

# WRITING AND EVALUATING NARRATIVE CVs

Breaking Barriers in Research  
Funding Applications





# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**03** Background & Aims

**04** The Study

**05** Linguistic Analyses

**06** Key findings

**08** Tips

**09** Acknowledgment

# BACKGROUND

Narrative CVs have emerged as a key strategy to promote fairer and more inclusive research assessment, offering researchers the opportunity to present their skills, contributions, and achievements in a narrative and contextualised way. The San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) supports the use of narrative CVs in order to shift focus away from narrow metrics such as publication counts and journal impact factors, enabling applicants to highlight diverse outputs and contributions to research, research community, and broader societies. This approach allows individuals to take greater control over how their research story is told. However, writing a Narrative CV can be challenging, especially for underrepresented researchers. Indeed, a Narrative CV requires adopting a new way of writing and tone, identifying how to highlight achievements and presenting the self (see Frith et al., 2025). DORA and other stakeholders have called for close monitoring of narrative CV implementation, with specific attention to how identity, language, and structure influence reviewers' perceptions (Adams et al., 2023; Fritch et al., 2024).



# AIMS

This project aims to provide evidence on:

1

*How different groups of underrepresented researchers write their Narrative CV, with a specific focus on the linguistic features of their writing*

2

*Whether the support provided (e.g., workshops) and feedback received (e.g., individualised feedback) are reflected in how the CV is written*

3

*Which linguistic features are associated with reviewers' evaluation of both the CV and the researcher*

# THE STUDY

## Researchers and CVs

Twenty-seven researchers submitted Narrative CVs, which were subsequently analysed for their linguistic features. The researchers were split between STEM and the social sciences and humanities. The sample reflects a diversity of characteristics (see Figure 1 below), including intersections among them.

The CVs followed the UKRI format ([R4RI template](#)). Of these, 21% were part of a successful application, while 46% were part of an unsuccessful one. The remaining CVs were either awaiting an outcome (21%) or had not yet been submitted (13%), with some prepared following a webinar or workshop on narrative CVs. Many participants received support while preparing their CVs (81.5%), and over half (52.2%) received feedback before submission. The CVs ranged in length from 489 to 1,981 words.



## Reviewers

Reviewers were recruited to evaluate the 27 CVs submitted by researchers. Reviewers hold positions as research fellows (24%), full researchers (42%), lecturers or senior lecturers (18%), and associate or full professors (4%). Additionally, 44% had acted as reviewers of grant proposals, 36% had provided feedback on narrative CVs, and 34% had evaluated a narrative CV. Of those evaluators, only 14% reported receiving instructions from the funder, while 6% reported seeking instructions independently. Nearly half (48%) found evaluating narrative CVs to be slightly or moderately difficult.

