

SELLING YOURSELF by maintaining an “AboutMe” file.

Are you in the process of building up your qualifications for the perfect job in the future? If so, the most important thing you should do *NOW* is start maintaining an “AboutMe” document that is nothing but a giant list of your qualifications (or a reminder of the gaps in your qualifications that need attention). This is not a resume. An “AboutMe” document is for your own record keeping, so don’t worry about fancy formatting. Simply enter information (with dates) as you proceed through your education and career. When you need to write a resume, you can refer to your “AboutMe” document to make sure that you don’t forget anything that is important to your prospective employer. If you start collecting this information only a month or two before you need a job, it will be too late. Frequently update your “AboutMe” document, and take corrective action if you’re weak in any category.

Your “AboutMe” document should cover the areas listed below (adapted from the 2009 National Defense Fellowship Application as well as numerous employment application forms). When you add items in each section, you should list them in *reverse chronological order* (i.e., most recent first) since that’s the way that they should be listed in a résumé.

Personal data

Contact information

1. Name - Enter your legal name, and any other name that may appear on your transcripts or reference letters (e.g., your maiden name).
2. Resident state - Enter the state you are a resident of for tuition purposes.
3. Email - Enter your primary email address. If you have multiple email addresses, use the one that will last indefinitely, such as a gmail account.
4. Primary address - Enter your primary (mailing) address.
5. Secondary address - Enter your permanent address.
6. Phone numbers – List your main phone number first, followed by alternate numbers (such as a mobile phone number).
7. Personal Web Site – if you have one, make sure that it is professional (without immature animated graphics, without broken links, and without potentially detrimental things such as political rhetoric)
8. Facebook, blog, or similar web profile link. If you have a colorful private life, you should consider two different profiles, and cite only your professional one.
9. Skype ID or similar video-conferencing contact info.

Citizenship/Residence status (usually optional except when applying for government positions)

If you hope to apply for a US government position, be aware that applicants usually must be U.S. Citizens or U.S. nationals. A U.S. national is an individual who, though not a citizen of the United States, owes permanent allegiance to the United States; individuals who are citizens of U.S. territories such as American Samoa and Swain's Island are U.S. nationals. The term does not refer to permanent residents.

Even for careers in industry, many businesses want to know your citizenship, or visa/residence status. Sometimes, employers are prohibited from requesting this information, but you can always provide it voluntarily (which may help, not hurt).

Demographic Information (always optional)

Gender, Ethnicity, Race, and Disability – By law, prospective/current employers, as well as review committees (such as those who grant fellowships), are not generally allowed to require this information, which is not supposed to impact your eligibility in any way. It is used to determine the degree to which members of diverse sections of the eligible population are aware of and apply for a program. See privacy act statements for more information about the policies of companies or institutions to which you apply.

Because job interviewers must avoid questions about your gender, race, religion, etc., they often make small talk by asking innocuous things like “how far above sea level is your town?” or “How many professors are in your department?”. You will seem stupid if you have no clue how to answer such questions. Therefore, your “AboutME” notes should record demographic and meteorological data about the city in which you currently live and about the organization for which you currently work. Examples include: population of your city, average temperature in your city, number of students in your university, number of students in your department, fraction of females in your department, silly trivia such as the state bird, etc. This kind of information is usually available at the comptroller’s web site at a university and at the local government web site for your city.

Academic Background

Schools

- city, state, and country of the institution you attend/attended.
- degree obtained or pursued
- degree status
- overall GPA and base GPA (i.e., highest possible GPA at your school)
- your ranking relative to others (if available)
- your major
- number of credits completed
- dates you attended the school or expected graduation date
- whether you attend/attended the school as an undergraduate, graduate, or other.
- whether the school is your baccalaureate institution.

Current academic status

What are you doing at this moment? (Senior, First Year Graduate Student, Second Year Graduate Student, Employed and not a student, etc.). Enter the name of your current or most recent academic advisor.

Joint Baccalaureate-Master's Programs

Indicate if you are or have been in a four- or five-year joint baccalaureate-master's program. Sometimes, a Masters obtained in this way is valued differently from a more traditional Masters that involves a thesis or more extensive coursework.

