



## Professional Biography Guide

Office for Alumni Affairs & Career Advancement

### What is a professional biography?

A professional biography is a summary of who you are as a professional, based upon your education, experience, and unique skillset (what you do and how you do it). It also should include your purpose (why you do what you do) and impact (what you aim to solve or transform for your patients/clients, organization, and/or in the world). More than that, it offers an opportunity to tell your story in an engaging way to capture your audience and promote your “brand” as a professional.

Similar to crafting your resume for different purposes and audiences, you must tailor your professional biography accordingly. Unlike your resume, you may wish to include a photo (professional headshot), and share more about your personal hobbies, interests, and family. Doing this well shows your personality and your interests beyond your work environment.

### How to tailor your professional biography

There are different lengths of professional biographies to use in different settings. Therefore, it is wise to craft your long bio first, and use it as a basis for writing the other versions, which are typically shorter.

The long biography is typically used as a more complete professional introduction of yourself. Long bios are used as an author bio in book writing, as an introduction for speakers/presenters, or as a board director/leadership team description in organizations, among other uses. The long bio is typically between 3-5 paragraphs, varying from 3-5 sentences each.

The short biography is typically used in other publications, print or online, as author bios at the end of articles or blogposts, in the “About” section of company or personal websites, or as listing in a professional directory. It can also be used as a professional summary statement in social media accounts (i.e. LinkedIn or Alumni database). The short bio is generally between 1-2 paragraphs, varying from 2-4 sentences each.

The pitch or professional statement is a brief description, typically no more than 2-4 sentences, that highlights your professional experience and qualifications. A simple formula to craft this is **present-past-future**.

*Example: Global Health MD/MPH with 5 years international clinical research experience in hospital and government settings. Expertise in childhood diseases and specialization in prevention. Strategic leader eager to bring multi-cultural communication excellence and crisis management to an NGO field officer role.*

The headline/tagline is a very brief “bulleted” list that describes you in a few words or phrases.

*Example: Emerging Global Health Professional | Expert Data Analyst | Triathlete*

Examples of different biography lengths and styles can be found through a simple internet search. Look at an organization’s “About” and “Staff/Team/Leadership” pages. Read author blurbs at end of articles or in books to get a sense of how they describe themselves, their work and purpose, and how they may feature achievements and interests.



## Quick Tips for Writing a Successful Biography

Writing your biography may not be an easy undertaking but it can be fun. While you want to be professional, you have more latitude to show your personality and creativity in how you tell your career story. Some additional tips to keep in mind:

- Write your bio in the third person. It may be acceptable to write in first person for a very short introduction, but generally, it reads better when presented in third person
- Proofread and edit ruthlessly. Enlist the help of your trusted colleagues to review for clarity, compelling content, and to catch any typos or grammatical missteps
- Highlight your name and contact information, and any relevant branding nicknames for which you are known (i.e. if you author a regular column as the “Global Health Guru of Rural America”)
- Include links to your relevant works
- Write conversationally, and keep it concise and clear--avoid jargon
- Update regularly, especially after transitions, major anniversaries, or significant accomplishments

One final thing to consider is your overall online reputation and brand. Conduct a search to see what appears and make a point to ensure correct and appropriate information reflects the professional image you want to convey.

### Need more help?

Use the Alumni database and online networks such as LinkedIn to review others’ professional headlines and biographies. A Career Coach can help review your draft biography versions in an individual career coaching appointment. To schedule an appointment, please log in to CareerConnect at <https://hsph-harvard-csm.symplcity.com>.

/Rev Apr 2019



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<http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/career-services/>  
updated 9/18