

# Resumes, CVs, and Cover Letters

Celia M. Elliott  
*Department of Physics*  
cmelliot@illinois.edu

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One of your basic (and often neglected) tasks as a scientist is to keep an up-to-date CV.

Over the course of your career, you'll be asked to provide a CV many times:

1. for employment decisions—to get a job, to get a raise, to get promoted.
2. for applications for special workshops or conferences.
3. for funding of research proposals.
4. for nominations for honors and awards.

Get in the habit of periodically (at least once a year) reviewing and adding new items to your CV. Save an electronic copy in several different places. It's one of the most important documents you'll have, and it will be exceedingly painful to have to recreate it, especially as you get further along in your career, if you lose it.

Today, we're going to talk in general about CVs, and in particular about a form of CV, the resume, which is used in job applications. We'll also discuss the all-important "cover letter," which should accompany every resume submitted for a job application.

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**CVs and resumes are formal, and adhering to a standardized format is essential**

**Provide only factual information about your educational background, work history, special skills, honors and awards, and job-related experiences**

**Do not include personal information unrelated to your ability to do the job**

**Organize the sections logically**

**Maintain witless consistency in length, style, and punctuation of items**

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Sensitive personal information includes gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, age (including date of birth), general health, disability status, veteran status, or anything that would identify you as a member of a legally protected class.

**CV = *curriculum vitae* (life story)**

**A summary of a person's education and professional experience**

**A resume includes many of the same elements**

**Academic CV**

**Education**  
**Professional Appts**  
**Honors and awards**  
**Affiliations**  
**Publications and talks**  
**Classes taught**  
**Service to profession**  
**Students supervised**  
**Grants received**

**Resume**

**Narrative (career) objective**  
**Work history, with summary of duties/accomplishments**  
**Education**  
**Special skills**  
**Affiliations and licenses**  
**Honors and awards**



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A CV is comprehensive; a resume is usually no more than two pages, tailored for a specific job application.

**CVs are exhaustive and accreting**  
**CVs are a permanent historical record of**  
**everything you've ever done professionally**



**They don't change direction, they just get**  
**bigger and bigger**

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**Resumes are selective and dynamic**  
**Tune your resume for the job you're applying for**



**Pick and choose what you want to emphasize**  
**(but don't leave gaps that would raise questions)**

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## **The purpose of a resume or CV is to *get an interview***



1. Convince the reader that you have the requisite education, skills, and experience to succeed
2. Convince the people who care about such things that you are attentive to detail

## Now let's talk specifically about resumes for job applications...



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## **Getting started—your name goes on the first line\***

**Center your name and affiliation or address  
at the top of the page**

**Provide complete contact information**

**Telephone number, with area code**

**Fax number, with area code (if applicable)**

**Postal address**

**Email address**

**\*use a common, easily read font (I recommend  
Times New Roman or a similar classic serif font)**

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## Put your current affiliation on a CV

### Celia Mathews Elliott

Department of Physics  
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign  
1110 West Green Street  
Urbana, IL 61801-3080 USA  
+1.217.244.7725 (phone) • +1.217.244.4293 (fax)  
*cmelliot@illinois.edu*

## Put your home address on a resume\*

### Celia Mathews Elliott

3808 Deerfield Drive  
Champaign, IL 61822-9773  
+1.217.351.5810 (phone) • +1.217.402.2291 (mobile)  
*celia.elliott@gmail.com*

**\*Don't use your current employer's letterhead when you're looking for a new job—major breach of business etiquette**

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**Next, provide a narrative statement  
of your immediate career goals**

**Tune the narrative to the job**

**Emphasize your skills and interests**

**Focus on what you can do for the employer,  
not what the employer can do for you**

**Be specific**

**Keep the narrative short and to the point**

Science writer and technical editor (AIP and CBE) seeking a senior editorial position; 28+ years' experience in science journal publishing

Certified research administrator at a Research I university with extensive experience in external funding (NSF, NIH, DOE) seeking a senior proposal-development position

University alumni relations and department-level fund-raising professional seeking senior development position in the physical sciences

Seeking a challenging, highly paid position that allows frequent luxury vacations and a guaranteed pension

**All of these descriptions apply to me—I'd use the one most closely matched to the job I was applying for (maybe not #4) 11**

Science writer and technical editor (AIP and CBE)  
seeking a senior editorial position; 20+ years' experience  
in science journal publishing

Certified research administrator at a Research I university  
with extensive experience in external funding (NSF, NIH,  
DOE) seeking a senior proposal-development position

University alumni relations and department-level fund-  
raising professional seeking senior development position  
in the physical sciences

~~Seeking a challenging, highly paid position that allows  
frequent luxury vacations and a guaranteed pension~~

**All of these descriptions apply to me—I'd use the one most  
closely matched to the job I was applying for (maybe not #4) <sup>12</sup>**



## **List your education and training next**

**Title the section some variant of “Education”**

**List every institution that you attended in  
chronological order**

**Each entry must include**

**The institution’s name and location**

**The degree you earned**

**The year you received the degree**

**Your major field of study**

**Include honor designations if applicable**

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If you have not received your degree yet, put the month/year that you expect to graduate and note it “expected.”

