

Making your CV look good

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What will you learn from this chapter?

You will learn how long your CV should be, whether to go for a one-page or two-page model and when a longer CV is appropriate. This chapter also shows you how to make your CV look attractive and easy to read by careful use of layout, fonts and formatting. Visual impact is important: if your CV looks unprofessional, it may be discarded at first glance.

How long should your CV be?

One-page CVs

If 50 people applied to a vacancy, and each CV took ten minutes to read, it would take the recruiter more than eight hours – a full working day – to read them all, assuming this person did no other work!

Research at the BI Business School¹ found that employers may spend as little as 45 seconds skimming a CV before branding it ‘not of interest’, ‘maybe’ or ‘of interest’. In such a short time, one-page CVs hold an advantage. Employers who receive many applications, such as investment banks, management consultancies, media employers and law firms, may prefer a single-page CV as they have many CVs to review. Single-page CVs also work well for speculative applications, which need to be concise to persuade the employer

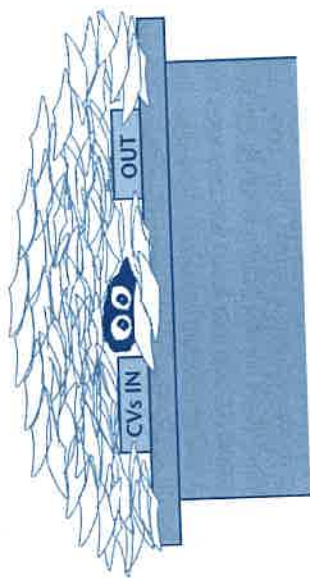
to read them. A CV is an appetiser: you should leave something for the interview rather than giving the recruiter indigestion.

Blaise would have written a shorter letter, but I didn't have the time.

—Blaise Pascal, mathematician, physicist and philosopher (1623–1662)

Surprisingly, one-page CVs can be much harder to write than longer CVs as you must make every word count, but they do show that you can write concisely – an underrated and important skill. It also shows you appreciate that the recruiter is busy and doesn't have much time.

Single-page CVs work well when they contain lots of single-line bullets. Everything should be focused on the job you are applying for; consider every word, and discard all those that don't add value.



The Presenter's Paradox: quality over quantity

Studies² suggest that students believe that giving extra information in their CV will strengthen their case, but don't appreciate that selectors may adopt an 'averaging' approach, and the extra information may instead dilute their CV. Less can be more: you need sufficient information to impress, but not so much that the important information is diluted by irrelevancies.

Two-page CVs

Two-page CVs are the most common for British students. The most important information should go on page one, as some recruiters may only read the first page if they have many applicants.

Try not to leave a lot of white space at the end of your CV. A full one- or two-page CV suggests that you have more to tell the recruiter, but don't want to go onto an extra page, whereas a CV that finishes halfway down a page suggests that you've run out of things to say about yourself: you have nothing more to offer. A solution is to leave extra lines between sections, which improves readability, and to increase font size and margin width.

One-page casual work CV

James Joyce

47 Moon Road, Bath, BA38 8PQ 07766634669
email: jj@gmail.com

OBJECTIVE

I am seeking restaurant work over the summer in Bath and am available for work any time from June to September. In previous jobs I have demonstrated organising skills, a sense of responsibility and the ability to perform under pressure. I am able to relate to a wide range of people, as proven by my varied work experience.

WORK EXPERIENCE

Waiter, Money Penny Restaurants, Bath, July–Sept. 2014

Meeting and greeting customers, dealing with their enquiries, maintaining hygiene and ordering stock. Also took phone bookings and orders. I learnt about working both on my own and with others, and about working calmly under pressure, and greatly improved my communication skills. I learned to use my initiative to handle stressful situations.

Client Assistant, Eastern Rail, Chelmsford, June–Sept. 2013

Developed my customer service skills so that the public felt at ease when asking for assistance with their travel arrangements. Maintained a calm and positive demeanour, even when dealing with angry passengers from delayed trains.

Other jobs have included housekeeping, and temping in a factory.

SKILLS

- **Providing excellent customer service** in customer-focused employment
- **Teamwork:** I enjoy working in both team environments and independently
- **Fast and proficient IT:** I am proficient with MS Word, Excel and PowerPoint.
- **Full, clean driving licence**

Interests and Achievements

- Captained the school hockey team that won the Essex Schools Cup.
- Organised many events at school, including a party for the elderly and a scheme for providing help to first years for any difficulties they were facing.
- Assisted teachers by helping pupils with classwork and tutoring small groups.

