Crafting a Compelling Narrative CV

OOR Workshop
October 2023

"The imperfect is our paradise."

Wallace Stevens, "The Poems of Our Climate"

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Please ask stupid questions!

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Applications requiring narrative CVs

- Narrative CVs are widely used for European funding opportunities.
- They are currently being piloted by the Tri-agency for NSERC Discovery Horizon and all New Frontiers in Research Fund (NFRF) applications.
- It is anticipated that narrative CVs will become the standard for most federal funding programs soon.
- Therefore: now is the time to get ready to write one.

What is a narrative CV?

- A structured format that provides a flexibly structured, written description of a researcher's contributions and achievements
- Has the potential to reflect a broad range of relevant skills, experiences, and qualitative impacts, more than can often be seen in a traditional academic CV
- Condensed (typically 4-6 pages)
- Usually, focused on a specific project

Why are narrative CVs being used?

- The narrative format allows researchers to describe their varied contributions to research across a diverse range of career paths and personal circumstances
- Encourages responsible, more limited use of bibliometric measurements of scholarly publications, citations, and journal impact factors
- Emphasizes qualitative descriptions of impacts of research and research-creation
- Fosters diversity and inclusion by recognizing and rewarding many worthy aspects of research which might otherwise be overlooked

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Why are narrative CVs being used?

- Drawing all of the above together, narrative CVs are being used to evaluate *project-specific* experience, capacity, and promise.

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We're in a transition period to narrative CV

Luxembourg National Research Fund survey:

- "Many reviewers…mentioned the utilization of ORCID or other online sources of quantitative data to complement their evaluation."
  - Activate Google Scholar and ORCID account; ensure LinkedIn profile is up to date.
- Many reviewers also express that it is more difficult to evaluate and compare narrative CVs.
  - Your narrative CV must be persuasive and create a connection with reviewers. Storytelling elements are helpful: setting, characters, problems, resolutions…

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Myth v. reality

- *Myth*: Quality of writing does not matter, only the substance does.
- *Reality*: Both quality of writing **and** substance matter.

  - Workshopping narrative CVs with colleagues is a good strategy.
  - NFRF teams, e.g., could review each others' CVs.
  - Encourage HQP to take GradProSkills writing workshops.
  - Be sure at least one or two people review your CV whose dominant language is the language in which you are writing it.
  - Before you start on your narrative CV, read an acclaimed short story in the language you will be writing in.
  - Explain your contributions to a colleague orally, then write *that* down.

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Transition period to narrative CV

- Read instructions on any application very carefully each time – requirements are likely going to change year-to-year for some time.
- Basic elements will stay more or less the same:
    - Personal statement
    - Most significant contributions *relevant to the application*
    - *Other* significant contributions – i.e. not necessarily immediately relevant
    - Supervision/mentorship
    - "Other relevant information"

A narrative CV is just a written job interview

- The reviewers already have your "traditional" CV if they want it – ORCID, Google Scholar, LinkedIn, etc.
- Personal information = "Tell us a bit about yourself."
- Significant relevant contributions = "Tell us why you're right for *this* job."
- Other contributions = "Tell us about your research competence more generally."
- Supervision/mentorship = "What do you love about teaching?"
- Other relevant information = "Is there anything else you think we should know about you?"

Getting started

- **Allow time**: it can take a day or more to get a first draft ready.
- **Know your audience**. Is it a multidisciplinary committee in addition to peer reviewers?
- **Read the material that reviewers will read** to know their criteria. Don't *only* read the instructions for applicants (though do read those too!).
- Think carefully: which of the research activities you have undertaken are **most pertinent to the present grant opportunity**?
  - A very strong contribution may not be relevant for the application.
- Collect evidence of impacts of these activities: every statement you will make in your narrative CV about the impacts of your research contributions should be **backed up by evidence**.

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Four basic principles:

- **Be selective**. Rather than long lists of publications, narrative CVs are geared towards qualitative descriptions of impact.

- **Use evidence**. You're telling a story – *your* story – but it's a non-fiction story that needs to be substantiated every step of the way.

- Address **academic** *and* **non-academic** outreach and impact.

- Describe **your career path** and its context – whether "traditional" or "non-traditional."

A *little* modesty goes a long way

- Narrative CVs are written in the first person.
- You want a balance between emphasizing your accomplishments and competence, on one hand, and not appearing *too* immodest, on the other.
- Err on the side of emphasizing your accomplishments and competence.
- How to be modest while not underselling yourself: mention contributions of collaborators and your team, especially your HQP; put emphasis on those who benefited from your research; highlight intellectual growth you experienced during the process.

