

# How to Write a CV



McGill

# CaPS

## Guides

Career Planning Service  
Service de planification de carrière



# HOW TO WRITE A CV

We see a lot of CVs at CaPS. Every year we read and review literally thousands of them, for job, internship, grad school and funding applications. They are from students of all levels representing each of the faculties and schools at McGill. While there is definitely room for individual variation, some things clearly work better than others. Use the information, tips and samples in this guide to start writing and organizing your CV, then **come to a CaPS CV drop-in or make an appointment** for an individual consultation to ensure that your applications are as professional and customized as they can be!

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## GETTING STARTED

### What's the point of a CV?

A CV provides a potential employer with a quick summary/overview of your experience, background and skills to help them decide if you are a good candidate to invite for an interview. CVs are also often required as part of graduate/professional school applications.

### General guidelines

1. **Writing a CV is an art, not a science.** The goal is not to force your content into a particular template, but rather to find a format and style that highlights your experience and strengths. The order and emphasis of your sections should also reflect the level of priority of your reader.
2. **Put yourself in the shoes of your reader.** Can they easily find the information they are looking for? Is it clear why you would be a good fit for the job?
3. **Use concrete examples** when describing your experience. What did you do/accomplish?
4. Your CV needs to be **consistent** and **clear** in terms of its style and format, **professional** in its content and overall presentation, and as much as possible, specifically **targeted** to the position/company/field you are applying to.
5. **Do your research!** For your applications to be effective, you need to demonstrate knowledge of the employer and what they are looking for. Be intentional and informed, not generic!
6. **Length:** In Canada, outside of academia, your CV can be up to two pages. There are a few exceptions, including the management/business sector, which tends to prefer one page. Ask at CaPS if you are unsure about norms for your particular field/geographic area.

### The "Master CV" - Your first draft

To make customizing your CV for each application easier, we recommend compiling a "master CV" that includes everything. This document will likely be several pages long, but since it's just for you, that's OK. The idea is to have a comprehensive record of your activities, experiences and accomplishments that you can draw on for future applications. Use the Common CV Components list on the next page to get started.

# COMMON CV COMPONENTS

These are the basic components of a CV for a current undergraduate student or recent graduate. While your Contact Information always comes first, the other sections can and should be presented in whichever order is most relevant to the position for which you are applying.

## Contact Information

- Include your full name, phone number and a professional email in an attractive header
- While a mailing address is conventionally included, use your best judgement depending on your situation
- Include your website and/or edited LinkedIn URL if relevant
- In North America, personal information such as age, height and citizenship is not included

## Languages

- If you speak more than one language, list these in order of relevance to the workplace
- Indicate your level of proficiency (i.e. basic, intermediate, fluent)

## Computer/Technical/Laboratory Skills

- List the specific programs/software or lab techniques you are familiar with

## Education

- List all degrees you hold or are working on, most recent first
- Include any specializations (major, minor), thesis or honours work
- You can include scholarships and awards as details here, or in a separate "Awards" section

## Awards and Scholarships

- List titles, reason for the award (if not clear from the title), dates and monetary values (if significant)

## Experience

There are many ways to organize this information. Early on, general section headings such as "Volunteer Experience" work well. However, once you have more experience and want to highlight patterns you have identified, try to strategically use headers for your experience section(s) in order to incorporate key skills from the job description.

General options include:

Work Experience  
 Volunteer Experience  
 Extracurricular Experience  
 Career-Related Experience  
 Additional Experience

Sample targeted headings:

Tutoring Experience  
 Sales and Customer Service Experience  
 Outreach and Marketing Experience  
 Writing and Editing Experience  
 Research Experience  
 Leadership Experience  
 Performance Experience  
 Administrative Experience

## Certifications/Affiliations/Memberships/ Additional Training

- List any additional certifications or active memberships you hold, along with the dates

## Interests & Activities

- Make sure this section is organized and relatively detailed/specific

## LANGUAGE, STYLE & FORMAT

### Format

Use a simple, clear format such as the example below:

#### What (your degree or job title)

date-date

Where (school or company and location)

- Details (if relevant)

