

HOW TO WRITE A CV

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INTRODUCTION

WHY CVS ARE IMPORTANT

You're applying for a job, and have been asked to supply a CV and cover letter. Or maybe you're applying speculatively - sending out CVs and letters to people you think may have a job to offer. Or perhaps, you're uploading a CV to a vacancy-matching website.

In each case, the CV (and letter) will be the means by which an employer gets to know you. It's your passport to a first meeting with that employer. As such, it's acting as a sales document, an advert that is selling you, with your unique set of skills and attributes. It'll sit on a recruiter's desk, or in their email in-box, giving someone an idea of who you are and whether you're right for their role.

A CV is a crucial piece of evidence. It must capture the recruiter's imagination and give them a picture of you. You need to make it easy for them to match what you can offer with what they need for their role, so that your application doesn't sit on the 'maybe' pile and certainly not on the 'no' pile. With some work and an understanding of what they're looking for, your application should be able to head straight for the 'yes' pile.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Use this book as a reference point when you're designing your own CV. There is no one right way to compose a CV but we've gathered together good and bad examples, explained what employers are looking for, and suggested ways round some tricky issues. Don't use the examples as absolutes: they are here to offer you some pointers as to ways you might develop your own version! You are unique and your CV must reflect that.

Remember that the advice offered here is for UK CVs. Recruitment is done in different ways in other countries and you should seek advice about how to tackle CVs for use elsewhere. Remember too that everyone thinks they are an expert on CVs: if you approach more than one person for advice on your CV, you'll get more than one answer on how to do it. But we hope that by using this book, you'll gain a better idea of the recruitment process so that you are well prepared to use your own judgement and discretion on how best to present yourself to future employers.

Good luck!

STARTING OFF

So, you know you need to write this document. You're sitting there with a blank screen, trying to figure out what the CV actually is. Where do you start?

CONSIDER THESE STATEMENTS:

Your CV should be a structured summary of your relevant skills, achievements and experiences. It should be a resumé of what you have to offer an employer. It should provide information about the potential you have to develop.

If you've seen a job description or person specification, it should also be your response to what the employer has said they're looking for.

Notice that we've not said a CV is a 'list of everything you've done'. Sure, you must make sure that you've supplied information about most of your life, but it must be done in a structured and critical way.

YOUR AUDIENCE

This document may be the first impression that the employer has of you. By making it immediately relevant to their needs, you're going to be exciting their interest, leading hopefully to an opportunity for you to impress them even more by meeting them at interview. Your audience is crucial. Don't write your CV totally from your point of view. You may be most proud of one particular piece of work experience you had, but miss out or dismiss without detail something you consider more mundane that actually is more useful to the potential employer. This is specially true of things like shop or bar work - just think of all the useful skills you're developing in those high-pressure customer-focussed environments!

You need to be able to stand outside yourself, to be quite strict in analysing what you've done, and then get creative in using dynamic words and phrases to describe it.

WHAT DO I PUT IN?

We're looking at three different things here:

- the duties you actually performed,
- the skills you developed from them,
- and the evidence you can provide to back up your claims.

A CV offers a snapshot of who you are. Think about the first page of a book - it either **holds your attention** or it doesn't. It is important to remember that it is not just about the qualifications you hold, but also about the type of person you are. A CV needs to keep the interest of an employer and make them want to have a conversation (interview) with you. To do this, you need to think about how you can **differentiate yourself** from the field and make sure these elements stand out on the page.

Tamaryn Dryden, Credit Suisse

A CV has essentially only one purpose: to make me, the reader, want to interview you. Therefore, it has to be **targeted to my position**. It has to reflect the fact that you meet the required criteria in terms of capability and qualifications in a manner that is quick and easy to read.

Andrew McLaren, Smith & Williams

The theory goes that if you've got this skill now, you should be able to build on it in a future job role. If you haven't, you'll need to provide evidence for some kind of 'ability to learn or adapt'. Your Careers Adviser can help you to think through the skills you've acquired, from study or work.

You will need to take time to understand individual employers' needs and adapt the information you present accordingly: one CV will not do for every application. You'll be prioritising or highlighting different duties, experiences, skills and evidence depending on the job you're applying for. Once you've been in the world of work for a bit, don't forget to update your CV with the new duties and skills, checking that the previous ones are still relevant and you're not repeating yourself.

THE EMPLOYERS' PERSPECTIVE

This section is about the people who will be reading your CV: who they are, what they want, and how you can persuade them to see you.

Essentially you are trying to provoke a reaction in the reader, to get them to think or feel or do something and in this instance, to be excited enough by your application to put you on the 'yes' pile, not the 'maybe' or 'no' piles.

All documents, whether postcards, essays, business reports or screenplays, are written with the reader (or more likely, readers) in mind. The closest parallel is writing a sales letter or a piece of marketing literature, where the prize product is you.

WHO READS YOUR CV?

Before sitting down with your application, ask yourself: who will read my CV? The likely possibilities are:

- Internal HR professional.
- Third party service provider such as a recruitment consultant or head-hunter.
- Future Line Manager.
- Future Line Manager's PA.
- General Office Manager.
- Retired Director or Non-Executive Director.

If you can't find out, don't worry. Assume that your CV will be read by both those who run the recruitment process, usually HR, and those who have 'the problem', ie the unfilled vacancy, which is usually a Line Manager. Make sure that you've covered areas that both sides are interested in.

WHAT DO THEY WANT?

Each of these potential readers has different perspectives, but they are united by a common purpose: they all want to make a good hire. Hiring staff is expensive in time and money - one leading national IT employer revealed recently that it cost about £3000 to employ each person onto its graduate stream - and even for small employers, there is a cost in terms of advertising and staff time in sifting and then interviewing. Recruitment can be stressful and unsettling for existing teams. Your task is to make it simple for the employer.

WHAT ARE THEY ASSESSING ME AGAINST?

Employers will usually have a clear idea of the job description for the role and you will probably have received that as part of an application pack. If not, then the advert should give you some clues as to what the job will include. More sophisticated employers will have devised a 'Person Specification' for the job: a document that details the competencies or skills that the person doing the job needs to have. Again, you may have received this as part of the pack. Both these documents are vital in giving you the clues as to how to match your skills and experiences with what the employer is looking for. If you haven't got either a job description or person specification, then see what you can glean from the website or advert, or even find out if it's possible to have an informal discussion with an employee about what the organisation would be expecting.

