

# Reprinted from the *APS Observer*, May 1989

For Students:

## WRITING YOUR VITA

By Steven C. Hayes and Linda J. Hayes

Your vita is a document you will get to know well. Regardless of your goals, you will be asked for it many times. It is a record of what you have done and a ticket allowing you to do more.

The topic of vita development can have a negative quality. Some people fall into vita building just for the sake of personal aggrandizement. Some scientists focus more on the quantity of the work than its quality; more on the notoriety of the work than its substance. But don't let these attitudes blind you to the importance of a good record, professionally presented. Your vita can give you access to good jobs where you can do good things; and considering what goes into a vita can help you focus your efforts and maintain your professional growth.

There are two aspects to a vita: doing and telling. That is, both form and substance are important. This article will describe what kinds of things go into a vita and how to present them.

### The Sections of a Vita

#### **Personal History**

Usually the first things mentioned in a vita are items of personal history. Who are you? Where are you from? Are you married? These are the questions answered in this section. One good way to arrange these items is as follows:

Vita

Your Name      Date

#### A. Personal History

Business Address:	Department of Psychology University of London London, England
Phone:	(123) 456-7890
Home Address:	123 St. Norbert Cross Flat #34 London, England
Phone:	(123) 987-6543
Birthdate:	August 24, 1965
Citizenship:	USA
Marital Status:	Single

You should line up the information in an attractive manner. Double space between items. You may wish to leave out marital status and/or birthdate. Some feel this information is irrelevant and could be used for discriminatory fashion. You should not include such items as religion, hobbies or items of that kind. They are unnecessary and unprofessional.

#### **Educational History**

Here you simply list each post secondary school you have attended. For each school, list your major, minor degree (type and date), any honors you received there, and titles of theses or dissertations (and the chairs of your advisory committees). The entries should either go from first to last or last to first. First to last is more traditional. You may wish to put the dates flush right so that they stand out. Here's an example:

## B. Educational History

### 1. University of California at Los Angeles, Los Angeles, California

Major:	Psychology
Minor:	Philosophy
Degree:	B.A., Cum Laude 1980
Honors:	California State Scholar 1976-1979
Honors Program:	1977- 1980
Honors Thesis:	A comparison of response prevention and shaping in the reduction of avoidance behavior in rats (Chairperson: Ima Psychologist, Ph.D.)

## Professional Positions

The next section is usually professional positions. Like the schools attended, professional positions are usually ordered sequentially (either from first to last or vice versa). First to last is traditional.

This is the first section where you can be a little creative. You want to list all positions you held, even if not necessarily paid. Thus, a practicum appointment would usually fit here. Research assistantships would fit. What does not fit here are short, one-shot experiences (e.g., giving a lecture to a group). One-shot paid consultants may fit. Unpaid consultants would probably fit better in a later section, such as "Professional Activities."

For each item, list what your title was and the name and address of the agency. The city is usually a sufficient address for this purpose if the agency is known. You should also list the nature of the position (full-time; ½ time) and when you held it. List your duties and your supervisor. The duties list is important, especially for more applied jobs, because it allows you to show the fit between your background and your desired work setting. Think of all the jobs you actually did and list them. This is often hard to remember, which is why you should get ready for vita writing long before you have much time to put into one. Keep a file of your professional positions and add to it as new duties are fulfilled.

Here is an example: Note the consistency of style, both within this section, and between sections (e.g., note the flush right date)

## C. Professional Positions

1. Psychology Trainee, Veteran's Administration Hospital, Palo Alto, California. Full-time summer position. 1983  
Duties: Consultation to kidney dialysis unit; group behavior therapy; program development on a token economy ward  
Supervisor: George Drought, Ph.D., Unit Psychologist
2. Research Assistant, Brown University, Half-time position. 1985-1986  
Duties: Assist in research on priming effects on memory. Analyze data using SPSS-X and SAS. Program in BASIC and PASCAL.  
Supervisor: H.D. Science, Ph.D.

There are many places where you can tailor our description of your duties. For example, if you want to make it clear that you take a cognitive perspective, use cognitive terms to describe your work. Try to think of who will read the document, then describe yourself honestly, but in the most favorable light. Don't offend people needlessly. If you use philosophically loaded words (e.g., "radical behaviorism," "mentalistic," "mechanical models") to describe your work you will please only the like-minded. This is something you should probably avoid, unless it would be a real disaster to work with folks not completely comfortable with your preferred manner of describing yourself.

