Narrative CVs: a Guide for Applicants

Created in collaboration with the Research and Innovation Support Network

Contents

How to use this guide

The term 'Narrative CV' is used generically here to refer to various sections of funding applications that prompt descriptions of contributions and achievements, reflecting a broad range of skills and experiences. For example, you might encounter it as the **UKRI Résumé for Research and Innovation** (R4RI) or as questions within the 'Your research contributions' section of Wellcome applications.

If you are new to writing a narrative CV, you might feel uneasy about the prospect of moving away from a traditional academic CV, based on a list of achievements. Writing your first narrative CV will take some time and effort, so please allow a few hours for this task. We have tried to simplify the process by providing advice, prompts and suggestions for how to write a narrative CV, including a template comprising the section or module headings used by most funders.

We suggest two ways to use this Guide:

> **Option 1**: Use the template section to prepare your narrative CV and keep it up-to-date. When writing a narrative CV for a funding application, you can copy your prepared text into the template provided by the funder, adjusting to fit the requirements of the call.

> **Option 2**: Use the prompts and suggestions in this Guide to help you prepare a narrative CV directly in a template provided by a funder.

Points to remember

Refer to your funder: Read the instructions for the funding scheme you are applying to, as length and format may vary. If you are writing a narrative CV without a specific funding call in mind, we suggest you aim for the CV to be under 1,000 words. Unless requested by the funder, do not attach a separate publications list or change the funder's template.

Be selective: The narrative CV format is intended to shift the focus from quantity to quality:
- Don't overwhelm reviewers with long lists, or dilute the communication of your key achievements.
- Think about your strongest contributions, and those that are most relevant to the funding call you are applying for.
- Focus on what you have achieved rather than what you plan to do in the future.

> ➢ **Question:** I am concerned that picking a small number of examples doesn't showcase the quantity of work I have done, which I believe is one of my strengths.
> ➢ **Answer:** If you believe that your productivity or the number of activities you have contributed to is an important asset for the funding you are applying for, given your career stage, you could include a sentence summarising this, while illustrating the quality of selected examples.

Provide evidence: When choosing material to include, think about how you are going to evidence quality and importance. Describe outcomes, and how you enabled them, rather than just stating activities. You can include both qualitative and quantitative evidence.

Provide context: Unlike a traditional CV, a narrative CV allows you to explain how the activities enhanced your skills or were important at your career stage, and the rationale for undertaking those activities.

- o Different researchers will have had different opportunities in their careers; focus on what you did with the opportunities that were available to you.
- o Most funders provide an optional 'Additions' section where you can describe factors that may help reviewers understand the context for your narrative CV, such as career breaks.

Evaluation: Your narrative CV will be used to inform the overall assessment of a proposal or application. Assessors should not be asked to score individual modules. Therefore, leaving a module empty or with little information should not be detrimental. The balance of material in a CV will look different depending on discipline or career stage.

> ➢ **Question:** I am at an early stage of my research career and I don't have many examples to include. What should I do?
> ➢ **Answer:** The assessors should take your career stage into account. State how long you have been working in research or in a particular field or role, so it is easy for them to assess your achievements in context. You could use examples from outside of academic research, such as leadership or mentoring others in a different sector or a voluntary context. It is OK for some Modules to be short or empty.

> **Tips**
> ➢ You can include examples from beyond academia, if they are relevant for your application.
> ➢ Don't overlook collaborative activities.
> ➢ Do you have an Oxford-activated ORCID and is the record up to date?
> ➢ Use 'records of impact' on Symplectic Elements to keep track of your activities.

Getting started

Suggested steps for making a start on your narrative CV.

1. Using the prompts in the template below, make a list of the activities you could include in each of the four modules.
2. In your long list, highlight the entries that are most relevant to the funding call.
3. For each of your highlighted entries, jot down evidence of their significance: this could be quantitative (e.g. 'this was the largest collection of its type') or qualitative (e.g. quotes). Referring to your funding call might help you to identify your strongest activities.
4. Check for overlap between the lists in each module, and move any entries that fit better in a different module.

5. Look at your selection for each module and think of the most important point that you would want a reviewer to remember. Try to summarise that point in a sentence or phrase.

Now you have the material you need to write a first draft for each module. You can use the suggested writing structure described in '[Completing the Modules](#)'.

Completing the modules

There is no fixed structure for how to write the text within each Module of a narrative CV template. For example, you can use continuous prose, bullet points, or a mixture. The Modules do not need to be the same length.

This is an example structure you could use within each Module.

