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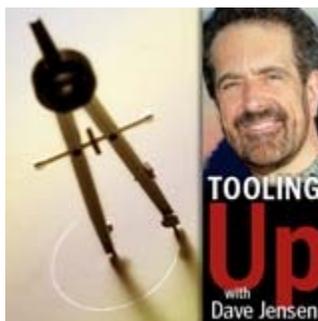
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Tooling Up: Put Some Muscle Into Your Marketing Materials

David G. Jensen
United States
15 February 2008

This is not a "résumé or CV" article. I'm not a fan of those. In fact, I'll usually decline when asked to do a talk about that subject on a campus. My reasoning is that many scientists put too much emphasis on the appearance of their paperwork. They fuss, write, and rewrite over and over again when they should be attending meetings, making phone calls, or engaging in some other, more productive activity.

As I've written before, a good résumé is better than a great résumé because it's out there working for you while the great one is still being analyzed and revised. Because I don't want to feed that frenzy, I'll concentrate this month on helping you get your job-search paperwork up to the "good" stage. You can take it from there with your always-improving networking skills.

SOME RÉSUMÉ AND CV TOPICS ARE STILL

CONTROVERSIAL

Regrettably, the world is full of résumé and CV ideologues. If you are a "one-pager" person, you believe that nothing in the world is more wrong than a multipage CV and vice versa. You can read conflicting advice in every résumé book in the Library of Congress, and there are more than 1000 on that shelf.

A CV is typically a laundry list of facts and information about a person. As a sales document, it doesn't have a lot going for it. And that's really what your paperwork is: --a tool to get you an interview and a shot at a job. The CV is a no-BS biographical sketch, and that's what academia expects. Some marketing-shy, just-the-facts academic types apply the same approach to their cover letters as well. Sometimes that dry approach works, I suspect, and sometimes it doesn't.

But when these scientists transfer their "just the facts" CV style into their industry applications and résumés, that's just plain wrong. Industry readers are looking for more than that. Your writing style for the industry application, including your cover letter, says something about you. Your choice of words, your selection of powerful phrases and descriptions--these things either

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work for you or they work against you.

THE KEY IS TO FOCUS ON THEIR INTERESTS, NOT YOURS

In academia, a CV is an exhaustive (and exhausting!) list of accomplishments: education, employment, awards, presentations, publications, grants--anything you ever did in a professional context. In industry, the most familiar document is the résumé. Like a CV, a traditional résumé is a list of accomplishments, but it's typically more stylized and selective--and it's *far* shorter. Although the one-page résumé has its fans, CVs (for experienced scientists with loads of grants and publications) can run 20 to 30 pages long, or even longer. And although an academic CV is usually just a list, a résumé may deviate from the list approach, including, for example, an "Objective" statement at the top.

If you're targeting an industry science position, I recommend an approach that's a little bit different. I call this slightly embellished document an "industry CV." The industry CV should paint a more compelling picture of your capabilities than an academic CV does and be shorter. It should be longer than a résumé but more focused on the needs of the employer than most résumés or CVs. That's where powerful writing, and editing, comes in.

Consider the "Objective" statement that some people put on their résumés. It's better than nothing, I guess, but really, employers care about their *own* objectives, not yours. That hiring manager is thinking, "I've got a job to fill here. All I need to know is, can this person handle the work involved."

A more powerful approach is to include a "Qualifications" statement, tailored to fit the particular job you're applying for. Consider everything you know about the job and craft a statement about why you're a good fit. If you can convince your CV reader, who spends an average of 20 to 30 seconds with each package, that you can fill their needs, you'll move into the short stack.

So, don't write:

Objective: Research microbiologist with 3 years of postgraduate research in gene expression and metabolism of *E. coli* would like to apply knowledge within an industry setting. Seeking a Research Scientist position in a growing biotechnology company, preferably in the Northeast.

Few hiring managers are going to be eager to pay you to "apply knowledge within an industry setting." They've got particular problems they want you to solve. So write something more directly related to the employer's needs, such as this:

Qualified By: Three years of experience increasing yields of *E. coli* secondary metabolites in computer-controlled 5-liter fermenters. Graduate education focused on genetics and metabolic pathways, combined with a hands-on understanding of microbial physiology and fermentation modeling.

This approach matches the applicant's qualifications to the job requirements. Whereas the former approach emphasizes learning in an academic setting, the latter conveys the impression of a smart person who's eager to attack the problems the company needs to have solved.

OTHER ALTERATIONS OF YOUR CV FOR INDUSTRY USE

An [earlier article](#) about this topic in the Tooling Up column ("CVs That Open Industry Doors") describes a number of other differences between the academic CV and the one you would use to find a job in a company.

One thing that can create confusion is that writers often use the terms "CV" and "résumé" interchangeably, as I often do in the Tooling Up column. But a résumé and an industry CV are used for different types of jobs. A CV should be used for technical positions that require more detail. For a new graduate, the industry CV could be 3 to 5 pages long, plus a list of publications. Some are a lot longer than that, but what is most important is that it be succinct.

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Modifying your CV for industry use means cutting back on superfluous detail and adding the "sizzle" that gets you the interview. The sizzle is in your statement of qualifications, right at the top of the first page (prime "résumé real estate"). Now cut back some of that superfluous detail, which documents the academic relics of days gone by.

For example, you don't need to have a list of every poster delivered or abstract written. Avoid that "personal interests" section that is so often dropped into a CV to make it seem résumé-like. The occasional hiring manager will be impressed by your interest in bowling, but more will find it a distraction, and at least a few people will be turned off by it.

In your CV, the powerful writing ends with the "Qualifications" statement. From there on, it's editing that counts: tidying up, shortening, formatting, focusing--generally, making certain that it bears no resemblance to the CV your graduate adviser has up on his Web site.

THE RÉSUMÉ AND COVER LETTER: CHOOSE YOUR WORDS CAREFULLY

The résumé is always a short-form document, used in situations in which you are applying for something other than a research job. Perhaps you have an interest in management consulting or in a marketing or business-development job. In cases such as these, you'll want to stick to a one- or two-page résumé. (Some fields, notably consulting, are famous for insisting on only one page.) Obviously, words matter when you are cut back to only a page or two. Consider using some of the "action words" that the University of the District of Columbia came up with for its law students. See this [excellent list](#).

The other crucial document, partner to your CV or résumé, is your cover letter. Your cover letter style can make a huge difference in your success at landing interviews. That's why you should *never* use a form letter. Hiring managers (and HR staff) read cover letters, as a rule, so this is your chance to focus on a major accomplishment and ensure that your CV gets more than the perfunctory 20 to 30 seconds.

When composing your cover letter, think about what the reader is looking for and point them toward it. Use a short paragraph to highlight an accomplishment that they will find more about inside your CV. Like the "Qualifications" statement on the CV, this is your "grabber."

An example:

I was recently a part of the team that did the *E. coli* metabolic pathway work published in the *Journal of Fermentation Science*, which led to the production of a unique secondary metabolite with commercial potential. My contribution was to identify the correct feedstock for a continuous fermentation run, in fermenters specially equipped with custom controllers that used programming I co-wrote.

See how this cover letter grabber ties together with the qualifications statement on the CV? It's the old one-two punch.

A writer and speaker on career issues worldwide, Dave Jensen is the founder and managing director of CareerTrax Inc., a biotechnology and pharmaceutical consulting firm located in Sedona, Arizona.

Comments, suggestions? Please send your feedback [to our editor](#).

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