What about listing your GPA if you’re a current student? Optional—don’t list it unless it’s high (e.g., >3.7/4.0)

What about listing minors? Good idea, especially if they’re job related.

## **Education**

1971 B.A., English, *summa cum laude*

B.A., History, *summa cum laude*

Michigan State University

East Lansing, MI USA

1974 M.Ed., Educational Psychology

University of Illinois

Urbana, IL USA

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Latin honors are typically given by U.S. universities and appear on the diploma.

*cum laude* = with honor

*magna cum laude* = with high honor

*summa cum laude* = with highest honor

*Do not* claim honors unless it is marked on your transcript or diploma.

No uniform standard; each university sets its own rules, so comparing Latin honors from one institution to the next is impossible.

Some U.S. universities do not award Latin honors at all, and some use the equivalent phrases in English.

## **Next, list where you've worked and what you did there**

**Title the section "Employment"**

**List every institution where you worked in  
*reverse* chronological order (current position  
first)**

**Each entry should include**

**The organization's name and location**

**The years that you worked there**

**Your job title**

**A brief summary of your job duties**

## Employment

- 1999–  
Present      *Director, External Affairs*  
Dept of Physics, University of Illinois  
Urbana, IL 61801 USA
- Interact with NSF, NIH, and DOE
  - Develop proposals for research funding
  - Teach courses in technical writing
- 1996–  
1999      *Assistant to the Head*  
Dept of Physics, University of Illinois  
Urbana, IL 61801 USA
- Wrote policies, reports, and nominations
- 1993–  
1996      *Assistant Editor*  
Dept of Nuclear Engineering, UI
- Edited three peer-reviewed journals

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## **What about part-time jobs unrelated to your career goals?**

**Include them if you can**

**Tie them to your commitment to your education; e.g., you flipped burgers to earn money for school**

**Show how they gave you an opportunity to practice leadership, communications, or other skills relevant to your future career**

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## **What about unpaid positions?**

**Include them if they are job-related**

**What skills did you gain?**

**General knowledge of technical principles and processes**

**Ability to contribute in a team environment**

**Practice in oral and written communications**

**General knowledge of project management**

**Understanding of quality control**

**How did they prepare you to be successful?**

## **List special skills next**

**Focus on skills that employers value**

**Programming—C++, Java, SQL, Python**

**Operating systems—Unix, Linux, Windows**

**Software—MATLAB, Mathematica, Excel**

**Relational databases—Oracle, Access**

**Circuit design and analysis**

**Equipment—optical microscope, lock-in  
amplifier, spectrum analyzer**

**List *first* the skills that you would be likely to  
use in the job**

## **What about classes taken?**

**Do not just provide a canonical list of classes you've sat through**

**Explain what you learned (techniques, theory)**

**Emphasize how the class has prepared you to contribute to the employer**

**Write out the course name and descriptor  
FSHN 421 ?**

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Food Science and Human Nutrition, "Clinical Pediatric Nutrition," **not** a course on matching shoes with scarves and handbags.



## **Coursework**

Physics 194, “Behavior of Complex Systems”  
fractals, neural nets, cellular automata, genetic algorithms, MATLAB, Mathematica

Physics 404, “Electronic Circuits”  
steady-state circuit analysis using complex numbers, time-domain analysis, digital electronics, signal processing, hybrid digital/analog circuits, high-frequency circuits

Physics 402, “Light”  
geometric optics, ray tracing and the matrix formalism, Fresnel formulas, polarization, Fourier optics, holography, nonlinear optics

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## **List honors and awards and professional associations next**