[In a good application] the student has targeted their CV to **highlight** the areas which are relevant to the role. This does not mean inventing material or lying about their **experience**. [They should] focus not just on technical skills but try to **demonstrate** soft skills in their experience/action.

Daniel Lawton, Nortel

HOW DO THEY DO IT?

The reader of your CV will first and foremost be checking that you have fulfilled the most basic criteria for the role, that you have at least some of the skills they are looking for. Then, they will be checking your experiences for signs that you have the potential to shine in their organisation. Some organisations literally use tick boxes to match off potential employees against their skills requirements. You must help them by demonstrating clearly and, crucially, with good evidence, that you have considered their needs and understand what they are looking for. Hiring staff should be a forward-looking experience for the organisation: show them how you can help them!

WHAT TO INCLUDE AND WHAT NOT TO INCLUDE

Even though each CV is unique, there are some sections that you must include. Read this in conjunction with the section on Adapting your CV.

PERSONAL DETAILS

These usually go right at the top of page one and, with clever word-processing, needn't take up too much space. You don't need to write 'Personal Details' or 'CV'.

Diana Clark
1 Winton Avenue, London, SW12 0NO
Tel: 020 8123 4567 Mobile: 07789 123456
Email: dclark@kcc.ac.uk

Strictly speaking, name, address, email and phone numbers are all that is necessary. Ensure that it is obvious how to contact you if you have different term time and vacation addresses; include dates if necessary.

Date of birth is optional and not necessary, particularly in the light of new anti-ageism legislation. Do include your **nationality** if there is any possibility that employers would query whether or not you have the right to work in the UK. Ensure that your visa status is clear. You might want to include **Gender** if your name isn't sex specific, e.g. Alex, or if your name is foreign or unusual, but this is by no means essential and entirely up to you. Similarly, it isn't necessary to indicate your **marital status** or to mention any dependents unless you particularly want to.

TOP TIP: If you need help formatting this section, you could use a Table in Word.

EDUCATION

Usually, your education would come next, particularly if you are applying as a current or very-recently graduated student. If you are a more mature person with extensive work experience, it might work better to concentrate on your work history instead.

Your most recent education comes first: the employer is far more likely to want to hear about your time at university than the detail of your GCSEs.

What do you say about your degree/post-grad course? It does depend on how much is relevant. If, for instance you are aiming at a job where you need certain technical or academic knowledge then make it perfectly plain that you have this. If it's appropriate, list courses and give marks. It could be worth thinking about listing just the higher grades. For more general graduate roles, steer clear of overkill: the reader may not want to hear about the use of topography in Thomas Hardy's novels or your experiments with dead pondlife in the Mendip Hills.

Queen's College, University of London 2004-2007 **BA Geography Expected Grade 2.1**

My degree has dealt with the impact of human beings on the environment with my final year options including:

- *Regional Economic Development in the UK.*
 - *Economic and Social Development in the Third World.*
 - *The Effect of IT on post-industrial economies.*
- In a major final year project, I studied the attitudes of London East End residents to the increased growth of refugee numbers within the local community.*

Skills gained include:

- *Compiling a comprehensive questionnaire.*
- *Analysing around 200 responses using complex computing and statistical techniques.*
- *Time-management in ensuring the project completed on time to be incorporated into a larger study.*
- *Adapting my communication styles through working with different community sectors.*
- *Negotiation and persuasion through asking people to participate in sensitive discussions.*

Purley High School for Boys 1999-2003

*A levels: Geography (A), Maths (B), English (B).
GCSEs: 12 including English and Maths at Grade A*

TOP TIP: There is no need to put the full address of the university, college or school, but a hint as to its location might be handy. For instance, you may want to "place" Royal Holloway in Egham or your old school in a particular town.

In all cases, you should work hard to figure out the key transferable skills that you learned from your course: you will have expended a lot of time and effort on it and you should extract as much as possible from it! On the previous page is an extract from one CV demonstrating how best to make use of your degree:

Always give your actual or expected class of degree and don't think that "second class honours" will disguise the 2.ii. If there is a genuine reason for a less-than sparkling degree, sum it up briefly: "Disappointing result due to illness in final year". If you were close to a First or 2.i, list the overall mark.

Be brief with GCSE results but ensure that you tell employers you have the grades and subjects they are looking for. Conversely, you should note all your A level (or equivalent) grades. If they were good, employers need to know this. If not, leaving them out doesn't fool anybody.

CAREER OR EMPLOYMENT HISTORY

Jobs should be put in reverse chronological order, just as the education section was ordered above. Employers will be looking for candidates who have taken the time to match up their own abilities with the employers' needs, as outlined in an advert or person specification. A good way to structure these sections is to separate out the actual duties you performed as part of your job from the skills you learned from doing the duties. Ensure that you can back up your claims to have particular skills with good examples and demonstrable results.

You don't have to keep your jobs in this order, though. It could work to put jobs under titles such as 'Relevant' or 'Additional Experience' which would cover periods of voluntary work, placements or internships. See the Adapting your CV section for more help with this.

However, if you have done many jobs and are applying for something in perhaps a different sector, you may like to think about ordering your jobs according to the skills learned.

From April 2007 - present: Technician, process research laboratory at Inco Acton, London, a precious metal refinery.

Main duties:

- Carrying out experiments in the laboratory for a project aiming at decreasing the quantities of nitrogen oxides emitted.
- Writing reports.
- Sharing results with rest of the Technical & Development team through monthly oral presentations.

Skills gained:

- Managed to obtain interesting experimental results and to present them efficiently to colleagues and supervisors.
- Used patent information to set up experiments.

December 2006 - March 2007: Technician at Inco Acton

Main duties:

- Taking samples at different stages of the production.
- Recording the weight of the bulk in preparation for the stock take.
- Laboratory research work.

Skills gained:

- Adapted quickly to the different tasks given and to the different teams.
- Worked efficiently and communicated well with process operators, research chemists, area supervisors and managers.
- Kept paperwork up-to-date to ensure it would be ready by the stock take.