1. **Summary sentence:** start with the main message that you want a reviewer to notice, or refer back to, which could be a unifying theme of the examples that follow.
2. **Succinct descriptions of your strongest contributions**: what you did and why it is important, with evidence. This could be in sentences or bullet points. You could group entries that are supported by the same evidence.
3. **Sentence summarising additional contributions:** end with a brief mention of other activities or contributions that you do not have space to describe fully but you feel are important for this funding application.

Where relevant, refer to related content in other modules.

> ➢ **Question:** I find it difficult to craft elegant sentences, particularly in English. Will that disadvantage me?
> ➢ **Answer:** Focus on stating what you have done and why it was important; reviewers will be more interested in the examples themselves than in the choice of words or sentence structure. Ask a colleague to read your draft text.

Template

Most narrative CVs have four Modules and we have provided specific advice for each Module and spaces to write in, if you wish.

Remember that the lists provided here of types of contributions you can consider for each module may not be exhaustive, and also that you are not expected to have made all these types of contribution.

The example sentence structures are provided to help you think about the elements to include; they may not be the best format for describing your own contributions.

Module 1 – Contributions to the generation of new ideas, tools, methodologies or knowledge

Highlight your **contributions** to and **skills acquired** from previous research, innovation or technical projects.

- o Avoid journal-based metrics, such as impact factors, when describing the quality of individual publications.

Types of contributions to consider

1. **Your outputs**, which could include:
   - Research publications (which might include a thesis or dissertation)
   - Policy publications, conference publications
   - Data sets, software, code, protocols, materials
   - Products (e.g. commercial, entrepreneurial, industrial, educational)
   - Evidence synthesis
   - Patents, designs
   - Artefacts
   - Exhibitions, audio or visual media
2. Development of **methods, tools or resources**
3. Generation of **new ideas and hypotheses**
4. **Funding** you have won (include funder, your role, dates, what the funding enabled)
5. **Awards** you have received or other forms of peer recognition, such as invited talks. Note that peer recognition may form part of your evidence of the quality of your research.

Tips

➢ To reference a publication, use a digital object identifier (DOI) hyperlinked to the publication. To save space, don't include the title or a full citation unless requested by the funder.

➢ Use the CRediT Contributor Roles Taxonomy to articulate your contributions to papers and collaborative projects.

➢ For a team project, mention your specific contributions and the skills that you used or developed.

➢ Describe how this research advanced the field.

➢ Remember to focus on quality over quantity.

➢ Demonstrate your commitment to open and transparent research practices, including in how you manage and share data, methods, and findings.

Example sentence structure: Description of your role and skills in [project/hypothesis/method A], the means by which it came about or was developed further, and the importance of it, as shown by [evidence B, showing significance for the field, e.g. basis for future collaboration or ongoing work of others, awards or other recognition].

Example: "I carried out the data integration using [method A] and co-wrote an early analysis of the effects of [B and C] on health outcomes [DOI]. This study (cited XXX times since X year) was the basis of a series of research community workshops, organised by [organisation D], which led to a [funder] award for the [E] consortium (£ amount)."

Spaces for Module 1 notes and draft
Long list of contributions and evidence:
Module text:

Module 2 – Contributions to the development of others and maintenance of effective working relationships

Types of contributions to consider

1. **Supervision** or mentoring
2. Project **management** or line management, critical to the success of a team or team members.
3. Strategic **leadership** shaping the direction of a team, organisation, company or institution.
4. Formal **teaching** could be included if it focused on the development of others and is relevant to your application.
5. Establishing or driving **collaborations or networks**, focusing on the working relationships rather than the research. If you are at an early stage in your research career, you can describe substantial contributions to team-working.
6. Provision of **development opportunities** including training, events, rewards, or recruitment strategies.

Tips

➢ Go beyond a list of the numbers of people you have supervised or mentored. For example, how did you help them to develop and what did they go on to achieve?

➢ What was the scale and profile of a team you have led and how was your leadership important for the achievements of the team?

➢ Even if you didn't have a leadership role, how did you contribute to the success of a team or the development of others?

➢ Did you overcome any challenges in collaborations or partnerships? How did you contribute to helping collaborations to succeed?

➢ Have you taken steps to be inclusive in your approach to managing or mentoring? If so, explain how you have done so.

Example sentence structure: I have supervised/line-managed/mentored [numbers of students, staff roles etc.] who went on to [example achievements of supervisees and mentees]. I supported their development through [examples of specific ways you supported development, such as providing opportunities (e.g. through sponsorship, resources, sharing of contacts, offering roles with responsibilities) for learning skill A or experiencing B].