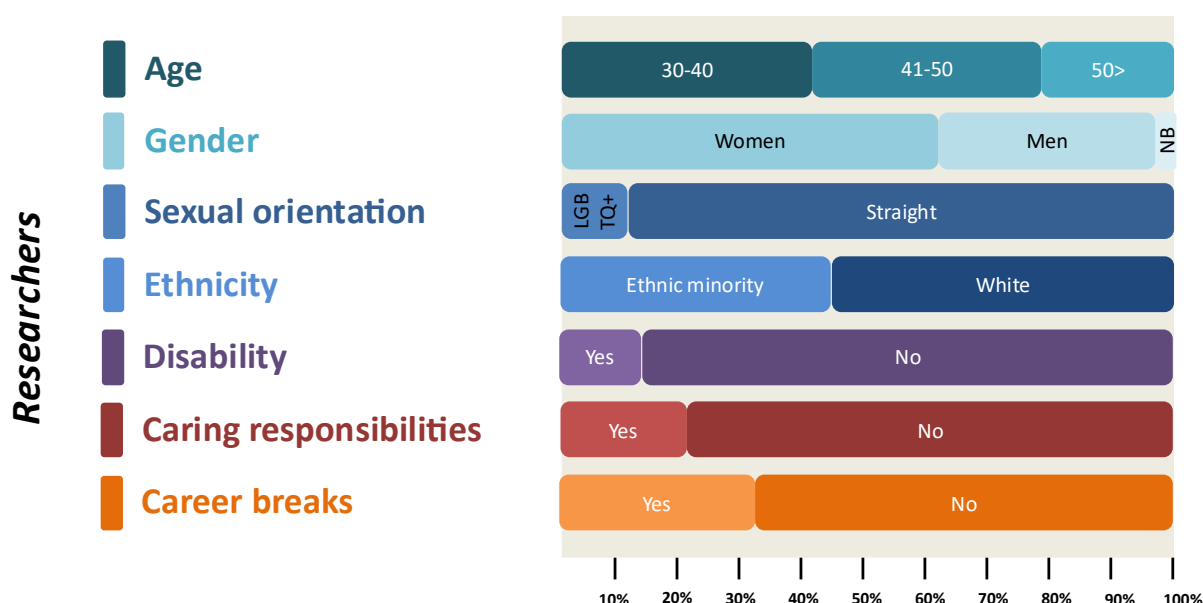


Figure 1. Summary of researchers' demographics. NB = non-binary

# LINGUISTIC ANALYSES

Each CV was analysed using two software tools: [BERTAgent](#) and [LIWC22](#). These tools identify key features of linguistic style. BERTAgent focuses on detecting the presence or absence of agency in the text, while LIWC analyses a broader range of linguistic features. Table 1 summarises the features that emerged as relevant in our analysis.

TERM	DEFINITION
<b><i>Agency</i></b>	Agency refers to the capacity of an individual to act intentionally and achieve goals. Linguistic agency reflects the strength of agency in the parts of the text where agency is actually present
<b><i>Lack of Agency</i></b>	This reflects how strongly the text conveys lack of agency, such as passivity, external control, or avoidance of ownership
<b><i>Negation</i></b>	Words that negate meaning or express denial, rejection, or contradiction (e.g., no, not, none)
<b><i>Discrepancy</i></b>	Words that express uncertainty or aspirational thinking, a discrepancy between expectations and reality (e.g., should, would, could, expect)
<b><i>Clout</i></b>	Words that reflect leadership and confidence rather than a tentative tone
<b><i>All or none</i></b>	Writing that reflects black-and white reasoning and tends to overgeneralize or express extreme reasoning (e.g. lack of nuances)
<b><i>Cause</i></b>	Words that signal causation or explanations (e.g., because, due to) and reflect reasoning and justifications
<b><i>Tentative</i></b>	Language that indicates with caution and uncertainty
<b><i>Certitude</i></b>	Words that boost certainty (e.g., definitely, absolutely) and assertiveness
<b><i>Social</i></b>	Words that refer to interpersonal focus, connectedness and collaborations

Table 1. Overview of linguistic features highlighted in the results that follow.

# KEY FINDINGS

We conducted a series of regression analyses to explore whether demographic factors defining underrepresented and minority groups (i.e., age, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, disability, caregiving responsibilities, career breaks, academic role), as well as whether researchers had received support in CV writing (e.g., training, peer support, R&I team) and individualized feedback prior to submission, influenced the language used in the Narrative CVs. The following are the statistically significant results from these analyses:



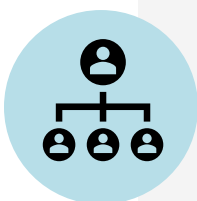
## Gender

Women used language that expressed agency, cause and effect, and that emphasised social aspects and relationships.



## Ethnicity

Ethnic minority researchers used fewer words that signalled leadership (clout), as well as less language expressing overgeneralisations and a dichotomous thinking (all-or-none), compared to ethnic majority (i.e., White) researchers. Ethnic minority researchers also used language that reflected lower levels of certainty (certitude) and social connections.



## Sexual Orientation, Carers, and Career Breaks

Sexual minority researchers used less language reflecting certainty (certitude). Researchers who were also carers used less dichotomous language (all-or-none).

Researchers who had career breaks used fewer cause-effect words but more language expressing leadership (clout).



