



The aim of a Curriculum vitae (CV) is to showcase your qualifications, experience and skills to demonstrate that you meet the requirements for the position you are applying for. Your CV is the key document to get you an interview.

In some sectors, recruiters may spend only 30 s per CV when shortlisting so it is primordial that your CV is short and to the point, well organised and focused on demonstrating your fit for the position and not an extensive list of all your achievements in which the important information is lost. Too much information can badly reflect on you as it suggests that either you are incapable of summarising, don't get what the job is about or that you don't want the job enough to make the effort of summarising.

There is no such thing as a perfect CV and recruiters all have their own personal preferences. This document regroups some advice to help you write your CV but it is up to you to decide what suits your specific situation and to ignore some of it; it is your CV after all and you need to be happy with it!

1. Crucial points

- No lies!
- Relevant and tailored to job description (make a CV for each application)
- Professional looking (no typos, clear, concise and easy to read and navigate)

2. Format

It needs to make it easy for the recruiter to spot relevant information and to be read fast.

Document

"Fancy" templates with a lot of colours and little icons can look pretty but are usually not suited to your stage of career as don't allow to display enough information clearly. Use them only if they would help showcasing a required skill, in example if you are applying for a creative/marketing post or a job for which you have barely any experience. In general, sober, well-organised templates are preferable.

Submit a PDF clearly labelled with your name and job reference (e. g. CV Dr Lisa Simpson ref 478953).

Margins and presentation

2.54 cm all around; human eyes can't usually see comfortably wider than that at once!

Add a footer with the name of your document (thus yours!) and page numbers using the format "Page 1 of 2".

Keep your text aligned to the left ("justified" is harder to read fast) with sufficient spacing to emphasize different parts and categories.

Keep all titles, format and alignment consistent in the whole document.

Avoid colours as don't always look good when printed in black and white.

Text

Use a sans serif font like Arial, size 11-12 and bigger for headings. **Bold** is useful for emphasis (when not over-used!) but CAPITAL LETTERS, *italics* and underlining should be avoided as difficult to read fast.

Do not use full sentences (start with an action verb: "Developed...") and regroup information by theme using bullet points to avoid repeating the start of the sentence.

Length

Usually 2 pages (3 max! Publications and conferences can be added in annexe). For lectureships it can be slightly longer (3-4 pages max) but this doesn't mean that you can add irrelevant information or be wordier, so keep it clear and concise!

3. Content

The following parts are the classic way to organise an academic CV. Depending on the job you are applying for and of what you want to showcase, you may want to add/modify sections ("Technical skills" for example for a lab-based job) or the order in which to present them. In addition to personal preferences, CV rules vary depending on the employment sector and country so search for specific conventions. See "Other types of CV" for different ways to organise your CV.

Personal details

Use your name in big font as the title (no need to write "CV"), preceded by "Dr" or followed by "PhD" if you want, but not both.

Give your personal email (with your name in it; not a ridiculous one like "cheeckygirl1999"...) and mobile number, not your work ones.

In the UK no need for: picture, address (your personal address will usually be collected in the online application form), family status, gender, nationality, date of birth/age. Avoid providing any unrequired information that could trigger unconscious bias by the people shortlisting.

Qualifications

Last one first. As a PhD, leave out A-levels and GCSCs (except if listed in the job criteria).

Provide dates (start and finish), Diploma with a generic field and University. For your PhD, add the title of your thesis. Supervisor's names and details are not necessary (key achievements on PhD can be added if relevant or if you are at an early career stage).

Employment

List relevant employment in reverse-chronological order.

Focus on last 5 years. Previous employment should be added only if relevant to the post and can sometimes be grouped (2005 – 2012: multiple postdoctoral positions in Neurosciences). If older positions are relevant, you can list them but with less to no detail.

For each one provide dates (start/finish), job title and employer. If the employer is not well known, consider adding a small description: "SimpsonsBio (Small start-up providing antibody production solutions)". One line max of introduction to the role if not obvious.

