

## How to tailor your CV for scientific roles at small-medium sized companies

**CVs land you interviews, not jobs. Keep it brief, relevant, and science-focused.**

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I started my career at large pharmaceutical companies Sanofi and GSK, as a statistical modeller, before moving into consultancy, and eventually founding my own company that focusses on health economics and medical statistics – named Delta Hat. Along the way I've seen literally thousands of CVs, most of which from recent graduates (both undergraduate, and postgraduate).

Many of those CVs would have been perfect for applying to larger companies, but just as your chance of success increases by tailoring your CV to a role, it will also increase when tailoring it to a company. This is because any job application to a large entity is likely to first go to a Human Resources department (HR), where it'll get processed in a certain way, often compared to the job description, or checked for certain key words. Dates and details will be cross checked in full for every role held, and references requested. There, the best CVs are those that follow a standardised format, where all of the information that HR needs is available and stacked neatly into chronological sections.

But at a small or medium-sized company your CV is likely to go directly to either a director of the firm, or to the hiring manager. All the CVs we receive at Delta Hat, for example, come to my inbox. Sadly, many contain insufficient information to make a decision, or to err on the side of rejection. When I'm not sure, it likely leads to a "no." In a competitive market, others will get their CVs right by thinking both about the role, and about the company and its size.

Here are a few of the major mistakes I see on CVs, which I'd advise others to avoid.

- Don't try to get the job with your CV alone. The oft-misunderstood purpose of a CV is to get an interview – after which a hiring decision is made. The CV needs to show enough to encourage a hiring manager to invite you to an interview, not to bombard with information on how you meet every minor point of the job description. Lots of information works better with larger companies' HR departments who are ticking off a list of requirements. At a smaller company trying to hit every possible checkbox won't get you the job without an interview, and it can lead to an overwhelming and difficult-to-read document.
- Don't include irrelevant information. Another common mistake is feeling that your entire history needs to be listed. In most countries, once you have a degree, your grades from secondary school no longer need to be listed individually. Similarly, question whether older experience is still relevant – for example part time jobs once you have full time experience. Carefully curate the information presented - there are only two pages (we seldom consider CVs that are longer than this) and they need to be used wisely. This means making the average value of every word high. The things you don't list in a CV can be used as examples in an interview.

- Don't make information hard to find. In most cases your recent experience is the most relevant, and should come first (reverse chronological order), especially if on a theme (for example a series of postdoc positions). For a recent PhD graduate, this will likely be your doctoral degree first, whereas a postdoctoral researcher's experience should come first. It's good to get across why you're suitable for a job immediately – don't make someone work to find it. In line with the previous point, you may also choose to omit information on a temporary job you've had since the last relevant post, or relegate it, to keep the story clear.
- Don't leave out important scientific information. Sharing what subject you might have studied at university – “chemistry” or “mathematics” – is useful, but not enough. The content of courses can vary massively - especially in longer or higher-level degrees. The person reviewing your CV will likely need more detail to get a better sense of your experiences and learn the subtleties: did you specialise in organic chemistry, or kinetics of chemical reactions, for example?
- Don't put detail in the wrong places. In general the largest 'block' of information on your CV should be your most relevant experience. I often see a single line given for degrees, and then multiple lines dedicated to voluntary activities at school 5 years previously. With limited space, the information needs to be on the most relevant topics – even if it is hard to omit things you are proud of. Given that limited space, make sure all salient information is presented that someone will need to assess your application.
- Don't be too prescriptive or forceful. Applications are made against a job description, but the recruiter has much more information about the skills they are looking for, which may not be what you believe they are. You may think telling them about the leadership skills you developed playing hockey is a good idea, but they may actually want someone to follow along and learn a complex operation – not attempting to lead until they fully understand. Avoid language such as 'shows', or 'demonstrates', simply listing the activities.
- Don't leave out a sense of your individuality. Employers want someone who can add to their company. Especially in smaller teams, it's important you add to the culture and are an individual, rather than an interchangeable body. We will be working with you every day, so want to be able to talk to you. Do you cook, or fly hot air balloons? Amateur dramatics, or walk your dog? I've employed people with all of these hobbies – it wasn't because they did those things, but because they included a few lines at the end of their CV telling me about it. Information such as this helps see the person behind the CV, and gives a great starting point for conversation in an interview. Even if you think your hobby is unremarkable, give detail to show you care about it. I bake with my daughter. Boring? Maybe, but aren't you curious what a 'funfetti' cake is?
- Cover letter. In the age of email, remember the email is the cover letter. Sending an email with two attachments; a CV and another cover letter, is missing the point.

Although the above gives some general rules, do not be afraid to flex or break them depending on context. For example if the job demands secondary school qualifications in maths and English, make sure to list them and include your grades. Far better than blindly following these rules would be to internalise the ideas behind these points.

Remember, in small to medium sized companies the person reviewing the CV will be someone much like yourself, with a few years of experience working at a company. How you can best help yourself, is to show how you can best help them – understanding the value of their time (presenting information well), what you can offer (qualifications), and why they would want to work with you (personality).

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