

## Episode 61: CV or Resume – or Résumé?

Welcome to Grad-post! I'm your host, Brian S. Mitchell, and we're here to talk about life before, during, and after graduate school and whether an advanced degree is right for you. I'll draw upon my experiences as graduate dean and research mentor, as well as my network of students, colleagues and experts to bring you the most complete information on graduate education that I can.

It's never too early to start thinking about what you're going to do with your advanced degree, and to do so you're going to need to update your resume. But some of you may be hearing about this thing called a "CV." What is it and do you need one? Is it the same thing as your resume? Let's explore.

A CV is a *curriculum vitae* – Latin for "course of life" or "life's course." *Resumé* with two diacritics is a French term which loosely translated to English means to "sum up" as in a life's summary. In general use and job-seeking practice the accents have been dropped and the unitalicized word "resume" is widely accepted as a term to describe a document that lists your professional skills and accomplishments. I'm not going to jump down a linguistic rabbit hole and weigh in on whether the French or English spelling is more proper. I'm simply going to use "resume" *sans* diacritics and the accent on the first syllable here since this is a podcast. What I WILL state unequivocally is that a CV and resume are **not** the same thing and in the employment communities we are discussing you need to know the difference. It's like the term "cow" which is often misused in everyday conversation to describe any domesticated bovine, but to ranchers and other cattle it makes a **big** difference. Same goes here. A CV and a resume are different. I like to think of a CV as listing professional accomplishments while a resume focuses on your professional skills. Which one you use depends on the situation. Let's start with the resume.

Everyone needs a resume. I mean **everyone**. Even those with a CV will want a resume. It's more widely recognized and less intimidating for employers not used to wading through a ten-page document looking for a quick summary of your professional career. There is plenty of advice out there on how to prepare a resume so I won't rehash that here. You can check with your placement office. But I will focus on **why** someone with a master's or doctorate will still need a resume even if you maintain a CV. As I just mentioned, a resume focuses on your professional skills. Professional people like you have highly specialized skills to highlight. Something like "proficient at Excel" isn't really what we're talking about here – anybody can say that. But if you've spent a lot of time doing extensive VBA coding as part of a project or your research that's a skill worth highlighting. Language skills count here, too. There are several rating scales for language proficiency including [ACTFL](#), [CEFR](#), and [ILR](#), and if this is a major part of your skill set or important to the job for which you are applying, you will want to take a test to get an appropriate rating. But if you were raised in a bilingual family and you're fluent, that's probably enough. Don't claim proficiency in a language that you don't really have, though. Two years of high school Spanish probably won't get you very far and you'll be exposed the second you sit down for an interview. Other skills to highlight might be access to and familiarity with specialized musicological or cultural collections, training on specialized scientific or technical equipment, industry-recognized certifications, or training and use of specialized software like computer-aided design. Be as specific as you can and be prepared to back up your list with specific and extended examples.

The resume should be tailored to the specific job to which you are applying. Be prepared to tweak it for each job application. Nothing will send your resume to the recycle bin faster than a statement of purpose or career objective that doesn't match the job description. With the advent of AI applicant screening, you have to find some way to make yourself stand out from the crowd, and that starts with a career objective that matches the job description. Nevertheless, expect rapid – even instantaneous – rejections. I recently had a colleague tell me that he received an automated denial the same day he applied for the job – on Thanksgiving Day no less! This isn't a podcast about job search techniques and even with the most highly polished resume you're going to get rejected, but an engaging opening statement makes an impact. Try to stay away from generic, self-aggrandizing descriptions like “energetic, dedicated, team player seeks impactful role in a dynamic organization” because everyone can and will say that. Your career objectives should be one sentence – two at most – and summarizes your key skills as outlined in the resume.

Once you have established your career objective or statement of purpose at the beginning, follow that with your education. Since you have an advanced degree, start with your undergraduate training: the institution you attended, the year you obtained your degree, it's official designation like BS or BFA, your major, and a title of an undergraduate thesis if you did one. You'll get mixed opinions on whether to include your GPA here. My advice is to not list a GPA in your resume – if someone really wants that kind of information they can ask or you can provide a transcript. Same goes for your advanced degrees. A GPA for a PhD is basically useless information. Similarly, I would avoid listing your research advisor under education. The company is hiring you – not your research advisor. And as tempting as it is to name drop, your research advisor may have a reputation that you don't know about. Keep the education level to a list of very basic information, especially for the resume.