Continued education (lifelong learning)

List all forms of education that you have voluntarily pursued that are *not* required in your formal education. Examples: Technical seminars, workshops, first aid training, writing assistance, undergraduate independent study projects, Army reserve training, etc.

Official Certifications

Describe or list any certifications, such as Professional Engineer, water safety instructor, parachuting, etc. Include certification date and expiration date!

Employment history

List the names, addresses, points of contact, and dates of employment of all employers that are relevant to your engineering career (leave out the summer job at McDonalds unless you were a manager there, indicating leadership ability). Include summer internships. Describe your role and responsibilities in a way that makes it clear that you truly contributed something valuable.

Areas of specialization (Notable skills)

What can you do better than most other people? Are you a fabulous C++ programmer? Do you know a particular experimental diagnostic technique especially well? This section should contain a list of skills that distinguish you from competitors. Example: "Expert in Matlab, shock physics, Microsoft Office products, X-ray computed tomography, and technical writing."

List specific subjects about which you are knowledgeable. Since this "AboutMe" document is for your eyes only, *honestly* rank your level of knowledge on a scale from 1 to 10, with a ranking of 1 indicating that your knowledge is minimal and 10 meaning that you are competitive with the world's experts in that subject. Example specializations include: Matlab programming, linear algebra, solar cells, micro-manufacturing, C/C++ programming, shock physics, heating and ventilation, etc.

This would be a good section for you to summarize all courses that you have taken. After you finish a course, take time to add it to your "AboutMe" document. The entry should include a brief statement of what was taught in the course and how that information might be useful in your career. Interviewers often ask you to describe your coursework so

that they can have a sense of how well you retained the information. As time passes, you will forget some of the highlights of your coursework, but taking a look at your “AboutMe” document before going to an interview will refresh your memory, allowing you to speak impressively about your knowledge. Furthermore, reading about your past work will actually help you *remember to use it in your career!*

Don’t list personality traits, such as “great team player,” which should be evident in your letters of reference. If you are a “leader” or “great organizer”, then that will also show up in your extra-curricular activities or honors lists in the form of incontrovertible evidence (e.g., president of Tau Beta Pi, captain of swim team, etc.).

Proposed Area of Study

What do you want to do with your education? Build upon it in graduate school? Apply it in industry? No matter what the answer is, you need to be able to state clearly how you would like to use what you have learned.

Discipline

You should select the discipline (Mechanical Engineering, Physics, Economics, etc.) to which your particular course of study is most closely related. If you are uncertain as to which discipline is most appropriate, consult with your academic advisor. Don’t make the mistake of proposing to study a discipline for which you have little or no background.

Area of Specialization

Describe your area of specialization within your chosen discipline. For example, an applicant within the Physics discipline might enter "optics" or "acoustics". An applicant in Mechanical Engineering might enter “computational shock physics” or “climbing robots.” Don’t be wishy-washy. The more specific you are in stating your interests, the more likely it will be that someone (employer, grad school professor), etc. will bring you onto their team – they know that you are most likely to be successful if you will be working in an area that interests you.

Desired advanced degree

MS, PhD, MD, etc.

Proposed Graduate institution

Where would you like to do advanced studies?

Publications

Enter all relevant peer-reviewed publications and presentations pertaining to your field since entering college. These may include articles, journal submissions, and conference proceedings. List the author(s), year, article title, publication title, volume, issue, and page numbers. Indicate what you contributed to this paper if your name is not in the

author list, or any other information you would like to convey. If you have an article in press but not yet released, put “(in press)” after the end of the title.

Presentations

List the presenter(s), title of the presentation, type (oral or poster), meeting/conference, month, day, and year presented. Indicate what you contributed to this presentation if your name is not in the presenter list. If you’re only starting your education and have not yet given any formal presentations, just list the ones made in your classes – they count!

Patents or patent applications

Enter the title, status (i.e., whether it is a patent or patent application), the patent or application number, patent inventors, patent approval or submission date, and a brief description of the patent.

Awards & Honors

For each of the following, indicate the agency granting the award or honor. Group similar awards together. For example, list together all awards that directly derive from your grade point average such as Dean's List recognition.