July and August 2005: Sales Assistant, Coffee Shop, Camden High Street, London

Main duties:

- Till keeping, taking orders, making and serving hot drinks.

Skills gained:

- Worked under pressure: reacting quickly and appropriately to customers' demands.
- Acquired diplomacy skills; communicated well with sometimes difficult customers of all nationalities.

This mature student has identified the skills she believes are necessary in a management accountant's role, and applied her background to them, giving examples from her own life as well as previous work. This section would come on page one of her CV, with details about her jobs and education, interests and so on, on the second page.

RELEVANT SKILLS

Numeracy:

- *Self employed - responsible for own book-keeping, accounting and financial planning.*
- *Theoretical approaches to number developed in mathematics degree, including mathematical models, economics, statistics.*
- *Managed clients' property accounts as an estate agent including calculating rent increases, advising on market rates.*
- *Juggled mortgage payments and other necessities with grant and part-time work.*

Communication:

- *Liaised effectively between clients and tenants serving both interests.*
- *Negotiated with suppliers and bank managers whilst self-employed.*
- *Built sound relationships with customers.*
- *Listened to others' needs as a Student Liaison Officer.*

Analysis and decision making:

- *Advanced maths work has developed my perseverance to solve complex problems.*
- *Thinking on my feet, making effective decisions when running a business to solve the unexpected.*
- *Considering a range of options to maximise clients' returns from their properties.*

Managing change:

- *Effectively changed computer lab access times in my role as Student Liaison Officer.*
- *Adapted fully to university life, making friends with students of all ages and cultures.*
- *Travelled extensively thriving in new surroundings.*

Information technology:

- *Regularly use Windows NT.*
- *Advanced Excel, Word and Access through using spreadsheets for clients' properties and working on various databases.*

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Below is a job advert from Oxford University Press, followed by CVs from two different candidates. Each has chosen to approach their application in a different way but both have focussed extremely carefully on the skills required for the job. Reading the advert:

Oxford University Press Are you ready to make a difference?

*Law Marketing, Academic Division
Product Marketing Assistant, Police and Crime Sector.
Based in Oxford for the first 6 months, there after Oxford or Baker Street, London*

Salary range: c£18,000

Our Law Marketing department is looking to recruit an effective Marketing Assistant who can help take the strategic marketing of our Police and Crime lists to the next level.

Preferably with some law background and experience in publishing, you will assist in our innovative marketing campaigns and activities to grow sales in a competitive marketplace. Reporting to the Marketing Manager in this sector, you will need to demonstrate your marketing and research skills, together with an aptitude for successful relationship building within the law field.

To succeed in this role, you will ideally need:

- *Experience in publishing and knowledge of the professional law field.*
- *Creative marketing skills in devising effective marketing initiatives.*
- *Project management skills; a methodical and thorough approach and a keen eye for detail.*
- *Excellent communication and interpersonal skills.*
- *Analytical and problem-solving skills.*
- *A degree.*

Please send your CV, cover letter and salary details to our HR Dept. OUP offers excellent benefits including final salary pension scheme, 25 days' holiday, subsidized staff restaurant, 50% off OUP books, season ticket travel loans, and flexible start/finish times.

Words to focus on: effective, strategic, innovative, 'some' law, 'experience' in publishing, marketing and research skills, successful relationship building. OUP has obviously decided they want someone reasonably dynamic, who understands a bit about the legal publishing world but is prepared most of all to commit their enthusiasm and imagination. **Note carefully all the skills they are looking for.**

In compiling your CV for this job, you would need to ensure you were using similar language and show you'd really understood what OUP means. Take your experiences and analyse them for their relevance and the priority they should be given in terms of space on your CV.

• Sinnita has kept the CV heading simple and it looks clear and professional.

• Although a personal profile can often be quite bland, Sinnita has used this one to explain why she is moving away from law. It also highlights the key marketing achievement of her career to date so that an employer would keep on reading to find out more.

• As her law background is obvious, she hasn't used up space listing all the modules.

• Here she has analysed her degree to determine which skills she learned from it are relevant to the role, using the job description.

• A-ha! She has selected her most relevant experience to go first, acknowledging that her other experience is not relevant and that an employer will notice this.

• She has split the duties she undertook for this campaign, from the skills she developed from it. Neat bullet points keep it to the point and relevant.

• This is the really important part of the CV. Sinnita has taken the skills from the job description, shown how she has developed them, and then put in a crucial piece of fact to back up her statement.

Our first candidate is Sinnita Akram, a law student keen to move into marketing. She presents herself using a traditional, experience-based format, successfully glossing over her lack of actual paid work experience in the area through her careful analysis of the competencies she's gained from various different areas.

SINNITA AKRAM

55 Beauchamp Place, London, SE5 8RP

Tel: 020 8666 7777 Mob: 07789 192030

Email: sinnita.akram@hotmail.com

PERSONAL PROFILE

Soon to graduate in Law, I plan to build on the experiences I have gained within and outside my degree to develop a career in marketing. A major achievement during university was to increase profits for the Law Society ball, principally through achieving better ticket sales and good sponsorship arrangements.

EDUCATION

2006-2009

BA Law, Regal College, University of London

Modules studied: all compulsory modules for entry to the legal profession

Skills gained:

- Understanding of the legal world, through working with professional lawyers who taught on the course.
- Research and project management, through ensuring my 5,000-word thesis 'Intellectual Property: the Aborigines and the Da Vinci Code' was researched, written and delivered on time.
- Excellent and well-tested analytical skills, developed through the system of defending my legal opinions during seminar discussions.

2003-2005

Nottingham Sixth Form College

'A' Levels in English (A), History (B), French (B)

1997-2003

Green Lane College, Exeter

10 GCSEs including Maths (A*) and English (A*)

RELEVANT EXPERIENCE

Oct-Dec 2006

Marketing Officer, Law Society Christmas Ball 'Bah Humbug!'

Duties included:

- Ensuring all 600 tickets to the ball were sold at full price.
- Creation of effective marketing campaign.
- Raising profile of Law Society within Regal College.
- Creating on-going relationships with sponsors.