EDUCATION

BA Honours English Literature 2:1, University of Bath, 2013–2016

Gold School, Chelmsford, Essex, 2006–2013

- 2013 A Levels: English Literature: B, Classics: B, Russian: B
- 2011 Ten GCSEs (A–C) including Mathematics, Double Science and French

This CV is targeted at summer restaurant work but, with small changes, could also be used for shop, pub or casual office work.

1. A clear, well-written objective can help you to stand out from the crowd. Avoid hackneyed phrases such as 'I have good communication skills and work well in a team'. Being prepared to work hard and to do almost any task are key attributes for casual jobs.
2. Normally, students put their degree before work, but for casual work during your course, evidence of relevant work experience and skills are of greater importance than the academic knowledge gained on your degree.
3. If this student were applying for a professional job, he would leave out routine tasks and duties, such as unloading, shelf restocking, cleaning and photocopying, but for casual jobs it's important to show your willingness to carry out mundane tasks.
4. If you can show you have useful skills and experience that can be put to good use from day one, you will be at an advantage over other applicants.
5. If you've done other routine jobs that aren't relevant, such as fruit picking or a factory assembly job, you could just summarise these as shown here. They provide more evidence that you are prepared to work hard and are adaptable.
6. Relevant interests and achievements give further evidence of people skills and taking responsibility.
7. Only brief details are given of academic qualifications, as they are not particularly relevant to the job.
8. French and mathematics GCSEs are mentioned. The latter shows numeracy, and the former may be helpful in serving the many tourists Bath gets.
9. No references are supplied at this stage. You only need to supply references when the organisation you are applying for asks you for them.

One-page investment banking CV

John Keynes

23 Danegate, York, YO1 3GA 07700900416 jk368@york.ac.uk

EDUCATION

BSc Economics

University of York 2013–2016

Predicted degree class: First, having achieved a First in Years 1 and 2

Including: Statistics 88%, Maths 91%, Financial Accounting 76%, Quantitative Economics 68%, Macroeconomics 71%, Financial Analysis 66%, Computing 75%

Cranley School,

Bedford 2005–2012

International Baccalaureate 2012 40/45 (top student in year).

Highers: Maths 6, Physics 6, French 7

GCSEs 2010: 10 GCSEs grades A–C, including English and French

EMPLOYMENT

Internship in Mergers and Acquisitions, HSBC, London June 2014–Sept. 2015

- Drafted due diligence summaries for private equity auctions
- Researched qualitative and qualitative information from a range of sources
- Delivered a presentation to clients on developing strategy to improve participation and engagement through technology

• Analysed financial and economic data for a report for future investment decisions

Team leader at residential camp, Brighton

August 2014 (2 weeks)

- **Responsibility:** looked after a group of nine secondary school children
- **Leadership:** motivated, inspired and acted as a role model

- **Assertiveness:** analysed situations to prevent problems in advance

Volunteer in Australia

Sept. 2012–June 2013

- **Communication:** fundraised by approaching people for donations
- **Adaptability:** worked in various teams. In the Cook Islands integrated different cultures by organising activities and games

SKILLS

- **Computing:** highly competent in Excel, Word and PowerPoint
- **Languages:** good spoken and written French, Japanese at JLPT N5 level

Interests and Achievements

- **President of University of York Investment Society:** ran a virtual portfolio that gained 25% in a year
- **International Maths Olympiad** 75% (class 1)
- **Travel:** have travelled on five continents and enjoy adapting to new cultures

This is a typical CV for investment banking. It packs a lot into one page and focuses more on achievements and responsibilities than on tasks and duties. Good presentation is important for all investment banking roles, but especially in areas such as Mergers and Acquisitions, where the work involves making a great many presentations.

