

A translator's CV – a translator's best friend¹

Michael J McCann²
PhB BA MA MITIA AFEPI

Index and contents

[Address](#)

[Author](#)

[Awards](#)

[Comments](#)

[Education](#)

[Experience](#)

[Identity](#)

[Informal education](#)

[Language pairs](#)

[Name](#)

[No gaps](#)

[No-no's](#)

[Phone number\(s\)](#)

[Photograph](#)

[Primary education](#)

[Secondary education](#)

[Specific skills](#)

[Third-level education](#)

[Walking encyclopaedias](#)

¹ Published in three instalments in the bulletin of the Irish Translators' and Interpreters' Association in July, August and December 2005. Revised February 2010.

² Former chairman of the Irish Translators' and Interpreters' Association (ITIA) and of the Irish Writers' Centre (IWC) – Ireland's national agency for writing and literature.

Identity

Whether you use the French *résumé* or the older Latin *curriculum vitae*, now fashionably abbreviated to *CV*, there is one tool in the translator's backpack which is indispensable nowadays, and that tool is the professional summary of your background, education and experience.

Whether you wish to *summarise* your life as the French word would suggest, or tell the world of the exciting *course of your life* as the Roman tongue would imply, there is one salient and very clear fact – not everybody knows you – and the logical corollary to that fact is that you will need to tell others about yourself from time to time.

While your CV must cover, at a minimum, four essential aspects of your life namely your *identity, work history, education, and skills*, a lot more can be added, and an even greater amount of items can and should be avoided entirely. There is only one way of writing your CV – the good way – and most definitely, there are a number of ways in which your CV should never be presented.

I write these articles as one who has read and perused over ten thousand CVs in the past number of years from translators as a director of [InfoMarex](#), my own translation agency, and as a part of InfoMarex's obligatory requirement to provide a CV on registering with my firm. I would like to share a number of the findings of my experience.

You will find that these articles do not attempt to cover **all** the theoretical aspects of what a CV could include – eight million links suggested by Google will do that, but rather the manner and inclusion of the things the CV must have and the many things a good CV must not.

Your name

Your CV should start with your name. This may sound obvious, but a considerable number of CVs do not, and some do not even show the translator's name in any part of the CV at all, neither at beginning nor end, expecting the reader to pick it up from other accompanying correspondence.

There is a modern helpful usage of putting the surname or family name in capital letters such as:

- Michael (Mike) John SMITH
- PONTE, Giovanni Battista (PONTE, Giovanni Battista)

The normal English format is the first of the above choices with the family name coming last. However, in some languages, particularly continental European and Oriental languages, the family name frequently is placed first. These styles are a matter of choice.

Writing the family name in capital letters eliminates possibilities of confusion where, in cases like Thomas Jordan, the name could be read either way. It is most helpful in the case of non-English foreign names, where Bin Li reveals neither first nor family names or worse still conceals the sex of the individual.

On a humorous note, I dealt for years with a translator whom I thought was male, only to discover after five years that 'he' was a 'she'. While I was embarrassed, she was only amused.

The official InfoMarex mode of address is now a direct and simple 'John', 'Jack', 'Mary', 'Liz', being either the proper official or the informal variants of the name, with no introductory adjective which might, in some languages, require declining or genderisation.

If your official name is different to what you are known by, do use the modern convention of brackets John (Jack) SMITH. It helps recognition when personal contact is being made that parents and siblings quickly recognise their own Jack the lad, and one is not told that 'no John Smith lives here. Oh, hold on! You mean Jack'.

Your name should be in its short version. This particularly applies to non-English names where nicknames are commonly used. Take for example the beautiful

José de Jesús Martínez Gómez de Uribe Blanco

where one finds the individual is known to all and sundry as 'Pepe URIBE'.

A similar example is a delightful name such as

Maria Susana Rocha da Costa Figueiredo da Oliveira

but who is known as 'Suzi OLIVEIRA'.

Two or even three initials in names should not be used unless one is an academic. The name John M.T.J. SMITH implies a solid posting at a university and outside that context, it looks pretentious. Avail yourself of [Occam's Razor](#). Don't multiply the unnecessary and use but one initial, if at all.

Your address

It is astonishing that many CV writers do not include their address in their CV or *résumé*. Quite apart from the client using international bank to bank facilities, it must be presumed that the translator would like to get a cheque in the post some day. Having to ask for an address, proves the point of its need.

