

How to Improve your Curriculum Vitae for Future Employment or Fellowship Applications



Introduction

Thinking about the future post PhD can be daunting, and deciding where you would like to continue your career is an important decision. Applying for fellowships or jobs can be very competitive. However, ensuring that you can obtain your dream job begins prior to CV preparation. There are a number of things that you can do to make yourself the optimal candidate and help improve your chances of obtaining that dream job or being successful at obtaining a fellowship. When looking for the best candidate for a position, employers may consider a number of factors in addition to successful publication, including the involvement in scientific societies and the ability to communicate well. These aspects are not to be underestimated in their ability to demonstrate a successful well-rounded scientist. Here we discuss how you can begin preparing for future applications now.

Papers!

Papers are an important part of your career as a scientist, and often publishing can seem daunting as a student. Of course, first author publications in top tier journals is what we all strive for and obtaining these publications is a significant achievement. However, not all research can be published in *Science* or *Nature*. You should not find this discouraging, as publishing in a wide variety of journals can be substantially beneficial for your CV or grant applications. The number of citations your publication receives can indicate the impact of your work within your field and this is often an important aspect to consider when writing your applications. To increase your publication record, you could discuss with your supervisor the possibility of publishing a method if you have designed a new way of analysis that is beneficial to your field. Consider opportunities to be involved in collaborations with other students, postdocs or groups (with the consent of your supervisor), as this may result in additional publications for your CV. Above all, if you feel your work is ready to publish, collate and present all of your data to your supervisor and maintain an open dialogue about what is needed to successfully prepare a manuscript. The ability to convert results into papers is a desirable skill for any future employer.

Involvement in Societies and Organising Events and Conferences

Involvement in societies such as the ASBMB can be beneficial for both fellowship applications and future employment. It is a vital aspect of being involved in the scientific community. It can provide the opportunity to apply for grants and fellowships to attend conferences or to travel overseas to work in international labs learning new

techniques. In addition, you may be fortunate enough to assist in the organisation of an event such as a conference or meeting. It is important that you take advantage of these opportunities, as acquiring the skills required to run an event are attractive to potential employers. You may learn a variety of skills including administrative, financial or organisational skills depending on your involvement, each of which is important in your future as a potential senior scientist or group leader.

Presentations and Networking at Conferences

Many students find the prospect of presenting their work to a wider audience intimidating; however this is a wonderful opportunity to not only discuss your work but also to introduce yourself to your potential employers. One of the key skills required to be a successful scientist is the ability to communicate, and this skill can be utilised in many aspects of your future as a scientist, such as lecturing and mentoring. In addition, every conference provides the possibility of generating networks through discussion with other conference attendees and presenters, which could be important for not only potential employment, but also future collaborations. Great opportunities exist for students to give oral presentations at many conferences, in addition to the presentation of posters. There are a number of student-oriented conferences or pre-conference meetings designed specifically for student presentations.

Applying for Bursaries, Fellowships and Competitions

A candidate with a proven track record of successfully attracting peer-reviewed funding is highly desirable to any future employer. Many bursaries, fellowships and competitions are specifically targeted towards PhD students; providing a great opportunity to bolster your CV in these areas, so be sure to apply for as many as possible. In particular, many travel bursaries offer a fantastic opportunity to subsidise costs associated with presenting your work at conferences – which are often held in exciting locations! Furthermore, this is a fantastic way to practice honing your grantsmanship.

Good Referees

In the era of the impact factor and the ever-pervasive mentality of 'publish or perish', it may seem a little old school to rely on a letter from a personal reference. Science, however, is a small world and sometimes who you know can make a big difference – particularly if this somebody has something nice to say about you. Perhaps you plan to ask the most senior person you know to act as a personal reference? Usually a good option, but it is imperative that this person knows enough about your skills as a scientist

to mint you a truly personal reference, not just one that is clearly a template. Whilst your advisor is an obvious choice, it is also important to consider more unbiased referees and in fact many fellowship applications require this. Good choices may be collaborators or previous research employers. Perhaps even a reviewer of your thesis could provide an insightful reference regarding your scientific contribution. Be sure to approach your strategically selected referees well in advance of an application deadline. People in science (particularly those in senior positions) are extremely busy and there is nothing worse than being one reference letter short the night before an application is due.

To Summarise - Take Control of Your PhD!

You may not have thought about this, but your scientific career has already begun - so set yourself up from the get-

go by not wasting any time! The most important thing to consider now is how can you maximise your desirability to potential employers and fellowship panels? Make sure you work hard to publish any work you have accomplished. Unpublished results may add to the quality of your thesis, but the reality is that very few people will actually read it! Organise your time well, and focus on things that will lead to publications or that will bolster your CV in the departments described above. Start planning early for your next step, and think about the requirements that will make that next step as easy as possible!

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