

## **C.V. Writing**

Your C.V. is your own personal advertisement. Think of it as a promotional brochure. Its main

purpose is to illustrate skills and experience relevant to the type of work you are seeking.

The C.V. highlights those things about you that are the most interesting, impressive and unique, without giving away all the details. It should help employers determine whether your skills match their needs. It should also sufficiently impress a potential employer so that he or she invites you to an interview to learn even more.

Although the terms C.V., curriculum vitae, and résumé are used interchangeably in Quebec, they are distinct. More specifically, the C.V. is generally used for academic positions and is much longer, as it includes publications, conferences, etc. A résumé is shorter and only contains information that is relevant to a particular position. For our purposes, however, we will use C.V. as a general term.

There are five steps to writing an effective C.V.:

1. Taking an inventory of your skills and experiences
2. Finding a suitable employer
3. Choosing the right format
4. Writing your C.V.
5. Customizing your C.V. for each application

Consider checking out the Career Resource Centre and our online resources for sample C.V.'s and information specific to the industry you are targeting. Your C.V. should always target each type of job or position you are seeking. (Generic C.V.'s are far less effective and will result in fewer interviews.)

### ***Step 1: Taking an Inventory***

Self-assessment is the first and the most important step in choosing an occupation, planning your career, and starting a job search. It is equally important when you are writing your C.V. Communicating and articulating your interests, skills, achievements and values effectively to an employer is critical to a successful job search, whether in writing (in your C.V.) or verbally (during an interview).

Consider what interests/experiences, skills, achievements and values you want to showcase to a potential employer.

#### *Interests/Experiences*

Understanding your interests and experiences, and matching them with a suitable employer is necessary to having a satisfying career. Reflect on all the activities you participated in during the last five years, including school, work, volunteering and leisure. Ask yourself:

- What have you liked and disliked about each activity?
- What did you learn from each activity?

#### *Skills*

There are two types of skills: hard skills and soft (or transferable) skills. Hard skills are easily measured and consist of factual knowledge that is usually learned during formal training or

at school. Hard skills include technical expertise, laboratory techniques, computer skills, and languages.

Soft skills are somewhat less tangible and can be acquired in various areas of one's life, such as school, work, or extra-curricular activities. These skills can be transferred to various work situations.

List your strengths and skills and identify those areas you need to improve in order to reach your career goal. Once you have done so, identify concrete situations where you demonstrated these skills.

#### Skills Examples:

Leadership, initiative, problem-solving, communication

As a new camp counselor, proposed and led weekly meetings with the crew to discuss particular issues faced by the campers.

#### *Achievements*

Achievements are occasions where you recognized a problem or a situation that could have been improved and you acted on it. Achievements illustrate your abilities and skills, and are indicative of your potential for taking initiative and solving problems. They prove you were successful in what you undertook.

Past performance is the best predictor of future performance; therefore, the more achievements you can identify, the easier it will be to impress a potential employer. During interviews, you will often be asked about your achievements. To help you identify these, think of things you are proud of.

The following questions can be used to trigger your memory of past achievements:

- Did you receive some form of recognition (award, title, trophy, etc.)?
- Did you intervene in a situation that could have become a serious problem had you not detected it?
- Did you make a suggestion that was adopted by your classmates, team or coworkers?
- Did you accomplish a task using less than the usual resources?
- Did you satisfy a particularly difficult client?
- Did you initiate something?
- Have you trained or taught people?

#### *Values*

Values are beliefs we develop early in life shaped by our family, culture, education, religion, and different socialization processes, and that we continue to maintain throughout our lives. They make up our fundamental beliefs about what is right and wrong, good and bad. There are countless values, including being healthy, having a family, having material possessions, following your religious beliefs, having job security, etc. Take the time to think of what is most important to you and list them.

Once you have listed your values, identify those:

- that you must have at work;
- that you would like to have at work, but are not necessary; and
- that are least important to you.

Sometimes we take our values so much for granted that we are not even aware of them, and mistakenly assume that others hold the same values we do. Behaving in ways that are inconsistent with our values may lead to frustrations and/or depression. It is important to become aware of one's values and seek environments that are compatible with them.