A full postal address is needed in a CV such as:

Mr. John SMITH,
The Beeches
14 Main Street
Bigtown,
MYCOUNTRY 4021

Mr. John SMITH,
P.O. Box 21,
Bigtown,
MYCOUNTRY 4021

If the writer does not wish to give a residential address, or if the country, as in the Middle East, does not use street addresses, a post office (P.O.) box — sometimes called *general delivery* in North America or *poste restante* elsewhere — will suffice.

The translator's postal address should not be embedded in the document headers, footers, footnotes, endnotes, boxes or comments, but rather as a part of the regular CV, for the simple reason that frequently most documents are now Internet transmitted ones where a 'copy and paste' function is frequently used which an embedded feature denies, or at least complicates this, at a first attempt.

Why make it difficult for a client to either send you either business or a cheque? At times, this thought which does not seem to cross some translators' minds.

Your address should be as it would appear on an envelope in the normal format of your country. Please do not confuse the postman/mailman!

Sig. Guido d'Arezzo, via Garibaldi 32 25030 Castel Mella BRESCIA Italy	Mr Onur Eslu, Pasha Bey Cad. 1/4 81570 Küçükalyali Istanbul – TURKEY
--	---

Some nations follow the person's name with the city where they live and work *backwards* with the address. Others put the city in CAPITALS preceded or followed by a postal or zip code with the country in small letters with only a title case. Sometimes, where they exist, the postal code comes to the side of the address, before the address or after a state address in federal systems. Follow and apply the local format.

The translator's address **must be** according to local postal convention, and **never** on one single line in a CV, *e.g.*

Mr Onur Eslu, Pasha Bey Cad. 1/4, 81570 Küçükalyali, Istanbul – TURKEY

Some conventions do not put commas at the end of address lines, others do. Some put commas after house numbers, others do not. Follow the local convention and do not confuse the local postman/mailman.

Translators more than any other profession will realise that what is patently clear at home is hopelessly unintelligible at the other side of the planet. Our profession has the underlying and basic purpose of bringing intelligence, *i.e.* understanding, into the minds of others, not confusion.

The translator should always write a CV address as if correspondence [or the proverbial cheque in the post] is to be received from abroad. The translator's CV is a tool which will circle the world and while 'Montrose CO' is understandable to all in Colorado, it is essential to follow it on a CV with the zip code and the words 'United States'.

In summary, make it easy for the client or agency to contact you as a translator. A first failure to understand an address in a busy client work environment trying to allocate a job may simply lead to your CV being disregarded and the following one chosen.

Your phone number(s)

By this is meant telephone, fax, mobile, cell, and pager numbers, to say nothing of the new system which may have been invented yesterday of which this writer does not yet know. Electronic communication is one of the fastest changing fields in modern technology. Use it to your advantage as a translator and do not let it put you at a disadvantage.

Your telephone number should be of an internationally recognised format and written on the lines of 't. +353 (0)1 627 1249 Ø'.

In this telephone number, seven things have been indicated :

- first, the number is in fact a telephone number having the abbreviation 't. or Tel.' before it. It is therefore not a 'Fax' or a joint 'Tel/Fax' number;
- secondly, it indicates that in an international dialling situation, the now universally recognised convention or sign '+' will be replaced by your local code to get an international line, *e.g.* 00, 1, 91, or 9, *etc.*;
- thirdly, it indicates that what comes *after* the '+' sign is the international code of the country being dialled;
- fourthly, it shows that for a dialling situation within the country itself, the caller will dial '01' and then the local number, but not in the local exchange area;
- fifthly, it indicates that if the call is from outside the country, the national code is reduced to from '(0)1' to a simple '1';
- sixthly, it indicates the actual telephone number as being the last set or sets of numbers in the format recognised in that particular country;
- seventhly, the symbol Ø indicates that there is an automatic answering machine attached to the number.

If local convention uses hyphens between numbers or full stops *e.g.* 202-456-1414 or 202.456.1414, then please use them as an extra assistance to those who are not

familiar with your country's numbering system.

A telephone number given simply as 2024561414 makes no sense at all. It is without set or sequence. It is also very difficult to read for dialling purposes without making a mistake.

Our American and Canadian cousins – as indeed a number of other nations – have long standardised their phone systems very sensibly with an international eleven (11) digit format, *e.g.* +1 202 456 1414 where, a '+' indicates whatever code you must dial on your own phone system to get an international line. After the international code, the first set of three numbers is the local area code, and the last seven always in a sequence of three and four [**not** four and three, nor in three twos and a one] is the local number itself.

