

CV Guidelines

What is a CV?

A CV is an outline of a person's educational and employment history. Everyone can benefit from a good CV when job hunting. The term 'Curriculum Vitae' is Latin and means 'the course of your life'.

There is no one-way of doing a CV; because every person is unique, every CV will look different.

Whatever your qualifications or experience, or the sort of opportunity you are applying for, a good CV is important. It may be quite simple, if you are young, or have not had many different jobs, so do not be put off if some of the following information seems complicated.

Research suggests that an employer spends approximately 30 seconds on each CV, so it needs to have impact.

You are probably in competition with other people with similar qualifications and experience. You need to make your CV stand out from the others. Selling yourself is a necessity when compiling your CV.

These guidelines are designed to help you draw up a CV that will be relevant to your own individual needs.

There are some traditions and expectations about the structures of CVs but it is more important that you develop a structure of your own. Remember, there are no rules on CVs, only general principles. However, there are two basic structures.

- The 'tombstone' approach is the traditional CV structure, which you may recognize
- The format that includes a personal career statement or profile.

Whatever format you use, follow three steps

- Prepare the draft CV
- Check and edit it, so it looks right, and satisfies your needs
- Produce and check the final version

What to include in the CV

1. Personal Details

Only include information relevant to the application. If information is not going to help you obtain an interview with an employer, think twice about including it.

2. Career Profile or Statement

You can really grab an employer's attention with this section. Don't be falsely modest; tell them what you have achieved.

This section should be written primarily with the employer in mind emphasizing your skills, attitudes, knowledge and experience.

A mistake often made on a CV is that responsibilities and duties from previous posts are often lifted directly from old job descriptions. This is missing a golden opportunity to sell yourself. Always try to imagine what you would be looking for if you were a prospective employer. Generally, this would be

someone who could bring real benefits to the organization; someone who has demonstrated in previous jobs that they have worked hard and successfully.

Your CV should therefore, be based on achievements, rather than just information. For example, if you worked in sales, to say 'handled sales for the company in the South Wales area' is simple information. Approached using the achievement principle it would read, 'sales representative, and instrumental in increasing existing client base through cold calling by 25% over a period of three months, resulting in increased revenue of £5K'.

Both statements are equally valid, but the second transmits the feeling of action and something achieved. This is the approach employers relate to.

3. Employment

Note down every employer you have worked for: full-time, part-time, holiday or voluntary work. There is no need to include everything in your final CV, but it is good raw material to draw from when you come to choose what to include.

4. Education

List your highest qualifications first. Give details, i.e. names and dates of the educational institutions attended, courses that you studied and qualifications you gained.

5. Skills and achievements

This might be any of the following, for example.

- Fluency in a foreign language
- Skills acquired through voluntary work
- Ability to use certain software, machinery or equipment

In other words, abilities or skills that are relevant, but not included in your employment section.

6. Interests

Interests say much about you as a person; your values, motivation and even your intelligence. For example, 'chess at County level, crosswords' suggests that this person is likely to be intelligent, bright and good at problem solving.

Try to expand on your interests. For example, 'Television - natural history, documentaries. Repairing and maintaining my MK 1 Ford Cortina', gives a different picture to 'Watching TV, cars'.

1. Prepare the draft CV

2. Editing your CV

The final CV needs to be brief and interesting to read. The final version should not exceed two sheets of A4 paper; there is only room for essential information.

3. The final version

Check the final document for accuracy and presentation. It is a good idea to show it to a friend or colleague. If you are comfortable with the final result you are ready to use it to apply for jobs and approach employers speculatively. The mistake people often make is that now they have a CV they feel it

is suitable for every job that they will be applying for. This in reality is not the case: dependant on the vacancy there will be a need to customise your CV to suit that particular job. You may need to emphasise certain information and leave out some that is not relevant to that particular post.

Skills Portfolio

Skills that employers are looking for can be categorised into four areas:

- 1 Specialist skills
- 2 General business skills
- 3 Self-reliance skills
- 4 People skills

You now need to look at your skills and split them into these four areas.

SPECIALIST

Company-specific skills

Specialist knowledge, e.g. product or market knowledge; specialist skills, e.g. IT packages; unique language skills, e.g. Chinese; specialist interpersonal skills, e.g. public speaker

Technical skills

Professional, sector-based or functional skills, e.g. journalism, research, creative design, economist, personnel, sales, marketing

Understanding commercial goals of company

Specialist understanding of an organisation's goals, priorities and future direction (combination of self-reliance, business acumen and people skills)

GENERAL BUSINESS

Problem solving

Achiever, successful, results-orientated, project management, creative, practical, logical, astute, agile mind

IT/computer literacy

IT skills, software packages, common sense, task orientated, progressive, specific, office skills, and keyboard skills

Flexibility

Multi-disciplinary, flexible, versatile, multi-skilled, willing, obliging, mobile, adaptable

Numeracy skills

Accurate, logical, problem-solver, detailed, methodical, consistent, quick thinker, analytical, thorough

Business acumen

Competitive, entrepreneurial, enterprising, commercial, foresight, budgeter, risk-taker, effective written communication

