GRADUATE JOURNAL

Conference survival

At the Materials Research Society meeting in Boston last October, I had flashbacks of my first conference eight years ago. In 1996, as a new master's student, I went to the Conference of Metallurgists in Montreal, Canada, and was completely overwhelmed. I didn't know what to say or who to talk to — I just had the vague sense that somehow I was supposed to 'network'. Instead, I hid from the crowds at the conference bookstore.

My refuge proved to be fortuitous. After browsing a bit, I realized the conference staff were still setting up the store. I offered to give them a hand. In return, I found an informal way to mix with scientists. The staff told me that I was not the only delegate who would rather read than talk to scientists they didn't know.

Since then, I have volunteered for a conference organizing committee and have led some student chapter meetings at conferences. And I continue to ask senior attendees how they arrived at their work, and what they like about it. It gets easier to approach new people with every conference. By helping out and talking to a few people casually, I learn more from conferences than just what is delivered at the podium. And I no longer try to hide in the bookstore. ■

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NUTS & BOLTS

Selling your skills

Some countries draw a distinction between a CV (curriculum vitae) and a résumé, others deploy the descriptions interchangeably. But whether or not you view a CV as a complete summary of your scientific career and a résumé as a shorter, more targeted job application, it is clear that when seeking a new post you need to use the appropriate approach.

If you're applying for an academic position or a fellowship, stick with a traditional chronological format. Start with your name and contact information, then list your education, honours, publications, presentations, work history, research interests, professional affiliations and references with contact information. Aim for completeness — include all relevant work experience such as teaching, research, residencies and fellowships. Don't worry

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about length; this document can run as long as you need.

By contrast, about the only thing an application for an industrial position has in common with such a document is that it should also start with your name and contact information. Instead of focusing on education and publications, emphasize your practical experience, and tailor your experiences to the employer's needs. For example, if you are applying for a job at a drug-discovery firm that focuses on protein structures and you're from academia, say how many structures you have helped

to solve. Education is the next most important category, but you may not want to have separate entries for each rung you've climbed at the same institution. You need to keep it short — 1 to 2 pages. Attaching a separate list of publications, or providing one if asked, helps.

Regardless of the format, strive to create a document that is organized, easy to read and pleasing to the eye. Most importantly, get started now and keep it up-to-date for whenever the need arises.

For more information and samples of résumés and CVs see *Put Your Science to Work* by Peter Fiske, *Cyberspace Resume Kit* by Mary Nemnich and Fred Jandt, and www.hsph.harvard.edu (put 'sample curriculum vitae' in the search engine). ■

Deb Koen is vice-president of Career Development Services and a columnist for The Wall Street Journal's CareerJournal.com.

MOVERS

Marc Tessier-Lavigne, senior vice-president, Genentech, South San Francisco

For Marc Tessier-Lavigne, a bout of seasickness stirred up a career epiphany 24 years ago that still reverberates today. In 1980, the maths and physics major at McGill University in Montreal won a Rhodes scholarship. He planned to follow that same research direction in Oxford, UK, and he registered for a PhD in physics and selected an adviser. But while crossing

the Atlantic aboard the *QEII*, the decision — and the waves — left him feeling queasy. He realized that his interests were more varied — one of his favourite undergraduate experiences had been scraping the surface of biology while writing a thesis on biophysics — and that he still had plenty of time to learn.

"Do I really want to be on a set career path when I'm 23?" he asked himself between the Dramamines. He answered by ditching the doctorate and pursuing a bachelor's degree in a hybrid subject that no one had picked as a major for five years. "Philosophy and physiology — the connection is tenuous, but it was exactly what I wanted," he says.

That flexibility and risk-taking has since characterized his career. He declined a rare tenure-track position at University College London after he finished his doctorate there, to pursue a postdoc instead; published only review articles for three years; went after one of

the more intractable problems of neurodevelopmental biology at the time; and, last year, left a lofty academic job to jump across to industry and join biotech firm Genentech in South San Francisco (see *Nature Medicine* **10**, 10; 2004).

In following such a varied path, Tessier-Lavigne unwittingly adhered to the template that is now considered the perfect background for a multidisciplinary scientist (see *Nature* **425**, 542–543; 2003). He has since advised his graduate students to do a postdoc in something completely different from their thesis topic. For instance, if a student's thesis was on the cell cycle of yeast, he'd recommend against them using a fellowship to continue studying that issue — even in another organism.

Following that logic, Tessier-Lavigne is prepared to pursue research subjects he's never investigated in a setting he has never worked in. ■

CV **2001–2003:** Endowed chairholder and professor, Stanford University
1991–2001: University of California, San Francisco, beginning as assistant professor of anatomy and rising to professor of anatomy and of biochemistry and biophysics by 1997

1994–2003: Howard Hughes Medical Institute, assistant investigator 1994–97, investigator 1997–2003

1987–1991: Columbia University, postdoctoral research, Center for Neurobiology and Behaviour

1987: University College London, postdoctoral researcher