Writing a Narrative CV

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Writing a narrative CV

This workbook guides you through reflective questions to help you with a narrative CV. What you write here will probably be much longer than the word or space limit that you will ultimately have in a grant or Fellowship application. It's important that you read the call guidance each time.

Think of this as your 'master' narrative CV document. When it comes to writing the one for the actual application, you will be pulling out the key bits of information which support you to demonstrate that you are the right person (or part of the right team), with a unique set of experiences, to be able to deliver the grant you are applying to. The examples here are written from an ECR or PGR perspective but every answer will be unique.

Key points:

- **Past focus:** CVs are about your past experience, in order to demonstrate that you are capable of delivering a future project. They are not a chance to describe how you will deliver that project, that belongs in other parts of the proposal.
- **Avoid vague and sweeping statements**: Your CV should be evidence-based wherever possible and demonstrate the impact of what you have done (think: why does this matter, what difference did it make?)
- **Be human:** Most people write in the first person ('*I did this'*). This may make it easier to convey your passion for the subject. Remember that your reviewers are still human (even 'reviewer 2') and are likely to respond well to something that is enjoyable to read and demonstrates you are interested in what you do.
- **Ask a friend:** It is often easier to understand your broader contributions to the research community or to mentoring when you talk to others around you.
- **Don't overthink the boxes:** There is no recipe or perfect way to write a narrative CV. Some researchers will have more for some sections than others, depending on the type of research they do and their career stage or experience. Some things might fit in more than one box, just choose the one where it makes most sense to you. For example, if you are describing a particular project in section one, it might make sense to mention an associate patent as part of this sentence, rather than 'saving' the patent for section 4. Aspects of work experience outside of academia may also belong in any of the boxes. Or may not be relevant at all. You don't have to include everything.

Section one: Contributions to the generation of new ideas, tools, methodologies or knowledge

What are your technical skills? What have you done with them and why is this important? Make sure you tell the story of how these build on each other to equip you to be the right person to deliver on the project you are proposing. Depending on your career stage, this might include relevant qualifications, positions you've held or funding awarded. Remember that the CV is about articulating *how* something came about so avoid simply listing projects you did, particularly when the project titles don't give a sense of what you actually did.

Ask a friend to check that they can follow your career timeline in this section.

What outputs have your technical expertise led to? (journal articles, tools, community standards, code, datasets, software, exhibitions, book chapters or open access outputs) What contribution did you make to these (have a look at the CRediT taxonomy for some ideas on language for how to articulate your contribution, or you may have other terminology which is more commonly used in your discipline). Use a Digital Object Identifier, hyperlinked to the publication, to save space and avoid using journal impact factors or un-contextualised citations.

EXAMPLE

I'm a polymer chemist with a passion for solving complex drug analysis and delivery problems within the pharmaceutical industry. During my PhD, I developed a new methodology to analyse low-levels of x drug within plasma (DOI), which is now undergoing further testing with industrial partner y. Combining these polymer synthesis skills with (other techniques), I applied this within the context of xyz (the first known instance of this application), working across a collaboration with three institutions and two industrial partners. Preliminary data demonstrates the efficacy of this … I won a visiting scholarship to Japan for 3 months to apply these skills in collaboration with material scientists and I'm the senior author for the resulting publication (DOI; with full datasets available).

Section two: The development of others and maintenance of effective working relationships

What steps have you taken to support other people to grow and develop? This doesn't have to be a formal role (e.g. supervisor) but instead think about the different activities you have undertaken in the last few months. Which of these included supporting others to plan and design equipment, learn new techniques, undertake a piece of writing, attend a conference for the first time, plan their professional development? You might be mentoring, guiding and supporting people without really realising it. You may also want to use this section to talk about non-academic work experiences with leading or managing teams. You could also talk about teaching, emphasising the skills and outcomes, rather than course codes and titles. However, if you already have lots of experience mentoring in a research context, it's best to focus on that. You may also want to include success stories or feedback. This section could also provide evidence of your ability to manage research projects.

