

What should your CV include?

Content

- Heading and personal details
- A profile or career aim?
- Education
- Employment
- Skills
- Achievements
- Interests
- References
- Action words
- Applicant tracking systems
- Overused words and phrases
- Spelling and grammar

What will you learn from this chapter?

Here you will learn what content you need to include in your CV: the different sections, why they are necessary and what you should include in each one.

You will also learn how to give your writing style impact, how to increase the effect of your CV via action words, which words and phrases are overused and so should not be included in your CV, and the importance of minimising jargon. The words you use in your CV can either give it a dynamic edge or make you come across as dull and uninteresting.

Heading and personal details

The first part of any CV is your personal details. You don't need 'Curriculum Vitae' as the heading. The less the selector has to read, the more he or she can focus on key facts; and if your CV is computer scanned, your name might just be recorded as 'Curriculum Vitae'!

Instead, start with your name in a large font size, say 18 points, so if the selector has a lot of CVs to view, he or she can quickly find yours. You don't have to give your full name; if your name is Christopher Robin Milne, it's fine to put 'Chris Milne'.

One graduate recruitment manager received a superb application but for some reason, the applicant had forgotten to add their contact details, so could not be contacted.

Next put your contact details: address, email address and phone number. Do include your email address as most recruiters will contact you via this. You don't need the words 'name', 'address', 'phone number' and 'email', as it's obvious what these are. Putting your address on one line (see below) can save space. Even your address isn't essential, as it's unlikely the employer will post anything to you, but the recruiter may want to know where you live, so you could just put the town where you live.

Robyn Hood

13 Lyndhurst Road, Sherwood, Nottingham. NT2 7SJ.
07777 764521

ab9999@univ.ac.uk

In the United Kingdom, you don't need to include your age, date of birth, health, gender, race or marital status. The more personal details you supply, the greater the chance for discrimination. Some firms have instituted 'blind applying', where the selector is not given any personal details, to reduce discrimination.

Photos are not normally included in British CVs unless you are an actor, but in some European countries a photograph is standard (see Chapter 10: 'International CVs').

Should you include a profile or career aim?

Career Aims

A **career aim or objective** shows the employer you have a clear goal and gives a focus to your CV. It states the type of work you wish to enter. It can narrow opportunities if too specific, but something too general, such as, 'I wish to work in business', suggests you haven't done your research. Career aims should be short: no more than three lines long. They are easier to

write than profiles and help prevent agencies submitting you for unsuitable vacancies. They can also help if you are changing career. If you have little work experience and a degree that is not relevant, a career aim can signal interest in a career. However, it is unnecessary when applying for a job in your degree subject area or if you have much relevant work experience.

Use a sensible email address, unlike the following

- demented.dinosaur@gnumail.com
- please_kiss_me@univ.ac.uk
- aardvark.mcdandruff@gnumail.com
- virgin_on_the_ridiculous@hotmail.com
- yourmywifenowjohn@univ.ac.uk
- sexylikewoaaaaah@univ.ac.uk

University researchers' created fictional CVs with both formal email addresses such as sannejong@hotmail.com and informal such as luv_u_sanne@hotmail.com. Recruiters rated applicants using a formal email address as more hireable than applicants using an informal address.

Underscores _ in email addresses were also disliked as they were obscured by the automatic underlining wordprocessors add to email addresses.

Exercise: write your career aim

Here are examples to get you started

- A computing graduate seeking a challenging software development role in a progressive technology company that rewards hard work and commitment.
- An English Literature graduate seeking an internship to gain practical experience and develop relevant skills in publishing.

Now write your own career aim here:

Profiles

A profile is an outline of your relevant skills and experience at the start of your CV, which allows selectors to quickly view key facts about you. It is a sales tool: a concise summary of your strengths. It's the CV equivalent of an interview suit in that it should create a strong positive first impression which entices the recruiter to read on. It differs from a covering letter, which explains in more detail why you are suitable for a specific vacancy and organisation.

Profiles are an introduction to your CV so should be at the start of your CV and not near the end, where some students place them.

