

Contributors: Purdue OWL.

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Writing the Curriculum Vitae

This handout provides an overview of strategies for writing an effective curriculum vitae. This topic is particularly important for graduate students who are entering the academic job market for the first time. Although there is some overlap between the two resources, this handout should serve as a supplement to the [suggestions available from Purdue's Center for Career Opportunities](#).

What is a Curriculum Vitae?

Also called a CV or vita, the curriculum vitae is, as its name suggests, an overview of your life's accomplishments, most specifically those that are relevant to the academic realm. In the United States, the curriculum vitae is used almost exclusively when one is pursuing an academic job. The curriculum vitae is a living document, which will reflect the developments in a scholar/teacher's career, and thus should be updated frequently.

How is a CV different from a resume?

The most noticeable difference between most CVs and most resumes is the length. Entry level resumes are usually limited to a page. CVs, however, often run to three or more pages. (Remember, however, that length is not the determinant of a successful CV. You should try to present all the relevant information that you possibly can, but you should also try to present it in as concise a manner as possible.) A more subtle but equally important distinction is that whereas the goal of a resume is to construct a professional identity, the goal of a CV is quite specifically to construct a scholarly identity. Thus, your CV will need to reflect very specifically your abilities as a teacher, researcher, and publishing scholar within your discipline.

What should I include?

Your CV should include your name and contact information, an overview of your education, your academic and related employment (especially teaching, editorial, or administrative experience), your research projects (including conference papers and publications), and your departmental and community service. You should also include a reference list, either as part of your CV, or on a separate page. Also, if you have a dossier containing confidential references available, you should mention that on your CV as well.

What comes first depends both on your background and on the job for which you are applying. Typically, the first item on a CV for a job candidate directly out of grad school will start with the candidate's education listed in reverse chronological order. Frequently the title and even a brief

description of the dissertation will be included in this portion. After that, you will want to determine both what the jobs that you are interested in require and where your strengths lie. When determining what comes after your educational credentials, remember that the earlier in your document a particular block of information comes, the more emphasis you will be placing on that block of information. Thus, the most important information should come first.

If you are applying at a research university, research projects, conference presentations, and especially publications become very important. If you are applying to a liberal arts college or community college that strongly emphasizes teaching, then showing your teaching background is of paramount importance. In any case, you will want to be sure that the information that will be most helpful in determining your qualifications for the job for which you are applying comes before information that will be less helpful.

Is there a standard curriculum vitae format?

One of the most important things to remember when working on your curriculum vitae is that there is not one standard format. There are different emphases in each discipline, and a good CV is one that emphasizes the points that are considered to be most important in your discipline and conforms to standard conventions within your discipline.

So how can you find out what these conventions are? A good place to start is to find as many examples as possible of CVs by people in your discipline who have recently been on the job market. You can find these by asking other grad students and junior faculty in your department if you can have a look at their CV's, and you can also make use of the Internet to find CV samples in your discipline.

Resources such as *The Curriculum Vitae Handbook* by Rebecca Anthony and Gerald Roe (Rudi Publishing: Iowa City, 1994) also include sample CVs for various disciplines. One caveat to remember regarding examples, however, is that they should never be used as models to be followed in every detail. Instead, they should be used as sources of strategies for how to present your own information most effectively. The most effective formatting for you will likely be distinguishable from the most effective formatting for someone else because your experiences and strengths will be different, and you will thus benefit from formatting adapted specifically to your situation.

How should I construct my work description entries?

Two common strategies that apply to CVs as well as resumes are **gapping** and **parallelism**. Gapping is the use of incomplete sentences in order to present your information as clearly and concisely as possible. For example, instead of writing, "I taught composition for four years, during which time I planned classes and activities, graded papers, and constructed exams. I also met with students regularly for conferences," you might write, "Composition Instructor (2000-2004). Planned course activities. Graded all assignments. Held regular conferences with students." By using incomplete sentences here, you cut out unnecessary words and allow your reader to see quickly what you have been doing.

Parallelism is also very important to a strong CV. Generally, you will want to keep the structure of your phrases and/or sentences consistent throughout your document. Thus, if you use verb phrases in one portion of your CV to describe your duties, try to use them throughout your CV. Particularly within entries, make sure that the structure of your phrases is exactly parallel so that your reader can understand what you are communicating easily.

One distinction between the work description sections of resumes and CVs is that bullets are very commonly used in resumes and tend to appear somewhat less frequently in CVs. Whether or not you use bullets to separate lines in your CV should depend on how the bullets will affect the appearance of your CV. If you have a number of descriptive statements about your work that all run to about a line in length, bullets can be a good way of separating them. If, however, you have a lot of very short phrases, breaking them up into bulleted lists can leave a lot of white space that could be used more efficiently. Remember that the principles guiding any decision you make should be conciseness and ease of readability.

How can I improve my CV?

Purdue's Writing Lab provides the opportunity to work with one of our graduate instructors in order to get some assistance with your CV, and many other universities offer similar opportunities through their writing centers. Also, consider showing your CV to your dissertation chair in order to get some feedback from him/her. Finally, many departments have job search or job placement committees that provide you with the opportunity to meet with faculty members in your department for extensive editing. If such a resource is available for you, that may be the best source of advice of all.

What other resources are available for help with my curriculum vitae?

There are numerous useful resources, both online and in print. Here are a few.

The *Chronicle of Higher Education's* [job site](#) features an area called "[First Time on the Market?](#)" that may be helpful.

The Curriculum Vitae Handbook by Rebecca Anthony and Gerald Roe (Rudi Publishing: Iowa City, 1994) includes sample CV's for various disciplines and tips for how to write CV's in various contexts.

The Academic Job Search Handbook (3rd Edition), by Mary Morris Heiberger and Julia Miller Vick (who are the authors of the *Chronicle's* "CV Doctor" column) also provides sample cover letters and CV's

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