

## DEVELOPING YOUR CURRICULUM VITAE AND PERSONAL STATEMENT

Cathi Dennehy, PharmD  
Joshua Caballero, PharmD, BCPP

Your curriculum vitae (CV) is essentially a summary of your professional and academic career to date. Many residency program directors (RPDs) rely on it to deliver a snapshot of your accomplishments in order to formulate their initial opinions about you. Along with the CV, you will be asked to provide a personal statement (PS). Typically, the PS is intended for you to state your program interest, individualize the reasons for targeting their program, and describe how your strengths can be an asset to the institution. The PS provides an introduction of who you are and also allows an RPD to gauge your writing skills (e.g., can you write in complete sentences, use appropriate grammar, get your point across) and assess your judgment. The CV and PS (and supplemental materials when applicable) combine to form one of the key factors used to determine your eligibility for an interview. Therefore, this chapter will highlight how to make your CV and PS stand out in a positive manner.

**Some institutions require supplemental materials that involve essay responses related to specific questions about you or examples of past behaviors in a professional setting or career path. Similar to the personal statement, they are used to gauge your writing style and judgment.**

### CURRICULUM VITAE

Students commonly ask how their CV can be creative and distinctive. The simple answer is to be truthful and organized, while highlighting areas of

## 22 Chapter 2: Developing Your Curriculum Vitae and Personal Statement

significant involvement with professional and creative activities. The organization and format of your CV should be easily readable and allow the reader to locate information quickly. When developing and updating your CV, it is important to explore various templates and styles. The student affairs office at your institution should have several examples to review. You may also solicit upperclassmen or pharmacists who serve as educators or clinicians to share their CV. Once you have an idea of how your CV will look stylistically, it is time to organize it. Organization and layout are key for ensuring a logical flow that enhances the reader's ability to process its contents.

Prior to assembling your CV, organize your accomplishments into categories by dates (see Appendix A: Preparing Your Curriculum Vitae: Format and Headings). If there are gaps in your educational or professional work experience timeline, consider addressing these in your PS. Below are recommendations that will provide you with a guide on having a polished CV that will impress.

### Stylistic Tips

#### **Create a CV with length suitable for your needs**

One question often asked is, "How long should the CV be?" The answer: *as long as it needs to be*. Do not worry about your CV length: it is highly unlikely that your CV will be 15 pages long. CVs that include more versus less information about your roles and responsibilities in your advanced pharmacy practice experiences (APPEs), professional activities, and scholarship activities are preferred. However, do not embellish your accomplishments. Most RPDs have seen countless CVs, and it is second nature for them to detect an artificially enhanced narrative. Again, there is no page limit to a CV. If the information you are including is pertinent to describing your character, commitment to your profession/public service, and professional accomplishments, then it belongs in your CV.

#### **Use professional quality stock paper and appropriate color paper for printing your CV**

White or an off-white/light tan/light gray, with or without a light watermark, is acceptable as long as it looks professional. Avoid lines, designs, or anything that distracts from the content. You want people to remember your CV for the content, not the color or background designs. Choosing to place the

CV into a separate folder/clear cover is a personal choice and is not required—as long as the cover/clear folder is professional, go ahead. In the end, it is the content of the CV that matters and not the cover that it is in.

---

➤ **Some decisions that students make will not be universally agreed upon by residency program directors (RPDs). As such, we feel RPDs will judge your curriculum vitae on content highlighting your accomplishments.** ◀

---

### ***Avoid using fancy fonts***

Font selection for your CV is a personal choice. For the purposes of readability it is fine to use sans-serif fonts or serif fonts as long as you are choosing a font that is easily legible. The style of the font you choose should also promote easy readability (e.g., Arial or Times New Roman) and not be too fancy (e.g., *Lucida handwriting*, ALGERIAN). The font used for subheadings should be boldfaced and of a conventional font size that is easily readable (14 pt) while all other text should be standard 12 pt.

### ***Be consistent***

All formatting should be consistent throughout your CV. CVs that have formatting changes from page to page (e.g., differences in font, indentation, heading style – some are underlined while others are set in boldface) reflect poorly on you. Failure to be consistent with formatting is analogous to a preventable medication error; each suggests a lack of attention to detail that can prove deleterious to a patient or to your candidacy.

