

Academic CVs

This tip-sheet provides some hints and tips for how to put together a typical academic CV, suitable for the UK.

1. Essentials

Your CV:

- is a factual **marketing** document outlining your career history, education, and skills. An effective CV will contain accurate and honest information which shows that you meet the requirements of the role you are applying for.
- will need to be **adapted each time** you apply, deciding what is relevant and irrelevant by looking closely at the information that is available to you.
- should focus on the last **five years**. Skills and experience acquired before this time can be added but only if directly relevant to the role you are applying for.
- must mirror what the prospective employer has said they are looking for. Keep the job advert, job description and person specification close to hand. Aim to use the same vocabulary.

2. Style & format

Looks matter

Your CV should be both professional to look at and easy to read. Through a quick scan of your CV (maximum 30 seconds), your potential employers must be able to extract key achievements.

Cast an eye over your CV: can you find all the crucial information quickly?

Length

For postdoc applications, your CV should be a maximum of two to three pages, with your publications and conference proceedings included at the end like an appendix.

For lectureship applications, it is often appropriate to write slightly more. But don't be fooled: lectureship search committees are scanning your CV just as quickly. Clarity, concision, and relevance are still key.

Bullet points and notes

To enable your CV to be easily scanned, use concise, punchy bullet points. Don't bother to say 'I' – start with the verbs instead, i.e., led a project.

Never use full sentences anywhere on your CV.

Fonts

Be consistent with your formatting throughout your CV.

To aid easy reading, use a sans serif font such as Arial, keep it to size 11 or above, stick to standard margins (1 inch/2.54 cm all around), use proper line breaks, and align all text to the left (never use centre or justified).

Bold font works well for headings and emphasising job titles, but capitals, italics, and underlining can clutter the page and are often best avoided.

3. Content

This is the traditional ordering of content, feel free to modify this according to the role you are applying to.

Personal details

Put your name in a large font and, underneath, your email address, and a phone number (one of each).

There is no need to start with a heading of 'CV' or 'Curriculum Vitae'.

You can (but you don't have to) add your title at the top of your CV – either 'Dr' before or 'PhD' after your name is acceptable, but not both.

There is no need to add any other personal details, e.g., photo, date of birth, or marital status. If you are applying to other countries, please check local conventions.

You might choose to describe your right to work:

Nationality: Canadian (work visa required)

Nationality: Icelandic (EEA national)

Nationality: Malaysian (work visa not required – UK permanent resident)

Employment

List your employment history in reverse chronological order. Include any non-academic employment here as well especially if your experience is valuable to the position you are applying for, e.g. relevant industry experience.

Highlight **key achievements** – i.e., for each position, add one or two bullet points to describe your successes.

Don't simply refer to 'duties' or 'responsibilities' – it doesn't show that you were actually successful.

Emphasise **collaborations** – e.g., where you have established or maintained professional relationships

with other departments, groups, and industrial partners.

Showcase any **management experience** – e.g., managing labs, students, budgets, supplies, and equipment.

Begin each bullet point with an active verb, e.g., led, coordinated, established, delivered...

Led a team of 4 for a six-month project costing £40,000. Delivered the key project milestones 2 weeks ahead of schedule and 10% under budget.

Be descriptive with your evidence and include quantifiable data where possible to support your experience.

Established an industrial collaboration resulting in a £400,000 grant and a successful patent application.

Ensure that all information is about you. Don't say 'we' or talk about your team in general terms.

Qualifications

List your qualifications in reverse chronological order and be sure to specify the years (start and finish).

Include your PhD and Masters thesis title within this section.

Highlight **key achievements** – i.e., for each position, add one or two bullet points to describe your successes.

Funding and awards

Showcase any money that you have won or assisted in winning: grants, fellowships, travel awards, studentships, scholarships.

For each grant, outline your contribution – especially if you drafted the document, you were the named researcher or co-investigator.

Specify the amount awarded.

Omit any unsuccessful grant applications.

Include any academic awards that you have received (not including school).

Teaching & Supervision (separate these sections)

Outline any experience you have of giving lectures, tutorials, demonstrations, or supervisions. Specify the level (e.g., 1st year undergraduate, Masters, PhD) and quantify (in hours) how much you have done and how the students were organised (lecture for 150 students, tutorials for 30 students in groups of 5).

Add feedback for your teaching (if you have it) and outcomes to your supervision (if you published with your students, they progressed to a PhD, or went into industry, and so on).

Evidence of esteem

This section is a chance to demonstrate that you are well regarded in your field. The evidence of esteem section can include the following relevant activities and the sections below as well (Outreach and Professional Bodies memberships).

- Invited presentations
- Chairing a panel
- Sitting on a committee
- Organising a conference or symposium
- Reviewing articles for a journal

Outreach and engagement

Give details of any outreach programs that you have been involved in. What was the activity and who attended?

Membership of professional bodies

List all active memberships.

Referees

If there is another space where referees' details are asked for, e.g., on an application form, you can omit this section entirely or write 'References available on request'. Don't give more referees than requested.

Breaks and disclosures

Minimise small breaks in your employment history by using whole years rather than months and years. For example 2009-2011.

If you have taken a career break or had time off lasting more than a few months, you can choose to:

1. Provide a brief, factual description, e.g., 'Parental leave (6 months)', 'Absence for health reasons (now fully recovered)', or 'Three months' full-time job hunting.
2. Leave the break out. You do not have to volunteer this information, though you might get asked about any gaps later, e.g., at an interview.

4. Checklist

- Does your CV correspond closely with the person specification and show evidence that you meet the essential criteria?
- Is your CV the right length for the kind of application you're making?
- Is your CV formatted consistently, with no spelling or grammatical errors?
- Is the content recent and relevant?
- Have you included all appropriate sections?

If you have any further questions regarding your CV or any other aspects of your professional development, please contact the Postdoc and Fellows Development Centre for a one-to-one meeting.

Contact us:
pfdc-support@imperial.ac.uk

