

Crafting Your ERAS CV: How to Make Your Work, Work for You

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It's spring of your third year of medical school. You'll soon be done with your heavy workload of clerkships and regular shelf exams and on to your final year of medical school. You get your ERAS token, excitedly log in to input your personal information, and when the application officially opens you get to that first page...and panic. Your ERAS CV is going to be one of the most looked-at documents of your medical school career. Where to even begin?

As someone whose CV needed to be trimmed and rewritten efficiently to be realistic for ERAS, I'm sharing my top six recommendations about creating a stellar CV that is sure to wow program directors and selection committees. But first, a few tips about the process:

- Anything you put on your CV is interview fodder. Is there a project that didn't result in a poster or publication and you're not passionate about it? You don't have to include it. This area is your opportunity to feature what makes you shine, not a catch-all for everything you've ever done.
- On the flip side, anything you've done in medical school counts, no matter how small it may seem. Even manuscripts that have been submitted, but not yet accepted, count. Some people also choose to include relevant college experience.
- Don't stress about what you hear from other applicants. There is no perfect number of experiences in each category (work, volunteer, research) that is required to score an interview, and each specialty is different. In my experience, pathology programs look for individuals who are well-rounded and have an idea of what the field entails. Finding pathology late in medical school won't hurt you. Don't feel like you're at a disadvantage if most of your experience is focused on another specialty you were previously interested in.

Secrets to Success

1. Start Early

If you're reading this before it's relevant to your application cycle, congratulations for being on top of your game! For everyone else, don't panic. Your first step, no matter where you are in medical school, is to make a CV. Your first task is simply to have a place to take your notes. If you're using this just for you, it doesn't need to be aesthetically pleasing or even complete. Just have a designated place for your thoughts.

Whenever you have an idea, write it down – even if it's just a few words to remind you later. Depending on how well you documented your experiences in your first years of medical school (if you have some old materials, you may want to start there), all the details may not necessarily come back to you at once if you sit down for an intensive writing session. The information you need to compile includes experience title and description, associated organization, dates of service, average hours per week, and mentor information. For instance, I initially couldn't remember some of my mentors' names and filled them in later.

2. Mind Dump First and Edit Later

The first draft of your CV will not be anywhere close to a masterpiece. My best advice is to first write down everything – and I mean everything! Then go back and select what you want to develop further to include in your final version.

The more material you have to work with initially, the easier it will be on you. While your personal statement reflects who you are as a person, your CV is who you are as a professional. The experiences you choose to highlight tell the story of your skills and abilities. Starting with a full list of the good, the bad, and the ugly gives you the most flexibility in crafting your narrative and your image on paper. Additionally, having those “oddball” experiences that don’t really fit into any one category can still be included in your application, even if not in the official ‘Experiences’ section. Brainstorming up front will save you time later.

3. Select What You Highlight Wisely

If there are any pearls you should take from reading this, please remember the following: (1) Your best advocate is YOU; (2) Be genuine and truthful; and (3) Quality over quantity.

Your entire ERAS application is your opportunity to sell yourself. No one is good at everything, so highlight your strengths – whether that be research, community outreach, leadership, teaching, etc. Programs are looking to bring in groups of residents with a variety of skills, experiences, interests, and goals. You’re not trying to fit a mold of the ideal candidate. Own your skills but be honest about your work. Fewer, but more well-developed and detailed entries will likely get you further than many short, superficial entries.

For example, the first draft of my CV contained highlights of some research projects that I worked on in college. Those projects ended up never being fully developed and I didn’t invest a lot of time into them. In medical school, I discovered that I’m really not passionate about basic science research and favor translational research and quality improvement. I chose to not include my college projects and highlight my later projects because that was a truer representation of my passions, skills, and career goals.

4. Remember That Real People Read Your Submission!

As a rule of thumb, if your CV is formatted in a way that you wouldn’t want to read, don’t submit it without revising. For example, I had multiple positions within a few organizations over my medical school career. Instead of creating a separate entry for each position, I lumped positions together under one organizational heading and expanded the description to include all my activities for that group. It made my CV much easier to read than having a ridiculously large number of short entries.

5. Don't Skimp on the "Extras"

My hobbies were one of the most asked about topics during my interviews. In general, the faculty I interviewed with were more interested in what I had to say about who I am as a holistic person outside of being a physician. While I am a mom and elected to not share that information in my application, I spent a lot of my interviews talking about how I love to bake, read, and explore activities in the community, and my excitement to share those experiences with my daughter. The hobbies you provide allow for easier conversation during interviews.

