



Three Heads Are Better Than One

Questions (And Answers) About What to Include on Your Graduate School Resumé/CV

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We are excited to bring you another version of “Three Heads.” Eric, Mitch, and I have a great time writing these. To give you a peek inside the process, we rotate the order of who writes first. (For you methodology mavens, we don’t use complete counterbalancing, but we do change the order each time.) Another element of the process is that we never discuss what each person will say. The first writer doesn’t read the other two, the second writer reads the first and then adds and responds. And the third writer gets to read the other two and then writes and responds. We think this is the best way to provide multiple perspectives on these important questions. And please keep your questions coming. We absolutely love connecting with students in this way. –Scott VanderStoep

All I am going to add to Scott’s excellent preamble is that we genuinely do love connecting to students in this way, and we are honored that Psi Chi allows us to continue to do this from time to time. – Eric Landrum

What they said.... – Mitch Handelsman

In what ways should my graduate school resumé be similar or different from a job search resumé?

Scott: A resumé is focused on work skills and career goals. The best resource for a career/job resumé is your university’s career center. The best resource for a CV (Curriculum Vitae) is your psychology advisor.

For a CV: I would submit a CV for a graduate school application. Your CV will be focused on research experience, including research skills developed and any dissemination that you might have had from that research, such as presentations at your university, a Psi Chi presentation at a regional convention, or a manuscript produced.

For a job resumé: Employers might care less about these research experiences and skills (unless of course it is a research or lab job). But don’t forget that in the knowledge economy, the kinds of skills you acquired as a research assistant could separate you from the rest of the job applicants. I would put the research experience information under the “skills” heading of your resumé (e.g., SPSS, R, data-analytic techniques you know). I would also include your current career objective, relevant work experience, and above-mentioned skills that you have that align with the job to which you are applying.

Eric: I do think the language is getting blurred in some contexts these days; that is, I have seen employers asking for CVs and graduate programs asking for resúmes. So I think that strict definitions of what a “CV” is and what a “resumé” is are probably less important than figuring out what your specific graduate programs want from you and/or what potential psychology workforce employers want from you.

I think my biases are pretty well-documented in many different venues, but I believe the core of both documents will be to identify, document, and articulate your SKILLS. Think about the

skills you have acquired throughout your undergraduate education—in your coursework, in your labs, as a research assistant, as a teaching assistant, during an internship, while serving as a Psi Chi officer, serving as manager on your intramural sports team, and volunteering in the community at the church group or with 4-H. Do not limit the consideration of your skills to only those you acquired through coursework. Document those skills on your CV/resumé. Be precise with specific examples. Your graduate school document might focus more on the skills to be successful in graduate school, and your psychology workforce document might focus more on workplace skills, but I suspect that, after a careful compare and contrast, those two sets of skills look very similar most of the time.

Mitch: Just two more things. First, make your CV/resumé very easy to read—so even college professors can find what they are looking for. Second, seek out guidance, examples, and feedback. Here are two internet sources to get you started: <https://icc.ucda-vis.edu/materials/resume/resumecv> and <https://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/curricula-vitae-cvs-versus-resumes/>

With limited space available on my resumé, how do I choose which details to include? Psychology jobs/internships, research experience, community service, professional memberships, certifications, personal interests, publications, etc.?

Scott: If folks with 20+ years of experience can make a resumé fit with limited experience, so can you! I would recommend slowly fading some of your older and less relevant experiences off your resumé. That happens sooner for some folks than for others. But other times your resumé will be more focused and more impressive as it dials in more directly on your current strengths and the current job ads.

For a job resumé, relevant employment experience is near the top of the list. For a grad school resumé/CV, research and related disseminations (e.g., conference presentations) should be near the top. For both types, educational accomplishments and awards/experiences that distinguish you from the pack are critical. Employment screeners read resúmes very quickly, so you need to differentiate yourself with material in the top half of the resumé. And sometimes resúmes are not even read by humans in the beginning screening phases, so you will need to, as one job site called it, “beat the ‘bot.’” In other words, the AI program that reads your resumé will be looking for key words in your resumé that align with key words in the job description. That also means that you will likely need to tailor (even if ever so slightly) your resumé for different jobs.

As important as it is to align your resumé with a job ad, some employment counselors say that this strategy can also be overdone, and in the final analysis, you have to be yourself. Such AI screening does not happen, to the best of our knowledge, in grad-school admissions. Not yet, anyway.

Eric: Unless you are specifically told to adhere to a page or word limit, I would not try to limit your own space. One will often hear that a resumé should stay to one or two pages, and if a company you are applying to tells you that, you should follow their rules exactly. But if a graduate program asks you for a CV

and yours is six pages long, then submit all six pages. Curriculum vitae translates from the Latin to “academic life,” and the goal of one’s academic life is to be as long as possible; thus, the goal is for your CV to be as long as possible (but without padding!).

If you truly have an extremely long list of accomplishments or long work history, you can either present the most relevant or the most recent and make a note on your document that “Complete Work History Available on Request” or something of that nature.

Mitch: Remember that a CV/resumé is a piece of writing, so think about the advice you have received about any writing. For example, think of your focus: What do you want to say? Think of your audience: Who will be reading this, and for what purpose? Here’s another good piece of advice: Show, don’t tell. Also think about where else you might convey the information you want if you just don’t have the space on your resumé, such as in the answers to questions on the application or in a cover letter.

I understand that CVs can be lengthier than resúmes. So, in addition to the basics (education, professional publications, research awards, conference presentations, and professional affiliations), should I also include information such as awards not related to my area of interest, webinars viewed outside of class, on-campus events attended, and/or nonacademic publications such as a personal blog?