Profiles can also be called **personal statements**, but we prefer 'profile': it's shorter. Don't call it **Personnel Profile** as students sometimes do: it's not just for HR! Profiles should be short – no more than six lines long, as they are appetisers to hook the recruiter into reading your CV. They can be either a paragraph or a bulleted list, but a paragraph is better at allowing your personality to shine through.

Profiles aren't essential. They work best for speculative applications or when a covering letter isn't needed, for example for CV databanks and for jobs where there is much competition for places, such as PR, advertising, consultancy and the media. They are less effective the more experience you have, so they work better for new graduates. Recruiters are cynical about profiles: a survey by Reed Recruitment found that 83 per cent of CVs included a profile, but that there was no correlation with success in getting interviews.

Don't include hackneyed phrases such as 'team player', 'good communication skills', 'hard worker', 'trustworthy', 'fast learner' and 'efficient'. These send recruiters to sleep because they see them so often and, even worse, they are rarely backed up by evidence.

Exercise: which profile has more impact?

1. I am a dynamic and highly motivated graduate, and I have strong leadership and organisational skills.
2. Strong leadership skills demonstrated by captaincy of the university lacrosse team. Organised an event for the university RAG Society for 100 students, which raised £350 for charity.

The second profile is evidence based and so has credibility, whereas the first is just hot air. Back up claims made in your profile with evidence in the rest of your CV. If your profile says, 'strong leadership skills' but there is no evidence in your CV of your having taken leadership roles, the employer won't believe you.

Don't write your profile in the third person: 'David is seeking a post . . .'. This sounds odd, as if somebody else wrote your CV for you. You can just avoid pronouns completely, as in the second example above: 'Strong leadership skills . . .', which makes your profile shorter. Do use full sentences and the word 'I' in your covering letter, however, as this gives warmth and a personal touch.

One retail bank advised, 'To say things like "I get on well with people" is meaningless unless backed up by example'.

Content of your profile

Say what you are doing now	Second year History student at the University of York . . .
Say what you're looking for	. . . seeking a summer internship in events management.
Match what they want	Publicity and events officer for the Asian Society, having successfully organised several large events.
• Core attributes and skills • Relevant achievements, experience, knowledge, training, qualifications or awards • What you enjoy doing: what motivates you	I take pride in all my work, thrive under pressure and love a challenge.

Exercise: now write your own profile

Write a profile for your CV in six lines or fewer. Follow the suggestions outlined above. Include a career aim and two or three strengths or achievements that are relevant to the job. Avoid writing about skills using such broad terms as 'communication' and 'teamwork', and using buzzwords!

Say what you are doing now.

Say what you're looking for.

Match what they want.

Education

Real quotes from student CVs

- I have a doable award in science
- I am doing a degree course in organic chemistry
- I am suspected to graduate early next year

The education section is more than just a list of qualifications: it can also show your ability to analyse information, solve problems, write effectively, plan and implement projects, and work without supervision. Normally, for a student or new graduate, education comes before work experience unless your work experience outshines your education but, once you've worked for a year or so, work experience will come first.

Education

BA (Hons) Business, Salford University, 2012–2015. Modules included:

Marketing 76%	Statistics 81%
Finance 58%	Law 59%
HR 67%	French 72%
Logistics 63%	Computing 66%

Final-year group assignment

Led a group of five students in planning and performing an experiment, analysing our results using SPSS software and making a presentation of complex information in a clear and concise manner, which gave me valuable experience in presentation skills and in time management. I learnt to communicate ideas and difficult concepts effectively, to write a report and achieve tight deadlines and achieved 81% for this project.

Canterbury High School, Canterbury 2005–2012

A Levels: Physics A, Chemistry C, Mathematics C

GCSEs: Eight, including Maths and English at grades A to C

You can summarise school qualifications as shown above, but mention important subjects, such as English and maths; you could list all of your grades if they are excellent. Put the highest grades first.

If your degree subject is relevant to the jobs you are applying for, then list relevant modules and grades: the more relevant your degree for the job, the more detail you should supply. A business student applying for finance might list many modules, but a history student applying for a similar role would simply give his or her degree title.

If you include a lot of modules, putting these into columns, as in the above example, looks smart and well organised, and makes the CV easier to read. However, it could confuse computer scanning software if it is sent to a large company or recruitment agency which uses this.

