

THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

ADVICE

Dos and Don'ts of Creating Your CV

Answers to common questions of early-career academics on this all-important job document.

By *Jennifer S. Furlong* and *Stacy M. Hartman*

FEBRUARY 6, 2024



GETTY IMAGES

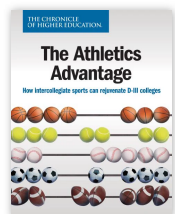
Drafting a curriculum vitae for the faculty job market can be a bit of a reckoning. The CV is essentially a running list of your accomplishments, and as you edit it, you see clearly what you've done and what you haven't. Even if you are not applying for faculty positions, it's useful to have an up-to-date vitae on hand — to gauge where to concentrate your efforts and to be ready to send it out if opportunity knocks.

A CV is a record of your scholarly life. Your goal is to organize the document such that your accomplishments leap off the page and need no interpretation. Unlike a résumé or a cover letter, a vitae is intended to be comprehensive, in that you are expected to list everything you've done in graduate school and beyond.

That said, your CV's readers will change with each job you apply for, so there is room to tailor the document. Clearly for jobs at teaching-intensive colleges you'll want to foreground your classroom experience, while a major research university will be more

interested in your publications. Depending on the [range of jobs you're applying for](#), you may also want to create another document that is a bit of a hybrid, landing somewhere between a traditional CV and a résumé. (We'll explore those hybrids in a future column.)

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As experts on graduate-career counseling, we've already talked about how to [write](#) and [tailor](#) cover letters. Now we turn to what to do, and not do, in preparing a CV for faculty openings. We aim to answer the most frequent CV questions we hear from graduate students and recent Ph.D.s. But the truth is: Every CV is unique, because everyone has a different path through graduate school. What works well for you might not work well for someone else, even within the same program cohort. So let the following advice guide you, but trust your own instincts as it's your CV.

Format. We recommend keeping your format simple (don't overload it with tables), your font standard (avoid Gothic, Script, or the infamous Comic Sans), and your margins typical size (one inch). Your vitae is a document that will grow in length. Set it up so that it's easy for you to add entries without having to fiddle around with the formatting every time. For most academics, this means using a standard Word document for your CV, rather than a résumé template. (Latex documents can look very nice, too, if that's your program of choice.) You will have to convert your document to a PDF before you send it anywhere, so what matters here is your ease of use.

Length. There's no reason to agonize over the length of your CV, as you might for an industry résumé. But neither should you pad it with incidental entries just to make it longer — that risks burying your achievements beneath layers of fluff. Some grant and fellowship programs (and the occasional job posting) will request a document of specific length — two pages, for example. In that case, follow the provided guidelines for length and content, and curate this shorter CV to highlight your most significant and relevant accomplishments.

Contact information. Put your name and contact information at the top of your CV — that's the obvious part, and most people get that right. Include your email address and phone number — *just one* of each (listing multiple confuses readers about which to use). Your contact information can include your social-media handles and any relevant URLs. It used to be that people would always include a mailing address at the top. You don't need to do that anymore, but it can be a way of signaling geographic proximity to institutions near you. Some job candidates will list a university mailing address at the top of their CV, as a way of showing academic affiliation. That's fine, too.

Education. For new Ph.D.s and A.B.D.s, this should be the first section on your CV. (Most everyone else should start with a version of your experience section.) List your degrees in reverse chronological order (starting with the most recent). For your doctoral degree, include the name of your adviser and the title of your dissertation. You may have a prior master's degree; if you did a thesis as a part of the program, you might include the title, particularly if it's relevant to your current research. For your undergraduate degree, keep the entry short and simple, omitting any thesis titles, extracurriculars, or honors (unless they are nationally recognized, like Phi Beta Kappa). Sometimes, job candidates include a synopsis of their dissertation under the entry for their Ph.D.; others opt to put the synopsis in a separate section.