### General guidelines

- Use formatting techniques such as indenting, uppercase, and bold consistently throughout to increase readability
- Use bullet points for your details; long dense paragraphs are hard to read quickly and **CVs are usually skimmed** in a few seconds, not read word-for-word
- List education and experience in **reverse chronological order** (most recent first)
- **Simple, straightforward layouts** tend to work best; avoid tables, boxes, templates
- Choose a standard, professional font and ensure the size is legible when printed
- Ensure your email address, voicemail message and any URLs are professional in tone
- **PROOFREAD** your CV carefully for typos, spelling mistakes and poor grammar

### Describing your experience

- Aim for a factual, confident and professional tone; avoid embellishment
- **Use active, skills-based language\*** and specific examples to highlight your accomplishments
- Start each bullet with an action verb instead of using pronouns (i.e. I, we)
- **Pay attention to verb tenses:** if you are no longer working somewhere, the verbs should be in past tense, for a current activity, use the present tense
- Add a descriptor for clarity if your title was "Volunteer" or "Intern", (i.e. Volunteer Peer Tutor, Administrative Intern)

\* see the list of Action Verbs at the end of this guide

## TARGETING YOUR CV

Keep the following tips in mind to ensure your CV is specifically tailored for each application:

- Read the job description carefully and research the organization to identify the key skills needed
- Use targeted headings (see examples on page 3) which speak to the main requirements of the position
- Include additional descriptive bullet points for relevant past experiences
- Consider the order of your sections to make sure the most important experiences appear early on

# SAMPLE: ONE PAGE CV

## Jane Student

243 Maple Street, Vancouver, BC, V2G 3B4  
Jane.student@mail.mcgill.ca 514-111-9999

### Education

**Bachelor of Arts: Sociology Major** 2017 - Present  
McGill University, Montréal, QC

- James McGill Entrance Scholarship (\$10,000) 2017

### Work Experience

**Peer Educator** 2017 - Present  
McGill Career Planning Service (CaPS), Montréal, QC

- Meet with students to review and offer feedback on their CVs
- Organize classroom presentations to promote CaPS activities and services
- To date, peer outreach activities have resulted in a 10% increase in drop-in appointments

**VP Communications** 2014 - 2017  
High School Student Society, Montréal, QC

- Managed all communications including monthly newsletter, social media and website

### Volunteer and Extra-Curricular Experience

**Crew Member** 2014 - 2016  
Midnight Kitchen, Montreal, QC

- Worked in a team of 8

**Camp Counsellor** Summer 2016  
ABC Daycamp, Vancouver, BC

- Supervised and interacted with a group of 16 children aged 6 to 10 years
- Developed weekly activities and agendas for campers
- Created and led local outings to attractions such as Science World
- Prepared and administered work schedule for all counsellors

**Groundskeeper** Summers 2012 - 2014  
Jagre Ridge Golf Course, Vernon, BC

- Groomed golf course each morning for clients
- Collaborated with a team of 12

### Certifications and Skills

- CPR/First Aid Certified (exp 2020)
- Microsoft Office Suite: Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and Adobe Photoshop

### Activities and Interests

**Music:** Over 10 years of experience as an active amateur musician in orchestras and bands  
Achieved Grade 8 RCM standing in both trumpet and piano

**Sports:** Avid runner, cyclist and skier; annual participant in the Terry Fox Run

# SAMPLE: TWO PAGE CV

## Jean-François Student

4509 Faure, Montréal, QC H3B 2Y9  
Jean-francois.student@mail.mcgill.ca; 514-330-1123

### Languages

English and French

### Education

**Bachelor of Science, Honours Anatomy and Cell Biology** 2016 - 201  
McGill University, Montréal, QC

- Minors in Anthropology and Social Studies of Medicine
- Dean's Honour List

**Diploma of College Studies, Health Sciences** 2014 - 2016  
Cégep de Trois-Rivières, Trois-Rivières, QC

### Research Experience

**Clinical Research Coordinator** 2017 - Present  
Bone and Mineral Unit, Royal Victoria Hospital, Montréal, QC

- Coordinate two research projects investigating treatments for osteoporosis
- Liaise between patients, investigators, hospital staff, and sponsoring companies
- Design and provide information and resources for patients diagnosed with osteoporosis
- Successfully recruited hundreds of study participants using innovative advertising