---

➤ **Proofread your curriculum vitae after you convert it to a portable document format (PDF). Page breaks and settings are often different than intended, especially when using free online programs.** ◀

---

### **Organizational Tips**

Hopefully, you've been updating your CV regularly. However, if you are putting it together for the first time since you began pharmacy school, you have a lot of work to do (which is not a bad thing... that may just mean you have been busy). Remember to organize your activities into specific headings.

## 24 Chapter 2: Developing Your Curriculum Vitae and Personal Statement

Appendix A: Preparing Your Curriculum Vitae: Format and Headings provides examples of common headings used for pharmacy CVs. However, below are additional tips to make sure your CV effectively conveys your work.

### ***Clearly state your name and how you can be reached***

Your name and contact information should be placed on the top of the first page. It should include a reliable address (mail and e-mail) and a phone that you can be easily reached at, such as your mobile phone.

**If not using your pharmacy program's e-mail address, use a professional e-mail address (e.g., johnsmith@XYZ.com).**

### ***Provide explanations for items***

All activities and acronyms in your CV should be clearly explained. You should not expect the reader to interpret these on their own, as in some cases they may be misinterpreted to mean something they are not. The person reviewing your CV may be a practicing pharmacist, an administrator far removed from clinical practice, or a representative from human resources. You should not assume that everyone knows what activities, terms, or acronyms mean.

### ***Arrange items in reverse chronological order with most recent first***

Having dates stand out in a column to the left with the activity stated to the right is one approach to cleanly represent the temporal progression of your activities and experiences. Too often, students will group accomplishments, one after the other and then state the time period within the text of the accomplishment, where it can get lost.



### ***Describe APPE roles and responsibilities***

The residency year is centered on cultivating clinical skills, organizing and managing patient data, multitasking, and communicating effectively. Therefore, these are all prime characteristics to highlight in your role descriptions for APPEs. With this in mind, more versus less information about your clinical roles and responsibilities is desirable. For past APPEs, provide four to five bullet points or a short narrative piece about the scope

of your responsibilities underneath each APPE listed. Highlight characteristics that show a higher level of responsibility. You may want to address the following questions:

- How many patients did you follow daily?
- Did you round with the medical team/preceptor?
- How were your recommendations communicated?
- Did you write chart notes?
- Did you advise the team during rounds?
- Did you make recommendations to the primary preceptor who communicated these to the team during rounds?
- What other activities did you perform (e.g., daily vital signs, medication administration record [MAR] review, pharmacokinetic drug monitoring, medication reconciliation, patient discharge teaching/counseling/facilitation)?
- If your APPE was one in which you were not afforded much independence, how did you attempt to create a more fulfilling role for yourself by reaching out to your preceptor, patients, and team to provide a greater level of service?

---


**It demonstrates a great deal of character if you find yourself on a rotation with negligible patient and team interaction, but you step up, show self-initiative, and try to work within the existing system to provide additional valued pharmacist services (some of which may even be new to the service model).**


---

If you have not chosen your APPEs yet, you should familiarize yourself with APPE responsibilities in advance of choosing or ranking them. For future APPEs, obtain a description of your role from the preceptor or your institution's experiential administrator and include this on the CV.

### ***Highlight honors and awards***

This is a section that sometimes gets missed. If you were a recipient of an honor or award during pharmacy school, make sure you have this section

to highlight it. You go back to any academic awards you have received such as National Merit Scholarship or Dean's Award; however, an award for being an outstanding social coordinator for your undergraduate fraternity should be omitted.

***Include your professional work experience***

Highlight any professional work experience while in pharmacy school. If you have experience as a research assistant or in a community pharmacy setting as a technician or intern, include it. Similar to the honors and awards section, including any involvement that extends into the undergraduate years pertinent to your professional roles and responsibilities as a future pharmacist, researcher, educator, leader, and involved public citizen, is appropriate. If you graduated from a particularly notable high school environment (e.g., Jesuit program, Charter/College preparatory school), you may include it since it may serve as a point of reference/discussion since the RPD may have come from a similar school and place an emphasis on it.

