

## Résumés and Curriculum Vitae

Amy Patrick <am-patrick@wiu.edu> and Bradley Dilger <cb-dilger@wiu.edu>  
Department of English & Journalism, Western Illinois University

Both the résumé and vita:

- provide basic contact information
- describe your relevant education, work experience, and professional history
- provide contact information for references

The résumé usually makes a job objective clear, either by explicit statement or through its focus. It focuses on work and internship experience and relevant skills.

The curriculum vita is the academic equivalent of the résumé. It lists most, if not all, of your academic accomplishments. If you are considering graduate school, have presented at an academic conference, or published in the field, you should maintain a vita as well as a résumé.

This handout is designed to help you build a “generic” résumé or vita which you can customize for specific job applications. For more materials, visit <http://www.wiu.edu/english/profdev/> or the English & Journalism advising office (Simpkins 130).

### Developing the résumé or vita

We recommend one of three methods for building a résumé or vita:

- 1) Use the worksheets which we provide on the web page listed above.
- 2) Follow the method suggested by WIU Career Services at their website <http://www.student.services.wiu.edu/careers/résumé/writing.asp>. For example:
  - a) If you don't have a specific job, internship, or graduate program in mind, think about the kinds of positions or programs you are interested in as you develop research interests or career objectives.
  - b) Think about any experience, training, or skills you have that are relevant to the position or program to which you are applying or which you are interested in pursuing.
  - c) Target your résumé or vita as much as possible to increase your marketability.
  - d) Write your résumé or vita with readers' points of view in mind. What would they be most interested in knowing about you? What would make you stand out as best suited for the position or program?
  - e) Strike a balance between clear, sufficient detail and conciseness; highlight your accomplishments but don't brag.
- 3) Make a reverse-chronological list of everything you think is relevant to your work in the field. Familiarize yourself with the categories typically used résumés or vita (see below). Then fit the items on your list to categories, considering our advice on categories below.

Looking at models can also help. You can find models online at several university writing center websites, career services, and by web searching for résumé or cv help—but ensure you use American sites, not European, as “vita” means something very different in Europe. Textbooks available from professors or the WIU library also provide models. Consider asking a professor you know, your adviser, or your employer or supervisor if he or she would be willing to share his or her own résumé or vita.

## What should or should not be included?

Your résumé and vita should include any items relevant to your academic discipline and your current professional work. On the other hand, things which are not relevant shouldn't be added; being brief is preferable to padding.

Since part of the job of these documents is providing a professional history, you should always list your degrees, even if they are not in English. Additionally, you should also include information which explains a gap in your chronology. For example, if you worked a year between undergraduate and graduate work, include a brief entry which explains that.

Many résumés begin with objectives or career goals. These are not usually included on a vita, though a vita often includes research and/or teaching interests. You also don't need to worry about personal information, photos, or descriptions—those may be present on European vitae, but not American ones.

Don't include high school or part-time educational experience unless there is something meritorious about it—for example, if you achieved a special certification or took classes relevant to your discipline.

## Using your résumé or vita as a diagnostic

Keeping a résumé or curriculum vita can help any student with professional development: as you develop these documents, you can evaluate your experience, your research, what you intend to do after you earn your degree, how you wish to market yourself, etc.

Share your résumé or vita with prospective employers, trusted professors, or advisers who can comment on areas you should improve. Do this early in your career as a student—that allows you the time to look for opportunities to build your experience, select appropriate courses, etc.

Generally speaking, items listed on the vita come from the standard academic triumvirate of research, teaching, and service. Don't be worried if your service accomplishments are modest, or if you have no publications. For most students, education will take up most of the “research” category. Service components are the *least* important—if anything, most students spend too much time on service, and not enough on research (e. g. reading, reading, and reading).

## Tailoring for a specific job

When you read a job description, pay close attention to each qualification the prospective employer is looking for, and tailor your résumé or vita to those qualifications. For example, when writing your career objective, research and teaching interests, or other sections, demonstrate that you are a good fit for the position and that you have the qualifications they seek. You may even use some of the language from the job description in your résumé or vita. The more you can show you are the best candidate for the position, the stronger your application will be.

## Things to keep in mind

For either a résumé or vita:

- **Use sections, and pick them wisely.** Sections make your résumé or vita easier to read. Adjust the sections you pick, and their order of presentation, to meet your strengths. For example, if you have many awards and scholarships, but little job experience, begin with awards. Also, omit any sections that you don't need. You can also label some sections to highlight specific experience or qualifications you have which meet a specific need in the job description.