**Undergraduate Research Assistant** 2016 - 2017  
Professor McGill Lab, McGill University, Montréal, QC

- Welcomed and registered participants and explained study
- Completed data entry, administrative tasks and lab maintenance

### Additional Experience

**Companion**

Montréal General Hospital, Montréal, QC 2016 - Present  
Centre Hospitalier St-Therese, Shawinigan, QC 2013 - 2015

- Visit patients in the dialysis unit to provide conversation, and support

**Volunteer Service Participant** 2014 - 2015  
Katimavik Youth Leadership Program, Hearst, ON, Prince Rupert, BC & Moncton, NB

- Lived with a group of 15 young people in three small Canadian communities for one year
- Volunteered as an Activities Coordinator in a seniors' residence, as a Tree Planter in a deforested area and as a Mentor in a community centre for at-risk youth

**Server (part-time)**

201

Bar le Barouf, Montréal, QC

- Train new staff on service and cash
- Awarded most efficient worker three months in a row
- Nominated point person to deal with crisis situations

**Sport Camp Counsellor**

Summers 2015, 2016

McGill Sports Camp, Montréal, QC

- Supervised a group of 10 children between the ages of 8-10
- Created and ran multiple activities related to various sports
- Encouraged and motivated children to participate and succeed in activities
- Updated parents on daily activities and events

**Extra-Curricular Activities****McGill International Student Buddy**

2017 - Present

International Student Services, McGill University, Montréal, QC

- Communicate with new McGill students from abroad prior to their arrival; advise and assist them during their entire first year

**Orientation Leader**

Aug 2017

McGill University, Montréal, QC

- Led a group of 20 new McGill students through orientation activities

**Judo instructor**

2013 - 2017

Centre de Judo Shawinigan, Shawinigan, QC

- Coached children between the ages of 5-15
- Judged judo competitions for the 5-8 year old category
- Created an information sheet for all participants about schedules and equipment they will need

**Activities and Interests****Sports:**

- Varsity soccer, McGill University (2016-Present)
- Judo – black belt. Won national championship

**Music:**

- Piano – classical & jazz

**Travel:**

- France, England, Spain, Portugal and Australia

# SAMPLE: ONE PAGE CV

## ◆ Fatima Student ◆

3600 McTavish, Montréal, QC, H3A 0G3, fatima.student@mail.mcgill.ca; 514-398-3334

### EDUCATION

**Bachelor of Arts and Science, Economics and Mathematics** 2014 - 2017  
 McGill University, Montréal, Canada

- Minor in History
- Exchange term at University of Edinburgh (Winter 2015)

**International Baccalaureate Diploma** 2014  
 XYZ International School, Beirut, Lebanon

### CAREER-RELATED EXPERIENCE

**Research and Event Planning Intern** Summer 2016  
 United Nations, New York, USA

- Researched the advantages of micro financing for female farmers in West Africa
- Assisted with planning for annual agriculture conference
- Translated English conference documents to French and Arabic

**VP Finance** 2015 - 2016  
 McGill Arab Students' Association, Montréal, Canada

- Managed the annual budget for one of McGill's largest student associations

**Assistant Analyst Intern** Summer 2015  
 ABC Bank, Hong Kong, China

- Translated English financial documents to French and Arabic
- Documented trade transactions and entered data into Excel

**Receptionist** 2012 - 2014  
 SFT Shipping, Beirut, Lebanon

- Answered client inquiries on the phone and in person in a trilingual environment
- Updated client accounts and entered import and export data

### SKILLS AND INTERESTS

**Languages:** English, French and Arabic: Fluent, Hebrew: Intermediate, Mandarin: Basic

**Software:** PowerPoint, Excel and Word

**Interests:** Reading (Politics, Technology), Painting and Genealogy

**Sports:** Basketball (Team Captain in high school, intramurals at McGill), Ultimate Frisbee and Golf

**World Travel:** Australia, Germany, France, UK, Israel, Jordan, Egypt, USA and Canada

◆ REFERENCES AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST ◆



# ACTION VERBS

On the following two pages you will find a list of action verbs organized by skill area. Use these ideas to describe your past experiences and skills in your CV and Cover Letter. Make sure to check out all of the categories as many verbs apply to multiple skills!

