

The Story of My Life

The five items that convey who you are to potential employers and schools

Function: Basic information to determine if you are qualified for the position. Minimally, should include contact information, education, relevant work history, relevant experiences, relevant awards, and publications.

Tips and considerations: Résumés change for every application and are tailored to that particular employer/school. Studies suggest that evaluators spend less than 15 seconds looking at résumés, so keep it **short** and **very organized** with a **logical format**. Résumés are more a list of *what you have done and can do*. Curriculum vitae (C.V.s), on the other hand, do not change that much for each application. They are longer and really summarize your experiences, thus giving the evaluator a sense of *what you know*. These will likely be read by scientists: people willing to take time to get the data they need. To that end, you can include short descriptions of important experiences, awards, etc. Even though there is no set length or format, it is critical that the document have a very **logical format** and be **very organized**.

Function: Gives an indication of how much you know in a given area as compared to the national average.

Tips and considerations: A variety of factors can adversely affect your standardized test scores. Consider taking practice tests, a preparatory class, or getting a tutor if you are dissatisfied with your scores. Also, determine how much weight is given to the score: is it just about getting your foot in the door, or is it a primary deciding factor?

Function: An honest assessment by professionals in the field regarding how well they think you will do in the indicated job/school.

Tips and considerations: Relationship is key! Recommenders should know you well, so they can accurately speak about who you are and why you'd excel. A good relationship trumps earning an A in their class, your grade on the final, etc.

These can take a long time for recommenders to write, so make it easy on them. Give ample time (>6 wks, if possible) and provide all necessary information: date due, address, program information, classes/experiences you've had with the recommender, and why you think *they*, more than others, are in a position to evaluate you.

Function: Provides an indication of who *you* think you are and why you are a fit for the position.

Tips and considerations: These documents should be personal; this is your chance to show a little bit of your personality. Make sure that your document is focused and shows that you have done your research about the position to which you are applying. Personal statements should be interesting & creative. Cover letters should indicate how you fit in *without simply rehashing your CV/résumé*.

Function: Lists the classes you took, the grades you earned, and any diplomas/certifications you were awarded. As such, this provides some context as to what you know and how well you know it.

Tips and considerations: Include all transcripts: university, study abroad, community college, etc.

A bad grade in one class will not likely prevent you from being interviewed. If you do have a blemish on your transcript, be prepared to discuss it honestly if it comes up.

Consider calculating your "in major" GPA. If that is higher than your overall one, you may want to highlight that.

Common Fatal Flaws in Applications

- Errors in spelling and grammar immediately discredit you!
- Lacking a logical flow in your documents
- Being too vague or including too much irrelevant information in your CV or résumé
- Failure to identify special certifications/licenses
- Failure to show quantities (e.g. You volunteered for 2 years- was that 100 hrs or 2000 hrs? Was your internship 1hr/wk or 3 days/wk?)
- Failure to have documents proofread by professors, career center, etc.
- References who do not know you well
- **Worst of all**, not being truthful (intentionally or unintentionally). (e.g. Do you already have your degree, or are you still a few months away? Do you *really* remember how to do spectroscopy?)