### ***Step 2: Finding a Suitable Employer***

Once you have compiled a list of your interests, skills, achievements and values, it is time to tailor them to your industry/job of interest. First, think about what kind of employer you would like to work for.

The following are important considerations:

- Size and type of organization e.g., local, national, international, non-profit, service-oriented, unionized, etc.
- Position characteristics e.g., challenging, solitary, part of a team, prestige, responsibility, variety of tasks, project-oriented work, opportunity for advancement, etc.
- Geographic location
- Type of supervision e.g., formal supervisor, casual supervisor, set own schedule, autonomous, etc.
- Working hours e.g., regular, flexible, long, shift work, company scheduled vacation, opportunity to work from home, etc.
- Salary and benefits e.g., financial security, health insurance, dental insurance, pension plan, child care, educational support, company car, etc.
- Travel
- Work environment e.g., indoors, outdoors, fast-paced, dress code, etc.

Using the considerations listed above, make an "ideal job profile," identifying the kind of organization you would ideally like to work for. As you begin researching employers and job postings, consult your list of values from Step 1 (Making an Inventory) and your ideal job profile. Are your values compatible with characteristics of the organization? If not, you may want to consider looking at other possibilities.

Once you have found a suitable organization or job posting that matches your values, think of the employer's needs and match them with your interests, skills and achievements. Now it is time to start composing your C.V. by organizing and laying out the information you have compiled in Steps 1 & 2.

### ***Step 3: Choosing the Right Format***

C.V.'s can be either targeted or untargeted and formatted in three distinctive ways: chronological, functional or combined. Students most often choose a combined C.V., but the most important factor is that your C.V. highlights your accomplishments and abilities, as well as your personal career objectives.

### *Targeted or Untargeted*

An untargeted C.V. is used when you do not have a clear idea of what job you are seeking or do not want to limit your application; whereas a targeted C.V. is used when you know what area you want to work in and/or have some career-related experience you can highlight. A targeted C.V. often includes a Career Objective (described in Step 4). Examples of targeted and untargeted C.V.'s are provided in the Sample C.V. section of this publication.

### *Chronological*

This type of C.V. organizes employment and volunteer experiences chronologically with the most recent information first. This format is good for demonstrating growth in a single profession: job titles and organizations are emphasized and responsibilities and accomplishments are described in detail. This format is suitable for individuals with continuous work experience who have not had frequent job changes or prolonged periods of unemployment. It is not always the best choice for students right out of school.

### *Functional*

The functional C.V. highlights the skills you have developed over the years and their application to the job for which you are applying, and focuses less on job titles and employment history. The attention is always on the skill acquired and less on the context of its acquisition. For any C.V. to be effective, it should be composed with a target industry or position in mind, but this is especially true for functional C.V.'s. This format clusters skills and qualifications under specific headings. For example, you may include headings such as Communications Skills, Leadership Skills, Project Management, Teamwork, etc. What is critically important when writing a functional C.V. is to match your skill and qualification clusters with the employer's needs. This format is suitable for individuals who want to emphasise skills gained in non-paid experiences (volunteer, extra-curricular) or the classroom. It may be particularly effective for individuals entering a new field in which they have little direct experience.

### *Combined*

More often than not, the combined C.V. is the format of choice. It has flexibility that comes from combining both the chronological and functional formats. This format stresses your skills and accomplishments, but also provides a chronological work history. The combined C.V. is particularly suitable for students because it lists your relevant work experience, but also highlights your abilities and transferable skills that may have been learned in the classroom or non-paid environments.

## **Step 4: Writing Your C.V.**

Your C.V. is your own personal advertisement so what you choose to include and how you sell your skills and experience will determine whether you are asked for an interview. The following are the basic components of a combined C.V. for students. Note that your contact information and career objective and/or summary always come first. The other sections can be presented in whatever order you feel is most relevant to the position for which you are applying.