## ANALYSIS

Accounted	Critiqued	Measured	Scrutinized
Analyzed	Deciphered	Observed	Studied
Ascertained	Deliberated	Prioritized	Synthesized
Assessed	Determined	Programmed	Tested
Compared	Estimated	Projected	Validated
Computed	Evaluated	Questioned	Verified
Conceptualized	Examined	Rated	
Concluded	Formulated	Recommended	
Confirmed	Justified	Researched	

## COMMUNICATION

Addressed	Counselled	Interpreted	Referred
Advocated	Demonstrated	Lectured	Reported
Authored	Discussed	Listened	Responded
Called	Drafted	Lobbied	Spoke
Clarified	Edited	Marketed	Summarized
Coached	Educated	Persuaded	Taught
Communicated	Elicited	Presented	Transcribed
Contacted	Explained	Promoted	Translated
Convinced	Familiarized	Publicized	Tutored
Corresponded	Informed	Queried	Wrote

## CREATIVITY

Adapted	Created	Improvised	Played
Authored	Designed	Innovated	Revised
Brainstormed	Developed	Invented	Shaped
Built	Engineered	Made	Visualized
Composed	Envisioned	Manufactured	
Constructed	Illustrated	Produced	

## INITIATIVE

Accelerated	Created	Improvised	Played
Accomplished	Coordinated	Initiated	Revamped
Achieved	Established	Instituted	Reviewed
Acted	Founded	Introduced	Revitalized
Advanced	Generated	Launched	Solicited
Applied	Handled	Proposed	Spearheaded
Attended	Implemented	Rejuvenated	Utilized

# ACTION VERBS

## LEADERSHIP

Administered	Delegated	Headed	Officiated
Advised	Directed	Hired	Oversaw
Allocated	Empowered	Influenced	Piloted
Anticipated	Enabled	Instructed	Recruited
Appointed	Encouraged	Interviewed	Sanctioned
Approved	Endorsed	Led	Selected
Assigned	Enforced	Maintained	Sponsored
Authorized	Financed	Managed	Supervised
Chaired	Fostered	Monitored	Trained
Decided	Guided	Motivated	Unified

## PROBLEM SOLVING

Aided	Fulfilled	Reduced	Solved
Alleviated	Generated	Refined	Streamlined
Ameliorated	Identified	Reformed	Strengthened
Augmented	Improved	Remedied	Supplemented
Customized	Increased	Remodeled	Transformed
Expanded	Polished	Repaired	Troubleshoot
Extended	Reconciled	Restored	Updated
Finalized	Rectified	Saved	Upgraded

## TEAMWORK

Accommodated	Contributed	Integrated	Related
Assisted	Cooperated	Mediated	Respected
Balanced	Facilitated	Negotiated	Shared
Collaborated	Harmonized	Participated	
Consulted	Helped	Partnered	

## ... AND MORE!

Activated	Excelled	Licensed	Shipped
Added	Executed	Navigated	Sought
Appraised	Experimented	Operated	Staffed
Approximated	Familiarized	Performed	Submitted
Audited	Guaranteed	Prepared	Surveyed
Displayed	Involved	Realized	Tailored
Dissected	Issued	Served	



A stylized bird logo with a pink body, a purple beak, and green wings, positioned behind the main text.

# CaPS

HELPING STUDENTS PLAN FOR THE FUTURE

## **CaPS Website**

For services, information and resources to guide you through your next steps.

[www.mcgill.ca/caps](http://www.mcgill.ca/caps)

## **myFuture**

For jobs, internships, workshops, events and .

[caps.myfuture.mcgill.ca](http://caps.myfuture.mcgill.ca)

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### **McGill Career Planning Service (Downtown)**

William & Mary Brown Student Services Building  
3600 McTavish, Suite 2200  
Montreal, QC H3A 0G3  
514-398-3304

### **McGill Career Planning Service (Macdonald)**

Centennial Centre  
21,111 Lakeshore Road  
Ste-Anne-de-Bellevue, QC H9x 3V9  
5143987582