- **Be brief.** Don't pad; include the minimal verbiage necessary for any item.
- **Be consistent.** Use the same order and formatting for entries of the same type. Try to format entries under different subheads in similar ways.
- **Be conservative.** Don't use a radical design, fancy fonts, or "résumé" paper. If you know you will be sending your document electronically, this is especially important. Try emailing the document to yourself or a friend first to see how it transmits electronically.
- **Be complete.** Job duties vary; don't just include titles, but also descriptions. Course numbers vary from school to school—include names. Generally speaking, add a brief explanation to any items which aren't easily understood outside your local context.
- **Don't double up.** Each item or activity should be listed only once.

## Word processor formatting

Carefully developing your résumé or vita on the computer improves consistency and makes updating easier. Here are some things to consider:

**Use style sheets.** You can establish a style for different items on your vita and control the entire document by altering the style sheet. This comes in very handy if you are trying to fit the vita on a certain number of pages. The free OpenOffice word processor uses style sheets very well.

**Use proper formatting for computing.** One space after each period. Use paragraph spacing, not extra "return" characters. Make sure to use proper quotation marks, italics instead of underlining, and em and en dashes where appropriate. (See Robin Williams's *The PC is not a Typewriter* for more details.)

**Use a header or footer.** Like an MLA-formatted essay, it's a good idea to include your name and page number on each page.

**Watch page breaks.** Enable "Keep with next paragraph" on headlines and subheads—that will keep a headline from falling on the bottom of a page. Turn on "orphan and widow control" to keep items from breaking across pages.

**Use contrasting fonts.** Put your headlines and subheads into a sans-serif font such as Helvetica, Univers, or Franklin Gothic. Use a serif font such as Garamond, Palatino, Times, or Utopia for the body copy. Don't pick anything outrageous—keep it conservative, readable, and legible.

**Don't trust the screen.** Always print your résumé or vita to proofread it.

**Avoid color, greyscale, thin lines, or graphics which may not copy well.** Since your résumé or vita are likely to be photocopied, stick to black and white; if you use graphical elements which may not copy well, make test photocopies and adjust as needed.

**Watch the details.** Turn off hyphenation. Make sure you use proper diacritical marks if you include any names from languages other than English. Check your spelling repeatedly. Check your contact information and that of your references.

## Sections of a résumé

Sections 1, 2, and 12 are mandatory. All others are optional and should be ordered according to their importance in the position description and your strengths.

#	Description	Comments
1	Contact Information	<i>This should definitely be first.</i> Use school and home contacts if you like, listing the one you'd prefer to use first. Include address(es), email(s), and phone number(s).
2	Career Objective	If you don't have a particular position in mind, spell out the type of job you want. Otherwise, demonstrate how your career objective is a good match with what the position describes. Avoid vague statements. State your immediate and long-range goals. "A statement should show that you know the type of work the company does and the type of position it needs to fill" (Beamon, qtd. in Crosby, <i>Résumés</i> 3).
3	Education	If this is more substantial than your work experience, place it first. Begin with your most recent schooling and work backward. Generally, don't list high school unless the school or program is unique or prestigious enough to warrant inclusion. Include schools or specialized training during military service. List names of schools, degrees earned or in progress, adviser for a thesis or dissertation, title of dissertation or thesis when appropriate, graduation honors if any, and positions held, if any.
4	Work Experience	If your experience relates to the job you seek, list it before education. Start with your most recent job first (reverse-chronological). Provide dates and names of employers. Indicate whether the job was full-time, part-time, or seasonal. Describe your duties, indicating promotions. Include military experience. If you have no paid experience, emphasize your education (including internships and special projects).
5	Affiliations	List only those relevant to the position. The names of professional organizations you've joined. Add the dates you joined, if you like.
6	Skills	Include any relevant certifications, grant-writing, foreign languages you can speak or read, or computer or technical skills.
7	Project Experience	If relevant, include a brief project description, any collaborators, and who the project was for.
8	Publications	Include relevant publications, even those submitted, under review, or in other stages of production. Add any provisional status afterward, in parentheses, if applicable. If you publish both creative and scholarly work, separate this into two sections. Format publication citations in a consistent style, such as MLA or APA format.
9	Service	If relevant, include names of the organizations, dates, & a brief description of your role.
10	Honors and Awards	Scholarships, essay contests, etc. Include the institution and/or organization granting the award. Describe the award briefly if its significance is not apparent from the title. For monetary awards (especially grants), consider including the amount of the award.
11	Intercollegiate Athletics	List only if relevant to the position. Include the sport, position, team and institution, and an awards, recognition, or special achievement.
12	References	<i>This should definitely be last.</i> Include full contact information, using the institutional address if possible, and the position of each reference.

