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JOB APPLICATIONS

Straight to the top of the pile

The distinctions between a lengthy, technical CV and a snappy résumé can make a big difference in a job search.

BY KAREN KAPLAN

Competition for research positions is fierce, and first impressions are crucial. In most cases, a written job application represents a potential employer's first exposure to an applicant. But assembling a list of qualifications and achievements is no simple matter. Should it be a short, snappy résumé or an exhaustive CV? How should it look? How technical should it be?

Early-career researchers need to know and

understand the expectations of employers in different countries and sectors. The content, format, design and language of the application materials can influence a candidate's chances of nabbing an interview. The wrong type of document, or one that has too much, too little or irrelevant information, can propel an application to the bottom of the pile — or disqualify it altogether. Given the state of the global economy, applicants can't afford to commit faux pas that could jeopardize their chances.

In all countries, the CV and résumé provide

an overview of an applicant's experience and achievements, and candidates need to know what to include, how to format the document and how to organize and present it visually. But accepted practices differ. In the United States and Canada, a CV is comprehensive, whereas a résumé is concise. In the United Kingdom and the European Union (EU), 'CV' and 'résumé' are generally synonymous, but there are variations. Researchers need to know when one, the other or a hybrid is most suitable.

NATIONAL DIFFERENCES

A US-style CV is usually an exhaustive, chronological timeline of the applicant's education, career and accomplishments. It starts with educational history and research experience, and includes a full record of awards, publications, grants received, conferences presented at, peer-review experience, committee work and other activities. Most early-career scientists have CVs longer than ten pages, and not all the content will be relevant to the position sought.

A US-style résumé, by contrast, is a succinct and tailored summary of the applicant's work and education, which focuses on his or her qualifications for the position. It should grab the reader's attention: according to a study published this year, US recruiters spend an average of just six seconds reading a résumé before deciding whether to pass it on or bin it (W. Evans, *Eye Tracking Online Metacognition: Cognitive Complexity and Recruiter Decision Making*; TheLadders, 2012). Presentation and structure are therefore paramount: a résumé's first page must highlight the applicant's relevant skills, knowledge and capabilities.

The same study found that recruiters spend most of those six seconds on the applicant's name, educational history, current position and most recent past position. The résumé should therefore keep descriptions of pertinent career and training experience and significant grants, publications and awards very succinct. Most résumés, even for mid-career scientists, should not exceed three pages. "The résumé is typically shorter and simpler than a CV because a non-scientist is often the first reader," says Joe Tringali, managing director of Tringali and Associates, a recruitment consultancy in Manchester, New Hampshire. "It's slightly salesy — it's a marketing document, with less emphasis on publications and more on techniques and skills."

It is important for international researchers seeking US positions to note that résumés ▶

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► should not include personal information or a personal photograph.

Appearance and layout are crucial for US *résumés*, although they are relatively insignificant for CVs in comparison with content. In a *résumé*, the applicant's name and contact information should be in large type at the top of the first page. There should be wide margins at the top, bottom and sides of each page and separating each entry; the main text must be no smaller than 11 point; and the font should be clean and easy to read.

THE RIGHT TOOLS FOR THE JOB

In general, say US hiring managers and careers advisers, applicants should send a full-length CV for research and grant applications (including fellowships) in academia, government and non-profit organizations, whereas a *résumé* is best for non-research posts in government, the non-profit sector and industry. For academic research posts that involve some teaching, such as at small liberal-arts colleges, or for academic or industrial postdoctoral research, the best option is a hybrid style that includes relevant skills, capabilities and knowledge on the first page. It should also contain information such as full or partial listings of grants, awards, publications and experience as a reviewer or on committees, and could total between three and eight pages. If there is a great deal more information on publications, posters, conference presentations, books authored and so on that is relevant to the position being sought, applicants can send the hybrid but append a note saying that a full CV is available.

The hybrid can also work well for professional-networking websites such as LinkedIn, where work and educational history should be informative and career experience clear, but an exhaustive list of publications, presentations, committee work and other experience is unnecessary. It is important, however, to include relevant keywords online, because many recruiters search for job candidates on networking sites and use keywords to refine and narrow their search. Careers advisers say that here, too, it is often best to link to the full CV, or add a note saying that it is available on request.