The “positions held” section is much more important. Again, start with positions after your undergraduate degree unless there are significant gaps between your degrees, like you worked for several years before going back to college. Include such positions as teaching assistantships and fellowships, and list your key duties and responsibilities as bullet points. List these appointments in chronological order and think very carefully about where any time gaps may appear. There is a fine line between providing too much information and not enough. You don't need to account for summers while you were in grad school unless it is something worth highlighting like an internship. But gaps of more than one year raise a red flag for potential employers. If you had a serious illness that made you take a medical leave, or you took time after a degree to start a family, or even if you were deported which these days is not as inconceivable as it once was, you don't need to list these personal things in a resume. But be prepared to provide honest answers in an interview. Be sure to include and highlight leadership positions in your list, especially if you were elected. Leadership in student government is particularly relevant as is activity in a professional society.

Either before or after your list of positions held will be the list of skills you want to highlight. We've already discussed what to highlight in your section on skills, but it's important that the positions you've held and the professional skills you are listing be consistent with one another. If it's not clear from your training where you developed a particular skill then it requires some explanation. Similarly, if you held a position but it didn't really help advanced your professional career, then consider whether it is worth including. Depending on your field, you may want to list community service, volunteer work, and even hobbies or

interests if they are relevant to your field or you think potential employers will find it of interest. Your resume is a reflection of **you**, so self-promote in an honest and verifiable way.

Let's turn now to the CV which promotes you in a different way: your accomplishments as a scholar. The content of a CV varies widely by disciplinary field, but in general, it starts with your contact information, followed by educational attainment beyond secondary education, positions you have held, and then a list of academic accomplishments like publications, presentations, performances, and exhibitions. There is no statement of purpose or a description of the type of job you are seeking – the CV says it all: you are looking for an academic position. That position need not be at a university – there are plenty of think tanks and non-governmental agencies that hire independent scholars and where the CV is appropriate. Your credentials for that academic position are your degrees and training, so that comes after your contact information. It's important to include your bachelor's degree in this list, even or especially if it is from a foreign institution. Just like the resume, GPA isn't important here, but if you graduated with honors it's important to note that. Unlike a resume, however, you probably won't be listing a dissertation or thesis title with education. The subjects of your scholarly work will be reflected in your publications and presentations. You may even have a separate section that lists research interests. But if you believe there is a compelling reason to include a thesis or dissertation title with your degrees, then that is acceptable for entry-level CVs.

Follow your education and training with "positions held." This may only be assistantships for those of you just starting out, but this is typically where postdoctoral training is listed. Postdoctoral training often does not lead to a degree in the United States so it's a bit awkward to list it under education though you will find some who do. I think it more appropriate under "positions held" since it fills out the chronology and helps you enumerate specific skills developed during that training. If you are just coming out of grad school and have had no relevant positions to list then just leave this section out. It's better to describe your situation in an interview than to have a sparsely-populated section of a CV.

Where you want to focus your efforts in the CV is the section on publications and presentations. I'm including here all of those things you did as a graduate student to highlight your scholarly or artistic accomplishments and develop your communication and dissemination skills. That might be exhibitions or performances. Your discipline and experiences will dictate what to name these sections. If you won any prizes or recognitions for a specific activity then be sure to list them. You will typically find these activities listed in **reverse chronological order** and even numbered in that way if appropriate. Publication #5 will be first, followed by #4, etc. This approach helps show continued productivity as well as the number of activities which is important in some fields. If you have a long list of publications, no one wants to know the title of your first publication from ten years ago, but the title of the most recent one and where it was published is important, so it comes first.

In many fields, especially STEM fields, publications are everything in a CV so pay careful attention to disciplinary conventions. Who is first author? Who is last? What is the percentage contribution of each author? Even formatting matters. Is MLA, APA, or some other standard the norm? Discuss these details with your advisor and make sure what you list in your CV is consistent with what the actual publication says. Be sure to include active links to journal articles using the DOI – digital object identifier. Even PDFs

have active links so use them liberally. Designate publications as “in press” or “in preparation” if they have not yet been published. The “in preparation” list is especially important for those of you starting out. The publication path can be a long and tortuous one, so don’t be afraid to list all things at various stages of that process. You should list peer-reviewed and non peer-reviewed publications separately, or at least noted as such in a single list. Highlight invited publications like reviews, even if you were not the lead author. It is now common practice in STEM fields to list the number of citations per article. I personally find this overkill and it can be daunting to try to keep all of that updated in a CV. If someone wants this information, they can easily find it. A way of summarizing the impact of your publications is with an “h-factor” which can be listed at the beginning of your publications list. The use of [h-factors is highly controversial](#) and I’m not promoting it here because the same argument can be made for it as for the number of citations: someone can easily look it up if they are interested. For those of you just coming out of grad school it is probably a useless metric anyway, so just leave it out until you have established yourself in a faculty role.