Skills developed:

- Web design and better understanding of use of technology in developing marketing campaign. I successfully created a brand and images associated with the brand which I uploaded to the Law Society website and used in email and text messaging of all students. Informal evaluation showed that students recognised the 'Bah Humbug!' brand even if they had not bought a ticket.
- Excellent negotiation skills. I improved the previous sponsorship total raised from £15,000 to £34,000 through targeted approaches to law firms. I followed up these approaches with personal contacts and was pleased when the law firms chose to send representatives to the evening. These contacts will be of continued benefit to the Law Society.

- Team-working is not a skill shown on the job description, but by detailing it on her CV, Sinnita shows she understands that the job is likely to be part of a small team. She has even suggested one way she works to improve teams.

- Here, she shows that she understands that 'communication skills' means more than just chatting to her colleagues.

- Although this experience is not directly relevant to the marketing role, it provides good background which Sinnita has exploited.

- She has quantified how well she uses IT packages so that the employer has some idea of her level of skill.

- Just beware the web address is current!

- Rather than just put 'reading' she has given enough detail to be interesting and show commitment.

- Eye for detail: I proof-read all marketing materials, from press releases, ticket information and web material, through to the on-the-night programme. This resulted in fewer mistakes and meant we kept to the print deadlines.
- Team-working through dealing with the rest of the committee. I found the most important element was keeping everyone involved and informed.

Sep 2005 - Aug 2006 Intern, Booksmart Charity, London

Duties included:

- Gained administrative experience in a busy children's book charity which specialises in getting children's books published through working with publishers, authors and public libraries.
- Assisting in organising children's book launches; booking catering, equipment and assisting on the day.
- Worked on database and produced reports from it for management team.

Skills developed:

- Excellent communication through working with many different sorts of people, from children and parents, to library policy teams etc.
- Analytical ability improved through working on database reports.
- Understanding of the main movers in the publishing industry and factors involved in the success of books.

ADDITIONAL WORK EXPERIENCE

Jun- Jul 2007, Intern, AB&O LLP, Chancery Lane, London

Duties included:

- Four week-long 'seats' in commercial, property, contract and tax.
- Taking notes during client meetings.
- Administrative duties.

Skills developed:

- Awareness of workings of international law firm, such that I became more confident in addressing solicitors and partners about legal issues.
- Importance of good presentation and correct forms of communication with clients.

TECHNICAL SKILLS

- Familiarity with all MS Office packages; I produced my thesis myself using Word, incorporating Excel spreadsheets and using images. I used Access at Booksmart.
- Good knowledge of Dreamweaver: see www.rcl.ac.uk/lawsoc/BahHumbug for demonstration.
- Good conversational knowledge of French and German.
- Clean driving licence.

INTERESTS

- I am a keen reader of classic literature and a founder member of a small book club.
- I sing in a chamber choir performing in venues such as St John's Smith Square and the Royal Opera House Linbury Studio.

The second candidate is more mature and has chosen to present her experiences promoting her skills rather than focusing on the short-term jobs she's held.

Amelia Morales

39 Stroud Green Avenue, Bodlington, BR3 9LK
020 8111 1234 a.morales@arn.ac.uk

- Amelia has addressed each of the skills asked for in the job advert. ▶

- By putting in some figures about her achievements, it makes it more real and proves her effectiveness. ▶

- The fourth point demonstrates a certain amount of creativity which is asked for in the advert. ▶

- This shows she has thought through what 'project management' actually means and demonstrates how she has learned the skill. ▶

Marketing Skills:

- Set up and developed Access distribution list to send regular mailings to Arnedale alumni, resulting in a 10% overall increase in attendance at events.
- Assisted in designing campaign to encourage membership of alumni society.
- Carried out market research project to find out what services were required by alumni. Involved designing and analysing questionnaire, achieved 25% response rate.
- Actively promoted Salsa club to reach a wider audience offering discounts to local businesses.

Project Management Skills:

- Organising annual alumni event involved planning strategy six months in advance, prioritisation of tasks such as booking venue, speakers and catering. Ensuring expenditure kept within budget.
- Managing production of quarterly alumni magazine, co-ordinating contributions, liaising with printers.
- Set up salsa night in local bar. Negotiated terms, planned lessons, worked out pricing and advertising strategy. Increased numbers attending by approximately 10% per month in first year of operation.

Communication and Interpersonal Skills:

- Interviewing people for magazine required good listening skills and ability to represent people's words in writing.
- Excellent service skills, establishing ongoing relationships with bookshop customers.
- Negotiating deadlines and work with writers and other professionals at New View, needed to be firm but diplomatic.
- Working closely with editorial team at New View publishing taking responsibility for own workload and clearly communicating progress to team.
- Persuading companies to advertise in alumni magazine. Ensuring these relationships were maintained to encourage repeat adverts.

Analytical, research and problem solving skills:

- Analysing data from market research questionnaire qualitatively and quantitatively (using Excel), using data to assess changes needed to current events and activities.
- Good research and analytical skills developed through law degree.
- Continually research both new companies to approach for advertising and competitor activity on salsa scene.
- Creative problem solving, finding new ways to increase book sales in light of competition from internet book sites.

- You could question why 'publishing skills' isn't top of her list as it is in the job advert, particularly as using this format means that the jobs she's undertaken are kept to the second page. ▶

- Amelia should have provided more detail on these job roles, particularly the legal book-selling, so that we had some context for the skills she has listed. ▶

- Her law degree, which provides much of her relevant law background, needs to be highlighted a little more. ▶

- Putting your referees' details down is fine, but sometimes you may need the space for more info on your jobs. ▶

Publishing Skills:

- Knowledge of legal publishing from sales work with Chancery Books.
- Dealing with administration of publishing contracts and royalties at New View Publishing.
- Developed knowledge of whole publishing process.
- Gained insight into marketable books through reading manuscripts.