## Sections of a vita

Sections 1, 2, and 13 are mandatory. All others are optional and can be ordered according to your strengths and the job, internship, or program requirements.

#	Description	Comments
1	Contact Information	<i>This should definitely be first.</i> Use school and home contacts if you like, listing the one you'd prefer to use first.
2	Education	<i>Almost always second.</i> Exception: if your work experience is substantially more impressive than your education. List names of schools, degrees earned or in progress, adviser for a thesis or dissertation, title of dissertation or thesis when appropriate, graduation honors if any, and positions held, if any.
3	Work Experience	Include relevant work experience—omit experience unrelated to your academic discipline. (Omit the whole section if your work isn't relevant.)
4	Teaching Experience & Interests	A list of the teaching positions you've held, courses taught, and a few sentences describing the types of courses you're interested in teaching. Format in a way which shows off your strengths—e. g. if you have teaching experience, put that first.
5	Publications	Include all relevant publications, even those submitted, under review, or in other stages of production. Add any provisional status afterward, in parentheses, if applicable. If you publish both creative and scholarly work, separate this into two sections. Format publication citations in a consistent style, such as MLA or APA format.
6	Conference Presentations	Academic and professional conferences only—not presentations given as part of job duties or coursework.
7	Relevant Coursework	For students without publications or presentations, this can be a valuable addition. Include brief descriptions, not just a list.
8	Awards	Scholarships, essay contests, etc. Include the institution and/or organization granting the award. Describe the award briefly if its significance is not apparent from the title. For monetary awards, consider including the amount of the award, especially if it is a grant you applied for.
9	Professional Service & Experience	List the professional activities, service, committee memberships, and other activities relevant to your work.
10	Skills	Include any relevant certifications, grant-writing, foreign languages you can speak or read, or computer or technical skills.
11	Professional Affiliations	The names of professional organizations you've joined. Add the dates you joined, if you like.
12	Community Service	If you have any volunteer service related to your field, include it; describe the organization briefly if it's not well-known.
13	References	<i>This should definitely be last.</i> Include full contact information, using the institutional address if possible, and the position of each reference. If you are listing your adviser (highly recommended), label that person as such.

## Frequently asked questions

**Q: What style guide should I consult for questions about punctuation and similar things?**

A: English students should use the *MLA Style Manual*. Journalism students should consult the *AP Stylebook*. If you have a question not answered by your style manual, just be consistent.

**Q: Who should I pick to be my references?**

A: You need people who can and will support you *enthusiastically*. When you ask someone to be a reference, make sure he or she can do that. Ask if the person would be comfortable recommending you for a program or position. If you have doubts, find someone else.

If you wrote an undergraduate or graduate thesis, include your thesis adviser(s). If you've held academic employment, include your supervisor(s).

Three to five references are usual. Always double-check contact information.

**Q: I presented a paper at a conference, then revised it and published it in a journal. Should I list it once or twice?**

A: Conference presentations you revise into papers *are* listed twice, since undoubtedly the paper changed between the time you read it and when you published it. However, conference papers published verbatim as part of conference proceedings should be included only once; note them under conferences.

**Q: Should I hire a CV or résumé-writing service?**

A: No. Do it yourself; you know your work better than anyone, and you should be making the decisions about how you are presented. But ask someone else to help you proof and polish.

**Q: Should I include test scores on my résumé or vita?**

A: No. Employers or institutions which want them will request official reports.

**Q: Can I include information about my thesis?**

A: Sure. Quite a few people in English include thesis or dissertation abstracts. Keep it brief.

**Q: I want to include specific information about a course I taught (or a paper I wrote, etc). Can't I add this to spice things up?**

A: Don't include specific information about only one or two things—you need to be consistent. This sounds like the sort of thing that would be ideal for a cover letter or personal statement.

**Q: Where can I get more help?**

A: We have more resources at <http://www.wiu.edu/english/profdev/>.

Ask your adviser or a professor you work with frequently to provide feedback on your résumé or vita.. You can also check out the *Chronicle of Higher Education*; their online advice (<http://chronicle.com/jobs/news/tools/cvdoctor/>) is good, and they have sample vitae to consider as well.

WIU Career Services (<http://www.careers.wiu.edu/>) can also help in a variety of ways; visit them in Sherman 116 or call 309-298-1838.