

Celebration vitae

Your CV and you

The “curriculum vitae”—the written history of all your accomplishments and accolades, otherwise known as the CV—may be the most critical piece of academic documentation of your career (besides those degrees hanging on your wall that is).

What is so important about the CV? Why do you need one? The CV is a key part of the application process when you search for any academic library position. It functions as a “ticket of entry,” outlining education, experiences, and qualifications that make you an acceptable candidate. Likewise, as you progress in your career, it tracks positions you have held, your scholarly presence in the field and additional degrees you attain. This much longer document becomes your passport to positions with greater responsibility, supervisory or leadership roles, and higher ranks of academia through tenure or promotion processes. While the CV helps us to hit these major career milestones and work toward big goals, it also functions as a record in the shorter term. CVs may be requested as part of annual evaluation processes so that supervisory chains and committees of peers can evaluate accomplishments documented within the past year.

What’s the difference between a CV and a résumé?

While both your CV and your résumé present information about your education and your professional skills, accomplishments, and affiliations, they differ in purpose and audience.

Curriculum Vitae

The CV is widely used in academia for job seeking, applying for promotion or tenure, and even sometimes as part of the annual review process. Fun fact: when literally translated from Latin, *curriculum vitae* means “course of one’s life.” When it comes to your CV, think *comprehensive*.

Résumé

In contrast, *résumé* derives from a French verb meaning “to summarize.” Common across both private and public sectors, an effective résumé concisely presents your experience and accomplishments, tailored to the specific job, grant, fellowship (or whatever else) for which you are applying. Generally, résumés should not exceed two pages.

Given these differences in purpose and audience: yes, you’ll almost definitely need both a CV and a résumé.

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Why are we writing this? And why should you listen to us, anyway?

After decades of mentoring and coaching other academic librarians in the strategies of writing a CV, the most common request we receive is for an example. Unfortunately, there aren't a lot of great models currently available in published literature (though we are sure there are many excellent CVs out in the wild). Many existing publications providing advice for CVs are targeted at new librarians.¹ These sources provide some transferable pointers, like prioritizing education. Much of their advice—such as the best ways to record advising of PhD candidates—is not relevant. More importantly, they are silent on topics where librarians need context-specific advice, notably where and how to record responsibilities like collection development, reference, cataloging, authorship of LibGuides, and one-shot instruction. Other advice directed toward librarians often focuses on the résumé format and lacks advice specific to academic librarians.

That said, not all academic libraries track and reward activities in the same ways. We are aware that our advice will likely be of highest value for tenure-track librarians, and we hope it has value as well for academic librarians who are in professional staff or non-tenure faculty roles. For this reason and many others, we offer up front a caveat: all the advice we will share is, fundamentally, a matter of opinion. While you may be able to find ways to integrate the pieces of this advice that you appreciate, we encourage readers to reflect on which choices are in their best interests. How you construct your own documentation to reflect yourself and your career is up to you, and you should make your own choices about what to adopt and what to leave. Certainly some organizational cultures promulgate an explicit or implicit expectation to structure these professional documents in very specific ways. On the other hand, internal cultural norms often don't translate outside of the internal culture, so these guidelines may prove valuable if you are hoping to communicate information about your career and accomplishments outside of your home institution, especially if you are engaged in a job search.

How do CVs change over the course of a career?

As we mentioned, your CV is a living document that changes over time. How exactly does this document evolve? This will look different for each person, but there are some general changes you can expect. Your CV will typically become longer, indicative of your growth as a librarian and scholar as you list all your various roles within the library, involvement across service opportunities, and your growing number of presentations and publications. Where you may only have a two- or three-page CV as a newly minted library school graduate, your CV mid-career may be a dozen (or more, though we don't necessarily recommend many more!) pages. Growth is natural as your career progresses and as your interests become more refined; your CV gets longer as your accomplishments accumulate.

Update and edit your CV with an eye toward impact. Will you always have your very first published book review on your CV, even after publishing several peer-reviewed publications and maybe some books? Probably not. Consider culling less important items from your CV as they become less important and as you add all the newer, exciting, and impactful activities in which you are engaged. These may include publications and presentations occurring in more prominent venues: a peer-reviewed article, a book, invited presentations, and keynote addresses, to name a few. As you do more, you may also see that your CV contains more and more names of collaborators as you work on projects and publish with others. Likely, you

will also document more leadership roles throughout your service obligations in addition to committee membership.

Track as you go—don't put it off

Taking time to track and note your accomplishments as they occur is a great way to build your confidence as well as build in moments to pause and celebrate your achievements, hence our title “Celebration vitae.”

Figure out a system that works for you and track as you go. Establish a regular pattern—as you complete projects, at the end of every academic period, annually—and dedicate some time to noting the key details of accomplishments and appointments. Some of us might tend toward visiting our CVs late on Friday afternoons as one way of wrapping up the work week usefully, without heavy brainpower.

We're not *quite* suggesting that a “CV emergency” is an actual thing. That said, if you've ever had to rack your brain, dig out old appointment books, and Google yourself to reconstruct your activities and accomplishments, you know you never want to do that again. Not only is it frustrating and time consuming, you also risk forgetting or omitting important details.

You never know when, suddenly knocking at your door, you'll see that amazing position, inspiring grant program, or chance to apply for a fellowship in a country you've always dreamed about. If you have a good tracking system in place, you'll answer that door with a shiny, up-to-date CV or résumé, or you'll at least have all the information you need ready to hand and be able to polish up your CV quickly and without stress.

Coming up: A detailed recipe for a beautiful CV

The next installment of our series, in the October 2023 issue of *C&RL News*, will get deep into specific guidelines and examples of CV structure and content for academic librarians. We will discuss in detail what categories to use, and what to include in them. We will talk about categories and content that are only *sometimes* useful to include, and when to include them. We'll offer some clear guidance about what to exclude from a CV and why. We'll offer suggestions for order of content and why that's important, and we'll advocate for a variety of structural and stylistic strategies that aid comprehension for the reader of a CV.

Often the leap from advice to one's own document can be tricky, especially if you are inspired to move beyond minor tweaks and into major overhauls of your professional documentation. We encourage you to seek advice and coaching in this activity from mentors, colleagues, friends, or—if they are available to you—from formal mentoring programs like the New Members Round Table Résumé Review program.²

Rather than a static document, updated once in a blue moon, we encourage you to think of your CV as a constantly evolving tool, helping you to document your constantly evolving professional life. Indeed, it is a living document that celebrates your accomplishments as they occur. Updating your CV once a year right before the annual evaluation deadline, or once every few years just as you apply for a new job, is a tedious chore. Instead of an unwelcome burden of necessity, think of your CV as a celebration of you—your accomplishments and your goals! *zz*

Notes

1. Sarah L. Stohr, “Compiling an Application Packet That Doesn’t Make the Search Committee Want to Kill You,” in *How to Stay Afloat in the Academic Library Job Pool*, ed. Teresa Y. Neely (Chicago: ALA, 2011), 57–65, <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10469302>; Karen Sobel, “Making Yourself Marketable for Academic Librarian Positions,” in *The Future Academic Librarian’s Toolkit: Finding Success on the Job Hunt and in Your First Job*, ed. Megan Hodge (Chicago: ACRL, 2019), 27–49; Meggan Press, *Get the Job: Academic Library Hiring for the New Librarian* (Chicago: ACRL, 2020).
2. “Resume Review Service Committee of New Members Round Table (NMRT),” New Members Round Table, American Library Association, <https://www.ala.org/rt/nmrt/oversightgroups/comm/resreview/resumereview>.