

Tips on preparing your CV

Preparing a curriculum vitae (CV) is a great way to present your academic qualifications in a single, concise document. A good CV can give you an advantage when applying for a research opening, but a poorly crafted CV can work against you. Here are some tips for making your CV stand out!

First, it is important to think about what a CV is and what it is not. A CV should represent your qualifications by listing your education history and relevant work and/or volunteer positions, ongoing or completed (note that these are specific events and experiences). A CV does not typically include a description of your attributes or long-term goals, which may be better suited for a resume or cover letter. The CV is just one part of the picture; you will be able to (and should) put your accomplishments in context or highlight your skills in a cover letter or contact e-mail. That being said, remember to describe your accomplishments in a way that will highlight how you would be a good fit for the position you are seeking (for example, focus on the aspects of your previous jobs that could translate into working in a research lab environment).

Relevant information to put in your CV may include:

1. General information (your major, year in school, and contact info)
2. Any research or science-related experience
3. Other work and volunteer experience
4. Science-related coursework that you have completed (your potential mentors will not have access to your college transcript)
5. Awards and honors that you have received
6. Clubs and organizations that you are involved in
7. Areas of research that interest you
8. Any other pertinent experience or accomplishment that is relevant to your audience

While content is top priority, style and professional tone will set your CV apart. Where possible, space out text to prevent a blocky and crowded appearance, and put certain key pieces of information in bold or italics. Placing your experiences in reverse chronological order (i.e., with ongoing or most recent items first, followed by things you completed longer ago) is common and helps to highlight your current undertakings. Ask to see some CVs written by other students or search the internet for stylistic elements that you can introduce into your CV. The effort you put into making your CV look nice (and editing your CV so it sounds professional) will reflect well on you.

Some other suggestions for things to do and things to avoid:

- DO:** Be succinct. Avoid the urge to include information (such as a list of hobbies) that will not help the reader judge how well you qualify for the opening.
- DON'T:** Use slang or informal language. Your CV is a formal document, and should be written using a formal tone. Avoid contractions and idioms, and be sure to spell out all abbreviations that the reader may not be familiar with.
- DO:** Pay attention to verb tense. For completed jobs, use the past tense (e.g., “tested the effect of

sunlight on chlorophyll production”). For ongoing positions, use the present (e.g., “investigating the boundaries of mockingbird habitats”).

DON'T: *Use crazy fonts* or **brightly colored text**. Plain and simple goes a long way.

DO: Include basic contact information. Your e-mail address is probably the most helpful (choose a professional-sounding address), followed by a phone number, but including a mailing address is still appropriate. Contact information should appear at the top of the CV.

DON'T: Include additional information such as ethnicity, marital status, or a photograph.

DO: Put your most important content first. If you have previous research experience, put a description of that experience immediately after your education summary (major, year in school, etc.). Readers will give more weight to what comes first in the CV, and in some cases, they may not read all the way through to the end!

DON'T: Sell yourself short to save space. Try to include all relevant experiences. Even a job waiting tables can show that you are reliable and able to work with others, which are positive indicators.

DO: Proofread. Have a friend or professor look over your CV for spelling and grammatical errors.

DON'T: Assume that spell check will catch all mistakes. Many typos are real words, so spell check will not help you find those errors. Proofreading is tedious, but critical (so it is on this list twice!).

DO: Be consistent in how you format the items in your CV. If you include dates of employment for one position, include dates for all positions in the same manner. If you put one section heading in bold, put each section heading in bold. Watch for stray spaces and indentations.

A few technical notes: Convert your CV to a pdf and include your name as part of the file name. Doing so will help avoid Mac-to-PC conversion issues and will make sure your CV is not confused for another in the event that your recipient has a folder full of them. If the CV stretches beyond one page, it is also helpful to include your name and “page x of y” (e.g., “page 2 of 4”) in the corner of each page. This will help the recipient discover if they are missing any of your CV.

Don't let the length of this list discourage you, and don't feel like you have to write the entire CV in one afternoon! It is actually fun to write a CV and see how much you have accomplished, but it is worth spending the time to do it right. Best of luck!