For each position, list key achievements (usually 5 max) that will demonstrate your suitability to the job (e. g. development of collaborations, lab management, supervision, organisation of workshop, development of method...). Use backed-up examples as bullet points (e. g. "Designed, optimised and validated a 16-markers flow cytometry panel subsequently adopted by the 5 partners of the grant to characterise all 200 samples of the clinical trial"). The "**CAR**" system can help

giving concrete examples by providing **Context, Action and Result**.

Grants and awards

Demonstrate that you can secure funding by listing the grants, fellowships, studentships, travel grants and awards (poster, presentation etc.) you obtained.

For the grants you were involved in, describe your actual contribution (design of project, writing, setting up collaborations, proof-reading etc.) and your position on it when relevant (Researcher Co-Investigator, named researcher...).

You may want to use sub-sections (grants and fellowships, travel fund, awards etc.).

Teaching and supervision

List teaching experience by categories (lectures, tutorials, demonstration etc.) indicating the level, number of hours and contribution (delivery, course development, module co-ordination, assessment etc.).

You can also list achievements in teaching (feedback from students, innovative methods you have introduced...) and certifications (AFHEA) if relevant to the position.

List supervision experience (project design, training, feedback, mentoring...) including the level of students/staff, your contribution but not their names.

Evidence of esteem

List here proofs that you are well-regarded in your field. This includes some awards and prizes, invited talks, reviewing of articles, positions held in a professional society, chairing sessions at conferences, judging posters, organisation of seminars or conferences, international presence/network etc.

Also list here your contribution to committees. It may be wise to add a couple of key achievements to demonstrate that you played an active role. Depending on your career stage, you may want to include administrative duties/collegiality in a separate section.

Outreach and Engagement

List outreach activities, your contribution and their impact. You can use the CAR system for example.

If you are involved in a lot of activities you may want to group them to highlight the variety of what you are doing (open days/lab visits, patients' consultations, school demonstrations, lay/blog articles, career fairs, student recruitment etc.).

Referees

List 2 or 3 people who you are sure will give you a good reference and agreed to. They need to know who you are now, not who you were 3 years ago... Provide names, position and institution, email and phone number.

If already asked as part of the online application you don't have to provide this.

Annexes

It is usually advised to provide your publications in an annexe or at the end of your CV. List them in reverse chronological order by type (Peer-reviewed research papers, reviews, book chapters, patents etc.) as you would list references in an article but put your name in bold. If more than 5 papers you can number them (with the one at the top, most recent, having the highest number).

You can add metrics information, number of stars if returned to REF (or prevision for next REF). For lectureship applications and some fellowships, you may need to highlight your contribution to each paper.

You can also list in annexe your contributions at conferences. Again, provide them in reverse-chronological order by categories (invited presentation, keynotes, selected presentations, posters etc.). Indicate the title of the presentation, name of conference and date.

4. Those "awkward" ones

The following are controversial and really depend on the job, the recruiter... and you!

Personal statement

Check the rules of the job you are applying for; in academia, no need for one so save the space on your CV! You can include a short one (4 – 5 lines max) to show your enthusiasm and sum up the main reason for your suitability if you are not submitting a cover letter. It can sometimes be useful to highlight your career goals when you move career. We would encourage you to write a cover letter instead.

Nationality

Where you are from shouldn't influence the recruiter so it's better to leave it out, except if the advert clearly states that the job is available to only some nationalities (case for some grants) or that applicants need to have the right to work in the UK (if you do, make it clear by indicating your status, e. g. permanent resident). This is however often captured on the application system and may not need to be on your CV.

Rejected grants

If you have many successful ones, you can remove them. If not, it is probably best to list them as they demonstrate experience in grant writing/design, which is better than nothing! You can choose to indicate that you were "involved in the design and writing of X grant application".

Career breaks

Except if requested in the application guidelines, you don't have to indicate career breaks. You may want to though if the break is obvious and indicate a short explanation like "parental leave", "raising family", "medical reasons", "voluntary work", "employment in other sector"... Using years only (not months) in the employment section can also help concealing short gaps.

