

# Chapter 2

## Getting Ready for the Job Search



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You've spent some time thinking about what your ideal job would be and now it is time to find it. Depending on your specialty, you will start looking anywhere from 6 to 18 months ahead of time. In a tight market, you might be starting to express interest as early as 2 years ahead of time. To get the most accurate timeline for your specialty, it is best to speak with your residency director.

Two essential items for preparing for your job search are your curriculum vitae (CV) and cover letter. When reading a CV, on average, a prospective employer decides in 2 minutes whether or not to pursue a candidate. This will be the first contact you'll have with a prospective employer; make sure you make the most of this first impression or else it may also be the last contact with them.

### 2.1 Why a Curriculum Vitae?

A CV is a detailed document charting your professional life. Depending on your experience, seasoned versus fresh out of residency, it may be only one page long. Starting with a good base for your CV now will serve you well in the future. You'll have many future uses for a well-prepared CV, such as applying for grants, going out of the country for mission work, speaking at conferences, etc. The format listed below allows for easy modifications and additions as you progress through your career. You will be amazed how quickly and easily the details of your past professional life are lost in the memory banks.

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## 2.2 What's in a CV?

Table 2.1 gives a listing of subject headings typically contained in a CV. There are several variations on this format. It doesn't really matter which of the many different formats you use as long as all the relevant information is there. The format we chose to use is one that several commercial curriculum vitae preparation services also use. If preparing your own CV seems untenable, there are several online sites available (e.g., [thedoctorjob.com](http://thedoctorjob.com)) to help in preparation. When you begin writing your CV, remember these simple tips:

- Keep it short and relevant, usually two to three pages maximum.
- Keep it generic: same CV for all jobs.
- Always spell check and proof read; get someone else to read it to catch those last couple of oops.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Postgraduate training: This includes your residency and any fellowship training that you have completed. Each line should start with the dates of training (e.g., July 2003 to June 2005: Stanford University Hospital Department of anesthesia residency). If you functioned as a chief resident, list that year out on a separate line for added emphasis.

**Table 2.1** Sample CV

Name
Contact information
Address
Telephone
Cell phone
Email
Personal information (optional)
Date of birth
Citizenship
Visa status
Board certification
Medical license
Postgraduate training
Education
Graduate/medical school
Undergraduate
Professional experience (chronological order)
Work history
Academic positions
Include position details and dates
Professional societies
Awards received
Publications
Outside interests (optional)

- Write everything out, minimize abbreviations.<sup>2</sup>
- If sending your CV via email, it is recommended to also send a hard copy unless specified otherwise. Email may disrupt the formatting on your electronic file, and you want it to look good!
- Hard copies, if sent, should be printed on good quality paper.

Potential employers will be scanning your CV for gaps in your training and employment. You should account for your time on a continuous basis. If you took a year off to trek in the Himalayas, list it in some way under special interests as traveling or exploring other cultures. Spin it in a positive fashion rather than letting one assume you “dropped out” for a year.

Here are some detailed descriptions of some of the particularly important subject areas in your CV. A sample CV can also be found in the Appendix of this book.

- Professional qualifications include board certifications. Upon completion of residency, most of you will be board eligible (BE) and not board certified (BC). It is useful to list any portion of your certification process that you have completed at the time of applying, for example, written boards (7/20). List all the states in which you have current or prior medical licenses. If you did not renew a license, list why (e.g., moved out of state). Many board certification exam opportunities were delayed or canceled due to COVID; simply note reason for delay on CV.
- Publications: Unless you are applying for an academic job or other position for which prior research experience is directly relevant or have done specialty-specific research during training, having a publication list available on request will usually suffice.

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<sup>2</sup>Professional experience: Many of you have worked for some period of time prior to your medical school of residency. List any such work in detail. You may have had a transitional job or moonlighted during training. List the dates and job title. You won't need to list employment in high school unless it is somewhat relevant to the job you're applying for.