### **Honors and awards**

**Title of the award**

**Entity that bestowed the award**

**Year it was given**

**Citation if available**

### **Professional associations**

**Name of the association**

**Your rank (member, fellow, senior member)**

**Years you have been associated with the  
organization**

## **Awards and Associations**

Phi Beta Kappa Society, 1970

Chancellor's Award for Excellence

University of Illinois, 2002

Honorary *kandidat* degree, Humane Letters

South Ural State University (Russia), 2003

Outstanding Service Medal

Civilian Research and Development

Foundation (Washington DC), 2005

Davis Teaching Award, Department of Physics

University of Illinois, 2013

Member, American Physical Society, 1997–present

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## Next, let's talk about cover letters\*



**\*Never submit a resume without an accompanying cover letter**

## **Use your cover letter to supplement your resume**

**The cover letter should explicitly state**

**What job you are applying for**

**Why you're a good fit**

**What you can do for the employer**

**Ask for an interview**

**Use your cover letter to direct the reader's attention to specifics in your resume**

**Demonstrated success in previous jobs**

**Related experience and appointments**

**Additional special skills (job-related)**

**Honors and awards**

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## **Select information to emphasize relevant experience and prior success**

**If you include research interests, put the topic of the prospective position first**

**List skills in the order of importance to the job you're applying for**

**Emphasize classes most closely related to the job that have prepared you for success**

## **No-nos for cover letters**

**Addressing the letter “To Whom it May Concern” (dated and tacky in the extreme)**

**Failing to specify exactly what job you are applying for**

**Using the letterhead of your current employer**

**Failing to supply complete contact information**

**Sending a generic letter that is not specifically tailored for the company or the job**

**Rambling on for more than a page**

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**One size does *not* fit all—if you really want the job, do the work**



**Write a general “core” document and then customize it for each application**

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## **Include only job-relevant information**

**DO NOT include personal information that is unrelated to your skills and experience**

~~Marital status  
Age or date of birth  
Dependents  
Health  
Gender  
Race or ethnicity~~

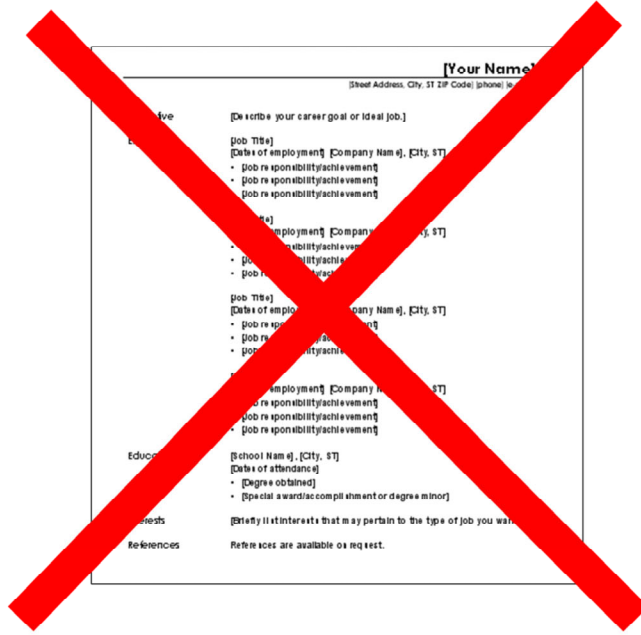
## **Include only job-relevant information**

**DO NOT include personal information that is unrelated to your skills and experience**

~~Marital status  
Age or date of birth  
Dependents  
Health  
Gender  
Race or ethnicity~~

Citizenship or right to work  
Year in school  
Availability for work  
Physical ability if job-related  
Gender if job-related  
Race or ethnicity if related

## Do not use one of the MS templates



## In addition to your formal CV or resume, maintain a narrative bio

*Celia Mathews Elliott* has worked as a technical writer and administrator at the University of Illinois since 1993. Although her primary responsibilities involve departmental administration and working with faculty to develop research proposals for federal funding agencies, she has taught undergraduate courses in scientific and technical communications for physics majors since 2000. Recently, she co-developed and team-teaches a graduate-level technical writing course in the Department of Physics.

She has presented technical-writing and proposal-writing workshops at Sandia National Laboratories, Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, the University of Sao Paulo (Brazil), and National Chiao Tung University (Taiwan), and she has participated in four webinars for the American Chemical Society on scientific communications. She answered questions on technical writing in two Reddit'science "Ask Me Anything" appearances, and her lectures on scientific communications have been downloaded by people from more than 90 countries.

