

Cooking up something great

A recipe for academic library CV content and structure

Our article in last month's issue covered the purpose of CVs, how they are distinct from résumés, and how they might change for specific purposes or over the course of a career.¹ This installment of our two-part series goes hands-on “into the kitchen” with our recipe for bringing a CV to the table, discussing specific components, and a few notes on style.

The essential ingredients: Must-have content on your CV

Several key categories are essential to include on an academic CV: education, professional experience (such as current or former positions), scholarly work (e.g., publications, presentations), and service.

Education: Beginning with your undergraduate degree(s), include the type and name of your degree(s) as well as the institution, location of the institution, and the year received. If you are still working on a degree, share your expected completion date. Please add degrees or certifications in progress; these are an indication of professional growth. Note that “Education” should be the first category on your CV in academia (other industries may deprioritize this category).

Professional experience: In this section, list your current and previous positions, whether in libraries (academic or otherwise), or in other industries. Each position should correspond with specific dates when you held that role and the location of the position. Be sure to clearly identify the position you held and indicate interim roles. Consider that this may mean providing a working, rather than official, title. For example, “library specialist” is generic, but “cataloging specialist” provides much more information about the work you likely performed. Identify rank and when you were promoted or tenured.

Scholarly work: Consisting primarily of publications and presentations, this section outlines your scholarly output. We encourage you to have subheadings for different formats (e.g., books, articles, presentations, posters, reviews, editorial responsibilities, grants, etc.). As a mid-career professional, be sure to categorize items, especially presentations, based on *how* they came to be, and note the type of publication venue (peer-reviewed, editor-reviewed). If you were invited to give a presentation, we want you to shout that from the rooftop and include it under a header for “invited presentations.” You can also categorize by “competitively selected” (and include the acceptance rate if you have it!). Include your

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works in progress (further evidence of growth), and consider which older, less impactful works you may decide to remove.

Service: Service work happens at all levels from within the library and at the campus, to state, regional, national, and international stages. Organize this section by prominence, prioritizing higher-impact service work, and then by date, with most recent activity first. Identify the venue, duration, and your role, and clearly communicate any leadership positions you have held and whether they were appointed or elected.

Season to taste: Add as appropriate

We recommend adding the following, complementary sections to more holistically communicate your professional experiences and the trajectory of your career thus far.

Librarianship: Add items to your CV that relate to the big bucket category we call “Librarianship.” These are items not easily represented in the sections we have already recommended, and the purpose of this section is to communicate the *value* of your work over time, especially to stakeholders external to the library such as campus administrators. This category highlights unique roles and responsibilities, specific projects and assignments, mentoring, supervision, and teaching (from individual library instruction sessions to credit courses, and everything in between). This section should only provide succinct highlights and possibly key numbers (e.g., total number of students taught in an academic year). Be careful not to duplicate content and draft extensive narratives that should go into a cover letter or tenure statements.

Professional development or certifications: There’s no need to list every webinar you have attended over your 15-year career. Use this section to outline key professional development experiences such as attendance in a competitively selected and/or immersive program, programs or training that represent significant, new areas of skills or knowledge, formal certifications (e.g., Academy of Certified Archivists), or regular participation in an annual meeting most related to your area of librarianship.

Awards and honors: Remember, your CV is a celebration of you! Include professionally relevant awards and honors, especially if these were competitively awarded and highly visible.

Media coverage: If you or your work are frequently covered by the media, include references.

Languages: If you speak, read, or understand other languages, include these in a “Languages” section on your CV. Definitely include this section if a position you are applying for requires or prefers language proficiency, and consider this as a “bonus” skill worth highlighting on your CV in general. Be sure to indicate your level of proficiency when listing your experience with other languages (fluent, proficient, reading level).

Serve it on the side: Context-specific categories

Some content makes sense to include in a CV only in particular circumstances. While the purpose of a CV is to provide a record of one’s overall professional accomplishments, it is possible (maybe even easy?) to overwhelm the reader with so much information that they miss what’s important. Adding tangentially relevant content to your CV might inadvertently call into question the rest of its content.

Other context-specific categories are listed below.

Church membership: There is only one context in which this should be included, and that is when the document is being used (for example in a job application) by a private

religious institution that is legally permitted to ask about, and discriminate based on, this information.

Citation counts/download counts/Altmetrics: In some contexts, like promotion documentation, short parenthetical references to Altmetrics scores, numbers of citations, and the like may be useful to include. In other situations, such as a job application, you might opt to leave it out.

Hobbies and interests: This is not necessarily harmful, but it's almost always entirely irrelevant to the reader. So if you include a section like this, it should always be the very last thing in the document, and very short.

Technology: Some technologies make sense to include if they are rare or specialized. For example, a digital humanities librarian who knows how to program in R should certainly say so. Familiarity with common technologies or applications like Microsoft Office or EBSCO should be assumed and not listed.

Volunteering / community service: If industry-adjacent, it definitely makes sense to include volunteer work. Sometimes you may wish to include other community service. If you include this section, keep the list short and sweet and eliminate any explanatory details.

Unpalatable: Things to exclude

Many résumé advice publications, and some CV advice, suggest inclusion of some of the elements below. We disagree and suggest not including any of these.