The points raised above apply equally to fax, mobile/cell and pager numbers. Our German cousins now refer to their mobile phone as *ein Handy* which tells you precisely what communication should be all about!

The purpose of your communication device is for you as a translator to be easily contacted or contactable. Make it easy for yourself by making it easy for others.

Your photograph

Your CV should contain a passport-sized recent photo in which you are looking straight at the camera. Avoid cap and gown photos or one containing pets. A poor translation raises the suspicion that it was done without the assistance of a dictionary but with the assistance of the cat!

In some countries, there is a local or cultural resistance to the inclusion of a photograph, as if the visual identification of the person would determine or not the allocation of translation work. This is a dying attitude. The inclusion of a photo is not for the purposes of a beauty pageant, but to help fix the memory of the translator in the mind of the client.

As an improperly sized photo can increase the recommended size of your CV from 80K (kilobytes) to 1Mb (megabyte) with the click of a mouse, the translator will ensure that such does not occur, as clients dislike **intensely** large unwieldy CVs.

Your photo creates an identity in the client's or agency's mind where you look the part of being a sound, focussed and intelligent translator.

The second advantage of a photo is that it reveals, or rather, confirms the sex of the translator. In many countries, it is either legally forbidden to ask about the sex of a potential employee on grounds of sex discrimination, or is simply politically or culturally incorrect to do so.

Inadvertently, many translators do not indicate or offer a hint as to their sex in their CVs by omitting to put a prefix, *e.g.* Mr, Ms or Mrs before their name. The use of Mrs or Mme is no longer an indication of marital status but a cultural convention. The client or agency therefore has to dance around the issue when the translator is employed, as a matter of sheer courtesy if nothing else, until the matter becomes clear. This is also the case where a only title is given *e.g.* Dr (or Prof) Goedele Laurent SMIT.

Where physical employment takes place, one of course immediately recognises the sex of the person. But as the bulk of freelance translation is nowadays by email and over the Internet, this becomes impossible, and frequently as with a small percentage of thousands and thousands of translators, embarrassing.

It is to be noted that three out of four North American translators do not include a photo in their CV, while three out of four Europeans and Asians do. There is no immediate tangible reason to hand, other than cultural preferences.

While a photo is not essential to a CV, like a picture, it is worth a thousand words.

No-no's

A number of items, in matters of identity, should **never** appear in a CV, principally your

- bank account number or code
- federal, national, local identity number
- military service number
- parent's names
- passport number
- personal identity code
- political party membership
- political persuasion
- religion
- sexual orientation
- social security number
- tax number
- tribe or clan
- welfare number.

Such matters are of absolutely no professional interest to a client or an agency.

A client may well pick up that the translator is of a particular religion or political persuasion from the translator's work history, but this is neither requested nor needed by clients unless there is a particular religious or political dimension to the translation project in hand where such knowledge will come in useful.

Many of the above no-no's are matters of security as well, and it should be clear that your bank account details should **NEVER** be given in an open CV. Your bank account details are only given on your invoice when work has been completed and where a client or agency is going to transfer directly the import of your invoice to your bank account.

Experience

Many persons writing a CV for the first time will fall into the simple trap of continuing from the section on their personal details and proceed to give details of their education.

This is particularly the case of those coming out of language school, college or university and whose actual outside-of-classroom experience is a bit thin on the ground.

The simple way over this problem is to list at this point your language skills, where some extremes are best avoided.

The first extreme to be avoided is not to list your languages at all in a CV and, believe it or believe it not, one in twenty translators and interpreters overlook to mention their languages.

The second extreme is to attempt to give oneself some form of points system, *e.g.* Spanish (10 or excellent), English (9 or very good) *etc.*, even if extracted from an academic record.

A third error to be avoid is to list your languages either alphabetically or in a string, *e.g.* Spanish, English, French, Catalan *etc.*, where the client might suspect that the first listed language is a mother-tongue, but such is not clear in this instance.