Commitment

Dedicated, trustworthy, conscientious, reliable, loyal, punctual, knowledgeable, experienced

SELF-RELIANCE

Self-awareness/ confidence

Purposeful, focused, reflective, perceptive, honest, self-belief, objective, realistic, balanced

Self-promotion skills

Positive, persuasive, pleasant, proactive, persistent, ambitious, opportunistic, promoter

Initiative and proactivity

Resourceful, energetic, drive, flexible, self-starter, self-reliant, initiative, self-disciplined

Networking skills

Initiator, trustful, personable, relationship builder, persistent developer, resourceful, adaptable

Willing to learn

Motivated, adaptable, enthusiastic, active, keen learner, inquisitive, continual improver

Action planning

Decision maker, planner, organised, negotiator, responsive, evaluator, forward thinker, target-driven, able to prioritise

PEOPLE

Team working

Supportive, facilitator, organised, co-ordinator, deliverer, imaginative, delegator, open-minded

Leadership

Dynamic, motivator, team-builder, confidence booster, energetic, capable, outward-looking, accountable, visionary

Interpersonal skills

Listener, adviser, counsellor, politically aware, initiator, professional, co-operative, constructive, assertive

Customer orientation

Welcoming, friendly, caring, approachable, constructive, accommodating, tactful, diplomatic, tolerant

Oral communication

Educator, trainer, communicator, presenter, promoter, influencer, humorous, empathetic, telephone skills

Foreign language

Specific language skills, cultural awareness, international experience, written and oral expertise, sensitivity

CV Dos and Don'ts

Do

- Keep it clear and simple
- Use bullet points, as in this list
- Keep it short, maximum of 2 pages
- Be positive and elaborate on achievements and results
- Assume the reader doesn't know what you did in your previous work
- Acknowledge a good CV takes time, don't hurry
- Adapt your CV to different jobs and opportunities
- Know your CV thoroughly, its often the basis for interview
- Word-process
- Show results in numbers or money (quantitative data)
- Pay attention to layout
- Avoid overcrowding and complications
- Put strongest statements at the beginning
- Use short sentences, not long paragraphs
- Do consult before using coloured paper

Don't

- Don't list salary requirements
- Don't disclose why you left your previous job
- Don't list addresses of the organisations you've worked for
- Don't use personal pronouns i.e. I or we
- Don't use jargon
- Don't have any spelling or grammatical errors
- Don't send cheap paper or poor photocopies
- Don't use pretentious language, write as you speak
- Don't copy someone else's CV
- Don't invent information that you can't justify at an interview
- Don't highlight problems i.e. divorce, redundancy, health
- Don't include a photograph
- Don't use extreme typeface or visual effects

The covering letter

What is a covering letter?

A covering letter is an introduction to your CV. It explains why you are sending it to an employer. A covering letter is not only something you can send to adverts for jobs – it can also be used for applications for work placements or work shadowing.

All application forms and CVs must have a covering letter, and this is likely to be the first thing an employer sees.

Responding to an advert

State the post you are applying for, the job reference and where you saw the advert. Explain why you are suitable for the position. You should state any technical competencies, skills or appropriate experience that is mentioned in the advert. Why? This is because employers use particular criteria with which they mark an applicant in order to produce a short list of suitable people to interview.

NB: never send a CV and covering letter if it specifically asks you to apply using an application form.

A Speculative approach

With this type of covering letter you need to explain exactly why you have contacted the company. Explain why you are applying, why you want to work in this area, why you want to work for this company.

To be effective and get a positive response you **must** demonstrate you have researched the company and have targeted your CV to fit their needs. How do you research an employer? By checking their website, local press, their company brochure, contacting the local chamber of commerce and by contacting the company direct. If you opt for the direct route then you should have a clear set of questions that you wish to ask drawn up, make comprehensive and clear notes! Your covering letter should have clear examples that demonstrate your suitability for a role within the type of company.

Covering letter layout

Basic tips:

- One side of good quality A4 paper.
- 4 paragraphs in length
- Contains your address and name.
- Covering letters should be typed not handwritten and in same font as CV.
- Refers to enclosed CV for evidence but don't repeat words and phrases used in the CV
- Spell check! Get someone to read through and check for spelling and grammar errors. Keep a photocopy.
- Personalise it. Always find out the name of the person to whom you are sending the application

What information needs to go into a covering letter?

Key points: -

- Give your reason for writing, why you are interested in the position applied for and/or how you found out about it.
For example: 'Your advertisement was of great interest.....'
'Your company enjoys an excellent reputation in ...'
- Refer to skills or experience you have to offer (e.g. a problem saving skill) which can provide a direct benefit to the employer. e.g. 'You will see from my enclosed CV....'
- The final paragraph should indicate your availability for interview, should be designed to ask for the interview (showing optimism that you will be called for interview), which should be described as discussion or meeting (some managers prefer this, as they may think that interviews are for personnel departments to deal with) e.g. 'Perhaps I may telephone your office next week to see how you may wish to progress matters.'