

CVs for PhD Students

There are a number of ways that someone with a PhD can effectively present their experience on a CV. How you choose to do this will depend on the kind of job you are going for and how much it directly relates to your field of research. This leaflet will look at how to portray your experience successfully whether you are going for a related academic role or something completely different to what you have done so far. The sections below cover the main parts of a CV in the most common order.

PERSONAL DETAILS

Include your name and contact details. Information such as date of birth and nationality are optional. However, including your nationality can be a good way to inform the employer of your eligibility to work in a particular country. You can also include work permit details for this reason.

CAREER PROFILE

This is optional but can be an effective way of providing a contextual summary to your CV. It should be short, about four to five lines, and very specific to you and your experience. Avoid generalisations such as 'dynamic team player'. For an academic CV you may want to title this section 'Research Interests' and focus on the research you have done and would like to do in the future.

EDUCATION AND QUALIFICATIONS

The amount of specific detail you devote to your PhD and other higher education qualifications will depend on how relevant these are to the job. Present the information in reverse chronological order.

For academic jobs and directly-related jobs outside universities

For these jobs your field of research will be of relevance and interest to the employer. Take time and space to outline your research focus, highlighting any particularly relevant areas. Avoid a lot of detail; a paragraph should be enough to get your message across. Essentially you want to show that you are now a competent researcher, so make sure you tell them you got results. In addition, include any relevant technical skills you may have developed, for example using lab equipment, scientific techniques, data analysis software or quantitative/qualitative research methods.

You should also include information about other academic qualifications. How much space you devote will depend on their relevance. If you have done a Masters or Bachelors degree in a related field you may want to include an overview of the courses studied and a summary of your project or dissertation.

For jobs unrelated to your research

If you are going for a role which has no obvious relationship to your PhD, you need to shift the emphasis away from your specialism and write about the transferable skills you have gained that are needed for the job for which you are applying. You should be able to find details of the required skills and experience in the job description and person specification that comes with the advertised position, or other research you have done to find out about the job.

See the University of Sheffield website for a more detailed explanation of skills developed through a PhD. The Vitae website has a useful tool for evaluating and evidencing your skills (search 'auditing your skills' from the homepage).

If the title of your PhD makes little sense to the lay person try to express it in simpler language. You want the employer to realise that you are able to communicate beyond an academic context. Consider whether or not the title would be of any interest to a recruiter. If not, leave it out.

For both academic and non-academic positions, school qualifications should be briefly summarised at the end of your education section.

WORK EXPERIENCE

For any job you should emphasise the skills you have acquired, backed up by specific evidence from the work you have done. Highlight your key responsibilities and outline any achievements. Again the information should be broadly presented in reverse chronological order but you could divide your work experience into sub-sections to ensure the most relevant comes first.

Academic employers are usually interested in research, teaching and administrative experience. You may want to split your experience into these areas and perhaps have an additional section at the end for other work experience. Include details of any funding you have attracted, perhaps from a commercial sponsor or research council. Mention any successful Funding applications you have been involved with. When presenting your teaching experience, make sure you include class sizes, degree of responsibility, pastoral support and course design if you have done this. If you have been involved in college committees include this in the administrative section.

If you are applying to a commercial employer try to address any concerns they might have about recruiting someone with a PhD. It is helpful to

include anything that shows business and commercial awareness. This might be part-time bar or retail work or any industrial experience, including placements. Also show the ability to deliver to tight deadlines. Academic researchers can sometimes be seen by employers as having the luxury of flexible deadlines in which to produce their research. If you have collaborated with industry during your research then make this stand out. If your PhD has been a solitary existence, use evidence of teamworking and interpersonal skills from work experience or leisure pursuits.

PUBLICATIONS AND CONFERENCES

These are commonly left to the end of the CV but for academic jobs are one of your most important selling points. Present them in reverse chronological order and list publications first followed by conference papers and poster presentations.

For unrelated jobs describe how you approached these, rather than their content, to highlight the more transferable skills gained such as writing skills, making presentations, networking and collaborating with others in the field.

OTHER INFORMATION

You may want to include an additional skills section for languages, IT and any other skills-related courses you have attended, for example, presentations, report writing and project management. Some universities are now running sessions to develop these skills for their research students. Look out for opportunities through your university or careers service to engage with the commercial world. This could be by participating in courses, using your expertise as a consultant or through Knowledge Transfer Partnerships.

You can also include information on membership of professional bodies and awards or prizes.

LEISURE INTERESTS

Some employers have an interest in this section; academic employers traditionally have been less concerned about what you do in your spare time. It is a useful place to address any skills gaps such as teamwork and show an employer that you have interests unrelated to your PhD, reading and research. It works best if your interests show active participation and commitment.

REFEREES

For most jobs two referees are the norm. Ideally one will be your supervisor as they have worked closely with you for at least three years. For academic jobs it is useful if your referee is well-known in the field and the more senior the better. If you already have your PhD your external examiner might be a good option as a second referee or perhaps someone who examined you for your upgrade.

If you are moving outside of academia you should have one reference from an employer. For those of you who have only

worked overseas, gaining an employment reference can sometimes be tricky because of language barriers. In this case you might want to provide two academic referees, perhaps giving the option of a third referee from abroad.

GENERAL POINTS

- Length: for non-academic jobs no more than two pages. Academic CVs can be longer but aim to have your most important information on first two pages. Start a new page for your publications.
- Style: make sure section headings stand out. Use bullet points to keep the text punchy and help the reader focus on the important bits. Don't make your font smaller than Arial 10 points.
- Tailor your CV to each job you apply for, giving greatest prominence to your most relevant skills and experience.

FURTHER INFORMATION

- *Your PhD... what next?* AGCAS Special Interest Series, 2006, www.prospects.ac.uk. Search for title from homepage
- www.careerstaged.co.uk a unique resource designed by the Careers Group. Search the information you want by typing in tag words. The tag 'Early Career Researcher' together with 'Career Development' are particularly useful
- www.vitae.ac.uk Contains sample CVs. Also contains the 'Researcher Development Framework (RDF)' a useful summary of the skills researchers develop on a PhD
- www.ktponline.org.uk Knowledge Transfer Partnerships provide opportunities for researchers to work in industry for short periods.

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