Celia earned bachelor's degrees in American history and English from Michigan State University and completed a master's in educational psychology at the University of Illinois. She was presented an honorary doctorate in humane letters from South Ural State University (Russia) in 2003 and the Civilian Research and Development Foundation's *Recognition Medal* in 2005 for her work with scientists in the former Soviet Union. She received the *Chancellor's Academic Professional Excellence Award* (2002) and the SPaRC Career Achievement Award (2016) from the University of Illinois and the American Physical Society's *Physics Haiku Grand Champion* prize (2004). Her teaching was recognized by the Department of Physics with the *Doug and Judy Davis Award for Excellence in Teaching Undergraduate Physics* in 2013.

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People will ask for a narrative bio to advertise your talks, introduce you at conferences, or nominate you for prizes.

## **Other tips for success**

**Use a standard font (Times New Roman, Calibri) of at least 11 pt.**

**Don't put more than one blank line between sections**

**No artwork, photos, fancy fonts**

**Nothing that identifies you as a member of a "protected class"**

**Fill the page, but make the information meaningful and job-related**

**No "References furnished on request"**

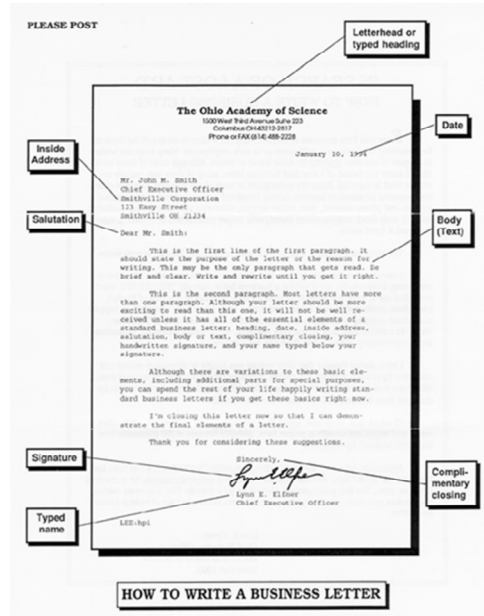
**Emphasize what you can contribute**

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And don't include "References furnished on request"—of *course* you're going to give somebody references! Use the valuable real estate on your resume to tell the reader something useful; don't waste space on witless statements.

# Tips for cover letters

## Format your letter as a standard business letter



## Tips for cover letters

**Make your own letterhead**

**Use a subject line that indicates which specific job you are applying for**

**Address the letter to a real person**

**Celia Mathews Elliott**  
3319 Jefferson Parkway • Champaign IL 61822-4726 USA  
+1 (217) 555-1234 • [cm Elliott@gmail.com](mailto:cm Elliott@gmail.com)

November 14, 2019

Professor Eric A. Schiff, Chair  
Department of Physics  
Syracuse University  
Physics Building  
Syracuse NY 13244

RE: Application for Job #37496—Senior Proposal Coordinator and Grants Administrator

Dear Professor Schiff:

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And don't include "References furnished on request"—of **course** you're going to give somebody references! Use the valuable real estate on your resume to tell the reader something useful; don't waste space on witless statements.

## **Tips for cover letters**

### **Give specific examples of how you have been successful in similar work**

In this calendar year, I have worked with 63 faculty to develop and submit more than 100 technical proposals to federal funding agencies and private foundations, totaling over \$84M in direct costs. Last year, our success rate was >55%.

### **Tell the reader how you can immediately contribute to the organization**

I am very familiar with all the federal proposal portals, including NSF's FastLane and research.gov, NIH's ASSIST, NASA's NSPIRES, DOE's PAMS system, SAM, and grants.gov's Workspace.

### **Tell the reader something that he or she will not get from your resume**

In addition to my duties as a grant developer and research administrator, I have taught a class on technical writing for upper-level physics undergrads for 20 years, and I love to teach.

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## Tips for cover letters

### Ask for an interview

Because I believe I can best convey my experience and approach to federal funding in person, as well as learn more about your requirements and needs, I'd like very much to schedule an interview. Please call me at (217) 555-1234 to indicate a time that would be convenient for you.

Very truly yours,



Celia Mathews Elliott

**Include a standard closing, leave blank lines to insert your signature, and type your complete name below the signature blank**

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## Spelcheck <sup>[sic]</sup> the final draft...



...and then proofread it from a hard copy



[cmelliot@illinois.edu](mailto:cmelliot@illinois.edu) 38

Train yourself to run the spellcheck every time you make a change to your document. If something has to be *perfect* (and a resume **does**), use these old proofreader's tricks:

1. Always proofread from a hard copy. Mistakes will leap off the paper that you'll never see on the screen.
2. Start at the lower right-hand corner of the document and read right to left, bottom to top. Doing so makes you look at every letter in every word.