

When You Need a Résumé

It's time to look for a job and you want to leave the traditional academic bench science in which you have been trained and move in some fresh direction. In the May 2010 issue of the *ASCB Newsletter*, Amy Greenwood discussed strategies to identify and pursue a nonacademic career.¹ She wrote that you may need a résumé rather than a curriculum vitae (CV). Resources that describe what a résumé is and how it differs from a CV are hard to find. Here are some pointers about résumés in particular and about how to initiate a successful job search and promote yourself in the 21st century.

A CV or a Résumé?

In your academic career you have generated a CV, an historical record of your accomplishments and professional activities. (The literal meaning of curriculum vitae is “the course of my life.”) In contrast, a résumé is an executive summary tailored to the position for which you are applying.

If you are not looking for an academic position it is often more appropriate to present a résumé to prospective employers than to present a CV. Many career advisors recommend a one-page résumé, but I find that it is almost impossible for most people with advanced degrees and years of experience to represent themselves effectively on one sheet of letter-size paper. Thus a two-page résumé is fine, but you still want to make sure the most relevant information is on the front page.

Standard 20-pound white copy paper is just fine when presenting your résumé in hard copy; heavy bond paper is so 20th century. But nowadays you will usually be submitting an electronic version. So save the trees and your money and don't bother with the hard copy.

Develop a Professional Summary

If you are not sending along a cover page, it is a good idea to include a professional summary in your résumé. Consider this your personal five-second elevator pitch in written form. All you need is a sentence or two to describe yourself

professionally. This should not be confused with an “objective” statement; rather it is a means by which you describe how you are special and unique. An example of a good professional summary is, “A medicinal chemist with 15 years of industry experience who has successfully generated lead compounds currently in phase



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II clinical development for the treatment of metastatic lung cancer.”

Spell out Your Achievements

A résumé is usually the first interaction that prospective employers will have with you, so you need to tell a good story. A résumé is your tool to let others know what you have done and how you made progress toward your goals, not only for yourself

but also for the team and/or the company for which you are working.

It is important to describe what you accomplished rather than just describing your job. For instance, it is better to say you “developed a new protocol that decreased production time by 50%” rather than just saying you “directed manufacturing.” As a scientist, you have solved problems and figured out how things work. Let those accomplishments come through in your résumé.

Customize Your Résumé

It is extremely important to tailor your résumé to the position for which you are applying. Make sure to bring to the forefront any experiences that relate to the position of interest. Use keywords that are associated with that profession. For instance, if you are looking for a research position, make sure to include reference to particular types of experiments or techniques you performed and programs or equipment you are familiar with.

If you are looking to break into a different line of work, like business, you need to use terms that those who review your résumé will recognize and understand, like “return on investment” or “opportunity cost.” A certain microscopy technique may be interesting to a research firm but mean nothing to an



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investment bank, unless you are looking to become an equity analyst covering the life science tools sector. So use your best judgment and make sure you know what you are writing about. It will not help your case if you are not familiar with the terms you use.

Think about whether the information you want to provide would be viewed as an asset in the position for which you are applying. If it is not, then leave it out. If you don't know, ask someone for help, preferably someone who is working in the field in which you are trying to get a position. (A person with whom you did an informational interview may be a good choice. See Amy Greenwood's article.¹)

Check Your Spelling, Grammar, Punctuation, and Formatting

There is no excuse for spelling mistakes when spell checkers are included in all word processing programs. That being said, beware of homonyms. The English language is filled with words that sound the same but are spelled differently, like *there* and *their*. The best way to prevent errors in the use of such words is to read your résumé over a few times, or better yet have someone else review it before you send it off. A fresh set of eyes is usually able to identify these common mistakes. This is especially important if English is not your first language.

Send a PDF Version

Given the ability of word processing programs to save all edits hidden in the background of your document, it is of utmost importance that you send a PDF version of your résumé rather than a Microsoft Word version. I have witnessed numerous occasions when someone has sent a résumé saved as a Word file and all of their tracked changes are still visible. This can be quite embarrassing and also provide information about which other firms you may have applied to if you just pasted one firm's name over another's. Also, the beauty of a PDF is that it can preserve formatting no matter whether the

document is being read on an Apple or PC computer.

Establish an Online Presence

Lastly, social media have turned the job search process on its head, and I think this is for the better. With the advent of websites like LinkedIn and Monster.com, you now have the ability to develop an online presence, be seen by more people than ever before, and hopefully be discovered more rapidly as a job candidate.

I particularly like LinkedIn for its professional look and feel. There are no goofy widgets or pages for revealing photos of your recent night out with colleagues like there are on

Facebook. Instead, it is just a simple and clean place to present your CV/résumé and highlight your professional network and interests. Let's hope the folks at LinkedIn keep it that way, and please do your part in reserving Facebook for friends and family and LinkedIn for networking.

I often recommend that people use LinkedIn as their online CV and pull specifics from there to craft their tailored résumés. Also, get your past advisors, mentors, and colleagues to share their views of you on your LinkedIn profile. These personal testimonials add a bit of color to your profile and can bring significant advantage.

Good luck on the job search! ■

—Eric Vieira, Mount Sinai School of Medicine

Note

Eric Vieira is the assistant director of the Office of Technology and Business Development at the Mount Sinai School of Medicine. Prior to a stint in the financial sector, he managed the Science Alliance, a career and professional development program of the New York Academy of Sciences.

Reference

¹Greenwood A. (2010). Transitioning to a career outside of academic research. *ASCB Newsletter* 33 (4), 27–28. www.ascb.org/files/1005wicb.pdf.

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