

Curricula Vitae (CVs)



The curriculum vitae (CV or vita) is a common and essential document for professional applications. It is also a living document, which means its content and format should be reviewed and updated often. Although there is no strict formula for creating CVs, this handout provides basic principles to help writers produce effective professional documents.

CV Purpose

In the United States, CVs are common in academic and medical fields; they establish your professional experience and breadth by providing a detailed, comprehensive overview of your formal education, career experience, and related professional experience and accomplishments. A full professional CV is multiple pages in length. CVs are different from resumes, which are brief overviews of your education, skills, and working past that provide a first impression to potential employers and help you gain an interview. Internationally, CVs are often used in a wider variety of employment contexts.

Audience

The most important thing you can do in writing your CV is to **learn about your audience**. Tailor your CV to showcase the skills and experience that your admissions committees or potential employers are looking for. Although every research or writing setting is different, familiarize yourself with CVs from your field to mirror standard conventions for content and document design.

Content and Organization

At the top of the first page, provide your contact information, including a professional email address. Your education should also be featured prominently near the beginning of your CV, complete with schools attended and the dates you earned or anticipate earning degrees.

The remainder of the document should be divided into sections that help categorize your qualifications and experience. Be sure to provide applicable details like venues, dates, titles, and responsibilities. Consider briefly describing any awards or organizations that may be unfamiliar to readers. Depending on your field, your CV may include some combination of sections like these:

- Research Experience
- Teaching Experience
- Administrative Experience
- Publications
- Presentations
- Awards
- Honors
- Scholarships
- Grants
- Licenses
- Certificates
- Titles
- Memberships
- Affiliations
- Software Skills
- Language Skills
- Courses Taught
- Teaching Interests
- Research Interests
- Major(s) and Minor(s)
- Relevant Coursework
- Thesis Information
- Dissertation Information

While many documents provide information in reverse chronological order, remember that the order of your content matters—the closer to the beginning, the more the content is emphasized. As you gain experience and your CV grows longer, it may help your readers if you add an *executive summary* (an introductory section that highlights your greatest or most relevant accomplishments). Some organizations may expect this information in a separate, resume-like document instead.

Generally, avoid information that indicates your political or religious affiliations or explicitly reveals age, race, ethnicity, or marital or family status. High school experience should not appear on a CV unless it is the only experience you have.

Read your CV out loud. Have others review your work and provide feedback. Proofread for grammar and spelling. Save a PDF copy to keep the format from changing. Use an appropriate, identifying title.

Formatting

The format of your CV is critical and should enhance the visual appeal of the document as well as the readability. While templates exist, tailor your work to make sure you present yourself most effectively and set yourself apart from other applicants or professionals.

Margins: Remember that you can adjust the margins to conserve space, shape the text, or maintain desired length.

Font: Choose fonts that are easy to read, whether they be **sans-serif** (like **Arial**, **Helvetica**) or **serif** (like **Verdana**, **Times**). Consider assigning one font for headings (preferably serif) and another for body text (preferably sans serif). For cohesion and clarity, do not use more than a couple different types of fonts. Your name is the most important information on your resume and will be in the largest font.

Headings: Use headings to separate the sections of your document and increase the readability of your document. Be sure headings visually stand out from the text by varying font size and style (**bold**, **CAPS**, *italics*, font size). Limit the number of sections by carefully categorizing content.

Bullets: Use bullets in subsections, especially with lists. Be concise, avoid complete sentences, and use active verbs to start phrases in bulleted sections.

Spacing: Use lines or spaces to separate your sections from each other and to provide white space: this makes your document more visually appealing. Use indentations to create space around the body text. Make your information look complete or full without appearing crowded.

Consistency: Be consistent in spacing, format, and content. Remember to make sure verbs are parallel (present tense for current experience, past tense for past experience). Use left alignment, except for when listing dates.

Bold: Use boldface sparingly, only to make headings more visually distinct, or, even more rarely, to emphasize things of paramount importance.

Optional: When appropriate, consider using readable color to make your document more appealing. Additional design elements or formats may be acceptable (or even expected) in creative fields.