For US industrial-research applications, a *résumé* is almost obligatory — unless the applicant knows for certain that they are sending their submission directly to a scientist. If an advert requests a CV, *résumé* or both, it is best



Applicants need to be aware of cultural differences in different countries.

Barbara Janssens



Studies show that recruiters focus on CV and *résumé* hotspots (red) such as name and most recent job.

to send a *résumé*, but indicate that a full CV is available. If the advert provides no instruction and gives a generic e-mail address, such as careers@xyzbio.com, a non-scientist screener will usually view the document first, and will expect a *résumé*.

In the United Kingdom and the EU, the long-form CV is rare and employers in all sectors are used to a style more or less identical to the US hybrid version. Applicants to UK positions should lead with contact information and personal data such as nationality, visa status, age and whether they have a driving licence, says Sarah Blackford, head of education and public affairs at the Society for Experimental Biology in London. She notes, however, that age is optional, and there should never be a photograph. Academic CVs should include references to attached appendices in which the applicant can more fully explain their research experience, publications, grants and conference presentations.

The European Commission is trying to standardize job-application formats using an online tool for uploading CVs (go.nature.com/yxm9r1). Unlike in the United Kingdom, CVs in the EU should include a photograph, says Emilia Daniłowicz-Luebert, an immunology PhD student at the Humboldt University in Berlin and team leader for the Careers in Life Sciences Project of the Young European Biotech Network in Bertinoro, Italy.

In China, CV formats are similar to the long-form US style, says Zhou Zhonghe, director of the Institute of Vertebrate Paleontology and Paleoanthropology in Beijing. He says that most employers offer an online tool for uploading.

Applicants can ensure that they are prepared for any eventuality by keeping multiple versions of *résumés* and CVs. Matt Hepworth, a UK-born immunologist at the Humboldt

University who is seeking a second postdoc position, has two versions of a hybrid, which he has sent out for industrial and academic jobs in the United States, the EU and the United Kingdom.

The first page of both versions includes a summary of his research focus and its implications for disease, but the industrial version also has a section highlighting his relevant skills and the techniques and protocols that he has mastered. The academic version lists conference presentations, travel grants and journals for which he is a peer reviewer. Hepworth's academic version is five pages long; the industrial version is three-and-a-half. "I really tried to restrict the length, even on the academic one," says Hepworth. Staying concise seems to have paid off — Hepworth is negotiating for a US postdoc job that he hopes will eventually become a tenure-track research post.

TAILOR TO FIT

Applications should be tailored for the post of interest. When the US long-form CV is called for, candidates should tailor through their cover letter; otherwise, the CV itself should be adjusted. UK industrial-research applicants should consider the description of the position in the advert when composing their research summaries, highlights and all text outlining current and past research positions and fellowships. "Use your positions as headlines and then demonstrate through your descriptions that you can meet the needs of that business," says Alison Mitchell, deputy director of Vitae, a research-career-support organization in Cambridge, UK.

In all countries, it is likely that the first viewer of an industrial application will not be a scientist, so an applicant's *résumé* (in the United States) or CV (in the United Kingdom and EU) should be peppered liberally

with words and phrases mined from the advert. A computer will almost certainly do the initial screen to weed out non-viable candidates and assign ratings; applicants shouldn't risk their submission being deleted just because it didn't contain the appropriate keywords. "Give them every reason to screen you in instead of screening you out," says Tringali, who adds that résumés and CVs for industry should not be overly technical.

In the interest of brevity, industrial applications should not include appendices, says Blackford. Terry Jones, senior careers consultant at the Careers Group, University of London, agrees. "Some applicants think that hiring managers will be happier with a much longer account. But people are busy," he stresses. "You need to get over some key points pretty quickly. It's about clarity, not about endless detail." Including irrelevant information about publications, grants, awards and presentations could also send the wrong message: "If industry sees someone with a huge publications appendix, they may think this person is still hanging on to academic culture," says Blackford.

