

Ten Tips to Turn your Clinical Research CV into an Interview

By Theodora Savlovschi-Wicks

When you write your CV (resumé), you are not writing it to impress yourself. You are writing it for the employers (and recruiters) who might hire you. In other words, you are writing the document *they* want to see, not the document *you* want to produce. While employers want to hire the best person possible, they start by scanning a lot of CVs looking for key words, phrases and characteristics that indicate who might be a good fit for the position. Automated systems do the same. The defining characteristic of a CV review is thus speed.

Later on, after most candidates have been eliminated, your CV will get a more thoughtful review, so the key words and phrases must be supported by substance.

Here are nine ways to write a CV that will make you one of the few candidates the employer will interview.

1. Start with a concise paragraph emphasizing your *relevant* skills

Studies show that recruiters spend only six seconds on the initial “fit/no fit” screening of a CV, so you don’t want them to spend those six seconds searching through your CV for the pertinent information — and not finding it.

Most recruiters will focus on the first paragraph. If they can’t find what they are looking for there, you’re off to the reject pile.

Keep your first paragraph short, about as long as the example below. Focus on your key skills, your experience, the position you are seeking, and how it relates to your career goals. Employ facts rather than subjective adjectives like “extensive” or “solid.” If you know the title of the open position, include it in this paragraph (and make sure you send the right CV to the right employer). Include buzzwords and phrases that will catch the recruiter’s eye and demonstrate you know insider lingo. Be specific — you want one job, not 10 almost-jobs. Here is an example:

Seasoned project manager professional with five years’ experience in a cross-functional project management role at an international level. Has worked in both pharma and CROs at local, regional and global level. Looking to progress into a more senior role as a program manager.

2. Make your CV easy to read

Make the recruiter’s job easy. Structure your CV so it is well-organized, “clean,” and intuitive. Information should be easy to find. Use one large, easy-to-read, modern, professional font like Calibri or Garamond. Use bold headings and bullet points that are easy to scan. Avoid all-caps, italics and underlining because they make text harder to read.

Most recruiting portals are best at processing Word (.doc) documents and worst at processing scanned PDF documents. If you submit a Word document, hide the paragraph marks and other formatting symbols.

3. Be concise

If possible, limit your CV to a single page (but not at the expense of readability.) Two pages are OK, but reviewers are unlikely read a third page.

At least initially, recruiters do not care about your life story, so focus on the information that is most relevant for the open position.

Recruiters are most interested in your professional accomplishments, so focus on those that are pertinent and relatively recent. Describe your accomplishments, especially if they are quantifiable, like "Monitored 15 sites, all of which achieved their enrollment targets."

Recruiters also probably want to know something about your academic record, so list your academic institutions, degrees, and any honors. List relevant professional certifications. If appropriate, list a few relevant courses and certificates. Your hobbies and interests outside work are the lowest priority and might not impress a recruiter with different interests.

4. Be specific

Include months and years in your employment history, since "2011 to 2012" could mean anything from two months to 24 months.

Employers care a lot about the specifics of your skills and experience, especially for CRA or and CPM roles. If a recruiter is staffing CRA roles for a phase 2 systemic lupus study, he or she might pass over a CV that says only "experience in infectious and immune diseases."

Your specifics will make you distinctive; you want to be a *great* fit for a specific position, not just one of many candidates who are a *good* fit.

Present your study experience, in chronological order from first to last, in a table at the end of your CV, probably in landscape format. Here is an example of an entry in a Table of Study Experience:

Role	Indication	Phase	No. of sites	No. of subjects	Regions/countries	Scope	Stages involved
Assoc. Study Manager	COPD	2	70	540	12 EU countries	Central monitoring, data management	Set up to database lock

Dates are optional. If information is duplicative, condense it in an appropriate manner.

5. Honesty is the best policy

If your current job description is inaccurate, and you want to include it, make the necessary corrections. By all means, present your record in a good light, but do not exaggerate or disguise it to the extent that it becomes misleading. You want a position you can handle, and you definitely do not want to get caught in a deception.

If you do not have the perfect skills and experience for a position, emphasize those that do fit and explain how others are transferrable to the new position.

Example: Sr. Clinical Research Associate and acting Clinical Trial Manager for three months on a phase II oncology study, conducted in 12 countries. Half-way through a PMP course.

If, like many people in clinical research, you started your career outside clinical research, leave those positions off your CV unless they are somehow relevant to your current career

goals. For example, if you are an individual contributor looking for a management position, experience managing a restaurant would be relevant.

If your employment record inaccurately portrays you as a job-hopper, include short explanations of why you left certain positions, e.g., “drug program cancelled” or “department reorganization eliminated my position.”

If your employment history is so long that discrimination becomes a concern, just include your recent positions (and leave dates off your academic record).

If you come across as *too* strong a candidate, the employer might consider you too good to be true or likely to move on when something better appears.

6. Include publications

If a record of publications is relevant to the position, include the pertinent ones at the bottom of your CV. If there are more than a few, put them on a separate page. If appropriate, state, “[number] publications, including the following:”

7. Include references

Below your CV or on a separate page, include professional references from previous managers or peers who can provide positive, credible perspectives on your skills, performance and work ethic. If you are a freelancer, include five references. If your LinkedIn entry includes references, include a link to your profile. You can include the references’ words, but recruiters will likely suspect bias. You might want to have a friend “test drive” your references to make sure they will be as positive you expect.

8. Review, review, review!

You would be surprised how many CVs misspell “quality” or “attention to detail.” Use a spelling, punctuation and grammar checker, but don’t automatically accept its suggestions. Let your CV sit overnight and then read it again. Repeat from time to time. Ask a friend to read it, not just for technical correctness but also for clarity and impact. If your CV is not in your native language, find a native-language speaker to help you. A professional CV consultant can help, but use your own judgment. Your CV can reflect your personality, but not if it comes off as unprofessional.

9. Add a cover letter

Despite their name, recruiters will likely read your cover letter after they read your CV. A cover letter gives you the opportunity to emphasize important points, customize your message, explain a gap in your CV, or relate to the employer. For example, you can mention a mutual friend, explain that you are looking for a new position because you are relocating, go into some detail about a previous experience or accomplishment, or explain that you were laid off because the company was acquired and downsized.

10. Get it out there, selectively

Your CV will not get you any interviews until recruiters see it, so send it out to a likely employers and a few staffing firms. If recruiters are already contacting you, you can start by working with one or a few of them.

If you send your CV to too many staffing firms or post it on job boards, you incur the risk of becoming overexposed. If that happens, recruiters will not want to compete to place you, or

they will assume nobody wants to hire you. Also, you probably do not want your current employer to know you are aggressively looking for new opportunities.

Establish long-term relationships with a few recruiters so they will be there when you need them. When a recruiter calls you for a specific opportunity, you will be in a much stronger position.

Keep in mind that there are usually two sides to a staffing firm: the people who work with the candidates and the people who work with the employers. In other words, your contact at the firm might just be loading up their database and not know much about the positions their firm is currently trying to fill.

For recruiters at staffing firms, review their LinkedIn profile, groups, references and connections to see if they are a good fit for you. Ask them about their geographic and position specialties.

Unless you are very experienced at looking for new positions, assume you will not get it quite right when you first start contacting recruiters. The market might have changed, so you might need to stress a different skill or expertise than the last time you were looking for a new position. Listen to the recruiters' questions, gauge their responses, and ask questions. You will then be even more attractive to the next recruiters.

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