### *A) Contact Information*

Contact information includes your:

- Full name
- Current and permanent address (if you live in Montreal during the school year but are at home in the summer, you might want to include both your temporary and permanent addresses)
- Phone number and optional fax number
- E-mail address
- Optional website address

Your contact information always comes first and can be incorporated into a header to save space and make the C.V. look more attractive. Also ensure your voice mail message and e-mail address are professional; avoid funny or strange nicknames (ex. [bubblegum@hotmail.com](mailto:bubblegum@hotmail.com)).

### *B) Career Objective or Summary*

The Career Objective and Summary sections are fast, effective ways to hook the reader into looking at the rest of your C.V. It gives your C.V. focus so the employer does not have to sift through all the sections to find out what position you would be good for. The Career Objective or Summary should follow your contact information. A Career Objective should outline your short-term goal; the rest of your C.V. should focus on relating your experience to this goal.

A Career Objective is:

- one or two sentences which summarizes the career direction you hope to take; and
- should answer one or all of these questions: what, where, with whom and at what level of employment?

Including a Career Objective indicates that you have a fairly clear idea of what you would like to do. Keep in mind that it could limit you if your application is too precise or not clear enough. As an alternative, you can mention your Career Objective in your cover letter.

Example Career Objectives:

1. To utilize my education and experience to enhance organizational effectiveness and client relations as a Financial Administrator.
2. To combine my degree in English Literature with my reputation as a creative individual to launch my career as a talented Writer and Editor.

Tip:

Make sure your contact information is up-to-date. Nothing is more frustrating for an employer than outdated contact information. If your contact information changes, be sure to

submit a new C.V. to the employer and request that the old one be discarded.

Tip:

Include a Career Objective if you have a fairly clear idea of the department or position you are interested in.

If you are not sure, or do not want to limit your application, a Summary might be better.

A *Summary of Qualifications*, on the other hand, highlights your strongest selling points and the most relevant qualifications and experiences (specifying duration, responsibilities and accomplishments).

A Summary is:

- three to five sentences summarizing your qualifications; and
- includes skills and experiences you have to offer to the organization.

Including a Summary is also a good idea if your C.V. is going to be electronically scanned.

Example Summaries of Qualifications

1. Dynamic motivator and problem-solver with excellent organizational skills looking to pursue a career in the area of Public Relations, Marketing and Broadcasting. Proven administrative capabilities and experienced in training and project coordination.
2. Bilingual Environmentalist with a solid education in the areas of waste management and impact assessment. Excellent written and oral communication skills with strong knowledge of environmental regulations and federal policy planning.

### *C) Languages*

When listing the languages you speak, start with those that are the most relevant to the workplace, even if they are not your mother tongue. If you are fluently bilingual, specify "Fluent English and French (written and spoken)." If you are not fluent in French but can get by, indicate "English, French" without mentioning your level of proficiency - you can save that for the interview. If you speak languages other than English and French, list them and indicate your level of proficiency (fluent, conversational, working knowledge or basic). If you are unilingual, it is preferable to leave this section out.

### *D) Education*

For students entering the workforce for the first time, and who have less work-related experience, this section is extremely important and deserves a lot of attention.

In it:

- list your degrees and years of study in reverse chronological order (if you have not yet received your degree, you can put the expected date with “expected” next to it or “to present”);
- include the name and location (city, province/state, country) of the institutions where you studied, as well as scholarships and educational awards (if you have many of these, you may want to create a separate section called Awards and Scholarships); and
- include any specialization (major, minor), authorships, thesis, or honours work if relevant to the job for which you are applying.

If you are working on a post-secondary degree, it is not necessary to list your high school unless the school is prestigious, you studied in another language relevant to the job, or you want the employer to know what city or country you grew up in.

Tip:

If your G.P.A. is high, you may want to consider mentioning it.

After you have listed your schooling, you may wish to consider listing any other educational training you have received, including certifications, workshops or seminars attended, licensures, etc. under the subheading “Certification and Additional Training” or “Professional Development.”

### *E) Skills*

This section summarizes the information you gathered in Steps 1 & 2 and reinforces your Summary of Qualifications. It indicates the relevant skills you possess and can offer to the employer (refer to the chart you made in Step 2).

