

## HOW TO...

### Prepare a CV

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#### Introduction

That candidates are often short listed for rotations and other posts on the strengths of their curriculum vitae (CV), rather than on many personal qualities unknown to the selection panel, is an all too often heard complaint. Anybody who has been faced with two hundred CVs when preparing an interview shortlist will also confirm just how arbitrary the process can be. Although standardised (and anonymous) application forms are increasingly being used in the UK, the initial process in most short-listing procedures is likely to remain CV based for the foreseeable future. It is surprising therefore, how many people fail to use the CV as an opportunity to show themselves at their best. This brief article is designed to assist in preparing a CV.

#### General principles

The three general principles in preparing a CV that should be followed are (a) always tailor the CV to the post being applied for, (b) use the CV to show successful progress towards your goals such as completion of any relevant elements of a training programme and (c) use it as an opportunity to sell yourself.

**Always tailor the CV to the post being applied for**

Tailoring a CV is best done by referring to the person specification and job description. Many short-listing techniques use screening or scoring systems based on whether applicants fulfil 'essential' and 'desirable' attributes on the person specification. Those applicants whose CVs clearly relate to the person specification will obviously score more highly. If for example, an essential attribute was the ability to drive, failure to mention a full driving licence may lose a critical point. Similarly, if 'desirable attributes' include ability to work in a team, then evidence of effective team working should be clearly identifiable from the CV. With respect to training programmes, CV headings that reflect core elements of the training programme are relevant. i.e. clinical experience, research experience, audit experience, management experience, etc. One further aspect of tailoring the CV concerns the inclusion of a short statement of career intentions or career development. For example, such a statement from an SHO

applying for an A&E specialist registrar rotation might be:

*'Having completed general professional training, achieved MRCS and gained experience in expedition and military medicine, I now intend to complete a Specialist Registrar training programme with the long term aim of becoming an Army A&E consultant with strong clinical and managerial skills and a specialist interest in military and remote medicine.'*

Whether this statement is provided at the beginning or end of the CV is often debated. The author's view is that the statement gives a brief overview of the applicant's achievements and intentions and certainly makes them stand out from the 'generic' CV.

#### Presentation

There is no doubt that an untidy and poorly presented CV stands out. First appearances are important. Many applicants use a title page to attract attention and immediately convey that the CV has been tailored for the post. It is essential that this title page is attractive yet not too elaborate. A well laid out sheet that simply states name, post nominal letters / qualifications, the date and, in some cases, the post being applied for makes an effective title page. Military rank may be omitted depending on the post being applied for. Using modern scanning, a regimental badge or similar can easily be inserted to provide some colour and a simple coloured border looks striking. Photographs of the applicant are not generally recommended. Remember, however, that there are distinct styles of CVs in different professions and countries and it may be appropriate to seek advice from someone already in the post regarding how best to present the CV.

**First appearances count**

The type face for a CV should be conservative in style. Avoid type faces (or colours) that are difficult to read or that may photocopy poorly – even if only one copy of the CV is requested, it is likely to be photocopied for the short-listing and interview panels. The CV should be printed on good quality white paper. Eighty grams per square meter (gsm) paper is appropriate and heavy, watermarked or parchment like writing paper is probably best avoided. Printing copies of the CV usually produces

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better results than photocopying, although the latter is usually necessary if large numbers of copies are required. If photocopies are necessary, they should be of good quality and taken through a clear "glass". There are a number of different ways of binding and presenting a CV and there is very little to choose between them. However, if an application requests ten copies of a CV, it is perfectly acceptable to submit them neatly stapled at the top left hand corner only. Over elaborate bindings should be avoided.

### Contents

For those whose CV is long enough, a contents page should be included that refers to the major sections of the CV. The pages must be numbered if a contents page is used. Numbering the pages also ensures that the pages are inserted in the correct order after photocopying or printing. The addition of a header and footer to each page containing "Curriculum Vitae of John Smith" is another option if the CV runs to many pages. In most cases, the next section or page after the title page of the CV will contain personal details and academic information only (Box 1), this allows ready access to contact details and brief comparison of individual candidates. Other information that might be included here includes current appointment, career development or intentions, marital status, qualifications (summary) and honours and awards. The remainder of the curriculum vitae can be presented in a variety of orders depending on the nature of the post and the experience of the candidate. The main sections of a basic CV, in a suggested order, appear in box 2.

#### Box 1. Personal details

- Name (in full)
- Date of Birth
- Address (current and permanent)
- Telephone number (including mobile)
- E mail address
- Qualifications

#### Box 2 CV contents: the basics

- Education
- University Education
- Postgraduate qualifications
- Courses attended (ATLS etc)
- Previous and current posts
- Publications and presentations
- Professional organisations
- Interests

### Education

The amount of detail included in this section will vary according to the seniority of the candidate. Primary school details are

generally not required. Whether to include secondary school qualifications, awards and prizes depends on how recent they are and whether or not they are relevant to the application. Details of O level grades and school sports prizes are not required for an Armed Services Consultant Appointment Board (ASCAB) for example.