Projects or dissertations can give evidence for skills such as the ability to work independently, manage time, solve problems, give presentations and write

reports. Group projects may be the closest thing to real work in your degree, so mention the role you took and how you coped with problems such as a lazy group member. Also mention any relevant technical skills gained during your course.

Employment

Real quotes from student CVs

- Over summer I worked for an examinations board.
- Bartender for privet parties.
- As indicted, I have over five years analysing investments.
- Reason for living: Relocation.
- I am experienced in teaching marital arts including karate.
- I was responsible for terminating employees.
- I am a genital person. [Instead of 'gentle']

This section can also be called Career History. Work Experience is appropriate if you haven't had much paid work, but Employment is nice and simple.

You can attract the selector's attention to the most relevant experience by grouping entries for this category under appropriate headings. Work experience can be divided into **Relevant Experience** and **Other Experience** headings, allowing you to put relevant work experience before other experience on your CV, even if it's less recent. You could also use other headings such as Computing Experience and Legal Experience.

RELEVANT EXPERIENCE

Bull and Morebull Solicitors, Leeds, July 2014

Three-week placement with a partner in the property department of a general practice solicitors' firm. Carried out research into a boundary dispute, attended Court and observed interviews with clients.

OTHER EXPERIENCE

Part-time Barman, The Drunken Sailor, Leeds, Sept. to Dec. 2015

Worked under high pressure, especially near closing time, and learned to deal tactfully with inebriated clients.

One student wrote 'Relevant Experience' followed by

'Irrelevant Experience'!

Selectors want to see specific examples of relevant skills. Even working in a bar or restaurant can give evidence of ability to get on with people, to work under pressure and to work effectively in a team.

Write about skills you've gained in your work, such as the following:

- Teamwork
- Providing good customer service, for example showing tact when dealing with an angry customer
- Using humour to defuse a tense situation
- Selling, persuading or negotiating
- Exhibiting leadership
- Training, coaching, mentoring, motivating and giving feedback
- Using technical skills: computer skills such as spreadsheets, payroll or accounts systems and statistical, scientific and engineering techniques used in your work.

How often did you use these skills, and for what?

If your maths qualifications are weak, mention jobs you had that used maths or, for example, a successful statistics module. Most graduate jobs don't require trigonometry or algebra – just quick, accurate business maths: percentages and graphs.

Summarise addresses to keep things simple, for example

Burger King, Lincoln

Not

Burger King, 21 High Street, Lincoln, LN1 2SR

Try to keep all the details on one line. If the type of business isn't clear, say briefly what it does (accountants, international law firm, consultancy, etc.).

Don't criticise previous employers, or you could be perceived as a bad influence.

If you've done several similar routine jobs, it might be better to put these all together and then to state the skills you have gained afterwards. For example:

Part-time Waiter at Cafe Des Amis, Carluccio's, and Pizza Express during my degree (2013–2016)

In all of these jobs, I had to work in a busy team, sometimes under extreme pressure, and be positive and friendly with customers whilst providing a high-quality dining experience.

Volunteering experience may sometimes be more varied and substantial than that gained in paid work. It can come under 'Work' if you haven't had much paid work, or otherwise in the 'Interests' section.

Skills

The 'Skills' section normally comes after 'Employment', but if you have a skills-based CV, then this section may come earlier and be in more depth (see Chapter 5: 'Types of CV'). The skills typically included are computing, foreign languages and driving, but you can also give evidence for 'soft skills' such as leadership, teamwork and adaptability. The most important and relevant skills should come first, and you must give evidence of where you have used each skill. This section often works well in bullet-point format, with the name of the skill in bold at the start of the bullet, as shown below.

- **Spoken Communication.** Member of the editorial team for the University newspaper, which coordinated the sale of advertising space to local businesses.
- Sales adviser at B&Q: demonstrated knowledge of the different types of items sold and their uses, and responded effectively to customer queries.
- **Leadership.** As a student ambassador, I gave talks about university life to sixth form students, showed parents and potential students round accommodation and organised seating on buses between campuses.
- **Computer skills.** High degree of computer literacy with excellent skills using Microsoft Office, particularly Excel and Access.
- **Languages.** Good level of spoken French, basic Spanish.
- **Full, current, clean driving licence.**

If you speak any other **languages**, mention these, especially if you are applying for jobs which require language skills, and state the level to which you speak the language. A **driving licence** is essential for some jobs, such as sales executive, and useful in others. A good format is: 'full, current, clean driving licence'. In the United Kingdom, use the British spelling of 'licence' with a 'c', and not the US spelling, 'license'.