Personal statement, example

"My research project will provide granular ethnographic narrative data that public and private health insurance decision-makers can use to assess the impact of [_____] on remote communities in [_____]. In my work as an ethnographer, I am interested in, and have researched, the far-sighted design of future artefacts, tools or infrastructures. I generally work in a cross-disciplinary and imaginative way, to synthesise new perspectives and consequently produce novel research. For example…"

- From University of Glasgow's "Narrative CVs for funding and job applications"
https://rise.articulate.com/share/NyPk_PNIENdfRS5R5catqqiJzs3woS3Y#/lessons/a0G1S8sChDTr93JCgMlM5HguP42vRwqC

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Relevant contributions

- **Be very clear about WHY a contribution is relevant** to the proposed research project: what skills did you develop, what experience did you gain, what networks did you establish, etc. that are *directly relevant* to the new project?

- Specify **your role and contribution** to team collaborations.

- Clearly illustrate **outcomes** and **impacts** of the contribution.

- Provide **EVIDENCE**.

Relevant contributions, examples

- Refereed publications (or clusters of publications)
- Non-refereed contributions, such as book reviews, published reviews of the applicant/co-applicant's work, research reports, policy papers, public lectures, etc.
- Forthcoming (submitted, revised and submitted, accepted, or in-press) contributions
- Creative outputs such as exhibitions, performances, publications, presentations, and film, video and audio recordings
- Contributions to research and advancing knowledge to non-academic audiences (e.g., general public, policy-makers, private sector, not-for-profit organizations, etc.)

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Relevant contributions, examples

- Advances to equity, diversity, inclusion and accessibility in the research ecosystem

- Co-creation or transfer of products, technology, processes, services or advice useful to specific organizations (in the private, public or non-profit sectors), communities or society

- Creation, curation, sharing or reuse of datasets

- Partnerships or collaborations in the research community, or with other communities, including through research networks, large collaborative projects or community-engaged research

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Relevant contributions, examples

- Support for traditional knowledge or Indigenous ways of knowing, including cultural practices

- Contributions to open science

- Intellectual property: including patents, copyrights, trademarks or trade secrets

- Creation of companies or organizations that promote research or the use of research results

- Development of tools, including software, for use by researchers or by others in the public or private domain

ECR example

"In 2022 I presented a poster and a talk to a group of international colleagues at the Symposium on Precision Measurement Physics in China. I have expertise in both theoretical and experimental physics, which is rare, so I was able to explore the thermodynamic interactions in a more comprehensive manner. This attracted the attention of physicists in France and Ireland, resulting in a keen exchange of knowledge and an invitation to sit on an international working group on thermodynamic measurements. This network will be a critical asset for my proposed research project."

- adapted from Narrative CV Example ECR:
https://www.mbie.govt.nz/dmsdocument/25177-narrative-cv-example-early-career-researcher

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Other contributions

- If the template has an "Other contributions" section, this is your chance to detail strong contributions that are not directly relevant to the project at hand.

- These illustrate your strength as a researcher or research-creationist *in general*.

- Everything about "Relevant contributions" applies here too, other than direct relevance to the project.

Supervision/mentorship

- **How** your supervision and mentorship of students contributed to their development. What exactly did your supervision/mentoring role entail?
- Tell **success stories** of those you have supervised or mentored – awards, academic or industry positions, etc. That's **EVIDENCE**!
- How your **EDI strategies and involvement in research culture** have created an inclusive environment for your students and mentees.

Supervision/mentorship example

"Multi-layered mentorship starts on day one in my lab. I mentor and co-publish with each of the students I supervise, grounded in initial one-on-one discussions about their career aspirations, work-life balance needs, and progress benchmarking. I ensure equitable and inclusive networking and conference opportunities and have supervised 1 Banting post-doc, and 5 PhD and 12 Master's students to completion. Two of these students won best conference paper awards, and among my former PhD students three are now professors at Canadian and international universities, and two were recruited as researchers for major pharmaceutical companies in the US and Germany."

Q&A

Additional resources

- Oxford webinar – "**How to write a narrative CV for funding applications**": https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VKk8oKM_kec
- University of Glasgow resource – "**Narrative CVs for funding and job applications**": https://rise.articulate.com/share/NyPk_PNIENdfRS5R5catqqiJzs3woS3Y#/lessons/a0G1S8sChDTr93JCgMlM5HguP42vRwqC
- **NSERC Discovery Horizons** (pilot) full application instructions: https://www.nserc-crsng.gc.ca/convergence/Instructions-Instructions/DHFull-HDFull_eng.asp
- **NSERC Guidelines on the assessment of contributions to research, training and mentoring**: https://www.nserc-crsng.gc.ca/NSERC-CRSNG/Policies-Politiques/assessment_of_contributions-evaluation_des_contributions_eng.asp

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