Building a Better CV:

Practical Steps for Career Growth

(Based on inputs by Prof. Tiffany Lewis (MTU) and modified for the PhysCOS ECW.)

Discussion Ideas

1. What kind of practical resources have you used in developing or refining your CV?
    - What kind of information can you learn from other people's CVs?
    - Whose CVs do you think would be most helpful to look at?
        - Whom is it appropriate to ask for a CV from?
        - Does timing matter?
    - Whom would you ask to read over your CV?
        - What kinds of comments do you expect? (This is a normal role for an advisor, but leave time for drafts and revisions.)
2. Examine your skillset critically, but fairly. Run your self-evaluation past a mentor at least once a year in connection with your goals and aspirations.
    - What are your strengths and how can you better demonstrate them? (Usually this is making them more visible through your activities or in collaboration with a key person who could then write a letter, not bragging to random people - show, not tell.)
    - Use your goals to learn what skills you need to further develop.
        - What are you missing now that you don't want to be missing in 3 years?
        - How are you going to grow those skills?
3. What are some things that different positions might be looking for and what is their relative importance? If you know you will need a skill much later, but not for your next position, should you wait to acquire it?
    - Publications have levels (e.g. announcements, white papers, peer-reviewed); there are also levels of authorship (e.g. first author, major contributor, alphabetized contributor).
        - How can you draw attention to the important papers in your record on your CV?
        - How do you explain what you contributed for larger papers?
    - Proposals, fellowships or other funding you have won.
        - When do these become important aspects of your CV?
        - How can you start to work toward adding them?
    - What awards are you eligible for?
        - How are nominations made and who could nominate you?
    - Presentations can translate to more exposure.

        - What are the loop holes for giving more presentations at larger conferences and how can you take advantage of them?
        - How are invitations generated for invited talks and how do people get on those lists?
    - Teaching at the faculty level (usually not before unless you want a teaching fellowship) you are expected to have opinions on pedagogical methods, which are developed from trying them out.
        - What opportunities do you have or can you create to implement teaching innovations?
        - What opportunities do you have to learn more about them?
    - Community participation (e.g. review papers or proposals, chair a session, lead something).
        - When is it appropriate for you to get involved in the community?
        - What opportunities are currently available to you?
        - How can you create opportunities to work alongside more senior folks outside your direct research area in order to grow your reputation?
4. How do you build a reputation in the field you want to work in? Who do you want to be in your network and how will you get them there?
    - How can you make yourself more visible in your field?
    - What activities or projects do you want to be known for and how will you get the word out beyond publishing papers?

Best practices for building a CV

General CV advice is rarely helpful because the ideal CV is highly personal and heavily dependent on your specific subfield and target audience. Since what works for one person might be bad advice for another, you should avoid a one-size-fits-all approach and instead focus on understanding the specific norms of the field you want to enter.
Key Takeaways:

- Tailor to your audience: A CV should be customized based on your past work and the specific role you are pitching it to. It is common to maintain multiple versions of your CV at the same time.
- Use templates strictly for formatting: Online templates are okay for visual inspiration, but they cannot dictate your content.
- Take ownership: It is your responsibility to learn what your target field values and how to best showcase your intended contributions.
- Seek personalized guidance: Instead of relying on general advice, have targeted conversations with your advisor and respected near-peer mentors in your specific subfield.

A standout CV is built through years of actual work and accomplishments, not just through clever formatting. To ensure your CV is impressive when you need it, you should proactively

plan your career goals from the very beginning of your current role (the long, slow work of actually doing the work).
Key Takeaways:

- Substance is key: 90% of a great CV is the long-term, slow work of actually doing the job well.
- Plan ahead: Start thinking about what you want on your next CV early on, and identify who will be able to write your recommendation letters.
- Stay focused but flexible: Work with mentors to create a roadmap. While this plan can change, having one ensures your daily work stays aligned with your long-term values and ambitions.

<u>The strategy for modeling your CV:</u>
To prepare a competitive CV, start studying the CVs of professionals whose career paths you want to emulate about 2-3 years before you actually need to apply. This proactive approach gives you the necessary time to actually develop the skills and accomplishments you see on their resumes, rather than just copying their formatting.
Key Takeaways:

- Start 2-3 years early: Give yourself enough lead time to do the actual work required to build your qualifications.
- Target recent transitioners: Look at the CVs of people who recently achieved the career step you want next. Avoid senior professionals, as their CVs highlight different priorities than what is needed at earlier stages.
- Find models online or ask: Check personal websites or politely request CVs from people whose trajectories you admire (provided you aren't in direct competition).
- Identify gaps: Use these model CVs to figure out what types and amounts of work or skills you still need to add to your own background.
- Involve your advisor: Share your goals with your advisor so they can help provide relevant opportunities and realistically manage your time.

<u>Best practices for personal details on a US-style CV:</u>
To avoid bias and maintain professional boundaries, it is best to strictly limit the personal information you include on your CV.
What to exclude:

- Protected characteristics & photos: Never include details like race or religion, and avoid using photos.
- Home addresses: Leave these off to prevent geographic bias. If you must use an address, use an institutional one.
- Phone numbers: Omit your phone number so employers are prompted to email you to schedule interviews, rather than calling unannounced.

What to include:

- A professional email: Provide an email address that you check on a daily basis.
- Citizenship (if applicable): If the job has citizenship requirements, listing your status upfront can save time and answer the employer's first question.

Best practices on listing technical skills and managing CV length:
Instead of using vague and often-distrusted adjectives (like "novice" or "fluent") to describe your technical skills, you should provide concrete, brief examples of how and where you applied them (e.g., "Mathematica: primary dissertation code, 3 years research", “MATLAB: 2 numerical math courses, 1 semester lab research”, “Latex: 2 projects in a lecture course”).
Key Takeaways:

- Provide context for skills: Prove your proficiency by annotating important skills with specific, real-world examples of how you used them.
- Highlight what matters: Elaborate only on the details relevant to the specific job you are applying for. This demonstrates that you understand the role and keeps the evaluator focused.
- Be concise: While you can annotate other sections of your CV, be mindful of space. If you write too much and make the CV unusually long for your career stage, evaluators may simply stop reading.

Best practices on requesting application support from mentors:
When asking mentors or advisors for help with your applications, always be respectful of their time. Giving them ample notice allows them to manage their own schedules and shows professional courtesy.
Key Takeaways:

- Give advance notice: It is best practice to give your mentors about a month's heads-up before they actually need to submit a letter or review a document.
- Set expectations early: Let them know approximately how many applications you plan to submit and when they can expect to receive your drafts for review.
- Courtesy goes a long way: While you can still ask for help on a tighter deadline if necessary, providing a polite timeframe makes it much easier for them to do you a favor.