Interests

In academia, avoid listing hobbies; nobody cares if you like reading and hiking! They can help recruiters picture you as a person and sometimes relate to you or... do the opposite! If they are not related at all to the job or don't help showcasing important skills (e. g. "stand-up comedy at open mic" can show that you are confident talking in public) or achievements (leadership role, winning a competition etc.), it's probably best to leave them out.

4. Other types of CVs

Skill-based CV

A skill-based or competency-based CV can be very useful to demonstrate how your transferable skills apply to a different sector when moving out of academia and avoid your CV looking too "academic".

Use similar rules of presentation as before.

Content in this type of CV is generally organised as a short career summary or

personal statement, a professional profile (see details below), professional experience / employment (list your positions with a max of one line summing up the position; you can include voluntary work), qualifications (you may include School qualifications if part of the criteria).

The main part is the professional profile. Define headings to showcase the skills relevant to the position (e. g. Project management, Leadership, Negotiation, People management and mentoring, Communication, IT and languages etc.). Use the vocabulary of the sector.

For each heading, provide a few bullet-points demonstrating your experience and achievements. Avoid general sentences (“Excellent communication skills”) but use clear examples with details and quantitative data (e. g. number of students supervised, level, duties as supervisor, feedback from student etc.). Use short sentences starting by an action verb (designed, developed, established, successfully managed, delivered etc.) and the CAR system.

Chronological CV

A chronological CV is the most “classic” CV outside of academia. It is easier to make than a skill-based CV but probably less efficient at showcasing your skills and fit when your previous employment was not directly relevant to the role.

Content in this type of CV is generally organised as a professional experience / employment and qualifications (you may include School qualifications if part of the criteria). You may also add a couple of other sections based on the role to showcase specific skills like “Positions of responsibility/leadership”, “Teaching” etc.

In the employment section, list your positions in reverse-chronological order with a short description of the role (1-2 sentences) and achievements as bullet points (CAR system).

Application system

Some companies use an application system in which you will be asked to “repeat” a lot of your CV. In this case follow the rules they provide (chronological or reverse chronological order, month and year, leave no gaps, explain career breaks etc.). This could result in a long document containing irrelevant positions for

which you can’t modify the formatting. Do your best to make your key achievements come through and if you have the possibility to also submit a more succinct and tailored PDF of your CV, do so.

Recruitment agency / recruitment sites

When applying for a position via a recruitment site, use a tailored CV as described above.

When uploading a CV on a recruitment site (Reed, Monster, LinkedIn...) without applying for a position, you need to increase your chances of being identified by recruiters, who use algorithms to find adequate candidates for the positions they need to fill. Tailor your CV to the type of role you are looking for but repeat the relevant experience and techniques for each position you held, thinking of including synonyms (e. g. ELISA, immuno-assay; flow cytometry, FACS) to be identified by different keywords and get a higher score with search algorithms. In this case, a short personal statement may help the recruiter see if the role they are trying to fill would suit you once you pop up from their search.

Once they have identified you, recruiters will normally help you tailor your CV for a specific position. They usually have their own templates in which they will copy/paste bits of your CV so it is easier for them if you provide a word version instead of a PDF at that stage.

5. Before clicking “submit”

If you are a postdoc from QUB, get your CV reviewed by the PDC (details [here](#)).

Additionally, ask a couple of people to look at your CV and assess the following points:

- In 30 s, can you spot the main headings / achievements corresponding to the essential criteria of the role?
- Is there any irrelevant information? If yes, delete!
- Does the CV look professional (alignment, font, consistent headings)?
- Are there any spelling mistakes / typos? If international, does everything translate well?
- Is your file correctly named?

References: “Academic CVs” Tip Sheet, Imperial College London Postdoc and Fellows Development Centre, “What every postdoc needs to know”, Liz Elvidge, Carol Spencely and Emma Williams (World Scientific), “Reed.co.uk” “Vita.ac.uk”