In some fields like computer science presentations are more important than publications. Publications take too long to get and by the time they come out the field has already advanced, so a presentation is more timely. You’ll know if this is the case and you can adjust the heading accordingly. But in some fields where both publications and presentations are common, list them separately. Be sure to indicate whether a presentation was delivered by you or someone else. This can be tricky if your only scholarly output to date was a co-authored presentation at a poster session. Use an asterisk on the author list to indicate who actually did the presenting. Such notations are of course unnecessary for those in the fine and creative arts where exhibits and performances are your scholarly output. List them as such and use hyperlinks to recordings or digital archives where available. As podcasts like this one become more ubiquitous you will likely have media appearances to list. If there are enough of them, list them separately.

Other sections you may find in a CV include “Honors and Recognitions,” “Grants and Funding” and “Students Advised.” If you won a competitive fellowship to help fund your advanced degrees, include it. If you advised an undergraduate on their thesis or led a musical group, include it. If you belong to professional societies, include them. Unlike the resume, you will not list hobbies or personal interests – those topics can come up on conversation. Don’t worry - your CV may be sparse at first but it will grow along with your career. And its format will change. When I transitioned from a faculty to an administrative role, I maintained **two** CVs: one that focused on my scholarly contributions and one that focused on my administrative accomplishments. The administrative CV actually included most of the scholarly accomplishments **plus** my administrative assignments, duties, and accomplishments. I categorized my publications and presentations as either academic or administrative and highlighted activities that proved I was an effective administrator. In a way, my administrative CV was like a combination of my academic CV and a resume: it had a focus on skills as evidenced by specific activities like leading institutional accreditation, establishing new centers, or securing funding for new fellowships. You probably won’t need to keep more than one CV, but if you are in an interdisciplinary field, you might want to consider keeping a couple different versions for different audiences. Psychology and Linguistics are examples of fields that can have very different sub-fields and warrant tailored CVs.

The CV serves a final, important purpose that a resume does not: it summarizes your “*bone fides*” for others to see when they are cyber-sleuthing you. It is common for academics to post their CV to their personal or program websites. You don’t typically do this with a resume in the private sector; that’s a tipoff that you’re job hunting. But for academics, they want everyone and anyone to see their CV. That information can be – and often is – posted directly on a webpage as HTML, but there will often be a link to a CV in PDF format that someone can download and peruse offline. Even as a graduate student, if you have a personal webpage you may want to consider posting your CV there. Some senior graduate students and postdocs – especially those looking for academic positions – may have their CVs posted to their research advisor’s or research group’s website. Again, this is something you typically don’t see with a resume.

To summarize, the CV and resume have these commonalities and differences as shown in the table below, with checkmarks indicating a definite must-include, x’s a do not include, and “maybe” indicated in parentheses:

	CV	Resume
<b>Statement of Purpose/Objectives</b>	X	✓
<b>Education</b>	✓	✓
<b>Positions Held</b>	✓	✓
<b>Professional Skills</b>	X	✓
<b>Publications/Presentations</b>	✓	(X)
<b>Hobbies/Interests</b>	(X)	(✓)

In closing, let’s look at some general strategies for preparing either a CV or a resume. First and foremost, be honest and forthright. Everything you put into these documents should be verifiable. Don’t even exaggerate. It’s not going to do you any good, and it could even cost you a job somewhere down the line. In this day and age of information storage and questionable privacy rights, even your first resume out of grad school could be findable in forty years. You don’t want that leadership position at the apex of your career torpedoed by some naive mistake you made when you were younger. Consider carefully every fact you are putting in these documents and whether you are able to defend it, even decades from now.

Thank you for joining me today. All of the links provided in my podcasts are available on my website at [grad-post.com](http://grad-post.com). There, you’ll find additional information to help you plan your adventure for an advanced degree.

Every degree counts, so put it in your resume!

## Links

<https://theglobalseal.com/actfl-language-proficiency-levels>

<https://www.languagetesting.com/cefr-scale>

[https://www.languagetesting.com/ilr-](https://www.languagetesting.com/ilr-scale?utm_source=google&utm_medium=ppc&utm_term=ilr%20language%20scale&gad_source=1&ad_campaignid=19309715453&gclid=Cj0KCQjw_IXQBhCkARIsADqELbl8kvKnkcBIFDyoWpaS8lxP53s6F_GQperasRvaaGliYGWkqal6eP8aApxeEALw_wcB)

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<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8238192/>