- scholarships
- academic honors
- scientific or engineering student leadership roles
- honorary societies
- other recognition since entering college.

Scientific or Research Experiences

Describe all scientific or research experiences since entering college. These experiences may include current projects, internships, or positions of employment.

Funding history

Funding for a “great idea” is usually secured by writing proposals to funding agencies such as the National Science Foundation (NSF) or the National Institutes of Health (NIH), or to specific industries that are interested in your idea. Getting money always starts with a proposal. The proposal usually names one person as the *principal investigator (PI)* who is responsible for managing the technical aspects of the work as well as ensuring that the money is indeed be spent on the proposed topic.

Even if you have never been a PI on your own project, it is a good idea to obtain the following information about any project that you have been even remotely involved with:

- Official project title (often there is a short title and a long title)
- Official project ID number and contract number at both your institution and at the sponsor institution
- Level of funding (total over project life)
- Current amount spent to date (for current projects)
- Official start and end dates of the project
- Name of the PI (and co-PIs if applicable)
- Name of sponsor (NSF, NIH, ACMEwidgets.com, etc)
- Start and end dates for your involvement in the project
- Your level of association with the project (PI, technician, intern, administrative support, etc.)
- Your level of time commitment

When you write a new proposal, the sponsor often asks for a statement of your funding history. They especially look at your current ongoing projects to make sure that your proposed level of commitment is compatible with your existing obligations.

When you apply for a job, the prospective employer will view you more favorably if your résumé shows a record of funding (or, for those just starting their careers, if it merely shows *awareness* of funding by including funding levels of projects that you worked on).

Leadership and Teamwork

Describe or list any leadership experiences, such as class president, committee chairperson, or scouts, with dates. Describe or list any teamwork experiences, such as class projects, varsity sports, extracurricular groups, or clubs. Provide dates.

Memberships & Professional Activities

Describe or list any educational or professional memberships such as ASME, IEEE, SWE, SIAM, Tau Beta Pi, SEM, etc. Include membership start dates. List professional activities such as organizing scientific workshops, editing manuscripts for journals, etc.

Community & Volunteer Work

Provide a summary of volunteer work and experiences, interests and/or hobbies. Where possible, indicate relevance to your career goals (leadership, teamwork, etc.)

Summary of Goals (ESSENTIAL!)

In your own words, provide an essay summarizing your educational objectives and your long-range professional goals.

As part of this statement, emphasize your ideas regarding: (1) the kinds of research in which you would like to be engaged during your graduate study or career; or (2) specific research questions that interest you and how you became interested in them. Discuss these research interests in sufficient detail for an expert who is technically competent in your field to judge your understanding of the questions to be addressed. This includes relevant hypotheses and approaches one might take to answering the questions, and other research principles required to investigate the research area you identify. Do not make this a recapitulation of a grant submission or a project report. Explain the science, but emphasize your longer-term goals and how the science fits into your life as an individual. Include citations to the literature. Be sure to include all relevant information pertaining to your goals.

The essay should be carefully checked for grammar and spelling errors. It illustrates your ability to think independently and creatively, but also your ability to write about your research or study plans accurately, thoughtfully, and concisely.

The people evaluating your responses will be highly qualified professionals and faculty members, generally with doctoral degrees in the discipline you have selected. Therefore, avoid tutorial discussions or flowery writing that drones on about your enthusiasm without any substance.

Who are the “big rollers” in your field?

This section is less “About You” and more “About Who Matters.” List here the names and contact information of all people who are major-league researchers in your field of study. At some point in your career, you will be organizing a conference or other event, and you can refer to this list when sending out the announcement. At some point, you might be trying to hire someone, and sending out the job posting to this list will produce good candidates. When you seek a job, consider positions that might affiliate you with these important people. When impressive people give you their business cards, consider putting their names on this list. When you are able to see the names on a conference announcement’s mass email, consider which ones should be added to this list. When you are reading the literature, whose name keeps popping up? Add that name to this list. When someone passes around an attendance sheet at a major meeting, copy the important names here. When you are interviewing for a position, refer to the projects and accomplishments of the important people (both researchers and managers) in the organization. Know basic facts about the important people in your current position (e.g., advisor, department chair, and college dean) because you might need to discuss them during your interview for a new position.

