

# C.V. Do's and Don'ts

An academic C.V. is one of the cornerstone documents of an academic job market application dossier. When done well, it can present a concise and yet thorough picture of an applicant. When presented effectively, a C.V. can help land a candidate on the shortlist for a first-round interview.

Without a doubt, it takes some patience and additional thought to distinguish one's C.V. from those of other applicants. But that patience can produce a document that fits better in the context of one's overall materials.

UChicagoGRAD reminds graduate students and postdocs at UChicago that 60-minute one-on-one advising appointments are available for C.V.'s at [grad.uchicago.edu](http://grad.uchicago.edu).

## DON'T:

1. **Expect** everyone to read the whole thing
2. **Assume** a publication list replaces the need to include details about your research
3. **Include** a half-page summary of your dissertation/research
4. **Write "Curriculum Vitae"** at the top
5. **List** course numbers without description
6. **Tack on** employment that is not related to research or academia
7. **Use** subjective claims or adjectives: "exceptional," "ground-breaking," etc.
8. **Include** photos, birthdate or any other personal biographical information
9. **Make it longer** than your advisor's C.V.
10. **Under-sell** yourself!

## DO:

1. **Read** other C.V.'s and follow standard formats for your discipline
2. **Tailor** to institutions
3. **Make PAGE ONE** compelling enough for reader to continue
4. **Explain** the significance of your work
5. **Vary** section styles to suit the content and move reader along
6. **Focus** on innovation and impact in each bullet
7. **Be specific** regarding methodologies employed
8. **Quantify** wherever possible
9. **Think a bit more** about font and layout
10. **Proofread** (and invite others to proofread) for consistency and grammar
11. **BONUS:** Keep your C.V. updated on your personal website

## EXAMPLE C.V. SECTIONS

Education, Research, Research Interests, Teaching, Pedagogy Training, Publications, Conference & Workshop Presentations, Languages, Technical Skills, Department Service, Service to the Profession, References

*Remember that section titles and designations can be customized. If it makes sense to combine sections, do it! Your primary objective should be to make **as accessible as possible** the information that matters to the reader.*

## REMINDERS:

- **Fonts matter.** Try to avoid default fonts like Times and Cambria. Use Garamond, Century Gothic, Palatino Linotype, or other easily readable and fonts.
- **Vary the section formats.** Your C.V.'s sections should be consistent but not uniform. Again, the format should make the content as easily legible as possible
- **Tailoring matters.** How you describe teaching, research, awards, etc. says a lot about your self-presentation—and about your understanding of the job/institution.

# Academic Cover Letter Do's and Don'ts

## Language to Avoid:

- 1. Although** I am not [x] / **do not** have [y]
  - Make sure that you are emphasizing why you are the best candidate.
  - Don't apologize for your great credentials!
- Here, now, I present you with 5 paragraphs about my **path-breaking** dissertation, which treats the fourth century chemist Dr. B in conversation with the fourth century philosopher Dr. C in...
  - Keep your dissertation description to two paragraphs at most.
  - Assume that non-experts will be reading your letter
- I hope to finish my dissertation in the next **decade**
  - Give specific information about when you will complete your degree
- I would be a **great fit** at **your university**
  - Be specific about why you want to be at this particular place.
  - Use the institution's name!
- It would be an **honor** to work with **Dr. X**
  - It may *be* an honor, but you need to show that you are ready to be an equal on faculty
- I hope to hear from you soon**
  - You *look forward* to hearing soon!
- I am **passionate** about teaching.
  - Show your passion through examples. Don't assume the reader will take you at your word
- List your publications and achievements in prose format
  - Your C.V. is a list. Don't regurgitate it
- I will next revise chapter 5 of my dissertation.
  - Think of broader next steps
- My last paper rocked the discipline
  - Take the advice of "The Professor is In" here. It didn't rock the world. And that's okay.

## DO:

- 1. Expect** everyone to read the whole thing
- 2. Provide** examples of how your work contributes to the field
- 3. Anticipate** that you will have readers outside your subfield
- 4. State** your progress and confidence of completion
- 5. Talk** about why you want to be there
- 6. Suggest** collaborations
- 6. Pitch** them on why you are going to be a good teacher of the required courses
- 6. Chart** reasonable next steps for your work
- 6. Confer** with advisors about appropriate length
- 7. Think** of yourself as their colleague

## Always:

- **Use department letterhead if you are still a student or postdoc, or are currently teaching at this or another institution.** You should be able to get it from the department administrator.
- **Keep it to under two pages, single-spaced.** Many letters for postdoc positions and some visiting assistant positions may be kept to 1.5 pages.
- **Be respectful of the reader's eyes.** Margins should be kept to no thinner than .7" and it's imperative to use a font between sizes 11 and 12 pt.
- **Proofread, proofread, proofread.** Did we say it enough times? Proofread your cover letters and have others proofread them as well!

Remember that appointments to review cover letters are available at UChicagoGRAD. Sign up for time with career development staff at [grad.uchicago.edu](http://grad.uchicago.edu).