

Science CV Writing Guide

How to write a CV

It's easy to worry too much about your CV, but you shouldn't. It's a documentation of your career, and you're the expert on it. There isn't such a thing as a perfect CV as it very much depends on your individual background. Most CVs we see are good, there will always be recommendations we could make but providing it details all skills, experience, qualifications and achievements you won't be too far off.

With that said, we can turn a good CV into a great CV with some guidance

What are companies looking for?

The first thing someone reading your CV should see is your speciality and level of seniority. They are often looking for a specific profile for instance:

- Science Graduate with PCR and mammalian cell culture experience.
- PhD Graduate with experience using CRISPr to edit cells
- Senior Scientist who's managed experimental design and an Associate Scientist in a time pressurised environment.
- PhD level experienced molecular sales specialist with at least 3 years' experience selling into the UK academic sector

A good CV quickly shows your seniority and speciality and if this isn't easy to identify quickly, your CV is likely to end up in the 'no' pile. What's important to detail is:

- **The timeline** – What you've been doing, work or otherwise, in the last few years.
- **Technical Strengths** – What have you been doing alongside this speciality, how lab based, how independent and publication strengths
- **Your personality** – Sporty, Traveller, Additional Study

If you're in doubt about what to write, take a look at a detailed job description and personal specification and try to mirror your CV to match. Here's our guidance on how to do your CV best.

What is a CV?

It's Factual & quantifiable

We want: "During my PhD I independently developed and optimised an 8 colour FACS Assay" Not: "FACS"

It's a Summary

We're looking to understand what you did, and what you are best at. It should be easy for someone to read, and very quickly understand your background. Few Science CVs should be over 2 pages.

It's Formal

This is a professional document, and should be professionally formatted. Use formal language, and if you're in doubt if something is not professionally relevant, omit it.

It's Promotional

It's not the time to be modest, and we are impressed by people who put impressive things on their CV. If you've got good results, been given an award, stuck at something that was hard, put it in. There are often several/many candidates with similar skills and experiences so it's the achievements and accomplishments that will often make you stand out above the other applicants (this is particularly important at a graduate level or early in your career).

It's Targeted

You should review your CV for each job and each company. Make sure you provide clear detail on your experience for each point on a job advert, and research the companies' other research teams, and put relevant techniques where possible.

It's only the first stage

The CV's only function is to get you an interview. It needs to convey what you're good at, but it won't alone get you hired, and it's your performance at interview which will make the difference.

It's Accurate

Your CV will effectively make up the questions you will get asked at interview. Adding things on the CV that aren't true may cheat your way to an interview but if you then can't answer questions at interview you'll very quickly get caught out or rise suspicion which will likely result in a rejection.

Common Mistakes

Jack of all trades

Don't put every technique under the sun on your CV. No-one expects you to be an expert on every technique so make it clear what you're brilliant at, and what you're competent at.

The best way to do this is to add the technique to the place/time you have done it so if you put HPLC on the degree course you did in 2010 then the interview will know to expect you may be a bit rust on the practical. Likewise if your current job of 5 years includes method development on GCMS then they will know this is a technique you are very familiar with.

Perfectionism

Should that title be 2 mm to the left? As a scientist, your CV doesn't need to be a work of art. Proof read what you write, but don't worry too much on phrasing or layout and always get a second opinion for a trusted friend or colleague who will give you an honest opinion.

Informatics & graphic style representation of skills and experiences on a CV is becoming more common however whilst they do look good, they are actually a very poor way to represent your skills.

Standing out

Science CVs stand out because of your work and your publications. If your CV stands out due to formatting, it's normally for the wrong reasons.

Buzzwords

This is an easy mistake, and not one to feel too bad about. Avoid using phrases that don't make sense, or don't really say much, and display the skills instead.

Instead of 'Great communication skills' or 'Great teamwork skills'
Put 'Assisted on a successful grant proposal' or 'Regularly train and compete in the Taylorrollinson rowing team at Henley Royal Regatta.'

CV Body

Format

A standard 2-page chronological CV is best as this time-date links skills and experiences.

Font

Choose a rounded typeface such as Ariel, Calibri or Verdana as these are easier to read on electronic devices. Font size will vary based on the typeface but between 10-12 on Calibri is about right. Text should be in black (or a dark-grey). Use bold or uppercase to highlight section titles and if you are tight for space add a horizontal lines to emphasis section breaks.

