

Academic 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.

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 research
4. **Write "Curriculum Vitae"** at the top
5. **Tack on** employment that is not related to research or academia
6. **Use** subjective claims or adjectives: "exceptional," "ground-breaking," etc.
7. **Include** photos, birthdate or any other personal biographical information
8. **Make it longer** than your advisor's C.V.
9. **List** course numbers without description
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, Publications, Conference & Workshop Presentations, Poster Presentations, Teaching, Pedagogy Training, Technical Skills, Service, Relevant Professional Experience, Professional Affiliations, 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 research, awards, teaching, etc. says a lot about your self-presentation—and about your understanding of the job/institution.

Introduction to the Industry C.V.

An Industry C.V. (or resume/C.V. blend) is typically a two-page document that includes details about educational background, research experience, and a select list of publications and/or presentations. Experience in industry environments, management positions, and leadership roles is more highly valued in this document than in an academic C.V. Optional sections that complement this information may include: a summary of qualifications, honors and awards, and a technical skills summary.

When to Use It:

- All R&D positions in industry
- Application Scientist/Technical Specialist
- Tech Transfer/Innovation Management
- Patent Agent
- Science Policy
- Research Management
- Medical Writing

Verbs to Use:

Be sure to use verbs that convey action. Avoid language that diminishes your role or importance in a given project:

Weak(er)

- Assisted with; Worked on; Looked at; Helped to; Cooperated with

Srong(er)

- Analyzed, Synthesized, Examined
- Managed, Led, Oversaw
- Created, Produced, Developed
- Wrote, Edited, Revised, Critiqued
- Communicated, Presented
- Collaborated, Facilitated
- Implemented, Launched, Initiated
- Taught, Tutored, Advised

Reading Job Descriptions:

- ❑ Read job descriptions with a pen or highlighter. Circle and highlight key words and qualifications. Use similar words in your documents.
- ❑ Emphasize experiences that are also prioritized in the job description
- ❑ Familiarize yourself with common job descriptions in industry before applying. It can be helpful to see multiple listings to get a sense of the language used.

Tailor to Industry Audiences:

The audience for an industry C.V. likely includes both scientists *and* non-expert H.R. personnel. It's important to communicate your qualifications to both groups.

- **Demonstrate** credibility by including publications and select presentations
- **Highlight** your personal contributions to group projects
- **Match** level of technical language in the document to the job description
- **Emphasize** non-scientific or soft skills (leadership, management, communication)
- **Include** industry-relevant experience (patents, startups, regulatory processes)
- **Quantify** impact, funding, size of teams, etc.
- **Copy Edit!**

Writing a Strong Bullet:

PROJECT: Describe what you did specifically, including the technique or method. Highlight tools or techniques that you employed, especially those listed in the job description.

PURPOSE: Articulate goals of the project in a way that is relevant to the company/industry.

IMPACT: Answer the question: "So what?" Think broadly about tangible/quantifiable outcomes (publications, grant funding, patents, new collaborations, innovation, etc.)

Example Bullets

- Developed novel amino acid sequencing method using fluorescent-tagged antibody arrays; published in *Nature Methods*
- Improved protein sequence accuracy 30% by decreasing valine/isoleucine conflation
- Collaborated with 2 research groups at Harvard University to commercialize new technology; filed patent application with USPTO

Evaluating Job Documents

There's no single right way to evaluate the effectiveness of job documents. However, it can be effective to use a multi-faceted lens to analyze different aspects of documents. The rubric below is one possible way to evaluate job documents. UChicagoGRAD always recommends having a "second set of eyes" review any documents before submission.

Formatting:

- Is the formatting consistent?
- Is the font standard and legible (appropriate size)
- Are the margins standard?
- Is it easy to locate the names of organizations and institutions?

STRENGTHS AND AREAS TO IMPROVE:

Clarity:

- Can you tell what the candidate did in each of his or her experiences?
- Do you think the document will be clear to *each audience*? For all documents, think about experts and non-experts in the candidate's subfield. For industry C.V.'s, think about HR personnel and industry scientists.

STRENGTHS AND AREAS TO IMPROVE:

Effectiveness:

- Overall, what are the most effective attributes of the document that you are reviewing?
- Does the document *efficiently*, but *thoroughly* convey the candidate's experience and skills?
- What are the first two questions that you would want to know the answer to when interviewing this candidate?

STRENGTHS AND AREAS TO IMPROVE:

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
- 7. Pitch** them on why you are going to be a good teacher of the required courses
- 8. Chart** reasonable next steps for your work
- 9. Confer** with advisors about appropriate length
- 10. 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.