Computing skills are vital for many graduate jobs. MS Excel is one of the most common skills asked for by graduate employers, so if you are good at Excel, do mention this. Good knowledge of MS Office is sufficient for most jobs ('*Good working knowledge of MS Word and PowerPoint*'), but for a computing job, divide your skills into sections, for example:

- **Programming languages:** Java (three years' experience), C# (proficient), PHP (working knowledge), Python (basic knowledge)
- **Operating systems:** MS Windows 10, Linux
- **Applications:** Dreamweaver, Photoshop

Don't include outdated skills. One candidate who was struggling to get a job had included in their IT skills section 'Windows 95' which is the IT equivalent of saying you can ride a horse.

If you send your CV to a **CV bank** with thousands of CVs, selectors will find CVs by typing in key words, so mention relevant skills by name. See 'Applicant Tracking Systems' later in this chapter for more about this.

One student headed this section 'Working Kills' instead of 'Working Skills'!

Achievements

You don't necessarily need a separate achievements heading but it can suggest you can get things done.

The best way to write about your achievements is via a bulleted list. Items on the list should be short and to the point. Be concise, but make it clear what the achievement is: you can go into greater depth at interview. Put the strongest and most relevant ones first rather than using date order as dates aren't essential here. Go for quality rather than quantity: if you have more than six achievements, divide them into sections such as 'Academic', 'Sporting' and 'Awards', as long lists may not be read.

- **Designed and developed** a website for the caving club, with 400 page views each month.
- **Elected** 1st XI university hockey captain and led team on tour to the Netherlands, where we won every match.

If you have few examples of your achievements, you could combine this section with examples of leadership. If you can't think of any achievements at all, leave this section out and focus instead on relevant skills and strengths.

See Chapter 3: 'Analysing Yourself' for more help in identifying and writing about your achievements.



Interests

Real quotes from student CVs

- Extra Circular Activities' (should be 'Extracurricular': this mistake is very common).
- 'My hobbies include' – instead of 'hobbies'
- 'I played in a football team but I was not aloud to be captain.'
- 'In my spare time, I enjoy hiding my horse.'

One recruiter said that he read CVs starting from the end, as students' interests and voluntary work gave the best insight into their personality and how they were likely to fit the company culture.

It's better to show evidence of depth of involvement and serious commitment for a few interests rather than listing many superficial activities, or you may appear a 'butterfly' – someone who flits between activities without commitment. Long-term commitment to one activity suggests determination and dedication. Do, however, show a range of interests to avoid coming across as narrow: if all your interests are sporting, an employer may wonder if you could chat with a client with no interest in sport. Bullets can be used to separate interests into different types such as sporting, creative and artistic.

A recruiter for an environmental consultancy looked at the 'Interests' section of the CV first. If there wasn't evidence of outdoor interests such as sports or mountaineering, the candidate was likely to be rejected as they might not be comfortable in an outdoor role.

Don't make lists: 'Reading, cinema, sport' doesn't say anything useful, so give details of the level and frequency to which they are pursued and societies or achievements related to them.

Don't use clichés

Read Recruitment² surveyed over 300 UK employers on what they looked for when reading CVs and found that one third of the recruiters said their biggest pet-hate phrase was 'I enjoy socialising with friends', followed by 28 per cent who identified 'Good team player/good working in a team or as an individual'.

Competitive sports suggest you can work in a team and handle pressure, whereas playing a musical instrument to a high level shows commitment and perseverance, and if you have regularly performed in front of audiences,

it suggests you won't be fazed if you have to give a presentation. Similarly, acting in a play requires teamwork, working to deadlines and the ability to cope with pressure.