Example: "I have supervised or co-supervised over XX PhD students and post-doctoral researchers. I gave opportunities to many of these early career researchers to visit other laboratories (e.g. in X and Y), to learn new techniques (such as X) and broaden their research horizons, and I give early career researchers priority in attending conferences. All team members are supported to identify CPD opportunities to further their career goals. They have obtained positions in academia, industry, business, education, and medicine, and have won awards including [XX]"

Example: "As a member of the department of X early career researcher committee, I co-organised a career development seminar series; I invited speakers from the pharmaceutical industry and university professional services to share experiences of their career pathways and roles (~30 ECRs attended per seminar; feedback received that the seminars were informative and inspiring)".

Example: "As part of the XX Collaboration, I supported effective teamwork by setting up channels on Slack for exchange of information and questions; this has improved our understanding of what partners are working on, in between formal meetings".

Spaces for Module 2 notes and draft
Long list of contributions and evidence:

Module text:

Module 3 – Contributions to the wider research and innovation community

Types of contributions to consider
1. Leadership of **activities across disciplines, institutions, and/or countries**
2. Editing and **reviewing** responsibilities
3. **Committee** work within your organisation and beyond (e.g. learned societies, funders)
4. Positions of **responsibility**
5. Activities that have contributed to the improvement of **research integrity or cultures**, including **equality, diversity and inclusion** practices
6. Strategic leadership **influencing a research or innovation agenda**
7. Contributions to **professional bodies**
8. Organisation of **community events**, such as conferences or workshops
9. Contributions to **open research**, active sharing of knowledge and skills, community resources

Tips
➢ Describe the importance of your contributions to the community and your career, rather than a generic list of roles.
➢ How did a research or innovation community benefit from your activity?
➢ What did you achieve on a committee or in a position of responsibility?
➢ Note that Module 3 is focused on the research and innovation community, and contributions to wider society are asked for in Module 4.

Example sentence structure: In my [description of role A], which I secured by [avenue B], I promoted/enhanced/initiated [activities C and D], which enabled/supported [result E in your field of research or innovation], as evidenced by [quantitative data E (e.g. change in participation) and qualitative data F (e.g. change in satisfaction)].

Example: As a member of the department X Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity committee, I initiated and led a working group on neurodiversity, resulting in several practical changes such a good practice guide for organising departmental events and training opportunities for HR staff.

Spaces for Module 3 notes and draft
Long list of contributions and evidence:
Module text:

Module 4 – Contributions to broader research/innovation-users and audiences and towards wider societal benefit

Types of contributions to consider

Think about benefits of your research (including avoidance of negative outcomes) beyond academia, which could be achieved through the following activities:

1. **Knowledge exchange**, bringing together researchers, users of research and wider groups and communities to exchange ideas, evidence and expertise.
2. **Policy** engagement and development
3. **Partnerships** with business, industry, healthcare, and so forth
4. **Public engagement** with research (PER) and public understanding
5. Patient and public involvement (**PPI**)
6. **Commercialisation**
7. **Participatory** research
8. **Responsible** research and innovation (RRI)
9. Actions to ensure research reaches and influences **relevant audiences**

> **Tips**
> ➢ Consider the activity you undertook, but emphasise the resulting change
> ➢ The benefits may be social, economic, environmental, health or cultural
> ➢ Who were the beneficiaries?
> ➢ Consider the scale and depth of the benefit

Example sentence structure: [Benefit A] was achieved in response to [challenge B] for [stakeholder C] as a result of [activity D], shown by [evidence E].

Example: My research into [A] contributed to the evidence-base underpinning the effectiveness of [B] for the treatment of [condition C], which affects [XX] patients in the UK. The evidence was appraised by appraised by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence in [date] and contributed to the

recommendation that [B] is a cost-saving option for treating patients who would otherwise be offered [C].

Example: In [year], I co-organised the first stakeholder engagement day in the UK (XX attendees) for [public interest topic A], which included a panel discussion at which campaigners spoke about their experiences and break-out groups discussed research priorities. Evidence submitted as part of public consultation led to changes in local policy, leading to [XX%] decline in the effect of [A] on the affected population group.

Spaces for Module 4 notes and draft
Long list of contributions and evidence:
Module text:

Additions

Most funders will provide a space in which you can describe any factors that provide context for the rest of your narrative CV. For example, you can provide details of career breaks (such as secondments or parental leave) if you wish to, or the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, or part-time working.

Please check funder notes: usually, this section does not count towards the page limit, and must not be used to describe additional skills, experiences or outputs. It may be seen by reviewers, even if it references a sensitive issue. Therefore, funders may recommend that you focus on how the issue has affected your career, rather than expanding on the issue itself.

Optional. Space to note Additions.

Feedback? Please let us know what you thought of this Guide and any suggestions for improvements. Authors: Mary Muers (Medical Sciences Division) and Tanita Casci (Research Services).