Guidelines on how to prepare a winning CV

A *curriculum vitae* (CV) is often the first glimpse a would-be employer or fund-donor will have of you. It is also likely to be one of many that would-be employers review. Therefore, your CV needs to stand out and be concise and catchy.

Apart from what to put in and what to leave out of your CV, describing your own strengths and abilities isn't easy. What we have tried to do with the following guidelines is to make the process easier and ensure that you end up with a professional document which shows you how to pitch your skills and stand out from the crowd. In the current economic climate, employers are looking to consistently improve on productivity and match a prospective employee's skills and experience with the job needs, both now and in the future.

What is the difference between a CV and a resume?
Generally a CV is longer than a resume and is more tailored toward obtaining an academic or educational job. Resumes tend to be customized for specific jobs, often in the private sectors. However, a number of countries use these terms interchangeably. For early career scientists, a resume should generally be 1-2 pages, while a CV can be longer and has no set limit although the average is 3-5 pages for early/mid-career.

What do people look for in a CV?
As with resumes, people who are reviewing CVs often do so very quickly, so the essential element is to make your CV easy to read and provide the necessary information in an easy to access format.

General guidelines for CV-building
There is no single formula or recipe for an academic CV, which means you actually have some freedom and creativity to design the organization and content of your own CV. Below we provide some general guidelines and potential sections to consider in composing your own CV.
- Avoid mistakes at all costs: changes in font type, formatting, or grammatical errors will sink your CV to the bottom of the job applicant pile. Use a spell check and have your CV read by someone else;
- Read the instructions in the job offer very carefully;
- Always ensure that your CV is well formatted and easy to read. Avoid bizarre fonts and colors (i.e. no bright colors). Use a clean font (e.g. Times New Roman Arial, or Garamond) no smaller than 12 and decide on the length according to the needs of the application;
- Use bullets and categories wherever possible as it will make your CV easier to read;
- Use action verbs such as managed, designed, improved, developed, etc. when describing your contributions to previous projects and work;
- The use of sub-headings (e.g. Education, Professional Experience, etc.) will help potential employers find the information they require with ease;
- Your experience and education should be listed in reverse chronological order (starting from most recent);

- If you are just starting your working life, having previously been a student, provide more in depth information regarding your academic achievements and include any internship done or working experience gained. Alternatively, if you already have some working experience, place the Professional Experience section first before mentioning Education;
- Once you have a final version, make a copy of your CV into a PDF – this will avoid any potential formatting problems between computers, operating systems, etc.;
- Update frequently – the key to keeping a CV current is frequent and attentive updating – after all the document is meant to be a detailed history of your work and contributions to your field of study;
- Avoid
    - Unclear or vague information. Use facts and measurable results wherever possible;
    - Using "I" or "me";
    - Trying to cover gaps in employment history. These can be explained during the interview process;
    - Reasons for leaving a prior job, unless required by the new employer;
    - Salary expectation;
    - Do not include a photograph (although this varies by country) or use clipart. Keep it simple;
    - Never criticize anyone in a CV;
    - Do not include age or marital status, as in many countries it is illegal to ask for personal details.

Common Sections of the CV
- *Goal or objective*
    - CVs usually don't have a stated goal.
- *Personal information*
    - Usually limit to contact information and affiliation;
    - Email, address (optional), phone, website/blog, LinkedIn etc.
- *Education*
    - Undergrad, MSc, PhD or other tertiary degrees (no high school), and mention "graduated with honors" or "graduated with distinction" if applicable;
    - Include thesis title and complete dates for research related degrees;
    - Provide more detail about the MSc or PhD project here if it's still in progress; list advisor, projected completion date, etc.
- *Current and Previous Employment*
    - Avoid listing summer jobs at restaurants, amusement parks, etc. If that is the only job you have ever had, try to show the relevance/experience gained that would be useful to the job you are applying for. As a general guideline, you should focus on the work experience that best supports your application, however candidates at an earlier stage in their careers may have less leeway. In any case you may wish to adopt a skills-based approach in which case you will concentrate on your relevant work experience only and summarize less relevant, past experience;

- o Any job that you list, make sure to indicate its relevance to the current job under consideration;
  - o Present this list in reverse chronological order.
- *Honors and Awards*
  - o Avoid high school awards or achievements unless relevant to your career;
  - o Avoid anything not pertinent to the current job;
  - o Add fellowships, grants, awards for best posters or talks, etc.
- *Peer-Reviewed Manuscripts and other Peer-Reviewed writing*
  - o List these first, with those "in review" on top;
  - o Avoid including abstracts – only include Authors, Year, Title, and Journal information;
  - o Numbered vs. listed by year? Chronological vs. reverse chronological? – decide which you prefer;
  - o Include DOI numbers and Impact factors.
- *Other publications* – the following sub-headings may be useful:
  - o Government reports;
  - o Book reviews;
  - o Books (include in peer-reviewed section if that is the case);
  - o Outreach publications / popular science articles;
  - o Lab manuals;
  - o Indicate media coverage under a separate sub-heading.
- *Presentations/Posters*
  - o Invited vs. contributed (possibly with separate sub-headings);
  - o List conference, location, authors, and any awards won by the presentation/poster.
- *Grants and Fellowships*
  - o Travel grants are entirely appropriate for graduate students;
  - o Internal grants won within your institution;
  - o Outside research funding is a major plus.
- *Professional Activities/Service and Affiliations*
  - o Memberships in different societies;
  - o Participation on grant panels;
  - o Organizer, chair, or discussant on different panels;
  - o Editorial board and journal reviews;
  - o Certifications or accreditations (possibly as a separate section).
- *Outreach*
  Activities outside of the academy, including
  - o Community events like talks to groups
  - o Science Communication (such as Twitter engagement, and followers, any social-media events organized, interviews with media, video materials created or other communication documents created; *if you have included these under Personal Information above, do not repeat*) for example:
    - • Twitter @joebloggs;
    - • Joe Bloggs ResearchGate;

