

Tips for Writing Effective CVs and Cover Letters

Putting a little extra effort into these materials can help you make a good first impression with potential employers.

Applying for jobs can be exciting — and stressful. Business experts recommend diligent attention to developing your resume or CV (curriculum vitae) and writing a cover letter as these are the first things that any future employer will see about you. The CV and cover letter are concise ways to share details about your skills and accomplishments. A good CV and cover letter do not get you the job, but they may make you more likely to get an interview. A CV is basically a list of your education, accomplishments, and specific skills. It is normally accompanied by a cover letter that tells potential employers more about you, what you are looking for in a new job, and why you are the right person for the job they have advertised.

CV TIPS

A CV for medical professionals includes several different sections. It should start with your full name and contact information. In the business world, most CVs include a concise, descriptive statement about your skills, but this is not always included on medical CVs.

A good CV and cover letter do not get you the job, but they may make you more likely to get an interview.

The next section describes your education and training. Include your undergraduate degree, any graduate studies, medical school, residency, and fellowship. Extra training can be inserted here as well (for example, competency in obstetric ultrasound or colonoscopy, or extra training in evidence-based medicine or quality improvement).

The CV continues with descriptions of previous related jobs (it's OK to leave out your bartending stint in college), any presentations or publications, substantive committee work (e.g., if you chaired a committee, contributed to a significant change in practice, or spent a lot of time on a project), and relevant volunteer work. CVs feature very little narrative except to provide brief explanations where a bulleted list does not suffice.

Most physician employers are relatively conservative, so experts recommend using a simple font and limited color in your CV. Physician CVs



MEDICAL EDITOR

Sarina Schragger, MD, MS

MANAGING EDITOR

Brandi White

SENIOR ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Andy Marso

ART DIRECTOR

Christine Schneider

EDITORIAL ADVISORY BOARD

Natasha Bhuyan, MD, Phoenix, Ariz.
James Dom Dera, MD, FAAFP, Fairlawn, Ohio
Alicia A. Kowalchuk, DO, FASAM, Houston, Texas
Corey Lyon, DO, FAAFP, Aurora, Colo.
Vinita Magoon, DO, JD, MBA, MPH, CMQ,
Round Rock, Texas

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

Cindy Hughes, CPC, CFPC
Kent J. Moore

DIRECTOR OF JOURNAL MEDIA

Darren Sextro

EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

Leigh Ann Backer

PROJECT SPECIALIST

Marilyn Harvey

CIRCULATION MANAGER

Susi Cordill

SENIOR CIRCULATION STRATEGIST

Rebecca Harp

CIRCULATION AND AD SUPPORT SPECIALIST

Frances Spitsnogle

PRODUCTION DIRECTOR

Bret Taylor

PRODUCTION DESIGN MANAGER

Stacey Herrmann

SENIOR PRODUCTION DESIGNER

Bryan Colley

PRODUCTION DESIGNER

Randy Knittel

DIGITAL PRODUCTION SPECIALIST

Evan Palmer

DATA OPERATIONS MANAGER

Tiffany M. Long

AD SERVICES AND SALES SUPPORT SPECIALIST

Stefanie Valenzano

EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

R. Shawn Martin

SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT FOR EDUCATION

Margot Savoy, MD, MPH, FAAFP

SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT FOR ADVOCACY, PRACTICE ADVANCEMENT, AND POLICY

Stephanie Quinn

RESOURCES

To help you write an effective CV:

- Creating a standout CV. American Medical Association. <https://www.ama-assn.org/residents-students/career-planning-resource/creating-standout-cv>
- How to write a curriculum vitae. American Academy of Family Physicians. <https://www.aafp.org/family-physician/practice-and-career/managing-your-career/find-a-job/write-cv.html>
- How to write a medical CV. *International Journal of Surgery Oncology*. <https://www.ijsoncology.com/articles/abstract/10.1097/IJ9.000000000000032/>
- What makes a good CV? *FPM*. <https://www.aafp.org/fpm/2016/1100/p7.html>

To help you write an effective cover letter:

- Everything that physicians need to know about cover letters. Physicians Thrive. <https://physicians thrive.com/physician-cover-letters/>
- How to write a cover letter. *Harvard Business Review*. <https://hbr.org/2014/02/how-to-write-a-cover-letter>
- Physician cover letters: why writing a good one is as important as ever. *NEJM CareerCenter*. <https://www.nejmcareercenter.org/article/physician-cover-letters-why-writing-a-good-one-is-as-important-as-ever/>

can be as long as they need to be, but be careful to avoid including facts that are not relevant to medicine.

COVER LETTER TIPS

A cover letter allows you to expand on the bulleted list of accomplishments included in your CV. The cover letter is a place where you can be specific about why you are interested in a particular position and why your skills would be a good fit. While the CV lists all your accomplishments, the cover letter highlights unique skills that make you a good candidate for the job. It is important to do your homework, make sure you address the letter to the person doing the hiring, and demonstrate that you have read about the position and the organization by making specific statements about them.

Cover letters have three main components: 1) an introduction, 2) a short list of relevant work that highlights one or two positions or accomplishments, and 3) a conclusion. They should be no longer than one page. If you are applying for your first job out of residency, you can talk about the skills you have gained during your training and how they would be a good match for the job. You should write different cover letters for each job and not use a standard template. Each letter

should include a specific detail about the particular practice, whether it is the patient population, the job description, or the location. You want to make sure the hiring manager knows that you are interested in that specific job.

While the CV lists all your accomplishments, the cover letter highlights unique skills that make you a good candidate for the job.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Writing effective CVs and cover letters allows you to present yourself and your accomplishments in a professional and clear light. Putting a little extra time into these materials may make all the difference in getting the job you desire. **FPM**



Sarina Schrage, MD, MS
fpmedit@aafp.org