Employment:

September 2005 - Present

Communications Officer, Arnedale University, Kent

August 2004 - August 2005

Administration Assistant, Arnedale University, Kent

December 2001 - January 2004

Bookseller (Part-time). Chancery Books, London

October 1997- September 2000

Editorial Assistant, New View Publishing, Cambridge

May 1995 - October 1997

Office Assistant. New View Publishing, Cambridge

Education:

September 2001 - June 2004

LLB (Hons) 2:2, Balcombe University, London

September 1993 - June 2004

OCR Diploma in Office Administration, Newman College of Further Education, Stockport

September 1991 - June 1993

8 GCSEs, Grades A-C, Widemore School, Stockport

Additional Information, Interests and Activities:

IT Skills: Word (advanced), Access, Excel (intermediate), QuarkXpress, Photoshop (working knowledge)

Travel: Working holidays in 1994 (Europe) and 2000 (Australia) undertook causal jobs, fruit picking and bar work.

Salsa Teacher: Set up and run club in a local bar.

Referees:

Ms A Goldberg (employer)
Director of External Relations
Arnedale University
Kent
KT1 4ML

Dr G Bradley (tutor)
Senior Lecturer
Law Department
Balcombe University
London
NW2 8UK

a.goldberg@arn.ac.uk
01457 344 566

g.bradley@bal.ac.uk
020 7000 1256

Which way to go? It does depend; your experience may fit either style more easily. The first, traditional, style may come to you more readily and more employers are used to seeing CVs written in this way, which, if you're trying to make it easy for them to understand, may be a good thing. However, the skills-based route may well be a good starting point for people with a more chequered career history. Do both and see which works best for you!

REFEREES

It's usual to provide just a couple of references, but if you felt that a third added an extra facet to your experience, you could give up to three referees. For recent graduates, you'd normally name an academic contact; for those who have worked, the current or most recent employer is normally listed. Of course, you may not want your present boss to know that you are planning to leave in which case you might say that "References can be provided on request". You could also use this phrase if space is at a premium.

Always supply the full name, job title and company name, and address: some recruiters may still prefer to use postal mail as opposed to email or phone.

It is not usual to include so-called 'testimonials' or open copies of general references from previous employers or tutors with an application.

Remember to ask permission before you give out their names. When you are talking to them, give an idea of what the job is so that they know what to concentrate on in their reference.

TOP TIPS: Try to use referees who are relevant to the job(s) for which you are applying.

TECHNICAL SKILLS

It's quite common to include a short section on your IT skills, whether or not you have a full, clean driving licence or even if you have a First Aid qualification. People often include their level of ability in languages too. This section can be a useful round up of all the skills that don't quite fit into any other part of the CV, but the general rule of 'keep it relevant and provide evidence' still applies.

DATES

Don't try to include actual dates down to the very day you started or left college or a particular job. But, do

try to be as specific as you can about the months as it makes it easier for an employer to figure out where you were when. There is a debate about whether or not to put dates on the left hand or right hand side of the information: generally it is much clearer and easier to read if they're on the left hand side, separated out.

LAYOUT, FORMAT AND BRANDING

We're assuming that people will be producing CVs on pieces of A4 paper; stick to this assumption for most areas except perhaps the specialist art and design field where a more creative approach may be desirable. Some people do create electronic CVs - mini websites where potential employers can take a look at their work - but on the whole, most employers like to read physical CVs and file them away so they need to be reasonably standard.

Therefore, do look carefully at your CV. Don't forget that the whole aim is to put the recruiter in the right frame of mind to read the document for long enough to be interested in it and put you on the 'yes' pile. Think about the use of space, margins and use of bold and italics, bullets and underlining. If in doubt, keep it simple. If you are being more creative, then think about how the presentation of the CV will affect the way recruiters will view you (your 'brand') and be consistent across your cover letter, CV pages or website.

Font: you don't have to stick slavishly to Times New Roman - copy your text into another font and see how it looks. Tahoma and Arial are clean modern fonts and easy to read. Ensure your font is easily readable by most PCs in case you want to send your CV by email; and make sure you stick to a single font rather than having varied ones which can look unfocused and messy. Incidentally, size matters: don't go smaller than 11 point.

Photo: not strictly necessary and may encourage some employers to discriminate. More acceptable in the media than for more regular professions.

Graphics: may be a good idea if you if you are trying to sell your creative skills, but not if it compromises or crowds the actual text. Graphics may not photocopy easily.

Paper: use a good quality paper that can easily be photocopied. Similarly, make sure you only use black ink that can copy well and use only white or cream paper.

Page numbers: think about the recruiter photocopying hundreds of CVs for different interviewers and one page going down the back of the copier! Ensure your name and 'page one of two' are inserted in a footer at the bottom, just in case.

TOP TIP: If you're going to be emailing your CV, try to ensure you stick to very standard margins and fonts so that your document stands a chance of arriving at an employer's in-box in a similar state to how you designed it. Check it out by emailing it to a friend (or even yourself) to see how it turns out. Do things like putting in the page break using Ctrl+Enter so that it's embedded into the formatting. You could consider putting the document into .pdf format so that it arrives in one piece, though if you do, check the employer has software that can read the document.

OPTIONAL EXTRAS

Personal profile

This is a statement that offers a brief overview of your skills and ambitions, and it would usually fit between your personal details and the education section. Think carefully about including a profile as they can often come across as bland and rather generic: "I am a hard working graduate with good communication skills" or "Jo Smith will be an asset to your organisation." However, a profile could work particularly well to explain your thinking if you are changing career direction.

For artists' CVs, a short, unpretentious statement is vital, to explain your philosophy and work. Medical CVs often include a brief Career Plan providing some idea of how you see yourself developing in the medical world.

If you are going to include a profile, keep it short and think about using bullet points to encourage the recruiter to keep on reading:

- A Law graduate with five years' experience as a City solicitor.
- Seeking to use research and analytical skills in the conservation sector.
- Has started voluntary working as a gardener for a Wildlife Trust.

Achievements

Although this is an important section for artists or actors to use to sell themselves, it's possibly not so much of a priority for other sectors. This is where you'd list your shows and awards, for example. But, for other people, don't include anything pre-sixth form unless you were an infant prodigy and won a national tennis tournament at age 14, for instance. Dwelling on school successes may highlight the lack of them in later life. If you do have a lot to say in this category, divide it up under relevant sub-headings e.g. Music, Sport.

