### **Constructing My Vita**

**TIPS FOR FACILITATORS**

* + Create space for participants to share briefly about the ways their experiences, people in their lives, and/or society has influenced the way they currently see themselves as workers. Be aware of the possibility that participants’ may feel their current vocational identities are defined by what they used to do for work, or by the length of time they have been out of work, or by what they can’t do because of their mental health conditions.
	+ Make sure to touch on individual, interpersonal, and societal factors that shape vocational identity. Acknowledge the real barriers that exist today (discrimination against people with mental health conditions, and against the long-term unemployed).
	+ Recalling past experiences can be painful for some participants. Be alert to signs of people needing extra support during this exercise.

**AGENDA**

1. Warm Up
2. Break
3. Activity
4. Summary
5. Evaluations

**SHARING VOCATIONAL EXPERIENCES**

* + **Orient:** as we’ve discussed, this module is about envisioning a future career identity for ourselves. One factor that contributes to career identity is our past vocational experiences. Some of those were positive experiences, from which we’ve gained skills and self- knowledge that we’d like to carry forward in our future work lives. Some of those were negative experiences, which also have the potential to help us learn more about ourselves and what we do and don’t want for our work future.
	+ For homework, we asked you to brainstorm past experiences that have influenced how you see yourself as a worker. Many of those experiences will likely be items that you would put on a resume, but some aren’t. Some of those experiences, like family values and cultural heritage, influences from mentors, or even doing work in therapy, would not appear on your resume, but they still impacted you and what you want for your future work life.
	+ Demo: have a facilitator briefly name and describe 1) a more conventional “work”

experience that they regarded as positive/were proud of and 2) a life experience that may

not appear on culture – ex. single mom/work ethic, travel/exposure to another culture, getting sick/accomplishing a treatment or recovery goal, etc.)

* + Have them do the same as above – briefly name one traditional experience and one “life”

experience that has impacted how they see themselves as workers.

* + Make the point: oftentimes, people struggle with creating a resume because they feel it doesn’t reflect who they are as a person or what they have to offer – especially if they have been out of work for some time. Today is your opportunity to begin to create a different kind of document – one that captures both traditional work and more broad but influential life experience. We call this document a “vita”. We will “mine” this vita to learn more about who you want to become as a worker. We will also use it as a foundation for resume construction.

**CONSTRUCTING MY VITA**

* + Show students example vita.
	+ Explain that today’s session is an opportunity to begin the vita but that it is students’

responsibility to complete it for HW. They don’t need to complete it in its entirety for next session, but the more they can do, the easier module 1 sessions will be.

* + Have them use their brainstorms to create a vita in MS Word.

**AT HOME**

* + Complete Vita

### **What is a Vita?**

A vita is a document that describes important life experiences - experiences that have shaped your vocational identity. (Reminder: vocational identity, simply put, means how you see yourself as a worker.) While writing a vita does involve listing and describing past jobs and education, it is much more personal than a resume. In a vita, when you write about your jobs and education, in addition to stating what you did, you also explain how you felt, what you liked and disliked, and what you learned.

### **Why write a Vita?**

Constructing your vita is an opportunity to write your story of who you are as a worker. You can share it with people who are supporting you in your career journey, like your Opening Doors counselor. It will also be directly relevant to several upcoming class topics, and it will serve as a helpful reference for you when participating in Module 1 activities.

### **How do I write about my experiences?**

You might be asking, what should I write? For some people, it is helpful to have prompts. The prompts help you build the story piece by piece. You may also feel comfortable writing freely, without the use of prompts.

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| **Sample Vita Entry (Short Answer Style)** |
| **Waiter, Mar 2009 – Jun 2011** |
| ***How I first got involved:***I walked in with my resume and asked if they were hiring! I knew of the diner because it was right down the street from where I lived. |
| ***I enjoyed this experience because…***there were so many people with interesting stories and characteristics both staff and diners. There was never a boring day. |
| ***One thing I struggled with was…***that I often had to stay late to help clean up after closing. It interfered with my sleep, which left me pretty moody day-to-day. |
| ***I got through it by…***Requesting earlier shifts. My boss granted my request but said he’d have to reduce my hours. At that point I knew it was time to move on. |
| ***What was most meaningful to me about this experience was…***it gave me the freedom to buy what I needed for myself. My family didn't have a lot, so to me, having a job that provided income was everything. |

**Sample Vita Entry** (Narrative Style)

**Editorial Intern, Age 20**

*In college I had an internship as an editorial assistant at an online travel book dealer. I got it through one of my roommates – he already worked there. I loved being surrounded by interesting books about different parts of the world – some I had never even heard of.*

*I considered myself to be a pretty good writer, but this job was challenging because we were expected to write reviews of the books without really reading them. I had never written in that way, and I didn’t get much training on it. At one point my boss criticized one of my reviews in front of the entire staff. I was*

*humiliated and felt like I wasn’t a good writer. I ended up avoiding writing more*

*reviews and just found other tasks to do.*

*I started to dread going, and I ended up leaving before the official end date. Later, I learned that I wasn’t a bad writer – but writing in this way was not one of my strengths. I also learned that it was important for me to have a supportive supervisor who I felt comfortable approaching and would not make me feel badly when I didn’t understand something.*

### **Personal Vita Example**

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| --- | --- |
| **EDUCATION** |  |
| *Central High School 1992–1996**Lowell, MA* | I took a lot of different kinds of classes in high school because there were requirements. I didn’t have any strong interests. I avoided math unless I had to take it for a requirement. I did well in my writing classes and English classes, and I enjoyed them. I remember wanting to throw up when I had to do an oral report in front of a group. The teachers seemed to like me, I had good attendance and didn’t cause trouble. I was on a committee to raise money for our class treasury, I made the posters. I played basketball for one year. |
| **EMPLOYMENT** |  |
| *Babysitting June 1998–**December 2000 Lowell, MA* | Occasional babysitting, on and off for six years, for neighbors. Kids age 1 through 10. I enjoyed the kids, but it was really stressful because I could not relax, they had a lot of responsibility. |
| **COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT** |
| *One day volunteer November 2002 Red Cross* | I helped out at a blood drive for one day. I talked with donors, especially people who were nervous. The volunteer coordinator seemed grateful to have my help. I got along with the other volunteers, they were my age and easy to talk to. |
| **INTERESTS** |  |
| Listening to music, going for walks, and basketball (playing and watching). |
| **LIFE EXPERIENCES** |  |
| *Travel Summer 1993* | I drove across the United States with my uncle and aunt when I was in high school. |
| *Day Treatment 2016–Now*  | I have been in treatment for the past year. Sometimes I don’t feel like I have control over my own life. I just want to feel like a normal person who does things people my age do. |

**Vita Instructions**

1. **Refer to your Vocational Experiences Brainstorm:** Choose two or three experiences from each category to write about.
2. **Get the ideas on paper.** Create a word document or use your notebook. When you’re writing, you can use bullets or sentences. It’s okay to first just write whatever comes to mind and edit later. Eventually, you’ll want to have a one-to-three-page typed document that resembles the example. When possible, provide years of experience. It’s okay to use estimates.
3. **Get support:** Sometimes, writing about work experiences can stir up difficult emotions. This is normal, especially for those who have experienced losses

related to work identity. It’s important to seek support if/when you encounter difficult emotions. If you have trusted people in your life you can talk to, like a therapist or a family member, we encourage you to seek their support. We encourage you to also reach out to an Opening Doors instructor, who can support you in identifying strategies that will allow you to continue your work on the project.