



TiPPS for Writing and Tailoring Your Curriculum Vitae

WHAT IS A C.V. AND WHAT IS IT FOR?

- A Curriculum Vitae literally means “the story of your life” and **serves to highlight and summarize your educational background, professional experiences and activities, your skills, your accomplishments, and other information relevant to a prospective job.**
- A CV is similar to a resumé but is often longer, more detailed, and used particularly in academic circles and for certain professional jobs.
- **The goal of a CV is to get you an interview**, pure and simple. As many CV writing guides will tell you, it is your “**sales document**” to an employer showing how you will benefit them as an employee and meet their needs. If your CV whets their appetite and makes them want to know you more (read: interview), it has accomplished its purpose.

FORMATTING TIPS

- Employers typically scan CVs and like to find relevant information quickly. You can greatly aid this process by **making your CV well-organized and easy-to-read. Using headings, section breaks, “white space,” and bullets** to break up and separate otherwise long strings of text greatly aid in this process.
- You can also use bold-faced or italic type to draw the reader’s attention to what you want them to notice. (Use with consistency and moderation.)
- *Length* – CVs are generally 2 to 4 pages long at the beginning of a scholar’s career and will grow in length alongside a maturing career.
- *Paper* – Most CV guides recommend that you print your CV on **good quality paper that is white, off-white, or neutral** (i.e., beige, light gray, etc.). I prefer the latter two choices because it makes your CV stand out subtly from the typical white ones. Flashy colors, fancy decorations and borders, photographs, and pictures should be avoided because they detract from your text and often send the message that your content isn’t sufficiently attractive enough on its own.
- Print on one side of the paper only.

- The main goal here is to **look professional and organized and attract (and keep) the reader's attention.** (It is often said that if the reading of your CV proves difficult and it doesn't attract the reader's attention within the first 30 seconds, it will be bypassed.)

GENERAL TIPS FOR WRITING CVs

- **Typical sections in a CV:**
 - *Contact information* – Include your full name, current address and phone number (remove from CVs posted online), and professional email address. This should be at the very top of the front page of your document.
 - *Educational background* – Include degrees you've received (institution name, location, type of degree, major/minor), generally in reverse chronological order (most recent first). You might also want to list any relevant certificates you've received (i.e., teaching credential or training). You may also wish to list any academic honors or awards here or else you can put them in a separate section toward the end of the CV.
 - *Work experience* – **Include relevant job experiences (institution name, location, official job title, employment dates) as well as a listing of the duties responsible for, skills developed, and accomplishments achieved.** The latter will give the potential employer a good idea of what you have done already, and particularly if those previous duties, skills, and responsibilities relate to the job you are applying for, try to frame your work experience in a way that will help the potential employer make connections to duties/responsibilities for the job you are applying for. And most importantly, **be specific!** Saying "Taught English for 4 years" gives no indication of what skills you taught, how you taught it, what other responsibilities you had, etc. Remember, you are trying to show how your work experience has prepared you for the current job. Finally, **list your entries in reverse chronological order** (your most recent or most pertinent experiences should also be in fuller detail).
 - *Other sections* – Other sections you may wish to include are *Publications, Professional Affiliations & Activities, and/or Conference Presentations & Papers* to establish you as a professional in your field; a *Courses* section (if some courses you've taken are relevant to work that you will do); a *Skills* section listing your technical/computer skills, languages spoken (what level and with what degree of fluency); and an *Interests* section to list your professional and personal interests. (*References* can be included on a CV, but they should be tailored for the position and your recommenders should be asked for permission well in advance of sending your CV out.) A number of these categories are flexible; think of whether including them will help you get the job or will just be seen as "filler."

- **What NOT to include** – Do not include personal details (i.e., age, weight, height, race, marital status, children, religion, health, etc.), previous salary, reasons for leaving a previous job, or any information that can be misinterpreted negatively.
- **Don't lie!** - Whatever you claim you have accomplished or can do in your CV should be the truth. If you are caught in a lie during the interview or at work, it will put your job prospects, current and future, in jeopardy.
- Try not to leave gaps in your employment history. Most employers will be suspicious if some years are missing in your work history. (Where were you? On vacation?) If you should have a considerable gap in employment, be sure to address potential questions in your cover letter.
- **State facts, not opinions** –They're more convincing to an employer.
- These guidelines are specifically for the United States. **When applying for a job in a foreign country, find out what their resumé/CV requirements are.** They may be very different, and some of these things listed here may not apply or be the right thing to do.

A FEW COMMENTS ON STYLE

- **Remember – the purpose of your CV is to sell yourself.** Don't try to oversell yourself (brag, claim to do what you can't do or haven't done), and don't try to undersell yourself (be too modest) either. Your goal is to get the employer to notice you and call you in for an interview. Be positive and confident of your abilities.
- **Arrange and gear your CV to the employer you are sending it to.** Focus on the employer's needs. Nothing is as irritating as receiving a CV that is clearly generic in nature. You might keep templates of different versions of your CV on file to easily create the perfect CV for each job.
- **Often the first few words in a sentence are often the most powerful in a CV.** Make sure the important information is up front for the reader. Also try to make your text **specific and detailed.** Use **active verbs** (see <http://www.cmu.edu/career/documents/sample-resumes-cover-letters/action-verbs.pdf> for an example).

FINAL CHECK

- When you've completed your CV, **ask yourself the following questions** regarding what you've included: Will this help me or not? Have I included everything that will help me get this job? Is it easy to scan and read? Have I drawn attention to what I wanted the reader to notice?
- Get **feedback** from your friends or colleagues.

- By all means, make sure to **proofread** your CV for typos, grammar mistakes, and missing information. Always have a second set of eyes to check your final copy. Remember, your CV is often the first impression the employer has of you. Make it a good one!