Examples of how to write about your interests

- As captain of the cricket team, I set a positive example, motivating and coaching players and thinking on my feet when making bowling and field position changes, often in tense situations.
- As a volunteer youth worker in Birmingham, I needed energy and imagination to deliver results. I prepared young people for youth parliament, helping to equip them with skills required to take up their role in society; this included organising a visit to Parliament.
- As part of my church choir, I organised a gospel singing night for the university Catholic Society. I planned the food, performances, venue and publicity. Ninety students attended, and we raised £230 for charity.

Mention any interests that are relevant to the job. For example, an anthropology student wanting to get into investment banking would increase her chances if her application showed evidence of relevant interests such as a virtual portfolio of shares. Similarly, membership of the Society of Young Publishers would signal a strong interest in a career in publishing.

Mentioning only passive and solitary interests such as reading, Sudoku and watching films may suggest you lack people skills. If you do include these, then say what you read or watch. Evidence of leadership, taking responsibility and initiative are important for many jobs: captain or coach of a sports team, course representative, chair of a student society or scout leader.

Unusual interests add 'sparkle' to your CV and provide a talking point at interview: skydiving, for example, can show you like to challenge yourself and can withstand pressure. Unusual interests also help you to stick in the recruiter's mind: 'Oh yes, she's the candidate who teaches belly dancing.'

When you are still at school, your interests will play a major part on your CV, but will gradually diminish with time. Relevant interests will still count, for example if you are a school governor and are applying for a post in education.

'Hobbies and interests offer a window to your personality. All good CVs have one thing in common; they make the employer want to meet the applicant in person. How do they do that? For one thing, good CVs often include a hobby section that sends a strong message to a potential employer, confirming that the applicant is the right type of person for the job. Many applicants don't pay enough attention to the hobby section, and that apathy can work against you. Like other CV sections, your hobbies must support the all-important goal of getting the interview.'

—Advice from Whitehall Recruitment

References

Most companies will take up references before they hire you, and these are normally taken up after interview or once the employer has decided to offer you the job. You don't need to include your references on your CV unless a requirement to supply references has been stated. You don't even need to put, 'I'm happy to supply references on request.' If you are short of space leave this out; it's obvious you'll supply referees if you want the job.

The referee should know you well enough to be able to write positively about you and should know you relatively recently; a teacher you last saw years ago won't be able to write about your recent activities.

You wouldn't get references like the following now because of legal constraints:

- 'Not so much of a has-been, but more of a definitely won't be'
- 'Sets low personal standards and then consistently fails to achieve them'
- 'Would be out of his depth in a puddle'
- 'This student impressed by her determination to do as little as possible'
- 'Of all the people I have met, she was certainly one of them'
- 'Should go far and the sooner he starts, the better'
- 'Has reached rock bottom and has started to dig down'

And how not to ask for a reference:

- 'Will you please be a referee for a job for which I am appalling?'

Normally, employers ask for one academic and one employment reference. The academic referee may be your tutor, but if a project supervisor or seminar leader knows you better, you can ask that person to be your referee instead.

Your employment referee is typically an employer from a recent job. If you lack a suitable employment reference, then you can use a character reference instead, for example a family friend, teacher or sports coach.

Ask your referees' permission, and tell them about the jobs you're applying for. Sending them your CV and, if possible, the job description as well will allow them to write a more informed reference. It's important to keep referees informed about your progress, and when you get a job offer, do thank them for their help.

Some international applicants include **testimonials** with their application.

These are open references given to the applicant by the referee to be used in any application, but are not greatly valued in the United Kingdom. There is no harm in including these, but the employer will still probably ask you for normal references.

How to write references on your CV

Include email addresses for your referees. Don't just give a phone number, unless your referee has said he or she prefers to be contacted by phone. Say what the referee's role is, or the recruiter may not know if your referee is a director or a cleaner!

Dr Wendy Woodhouse, Lecturer, Business School	Debbie Hackett, Store Manager, ASDA,
Durham University	Old Potts Way
Durham, DH1 3LE	Shrewsbury, SY3 7ET
ww999@durham.ac.uk	dh21@asda.co.uk

Example reference form

This is the type of form an employer might use to ask for a reference. These forms vary greatly, but it will give you some idea of the criteria you might be judged on.