- Joe Bloggs LinkedIn;
- Webpage.
- *Teaching/Advising*
  - Courses you've taught, guest lectured, or assisted with;
  - Students you've mentored or advised.
- *References* (optional; generally not provided before an interview)
  - E.g. Letters of recommendation from previous employers. Characteristics such as reliability are important and not measured in an academic transcript.

Further guidelines
- Always keep a MASTER CV that you update frequently and which stores all your experiences;
- Tailor your CV for your audience. Look for institutional requirements when undertaking specific applications;
- Include a few keywords from the job offer text and (optionally) from the organization's website, but note that some institutions cull some of the CV's by searching for keywords;
- When ready to send your CV by email – always include your name in the CV, the assessor may be receiving hundreds of CV's, and you want yours to be noticed. Don't just label your file "CV";
- If the CV is to be sent in electronic format, it is possible to include hyperlinks that take the reader to sites showing more in-depth details about accomplishments.
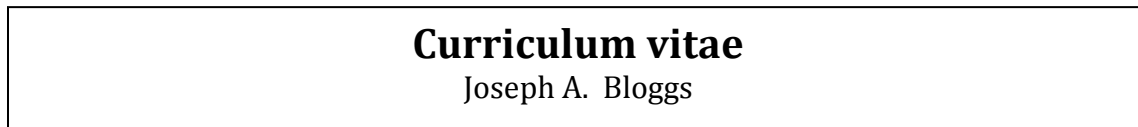
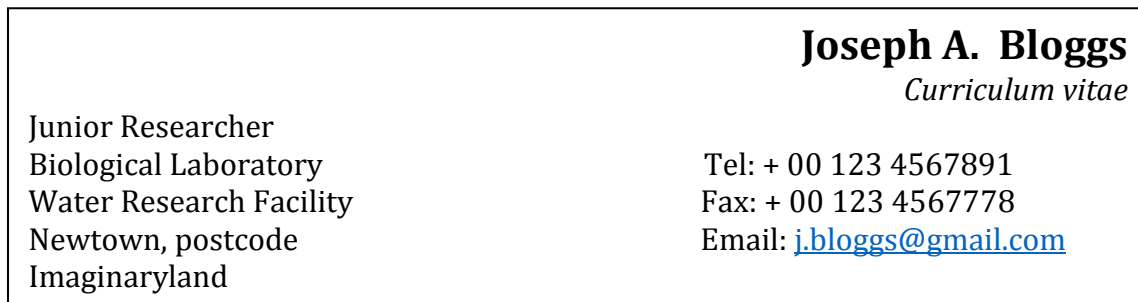**An example of a CV - the right CV for the job**
The first page needs to present your name clearly. The reader will know that the document is a CV, so the words "*curriculum vitae*" do not need to be smack you in the face

<div style="border:1px solid black">

Joseph A. Bloggs
Curriculum vitae

</div>

is better than

<div style="border:1px solid black">

Curriculum vitae
Joseph A. Bloggs

</div>

Simple address details should be given

<div style="border:1px solid black">

Joseph A. Bloggs
Curriculum vitae

Junior Researcher
Biological Laboratory
Water Research Facility
Newtown, postcode
Imaginaryland

Tel: + 00 123 4567891
Fax: + 00 123 4567778
Email: j.bloggs@gmail.com

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Next, it is usual to give something about your qualifications. Consider what other factors make you uniquely employable and add some details, such as organizational membership (see *Professional Activities* section above), any special skills or noteworthy achievements including volunteering. Each category of information should stand out somehow. The following example shows a way of doing this. It needs to be visually appealing as well as informative.

Joseph A. Bloggs
Curriculum vitae

Junior Researcher
Biological Laboratory
Water Research Facility
Newtown, postcode
Imaginaryland

Tel: + 00 123 4567891
Fax: + 00 123 4567778
Email: j.bloggs@gmail.com

Education
2003-2005 BSc. Biology (University of Dogsville)
2006 MSc. (University of Catsville)
2009-2013 PhD. The ecology and conservation of lowland stream invertebrates (Alphaland College)

Experience
E.g. post doc

Leadership positions

Grants and contracts awarded

Publications and conference proceedings

Other significant activities (use some of the categories suggested above)
E.g. Volunteering or community engagement