Honors and awards. There's a strong tendency among Ph.D. students to include an honors-and-awards section immediately after the education section. But that doesn't

make the most of this prime real estate on your CV's front page. Keep this as a separate section if you have one or two major external awards that should be highlighted. If not, it may be just fine to briefly mention a few awards in the education section, under the relevant degrees, or to move the awards section lower in the document.

Grants and fellowships. Like honors and awards, this section is most useful if you have at least one or two external grants to list. If all of your funding has been internal (i.e., awarded by your doctoral university or department), it's also fine to move this information to the education section, under the relevant degree.

Publications. It's common practice to include your publications on the first page of your CV. Given how important these are for early-career job candidates, this may make sense for you, especially in an application for a tenure-track job at a research university. Include your publications in reverse chronological order, using the same citation format for each entry.

The most-frequent questions we are asked about publications are: "What if I don't have any actually published yet? Should I include ones that are forthcoming, that I've been asked to revise and resubmit, or that are under consideration?"

If that is the status of all of your potential publications as you finish your doctorate, you're not alone. Our usual answer is to list those future pubs — as long as the status of each is clearly listed and the claim is true. That said, if you have even one successful publication, your claims about others in the works will appear more credible.

Experience (teaching, research, professional). This section is the most challenging part of CV writing for most job candidates. It's the one place on your CV that is not just a list but also brief descriptions of the work you've done as a graduate student or early-career scholar.

For many early-career academics, this will be a single section that focuses on your teaching experience. Depending on your field and your record, you may want to divide up your experience into multiple sections. As a candidate in the sciences, you might have a separate section on your research experience, describing the projects you've worked on and the techniques you've used. Candidates in the humanities might use a research-experience section to emphasize extensive archival work. You may have still other types of experience to include, such as fieldwork (for anthropologists) or professional work experience (for nurses and social workers). Grouping similar experiences together in separate sections — and labeling them clearly: “Teaching Experience,” “Research,” “Fieldwork” — makes it easier for anyone reading the document to understand what you've done.

Many job candidates ask us whether it's OK to use bullet points in this section on a CV, as you might on a résumé. They worry that a CV with bullet points might look suspiciously like a business résumé, and connote an interest in work beyond being a faculty member. Unfortunately, there's no way for us to tell if that's a valid concern, given that different readers bring different perspectives to reviewing CVs.

What we do know, however, is that some kinds of academic experience on a CV benefit from a bit of explanation — a sentence or two, at most. For example, don't merely list a course title; tell us about its content. Was it a course for first-year students or majors? What was the enrollment? If you held a fellowship in a campus administrative office, include a line or two about the scope of your work. The goal here is to be informative yet concise.

Courses taught. Some job candidates have a separate courses-taught section. That can be a compelling way to organize content if you have a good deal of teaching experience, particularly if it's at multiple institutions or includes many different types of courses. In this case, your teaching-experience section would list the institutions and the dates of your faculty appointments, whereas the courses-taught section would include information about the courses themselves.

University service. It's common for doctoral students to participate in campus governance, admissions committees, student-life activities, and curriculum development, among other things. List those activities under this section; some of them might merit a short description (one or two lines) so that your readers understand the nature of the work. This information is not something you would include in a cover letter for most faculty positions, but here on your CV, it gives a sense that you understand how institutions operate.

Research and teaching interests. Not everyone needs to include this section. However, it can be useful for job candidates whose full range of teaching and research areas aren't obvious from other sections of the CV. Its location on your CV is up to you. You could include both teaching and research interests, or one or the other. Your entries here should be short, recognizable fields of interest in your disciplines. Whatever you might include here, it should be something in which you truly have some expertise. Don't use this section simply to make yourself look as if you fit a particular job description.

The next few categories tend to come toward the end of a CV. You can play around with the order, depending on the job posting and the elements you wish to emphasize.

