

Your CV

Your CV is not a comprehensive listing of every single fact about yourself. It should be tailored to a particular type of work or type of employer, stressing the facts that are most relevant to the job you want. If you intend to apply for completely different types of jobs, you will need to develop more than one CV, each with its own emphasis. In order to successfully target your CV it is essential to know exactly what skills, experience and personal qualities the employer is looking for. If this information has not been provided on the job advert or on a person specification you will need to undertake some research to ensure that your CV has the right focus.

GETTING STARTED

There are many different ways to write an effective CV, so do not feel you have to create it in one particular style. Experiment until you are happy that your CV gives the relevant details in a clear and persuasive way.

CONTENT

- Use positive language and adopt a confident tone.
- Don't just list facts. Add some comments and interpretation, such as evidence of the skills you have acquired from your various jobs. This could take the form of a short paragraph or you could use short phrases, each on a separate line and introduced by a bullet point (•).
- Your most relevant experience and skills should be the most prominent and on the first page. This will encourage the employer to read on.
- Avoid bland and overused statements. Instead of: *'As course rep for my year I developed good communication skills when liaising with academics.'* Try: *'As course representative for my year I gained confidence in presenting ideas orally and learnt how meetings work.'*
- Present your information in reverse chronological order unless an alternative format works better for your experience.
- Use more space if the topic is important, for example, do not take a separate line for each of your GCSEs and then take only a couple of lines for your degree.
- Take care with dates. Make sure every year is accounted for. Employers may think you are hiding something if they see too many gaps.
- You will probably need two pages to give enough information to capture an employer's attention. Do not use any more than that. Use two separate sheets of paper rather than one sheet printed on both sides.
- Put your name in a header or footer on the second sheet in case the two become separated.

LAYOUT

- Your CV should look neat and tidy with all the information easy to find. Use headings such as **EDUCATION** to make it easy for the employer to find the information they are looking for. Most employers

will expect a CV to be laid out in a conventional way. Others, such as those in creative areas of work might like one that looks more unusual.

- Use CAPITALS and **bold print** to separate out different sections. Underlining is probably best avoided as it can give the CV a rather old fashioned look. Do not go overboard with special effects; use them sparingly.
- Avoid using tables and boxes as these tend to make a CV look cluttered.
- Use the tab key (rather than the space bar) to indent information to create a neat effect. Placing the dates on the left hand side, with the rest of the information 'tabbed' in a few centimetres, is often an effective way of setting the information out neatly and makes the details easy to pick out.
- Use a good quality paper and a printer which produces a clean output. White paper is usually best. Sometimes light shades of other colours can be attractive, but avoid bold or fluorescent colours.

FINALLY

- Compare your CV with a job description for the work you are applying for. Have you shown you have developed the skills the job needs?
- Remember that a CV should give evidence, from your past experience, that you have the skills to carry out the job to which your CV is targeted.
- Give your CV a final check:
 - Is it neat and tidy, and pleasant to look at?
 - Is it clear and logical, so that the information is easy to find?
 - Are the spelling and grammar correct?
- Get a friend to look at your CV and give you a second opinion. Arrange to see a careers adviser who may be able to suggest improvements.
- Remember that your CV will need a covering letter to introduce yourself and summarise the main points which you hope will attract the employer. See the leaflet in this series on *Covering Letters* for further advice.

MAIN SECTIONS IN A CV

Most CVs have the following sections:

Personal details

This will usually consist of your name, address, telephone numbers and email. It is not necessary to supply information regarding your age, nationality and gender. However, including your nationality can be a good way to inform the employer of your eligibility to work in a particular country. You can also include work permit details for this reason.

Career profile

Only include a profile if you can say something very specific about yourself and experience. Avoid generalisations such as 'dynamic team player'. Profiles

should be about four sentences long.

Education

List:

- details of your university education
- A-levels (or equivalent) with grades.

Rather than writing out all your GCSEs (or equivalent), note the number attained. However, if certain GCSEs are required for the job you wish to apply for then list details of these.

If the work you are applying for will make direct use of your subject, give full details about your degree. You can include an overview of the degree as a whole; a list of relevant courses you took; a description of a final year project, dissertation or other important feature.

If you are applying for work where your subject is not relevant, you do not need to go into so much detail. Instead, you could concentrate on the general skills you have acquired such as computing skills, working on a team project, coping with a high workload, having to argue a case in class and so on.

Work history

There are various ways you could list the jobs you have done:

- reverse date order (the most recent first)
- divide your work experience into categories according to relevance to the job or industry such as, 'Media-related' and 'Additional'
- group similar jobs, for example 'administrative' and 'retail' together, even if they happened at different times, summarising the skills you gained after each section.

Employers are often interested in all of the work experience you have had (paid and voluntary), particularly if it shows you have general qualities which they value, such as the ability to work in a team, lead a team, be in charge of a project, meet deadlines, work under pressure and take responsibility. Consider mentioning exactly what it was about the jobs you did which developed skills such as these, for example:

'Worked under pressure to convert 20 telephone calls per day into completed market research questionnaires, involved good immediate rapport building and tenacity.'

Additional skills

Employers are often interested in specific skills you have acquired, such as:

- foreign languages
- computing languages or packages
- keyboard skills.

Try to give specific details, for example about your level of proficiency in foreign languages, degree of familiarity with computer packages and so on.

Interests and activities

You could include:

- leisure activities and interests such as sports, music,

cultural activities

- membership of clubs and societies
- positions of responsibility
- travel.

Do not just list your interests; show how they developed qualities the employer will value.

Leisure activities, particularly organised ones where you took a major part, can develop the same general qualities as work experience. Employers often look at extra-curricular activities in order to find evidence of the personal qualities they seek, particularly when they are assessing new graduates who have not usually had the opportunity to develop these qualities in a work environment. Mention the level of achievement you have reached and specific things you have done in order to indicate your commitment.

Referees

CVs are usually two pages long which should give you space to include full references if you want to or are asked to. If you run out of space it is perfectly acceptable to write 'References available on request'.

Generally speaking, two referees are enough. Choose people who can comment on different aspects of you. Only give three if there is another person whose opinion you feel the employer really needs to hear. At least one referee should be your tutor or a lecturer who knows your academic work. The second would ideally be from an employer; otherwise it could be a professional person who knows you well in a personal capacity. Seek your referees' permission first. Give them a copy of your CV and covering letter and an indication of the sort of work you are applying for. This will help your referee to judge the sort of comments which will interest an employer and hopefully portray you in the best light.

FURTHER INFORMATION

- www.careers.lon.ac.uk/sortit includes a section on assessing your skills and one on looking at CVs from an employer's point of view
- www.prospects.ac.uk/links/appsinterviews
- *How to Write a Curriculum Vitae*, The Careers Group, University of London, 2006
- *Making Applications*, Graduate Prospects, CSU Ltd, 2005

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