Please rate the applicant on the following criteria:

	Strong	Average	Weak
Makes decisions on own initiative. Willing to do what is required to get the task done.	Taking responsibility		
Plans ahead and breaks down objectives into manageable tasks with clear goals.	Organising		
Can handle several tasks at once. Able to think and act quickly. Works well to deadlines.	Working under pressure		
Shows determination to continue even when things are going wrong.	Facing challenges		
Deals confidently with people. Influences via reasoned arguments.	Persuading		

Please comment on anything else we should consider (e.g. academic performance, integrity, personality).

How long have you known the applicant and in what capacity?

Action words

Certain active words in your CV and covering letter can give these additional impact and make a stronger impression. Instead of writing 'my work involved serving customers', you could instead write 'advising and helping customers and recommending products', which makes more impact. Which of the following paragraphs makes the better impression?

- For my final-year project, I had to carry out a survey of patients' attitudes to health care services for the elderly. This involved interviewing patients in hospital and in their homes. A database was used to keep track of data collected. This project was finished on time and was awarded a 2.1 grade.
- Devised and prepared a survey of patients' attitudes to health care services for the elderly as my final-year project. Interviewed 70 elderly patients and obtained a substantial amount of data. Created a database to analyse and interpret this material. Completed this project three weeks ahead of schedule and achieved a 2.1 grade.

The first paragraph contains a number of weak, passive verbs (in bold) whereas the second contains strong, active verbs (again in bold) such as devised and created suggesting a person who has initiative and takes action. The second paragraph also has the personal pronouns removed ('Devised' instead of 'I devised') which saves space and gives greater impact.

Leadership - Led - Managed - Supervised - Coordinated - Controlled	Creativity - Discovered - Designed - Devised - Developed - Created	Organisational - Planned - Organised - Improved - Integrated - Initiated
Influencing - Persuaded - Negotiated - Recommended - Resolved - Motivated	Common Action Words	Communication - Advised - Explained - Liaised - Summarised - Defined
Problem Solving - Investigated - Analysed - Assessed - Diagnosed - Evaluated	Presenting - Taught - Trained - Presented - Instructed - Represented	Success - Completed - Won - Achieved - Increased - Generated

Exercise:

Try writing your work or interests sections of your CV, or your covering letter, using action words.

Admissions advisers at the University of Hertfordshire drew up a list of words which make a good impression in applications. These included *achievement, developed, planning, active, impact and involved*. Words which made a poor impression included *always, awful, bad, fault, hate, mistake, never, nothing and problems*.

Applicant tracking systems

Some large companies use computerised applicant tracking systems (ATS) that analyse candidates' fit for the job by scanning submitted CVs for keywords. Systems such as EmployAStar use artificial intelligence to parse the CV text and extract important information such as employment, education and skills, which then populates a CV database. Keyword searches rank CVs in order of suitability for particular vacancies. If your CV contains the keywords the employer wants, you will be ranked higher in the search results. Recruiters may only view the CVs of highly ranked applicants.

Simplified Applicant Tracking Screen

List name C# Developers in Birmingham area 14.27 07.11.16
Keywords 'C#', 'Developer'

Name	Updated	Rating	Status	Email
Rini Patel	04.10.16	****	Contacted	rp312@mail.com
Dave Collins	19.09.16	****	Contacted	dc12@gmail.com
Janet Lim	23.10.16	***	No contact	j_lim@yahoo.com

Keywords are words and phrases that describe attributes of the person required. The software is programmed to pick these words out so the words used on traditional CVs are less important. For example, in the statement

'I design websites using HTML and JavaScript' employers would search on HTML and JavaScript rather than design.

Some candidates have tried hiding lots of keywords in 'invisible' white text to try to get their CV to the top rank, but this is of doubtful effectiveness!

Making your CV scannable

Applicant tracking systems typically accept MS Word documents, PDF, .rtf, .html and .txt files. Other formats may not be opened and therefore not viewed.

Write your CV so that it includes keywords from the job specification. Most candidates send their standard CV without any customisation, which increases the chance of rejection because it doesn't include the required keywords to qualify for review by a recruiter. Very few companies now scan paper CVs.

Describe your experiences with concrete words: 'Managed the team' rather than 'Responsible for running the team'.