---

**A commonly asked question is, "How far back and to what level of accomplishment should be included on the curriculum vitae?"**

**The answer is simple: stick to professional activities or awards, such as working as a research assistant in a biology laboratory.**

**Your work at a fast food restaurant should be left out.**

---

***Provide examples of leadership and professional activities judiciously***

Most RPDs will seek out examples of involvement and leadership to evaluate you. However, do not misinterpret this to mean more is better. Due to increases in the number of applicants to residencies and number of available residencies, students mistakenly view the *quantity* of involvement as being more relevant than the *quality* of involvement. In reality, it will be much more valuable for the program to understand your motivations to become involved with any particular organization. Therefore, if you have been with five professional organizations over the course of your PharmD curriculum, but your level of involvement or roles are unclear or poorly defined, it will appear less meaningful than if you were involved in two professional organizations in which you were genuinely interested and

took on a major role (e.g., officer position, organizing chair). Since your time as a student is finite, you should prioritize activities where your interest is genuine.

### ***Feature types of presentations separately***

Why separate them? In general, we believe most RPDs place a higher value on presentations and posters given at a professional meeting than on those presented on a rotation. Therefore, presentations should have their own heading. Presentations given as part of an introductory pharmacy practice experience (IPPE) or APPE should be separated out under a subheading (e.g., IPPE and APPE Presentations). If you have presentations or posters that were not completed during an IPPE or APPE, they should be separated under their own subheading (e.g., Professional Meeting Presentations and Posters). For posters, include each author's name (last name and first initials) in the order of authorship. Be sure you boldface your name so that it is evident that you contributed to the poster. This also helps the reader quickly identify your place in the project; a touch always appreciated by those evaluating your CV. Additionally, consider highlighting your contribution by listing one or two bullet points immediately beneath the poster. If authorship was listed by alphabetical order, a bullet stating this may be justified.

The appropriate way to list a professional poster is to include authorship; title of the poster (not capitalizing all the words in the title); name of the meeting at which it was presented; the city and state the meeting was held; and the month and year of the presentation. Appendix A: Preparing Your Curriculum Vitae: Format and Headings has an example of such presentations.

**If you had a name change during your education, setting your name in boldface type is a good way to indicate that this is you.**

### ***Be careful when listing publications***

Many professional poster presentations at professional meetings will have the corresponding abstract published in the organization's journal. Some, however, are not. If you have a poster that also resulted in an abstract publication, list this as a poster on the CV as described above. If you have a published abstract affiliated with a poster, it may be included under a

Publications heading; however, state so with brackets at the end of the citation (e.g., [abstract]).

## **PORTFOLIO (OPTIONAL)**

A portfolio is a binder in which you organize a professional copy of all your pertinent presentations, drug monographs, or journal clubs (e.g., given during APPEs), posters, or any other activities during pharmacy school you may be particularly proud of. Some pharmacy programs require that you create a portfolio and update it periodically. Even though it is not a requirement for most programs, some students make one and take it with them to the ASHP Midyear Clinical Meeting (MCM) to share during Personnel Placement Service (PPS) or to their on-site interviews. The purpose of the portfolio is for RPDs (and anyone else interviewing you) to view your work and see what you've done throughout pharmacy school. Additionally, portfolios can also be constructed online (often via software provided by the pharmacy program) and may be shared with RPDs or other relevant personnel in a more flexible manner.

**Please remember that similar to your curriculum vitae, anything in your portfolio is fair game during the interview process.**

## **PERSONAL STATEMENT**

Do not underestimate the value of the PS. The PS is what gives RPDs a hint of your writing style: basically, it lets them know if your written communication skills are a strength or a weakness. Therefore, a poor PS can doom your application. Generally, we encourage students to remember that the PS is not a creative writing assignment but is intended to show that you can explain yourself clearly, use correct grammar and punctuation, and relay a clear message that answers the essay question(s) being asked. With Pharmacy Online Residency Centralized Application Service (PhORCAS), you will have the opportunity to personalize and upload your PS.



**Do not forget that supplemental materials, such as essays to proposed questions, should also have proper grammar and punctuation and relay a clear message.**

The PS format is similar to a standard business letter and should be printed on the same type of paper as your CV. Single-spacing is appropriate, and each letter should be addressed with the exact name and title of the individual who is hiring or the name of the RPD. Never send out a letter addressed to “Dear Sir” or “Dear Program Director.” The general format of a PS is as follows:

- **First paragraph:** Introduce yourself and state the specific position you are seeking. State what your professional goals are; avoid being vague. Be specific regarding your goals and future plans. They may change over the course of your residency, but RPDs want to interview applicants who say they have a *plan* and “I hope to be ....”
- **Second paragraph:** Highlight the reasons the RPD or residency committee should consider you for the position. Address what you feel are your most important skills, attributes, or past experiences as they relate to the position you are applying for—do not restate your CV. If you are applying for a postgraduate year-2 (PGY-2) or fellowship position, you should state how this additional training will further your career interests and objectives. This could be a separate paragraph or included in paragraph two.
- **Third paragraph:** Bring closure to the letter and state what you will do or what you expect the RPD to do. For example, you could specify that you will wait for them to call and arrange an interview.

