

The 5 things an employer is looking for in a resident's CV

DEC 10, 2018

Staff News Writer

You've faced down the MCAT, conquered medical school, reigned as a resident and yet, like many even more experienced physicians, may feel some trepidation about writing a winning curriculum vitae (CV). It doesn't have to be that way.

Writing that first job-seeking physician CV is just one more of medicine's rites of passage, with techniques mastered and passed on by fellow physicians before you. The AMA has created a guide, "Creating a Standout CV," listing every necessary element, along with other helpful tips.

The AMA also offers other resources for residents transitioning to practice, such as advice on understanding and negotiating employment contracts.

When it comes to CVs, here are five things a potential employer will be looking for.

A CV—not a resume. The CV is the standard for clinical, academic and research careers. The personal information, order and writing style follow largely fixed conventions. That straightforward approach not only helps on the writing end; it is what's typically expected on the receiving end.

A job seeker's CV might acceptably break with tradition by carrying a very brief employment objective at the top, but the first formal element is always education. What follows, in order, is concise, relevant information on essentials such as postgraduate training, practice experience, board certification and licensure, research and publications, professional and personal accomplishments, and references.

Resumes, in contrast, may vary widely in terms of presentation—for example, chronological versus skill-based—are typically shorter and often much more narrative.

Resumes do come up in physician employment—for example, if the objective is not patient care, but consulting or management—and there is always a chance you will be asked for one in any hiring situation. In such a case, you will still be expected to provide a CV.

Clarity and a quick read. Even though the format of a CV is largely fixed, there are tips that will help

the reader make sense of what might be a three-or-more page list of accomplishments. The AMA guide provides examples of “gapping”—writing in less than complete sentences—to concisely convey essential information. Also use “parallelism.” That is, follow that same grammatical style throughout to ensure a consistent presentation.

Another style tip is to follow the lead of others in your field. “A good CV emphasizes the points considered most important in your discipline and conforms to standard conventions within that discipline,” notes the AMA guide. “You can learn these conventions by finding recent examples of CVs from people in your field.”

There are numerous free CV templates online. Choose one with clear section headings. The AMA notes bullets are more common on resumes than CVs. Typical type sizes are 11 or 12, and never use less than 10. When sending one electronically, do so as a PDF.

No typos, errors or other missteps. A CV not only lists your qualifications; it is a first impression and you can’t afford to be perceived as careless. Use spell-checking software, but don’t solely rely on it. Have others read through your work, even last-minute changes.

Exaggerating accomplishments may be winked at in some fields, but not in medicine. As the AMA guide points out, though, name-dropping, rare in resumes, is acceptable in CVs. So if you performed research under a certain professor, for example, then include the person’s name and title.

The AMA guide provides a substantial list of CV don’ts: “A CV is not the place to discuss anticipated compensation, reasons for leaving previous positions, personal health problems or disabilities, examination scores or license and DEA number. You should also omit references to your race, religion, age, place of birth, citizenship and marital status.”

Your full legal name. As the AMA guide points out, “This is particularly important if you have ever changed your name. It allows prospective employers to verify that the information you provided is accurate.”

A cover letter. A CV may be more sterile-sounding than a resume, but a cover letter affords the opportunity to fill that gap and bring your accomplishments to life. Cover letters are typically expected, to tie the elements listed on your CV to the employer’s needs and to make the case for why you are the best candidate to fill the position.