In this section:

- highlight relevant skills and how you have acquired them; and
- choose only those skills that are important for the job for which you are applying.

Example 1:

#### Communication Skills

- Facilitated small group discussions as a Teaching Assistant.
- Created weekly e-bulletins for McGill students as a Publications Assistant.
- Worked with students to improve their cover letters and C.V.'s as a CaPS Peer Educator.

#### Computer Skills

- Adobe Creative Suite (InDesign, Illustrator, Photoshop and Dreamweaver).
- XHTML and CSS.

#### Skills

##### Laboratory Techniques:

- Assisted in gel electrophoresis as a Research Assistant.
- Used Western blotting to detect specific proteins within tissue samples.
- Measured the mass-to-charge ratio of ions using mass spectroscopy.

##### Computer Skills:

- Microsoft Excel.
- AutoCAD.

Tip:

Remember, relevant skills may include both the hard skills and soft skills you have acquired through work, volunteer, extra-curricular, internships and school experiences.

### *F) Career-Related Experience*

A Career-Related Experience section is included in a targeted C.V., which is normally used when you know what area you would like to work in and/or have career-related experience you can highlight. Your targeted C.V. will then have two experience sections: one that is “career-related” and one for “other work experience.”

In this section:

- List your experience in chronological order starting with the most recent.
- Include the period of employment (season, month and/or year).
- Specify the position titles (create one if need be; ex. “Office Worker” if you had a general position in an office environment).
- Include the name and location of the organization (city, province; country if not in Canada).
- Describe your responsibilities and write specific examples to demonstrate your soft and transferable skills such as communication, leadership, and organization.
- Emphasize the elements of your previous jobs that relate to your career objective.
- Write using action verbs in single lines.

You may combine entries where appropriate. For instance, if you worked for the same company for the past couple of summers, but held different positions, you can bring them together under one entry. This will save space, but also highlight career growth within the positions you have held.

Example:

#### Career-Related Experience

McGill Career and Placement Service, Montréal, Québec

Graphic Designer and Desktop Publisher date - present

- Produce brochures and booklets for distribution to students.
- Administer monthly career e-bulletins to the McGill community.
- Consult with Career Advisors regarding graphic-related projects.

Tip:

You can change “Career-Related Experience” for a more targeted heading,



such as “Teaching Experience,”  
“Professional  
Experience,” “Research  
Experience,” etc.

Tip:

You may organise the  
components of your  
career-related and work  
experience differently.  
For example, if you feel  
that your job title will  
have more impact on the  
reader, you may want to  
list it first. If, however,  
the employer’s name is  
relevant, you might want  
to list it first.

What is important is  
that you are consistent.  
Do not alternate between  
these formats on  
one C.V.

Example:

Raven Truck Accessories, Edmonton, Alberta date-date  
Marketing Assistant (date-date)

- Led a marketing team with the goal of increasing sales.
- Maintained and updated company website.
- Oversaw production of company catalogue.

Corporate Development Assistant (date-date)

- Assisted the V.P. of Corporate Development in developing strategies to improve company growth and sales.
- Developed and implemented company’s privacy and health policy.
- Launched company’s intranet.

Other Work Experience

RBL Warehouse, Edmonton, Alberta

Accounts Payable Clerk date-date

- Matched invoices with shipping receipts.
- Inputted payable amounts into computer system.
- Mailed cheques.

### *G) Work Experience*

A general Work Experience section is included in an untargeted C.V. Format this section like the Career-Related Experience described above.

Example:

## Work Experience

### Groundskeeper date

Jagre Ridge Golf Course, Edmonton, Alberta

- Groomed golf course each morning for its clients.
- Worked as a member of a large team of 12.
- Proposed and implemented a more efficient process for watering the greens.

## *H) Extra-Curricular Activities, Interests, and Volunteer Experience*

While these sections are not mandatory, they can be very important for students. Employers may look at it carefully, especially if your work experience is limited. They may also use this information to learn more about your personal characteristics and as an icebreaker during an interview. These sections can also demonstrate that you are a participating member of your community.