1. **You don't need** the words 'address', 'phone number' and 'email address' as it's obvious what these are, and they just waste space.
2. **Education.** If you are still at university or left recently, your education should be at the top. If you don't give your academic results such as A-level grades, recruiters will assume they are poor. They will, however, be irrelevant once you have worked for a few years.
3. This student has done the **International Baccalaureate**, which is liked by many employers because of its focus on language skills and its rounded nature.
4. **Employment.** Say what the companies you worked for did, if this is not clear. Include locations. Mention products, departments – provide context. Think about challenges faced or any value you added.
5. **Include any achievements:** give numbers if you can ('portfolio that gained 25%'). Give dates and provide months as well as years if needed; for example, Dec. 2014–Jan. 2015 is very different from 2014–15.
6. Evidence of experience of other cultures can help for investment banking because of its cosmopolitan nature.
7. **Skills:** keep this simple – mainly languages and technical skills.
8. List several strong **achievements** which are quantified.

Two-page science placement CV

Rosalind Franklin

22 King's Road, London NW17 3YU rf@gmail.com 0779005678

PROFILE

Second-year biology student keen to complete a laboratory-based internship this summer. Combined studies with work and other commitments, showing myself to be self-motivated and committed to achieving my goals. Demonstrated organising and problem-solving skills and capacity to take responsibility.

EDUCATION

BSc Biology predicted 2:1 University of Kent 2014–2017

Subjects included:

1st Year	2nd Year
Metabolism	Pharmacology
Molecular Biology	Physiology
Physiology	Gene Expression
Chemistry	Infection and Immunity

Practical skills gained during degree

Preparation and identification of nucleic acids, bacterial isolation and cultivation, immunoassays, spectroscopy, enzyme assays, protein purification, gene cloning, gas chromatography, HPLC, western blot analysis, and DNA and RNA extraction.

Research Project: 'The Effect of Molecular Chaperones on Yeast Prions'. Required that I work methodically and pay close attention to detail in order to achieve accurate results.

St. Paul's Girls' School, London 2007–2014

A Levels: Chemistry B, Biology A, Maths C

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

1. A large font size for the name makes it stand out and easier to find in a pile of CVs.
2. Note how the address, email and telephone number are on one line. You don't need the words 'address', 'email' and 'phone' as it is obvious what these are. Use a sensible email address.
3. A profile or objective can be useful, particularly if you are sending your CV to recruitment agencies where a letter may not be required. However, it isn't essential as this information can be included in a covering letter.
4. Subheadings such as 'Education' and 'Work Experience' can be larger than the body font to stand out.
5. The use of tables to list modules looks smart, suggests an organised person and makes the CV easier to read. You can add your module marks here if they are good. First-year modules are given with results, and second-year modules are just listed, as exams haven't yet been taken for these yet.
6. Modules and practical skills help to sell your degree. If you have a job description that lists technical skills you've used on your course, make sure these skills are mentioned in your CV, and research any you have not used. Employers may do keyword searches through CVs for specific skills such as HPLC or Excel. However, if you were going for a job that didn't involve lab skills, you could leave these out.
7. Projects are very important if you're looking for research work, as they are the nearest you will have come to doing real science work. You could sell the skills you had gained here:
 - Ability to work independently
 - Manage your time
 - Solve problems
 - Working in a team (for group projects)
8. A Levels on one line and summary of GCSEs to save space

WORK EXPERIENCE

Part-time Sales Staff

Next, Croydon

Sept. 2012 – Feb. 2013

Working in a busy store, dealing with customers giving high-quality customer care and ensuring sales targets were met. I was responsible for my own section and built strong, positive relationships with customers and staff.

Work Experience

Guys Hospital, London

July 2011

Shadowed a doctor in her clinics and helped patients.

Other jobs have included factory work and a paper round which involved getting up at 6 a.m. in rain or shine!

SKILLS

- **Problem-solving.** Continuous problem-solving exercises given as assessments, which required mathematical analysis and evaluation
- **Teamwork.** Have successfully undertaken various team projects within both academic and non-academic environments.
- **Communication.** Advised customers at Next, and responded effectively to customer queries. Developed knowledge of the different types of items sold and their uses. Delivered many presentations as part of assignments and projects on my course.
- **Computer skills.** Advanced user of Windows 10, MS Word, MS Excel and Access.

INTERESTS

- Organiser of RAG events, working in a team to plan and organise charity events, risk assess events, and liaise with venues.
- Peer mentoring: help new students settle into University life by meeting them in small groups to discuss any anxieties they may have.

