

6 steps for building a competitive CV

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Staff News Writer

A strong curriculum vitae is more than a summary of your experience—it's a chance to show residency program directors how and why you're exactly who they want. As you apply for residency, get ahead of your competition with these expert tips on building your CV.

Developing professional and research experience for your CV is a major priority, especially during your early years of medical school. Unlike general resumes, a CV "is a type of resume used by professionals in the fields of academia, medicine, teaching and research. A CV is an overview of your life's accomplishments, most specifically those that are relevant to the academic realm," according to the AMA's *Succeeding from Medical School to Practice* resource.

When writing your CV, the guide recommends these tips:

Start by reviewing other CVs

While there's no standard format for a CV, "a good CV is one that emphasizes the points that are considered to be most important in your discipline and conforms to standard conventions within your discipline." How do you determine what these conventions are? Review as many CVs as possible from people in your discipline who were recently on the job market. Ask a mentor or colleague to share their CVs or try a quick Google search.

Keep your language understated and simple

Avoid self-congratulatory statements and hyperbole when describing your work. Strong CVs use language that is clear, succinct and readable for program directors who will have hundreds of applications to review.

Use strong verbs and “gapping” to write job descriptions

A common tenet of writing is to “show” rather than “tell” your experiences—this same principle applies to any line on your CV. Use active verbs to help describe your jobs or research. Also keep your descriptions brief using “gapping,” a CV-writing strategy that allows for “the use of incomplete sentences in order to present your information as clearly and concisely,” according to the guide. For example, instead of writing, “I tutored college biology for two years, during which time I met weekly with students, I answered their questions and I provided advice on study techniques,” you might write, “Biology tutor (2012-2014). Met weekly with students. Answered questions. Advised on study techniques.” By using incomplete sentences, you eliminate needless words and allow readers to quickly discern the experience and achievements. However, a note to the wise: Pay close attention to parallelism if you’re using gapping. If you start one line in your description with a verb, it’s best to do the same for all other descriptions on your CV. The key is to maintain consistency.

Name-drop when appropriate

Referencing the names of specific people you’ve worked with is much more common on CVs than resumes, especially if this person’s work relates directly to your residency program or desired specialty. For instance, “If you performed research under a certain professor, you would probably include his or her name and title. Science and academia are small worlds, and it is likely that a prospective employer will have heard of a given specialist in his or her own field,” the guide recommends.

Include a note about references

First make sure you’ve asked the right people to be your references. Identify physicians who can “comment on the quality of your clinical skills and on your personality within the past several years” and let them know that you’d like to list them as references on your CV.

Organize important information

CVs typically are led with educational experience. What you list after your educational experience and the order in which you organize this information will depend on where your strengths lie as an applicant. “When determining what comes after your educational credentials, remember that the

earlier in your document a particular block of information appears, the more emphasis you will be placing on that block of information. Thus, the most important information should come first,” according to the guide. CVs for people in the medical community generally include:

- Your full legal name—make sure you provide the most updated one if you’ve changed your marital status during training.
- Your current home and/or office address.
- Phone number and email address that you regularly check for correspondence.
- Education (including the names of your institutions, degrees received and dates listed in descending order).
- All relevant clinical and practice experience.
- Professional or teaching appointments.
- Any research you’ve published or presented.
- Professional society memberships and affiliations.
- Personal and professional references.

Explore more student-friendly tips for applying to residency

- Review and print this must-have checklist of tasks to prioritize during your first and second years of training. This will help you begin preparing a strong application for residency.
- Print your second checklist for success during your third year of med school.
- Find out how many residency programs students really apply to each year (broken down by specialty).
- Read how to get published and review this list of the top journals seeking to publish work from physicians in training.