How to format your CV for scanning

- Use standard fonts in 10 to 14 points size. Fancy fonts may not survive the scanning process.
- Use bold or capitals for headings.
- Avoid graphics, boxes, shading and underlining.
- Avoid multiple columns as text might be interleaved from different columns making it unreadable.

Overused words and phrases

Certain words such as **dynamic** and **motivated** are so commonly used in CVs and covering letters that, instead of coming across as dynamic and motivated, you are perceived as lacking in originality.

These words are called buzzwords. The problem with such words is that they are rarely backed up by evidence. Below are some of the most overused buzzwords used in LinkedIn profiles.³

results-orientated **passionate** **responsible** **proactive** **proven** **dedicated** **creative** **expert** **innovative** **positive** **motivated** **driven** **reliable** **strategic** **effective** **dynamic** **enthusiastic** **problem-solver**

Avoid jargon

The company O2 in a survey of recruiters for its 'Think Big' programme found that using too much jargon can make candidates up to 72 per cent less likely to get the job. The following ten phrases were the most overused.

• Able to take a helicopter view	• Road-mapping
• Shifting the paradigm	• Strong interpersonal skills
• Blue sky thinking	• Leveraging my skills
• Out-of-the-box thinking	• Critical thinker
• Results-orientated	• Dynamic team player

It's normally better to use a simple word which has the same meaning such as 'using' instead of 'leveraging'. Don't use a complex word where a short, simple one will do.

CVs may be read by HR staff who may not understand technical terms, before being passed to the recruiting manager, so avoid unnecessary jargon. Also avoid using initials unless their meaning is well known (such as BBC) spell out the full words if they are unfamiliar.

Professor Daniel M. Oppenheimer⁴ led studies on how language used can make you appear more or less intelligent. Researchers replaced shorter words in essays with longer words. Participants judged authors who used shorter words such as 'use' instead of 'utilise' as more capable and intelligent. The ease of processing information is strongly associated with positive qualities, including likeability, confidence, intelligence, and capability. Some graduates think that using long, complex words in applications will make them appear more intelligent but the opposite is true. If your writing is clear and simple, you will be viewed more positively.

Spelling and grammar

Spellcheck and then proofread your CV and covering letter and then give it to a friend to check again. Spellcheckers won't pick up 'form' instead of 'from' or 'sex' instead of 'six'! Grammatical mistakes are at least understandable, but spelling mistakes suggest you can't even be bothered to spellcheck your application.



If someone can't spell, they do not have the attention to detail we require in solicitors.

—Advice from a law firm

Exercise: spelling test

The following text contains at least 50 mistakes which have been found in CVs and covering letters. See how many you can spot. Although this is a humorous example, many of these mistakes do regularly crop up in applications!

Dear Sir or Madman,

I am sicking and entry-level position in public relations. I am suspected to graduate from my cause in orgasmic chemistry early next year and would like a salary commiserate with my experience. I would be happy to work in any part of England or Whales.

I am a conscous individual with grate written communication skills. I have a talent for working with commuters and I'm an acurate and rabid typist. I have lurnt MS Word computer and spreadsheet pogroms. I am also a prefecionist and rarely if it ever forget details. I have a proven ability to track down and correct errors and excellent memory skills, good analytical skills and excellent memory skills. I have an ability to meet deadlines while maintaining my composer and can communicate information in an interesting manor.

When I worked in retail for a stationery company my responsibility's included oversight of are department, money-laundering duty's, sock control, customer liason and severing customers. It gave me an incite into business I received a plague for salesman of the year. I was also an administrator in a busy office, had an annual fudget and was instrumental in ruining the entire operation. My reason for leaving their was maturity leave.

As indicted in my Curculum Vitea my extra circular activities at university include vox pox for student radio, for two conservative years which enhanced my verbal communication skills. My hobbits include martial arts and hiding my horse. I also own and maintain a volis wagon beatle. Formally, at secondary school I was a prefix and pier mentor.

I hope I have peaked your interest and expect to here from you shorty.

Miss S. Pelling

Here is the corrected version

Dear Sir or Madam,

I am seeking an entry-level position in public relations. I am expecting to graduate from my course in organic chemistry early next year and would like a salary commensurate with my experience. I would be happy to work in any part of England or Wales.