Additionally, if you have parts of your background that don’t nicely fit into your list of experiences, you can utilize the “Other Awards/Accomplishments” section on the ERAS CV. Here, I shared my certifications as a Medical Laboratory Scientist and in Healthcare Compliance

as well as non-medical school awards I received. This section has a character limit, but you should include as much as you can to round-out your application.

6. When Frustrated, Take a Break and Come Back Fresh

Drafting your ERAS CV is not easy. The process is very involved and requires a lot of detail. It's a time investment and not something you should try to cram in days before the deadline. I found taking breaks and coming back with fresh eyes was very helpful. I caught more typos and areas to revise than I would have if I tried to finish it in one session. I did five full edits of my CV before submitting. It's also helpful to have another set of eyes, whether that be a friend, family member, or mentor. Don't be afraid to ask for help.

Final Thoughts and Examples from My Application

Your ERAS application is a summation of your early career as a medical trainee. This is your time to shine and be proud of all the amazing work you've done!

Below are examples of CV sections from my personal ERAS application that I submitted when applying for residency. Please note these sections from my ERAS CV reflect my own opinions and do not reflect the opinions or beliefs of any institutions, groups, or other persons mentioned in them.

The residency application and interview process can be stressful, but I promise you its worth it. Welcome to the next phase of your career as a physician!

Compiled activities under one heading:

<i>Volunteer Experience</i>	<i>American College of Medical Quality, Milwaukee, WI, United States of America</i>	<i>SRF Vice Chair/Social Media Chair/Delegate to the AMA MSS/QTip reviewer</i>	<i>08/2020 - Present</i>		<i>3</i>
<p>Description:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Assist the Chair in preparing and executing SRF strategic initiatives - Liaison with ACMQ physician leadership and lead trainee participation in ACMQ meetings and projects - Expand SRF membership through social media engagement - Create and execute a monthly virtual Journal Club focused on educating SRF members through relevant medical quality articles - Collaborate with the editorial team for the American Journal of Medical Quality to review student quality project submissions for publication <p>Reason for Leaving:</p> <p><i>Currently active as Vice Chair, Delegate, and QTip reviewer. Completed 1-year term as Social Media Chair.</i></p>					

Research project and associated poster and submitted manuscript:

Research Experience	Medical College of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, WI, United States of America	Student Researcher	12/2020 - Present		2
<p>Description:</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p><i>Project title: A complex KMT2A-AFF3 fusion resulting from a three-way chromosomal rearrangement in pediatric B lymphoblastic leukemia</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reviewed patient presentation, laboratory results, and treatment regimen - Performed a literature review to place patient results into context with known literature - Outcome: manuscript submitted </div> <p>Reason for Leaving:</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 20px; width: 100%;"></div>					

Miller, L.J., Leventaki, V., Drendel, H.M., & Bone, K.M.. (2021, Jul). A complex KMT2A-AFF3 fusion resulting from a three-way chromosomal rearrangement in pediatric B lymphoblastic leukemia. *Cancer Genetics*.
 Pub Status: *Submitted*.

Miller, L.J., Leventaki, V., Drendel, H.M., & Bone, K.M.. (2021, September 25). *A KMT2A-AFF3 Fusion Resulting from a Complex Three-way Chromosomal Rearrangement in Pediatric Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia: a Case Report* [Poster presented]. College of American Pathologists Annual Meeting/Chicago, IL, USA.

My "extras":

Other Awards/Accomplishments

Certification in Healthcare Compliance, CCB (2021)
 Certification in Medical Laboratory Science, ASCP (2016-Present)

2nd Place - Faculty Sponsored Research, American Society for Clinical Laboratory Science Poster Competition (2016)
 Student Bowl Champion, American Society for Clinical Laboratory Science-Wisconsin (2016)
 Honorable Mention, Marquette University Community Service Award (2015)
 General Chemistry Award, Marquette University (2013)

Hobbies & Interests

- Amateur chef and baker
 - Favorite recipes: blueberry quick bread, peanut butter cookies, apple pie, pesto chicken, and manicotti
- Movie enthusiast
 - Favorite franchises: Marvel, Star Wars, Lord of the Rings
- Avid reader
 - Favorite series: All Souls Trilogy, Outlander, Game of Thrones
- Downhill skiing
 - Expert level since 2010