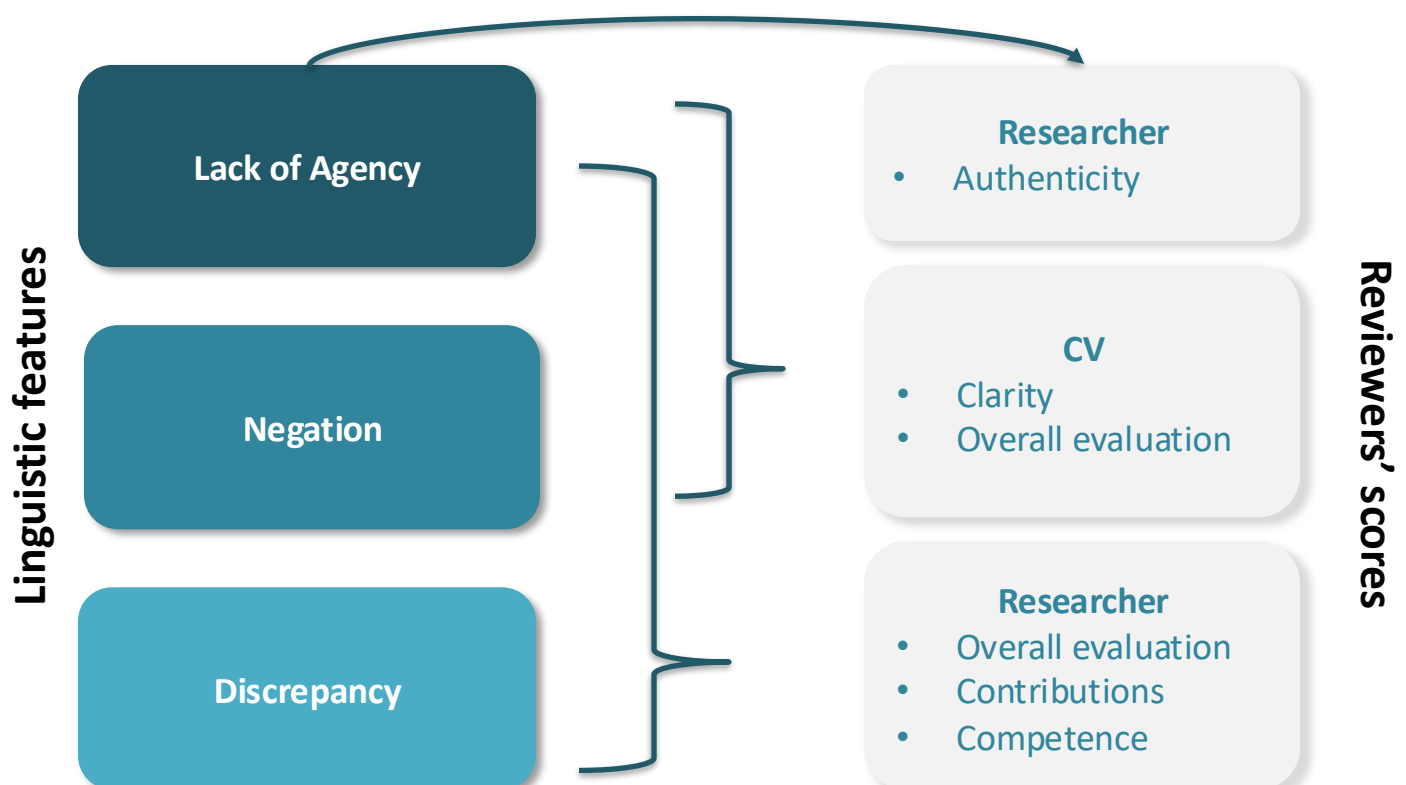
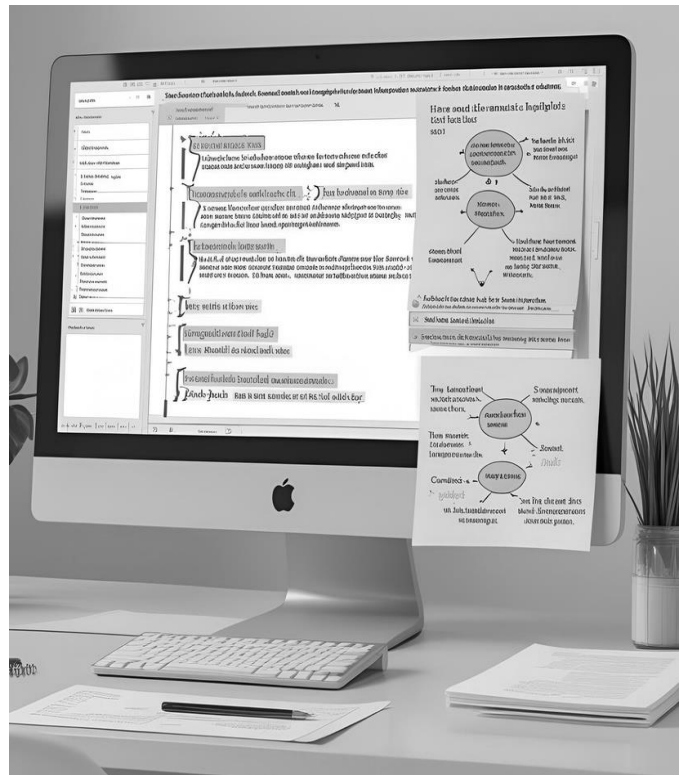
## Feedback