REFEREES

Francis Crick,

Lecturer, School of Biosciences,
University of Kent,

Canterbury, Kent, CT2 7NJ

fc777@kent.ac.uk

01227 764000

Tina Watson,

Manager,

Next, High Street,

Croydon, CR1 5RU

tw@next.com

020 8777 5555

9. Although these are not science jobs, **transferable skills** are mentioned here. For example, people skills, teamworking skills, and communication skills are all valuable evidence that you could employ these in a science setting. Sometimes we see CVs from students with science and technical degrees which have no evidence of people skills at all: you wonder if, when they are sitting next to a friend, they text rather than talk with the person!
10. If you have done a lot of jobs, you can **summarise the more routine jobs** rather than filling your CV with lots of irrelevant information.
11. More evidence of relevant skills, focusing on some of the core competencies needed in science jobs. Notice how the skill is in bold at the start of the bullet to explain what it is about. This is a good place to use Action Words such as 'advised', 'developed' and 'delivered'.
12. **IT skills** are important: be specific about which programs you have used, rather than saying 'good IT skills'.
13. Show a range of interests, and focus more on social and active rather than solitary and passive interests. Serious commitment to at least one activity can be viewed favourably, as will evidence of getting on well with other people, for example in team sports. Independent or challenging holidays or foreign travel can also look good. Sell your transferable skills here: evidence of leadership, responsibility and communicating.
14. Normally you would give one academic referee (tutor or project supervisor) and one employment referee. Provide their job title and make sure you include their email address and phone number so they can be contacted quickly if needed.

CVs of more than two pages

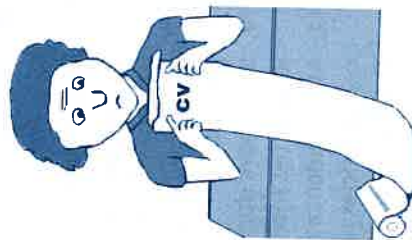
Graduate CVs in the United Kingdom are normally no more than two pages in length but CVs for PhD graduates applying for postdoctoral research and lecturing posts can be much longer as they contain publications, conferences attended and teaching experience (see Chapter 9: 'Academic CVs').

CVs for highly experienced professionals can also be longer, but a new graduate should rarely require more than two pages.

A survey by CareerBuilder³ found that 22 per cent of employers would reject candidates with CVs of more than two pages.

Keep related items together

There are certain design principles, called the Gestalt Principles of Grouping, which are relevant to CVs. One of these principles says that things that are close together belong together, so related information in your CV should be kept together. For example, education and qualifications are best grouped together under an 'Education' heading rather than under separate 'Education' and 'Qualifications' sections so the recruiter doesn't have to cross-refer.



Boxes and lines make the CV look crowded

Don't centre all the text.

One employer received a CV in which the text was entirely centred like this.

Her first thoughts were that she had been sent a restaurant menu.

However, another graduate got a job in a top restaurant by designing her CV to look like a menu!

Keep the formatting simple: if you have lines between sections, boxes, shading and tables your CV can look cramped. They also waste space, especially a rectangular box round the whole CV. Boxes may also confuse computer CV scanners. Tables with invisible borders can, however, allow modules or references to be neatly aligned in columns.

Blank lines make a better divider between sections, the white space giving a cleaner, more spacious look.

Alignment of text

The eye tends to scan down the left-hand side of the CV (unless the CV is in Hebrew or Arabic), so put headings and subheadings on the left rather than in the centre. Place the job title and employer before the date, as these are more important. In 'Education', put degree subject, then university and then date. Emboldening the job title/qualification and employer/college, as shown below, makes the content easier to read.

Waitress, Pizza Place, Croydon, July to Sept. 2015 Responsibilities involved . . .

BA Hons History (Upper Second), University of York, 2013–2016

Modules included . . .

Turn off justification of text (the justified text symbol is shown ringed to the right). Although justification gives a neat right edge to the CV, if you only

✗	✓
Education	Education
University of Birmingham, 2013–2016 Lincoln College 2011–2013 City School, Lincoln, 2006–2011	LLB Law, University of Birmingham, 2013–16 Lincoln College 2011–13 A Levels: Law B, Art B, History C
Qualifications	City School, Lincoln, 2006–11
LLB Law: Upper Second Class A Levels: Law B, Art B, History C GCSEs: Nine, including English A and Mathematics B	GCSEs: Nine, including English A and Mathematics B



have a few words on the line, it can lead to large gaps between words, as shown here.