How have you helped other researchers recently? What did you do and what was the impact of this?

What teams or collaborations are you part of? What specific things would other people in that team say you contribute to *how* the team works (not just *what* it does). If you don't know, ask them!

EXAMPLE

I mentored three summer students working in our lab over the summer, supporting them to understand good health and safety practices, manage their time and write up their findings, which are now being built on by a new PhD student. As a result of this experience, I devised a new buddy system for use of some of our core equipment, which has resulted in lower wastage of materials, as well as new users feeling more confident. I am also mentoring an Undergrad student from an underrepresented background, who is considering undertaking a research Degree and have offered lab tours to them and some of their fellow students. I have extensive experience as an Undergraduate lab demonstrator (winning a student commendation in 2019) and have undertaken one to one tutoring for High School pupils, being recommended by parents for my ability to tailor how I explain things and encourage the students to work things out for themselves.

Section three: Contributions to the wider research and innovation community

What do you do to contribute to work being done across the research community, to ensure your discipline is thriving and healthy, with a positive culture and where new ideas can flourish? Expectations will be different depending on your career stage. More junior researchers might focus on seminar series or journal clubs they have helped to organise, or perhaps any committees (health and safety, Athena Swan, sustainability) they have been part of. As you progress, you will have more to say around conference organisation, peer review and editing, as well as starting to set up a new research group. For senior researchers, this is really about leadership and how you are contributing to setting the strategic direction for your discipline. How are you engaging with questions like what open research, research integrity, rigour and reproducibility look like in your discipline, and helping to push the discipline forward? This might look like setting up entirely new research centres.

When have you organised or contributed to the running of seminars, journal clubs or conference programmes?

What peer review activities have you engaged in?

What committees or professional networks have you been part of? What specific things did you actually do with these groups and what was the impact of that? What skills did you learn?

EXAMPLE

I have contributed to our University student-led researcher journal as a writer and peer reviewer, also helping with peer review of submissions for the annual student conference. I engage in interdisciplinary events and seminars (e.g. the University's water innovation hackathon and the 3 minute thesis competition) as I'm keen to understand different approaches and build networks of other water researchers across public policy, health, law, environmental sciences and engineering. I started a 'water researchers' Teams channel to continue these interdisciplinary conversations. As student representative in our division I invited and hosted several seminar speakers, as well as representing student matters at monthly committee meetings (including contributing ideas to a conference code of good practice for the division, which has been used in several University and national conferences and received positive feedback).

Section four: Contributions to broader research/innovation-users and audiences and towards wider societal benefit

What do you do to engage with the wider, non-academic community? What networks, events or collaborations are you part of which allow you to find out about the needs and interests of people who might be the ultimate beneficiaries of your research? What public, patient or policy engagement work have you undertaken (blogs, podcasts, workshops, briefings, festivals or other events, schools-liaison…). What this box looks like will depend very much on the type of work you do and not everyone will have a huge amount to put into it. Try to detail the steps you have taken to engage with wider communities as well as any impact that has happened as a result. For example, participation numbers, feedback or other outcomes from events as well as patents, licensing agreements, policy briefings…

The panel will be looking to understand whether you have the right skills, confidence and networks to be able to do this sort of work in the project you are applying to, if required.

What skills have you gained from your wider engagement activities?

EXAMPLE

I contributed to the Being Human Festival in 2021 and 2022, delivering activities to over 100 members of the public each year on xyz. From listening to the questions people were asking about my research, I realised that there were many misconceptions and I decided to join some interdisciplinary debates happening at the science centre 'after hours' event, to bring a humanities perspective to the debates and was interviewed for a podcast (LINK). I am a member of xyz trade association.

Ask yourself: what are the things you are most proud of from the past few years? Are these captured in this document? Think beyond the outputs (prizes, grants and publications) to include the things that made a difference to other parts of the research system or community, or which led to major breakthroughs in thinking.

Finally, some templates may have a box for 'other information' such as career breaks, covid-19 impacts or parental leave. Be careful to read the guidance and be aware that if you try to sneak additional information in here it may be ignored!