Languages. For fields that value language abilities, list all languages in which you have proficiency and your level of fluency. If you have a recent, official assessment of your language-teaching skills from a group like the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, mention it. If not, try to accurately describe your skill level with phrases like "conversational," "fluent," "native fluency," or "reading comprehension." Be honest. You never know when you might be asked to demonstrate your proficiency in a job interview, and you won't make a good impression if you've overpromised.

Skills. Additional skills that are relevant for your teaching and research should be included here. These might include any coding languages you know, video or audio editing, qualitative or quantitative data-management systems, experience with

scientific equipment and techniques, and software programs prevalent in your discipline. This is not generally a place to list “soft” skills, even though we believe those are highly relevant to the work most academics do; nor is it a place to list hobbies or skills that are irrelevant to the job you’re applying for. We also recommend against listing “research,” “teaching,” or even “grant writing” because those skills should speak through the other achievements you list in your CV.

Professional memberships. List here any memberships you have in scholarly or professional organizations relevant to your field(s). Such memberships demonstrate that you are an active and interested participant in your discipline. If you have not yet joined the relevant societies, it’s good to look into doing so before you begin applying for academic jobs. The organizations usually have very low membership rates for graduate students, and some departments may reimburse you.

Putting it all together. We encourage you to play around with the organization of your document, saving each iteration separately, to give yourself some flexibility. Consider swapping your teaching and research sections, for example, or moving your professional experience up if the position you’re applying for combines administrative and teaching/research responsibilities.

As with every other element of your application, ask yourself what you want your reader to immediately see and remember about you and your work. Once you have two or three versions that you are happy with, ask a faculty adviser or someone in career services for advice on which version works best, and for which types of jobs. Disciplines sometimes vary in their expectations, so it is important to make sure that your CV reflects the conventions of your field.

One question we often get: Should I include my undergraduate accomplishments on my CV? In general, you will be evaluated on the strength of your work in graduate school, so we don’t recommend padding your vitae with undergraduate achievements. One or two entries that stand out (an award for an undergraduate

thesis, for example, or an undergraduate teaching assistantship) might make it in, but keep them pithy. You should certainly include any well-known postbaccalaureate-fellowship awards you earned, such as a Fulbright, Marshall, or Rhodes. You could include them in your education section, especially if they led to a degree, or put them under the grants and fellowships section.

CVs are always a work in progress. Putting one together can be stressful; it's tempting to think that if you do it exactly right, it will protect you from the whims of a harsh and capricious academic job market. But no job document is ever "perfect." Your goal should be to produce something very, very good with no typos. And if, in writing your CV, you realize you have gaps, that's OK. It's data on where to concentrate your efforts in the future.

We welcome your thoughts and questions about this article. Please [email the editors](#) or [submit a letter](#) for publication.

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Jennifer S. Furlong

Jennifer S. Furlong is director of the office of career planning and professional development at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. Most recently, she served as co-president of the Career Services Association of CUNY and as mid-Atlantic regional director of the [Graduate Career Consortium](#).

Stacy M. Hartman

Stacy M. Hartman is an independent researcher, facilitator, and consultant. Formerly the director of the PublicsLab at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, she is co-editor of [Graduate Education for a Thriving Humanities Ecosystem](#),

published in November 2023 by the Modern Language Association. More information about her work can be found at stacyhartman.com.