### **Additional Points to Keep in Mind**

#### ***Avoid cutting and pasting your personal statement***

The practice of recycling written work that you’ve prepared for one program for another program is not recommended as the question(s) being asked may differ, as will programmatic strengths. Every year, RPDs receive a subset of

applications where candidates have mistakenly listed wrong institutions' names in their PS. This lack of attention to detail can make the difference in whether you are offered an interview or not.

***Use proper grammar***

Poor use of grammar is another preventable red flag that stands out in the PS. If you know in advance that you have some difficulties with verb tense or word choice, have your PS reviewed by a family member or friend and then proofed a few more times for accuracy prior to submitting your application. Also, some faculty may be happy to review your written assignments (e.g., PS, responses to essay questions) and offer suggestions. It is important to realize that faculty have multiple professional and personal responsibilities—do not take offense if they are not able to do this for you. If you are going to seek this type of intensive, focused help from your faculty, your best chance of success is to approach one you have an existing rapport with and give them ample time to review your work.

***Highlight how program elements fit with your professional goals***

How will completion of the residency program fit into your career path? If you really want to impress the RPD, you can also mention in the PS specific research being conducted at the institution you are applying to (e.g., “I talked to applicants from your program and here is what they said...” or “This impressed me as I’m looking for \_\_\_\_\_ in a PGY-1 residency.”). If the content of supplemental materials (e.g., essays) required by a program overlaps with some of the content of your PS, view it as an opportunity to include different elements in your PS that are not already discussed in your supplemental materials.

***Avoid too much personal information***

Personal information pertaining to age, relationship status, religion, and political beliefs should generally be avoided. Your PS and supplemental materials speak to your professional judgment. If you are communicating information that is too personal, an RPD may have some reservations. For example, if an essay question asks you to describe a personal or professional challenge and how you overcame it, it would be more appropriate to

discuss a professional/academic challenge than to discuss challenges from personal relationships. In some cases, references to personal challenges can be introduced as part of an essay question, if this is the intent of the essay question. For example, if an applicant or family member has had experience with “lack of access to medicine or healthcare,” this may relate to how you wish to shape pharmacy practice and improve access to medications. The key is to use this as an opportunity to focus on the professionalism you gained or maintained in spite of the personal challenge.

**Keep it brief**

Try to limit your PS/supplemental materials to one page. RPDs seek applicants who can convey their ideas and points succinctly. *Remember: attention to detail is key.*

**Promote yourself, but avoid bragging**

Your CV highlights all areas of involvement. If you are particularly proud of certain accomplishments, feature these (maybe the top two) in your PS. Keep in mind though that you are also trying to integrate how this program meets your personal goals and where this fits into your professional future. It is not about restating your CV.

**Set yourself apart**

Be yourself. Again, it is important that you do not view the PS as a creative writing assignment unless otherwise asked to do so. This is also true of any additional supplemental materials or essays. It is never a good thing to be too poetic or flowery in your writing style when it comes to a professional application. Alternatively, a PS that is too generalized is also not strong. Typically, these come from applicants who try to use a general or similar PS for several programs. Therefore, if you focus on your strengths and how that specific program can assist you in your future goals, it should be unique enough to stand out.

In conclusion, your CV and PS are features of your application that will determine whether you are invited to interview. Use this chapter's recommendations to put yourself in a position to get that invitation.

## KEY LESSONS

- Keep your curriculum vitae organized using headings and maintain a reverse chronological order.
- Make sure that your curriculum vitae describes your activities and roles as bullet points as it pertains to research, leadership, advanced pharmacy practice experiences, work experience, and community service.
- Avoid using fancy fonts or paper colors that will distract from your curriculum vitae or personal statement.
- Personalize your personal statement and any supplemental materials by focusing on your strengths.
- Keep your personal statement to one page.
- Ask at least two people to review your curriculum vitae or personal statement for readability and clarity of content.
- Start early. Do not wait until a month before residency applications are due to start your curriculum vitae. If you add to it gradually over the course of your pharmacy school education, you are certain to have captured everything.