Profiles are best kept short and **to the point**. Profiles can be very useful if they contain information **specific** to the individual applicant. Be careful not to use this space to write a list of generic skills (communication, teamwork, determination). Use the space to make the recruiter remember your application and tell us something unique about yourself.

Lucy Walton, Bloomberg

A recruiting line manager reviewing a CV can be put off by a generic profile which does not fit with the **actual attributes** required in the specification.

Hobbies and interests

If all you can say is that you like reading and going to the cinema, it's probably best to say nothing at all (you don't have to include a hobbies section). Leave out any mention of "socialising with my friends": recruiters will interpret this as partying, clubbing and hanging round pubs, which may not be the impression that you want to give. There is an example of how you might structure these interests in a useful way later on.

Use this to make your application **stand out from the crowd**, sell yourself and your experiences. There is not much point telling a recruiter you like to swim/play tennis etc, unless you can use it to demonstrate other qualities like dedication to achieving a goal. Relate everything on the CV back to the job you are applying for.

Lucy Walton, Bloomberg

The hobbies section is a way of demonstrating the type of person you are and what you enjoy. This section is a great opportunity for you to **illustrate your personality** and to make your CV more three-dimensional. Add facts that will make people curious about you and want to speak to you further. Think about when you meet people for the first time and what you would tell them about yourself. Qualify as much as possible - courses taken, accomplishments in that field or levels and grades achieved.

Conferences attended, publications, electives etc

CVs for academic posts are slightly different from others in that you do have space to write more fully about yourself and should include as much as you can. Medical CVs would need to include detail about the electives and Special Study Units you've undertaken. Do seek help from a Careers Adviser if you're embarking on such a CV for the first time. However, the advice given throughout this booklet still stands: the contents of your CV must be targeted, relevant and specific to the post you're going for.

WHAT YOU SHOULD DEFINITELY LEAVE OUT

Inappropriate email addresses

Email addresses that are for your friends' eyes only. Your lagerlad78@hotmail.com is fine for your friends but isn't going to look great to a prospective employer. Create a new one.

Negativity

Don't use soft words like 'tried', 'disappointed' and 'maybe'. Instead use proactive, strong words such as 'achieved', 'developed' and 'created'. Some of your achievements may have come out of a negative situation, but you need to turn this into a positive. For example, instead of saying 'My predecessor had left the business in a mess and I turned things around' you could say 'I used my initiative to introduce several new measures and projects that would enhance the performance of the business.' In short, always focus on the positive: no employer wants to hire someone they think has a negative approach.

False information

Lying about your results or your employment history may get you to the interview stage, but it's unlikely to get you any further. Interviewers will certainly ask you for more details about the information on your CV, so it will soon be obvious if you've lied. What's more, even if you did somehow slip through the net but were rumbled later on, employers are legally entitled to withdraw their offer. Stick to the facts!

Mistakes

Check, check, and check again. Check, double check, triple check and if in doubt get a friend to check. Many

employers will discard CVs if they spot a spelling mistake or grammatical error - remember, if they've got hundreds to go through, they'll be looking for ways to filter them down.

Facts only you think are important

Keep your focus and ask yourself if what you're including is relevant to the job and the employer. If it's not relevant, think about ways you can make it appear so (sometimes you need to think laterally). If you can't make it relevant - leave it out. For example, you may have had lots of short-term café jobs which, if listed out separately, would look quite piecemeal and confusing. It may be better to conflate these under one 'various customer service jobs' heading and then listing with examples the very valuable skills you would have learned from them all.

With the use of the advanced *spelling and grammar* checkers available in MS Word there is no excuse for spelling *mistakes*. Some grammar mistakes are allowed from students whose first language is not English but otherwise it is very off putting.

Lists

A long list of duties or course modules is not going to make you stand out. Employers want to know about you, your skills and your achievements - they don't want a job description or course outline. However, it's fine to mention duties or courses that are of particular relevance or that highlight a particular skill.

Spelling is ... important. I've had numerous letters or e-mails from applicants saying their *ambition* is to be a journalist, but spelling 'journalist' completely wrong. Or saying they'd like some work experience at The Guardian and sending the application to me at The Independent. Careless mistakes are just not acceptable in an industry where *fact checking* and excellent spelling is essential.

Lesley Wright, The Independent

ADAPTING YOUR CV

By now, you'll have realised that the 'One-CV-Fits-All' approach isn't going to work. You need to adapt your CV to the different jobs you're aiming for. Below, we show you some ways of how this can work in practice.

THE CV FOR A JOB WHERE YOU HAVE RELEVANT EXPERIENCE

Here the fact that you know the role or the sector may be the key element. You are probably going to want this relevant experience to be as prominent as you can make it.

Perhaps you are applying for a job in theatre administration. You have experience in a theatre but that was 3 jobs ago. This is your work experience in reverse chronological order on your CV:

Executive Officer/Information Officer
Institute of Biology
January - August 2007

As executive officer, was PA to the head of department, and assisted in research and revision of a members' handbook.

Teaching Assistant

Kingsmead College Studio Art Programme
Winter term 2006

Taught drawing on the portfolio development course for BTEC students preparing for entry into Art School.

Administrative Assistant
Arts Theatre, Great Newport Street
September 2005 - August 2006

*Acted as the main receptionist for all departments of this West End theatre company.
Handled the switchboard, reception and mail.*

What you need to do is make the theatre experience more prominent, but doing so could break up the chronology. Here is one possible solution:

THEATRE EXPERIENCE

Administrative Assistant
Arts Theatre, Great Newport Street
September 2005 - August 2006

Acted as the main receptionist for this West End theatre company.

Handled the switchboard, reception and mail.

Established good relationships with every area of the company including Artistic Director, Design and Production Departments, Marketing, Box Office, Catering and Technical staff.

OTHER EXPERIENCE

Executive Officer/Information Officer
Institute of Biology
January - August 2007

As executive officer, was PA to the head of department, and assisted in research and revision of a members' handbook.

Teaching Assistant
Kingsmead College Studio Art Programme
Winter term 2006

Taught drawing on the portfolio development course for BTEC students preparing for entry into Art School.