I am a conscientious individual with great written communication skills. I have a talent for working with computers and I'm an accurate and rapid typist. I have learnt MS Word computer and spread sheet programs. I am also a perfectionist and rarely if ever forget details. I have a proven ability to track down and correct errors, good analytical skills and an excellent memory. I have an ability to meet deadlines while maintaining my composure and can communicate information in an interesting manner.

When I worked in retail for a stationery company my responsibilities included oversight of our department, money-lending duties, stock control, customer liaison and serving customers. It gave me an insight into business and I received a plaque for salesperson of the year. I was also an administrator in a busy office; I had an annual budget and was instrumental in running the entire operation. My reason for leaving there was maternity leave.

As indicated in my Curriculum Vitae my extra-curricular activities at university include vox pop for student radio, for two consecutive years, which enhanced my verbal communication skills. My hobbies include martial arts and riding my horse. I also own and maintain a Volkswagen Beetle. Formerly, at secondary school I was a prefect and peer mentor.

I hope I have piqued your interest and expect to hear from you shortly.

Miss S. Pelling

Well done if you found over 50!

Quiz to test what you have learned

- What is the best heading for a CV?
A) Curriculum Vitae B) Your first name and surname
C) Your full name D) CV for [your name]
- UK Employers have no need to know your age, sex or marital status.
A) TRUE B) FALSE C) PERHAPS
- Your CV should include a personal profile or career aim.
A) TRUE B) FALSE C) PERHAPS
- You should not include any grades on your CV until you have actually obtained that qualification.
A) TRUE B) FALSE C) PERHAPS

5. You should only include education from about age 11 and above in the 'Education' section.
A) TRUE B) FALSE C) PERHAPS
6. You should give the complete name, address and postcode of your school, university and employers.
A) TRUE B) FALSE C) PERHAPS
7. You should always include a section on hobbies and interests in your CV.
A) TRUE B) FALSE C) PERHAPS
8. You should always give your tutor as a referee.
A) TRUE B) FALSE C) PERHAPS

Answers are at the end of the chapter

Finding out more

References

1. Van Toorenburg, M., Oostrom J. and Pollet T. (2015) 'What a Difference Your E-Mail Makes: Effects of Informal E-Mail Addresses in Online Résumé Screening', *Cyberpsychology, Behavior and Social Networking*, 18(3), 135–40. doi:10.1089/cyber.2014.0542.
2. Cheary, M. (2016) *What Recruiters Are Really Looking for in Your CV*, www.reed.co.uk/career-advice/what-recruiters-are-really-looking-for-in-your-cv.
3. Sharma, M. (2010) *Most Overused Buzzwords Used in LinkedIn Profiles*, <http://blog.linkedin.com/2010/12/14/2010-top10-profile-buzzwords>.
4. Oppenheimer, D. M. (2005), Consequences of erudite vernacular utilised irrespective of necessity: problems with using long words needlessly. *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, 20, 139–156. doi: 10.1002/acp.1178

Further reading

1. Harrison, M., Jakeman V. and Patterson K. (2016) *Improve Your Grammar* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave).
2. Peck, J. and M. Coyle (2012) *The Student's Guide to Writing: Spelling, Punctuation & Grammar* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave).
3. Truss, L. (2003) *Eats Shoots and Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation* (London, Fourth Estate).

Quiz answers

1. b. Your first name and surname
2. TRUE. Although the first two can normally be guessed at!
3. PERHAPS. This can be useful but needs to be informative, factual and focused on the job in question.
4. FALSE. You can list any grades you have obtained until the present. It is often helpful to note your predicted degree class, and your grades will provide evidence to support this prediction (i.e. Upper Second [expected]).
5. TRUE. Education up to age 11 is not normally expected on a CV.
6. FALSE. This overloads recruiters with unnecessary information. Only include full addresses and contact details for yourself and your referees, and summarise other addresses.
7. FALSE. It is not the hobbies themselves which are important, but the way you present all the relevant aspects of your achievement and experience. Do not get hung up on this.
8. TRUE. Students and new graduates are normally expected to give the name of a member of academic staff as a referee, but this doesn't have to be the person formally assigned to you as a tutor if you prefer to use another academic who knows you well, such as a project or dissertation supervisor.

Well done if you got seven or more correct!