Personal References

Enter contact information for at least three people who can vouch for the quality of your work. References should be scientists, engineers, or faculty members who have current or recent knowledge of your academic accomplishments or your professional experiences. Usually, you will not be able to see the letter of recommendation.

Make sure that you enter the correct email addresses for your references, and that they agree to be listed as a reference.

A minimum of three references is usually required.

The following information should be provided for each reference:

1. Name - The first and last name of the reference.
2. Institution - The current institutional affiliation of the reference.
3. Department - The current departmental affiliation of the reference.
4. Position - The current position of the reference.
5. Email address – Verify that it is current!
6. Context – how the reference knows of you
7. Discussion of your skills and work style relative to the specific interests of the place to which you are applying for a job.

Tip: No matter how well your reference knows you, he or she can forget to mention specific information that you desire in the letter of reference. Therefore, don't be shy about "coaching" your reference. If, for example, you are applying to become a professor, then ask your reference to discuss your funding history as well as your background in teaching and research. Give your reference a copy of your "AboutMe" document to spur memory. Come right out and say "here is an informal summary of my background with yellow highlighting on the parts that I think might be useful to you as you write a letter of recommendation for me." This act alone will put your reference in a good mood about you.

EVIDENCE, EVIDENCE, EVIDENCE

For any statement made in your CV, keep electronic *and paper* copies of evidence to back up your claims. This is especially important for foreign nationals, since such evidence is generally needed for green card applications.

Examples of evidence are...

- *Academic credentials:* Obviously, keep a copy of your diploma.
- *Conference presentation:* copy of the email stating that your abstract was accepted, copy of the conference program listing your name as a contributor
- *Professional service:* copy of email stating that you have been elected to serve on a prestigious committee, copy of letters of appreciation for your volunteering, etc.

- *Honors*: award certificate, copy of email notifying you that you made the dean's academic honors list, etc.

Quantitative measures of skill

Standardized test Scores (SAT, EI, GRE, MCAT/LSAT, TOEFL, etc.)

Keep a record of all standardized test scores. If you intend to apply to graduate school, the most important one is the GRE. To do well on any standardized test, you should take a practice test. *Keep taking practice tests until you get good scores!*

Prospective employers (or funding managers, or review panels, etc.) often have no clue what a raw score means because they often don't know the highest possible score for the exam, nor do they know the average score for the exam. Therefore, always give your percentile (i.e., how your score compared with others who took the same test).

If you take the GRE, save the registration number. Your GRE registration number is assigned to you by the Educational Testing Service (ETS) and appears on your test results. Your registration number is 7 digits, and it is not the same as your confirmation number. Subject Tests are highly recommended where applicable. A GRE General Test score should be provided, even if you did not have to take a GRE for your graduate program. You (not your employer) are responsible for contacting ETS and requesting that they send official copies of your GRE scores to prior to the application deadlines. You should request scores from the ETS at least 20 business days before the deadline. You may contact ETS at <http://www.gre.org> or (609) 771-7670. MCAT/LSAT test scores cannot be substituted for GRE test scores.

Official Transcripts

When applying for jobs or fellowships, transcripts from your baccalaureate institution (and from any institution at which you have been a graduate student) are usually required. To begin a dialog with a prospective employer, it is a good idea to give them unofficial transcripts or grade reports, but they will ultimately require *official* transcripts. Therefore, be sure that you know how to request official transcripts from your educational institutions. Allow at least four weeks for most institutions to respond to a request for transcripts. Transcripts should include courses in the most recently completed semester or quarter.

Criteria against which my performance is currently judged (and will be judged in the future)

Whether you are a student or working professional, you are always judged against specific criteria. If you're employed, these are the criteria for raises or promotions. If you are only taking classes, these are the expectations that your professors have in order for you to earn an "A" in their classes. If you are a graduate researcher, list your project

deliverables. Regularly edit your “AboutMe” document to indicate how you are performing relative to those criteria.

If you aspire to a position in a particular company or university, then look up how *they* judge their employees. Start beefing up your AboutMe document in those areas, and emphasize them in your letter of application.