

NARRATIVE CV FAQs



We have compiled this list of frequently asked questions to help respond to some of the issues that consistently emerge when we present our Narrative CV experiment or give workshops on writing and evaluating the Narrative CV. Let us know which questions you would add to the list!

1. Doesn't this format favour those with native English?
 2. Isn't it just boasting?
 3. How can these narratives be as objective as a traditional CV?
 4. How are senior academics meant to distil their experience into the restricted word count?
 5. What should I do about 'evidence'?
 6. How do we know what 'good' looks like?
 7. Don't they create more work than a traditional CV?
 8. Isn't it the same material as a cover letter?
 9. Do the funders really value these wider contributions?
 10. It isn't fair that the goalposts have shifted
 11. How do I talk about impact when everything I do is part of a team?
 12. What do we do about team NCVs?
 13. How do we find time for these extra activities?
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<p>Doesn't this format favour those with native English?</p>	<p>It is likely to be true that those with a familiarity for English idiom will feel more comfortable with writing a longer paragraph about themselves and their work. Non-native English speakers are advised to work with a peer; perhaps to use AI tools to support their writing; and to use a format such as that provided by the Oxford structure, to help with their work.</p> <p><i>Ref:</i> <u>narrative cv guide oxford june 2023 0.pdf</u></p>
<p>Isn't this just boasting?</p>	<p>Conversations with academics from a broad range of communities does suggest that there are cultural pre-dispositions against what is perceived as 'boasting'. Use the Oxford structure, to present your work as factually as possible; work with a peer to help you celebrate your achievements; and keep an ongoing list of all your activities to help you remind yourself of everything you've done.</p> <p><i>Ref:</i> <u>EUROPEAN RESEARCH COUNCIL - Narrative CVs – a good idea? (europa.eu)</u> Prof Anja Leist discusses these concerns</p>
<p>How can these narratives be as objective as a traditional CV?</p>	<p>There is plenty of evidence to show that 'traditional' CVs are not objective. Research shows that names on CVs create biases of race and gender. International researchers often use different templates including information that engender bias (e.g. photos, marital or caste status). Some applicants will have had a lot of support in writing applications, others very limited help, depending on the resources available at their institutions.</p> <p><i>Ref:</i> <u>Is there a glass ceiling for ethnic minorities to enter leadership positions? Evidence from a field experiment with over 12,000 job applications – ScienceDirect</u> <u>The Impact of Gender on the Review of the Curricula Vitae of Job Applicants and Tenure Candidates: A National Empirical Study Sex Roles (springer.com)</u></p>

<p>How are senior academics meant to distil their experience into the restricted word count?</p>	<p>NCVs are an attempt at changing what is valued in academic research by being more inclusive of the whole suite of activities that constitute academic labour. This isn't to downplay the previous standard relating to publication metrics and it is possible to summarise those effectively. Ensure everything you list is appropriate to the particular funding call; explicitly refer to 'highlights'; be clear on why you are including specific experiences. Remember that the NCV is just one part of the application process.</p>
<p>What should I do about 'evidence'?</p>	<p>Meetings with researchers show that many worry about the quality of the evidence they can use to back up their assertions in an NCV. Where possible, as the Oxford structure shows, use facts and figures to back up your claim. Consider whether you would stand by your evidence if asked about it at an interview. Remind yourself that the NCV is part of an overall application, not the whole package. Be conscious, as you record your activity (#2), of thinking through what evidence you could later use and perhaps build in feedback mechanisms.</p>
<p>How do we know what 'good' looks like?</p>	<p>Funders are clear that they do not want to advertise sample CVs online, for fear of dictating what an NCV 'ought' to include. So far, guidelines for reviewers are scarce also. Use the FNR (Luxembourg's national funder) samples. Take a look at the new peer-sharing platform created by the Marie Curie Alumni Association, with funding from international partners. Talk to research administrators in your institution to be put in touch with more experienced writers.</p> <p>Ref: Time to rethink the scientific CV (nature.com) (FNR examples) PEPCV (mariecuriealumni.eu)</p>

<p>Don't they create more work than a traditional CV?</p>	<p>Certainly the first time you write an NCV, it will take some time to put together a draft. Initial research by FNR showed that over half of applicants took more time, but a follow-up survey showed that time had reduced. Researchers suggest that some of the material is already to hand, in for example an application for HEA fellowship, or in preparation for career development conversations. You will need to spend time updating the NCV for each different application, to include new or more relevant experiences.</p> <p>Ref: <i>FNR Download Center - Narrative CV 2023 Report FINAL withcover.pdf - All Documents (sharepoint.com)</i></p>
<p>Isn't it the same material as a cover letter?</p>	<p>In general terms, a CV relates your 'qualification', in the broadest sense, for a role, while a cover letter represents your 'motivation' for a role. A personal statement usually covers both of these. You will need to make a decision about how you are presenting evidence for all the things the funder or employer wants – you could for example talk about your research skills in Module 1, your team work skills in Module 2. Your cover letter could then be a summary of these and then use the space to be explicit about why this opportunity is the right one for you. Always read carefully what the funder or employer is asking you for.</p>
<p>Do funders really value the wider contributions as much as 'the research'?</p>	<p>Until there is more robust evaluation done on the NCVs that are successful in winning grants, we are not going to know. Changing how researchers are selected will take time and a culture shift and you yourselves are part of that. Resources on training reviewers will encourage them to take career stage into account when assessing applications.</p>

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<p>It isn't fair that the goalposts have shifted.</p>	<p>Researchers are used to the idea that their work is judged on the basis of visible metrics such as publications or grants. NCV seems to signal that now even more is expected and that the work that has been put in to getting the publications is wasted. While it is tempting to believe that this is not fair, it's also important to recognise that a lot of good academics do not win funding or promotion for reasons of structural inequality. NCVs are seen as a way of changing the very competitive nature of academic research to be more inclusive of different kinds of researchers.</p> <p><i>Ref: for example missing-elements-report.pdf (rsc.org).</i></p>
<p>How do I talk about impact when everything I do is part of a team?</p>	<p>Claiming impact, in order to be able to provide evidence in your NCV, feels uncomfortable to some researchers. Whether it's because it's hard to measure (see #5 above) or because it's hard to disentangle your own contribution, it can feel disingenuous to claim something individually. There's no precise answer to this. Try to be as clear as you can as to your own contribution, quantifying where possible. Describe clearly and concisely the whole team's work if necessary. Be proud if it is your work that has enabled the team to succeed.</p>

<p>What do we do about team NCVs?</p>	<p>A good question! The main advice seems to be to be extremely clear on why you are including particular team members' contributions in each section – use an introductory sentence to do that. Spend as much time as you can – build in extra – to work together as a team to download all the possible contributions and then find a way to share these out fairly. Ensure that each team member writes in a similar style or voice; or appoint someone to edit the contributions into a similar style.</p> <p>Ref: <u><i>Oxford Team NCV guidance</i></u></p>
<p>How do we find time for these extra activities?</p>	<p>Some researchers feel their managers do not support time 'away from' research. In fact, of course, the kinds of activities that can be used as evidence in an NCV are all part of being a researcher. Contributing in team meetings, mentoring (even informally), organising or attending conferences, are all key elements of an academic researcher's career. If you are a postdoc, don't forget that it's likely your organisation has signed the Concordat for Researcher Career Development, that allows for 70 hours per year professional development. Use an annual career review process to plan in development activities.</p>

