Imperial College London

PhD students:
How to write a CV for roles outside academia

CVs provide a concise summary of skills, knowledge and experience that will be of interest to the recipient and need to be 'tailored' to a specific role or sector. This handout looks at CVs for PhD students applying for a role outside academia; there is a separate handout for PhDs that looks at the academic CV. If you're applying to a few different roles, you may find you need a few different CVs.

Before you get started, you should ask yourself:

- What skills, knowledge and experience do I have?

- What evidence do I have by way of achievements and outcomes that demonstrate my skills, knowledge and experience?

- Who am I writing this CV for and what will they be particularly interested in?

- How can I communicate this in a professional way?

STRUCTURING YOUR CV

PhD CVs aimed at a new role altogether need to emphasise the skills and qualities you've demonstrated in gaining your PhD, alongside other work experience and extra-curricular activities.

Aim for one or two pages maximum, in classic (reverse) chronological format and tailored to the role. The length of your CV is often affected by how many publications you have and whether you decide to provide full details of them. You could simply refer to the fact that you have produced 'x' number of peer-reviewed publications. But if you are applying to a technical role in industry, then details of your publications could be of interest to the recipient, so either include this information within the two-page CV or, if you have too many publications to include, provide full details on a separate third page, as an appendix to your two page chronological CV.

Your name, contact details and nationality/eligibility to work in the UK go at the top of your CV. Sections you should always include are then:

- Education (in reverse chronological order)

- Work Experience (including volunteering and unrelated vacation or part-time work)

- Skills (e.g. lab techniques, IT/stats, languages, etc.)

- Interests and Achievements (extra-curricular activities, etc.)

- References

In addition, you may wish to include sections such as:

- Scholarships and Awards

- Publications

- Conferences Attended

- Commercialisation of Research/Patents

- Industry Collaborations

A Profile at the start of your CV is also optional; you should only include it if it adds something new and interesting. Avoid a subjective, clichéd list of positive qualities.

Your decision as to which sections to include, as well as how much information to include within these sections, will depend on your own achievements, the role for which you're applying, the country to which you are applying and also whether there is a particular layout specified for the application you are making (in which case you should follow any instructions given very carefully). It can be helpful to glance at a few sample layouts of PhD CVs so that you're aware of the importance of visual impact, and then decide how you wish to structure your own to emphasise your achievements. See the Further Information section to help with this.

Education section. Provide brief details about your research, e.g. thesis title/aim. Highlight relevant specialist techniques as well as transferable skills such as analytical ability. You could mention for example that you undertook a carefully designed study/proof of principle into 'x', as the way you've approached your work may be relevant, even if your actual research isn't. Communicate in a concise, punchy way. Bullet points can work well; begin with positive verbs to highlight what you did exactly and any outcomes/results achieved, with sufficient detail or numbers to indicate performance.

Include concise, relevant information and dates for previous academic achievements e.g. MSc/MRes dissertation(s), Final Year Research Project (as an undergraduate) and options/modules chosen. You can also include A Level subjects and grades (with dates and institution attended in the same format as the rest of the Education section, but on one line); GCSEs can be summarised (e.g. overall numbers achieved at x, y, z grades) or left off your CV at this stage.

Work Experience/Employment section. You could use a general heading such as the latter, or split up experiences according to their relevance and group them within separate sections, in reverse chronology within each section, highlighting the relevance of your experience with tailored headings e.g. Technical Experience (or Scientific or Engineering Experience) – this might include your research experience on your PhD if you have limited other work experience. Other headings could be Professional Experience or Industry Experience perhaps. The aim is to highlight the connection between experience you've gained in the past with what you hope to do in the future. If you have teaching or demonstrating experience, you could create a heading or section to highlight this e.g. Leadership Experience, or incorporate it within Work Experience or Professional Experience.

Use bullet points that begin with action words to highlight relevant skills and tailor your CV further. For example, teaching requires team-work, communicating, planning and organising, confidence under pressure, evaluating and improving on the service provided. Conducting research requires excellent project management skills. Experience such as organising seminars or conferences with external invited speakers, committee work e.g. Postgraduate Representative or Health & Safety Representative in the lab or Sub-Wardening could be highlighted with the use of headings such as Positions of Responsibility, Management Experience or Project Management. Add just enough detail to show what was difficult or impressive and mention specific outcomes/results.

Additional Skills. A complete list of laboratory techniques is probably not necessary if you are now moving into a role outside the lab, but it's worth mentioning all or most of your IT, statistical, modelling or programming skills - as quantitative and analytical skills are highly transferable. Do mention any language skills, First Aid qualifications or Driving Licence.

Interests. Employers will be very interested in your extra-curricular activities, especially when you're applying for a new career, and will look at this section for evidence of qualities such as team-work, leadership, drive and initiative as well as relevant interests, e.g. reading business news. So think about what your extra-curricular activities say about you. Structure this section with sub-headings and bullet points, so that the reader can see your most impressive or relevant achievements at a glance. Use action words to show what you achieved and how.

References. Follow all instructions given in the application pack as procedures differ; referees are likely to include at least one academic, e.g. your supervisor or another academic who knows your work well and one employer referee, e.g. someone for whom you've worked in the past, or an industry collaborator perhaps.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Available from the Careers Service:

- **Online -** Vitae has sections on career opportunities in education and how to market yourself to employers at **www.vitae.ac.uk**;
  'Your PhD… What Next?' has a section on academic careers at **www.prospects.ac.uk**;
  www.beyondthephd.co.uk - although this is aimed at Arts and Humanities doctorates, it has some interesting articles and videos about career progression post PhD;
  the Research Council website also has case studies on researchers at **www.rcuk.ac.uk**

- **Reference Books -** Including: 'CVs and Cover Letters for PhDs and Postdocs' (University of Cambridge) - useful in comparing layouts; 'University Researchers and the Job Market' (AGCAS); 'Moving on in Your Career: A Guide for Academic Researchers & Postgraduates' (Ali/Graham); 'Career Planning for Research Bioscientists' (Blackford) and 'The Academic Job Search Handbook' (Miller Vick/Furlong) – with a US slant.

- **Careers Consultants –** can provide advice and support on writing your CV, you can book a consultation via JobsLive.

For information on the disclosure of disability or specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia, please see the information on the Careers Service website:
www.imperial.ac.uk/careers/disclosure