

# How to Write Your Curriculum Vitae

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## The Challenge

Soon-to-be residency and fellowship graduates are often challenged by how best to structure their curriculum vitae (CV). This involves making choices about whether to include certain information, like activities that predate medical school, and how to best highlight activities and accomplishments. The development of a CV is further challenged by individual academic institutions and potential employers having particular specifications regarding the order, format, and content.

## What Is Known

A CV provides fellowship programs, employers, and/or academic promotion and tenure committees with a chronological story. A CV highlights your education, skills, experiences, and achievements (academic, scientific, teaching, and clinical). It is a dynamic document featuring the evolution (and gaps, as applicable) of your training and experience for a particular audience at one moment in time—applying for a fellowship, a position at a medical center, or a grant. This comprehensive chronicle of your career is in contrast to a résumé, which succinctly highlights your experience and skills in a 1- to 2-page document. A CV is often submitted with a cover letter to help the reader connect your experience to the position requirements and differentiate you from other candidates.

## How You Can Start TODAY

1. *Follow institutional specifications.* Make sure that your CV aligns with the format expectations of the institution, employer, or grant agency reviewing your CV. If available, obtain CV guidelines from several of the organizations to which you wish to apply. Identify individuals who have successfully applied for similar positions or awards previously and inquire if you may use their CV as a template for yours. A general CV template with accompanying tips is available as online supplemental material.
2. *Be thorough and use consistent formatting.* List your educational background, prior affiliations, certifications, achievements, awards, grants, scholarship, committee memberships, and volunteer work with accurate dates. Use consistent chronology (typically

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*Editor's Note: The online version of this article contains a general curriculum vitae template with accompanying tips.*

## Rip Out Action Items

1. Start developing your CV today using an accepted template. It is a timeline of your education, skills, and experience. It highlights your academic, scientific, and clinical achievements.
2. Create a CV file for items to add to your subsequent CV. Update your CV semiannually. When you have an urgent request to submit your CV, it will be ready to go.
3. Use your CV for personal growth and annual goal setting. Meet with mentors and colleagues to review your CV and goals to identify opportunities that will enhance your professional development.

past to present) throughout the CV. List additional languages spoken and prior names. Add a running header or footer with your name, the page number, and the current date.

3. *Highlight elements relevant to the sought-after position.* What are the 2 to 3 major items someone should know after reading your CV? Consider subheads within sections to demonstrate common themes (eg, under leadership, add a subhead for education, clinical, and quality/safety). Consider bolding meaningful activities to highlight position-relevant skills and accomplishments. A brief annotation can clarify your contribution to a project. Savvy reviewers can spot fluff in CVs (brief activities, peripheral involvement), which may detract from your actual accomplishments.
4. *Include a cover letter.* A single-page letter using a professional and warm tone can provide compelling information not available in your CV. Open the letter by introducing yourself, stating the specific position you are seeking, and describing your interest in joining the organization. Use the remainder of the letter to connect your values and experiences to the position requirements. Consider highlighting your geographic preference (organizations are recruiting for retention), gaps in your CV, and skills (eg, communication, teamwork, leadership, problem solving, and/or quality improvement). Close with a thank you and an actionable statement, such as “I am available to discuss this opportunity with you further and look forward to hearing from you.”
5. *Proofread.* You only get one chance to make a first impression. Be sure to check spelling, titles, and punctuation. These errors can adversely affect the reader's impression of you. Ask colleagues and mentors to read your CV and cover letter to ensure

that your story is being told effectively, to check for critical omissions, and to find errors.

## What You Can Do LONG TERM

1. *Maintain your CV as a dynamic document.* Create a comprehensive dynamic CV file to save all activities and accomplishments that could be added to the next updated version of your CV. Depending on the position you are seeking, you might select specific projects in this file to include in your updated CV.
2. *Update your CV at least semiannually.* Are you capturing all of the activities you are currently doing—teaching, committee work, leadership roles, grant applications, significant quality improvement projects? When you have an urgent request to submit your CV, it will be ready to go. Save the file with the current date as you may not use the same CV for future position applications. Keep a backup copy on another device in case one device fails.
3. *Identify opportunities for professional growth.* Your CV is your career chronicle. Use it to identify opportunities that will enhance your professional development and to set goals for the year ahead. An astute CV reader (eg, mentors and colleagues) can identify strengths and opportunities for your future growth. Have your CV reviewed annually to discuss your career themes, goals, and directions, as well as to proofread your CV. Just sharing your CV (with reciprocal reviews as appropriate) may open new doors for you!
4. *Revisit the storyline of your CV.* As your career evolves you will have additional areas of emphasis, expertise, and interests to add to your CV. Be sure that your CV entries reflect that story using common subheads within categories to highlight key elements.
5. *Host a CV session.* Invite trainees and experienced faculty to a 30-minute CV session. In advance, ask trainees and junior faculty to update their CVs, bring copies to share, and raise questions. Dyads can

spend 15 to 20 minutes reviewing CVs and adding common questions to a whiteboard that can then be discussed with the group during the remaining time.

## Resources

1. American Medical Association. *AMA Manual of Style: A Guide for Authors and Editors*. 10th ed. New York, NY: Oxford University Press; 2007. <http://www.amamanualofstyle.com>. Accessed March 29, 2019.
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4. Darves B. Physician cover letters: why writing a good one is as important as ever. NEJM Career Center. Published May 29, 2014. <http://www.nejmcareercenter.org/article/physician-cover-letters-why-writing-a-good-one-is-as-important-as-ever>. Accessed March 29, 2019.



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