Language pairs

EN FR > ES

This format indicates that the mother tongue is Spanish (the target language of translations) and the other languages are the source languages from which translation will be made. An expansion of the above can be made as follows:

English, French to Spanish
Mother-tongue Spanish
Fluent English, French
Read/written Catalan, Italian
Read Portuguese, Latin

The above or similar layout will clearly show to a client or agency that the translation

of a document could be sent in English or French, with perhaps footnotes or annotations in Catalan or Italian and that the translator would be able to handle these competently. A client, however, would be at risk if a full document in *e.g.* Catalan or Italian were to be sent for translation to Spanish as the professional competence in and a total familiarity with the source language(s) would not be there.

Please use the [ISO 639-2 International Codes](#) when identifying your languages.

Experience proper should be listed in the following ways. Your experience should start with your present or most recent job and work **backwards**:

June 2003 to present:

Important Co. Ltd., London – In-house translator – English to Spanish
Business correspondence, contracts, *etc.*.

January 2001 to May 2003:

Petite Compagnie S.A., Geneva – In-house translator – French to Spanish
Two business manuals – 17 month contract.

There is no need to give the full address or contact details of the previous employer, nor to break any confidence about the nature of the correspondence or even the titles of the manuals. It suffices to show in what languages you were working and for how long. Itemisation of the workload is counter-productive and a future client might well think or ask themselves 'If so much detail is being revealed about previous clients, will the same amount of detail be revealed about us at some point in the future?'

Walking encyclopaedias

Few translators realise that they can be walking encyclopaedias and sources of great knowledge about the clients and companies for whom they work. Simple business correspondence between client and supplier on non-deliveries, details of slow client payments, contract documents on a proposed takeover, patents, contracts of employment listing key shareholdings, exit parachutes or golden handshakes are but a few areas to mention. The translator not only knows about all of this. He/she knows it in two languages with the nuances of every comma and colon!

The translator in his/her CV must show

- knowledge [with restraint]
- experience [in summary]
- discretion [in abundance].

However, having said all that which might make it seem that the life of the translator on the inside track of things is exciting, it is also tediously boring as anyone who has ever translated a two hundred page takeover document will attest, where after the third '*aforementioned*' and the sixth '*subject to paragraph 5, sub-section 4*' intellectual

curiosity grinds to a halt and professionalism hunches its shoulders at work over the keyboard.

No gaps

The section of your CV dealing with experience should not show gaps. If between clients, you have gone back to school/college/university, a line should read: See Education.

If it has been a genuine gap year(s), a line should explain why, *e.g.*

Jan 2003 – Dec 2003 Round the world trip – ten countries

Jan 2005 – May 2005 Aid-relief worker – South-east Asia

It does avoid awkward questions which may not be allowed in your culture or country, *e.g.* 'Were you sick? Hospitalised? In jail?' and it shows unbroken continuity and reliability. It also allows the client or company enquire about this, if appropriate, or if the CV is being presented as part of an interview process for an in-house position, it is an opportunity for the translator to show another interesting side to his/her personality which may have little to do with translation, but a lot to do with outlook and attitude.

Education

It is a trend of modern life to regard education as what is given to you in a classroom. We ask 'where did you go to school?' as if the school or classroom were the only source and fountain of education. The word itself from the Latin, *educere*, meaning 'to lead out / to march forward / to raise up' amongst a multitude of other meanings, says nothing about giving classes or courses, but rather speaks of leadership and culture.

Informal education

Long before Education Acts and obligatory public education, a pupil might have been educated privately or by a family member at home or which some neighbours' children or with a tutor, to ensure a total rounding off of the person. It is interesting to note that in ancient Ireland under the old Breton laws, the sons of chiefs were always sent away from the family to a trusted friend to be educated on how to grow up without privilege, and not so much as to be schooled in the 3 R's of '*reading, 'riting and 'rithmetic*'.

Education has less to do with reading such and such a subject at university and more to do with the rounded grasp of culture and civilisation, which nowadays tends to have a clear technological and electronic bias.

Within these parameters, the translator more than many another professional must show him/herself to be a balanced, cultured and a knowledgeable person with a wide

variety of interests.

This is not to say that a translator of a very narrowly focussed field is not to be regarded as a good translator, but what we are rather trying to say is that a translator will be exposed during his/her professional career to variety.

Formal education

It is quite amazing the number of established translators who do not list their formal education which should be a statement of primary, secondary, third level and post-graduate achievement. Every modern nation has its own grip on the division of formal education. Don't leave it out. Do put it in your CV / *résumé*.

