



The
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The
Careers
Service.

CVs And Covering Letters For Researchers.

Your Curriculum Vitae – CV – should be a clear and concise outline of your skills, work experience and professional expertise. In just the same way as publications arising from your research need to address the relevant section of the academic community your CV needs to address its target audience – prospective employers. In fact, there may be a number of similarities between publishing your research and publishing your CV.

Your research so far...

- What have you discovered or developed?
- What will your peer reviewers/readers want to know about your credibility?
- What results do you have to support your claims?
- What are the conventions in style and presentation for publications?

Your life so far...

- What skills, knowledge and experience do you have to offer?
- What will a potential employer want to know about these skills? What will they find interesting?
- What have you done in your life to back up your claims?
- What is considered professional in terms of the style and presentation of a CV?

This guide will help you to design an effective CV for applications for both academic and non-academic jobs in the UK. For advice on how to present your CV or resumé for other countries, please seek advice from staff in the Careers Service, or look at the Going Global website (accessible at <http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/careers/students/inter>) There are also a number of resources in the Careers Service which may be of use – see the section at the end of this briefing sheet.

What do you have to offer – where is the evidence?

When applying for jobs, think of yourself in terms of the skills, knowledge and experience you have acquired. Depending on the job you want, the balance of importance between each of these will change. However, begin by writing everything down and then you can decide what elements to include and what to leave out of your final document.

Examples of CVs can be found on the Vitae website and these will give you an idea of the main headings which need to be included in your document. You might begin by placing evidence under each of these main headings – partly to ascertain if there are any gaps that need to be worked on. Vitae's website can be found at www.vitae.ac.uk

Skills

The Careers Service leaflet 'Skills of Researchers' emphasises the importance of including skills gained alongside the body of knowledge you are acquiring/have acquired whilst completing your PhD. These skills can also be demonstrated from full-time and part-time work, voluntary work experience, travel, sports or involvement in student societies.

Knowledge

The depth of knowledge acquired during research may be of prime importance for an academic research or lecturing post. However, for jobs outside your subject area, it will be effective to highlight how certain techniques or subject knowledge are transferable and how they relate to the job in question. It is a good idea to explain your research in clear terms, avoiding jargon, and get a non-specialist friend to read the research summary on your CV to see if they understand what you are doing.

The publications in this series are: Support for Postgraduate Researchers; Support for Research Staff; Your PhD - What Next?; Skills of Researchers; CVs and Covering Letters for Researchers; Interview Tips for Researchers

Experience

Experience includes being a research student, but also previous work or professional experience, other activities within the University – for example, demonstrating in a laboratory or teaching work – and non paid experience – for example, in a voluntary organisation. Focus on achievements and give evidence of how these were obtained.

Who are you writing this for?

A CV is like an advertisement. It will work best when it focuses on how the product, you, will satisfy the needs of the customer, the employer. This means tailoring your CV according to the job applied for. For example

Jobs using your specialist knowledge – focus on your subject achievements, ability to deliver results, your research, projects undertaken and resources managed, relevant techniques and knowledge, skills such as team work, problem solving and creativity. A research post is likely to involve teamwork, working to deadlines, multi-tasking and communication skills, as well as specialist research techniques. Try to address all of these within your CV and Covering Letter/ Statement of Purpose.

Academic jobs – focus on your subject-specific achievements and education, your past, current and future research interests, any teaching, demonstrating or departmental administration activities and anything else to demonstrate your research skills and professional standing. List publications, research collaborations, conference papers, membership of professional bodies. Don't worry if this document goes over two pages. If you have enough material, place publications and conference proceedings together on one sheet and put this towards the end of your CV.

Other fields of employment – focus on your key transferable skills in **relation to the job applied for**. Highlight achievements gained outside academic research as well as the time management and people skills developed whilst doing your research. A 'personal profile' highlighting your interest in, and suitability for, this type of work can be very useful and this is usually placed on page one of your CV under the 'contact details' section.

For any job, try to find out what the employer is looking for. This information can be found in: job descriptions and person specifications, advertisements, recruitment and promotional literature, the company's website and competitors' sites – which show what similar employers look for. The Careers Service will be able to offer help and advice once you have drafted your documents, but please note, we do not have time to correct grammar, spelling or punctuation. It is your responsibility to ensure the finished documents demonstrate your attention to detail and excellent communication skills.

The covering letter/statement of purpose

For academic applications, the covering letter and statement of purpose may fulfil the same purpose and it would be usual to send one or the other – depending on what was asked for by the university or research establishment.

The aim of these documents will be to outline, in a clear and logical way

- why you are interested in the post
- what you bring to the role – as evidenced in your Application/CV
- some indication of your future plans for research and teaching

Reference to the job description and person specification is vital here. Also, the more research you have done on the university/research establishment, the more easily you will be able to align your current and future research plans to their needs. It is usual to take more than one side of A4 paper to address these issues effectively and most applications invite you to continue onto a second sheet.

For non-academic applications, the covering letter will be shorter – about one side of A4 – and will

- Introduce yourself and mention the vacancy you have applied for.
- Outline what you can bring to the role – as evidenced in your application/CV.
- Explain what attracts you to the job – especially if it is a non-academic post as you will need to demonstrate your understanding of the role and your commitment to this career direction.
- Show why this organisation/company is attractive to you.

If you are sending your CV speculatively online, treat the corresponding email as a brief covering letter. That way, the recipient is more likely to open the attachment containing your CV.

Aim to keep your CV up to date and, once you have drafted a statement that you are happy with, this document can be saved and updated too, as you gain experience and further qualifications. It follows that you will keep the documents in a readily-accessible file and ensure that your supervisor/principal investigator has copies of the latest documents, to aid you in producing full and appropriate references.

Further sources of information (all available at the Careers Service)

- Briefing sheets on: 'Applications' and 'Covering Letters'
- Various reference books on designing and writing CVs and Covering Letters
- Our publication 'How Do You rate Your CV?'
- A list of 'power words' that you can use to strengthen descriptions of your experience