Structure

So, how should it be structured? We recommend the following headers:

- Name & contact details (and picture – optional)
- Personal Statement/Career objective
- Key Skills/achievements
- Employment History
- Academic History
- Voluntary Experience
- Other skills
- Personal Interests
- Addendum with key academic publications and/or presentation

Name & Contact details

Full names, address and contact details including phone numbers and (appropriate) email addresses. You would be surprised how many CV's we see that don't have a name or contact details! Pictures are optional but a professional headshot can add a personal dimension to the CV, but an inappropriate picture could get you rejected before the reader has got passed the header.

Personal Statement/Career objective (optional)

A good personal statement should be a 2-4 line introduction to you, who you are and what you can do - don't just add a list of corporate buzzwords.

Career objectives can be very powerful if you are only interested in a certain type of role but they will pigeonhole you so only use if you are clear and the type of position you are looking for.

Key Achievements (optional)

A Key Achievements section can help highlight your biggest successes but these should also be incorporated into the appropriate Employment, Academic sections. Best used for Commercial/Management roles & should be 3-6 summary bullet points.

Employment History

If you have no applicable industry experience then this section should sit below the Academic History section. Industry experience is often more highly valued to other industry employers so as soon as you have industry experience then Employment section should sit above the Academic sector.

Each role needs: Company name; Start/leaving date (month & year) & Job title

This then should be followed by a brief 1-2 sentence summary of what the company does followed by a bullet list of your role, responsibilities and successes/achievements.

If you are writing a technical/Lab based CV then it is essential to list all the techniques you used (on a regular basis). Don't assume that the person reading the CV will understand what you do in a certain role type. If you are writing a Sales/Commercial CV you should detail your achievements using a variety of metrics such as performance against targets/growth plans/colleagues etc..

Jobs become less relevant the longer ago they are, play around with the detail, or omitting detail entirely once you have gained new experience to recoup space on the CV. However, you can be creative here so by including more detail on roles that are more significant to the role you are applying to, but maybe some time ago or short-term, makes them stand out on the CV.

Education

Include all standard academic history – regardless of your level so this should go back to GCSE's/O-levels. You don't need to list specific subjects and grades. As with your employment this should be listed: University/School name; Subject & grade; period of study (month & year) [optional but recommended]

The level of detail should be a reflection of how long ago it was you studied and how relevant it was to the position you are in now/applying for. If it is relevant then detail can only be a good thing. If you have 15 years in Life Science Sales the exact detail of your PhD in Biochemistry is less relevant.

Where there is significant relevance, your description should be an accurate summary of your research or dissertation and must include the techniques you used. This detail should all be relevant to people considering if you've got the skills for a job.

Again this is where you can really promote yourself by including achievements, awards, increased responsibility such as: for mentoring, instrument support, method development, dealing with sales reps, liaising with industry sponsors, winning (& writing) grant applications etc..

Voluntary Experience (optional)

Although it's a cliché, having voluntary experience will help to give your CV a bit more character and will help to present a more caring/passionate side.

Other Skills

Only list relevant skills and experiences here such as IT/software skills & packages; Health & Safety courses, training/mentoring abilities etc..

Personal Interests

Our favourite section as it gives a CV personality and character. Your personal interests will often say a lot about your competencies.

Significant periods of travel can indicate an ability to be independent, resourceful, explorative and confident around new/different cultures/environments. Sports demonstrate a competitive edge; team sports demonstrate you understand the value of teams and holders of roles or responsibilities suggest an element of leadership and organisation. However, beware as your interests can pigeon hole you and there are many interests/hobbies best left off a CV! Always sanity check this section and consider the pro's and cons' of your interests to an employer.

Addendum with key academic publications and/or presentation

We recommend a 2 page CV but use a third page addendum to list publications/presentations etc.. You should select your highest impact/most recent/most relevant papers, even if still pending. Add "full list of publications available on request" to avoid the list extending past one page.

References

Not necessary on an industry CV, but include a statement along the lines of: "Industry and/or academic references available on request"

Career Gaps

If you've got a gap, give anything you can to show what you've been doing. Always non-scientific work that you've done if you've got spaces post-graduation. If you were traveling, relocating or doing a Coursea course, we want to see any evidence that you've had a daily routine beyond Netflix and COD.