Those applying to positions in Germany, Austria and parts of Switzerland need to be aware of cultural differences, says Barbara Janssens, PhD career manager for the German Cancer Research Center in Heidelberg. If an advert is in German, employers in those countries expect CVs in the same language — not in English. CVs should include a professional photograph of the applicant, she says, and must be signed and dated. They should also include personal details such as date of birth and marital status, and copies or PDFs of diplomas and certificates.

When applying for scientific positions in most other European nations, it is safe to send application materials in English, unless the advert is in another language. In that case, applicants should contact the employer to learn what language to use.

Ultimately, say careers advisers, applicants need to suss out potential employers' expectations for format, language and other uncertainties by reading the advert, checking with mentors, reaching out to contacts who work for the employer and asking the employer themselves. The most brilliant research accomplishments can't work in an applicant's favour if the CV or résumé goes unread, as Sharon Milgram, director of the Office of Intramural Training and Education at the US National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Maryland, points out. "Don't blow your chances," she says, "by not giving me what I want." ■

Karen Kaplan is assistant Careers editor for Nature.

TURNING POINT

Brian Fisher

Brian Fisher, an entomologist and curator at the California Academy of Sciences in San Francisco, has maintained funding from the US National Science Foundation (NSF) since 1994 to collect and study ants from around the world. He has identified more than 1,000 species and studied their evolution. After a few US politicians suggested that his grants are wasteful government spending, he started considering different ways to fund his research. This year, Fisher found some success with crowd-funding through a website called Petridish.



How did your research become politicized?

It started in 2010, when Senator John McCain (Republican, Arizona) listed my field work in East Africa — collecting ants and sharing their photos and information on the AntWeb website — as number six of what he considered the top 100 most wasteful projects funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. Since then, the project has been cited in at least six different Republican campaign commercials as an example of how President Barack Obama's administration wastes money. It has been interesting to get raked over the coals. But what caught me most off guard was that the critics, such as conservative radio personalities, weren't necessarily focused on funding for ants; they were questioning whether the government should fund science at all.

Has there been any fallout for your career?

I have a big research project, with 25 people involved worldwide. I'm worried about the next NSF funding cycle, and the negative publicity doesn't help. So I've been looking at alternative sources of funding, including crowd-funding: small contributions from online donors.

How has science funding changed since you got your PhD?

Scientists have become more like entrepreneurs, having to seek many sources of support. Ant research has always been on the fringe, getting by on crumbs of funding. But you used to be able to sustain your career on NSF funding. Now scientists need a portfolio of options.

How did you learn to create such a portfolio?

I dropped out of my first graduate programme, in biology, because the only money available required me to work on a project that I wasn't passionate about. I spent a year incubating ideas and writing grant applications — figuring out how to raise my own money — so that I could pursue research on ant diversity. Since then, I have raised well over US\$750,000 from

unconventional sources, including private donors, corporations and foundations, to create the Madagascar Biodiversity Center in Antananarivo, which identifies land for conservation and catalogues local species. I've also been able to create Ant Course: a field course offered in different countries to teach students about ant taxonomy and field-research techniques.

Describe your experience on Petridish.

I wanted to secure at least \$10,000 in funding to visit a remote, rugged, pristine forest in northwestern Madagascar, to collect ant species before the habitat is converted for cattle raising. My project was posted online for 45 days and I landed 94 backers — ranging from one who pledged more than \$5,000 to 48 who pledged about \$20 each. This was my first experience with crowd-funding and it was really hard, especially shooting the requisite video pitch. I'm used to investing three weeks of blood and sweat writing an NSF grant application, but speaking directly to the public was very different.

How might crowd-funding help science?

Scientists need alternative sources of money now, but that is just one of the benefits. Crowd-sourcing helps to democratize science — the websites let amateur scientists participate. There is a public-relations aspect — you have to make clear the relevance of your research. I think every graduate student should try to get funding in this way, because the emphasis is on communication. They would need to focus their questions and make a pitch, but a few thousand dollars could be enough to support them. Graduate students need to learn how to advocate for their field — you can't just hide inside the ivory tower. The walls are gone. ■

INTERVIEW BY VIRGINIA GEWIN