Here you've taken out the relevant experience and highlighted it with a special heading. The other experience is put in correct chronological order. Notice that although the theatre job was relatively mundane in itself, you can emphasise the way that it put you in touch with the wide range of activities in a theatre. It appears first on the page, has its own heading, and the analysis of the skills is more detailed than in the other less relevant areas.

THE CV FOR THE JOB WHERE YOU HAVE NO RELEVANT EXPERIENCE

This CV calls for some creative thinking. The basic strategy is to look for elements in your experience that have the closest parallels to the job in question. Accountancy? You must at least have managed your own finances, perhaps even those of a student society? Event Management? What about your mother's surprise 50th birthday party, or your work in helping Freshers to settle in to your Hall of Residence?

Say for example you want to be an IT consultant. You're a science student with limited IT knowledge. Your CV offers a lot of technical detail on your degree.

2004 - 2007 Royal Hathaway College, London BSc Pharmacology with Toxicology (2.1)

1st year: *chemistry, experimental pharmacology, cells and molecules, theoretical basis of pharmacology, physiology systems, experiment design and analysis.*

2nd year: *cell and tissue pathology, environmental pharmacology and toxicology, applied pharmacology, experimental neuropharmacology, physiology and pharmacology of the CNS, drug design and development.*

Final year: *toxicology, cellular pharmacology, central neuropharmacology and neurotoxicology, experimental pharmacology of inflammation.*

All of that detail would be fine and perhaps even necessary for a lab assistant role, but how relevant is it for IT? It is worth noticing that in the description there are some words that would make a lot of sense to IT specialists:

- experiment design and analysis
- theoretical basis
- design and development.

A scientific discipline - with its ordered method for setting up and recording experiments and observations - is probably a good grounding for IT work. You could present it like this:

2004 - 2007 Royal Hathaway College, London BSc Pharmacology with Toxicology (2.1)

Experimental science degree involving the design of experiments using complex software and the accurate recording and analysis of results through database and spreadsheet manipulation. Subjects included physiology, the theoretical basis of pharmacology and drug design and development.

It would help to also mention any use of computing technology that was required during the course to show an awareness of how IT impacted on laboratory practice.

THE ONE-PAGE CV

You have lovingly crafted your two-page CV. You're extremely confident that it conveys the essence of you, and at the same time matches employers in your chosen area. But, into your in-box drops a perfect job where they only want a one-page CV. What can you do?

Perhaps the easiest solution is to strip away the description and present the bare facts. If your CV experience section looks something like this:

August 2007 Natural History Museum, London Tour Guide for Summer Groups

Skills Gained

- Ability to deal with numerous awkward questions!
- Communication with children aged 6-13yrs and their teachers.
- Creativity used to develop a range of methods to explain complex scientific information.
- Presentation skills.
- Ability to think on feet and deal with the unexpected.

June - July 2006 Natural History Museum, London Summer Placement

My main responsibility was to assist with the compilation of a database of specific zoological references. The placement involved working closely with members of the scientific community at all levels.

Skills Gained

- Communicating with colleagues at all levels with confidence and diplomacy.
- Working as part of a dedicated team.
- Working effectively to a strict deadline.
- Attention to detail required to accurately record 26,000 references.

You could re-work it like this:

Summer 2006 and 2007
Natural History Museum, London

- *Compiled zoological database for scientists.*
- *Guided school groups round the Museum.*

Say you've put in a lot of carefully-chosen, analytical detail about your Interests and Hobbies. All very interesting, but it takes almost half a page!

Music

One of my main interests is music. I have played the cello in the orchestra at both school and university. In order to succeed in this competitive environment it takes enthusiasm, determination and perseverance, but is also highly enjoyable. As part of a large group it is essential to get on with others and contribute to the overall performance.

Debating

In my second year I was elected Publicity Officer of the Debating Society. In addition to being responsible for the publicity of all events, I was on a committee to help run the society of over 100 members. We had to assess popular topics of debate, invite key speakers and organise room bookings and refreshments for the monthly debates.

Sport

I am a member of the college netball team. We attend a number of inter-university fixtures each term. This achievement is due to our excellent team spirit and a commitment to succeed through regular practice sessions! I have also turned my hand to umpire some matches which requires extreme strength of character and firm diplomacy!

That could boil down to:

Other Activities

*Play cello for the University Orchestra.
Committee member and Publicity officer of Debating Society.
Team member and umpire for the college netball team*

The three lines show three separate areas of activity - a new one on each line. Concentrated together like this they can look very impressive, giving an idea of the level of achievement and commitment even without the extra detail. When you come to write your covering letter, you may be able to use some of the ideas discarded at this stage.

*"A skills-based CV is useful as long as the candidate can **demonstrate** evidence of utilising the skills highlighted. For example, strong communication skills and organisation skills are required for project management and we would be looking for **practical examples** of these in a successful CV."*

Julie Gallacher, Thames Water

DEALING WITH DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES

Is your experience hard to summarise? Is there something in your background that is difficult to portray in a positive light? Are there situations where you fear prejudice?

If you can, seek additional help in these circumstances and try to ensure the employers you're approaching have a positive attitude towards people in your circumstances. There are many sources of help but it may be best to start off with your Careers Adviser.

CAREER CHANGE

Your reasons for changing career can be set out in your cover letter, or in a section in your CV headed Objective or Personal Profile. In addition, you can discuss your experience in such a way as to emphasise transferable skills. See earlier where we talked about a skills-based approach to demonstrate your work experience.

MATURE STUDENTS

New anti-age discrimination legislation means employers have to be extremely careful in the language they use to recruit staff and evaluate carefully their recruitment procedures so as not to distinguish between length of experience. As an older graduate you have a lot to offer potential employers in terms of skills and general maturity of outlook. You will probably need to explain to a prospective employer why you made various choices in the past, and be particularly determined in highlighting the specific skills you have acquired in order to persuade the employer to take you seriously. Write about your commitment and loyalty, realistic expectations, ability to learn, adapt and change; and be positive about the wealth of experience you bring. Think carefully about including every single job you ever held: it might be sensible to use a skills-based CV and put less relevant work under an 'Additional Experience' heading. Anticipate concerns employers may have about you; for example, ensure that your IT skills are up-to-date and that this is clear on your CV.