Scott: You should include these experiences if the events you are describing connect with your professional development. Webinars on statistics and methodology, critical thinking, or training sessions on antiracism should be included. As I noted earlier, as you develop more and richer experiences, some of your earlier vita entries (such as courses taken) may fade away. This is certainly true of a resumé for a nonacademic position, which are much shorter than CVs. Linking your blog will only cost you one line on your resumé/CV so I would consider including it. But only include it if you’re ready for graduate admissions committees to read it—the writing should be clear and cogent and writing that you think will reflect well on you as a candidate for an advanced degree.

Eric: Starting your career, I’d be careful about including nonacademic publications and personal interests. I’d like to say that there would not be any bias held depending on viewpoints expressed, but you never know who knows who on a graduate admissions committee or a faculty hiring committee. If you write a blog about the joy of bow-hunting and you have 10,000 weekly subscribers who read your blog and the Director of the Graduate Training Program is also the coordinator for a statewide chapter of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, sharing your impressively popular blog may end up backfiring (this is a completely fabricated example). Show your CV to a bunch of faculty members at your current institution and get multiple opinions, then make your own decision based on the collective wisdom. Unless you are certain that you know the graduate program likes and appreciates the idiosyncratic, I recommend that you start down this journey in the center lane.

Mitch: Of course, it’s also possible that the director will be an avid bow-hunter.... The question is, though, whether you want decisions made about your professional career to be made on the

basis of nonprofessional information. If you have a personal interest that overlaps with your professional aspirations, and you will not be happy in a program that doesn't share your values, then by all means show the relationship between your personal and professional activities. Otherwise, I concur with my colleague's advice of caution about personal information that is not relevant to your professional aspirations.

On the other hand, what if I don't have a lot to put on my resumé? Is it OK to have a short resumé if the items included are strong such as a very high GPA and a single lengthy research experience, etc.?

Scott: The good news is that your resumé will grow every year. Eric and Mitch may differ on this, but "padding" an already thin resumé will work against you because the irrelevant stuff will stand out more than an abbreviated resumé. So, you should present what you have, in standard font size with standard spacing. As I noted above, what you will probably notice is that, as your experience grows, some elements of your resumé that you currently include will likely drop off. As for single lengthy research experiences, by all means include it. And brag about it and expand on it. For example, make sure you include the methodological and statistical techniques that you learned on the project. I would consider linking poster presentations or final written reports to your resumé so future employers can see your depth of experience and the deliverables that you've produced.

Eric: My friend Scott is precisely correct: do not pad your resumé. Experienced reviewers of resúmes, such as graduate admissions committee members, know what padding looks like and they will not be happy to see it. For example, say you have five conference presentations and one item that you and your advisor have written up and have sent off for publication in a scholarly, peer-review journal (congratulations!). Padding (and a bit of misdirection) would be present on your resumé if you had a heading that read **Publications and Presentations** with all six items listed there: the five presentations and one item submitted for publication. You would be much fairer with your own "data" if you were to have one heading on your resumé called **Conference Presentations** with your five conference presentations listed in 7th edition *Publication Manual* format, and then a separate **Manuscript Submitted for Publication** heading with that remaining item, in APA format, presented there.

Mitch: Use padding if you're going camping. Otherwise, it can be a "kiss of death," as Dr. Drew Appleby says. Be honest. Be clear. Be informative. Be proud of what you've accomplished. And be mindful of what you've accomplished. (Eric is so right about skills.) In my graduate school applications, I mentioned skills I learned in a course-related lab. I was clear that I didn't learn those skills on my way to an empirical publication, but I was also clear about the skills themselves. I'd recommend talking with your advisor about what skills you have now that you didn't have when you started college.

I have heard that my resumé and/or CV should complement my other application materials? How should I go about that?

Scott: I would think about the CV as a preview to the larger unveiling of your professional competencies. If your CV shows that you

have strong quantitative skills, make sure you have strong grades in your methods and statistics classes when graduate admissions committees review your transcript. If your CV highlights clinical experiences, make sure your letter writers highlight those experiences when they write for you. Whatever is in the CV should show up in more detail in other parts of your application.

Eric: I *think* what is meant by this term or phrase is that the parts of the application that the student has control over do not need to be redundant. That is, if you have prepared a proper, complete, and detailed CV, then your personal statement should not be a recap of your CV, but your personal statement should answer the prompt provided by the graduate program; there is no need to re-present your credentials again in your personal statement because you have already done so (thoroughly) in your CV. Furthermore, your cover letter can be a third method of expressing yourself separate from the CV and the personal statement. There is no need to be redundant nor repetitive; take each opportunity to express some different aspect about yourself in each of these various venues so that these different messages complement one another.

Mitch: In teaching, there's a concept called "backward design," which says that the design of a course should start at the end, with this question: "What do you want students to know and be able to do when they finish the course?" For your application, think about the end: What do you want the admissions committee to know and be thinking about you when they finish reading your materials? Then, you can make full use of my colleagues' comments to decide where in your application they will see that information. One addendum: Sometimes a little redundancy is good; at those times, it's called *emphasis*. You may want to emphasize an experience when you are highlighting a theme that runs through your career, such as statistical skills, commitment to social justice research, service, etc.



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Mitch Handelsman, PhD, is Professor of Psychology and CU President's Teaching Scholar at the University of Colorado Denver, having earned his PhD in clinical psychology from the University of Kansas in 1981. He has coauthored two ethics books, *Ethics for Psychotherapists and Counselors: A Proactive Approach* (2010; with Sharon Anderson), and *Ethical Dilemmas in Psychotherapy: Positive Approaches to Decision Making* (2015; with Sam Knapp and Michael Gottlieb). He is an associate editor of the *APA Handbook of Ethics in Psychology* (2012). His blog for *PsychologyToday.com* ("The Ethical Professor") focuses on ethical and teaching issues.