### University Education

In contrast, all university education should be included. This will include medical school or university details, intercalated degrees, honours, distinctions and prizes and the dates of attendance and degree(s) achieved. Details of Army Cadetships should go in here. Chairmanships (and other offices) of societies and student bodies as well as important sporting achievements can either be included here or listed later under relevant headings such as management experience, awards and achievements or leisure pursuits.

### Postgraduate Qualifications

This should include postgraduate degrees and diplomas (memberships and fellowships) with dates. Completed parts of incomplete examinations should be given (MRCP Part 1 1999) although the CV should not imply that the candidate has obtained the full diploma. Once the full examination is passed, it is no longer necessary to give the date of passing of earlier parts. Courses such as Basic Surgical Skills, Advanced Trauma Life Support (ATLS), Advanced Life Support (ALS) and Major Incident Medical Management and Support (MIMMS) should be put in a separate section either headed courses attended or vocational training.

### Previous and Current Posts

This section gives a resume of posts held to date. These can be given in chronological order starting with house jobs, or in reverse order from the current post. The former option is easier to comprehend quickly on short listing or at an interview and is probably preferable. The dates of the post, supervising consultants(s) and department and speciality (for example general medicine with diabetes) should be included. Long details of the procedures undertaken are not necessary, but a clear idea of the experience gained should be given. This should only describe the elements of the post specific to that post. All general medical posts will include 'on-call' and practical experience and outpatient clinic experience but it may be relevant to describe a post as 'a 1:4 partial shift rota with supervised outpatient clinic experience in cardiology and general medicine.'

### Publications and presentations

Presentations and posters should also be listed here under appropriate subheadings.

For junior trainees, presentations to peers, departmental meetings, grand rounds and learned societies may far outnumber publications and it is essential to list these. Any publications to date should be listed in order of publication. Papers that have been accepted should be listed followed by “*accepted BMJ July 2001*” as appropriate. Submitted and “work in progress” papers may also be listed, but should be separate in a clearly labelled section. These papers must be genuine since they may be the subject of questions at interview.

### Professional Organisations

Professional organisation such as the Association of Anaesthetists, the British Association for Accident and Emergency Medicine and the British Medical Association should be listed. These memberships should be current.

### Interests

This is the “Miss World” bit. It is important to avoid putting too many interests, and also to be able to talk knowledgeably about them at interview, if asked. An unfortunate colleague of the authors listed *origami* as an interest and was handed a sheet of paper across the table at her medical school interview. If sporting interests are listed, the level at which they are played should be indicated. “Serious” travel (Borneo rather than Bournemouth) can be included here with brief details of any important individual expeditions.

### Developing your Curriculum Vitae

There are often unreasonable expectations of junior doctors (and others) when it comes to CVs. In most cases, early on in a career, there will be relatively little to include and it is important not to include unnecessary details in an attempt to “pad it out”. Above all, it is important to be honest. A survey of 2000 people conducted by a television recruitment channel found that 1 in 3 men lied on their CV, as did 1 in 5 women. The most common exaggerations are about qualifications, leisure pursuits, and work experience (see further resources). Remember that the CV reflects the individual and exaggerated claims may reflect honesty in medical practice. With the exception of truly remarkable candidates, it

#### Box 3 Development of a full CV

- **Title page**
- **Personal Details**
- **Career Development**
- **Education and Qualifications**
  - University*
  - Post graduate*
  - Vocational*
- **Awards, prizes and scholarships**
- **Appointments**
  - Current*
  - Previous*
- **Professional Memberships and Affiliations**
- **Other relevant experience and skills**
  - Military service*
  - Pre-hospital care*
  - Teaching*
  - Audit*
  - Research*
  - Management*
- **Leisure Activities**
- **Publications and presentations**

takes some time to develop a fully rounded CV and this is well recognised by short-listing panels. It is good practice to maintain a comprehensive master CV that records your employment, achievements and successes in a ‘running list’. This master can then form the basis for creation of shorter tailored CVs for specific applications. It is also useful to consider keeping a portfolio of CVs including a short paragraph that can be used for briefing visitors and a short current general CV for immediate use in times of urgency! Box 3 lists the headings in a full CV with examples of a number of additional sections which can be added as ones career develops.

### Further resources

These web sites provide further readily accessible guidance on preparing a CV and include several examples.

- <http://www.cvtips.com>
- <http://jobstar.org/tools/resume/index.cfm>
- <http://www.bmjcareers.com> (see for example Black M. Tips on...:Developing a healthy CV BMJ 2001; 323: 3)