Receiving feedback seems important because it prompted researchers to write CVs using more agentic and cause-effect language, while avoiding reinforcing language that might convey overconfidence (certitude).



# KEY FINDINGS

We then analysed correlations between linguistic features identified by BERTAgent and LIWC22 and reviewers' scores of narrative CVs. As illustrated by the figure below, the results showed that more positive evaluations of both the CVs and the researchers across all dimensions were associated with fewer references to low agency. Similarly, higher scores across all categories, except for the assessment of researchers' authenticity, were linked to less frequent use of negation. Furthermore, evaluations of researchers, but not the CVs, were more positive when discrepancy language was minimised.



# TIPS

This study provided initial evidence on the importance of the language used in writing Narrative CVs. Based on our findings, we suggest the following practical tips

1

**Choose language that emphasises agency and ownership**

2

**Use affirmative language and avoid expressions that signal discrepancy or rely on negation.**

3

**Review and refine your language to maximise positive evaluations**

## Examples

- Original text: *'The findings reveal a promising impact'* →  
Rephrased text: *'I am to create impact through my findings..'*
- Original text: *'Recommendations have been formulated'* →  
Rephrased text: *'I have formulated recommendations to...'*
- Original text: *'I did not overlook any team issues ...'* →  
Rephrased text: *'I identified and addressed all team issues..'*
- Original text: *'I identified that the PhD student would perform better with clearer goals and worked together on it'* →  
Rephrased text: *'I set clear goals together with the PhD student that improved their performance'*



## Limitations and Future Directions

- Larger and more diverse CV samples are needed to confirm the patterns observed in this study, including participants with a broader range of backgrounds, career stages, and disciplinary contexts.
- Longitudinal studies should be conducted to assess whether the effects persist over time, particularly as researchers gain more experience with narrative CVs and benefit from improved training and guidance.
- Comparative analyses of different narrative CV formats—beyond the UKRI template—are necessary to understand how various formats influence content and evaluation.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful to the participants who shared their Narrative CVs and to those who evaluated them. Their contributions provided us with valuable preliminary data on the role of language in Narrative CV writing and evaluation.

## PROJECT

[Breaking Barriers in Research Funding Applications: Evaluating Narrative CVs and Co-Designing Solutions for Application Processes.](#)

Funded by [EDI Caucus](#) (Workstream 2 – Research Process)



## CITE AS

Fasoli, F., Frith, H., Nolan, J., Hutton, S., Noël, N. (2025). *Writing and Evaluating Narrative CVs*.