If you participated in student clubs or did community work, describe these in the same way you

would for paid work (remember to use action verbs and achievements) and place them in a separate section under the title “Extra-Curricular Activities” and/or “Volunteer Experience.” Under the title “Activities and Interests,” briefly mention your leisure and/or additional activities if you have something substantial to mention. Be specific.

For instance, state “Elected Team Captain of community hockey team” as opposed to just stating “Hockey.”

Example:

### Volunteer Experience

#### Peer Educator date-date

McGill Career and Placement Service, Montréal, Québec

- Met with students to review and offer feedback on their C.V.’s and cover letters.
- Organised classroom presentations to promote CaPS activities and services.

#### Conference Organizer date-date

Canadian Constitutional Affairs Conference

- Designed and maintained Conference’s website.

### Extracurricular Activities

#### Stage Actor date-present

- Performed in over 12 plays throughout high school and university.

### Leisure Activities

- Dedicated member of Ultimate Frisbee team for three years.

## *I) Possible Additional Sections*

### *Honours and Awards*

If you have been recognized for excellence or for an important contribution, you may include an Honours and Awards section. However, be selective in putting down awards: they should be significant, relevant and current. Another option is to create a sub-section. For example, in Education you could include a sub-section that lists your academic honours.

Example:

### Honours and Awards

- Dean's Honour List date-date
- Chamber of Commerce Business Award date
- Rutherford Scholarship (value \$2500) date

Tip:

These sections can be titled in a variety of ways.

You can break them up into themed headings like on the right; or you could group ideas under one main heading, such as "Activities." Subsequent sub-headings could include:

- Sports
- Academic Involvement
- Community Involvement

### *Professional Associations*

If you belong or have belonged to one or more professional associations that are relevant to your career goal, list them. Your participation in an association demonstrates your interest in and commitment to the field. You may also include specific information about your role.

### *Publications*

In this section, list books and/or articles you have written and published. Include the name of the publisher, co-authors (if applicable), title, journal, date and relevant page numbers. Individuals who have published their thesis or dissertation may also include the title of their work.

### *References*

Unless you are applying for an academic position, or the job posting requests it, do not include references on your C.V. Instead, you may write "References available upon request" at the end of your C.V. Be prepared to provide three references to a potential employer at any time. The best references are supervisors or professors, or people you know from volunteer or extra-curricular activities. List your references on a separate sheet, using the same type of paper and font face you have used for your C.V.

You should include the following information:

- Name
- Title
- Connection to you
- Name of organization
- Address
- Phone number

- E-mail

This list is to be handed to a potential employer only when it is requested (usually at the interview).

Tip

Remember to verify that the information you provide is accurate. Always let your references know they might be contacted. Take advantage of this time to talk to your references about the position so they can emphasize the things which are most relevant.

### ***Step 5: Customizing Your C.V.***

Congratulations! You have now prepared a basic C.V., but there is still work to be done. You cannot send the same C.V. to each employer. Rather, it is important to take the time to customize each application.

An employer will most likely spend only 20-30 seconds scanning your C.V. In that time you need to convince the reader you are a candidate with the skills and background suitable for the job being offered and deserve an interview. Your C.V. should be well-organized and visually appealing.

Here are some suggestions you should keep in mind when preparing your C.V. for a particular employer:

#### *Content*

- Make sure your C.V.'s content is targeted towards your specific employment objective. Do not include extraneous or irrelevant material.
- Review, review and review. There should be no spelling or grammatical mistakes. (Do not rely solely on spell check because a word may be spelled correctly, but used incorrectly.)
- Use action verbs to describe your skills, accomplishments and responsibilities.
- Keep your statements short. Do not use lengthy sentences or descriptions.
- Be concise! Eliminate "fluff," such as "responsibilities include..."
- Be positive - do not include negative information.
- Update your C.V. regularly as you acquire new skills and experiences.