FRAGMENTED PAST EXPERIENCE

If you have had a variety of experience - perhaps many jobs of different kinds that vary in relevance to what you want to do now - one way of presenting it is to give a brief chronology, and then follow a list of skills backed up with good examples from your various posts.

UNDER-RATED EXPERIENCE

Experience such as child-care, caring for elderly parents and other domestic activities may be under-valued by employers. Use assertive language to describe your experience to help break the stereotype. For example, you could choose to highlight skills you've acquired such as empathy, multi-tasking, ability to co-ordinate, and dependability.

POOR OR NON-RELEVANT ACADEMIC RECORD

If your qualifications are not relevant to the job you are applying for, give a convincing reason why you want to move into a new area, perhaps using a Personal Profile. Stress the general transferable skills you have acquired from your degree, such as research, analysis, time management and so on.

If your educational background is weak, with few mitigating circumstances, place as much emphasis as possible on other aspects of yourself, such as work experience, extra-curricular activities or other responsibilities.

If you believe an employer could view you as over-qualified educationally, highlight evidence demonstrating how well you have coped with the world of work, outside academia. Place this near the beginning of the CV, and summarise your educational qualifications briefly near the end; this may help

achieve the right balance.

SITUATIONS WHERE YOU FEAR PREJUDICE

You may be in poor health, have a period of unemployment, or a criminal record. At what point do you raise the issue with a prospective employer? There is no easy answer. Sometimes the risks of early disclosure are less than those of concealment. Mentioning any difficulties in your CV or cover letter allows you to present the facts in your own way, and may suggest to the employer that you are open and honest.

However, it may be wise in some instances to postpone disclosure, with a view to increasing your chances of obtaining an interview, at which you may feel you could put across the facts more effectively. But remember that you are likely to have less control over how you present matters than you do when composing your CV and cover letter. Below we offer some more help and guidance. Do think about talking these issues through with a Careers Adviser, or find a mentor who may offer another view.

Disability or poor health

Both the social and legal climate regard discrimination against disabled candidates as unacceptable. Nevertheless, many people feel that prejudice does exist, and want to think carefully about how they present themselves.

If your disability will not be apparent at an interview, it might be best to delay informing the employer until then, to avoid the chance of a prejudiced response to your CV. If, however, your disability will be obvious the moment the employer meets you, you could discuss it in your CV, naming the disability itself in layman's terms and stressing the way you cope in a positive light.

Mental health

Under the terms of The Disability Discrimination Act (1995) employers must not discriminate against people with mental health problems, and make reasonable adjustments to enable them to work successfully. It is important to be careful about the amount of information you disclose to employers; you don't have to mention anything in an application if you are not asked, but, on the other hand, openness and honesty early on may reduce any confusion later.

Try to present your experience in as positive way as possible, for example describing any time out of work

as time spent evaluating your options and career objectives.

Unemployment

This is often best covered by explaining the positive use you made of your time such as developing keyboard skills and so on. Perhaps you can describe it as a time for taking stock and re-evaluating your life direction, or absorb it into a period of part-time work. Alternatively you may be able to date the work experience you do have through years rather than providing specific months and years which may highlight the gaps. If neither of these can be made applicable to your circumstances, be totally honest and describe the period as a way of demonstrating your capacity to survive and recover. A final approach could be to refer to it very briefly in the CV and provide a fuller explanation at interview.

Ethnic origin

Despite legal protection, people feel that prejudice does exist even though they are UK nationals or permanent UK residents. If you feel that your name might raise questions as to your nationality or visa status in the potential employer's mind, be very clear on your CV. However, there is no legal imperative to do this. If all or part of your educational background has been abroad it might be wise to provide an indication of what the approximate UK equivalent is.

Work permit required

Current legislation makes it extremely difficult for students who come to the UK from overseas (other than nationals of countries in the European Economic Area) to gain a work permit after graduating. Employers have to prove that they are unable to find a UK or EU national to do the job, something which is almost impossible to claim in the case of most new graduates without work experience. If, however, you have particular skills or expertise which the employer needs (e.g. specialist scientific, business or language) make these prominent on your CV. Also, the employer will want to establish your level of English language skill and your cultural knowledge so do be explicit about your abilities in these areas.

Criminal record

Check the status of your conviction in connection with the job for which you are applying (www.crb.gov.uk). If the conviction is 'spent' you need not make reference to it on your CV. If not, it may be better to refer to the conviction in your cover letter where you have more space to provide details of rehabilitation. Seek advice

from your Careers Adviser to help with your individual circumstances.

COVER LETTERS

The cover letter could be the first thing the employer reads, so it's vital that you create a positive and persuasive first impression.

CVs sent to employers should always be accompanied by a cover letter. The cover letter highlights and summarizes the main points of the CV. The details in your CV should provide clear evidence for the more general statements you make in the letter. As with CVs, cover letters should be targeted for each individual position you apply for. This is your chance to show the employer how interested you are in the position, how relevant your skills are, and how much you know about that specific company. The more knowledgeable you are about the job and the industry you're applying for, the likelier you are to stand out from the competition and be invited for an interview.

Here is a basic layout for a cover letter:

	YOUR ADDRESS
THEIR NAME	
THEIR JOB	
COMPANY ADDRESS	
DATE	
DEAR....	
	<u>HEADING</u>
	TEXT
YOURS SINCERELY	
SIGNED	
YOUR NAME	

Your address

If this is different during certain dates, say so in the letter or the CV.

A cover letter is an application letter. It introduces you to the employer, explains why you're applying for a position with their company and demonstrates how your skills and interests fit the requirements for the job.

The employer's name and contact details

Try to find out exactly to whom you are writing as it is much more personal if you can direct a letter to an individual. It also means the letter is less likely to be passed round a busy office.

Heading

You don't have to use a heading, but they are often seen in business correspondence and it makes it immediately clear as to why you are writing.

Greeting

You've done the research so you should be able to pinpoint the right person here! If you're writing to a woman and you don't know her title, use 'Ms'. However, you may find that some companies are becoming reluctant to disclose individuals' names for security reasons: if you can't find out the name, write 'Dear Sir/Madam'.

Signature

If you have addressed the letter to a named person, you sign off with 'Yours sincerely'. If you have written 'