research to be listed under “Research Experience.” Follow the norm in your field. If an abstract is not required, you may elect to include a very brief description after the title – two to three sentences at most.

Awards, Fellowships, Honors, Grants

List all relevant academic distinctions, teaching awards, fellowships, honors, or grants you have received since you entered graduate school in reverse chronological order. Include the name of the department and institution bestowing the honor. Include undergraduate honors and fellowships if

they are relevant to your field or indicate exceptional academic achievement (e.g., summa cum laude, Phi Beta Kappa, etc.).

Publications, Creative Work

Include bibliographic citations of articles, research reports, and book reviews that you have published. If applicable to your field, poems, musical recitals, or art exhibits may be included in this section. Depending upon your discipline, as you gain experience, you will further separate these items into different categories, such as “book review,” “articles in refereed journals,” books,” etc. Use the form of citation appropriate to your field. In order to list something as “forthcoming” in this section, you should have a reasonably firm sense of when the publication will appear in print, unless otherwise directed by your advisor.

Presentations/Meeting Abstracts

List all papers/talks you have given, along with the names, dates, and locations of the conferences or meetings where you presented that work. If you have numerous publications, you may choose to list only invited talks or selected abstracts. If you presented your work at a University of Virginia symposium or workshop, you may also list the talk here if it was a substantial piece of work or something directly relevant to your research agenda.

Work Submitted, Work in Progress

In some fields, it is fairly standard for scholars to add sections entitled “Work Submitted: and “Work in Progress” to their CVs. Often these can be listed under a subheading in the publications section. If you have an article or book under review at a refereed journal or academic press, you should list it under the category “Work Submitted for Publication.” In this way, you can inform employers that you have enough confidence in your work to submit it for publication. If you are an experienced candidate, or want to change jobs, you will want to indicate the potential of publication on new projects by reporting your progress in a section entitled “Work in Progress.”

Research Experience

Most often used in some of the natural and social sciences, this category can include dissertation and possibly undergraduate and internship research. Typically, you describe your project(s) (including any techniques you mastered) and list the affiliated lab and/or professor.

Teaching Experience

Include all full-time, part-time, and adjunct teaching experience. For each position, list your title, the dates of employment (or semester and year), and the name (not the mnemonic) of each course you taught. Include a brief description of your responsibilities and the size of the course. Since job titles vary from one university to another, you need to tell the employer something about your level of involvement in the course design, preparation of materials, weekly instruction, and grading.

Research Interests, Teaching Interests/Competencies (separate sections)

In some fields it is effective to list your current research and/or teaching interests. When listing your teaching interests or competencies, be sure to list general as well as specialized categories so

that employers know you are capable and willing to teach the undergraduate and general education requirements offered in their departments. This is especially important for junior scholars who may not have yet had the opportunity to teach all areas of their expertise.

Professional Training/Related Work Experience

List any special professional training you received in your department or through a professional organization in this section. Such training may include special courses on pedagogy or teaching techniques, professional seminars offered by a professional organization, or technical or computer training completed in addition to your regular coursework. If you have non-academic work experience that is relevant to your application, list and describe such experience here.

Languages

List your language skills, as well as some indication of your level of expertise (e.g., “Reading knowledge of French and German” or “Fluent in Hindi; working knowledge of Swahili”).

Professional Affiliations and Service

List the major professional organizations to which you belong or with which you are affiliated. If you have served actively in one or more of these organizations, you may wish to indicate the level or your involvement as well.

Academic Service, Community Outreach

If you have served on any committees (such as graduate advisory or search committees in your department or any appointed or elected position in the university), list the experience here. You may also note in this category any talks you gave or meetings you arranged in your department about professional issues in your field. Demonstrating service will tell employers that you are a good citizen in your current department and institution. If you have volunteered your time in other ways related to your discipline within the community at large (e.g., judging a science fair, school and museum outreach, etc.), you can list such activities here as well.

References

Either at the end of your CV or in a separate “References” document, list the names, titles, and academic affiliations of your references. List your references in order of importance (e.g. your dissertation director/advisor first, followed by other members of your committee or other advisors who know your work well). It is customary to list the mailing and e-mail addresses and telephone numbers of your references. Follow the standard practice in your field.

General Tips on Form and Style

Even though content determines the length of your CV, you should aim for a tightly constructed, succinct and efficient presentation of your credentials. **There is no excuse for typographical error in your CV.** Proofread and ask others to proofread for you. Careless errors send a very bad message. Begin your CV well before you need to submit it to allow time for critiques and proofreading.

It is also exceedingly important to be **clear** and **consistent** both in form and content. Use unambiguous, concise descriptive language that facilitates speedy processing of critical information. Avoid overly dense text with little white space separating entries. Create an **organizational hierarchy** and apply it consistently throughout your CV.

- The title heading “Curriculum Vitae” is commonly used but optional.
- Each page after the first should bear your name and the page number in a header or footer. Because maintaining a CV is iterative, you should get in the practice of updating it at least every six months to a year. Many scholars include a “revised” date in a footer on the first page.
- Use an 11- or 12-point font size with 1”- to 1 ½”-inch margins.
- Use action verbs, measured descriptions, parallel grammar, no first-person pronouns, and little punctuation.
- Be careful not to pluralize section headings that cover one entry only.
- Keep dates to the right as opposed to listing them first in your sections. The reader’s eye naturally gravitates to the left—you want your biggest selling points there (e.g. your pedigree/school, your job title, etc.).
- Use **boldface**, *italics*, and spacing to highlight information, but be consistent and sparing in your use. Overuse distracts readers and defeats your purpose.
- Avoid graphics, shading, and underlining; if you use lines, put at least ¼” inch of white space around them.
- References to electronic materials/web links: Feel free to cite electronic references to articles, portfolios, courses, etc., particularly to show your technical prowess if you created the site. Personal web pages should be referenced only if all material presented is professional. Irrelevant text (e.g. vacation photos, personal narratives, etc.) may turn off some members of your audience.
- All CVs should be laser-printed in black ink on white or light-colored, 8 ½” x 11” bond paper (look for “resume paper” at the U.Va. Bookstore).

Note: It has become more common to see headshot photographs on CVs, particularly in the natural sciences. Think about what information this text communicates and be aware that some search committees may cover up the photo in adherence to anti-discriminatory policies.

Recommended Resources

The Chronicle of Higher Education “Careers” web page at www.chronicle.com/jobs
See especially the CV Doctor in the “Tools & Resources” section.

The Academic Job Search Handbook (Mary Morris Heiberger & Julia Miller Vick, 2001)

The Curriculum Vitae Handbook: Using Your CV to Present and Promote Your Academic Career (Gerald Roe & Rebecca J. Anthony, 1998)

Job Search in Academe: Strategic Rhetorics for Faculty Job Search Candidates (Dawn M. Formo & Cheryl Reed, 1999)

Cracking the Academia Nut: A Guide to Preparing for Your Academic Career (Margaret Newhouse, 1997)

To Boldly Go: A Practical Career Guide for Scientists (Peter Fiske, 1996)