

Effective Teacher Résumés, CVs, & Cover Letters

by [Mary J. Chang](#)

Most employers give each résumé or curriculum vitae (CV) a couple of minutes of review to see if the minimum requirements are included. In your search for the ideal teaching job, what elements are employers looking for in your application documents, namely your résumé, CV, and cover letter? There are some distinct features that you can include and adapt to be more competitive on paper.

Résumés & Curricula Vitae

Length & Detail

What is the difference between a résumé and a CV? Which one is most desired and effective when applying for a teaching position? Résumés traditionally do not exceed two pages of education and employment information, so only the highlights are included. CVs are more extensive, with fuller descriptions for each position as well as other details and sections, like

- Presentations & Publications
- Awards & Recognition
- Travel Experience
- Technology Experience
- Languages

The last page of a CV should be dedicated only to listing your professional references (referees), typically four to six people.

As for which document to use when, let the job announcement guide your application. If there is no indication of which one is required, let the length be dictated by the number of responsibilities listed on the announcement. In other words, if you are applying for a teaching pool position (many positions are open), then submit a résumé so you can impress succinctly. However, if you are thinking of vying for a leadership position, don't be modest—submit a CV that lists all of your talents and training.

Versions

On many European and some Asian résumés, applicants include an official professional photo, personal details like marital status, birthdate/age, sometimes religion, and occasionally hobbies/interests. Most American employers do not require or desire the personal information on résumés/CVs, because U.S. hiring practices do not legally allow hiring groups to consider this kind of information.

Order of Operations

Does it matter what is listed first—education or employment history? The short answer is “Yes.” Again, look to the job announcement for direction with this. If the announcement highlights

training and education above the work experience, then supply this version of your résumé or CV. Be sure to include the level of training (bachelor's, master's, or doctorate degrees; certification; and endorsements), the name of the institutions, and the dates of completion. If the announcement has experience or a combination of experience and training as the leading requirement, then submit a résumé or CV leading with your teaching experience.

Importance of Presentation

Regardless of leading with education or with experience, it's vitally important to make it easy to find and understand your key information. Pick a single font and a point size that is easy to read and fairly standard. To emphasize information, use bold, italics, or underlining of the same font.

Block related information together under a clear heading. For example, if you worked in several training programs in one institution, and your work for each was slightly different, list these under the institution's information (organization name, city/state/province/region) and then the job title(s) and dates of work [month and year]. Under each position, provide the top three to five duties you completed using active verbs.

Dedicate most of your document space for field specific experience. If you are just getting started in the field of teaching, then list related experiences (tutoring, volunteering, or informal teaching). If you have any specialties that could enhance your bid for the position, include these as a category as well. Lead with your most recent and relevant experience. Usually, experience is listed in reverse chronological order (with the most recent first). However, if there are significant work experiences that highlight your talents, categorize these under a heading, such as "Program Management" or "Online Teaching," toward the top of your documents.

"Measure Twice, Cut Once"—A Carpenter's Saying

"Measure Twice, Cut Once." Translation: Double-check before sending. Be sure your contact information is accurate. If you are in-between residences, list a "permanent address," which can be that of a relative or good friend, and a "current address," which is where you are gathering your correspondence now. This is a good way to still receive key postal mail while working internationally.

Often, job seekers include a line at the bottom of their résumé stating that "References are available upon request." If the announcement says to provide a certain number of references or recommendation letters along with your application, then you should list the contact information for your referees (name, occupational title, organization, relationship to you, and current email and phone numbers) and include those letters in your application packet.

Dates of completion and employment can make or break your bid for a position. Most positions require that an applicant have the necessary degree and a certain amount of experience. If you omit these dates for fear of ageism or appearing less experienced, the omission will likely cause your application to be rejected by most American institutions due to insufficient information. Because there are different numeric ways to list the date, it's clearer to spell (or abbreviate) the months and list the four-digit year to avoid any confusion.

What's Covered in a Cover Letter?

For as much as your résumé or CV tries to highlight the totality of your training and experience, the cover letter is meant to give a fuller story of your specific experience as it aligns with the job announcement. This means that you should make a unique cover letter for each position.

The cover letter should be brief, typically only one and no more than two pages. It is common to first state which position you are seeking and how you learned about this position. Then provide details that address each of the requirements on the announcement. For instance, the job announcement describes the need for someone with teacher training experience. If your résumé or CV has only a line describing your teacher training experience, flesh this out more in your cover letter—who were the participants, what topics did you cover, and how long were they part of this training?

Bonus Tips

Obtain Documents: Can you place your hands on your academic transcripts right now? Do you know where your diplomas or certificates/endorsements are? If you are asked to provide lesson materials or an original exam that you developed, could you produce them? Start compiling a Professional Portfolio that has all of these items in one place. As you seriously enter the job-seeking arena, you will be asked for these and many other documents multiple times.

Many universities allow for alumni to request transcripts online. It is wise to order at least five copies at a time—one to open and make photocopies of for the impromptu application and four sealed ones for those employers who only want an original. If your diplomas are already mounted and on display on your wall, take a careful digital photograph (avoid glare) of it and send it out as an attachment or print out a few copies to have on hand.

Translate Where Necessary: If you received a degree in a non-English-speaking country, provide an official translation of the degree and courses completed. Most American institutions will ask for a copy of this translation to better understand which degree you received and if it is equivalent to the American standards.

Actively Get Recommendations: In every place you have worked for any substantial amount of time (more than 1 full month), ask your supervisor, colleague, and supervisee for a letter of recommendation. If you are a recent graduate, ask your professors, academic counselor, or department head for a letter as well. If certain individuals are reluctant to write a letter, ask if they wouldn't mind being a referee.

Practice Interviewing: Practice for your interview by checking out the website for the organization you are applying to and being aware of what it values. Go online for general interview questions and practice giving your answers for each of them. Be able to answer questions about grammar, relevant standards, and other stressor situations (often given as scenarios where you need to describe what you would do).

How much is enough?: Remember, have enough copies of the different versions of your résumé and CV: Versions for a domestic position and others for international positions, versions that focus first on education and others that highlight experience at the start, as well as hardcopy and digital versions of all of these. Having at least four versions of your résumé and CV will allow you to have a good head-start on the employment application process.

How do you know if your résumé or CV is effective? First, have a trusted colleague or family member edit the surface features. As a teacher, I will leave you with some homework: Imagine you have the work and education history of your absolute favorite teacher of all time, and you were asked to design his or her résumé and CV. How would you describe this person and his or her duties? What words would you use to describe the essence of his or her teaching that compelled you to join the field of teaching? Now, look at your own résumé or CV. How does it stack up? Is there another draft in your future?

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