## Membership in Professional Associations

List all of them. Note whether you are a member, associate, or student member. Here is an example:

#### D. Membership in Professional Associations

American Psychological Society (Student Associate)  
Society for Research in Child Development (Student Member)

### Professional Activities

This is the place where you list all the projects you started, neat things you did, committee memberships you held (don't forget departmental committees. They count.), in-service training programs you conducted, important guest lectures you presented, etc. You can be creative here (but see later section on "padding"). You can subdivide this section as needed (e.g., Associations and Divisions, Administrative, etc.) Persons giving lots of workshops or colloquia may want a separate section for these. You may list items first to last or vice versa. An example:

#### E. Professional Activities

##### Associations and Divisions

1. Member of Program Committee, Nebraska Psychological Society, First Annual Convention, Lincoln, December 1988.
2. President, Psi Chi, University of Hawaii Chapter, 1984.

##### Administrative

1. Students' representative to the Departmental Training Committee, Department of Psychology, New Mexico.

##### Other

1. In service training. "Measuring change." Presented to the staff of the Piedmont Psychology Center, June 1985.

### Editorial Activities

If you go to a lot of conventions, do a good deal of research, and get to know prominent people, you will probably be reviewing manuscripts before you get out of graduate school. Reviewing is a critically important activity for the field, and you should list it. If you review a MS sent to you, you usually list that as "Ad Hoc Editorial Consultant." Example:

#### F. Editorial Activities

1. Editor, The Student Observer, a student supplement to the APS Observer, 1989.
2. Ad Hoc Editorial Consultant, Psychological Science, 1989.

### Grants

List the grants you have received. Some professionals include grants they had a significant role in, even if they were not the Principle Investigator. Many people list grants they wrote that were not funded. AS a student or young professional that is probably fine, since if you even sent one in it is a good sign. Use your own sense in this area. Certainly a long list of "failures to fund." if not countered by several successes, could eventually hurt more than help. People may think you are a motivated incompetent. Here's an example of this section:

#### G. Grants

1. Small Grants Division, National Institute of Mental Health, #MH 36998-03, Social Skills Training for Sexual Deviants, \$10,000, 1986-9187. E. Z. Dozit, Principle Investigator.

### Papers Presented

List all the papers you presented at professional meetings. It seems to be common to list them by year starting with the most recent and working back. Some people number entries, but that seems to say that you are counting so it probably is not a good idea. Some people also put colloquia here; others put them in a separate section (e.g., in the "Professional Activities" section).

List papers in regular APA format and double space between entries.

## H. Papers Presented

1986

Dozit, E.Z. (August 1986). An experimental analysis of life, behavior, and the whole universe. Paper presented at the meeting of the American Psychological Association, Washington, D.C.

Dozit, E.Z. (August 1986). The role of response mediation in the formation of prototypes. Paper presented at the meeting of the International Society for Psychological Research, Lake Tahoe, NV.

Some people also list papers or talks presented to nonprofessional audiences (e.g., the PTA, radio talk shows). In general, this seems rather extreme, and might give an impression of padding. If you must list them, either create a special section (e.g., "Talks Presented to Nonprofessional Audiences") or put the most important ones in "Professional Activities."

## Publications

When you have sufficient entries, organize them by year and by type (articles, chapters in books, books). It seems to be common to list them from the most recent to the oldest. That way, the current work (which is usually what you want folks to see) is seen first. List papers in regular APA format.

Do not put papers which are under submission or in preparation in this section. It will look as though you are padding (see section below). In press articles belong here. Invited articles which are in preparation probably belong since they will definitely be published. An example of this section:

## H. Publications

### a. Books

Tense, I.M. (1989). *Having fun with anxiety*. New York: Weirdo Publications.

### b. Articles

1987

Tense, I. M. (1987). The relation between anxiety and performance is an inverted W, not a U. *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, 112,445-446.

