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Resume vs CV- Differences and when to use which

February 4, 2014



"Your CV is so impressive, we're interested in hiring the person who wrote it"

The terms resume and CV are often used interchangeably, implying that the two are similar. When in fact, both have distinct usage, different way of writing and even cater to different audiences. It serves well if you know the important differences so that you may correctly draft each one of them.

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A CV (or 'Course of Life' in Latin) is an in-depth document that can extend to two or more pages and lists your achievements in detail. The CV covers your education, work experience as well as awards/honors/projects or published papers. The document is usually organized chronologically (meaning, starting from the first work experience till the most recent) which should make it easy to have an overview of an individual's full working career.

[Tip: A CV (and resume too) should be formatted in such a way that it's easy to add/delete information. Do not include unnecessary lines/boxes/headings/columns/page margins. The document should be easy on the eyes of the employer]

Unlike a CV (which is mostly static, what changes is the Cover Letter), a resume is a highly customizable document which should be tailored for every position you apply for. It is usually a page long and one should be as concise and to the point as possible. The goal of a resume is to make an individual stand out from the competition. It should only contain the summary of your education and relevant job experience, minus the high detail.

[Tip: While in a CV, it's a good practice to list your achievements/work experiences chronologically, in a resume it should be listed in a reverse chronological order, meaning starting with the most recent. Always mention the duration of all previous jobs/trainings.]

Now that we know the basic difference, we should keep in mind the purpose each one is used for. Usually a CV is used when applying for an academic/research career. Because to a professor/university, your skills and expertise in various technical projects/courses will count much more than *a specific skill*. He would want to know what is it that you have done previously in the field of research that makes you the suitable choice for an intern. Moreover, list out your achievements/awards and honors in detail complete with the year of receiving.

[Tip: Always add a brief description of what YOU did in all projects/trainings that you mention in your CV. Do not describe the whole project there, mention your specific contributions to it. For

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eg. “Developed simulation algorithm and code in MATLAB. Graphed, assessed and organized final results”.]

A resume, on the other hand, is mostly used for screening applications for a job opening. Therefore, it is highly likely that an experienced HR manager in a top company maybe looking at it. That makes it crucial to include only the relevant information (as he generally wouldn't have much time to read about your school scholarships) and organize it in an efficient manner. Mention previous work experiences complete with, again, what you did rather than what you were supposed to do. Do not add the “declaration of truthfulness” at the end, that's just a gimmick to take up valuable space on a resume. Of course what you've written is bound to be true! If it isn't, the employer would get to know that anyway during the interview.

[Tip: Start sentences with action keywords like “Led, Completed, Initiated, Undertook, Managed” to describe your job responsibilities and to make your resume more compelling.]

Writing an impressive resume/CV is paramount if you wish to get an interview call. Often, we think the contents of it make the difference. But how you present the information is also equally if not more important. It is the doorway to a potential job application and no matter how skilled an applicant may be, a resume that is not well presented can cost one an interview opportunity. Always get your resume/CV reviewed by professors/friends/family or colleagues.

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