

No Second Chances at a First Impression – Creating a Strong CV

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The CV gets you the interview, and the interview gets you hired. A strong CV is critical to your ability to find and secure a great position. As the saying goes, “you don’t get a second chance to make a first impression” - and this statement is quite true when it comes to the first impression that your CV creates for a potential employer. The quality of your CV can mean the difference between a strong first impression that leads to an invitation to interview and a negative first impression that you rarely have an opportunity to overcome.

Here are 7 guidelines to help your CV create a strong first impression.

- 1. FIND A FORMAT AND BE CONSISTENT:** A potential employer who is reviewing your CV for the first time should be able to clearly determine the progression of everything you have done from your undergraduate training until today in 30 seconds or less. Unorganized or difficult to read CVs will often never move past an initial glance, so it is important to find a clear, easy to read format for your CV. Be consistent in your font selection and use of headings – if your heading for “education” is bolded and underlined, then your heading for “publications and presentations” should be as well. Don’t overdo it with unique fonts or graphics – let the information about your training and background be the focus of your CV.
- 2. USE REVERSE CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER:** You should begin your sections on education and experience with your current or most recent position. If, for example, you are in residency and have been accepted for a fellowship, that fellowship position, along with the anticipated dates in which you will complete that fellowship, should be the first item listed in your “experience” section. If you are currently in residency with no plans for fellowship, your residency should be listed first, followed by any internship training, and then your medical school and undergraduate training. This will allow a potential employer to quickly assess your anticipated date of availability and clearly understand your training background.
- 3. CLARIFY ANY GAPS:** Not every physician’s path from undergraduate training to residency or fellowship is straightforward. However, gaps – or periods of time that are not accounted for on your CV – can be potential red flags for employers. If there are breaks in your training timeline, it is a good idea to briefly address those gaps in your reverse chronological listing of education and experience.
- 4. INCLUDE YOUR CONTACT INFORMATION:** A great CV is useless if a potential employer has no way to reach you to set up an interview. Your CV should include up-to-date contact information, including a phone number and an email address. Be cautious when using university or “.edu” email addresses on your CV as these email address often expire once you leave the program. Potential employers may hold on to your CV – especially if they don’t have a current opening – and you could miss out on a great opportunity if the email address on your CV is no longer a way to reach you. Consider setting up a Gmail or Yahoo or Hotmail account that will stay with you throughout your training and career – just be sure that you don’t forget to check this email account for new messages!

5. **HAVE A SHORT FORM CV AND A LONG FORM CV:** For private practice or hospital employed (non-academic) positions, your CV should be no more than 2 pages. Potential employers may be reviewing a high volume of CVs and longer CVs could be put to the bottom of the pile. However, the goal is to be brief while still presenting a comprehensive overview of your background. If you have authored numerous publications or given many presentations, you don't want to completely exclude those from your CV – but consider using a shorter paragraph format to highlight the number and types of publications and presentations you've done, rather than listing each one individually. You can also include a statement that a “full list of publications and presentations is available upon request,” so that those who wish to review this information are able to contact you to do so. For academic positions, however, CV length is not an issue and therefore, your CV should highlight all of your education, experience, publications, presentations, research, and teaching experience in detail

6. **USE A COVER LETTER (OR EMAIL):** A cover letter (or cover email) provides you with an opportunity to share additional information about yourself that might not be able to be conveyed clearly through your CV. Ideally, your cover letter should be brief (2-3 paragraphs) and should be tailored to each job opening. Do not address your letter “to whom it may concern,” but instead, use the name of the person to whom you are sending your CV. Your cover letter should highlight any unique or impressive qualifications or accomplishments, and it should explain your reasons for having interest in the practice and location. If you are seeking a position in a particularly competitive market, it can be beneficial to highlight any ties that you might have to the area. Use your cover letter to convey your passion for medicine and your specialty in particular, and share your vision and goals for your career.

7. **PROOF READ, PROOF READ, PROOF READ:** There is no quicker way to create a bad first impression than by having typos on your CV or cover letter. Though a typo may seem insignificant, it indicates to an employer that you have poor attention to detail - and this is a “red flag” for most practices and employers. Typos can happen quite easily, so it is important that you not only utilize the spell-check functions on your computer, but that you also have a couple of people proofread your CV and cover letter before you submit them for consideration.

Following these guidelines will help to ensure that your CV creates a strong first impression and gets you the interview that will get you hired.