

GRADUATE AND PROFESSIONAL STUDIES

Application Documents

Disclaimer: Career Services provides these guidelines as general summary information only. Expectations vary from program to program. We do not recommend any particular format or content definitively.

Curriculum Vitae

Most students have used a job search resume, but are less familiar with a CV. The two overlap in some ways but have significant differences and purposes.

- A resume is designed to provide a detailed picture of a job applicant's qualifications for particular work and is customized to emphasize information that fits with particular job needs. It is not meant to provide a complete history.
- A curriculum vitae (CV) – or professional activities resume – is meant to provide a complete picture, literally “the course of a person's professional life.” It can vary from 2 to 30+ pages outlining details of the scope and type of professional and academic experience a person has. It shows the trajectory of a person's career and relevant depth and breadth of experience. Headings vary but usually begin with information seen as most significant by the profession and end with less critical information.

In addition to graduate or professional school, CVs are often used to apply for scientific, academic and medical work. There is no one standard format or layout. Recommendations vary by discipline, purpose and organizational preferences. As graduate school is typically focused on doing, writing about and presenting research, graduate school CVs often place more emphasis on those areas.

TIP:

Ask grad schools for format or content guidelines/restrictions, and read about the faculty and program for clues about what's important to them. If you're not able to get information from programs, their faculty may have CVs online. Recent graduates from the same program may also be willing to share theirs.

Basic guidelines

- Use 8.5" x 11" white paper, black ink, 11 – 12 point easy-to-read font, with approximately 1" margins
- It is unnecessary to begin with the title (CV or Curriculum Vitae)
- Include name and page number on each page; use white space and category headings to break up text
- Beneath each heading, arrange information in reverse chronological order (most recent to oldest)
- Language should be clear and easy to read; avoid first person (I, me, my) statements
- Do not list information from high school or earlier. Omit photos, social insurance number, and references to health, physical appearance, age, religious/political affiliations or other personal information

Section headings

Most common sections

- Contact Information
- Education
- Awards/Scholarships/Honours
- Professional (discipline related) Experience
- Research
- Publications/Conferences/Presentations
- Referee/References Listing

Optional sections

- Objective
- Teaching and Research Interests
- Professional Licenses/Certifications
- Special Skills
- Professional Affiliations/Service
- Interests

Most common sections

Contact Information — Use your formal, legal name the way you want to be referred to professionally. Include current address, phone number, and professional email (usually your first and last name, not a nickname). A website or online portfolio URL may be appropriate in some disciplines.

Education — This section should list:

Degree Earned, major/minor or concentration	Years attended
Post secondary institution attended	City, Province
Graduation date or expected graduation	

- Do not cite numerous courses; a full list will be in transcripts. If highlighting a particularly unusual but relevant course or independent study/research, provide a brief description.

Awards/Scholarships/Honours — If significant in number, group by type.

Professional Experience — This may be subsectioned into paid, volunteer, and if relevant, specific experience with special populations. Showcase any teaching assistant positions, related professional experience – fieldwork/ research/internships/practicum – or other experiences demonstrating significant experience pertinent to graduate school. **Note:** Some graduate school guidelines suggest using only relevant-to-graduate-school work such as tutor, teaching assistant and research, while others accept broader experiences.

- Paid work, volunteer experience and in-the-field studies should be laid out by:

Title	Dates
Organization Name	City, Province

- For teaching experiences, organize by Courses Taught and/or Teaching Assistantship, citing course name/ number, department, university, city, province, semester and year, with a brief description of content.
- Accurately describe specifics, scope of responsibilities and concrete outcomes or achievements.

Research — Include where research was conducted, dates, research advisor, major paper(s) or thesis, work completed, important findings, results, and techniques/instruments used, especially for science disciplines.

Publications — Include any work published. Academic journals are preferred, but non-academic sources can be included. Identify and include major presentations you have given outside of a class as an undergrad student.

- Cite in the preferred format for your discipline, including dates, page numbers, etc.

References — Cite names of faculty (and others) who have written letters for you. List using titles, institution and department, unless otherwise requested. Usually at least three references are expected.