Page margins

The standard MS Word setting of 2.54 cm for margins leaves room for the recruiter to write notes in the margins if the CV is printed but, if you are short of space, the 'Narrow Margins' setting in MS Word gives a 1.27 cm margin. This is the minimum you should use, as smaller margins risk text being cut off if printed or photocopied.

To save more space, use single line spacing (1.15 spacing looks smart).

Bold, italic, underlining and UPPERCASE

Underlining and UPPER CASE were used on typewriters for emphasis before the **bold** and *italic* styles became available. **Bold** and *italic* are much better for drawing the eye to key words and phrases, but use them sparingly.

Descenders and **ascenders** may be technical typographic terms but are important in affecting legibility. **Descenders** are the tails below letters. **Ascenders** are letters where part of the letter extends above the body.



Underlining words makes letters with descenders underneath harder to read, by cutting through the tails. Underlined words might also be misread if your CV is computer scanned.

UPPER CASE LETTERS lack the descenders and ascenders which increase legibility. This is why, in most countries, motorway signs no longer use just capital letters.

Which font should you use?

Don't use more than two fonts as this can look unprofessional. Stick to the conventional fonts suggested below, unless you are applying for graphic design jobs and wish to show off your knowledge of typography.

The choices for fonts are **serif** fonts, such as Times New Roman, which have curls on letters, called serifs, and **sans serif** (from the French 'without serifs') fonts, such as Arial, which lack tails.

Serif fonts

Some writers suggest you use Times New Roman or similar serif fonts for your CV. The 'Roman' fonts may not go back quite as far as ancient Rome (they originated in the fifteenth century) but they do look rather old-fashioned and might suggest that you are traditional in approach. Serifs alter the outline of letters, making them less legible for students with dyslexia or visual impairments. They also reproduce poorly on old monitors, which have lower resolutions than printed text.

Serif fonts have tails (circled).
Sans fonts don't.

Sans serif fonts

Most CVs are now initially read on screen and, as serif fonts don't read so well on screen, websites rarely use them. The BBC uses Arial and previously used Verdana, both sans fonts, as they are simpler, clearer and more modern in appearance. Google also use Arial. In the United Kingdom, two new sans typefaces were specially designed for use on road signs, as these must be quick to read.

Sans Fonts
This is Arial
This is Calibri
This is Verdana
This is Tahoma
This is Trebuchet
This is Lucida Sans
Serif Fonts
This is Times New Roman
This is Georgia

Fonts may be substituted when viewed on different computers, so choose a 'web safe' font which looks the same on any system. These include:

- Serif fonts: Georgia, Palatino, Times New Roman
- Sans fonts: Arial, Helvetica, Lucida Sans Unicode, Tahoma, Geneva, Trebuchet, Verdana

One study⁴ found Verdana to be the most preferred font as it reads quickly and is legible, and Times New Roman was least preferred. Another study⁵ found that of 12 common fonts Tahoma was the quickest to read. Tahoma and Verdana were both designed for Microsoft for readability on screen and of the two, Tahoma has narrower letters and tighter spacing. Verdana is excellent if you have room for it, but Tahoma and Arial are more space efficient. If you prefer a serif font, try Georgia, which was designed for clarity on screen.

One font to avoid is Comic Sans: it looks a little childish and is inappropriate for CVs.

A student submitted his CV in 14-point Comic Sans font (like this). The recruiter said that it looked like it had been written by an eight-year-old.

Font size

The font size is expressed in 'points', referring to how big letters are.

18 points is a good size for your name at the start of the CV.

14 points works well for subheadings such as 'Education' and 'Interests' making it easy to pick out the main CV sections.

10 points is a good size for the normal body text of your CV in most fonts; it is big enough to read easily whilst conserving space. It is too small, though, in Times New Roman.

One study found that people using particular typefaces or smaller font sizes (within reason) were perceived as more intelligent: perhaps because a large font size reminds us of the way children write.

Colour

A classic dark colour, such as dark blue or burgundy (dark red) for your name and subheadings adds visual interest and makes subheadings quicker to distinguish. Dark colours also photocopy clearly.

The Gestalt Principle of Similarity says that the mind groups similar elements such as form, colour and size together, so CV subheadings such as 'Education' and 'Work' should be in the same font, font size, style and text colour, and bullets should be of the same size and shape.