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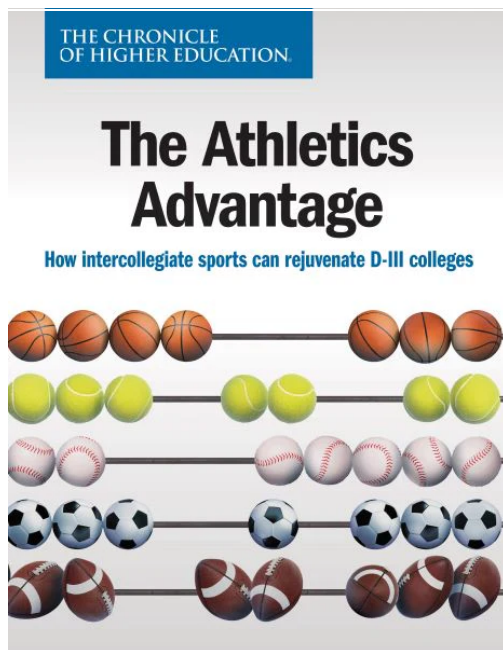
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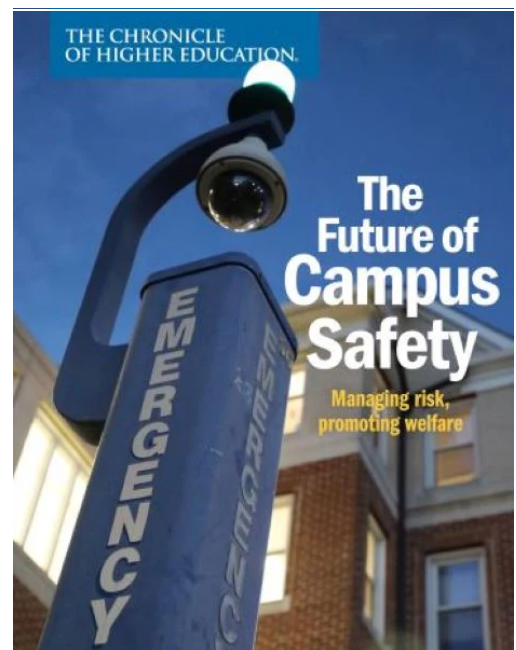
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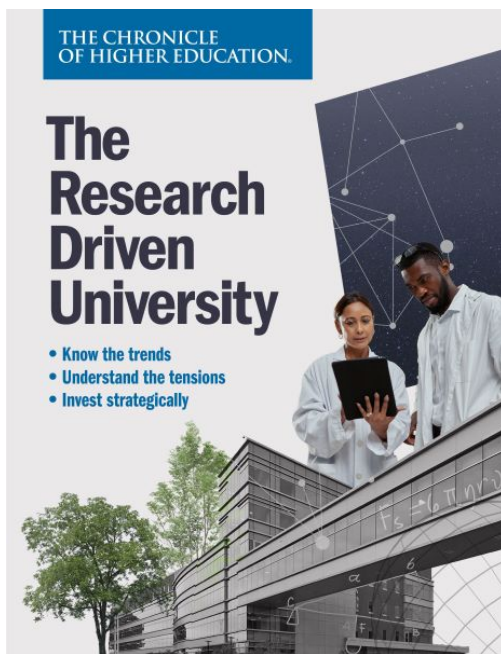
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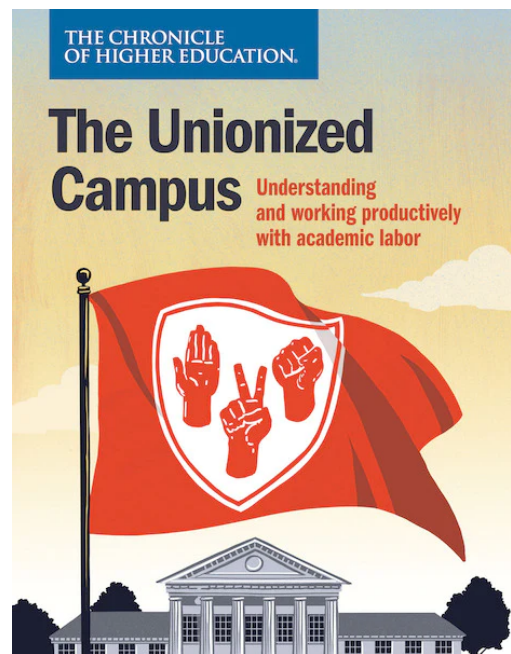
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