#### *Organization and Layout*

- In Canada, your C.V. should be approximately two pages in length. The first page is the most important so present your most compelling information first. If the reader is not convinced you are a strong candidate by the end of the first page, they have little reason to continue reading.
- Organize your sections in an order that best supports your employment objective. If your education is your strongest selling point, put it first; if your work experience is your strongest

selling point, put it first instead.

- Include your Contact Information at the top of the first page. Include your name and phone number in the top corner of each subsequent page.

### *Format and Design*

- Your C.V. should be cleanly formatted. Use a common type face (Arial, Verdana) and do not change fonts throughout (changing fonts decreases readability). Use a legible font size (preferably 11 point).
- Section headings should stand out: use capital letters, a bold type face or underline to emphasize section headings.
- Your header can be formatted in a different font and should be larger (approx. 14-16 point), but be tasteful in your choice!
- Your margins should be around 3/4" all around.

### *Presentation*

#### Printed

- Your C.V. should be laser printed on good quality 8 1/2" x 11" paper. Avoid using patterned paper, which may decrease readability. If you choose to use a colour other than white, use a neutral tone (avoid dark or brightly coloured paper because it does not fax or copy well).
- Do not print your C.V. double-sided. Staple your pages together instead of using a paper clip. Do not staple your cover letter to your C.V.
- Avoid folding your C.V. Mail or drop it off flat in a large envelope.

#### Email

Many employers request that your C.V. be emailed. The preferred method is as an attachment (Word or PDF).

#### Scannable

Some employers, particularly big firms, may scan the C.V.'s they receive. If you know that your C.V. is going to be scanned, you want to keep the following guidelines in mind:

- Use as many keywords as you can: these are different from action verbs in that they are nouns, phrases and terminology that demonstrate some of your skills or achievements and are known to be valued in the industry (buzzwords). They are usually hard skills. You could include a section on your C.V. titled Keyword Summary and list as many keywords that you feel are relevant.
- Do not use italics; instead, use capital letters to designate section headings.

### *Other C.V. Styles*

#### C.V.'s for Graduate Students

Graduate students wanting to work as academics, physicians or professionals can have C.V.'s that are three to ten pages long. Those seeking a research career outside of academia or a non-academic job should limit their C.V.'s to two pages. In either case, your C.V. should include some additional information, including:

- Dissertation title
- Research undertaken and interests

- Teaching experience
- Publications
- Presentations
- Other academic experience (organizing conferences and administrative and editing work, etc.)
- Grants and awards

### *One-Page C.V.*

There are certain instances where a one-page C.V. is recommended, namely when applying for a position in the U.S. or applying to consulting or investment banking firms. In these instances, brevity is the rule. Employers will use your C.V. to test your ability to be concise: every word should count.

### *International C.V.*

Few of the domestic rules apply to an international-style C.V. These should be used when applying to schools, agencies and organizations outside of North America. Most organizations will also require a detailed application to accompany the C.V.

The components of an international C.V. often include:

- A Career Objective: you should address the geographic setting, field of work and level of entry.
- Personality traits: tell the employer what type of person you are, your qualities and your strengths.
- Professional skills: include your skills that are relevant to the job. Give concrete examples.
- Education.
- Work experience.
- International experience: if you have international experience including education, paidwork,

volunteer work, and travel, group it together under this heading. You should have two work experience sections: one for international and one for other. In Canada, it is illegal for employers to request personal information; however, Canada has no control over what international organizations may require from potential job applicants.

International employers may want to know:

- Age
- Marital status and number of dependents
- Spouse's occupation
- Availability
- Language
- Nationality and national origin

### *In Conclusion...*

You should consider your C.V. as a marketing tool: its main purpose is to advertise your experience, education and skills to a potential employer. Your C.V. should demonstrate that you would be a valuable member of the organization. As such, it is important to tailor your C.V. to the organization and the industry. Do your research! Develop a list of keywords and skills required for the position and consider how your own skills match the needs of the employer. Your C.V. should present information in sequence and in a manner that best

connects your background with the requirements of the employer. A strong, coherent C.V. will help you secure an interview.

\*\*ADD SAMPLE CVs.