Images: Photographs, charts, decorative borders, and other images are very uncommon in a CV. Some, like a personal photograph, do not belong in any of your documentation. Some charts and infographics could be appropriate in a statement; other images (i.e., screen captures) might appear as part of a portfolio.

Long lists or descriptions: If a lengthy description, in paragraph or bullet form, is necessary for an accomplishment to be understood, then it belongs in a cover letter or a narrative statement, not a CV. Consider whether there is a short, bulleted-list approach to convey the accomplishment you are considering.

Skills-based organization: The intention of a CV is to organize accomplishments first by category, and then chronologically. Skills or function-based structures (e.g., “Project management/Collaboration/Instructional Design”) do not fit this model and should not be used.

Summary statements, goals, or objectives: While résumés commonly include a “summary” statement at the top of a document that highlights your career accomplishments in a couple of sentences, this element does not belong on a CV. Likewise exclude an “objective” statement, or “goal” job titles.

Value statements: Statements of what matters to you and why are important, but do not belong in a CV. Those belong in cover letters, in separate companion documents like Teaching Philosophies, or in written statements discussing the impact of your work (typically required as part of promotion documentation).

Setting the table: Write with style

The CV is a document, and therefore is subject to the usual expectations and requirements for good document structure: appropriately formatted and clear headings, a well-organized outline, and useful cues for the reader such as page numbers and consistent application of

font and formatting. With that in mind, here are a few things to keep in mind to make your CV as readable as possible.

A few words on fonts

An academic CV or résumé is a formal, professional document. Your workplace dress code may be traditional business wear, business casual, or “just wear clothes to work.” When your CV wakes up in the morning, it should always don the same outfit—button down and formal business attire. Your reader is interested in you and your accomplishments, so keep the focus on that by skipping decorative fonts and bullets.

Opinion is divided on whether serif or sans serif fonts are more readable, so feel free to go with your own preference (just please no Comic Sans). More importantly, opt for a commonly used font of standard width, avoiding extremely wide or narrow fonts. Keep font sizes, including internal headings, between 10 - 14 points for better readability. The only exception to this is your name, which is the title of your CV—go for it . . . up to 18 points.

Thoughts on formatting

- Standard margins (half-inch all around) allow sufficient white space and avoid overwhelming the eye or crowding the page.
- Similarly, allow sufficient and consistent spacing between lines and sections. For ourselves, we like setting “space after.”
- It’s helpful to include your last name in the footer, along with a page number (e.g., Page 2 of 6), in case the printer hiccups and delivers your CV in disconnected pieces.
- Don’t rely on color. Black text with default blue and underlining for hyperlinks on white paper is most accessible.
- Stick with single columns and only use tables for tabular information, never for layout.
- For lists of publications, etc., save the reader time by formatting as a numbered list.
- Include entries in reverse chronological order, so that the reader begins in the present and moves backward into the past.

Finish strong

Keep your eyes on the prize—proofread carefully for typos, grammar, and consistency. Choose a citation style that clearly indicates authorship and stick with it. No, honestly, it doesn’t matter which citation style, as long as a reader can clearly see authors and their order. Proofreading is easiest on a printed copy. Don’t be shy about asking trusted colleagues, friends, or family to read your CV for consistency and clarity.

While we aren’t discussing cover letters or other narrative pieces in this article, you will be writing those documents anyway, so we will take a moment here to suggest Helen Sword’s excellent book *Stylish Academic Writing*.²

If it’s expired, toss it

Just as we weed our collections (and our spice racks), it’s okay to periodically weed our CVs and our “Scholarly work” section is a great place to cull, especially as we want to highlight more important work.

We recommend a strategy of asking yourself whether a particular entry meaningfully adds to how your readers will understand your career. If it does not, consider omitting it or collapsing it (e.g., “30 search committees” or “12 book reviews”). We’ll give some examples through scenarios.

- If your sole published work is a book review, you should absolutely include that in a publication section. That said, a seasoned scholar with many pages of publications and presentations to record would be ill-advised to separately list every single review.
- A new professional whose entire record of professional development post-MLS consists of attendance at two conferences should certainly include those in the professional development section. But a professional with 10 years of experience who might have attended 20 conferences, and presumably has had an opportunity to engage in other professional development like workshops, certificates, etc., should not.
- One of the authors of this article has served on more than 30 search committees. It would be wearisome to inflict that list on any reader! If you have served on two, it probably makes sense to include both, listed with details. Our long-serving colleague might still wish to highlight if they have been invited to serve on a search committee of particular impact.

The choices you make in selecting, formatting, and organizing the content of your CV or résumé will either enhance or obscure the reader’s ability to parse, absorb, and understand your accomplishments.

Bon appétit!

Remember, your CV is a celebration of you; take our advice with a grain of salt. If you would like to sample our recipe for an outstanding CV or download and use a template, please see our example available with this article on the *C&RL News* website. *~*

Notes

1. Megan Welsh, Courtney McDonald, Jennifer E. Knievel, “Celebration vitae: Your CV and you,” *College & Research Libraries News* 84, no 8 (September 2023), <https://doi.org/10.5860/crln.84.8.280>.
2. Helen Sword, *Stylish Academic Writing* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ Press, 2012).