

# Writing Your Artist Resume and CV

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An artist resume is different from a traditional professional resume that you would use to apply for a position at an organization. Contingent upon what your primary artistic discipline is, there can be many rules for your artist resume that must be followed. These rules vary widely between disciplines and sub-disciplines. For example, theatrical acting resumes have a very specific format and are always limited to one page. Making this even more confusing, while there are many rules for specific disciplines, our artistic careers are unique and don't always neatly fit into a discipline category. As a result, determining how to categorize things and arrange the order of your resume can be a very creative process. It is a process of working within known constraints while applying creative problem solving. These are activities that should be right up the alley of most artists.

The best way to understand what a Curriculum Vitae (CV) is, is to note its differences from an artist resume. While an artist resume is a curated selection of information about your art practice with a focus on the most recent work, a CV is a comprehensive listing of everything you have done in the field as an adult working artist. CVs are a standard requirement for positions in higher education. They are also a pretty standard part of most artists' toolboxes. While all artists must have an artist resume, the CV is not always necessary. That being said, it is strongly recommended that you maintain both. The CV is the complete archive of everything you've done. It is a comprehensive list you will refer to over and over again for a variety of purposes, including curating your most current artist resume, as you will frequently want to tailor the content of your standard resume to a particular opportunity. CVs can be of unlimited length, and, for obvious reasons, increase in length with age. Most importantly, as a CV is a comprehensive document, if you face a situation in the future where you need a CV and you have not been maintaining it, it will be extremely difficult to create it. If you begin your CV now, you can simply continue to add to it as you add to your body of work and experiences.

## CONTENT

It's important to create an artist's resume that includes the content that is expected. Keep these guidelines in mind to make sure you are on the right path:

***The artist resume is not your traditional resume.*** The artist resume is different and separate from the traditional work resume that typically lists your education, work experience, and skills. Obviously, there may be some overlap. Your education will likely be the same on both documents. You may have art-related

work experience that would be included on both documents, as well. Your art resume, however, is a different document with categories you would typically not include on a traditional resume, such as exhibitions or performances. Unfortunately, most of us need to maintain a traditional resume, an art resume and an art CV. In some fields, such as theatre, you might very well have multiple theatre resumes (i.e., a lighting design resume and a scenic design resume). A well-organized file system is key. Don't get overwhelmed in the beginning. Start your CV with a comprehensive listing of everything and work on your primary art resume (the one you will be most likely to use). The rest will follow and will not be nearly as difficult as the first.

***Front-load your resume.*** The sections that represent you best should be on the first page. In most disciplines, you have some flexibility in terms of how to order your sections. If you have limited solo exhibitions, but have won notable grant awards in your field, the grants or awards section should precede the exhibition section on your resume. Just as with the other artist writing pieces, you should assume people will peruse your resume casually and really only focus on the front page. By the time people make it to the third page it is usually just a glance through. They also only make it to the third page if the first two pages are interesting enough to keep turning the page. Don't get careless with the later entries, though, because sometimes people do start at the end and work backwards!

***Know the rules, but don't be afraid to break them when it is appropriate.*** Do you have many activities in a particular category that would not usually be found on artist resumes from your discipline? Add it. While there are expectations about what belongs on a resume for a particular artistic discipline, some of these rules are not set in steel. A typical theatrical resume would only include content from one technical area (i.e., costumes). But if you are using the resume to apply for a position where both costume and properties building experience would be of benefit, highlight your experience in those areas with clearly marked categories.

***Use terminology that everyone will understand.*** Avoid acronyms and references that are not widely known outside your discipline or geography. For example, students often refer to programs on their campus throughout their resume that would have no relevance to persons outside their school. Don't assume your readers will know even well-known organizations by their acronyms. Did you get a travel grant that would be unclear to your readers? Provide some explanation.

By design, people who do not know you will be reading your resume. They need to be able to understand it.

## **FORMAT**

It is just as important to use the correct format when preparing your resume as it is to provide the required content. Following these guidelines should answer most of your questions about proper formatting:

***Use reverse chronological order.*** Experience, publications, exhibitions, performances and any other resume categories that include dates, should be presented in reverse chronological order. That means that the top of the category will have the most recent entries and the list will work backwards in time.

***Review for consistency and verb agreement.*** Entries for any activity/experience on your resume that are in the past should consistently use past-tense verbs. Entries for any activity/experience that you are presently still involved in should use present-tense verbs. Entries in each category on your resume should be consistent, not just in verb tense, but also in basic structure and punctuation.

***Use strong but simple design.*** Your resume should be meticulously formatted. Avoid weird spacing, bullets without hanging indents, and anything that makes the resume look sloppy. While it should be perfectly consistent and easy to navigate, it also should cleanly highlight the content. Don't let the visual design take over. The key is easy navigation and consistency.

***Always share in a pdf format.*** Before submission, save your resume in a pdf format and share the pdf file for the submission. This is the only way you can be certain that your reader will see the same thing you saw when you completed the document. There is such wide variation in resume content and format between and inside artistic disciplines, the best way to figure out what to include and how to format your artist resume is by researching the artist resumes of other artists. Conveniently the internet makes it very easy to "career stalk" others (in a non-creepy way). The majority of working artists today have a website that includes their resume and/or CV. In addition to exploring content to include and format to apply, this is also an important exercise in understanding what and where artists in your field do and go. This will help you to identify holes in your own set of experiences that you can fill as you progress throughout your career.

# Discipline-Specific Resume/CV Resource Guides

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## Dance

- [Pointe Magazine's "Dance Resumés 101: What Directors Need to Know and What They Don't"](#) | useful overview of dance resume conventions

## Music

- [Berklee College of Music A Guide to Resumes](#) | a comprehensive guide to resumes for musicians with a variety of different practices
- [Eastman School of Music Performance Resume Handbook](#) | a thoughtful guide to musicians resumes with many examples
- [New England Conservatory of Music Tips for Writing Performance and Composition Resumes](#) | a solid guide that is especially useful for composers and classical performers
- [University of Puget Sound Music Resume Guide](#) | includes a variety of example resumes including ones for those working in the music industry

## Visual Art

- [College Art Association Artist Resume Recommended Conventions](#) | the go-to standard for visual artist resumes
- [Maryland Institute College of Art Building Your Resume Tools and Tips for Creating the Best Resume](#) | a well-organized, easy to understand guide that includes good examples

## Theatre

- [NYU Tisch School of the Arts Resume Guidelines and Samples](#) | guide including examples and tips for a variety of performing arts, film and writing resumes
- [Pace Theatre Resume Guidebook](#) | includes examples for a variety of theatrical resumes