Only make very limited use of colour: one student had a CV with white text on a black background which, apart from looking strange, might use up all the black ink in the printer when printed.

Bullets or paragraphs?

Bullet points

Our brains love lists. They process lists more efficiently and retain the information with less effort. It's easier to extract the key points from small chunks of information as these are easier to read.

Using bullet points on your CV can help you to write shorter, more concise and focused sentences that will grab the reader's attention. A concise CV is one that gets straight to the point; you don't want the person reading your CV to lose interest.

—Advice from Whitehall Recruitment

Bulleted lists divide information into short, distinct items and appeal to our tendency to categorise. They hold our attention better and allow concise, dynamic sentences. Bullet points and CVs go together like bread and butter, allowing recruiters to quickly pick out relevant facts.

Use proper bullets such as round dots or squares. Bullets come in many styles, and unusual bullets might confuse scanning software.

- Circular or square bullets look more professional than

– dashes or
* asterisks.

- Proper bullets have the left hand text vertically aligned as shown here

– Incorrect bullets have a ragged edge as shown here

Long lists of bullets look boring, so limit the number of bullets in a list to about six. Try not to bullet every section of your CV, as having some sections bulleted and others in paragraphs adds visual interest.

Paragraphs

Paragraphs express complex thoughts and allow your personality to come through better than bullets. They allow more detail, nuance and depth of information, and demonstrate your writing skills better, but do take longer to read.

Keep paragraphs to a maximum of seven or eight lines as recruiters may skim over paragraphs longer than this. Instead, divide long paragraphs into several shorter paragraphs or use bullets. Don't let a paragraph or bulleted list spread over both pages of a two-page CV as this reduces readability.

Humanities students often use long paragraphs in their CVs, whereas students studying scientific and technical degrees tend to prefer bullets and short sentences!

Exercise: Hold your CV at arm's length

- ☐ Is it clear and easy to read?
- ☐ Does it have a pleasing, professional appearance, or does it look cramped, and overloaded with too much content?
- ☐ Are the main sections, such as 'Education' and 'Work', easy to pick out?
- ☐ For the job you are applying for, write down the key skills needed (see Chapter 4: 'Researching jobs and employers'). Then look at your CV for just 20 seconds to see if this information jumps out at you. If you can't pick it out quickly, then neither will the recruiter be able to.

How not to format a CV

Hilary Potter

Tel. 01234 123456

12 Flagstone Terrace, Manchester, MM1 7RG

Experience

June–July 2015 Hayes Insurance, Office Assistant

Working in a busy office

- clerical work, answering phones and entering information on database
- Liaising with other departments and arranging delivery of items

Jan.–May 2014 Waitress – Peggotty's Restaurant, York

Took orders and served food and drinks to customers at tables in the dining room. Checked with customers make them feel welcome and comfortable and to ensure that they were enjoying their meals and took action to correct any problems. Gave out menus and took orders for food and drink. Prepared drinks and desserts, helped with washing up and cleaned tables. Took payments and gave change. Sometimes responsible for opening up and closing the facility.

YORKIST – UNIVERSITY MAGAZINE WRITER/CRITIC

- Including cover article of summer issue with detailed research and work to deadlines

June 2015 Director of The Rocks: production for degree

- Adapted for an outdoor performance

- Planned and led rehearsals

- Edited the sound and bought costumes

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EDUCATION

2014 - 2017 University of York BA (Hons) History

2010 - 2014 Bosworth High School, Manchester

A Levels
9 GCSEs

History – A

English B

Maths – B

1. Name and subheadings should be in larger font size to stand out.
2. Bold and italic are great for emphasis, but for a few words only.
3. Turn off justification of text to avoid strange text spacing.
4. Underlining can look old-fashioned and is less legible, especially under letters with descenders.
5. Avoid long, dense paragraphs with too much detail. Also the font and font size have changed here.
6. Upper-case words are less legible.
7. Use proper bullets rather than dashes, which don't wrap correctly here.
8. These are proper round bullets, but don't mix up bullet types in one CV.
9. Double-spaced lines waste space and look inconsistent here.
10. A blank line is needed between school and university, for clarity.
11. Boxes and lines make the CV look busy.

Finding out more

References

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