November 21, 2013 by [Rob Jenkins](http://chronicle.com/blogs/onhiring/author/rjenkins)

**Changing My Mind About CVs**


In my most recent “Two-Year Track” column, “[How the Job Search Differs at Community Colleges,](http://chronicle.com/article/How-the-Job-Search-Differs-at/143089/)” I stated that candidates need to tailor their cover letter for each job but can probably use the same CV. I think I’d like to modify that statement.

I based my original advice on the fact that, as a serial community-college search-committee member, I’ve reviewed thousands of CVs. Although in some ways they’re as unique as fingerprints, in other ways they’re all very similar. Honestly, I’ve seen just about every imaginable format, but I’ve rarely seen a CV that I thought was simply awful.

As long as I’m being honest, I might as well admit that when I look at an application, I don’t usually spend a lot of time going over the CV. I pay a lot more attention to the cover letter. So I had pretty much concluded that, as long as the CV looks neat and professional, and as long as it includes all the relevant information, format isn’t really all that important.

Soon after writing that column, however, I had an experience that changed my perspective. I was one of several experienced faculty members who conducted a CV workshop for graduate students at the recent South Atlantic Modern Language Association conference in Atlanta. Over the course of 90 minutes, each faculty member met with five or six grad students, looked over their CVs, and gave them job-search advice.

Of course, most of the students who came to see me were interested in applying at two-year schools. I went into the session prepared to give each student’s CV a cursory once-over before spending the rest of my time talking about cover letters. But as I looked at their CVs, it occurred to me that most really weren’t well suited to the community-college application, and that perhaps job seekers should consider tailoring their CVs much as they tailor their cover letters.

For example, I noticed that most students placed information about their dissertation and research near the top of their CVs, right after “Education.” That might be appropriate if you’re applying at four-year schools, but it’s probably not ideal for community colleges. I recommended to those students that they move that information down and put information about their teaching in its place.

Speaking of teaching, I also noticed that several students had two teaching-related categories: “Academic Appointments” and “Courses Taught.” In those cases, I recommended combining all that information under a single category labeled “Teaching Experience” (or, simply, “Experience”).

If you’re applying strictly at four-year schools, then by all means, follow the CV advice you received from your adviser or career center. But if you’re thinking about applying at two-year colleges, you might want to consider the modifications suggested above. I don’t know how much difference a couple of minor changes can make, but in today’s ultra-competitive academic-labor market, perhaps every little bit will help.