### **File Format Tip**

If you submit your resume via email or the web, rather than in hard copy, you run the risk of the formatting, pagination, etc., coming out wrong on the other side and making your documents difficult to read. This is especially common with word processing documents and spreadsheets. To put your best foot forward, you want to make sure that the documents you submit will look to the admissions staff exactly as they look to you. There are several file formats in which you can save your documents so that they will look the same on the other side (.tiff, .eps, .pdf, et al.). You should always follow the instructions in regards to the file type(s) requested; however, at the time of this writing, the most popular and convenient way is to save your document as a .pdf.

The .pdf is the file type for Adobe System's™ “Portable Document Format”™ and has become nearly ubiquitous in its usage. Anyone can download a free copy of the .pdf reader (Adobe Reader™) at [www.adobe.com](http://www.adobe.com). If you want to create a .pdf file, however, you will need to buy their software. Alternatively, a great way to create .pdf files for free is to download a copy of Open Office ([www.openoffice.org](http://www.openoffice.org)). Open Office is a free office suite that includes a word processor, spreadsheet, etc., just like Microsoft Office™, and it includes the built-in ability to create .pdf files. All you need to do is to download Open Office, open your file in it, and then save the file as .pdf file type. Once you have your document saved in the .pdf file type, open it to make sure it looks good to you (the best way might be to download a free copy of Adobe Reader™ to do this) and then submit it.

## 2.3 The Cover Letter

For each job application, you will send the generic CV and a more customized cover letter. Your cover letter is not simply a rewrite of your CV. Your cover letter is more personal – it is the opportunity for you to explain why you feel that a specific practice is a mutual good fit. Some key things to include in the cover letter are as follows.

- Date of completion of residency and date of availability for employment. It is OK to have a specific start date request, but if you can be flexible, be sure to convey that information.
- Any specialty skills from residency or fellowship: do you have a certain niche that is marketable? For example, you spent 6 months on the cardiac rotation.
- Type of practice you are interested in. There may be certain specialty areas where you feel you possess special expertise and could add extra value to the practice.
- If a job is of particular interest to you because of geography, personal or professional ties, you may choose to mention this. Employers are looking for potential employees who have staying power so having a tie to the practice can be a bonus.
- Name drop: If someone in the practice knows someone from your residency program, it is a sure thing that they will contact them before they contact you. If you have a known connection and that person will be your advocate, it is reasonable to mention it in the cover letter.

### Sample Cover Letter

16 January 2021

Dear Dr. Smith,

My name is Jane Doe and I am contacting you regarding potential job opportunities in your practice. I will be graduating from the Stanford Hospital Anesthesia Residency program June 2021 and would be available to start

work Sept 1 2021. I am interested in a broad practice and am comfortable covering OB, cardiac, pediatric and liver transplant anesthesia. Additionally, I did a concentrated 6 months of regional anesthesia and feel that this is a skill that might be useful in your group's setting. The Florida Keys Associated Anesthesia group comes highly recommended from Dr. Brute Force (Orthopedic Surgery, Hurricane Hospital). I am very much interested in living in Key Biscayne; my husband's family lives there and we hope to settle down closer to family.

I have enclosed a copy of my CV with contact information.

Thank you very much for your time. Sincerely,

Jane Doe, M.D.

## 2.4 Letters of Reference

If you are a viable candidate, your prospective employer will ask for a list of individuals they can speak with, who can attest to your professional qualifications. One constant on your list of references should be your residency director or chair of the department. Similar to the dean's letter when you applied for residency, this letter provides a general overview of you and your performance during training. For other references, it is best to solicit letters from faculty who have some name recognition, and are well networked. If you have a niche, for example, regional or OB anesthesia, it is valuable to have a letter from a faculty member that also has that niche. The names you choose to provide may vary from application to application. If the head of the group is friends with Dr. X at your hospital, it is a guarantee they will have a conversation about you before you sign on the dotted line; it behoove you to list them as a reference. That said, it is also a good idea to ask your potential references if they feel comfortable writing a letter for you before you list them as a reference. You don't want to be surprised at the interview by an unfavorable letter in your file.