## Papers Currently Under Submission

In this section, list your articles that are currently under submission. List only authors and title. It seems unnecessarily risky to say where you sent it. If it is turned down you have to change your vita and everyone knows that it was rejected. Listing the journal probably makes the listing more credible, however, so there is a trade-off. Once papers are on this list, keep them there until you give up resubmitting, or until they get accepted. When they get accepted, they go to the publications section, and are said to be "in press."

## Projects Underway

Use this section for manuscripts in preparation and for projects that are actually underway (e.g., experiment in progress). List as in the section on papers currently under submission. Both this section and the previous one (under submission) are optional; professionals with established reputations sometimes leave them off. Students often need these sections, however. Established researchers sometimes list articles in preparation just to make sure they will not forget the publication of a minor project when they update their vita.

## Statement of Professional Interests

You may want to save some work by including a brief paragraph on your professional interests: research interests, applied interests, and teaching interests. Many vita of established professionals contain a brief outline of current or favorite research or other professional interests. You might want to start off with a general statement and then conclude with a specific listing.

## Professional References

Finally, you need three to five professional references who will speak very highly of you. Don't ask for a reference simply because the person is well known, unless you are confident of the quality of the actual reference. Ask the person before you include his or her name on your vita if it is OK to do so, as a professional courtesy. List and number each reference, give their name, title, and address. Sometimes people leave this section blank, with a line such as "References Available on Request" appearing instead. The only advantage of this is that the best and most current references can then be used as needed. If the relationship with a former referee becomes strained, this would prevent their having an opportunity to speak in your behalf. This circumstance is rare, and it is more common to list the references.

## OTHER GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

### Forms and Style

This document is critical so prepare it carefully. Use a carbon ribbon or laser printer, not a cloth ribbon; use wide margins and white space in between items and sections; lay it out in an attractive and well organized fashion; proof the document carefully; put your name at the top of each sheet. For example:

E.Z. Dozit  
Vita  
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Have the original printed or xeroxed on good paper on a very good machine. Staple each copy together.

### Detail

Remember, you want to be honest, and you also want to impress. Provide sufficient detail to do so. For example, on papers presented, give the full reference on each. Such understatement as only listing the convention is needlessly modest (or it may be interpreted as lazy) and does not convey the important information. On the other hand, don't over burden the document with detail that is unimportant. Have some psychologists read it and get their feedback.

### What Not to Put In

Don't try to overly personalize your vita – leave that for a separate letter or an interview. It is unprofessional to include your hobbies, the name of our dog, your high school activities, and the like. Occasionally, persons do foolish things like putting their favorite poem on the first page of his vita. That alone will kill any chance for many positions. Remember that if you are qualified, there are also a dozen others who are too. The slightest little stimulus could be reason enough to weed out your application. Poor attention to form, detail, content, or "what not to say" could be the stimulus.

### Padding

One of the cardinal sins in vita writing is padding. Padding is defined when a reader reacts to the vita as more form than substance ("Who is he trying to kid?") Thus, it refers to an audience reaction, not a specific vita writing behavior. The reaction is most likely when the importance or substance of the item is not obvious. This is especially true in the professional activities and projects underway sections. Make sure these sections are legitimate. For example, never list umpteen projects underway if you don't have any publications. People will never believe you even if it is true. Instead, if you are in that situation, list the most important projects underway. Similarly, don't list a zillion projects submitted. when you have no publications' it may not seem fair, but remember "padding" is an audience reaction, not a specific vita writing behavior.

Other signs of padding include listing conventions attended, journals subscribed to, articles you read over and edited for a friend, and projects you worked on in anon-professional role (e.g. secretary).

### Vita Development

- a. Write up your vita now. No matter how puny. From acorns giant oaks grow, and you might as well begin. It will also get you thinking about your career development.
- b. Keep a vita development file. (If you aren't keeping any kind of files yet, start). Throw notes into this file regarding the kinds of things you are doing on your assistantships, special talks you gave, activities you performed that were

- noteworthy, committee assignments; papers presented, associations joined, everything you need to update your vita.
- c. Set goals for your career and work toward them. Design a reasonable strategy to reach those goals. Use the periodic updates of your vita as an opportunity to assess the development of your career.
  - d. Revise your vita at least once a year, or more often if the need arises.
  - e. Have your advisor and others go over your vita before you send it out.

Good luck!

### **Reprinted from the *APS Observer*, May 1989**

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