Non-Academic Cover Letters: Tips & Tricks

Cover letters for non-academic jobs give job candidates the space to provide employers with clear evidence of interest in, knowledge about, and passion for the company, institution, or organization to which they are applying. They are brief (no more than a page long). Industry/Non-profit/Government cover letters provide specific and compelling reasons why a candidate is a strong **fit** for a position or role.

Cover letters also serve as succinct writing samples. It can be helpful to think of them as short **argumentative essays**. To this end, well-written cover letters should have a **main claim** about your fit to a particular position and should provide the reader with reasonable **evidence** to support this claim throughout. They create a narrative context for the information found in a candidate's resume, fleshing out the list of qualifications and experiences that hiring managers will find there.

Finally, cover letters work **in tandem with** the resume. Hiring managers will not *necessarily* read the cover letter *first* and then move onto the resume. It's likelier that a hiring manager will move back and forth between resume and cover letter.

Some Initial Best Practices

- Write to a **real person** whenever possible (use "To Whom it May Concern" as an alternative):
 - Find out the hiring manager's name and address the letter to him or her
 - If you can't find it in the job description, try to figure it out by looking on LinkedIn
- Tell the reader what's **exciting** about this job in the first paragraph
 - Answer the question: "Why are you interested in / excited about *this position*"
 - Mention *substantive* conversations or connections with current employees
- Move **quickly** into specifics about what skills or experience you would **bring** to the job
 - Remember that it's not just about what you will get out of the job
 - It's about how you will make **the kind of contribution that they need**
- Give **narrative shape** to resume or CV, using specific examples in each paragraph
 - Don't repeat your resume in list form!
- **No more than one page**. Be sure to include an actual signature

Write LESS About Research:

Research skills will likely be highly valued by employers, but it's not necessary to go into extensive detail about your dissertation, thesis project, or research interests—**unless** the content of the job matches perfectly with your graduate work.

Take cues from the job description. Ask whether the job *requires* knowledge of methods or research areas in which you have expertise. If it doesn't, then consider writing about your research *skills*.

Don't FORGET About Them:

- **Too often, students and postdocs are in a hurry to explain their skills and experience.** Hiring managers care far more about the fact that candidates have taken the time to learn about their company or organization. Answer the question "why do you want to work for *us*?"
- **How many times does the company's name appear?:** The name of the organization should be in every paragraph. Make it easy for the hiring manager to discern that you've tailored the document to them.

Non-Academic Cover Letters: Tips & Tricks

Common Questions:

- **Do I need to include my address?** No. Your address is on your resume. Don't waste space!
- **Does graduate experience still count as experience?** Yes. Your graduate degree and/or postdoctoral can stand in for some years of experience *but you have to make a sound argument as to why this is the case.* The cover letter is the perfect place to describe in detail why your research skills and experience constitute *work* experience.
- **Should I include references in the letter?** No.
- **How should I end the letter?** Tell the reader that you "would look forward to talking more about this position in person."

Don't Apologize!:

Too often, graduate students and postdocs will include sentences that begin, "Although I don't have exactly the experience you're looking for [...]."

Avoid this construction! Instead, talk confidently about how your experience as a graduate student will fit directly into the position. Graduate career advisors at UChicagoGRAD can help you make this case.

Don't Forget Format:

Your Resume and Cover Letter should both be in the same font (UChicagoGRAD prefers Garamond, Century Gothic, Palatino Linotype, and a few others).

Don't shrink your font or margins just to make the page limit. Show that you care about the hiring manager's time and keep your letter concise.

There's no need to include your full address *in addition* to the employer's address. You will most likely be submitting materials via email! Don't waste valuable space in your documents.

Areas of Skepticism:

Think about some of the areas where hiring managers might have skepticism about graduate students or postdocs.

- **Are you able to work in teams?** Use examples in your cover letter that show you working with others to solve problems.
- **Can you work quickly, efficiently, and accurately?** Don't let the reader worry that you work "academically" - i.e. slowly and methodically. Show them that you have a record of achievement!
- **Do you have to be the smartest person in the room?** Hiring managers might see a graduate degree and worry that you do not effectively deliver or receive critical feedback. Show them that you've worked with others and that you thrive on collaborative input.
- **What kind of practical experience do you have?** If you have applicable professional experience outside graduate school, be sure to talk about it. But if you have been only in school, think about the activities that you have done outside the classroom. Have you managed a lab? Planned a conference? Served on committees? Talk about these activities.

Checklist:

Before meeting with UChicagoGRAD career advisors, it's helpful to have thought of and done some of the following things. This work can really improve the efficiency of our conversations with you!

- Your letter is 1 or 1.5 pages (we can help cut)
- It uses 0.7" to 1" margins and a standard font
- It has specific references to why you want to work at the company
- The company's name is in each paragraph
- It uses 1 - 2 examples of your work experience or skills in each paragraph
- It does not **just** list what's in the resume
- It is signed