Primary education

By primary education, we mean that first formal national or state education, usually compulsory in most developed nations, given from around five to twelve years of age. On a CV- *résumé*, it is merely sufficient to indicate the years, school and location, and there is no need to state anything about this primary education itself *e.g.*

1977-1984 National school, Little Town, Big Country
Primary certificate

It is to be noted that some countries because of the compulsory nature of primary education, no longer give any sort of certificate, which is unfortunate as the person then has no public record of either attendance or achievement.

Secondary education

Secondary education may be called comprehensive, lycée, lyceum, gymnasium, classical, technical, state, high school or simply secondary depending on your country of birth and it will normally run from twelve to seventeen years at the upper end of the cycle. It is useful to indicate briefly if this is a single cycle or a double one, *e.g.*

1985-1987 Middle School, Little Town, Big Country
Junior certificate [Biology, English, History, Geography, Maths, French]

1988-1989 Town High School, Bigger Town, Big Country
High School diploma [English, Maths, Chemistry, Physics, French]

There is little point in indicating marks/grades for these levels but merely to indicate the type or nature of subject taken.

Many a person fails to give his/her secondary education because it may not have been the 'classical' or 'high school' type of education, or simply because they feel that it is

not 'important' enough. Technical or vocational education at secondary level can be just as important for the translator whose educational 'experience' has frequently to come from outside the box.

Third level education

It is a mistake to think of third-level education as purely that to be found at a university. At the end of a normal three- to five-year course, the undergraduate student ends up with what is called a primary degree such as a *Baccalaureum Artis* (B.A.) or *Baccalaureum Scientiae* (B.Sc.). In some countries, the words [and consequently the initials] are reversed.

There are many truly excellent institutions of third level education which are not universities in the old sense of the word, for example, professional colleges, polytechnics, institutes of technology, regional technical colleges, *etc.*, where the level of education is for all intents and purposes equal to if not better in their specific subject areas than at a university, and particularly from the practical training aspect.

It does no harm either to remember the words of the wag who said 'I never let university interfere with my education'.

In a survey conducted earlier in 2005 where in excess of 3,000 translator CVs were analysed, sixty one per cent of the translators analysed possessed a primary third-level degree of some sort or in some subject(s).

However, many persons now find it possible and suitable to read for a Master's or for a Doctorate in their chosen field. In the same survey referred to above, some 26% of the translators also held a Master's degree and some 15% had doctorates.

It is interesting to note that from among the excess of four hundred translators in the survey holding doctorates, only a handful had a doctorate in 'true' translating or interpreting studies, whereas the vast majority held a doctorate in fields as disparate as law, chemistry, business management, medicine, *etc.* This level of heterogeneity in the translator community assures clients at large a level of prior experience unparalleled in other professional fields.

Post-graduate work and education

A list of post-graduate work adds greatly to the list of specialisations and specialist areas which this type of translator can offer a client.

Awards

The translator should state also in a CV any award, prize, bursary or scholarship given. The same may have little reference to a translation in hand, but it is an extra display to the client of competence and achievement.

Specific skills

There are two levels of specific education. The first normally refers to courses taken to carry out a specific profession, *e.g.* that of a lawyer. The second refers to courses which are specific to you and to your interests, whether those interests are work-related or not.

A translator should list all translation-related courses taken, *e.g.*

- MS XP Professional (3 weeks),
- Advanced Excel (5 weeks),
- Technical German for Mechanics and Electricians (2 weeks), *etc.*

Other courses, might be less interesting to a client, *e.g.*

- Speed-reading (2 weeks),
- Advanced speed touch-typing (1 week),
- Bee-keeping and hive health (autumn 2004), *etc.*

Such courses might not help your skills as a translator, but will show the client, albeit fleetingly, that you have more interests than the grammar and syntax of your chosen languages.

May you have every enjoyment in creating or re-editing your CV / *résumé!*

Comments

Most of the comments raised in the emails received so far in response to this article fall into one of three categories:

- a misunderstanding as to the purpose and aim of a CV;
- cultural, national or stylistic differences, or
- simple errors of fact.

Further comments are most welcome and can be sent to comments@infomarex.com

Michael McCann is a graduate of the Gregorian University (Rome), a double graduate of Trinity College (Dublin), a graduate of the University of Pisa (Italy), and a professional member of the Irish Translator's and Interpreters' Association (ITIA). He is former chairman of the ITIA and of the Ireland's development agency for literature and writing, the Irish Writers' Centre. He is resident in Celbridge, Ireland and is the owner of the InfoMarex translation agency.