

A TRANSLATOR'S CV – A TRANSLATOR'S BEST FRIEND*

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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 Latin 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 fifteen thousand CVs in the past number of years from translators as a director of [InfoMarex Translations](#), my own translation agency, and as a part of InfoMarex Translations' own obligatory requirement to provide a CV upon on registering with the firm as a translator. 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

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 such as '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/gender of the individual.

The official InfoMarex Translations' 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, please 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 our 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 'PepeURIBE'. 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 tenure posting at a university and outside that context, it looks pretentious. Avail yourself of [Occam's Razor](#). Do not 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 postal worker/mail carrier!

Sig. Guido d'Arezzo,
via Giuseppe Garibaldi 232
25030 Castel Mella
BRESCIA
Italy

Mr Onur Eslu,
Pasha Bey Cad. 1/4
81570 Küçükalyi
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 Küçükalyi, 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 again do not confuse the local postal worker/mail carrier.

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 understanding into the minds of others, not confusion.

The translator should always write a CV address as if correspondence is to be received from abroad. The translator's CV is a tool which will circle the world and while 'Montrose CO' may be understandable to some as being 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 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 format, the following information has been indicated in the phone number:

1. 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;
2. It indicates that in an international dialling situation, the now universally recognised convention or sign '+' will be replaced by your local code to access an international line;
3. It indicates that what comes *after* the '+' sign is the international code of the country being dialled;
4. 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;
5. It indicates that if the call is from outside the country, the national code is reduced to from '(0)1' to a simple '1';
6. It indicates the actual telephone number as being the last set or sets of numbers in the format recognised in that particular country;
7. 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 in an international eleven 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/cell 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.

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. Please ensure that your photo does not exceed 50KB in size.

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 (without following punctuation) 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 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 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 background 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 make a transfer directly 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 2015 to present:

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

January 2013 to May 2015:

Petite Compagnie S.A., Geneva – In-house translator – French to Spanish Two business manuals – 30 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' 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. Do not leave it out. Do put it in your CV/*résumé*.

Primary and secondary education

There is no need to list primary or secondary education on your CV, as the vast majority of translators will have third- or fourth-level education and recognise this as a given.

Third-level, fourth-level and post-graduate education

List each level briefly particular with any specialisations undertaken.

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.

Comments

In writing your CV, please limit it to two (2) A4 pages.

Most of the comments raised in the emails received over the years 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.

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

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

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Celbridge, 31 July 2020