TIP:

Graduate school programs want to hear about you, your contributions and accomplishments. Clarify time gaps if they appear in your CV, but don't include trivial information to add length or repeat information in multiple sections.

Optional sections

Objective — e.g., Acceptance to Master's of Chemistry, or Medieval History Research Assistant Position.

Summary/Teaching and Research Interests — A brief description of competencies, current/recent activities that lead to achieving future goals.

Professional Licenses/Certifications — Mostly used for technical subject matter.

Special Skills — List skills that set you apart from other applicants. May include non-standard but relevant computer skills, international experience or foreign language/intercultural competence.

Professional Affiliations/Service — May include student, local, provincial, national or international professional association membership, committee work and/or conferences and presentations attended.

Interests — Keep this brief, citing one or two endeavours that make you interesting and well-rounded.

TIP:

Have multiple people – including Career Services and someone in your discipline – read your CV. The perspective of people both familiar and unfamiliar with you and your discipline will help uncover areas which may be confusing to the admissions panel.

Application Essay/Letter/Personal Statement

In addition to marks, schools may use less quantifiable information to select the best person-program fit, such as the application essay. Also referred to as a statement of purpose or letter of intent, this is difficult to write but can tip the balance in favour of one applicant over another. In most cases, there is a word-count limit to show ability to organize thoughts, write clearly and stand out from a large number of extraordinary applicants.

Applicants are often given a question(s) to address or points to include to draw out a uniquely personal explanation of their interest, people or events that had an impact on career aspirations, professional involvement so far, and how the proposed program supports and furthers their professional goals.

- **Your audience:** The selection committee, usually faculty members who are experts in their field.
- **Your goals:** To help them understand the reason you are interested in **this** program, and a brief explanation of gaps or shortfalls if they appear in your transcripts or CV.

Getting into grad school is a very competitive process. Link your personal story to what your research reveals about why this graduate school and program is a great fit for you and what you expect to study and research.

- Why does this subject matter capture your interest and make you believe it is your "life's work?"
- Is there a particular program professor who has done research you have found extremely interesting?

Demonstrate you are prepared for grad school through solid writing, understanding the field, using specific coursework and other accomplishments mastered relating to the field. Highlight what you have done beyond "other students" to make you a stellar representative of their program and school throughout your career.

TIP:

Show your essay to a number of professors – each will have different ideas about what is effective. Take down all suggestions and advice, and any “inside scoop” some may have. Make your own final decisions based on what will most accurately convey who you are as a candidate to the panel.

DO	DON'T
Write in the first person and stay within the word-count limit	Repeat information already on your CV
Show genuine interest by being clear about your own motivations and thoughts	Highlight weaknesses or problems
Proofread and edit for grammar, tense, consistency, accuracy and style	Reference monetary benefits or outcomes
Ensure professors you cite as desired supervisors have not retired or left	Start every sentence with “I”
In point form, plot out your story from what started you in this direction to where you see yourself down the road. This ensures when you start writing, each paragraph clearly conveys a specific point you want them to “get”	State the obvious or write in generalities
Avoid negative statements, cliches, or language you would not normally use; be wary of using humour	Pander to the program, repeat points requested, or address them in the same order as listed

TIP:

Themes and milestones identified for these documents may also be used for scholarship and bursary applications which often look for similar information. If you need assistance identifying what to include or the theme of your personal story, book an appointment with Career Services.

Reference Letters

Reference letters help the admissions committee understand you, your skills, your interest in the field, and current academic and research experience from an established professional’s point of view. Choose references who know you well enough to comment on your academic and/or research abilities, specific interests in the discipline and related activities undertaken. Letters from professors who do not know you well are not as strong.

- ✓ Ask individual instructors if they are willing to write reference letters for your grad school applications.
- ✓ Ensure they know the programs you are applying to and what skills, interests and abilities you have as they relate to your applications.
- ✓ Discuss letter requirements with each reference including expectations of specific information, delivery process and deadlines for each school. **Note:** Follow directions exactly. At some schools, references may be asked to send letters directly to the program. If so, provide each reference with a stamped, pre-addressed envelope. For other schools, reference letters may be accepted by email from the writer, while still others allow sealed reference letters to arrive with the application package you send.

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