



Resumes, CVs, and Cover Letters



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



Copyright © 2023 The Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois
All rights reserved.

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.

Images used in this talk are royalty-free and were purchased from istockphoto.com, unless otherwise identified.

CV = *curriculum vitae* (life story)

A concise 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



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**

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)**

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**

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

Organize the sections logically

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

**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

Email address

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

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)
cm Elliott@illinois.edu

Put your home address on a resume

Celia Mathews Elliott

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

**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)**

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)**

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

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

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**

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

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

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

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 ?**

Food Science and Human Nutrition, "Clinical Pediatric Nutrition"

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

List honors and awards and professional associations next

Honors and awards

Title of the award

Entity that bestowed the award

Year it was given

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

Use your resume to supplement your cover letter

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

**Use your resume to provide additional
information about yourself**

Demonstrated success in other endeavors

Related experience and appointments

Additional special skills (job-related)

Honors and awards

**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

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

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.

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, Arial) 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

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

PLEASE POST

The Ohio Academy of Science
1000 West Park Avenue, Columbus, OH 43210
Phone: 614/464-2228

January 10, 1951

Mr. John M. Smith
Chief Executive Officer
Smithville Corporation
123 Elm Street
Smithville, OH 43224

Dear Mr. Smith:

This is the first line of the first paragraph. It should state the purpose of the letter or the reason for writing. This may be the only paragraph that gets read, so brief and clear. Write and rewrite until you get it right.

This is the second paragraph. Most letters have more than one paragraph. Although your letter should be more exciting to read than this one, it will not be well received unless it has all of the essential elements of a standard business letter: heading, date, inside address, salutation, body or text, complimentary closing, your handwritten signature, and your name typed below your signature.

Although there are variations to these basic elements, including additional parts for special purposes, you can spend the rest of your life happily writing standard business letters if you get these basics right now.

I'm closing this letter now so that I can demonstrate the final elements of a letter.

Thank you for considering these suggestions.

Sincerely,
Lyons E. Elliot
Lyons E. Elliot
Chief Executive Officer

123-456

HOW TO WRITE A BUSINESS LETTER

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

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

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:

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 \$34M in direct costs. Last year, our success rate was >65%.

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.

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

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

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.

Spelcheck ^[sic] the final draft...



...and then proofread it from a hard copy



cmelliot@illinois.edu

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.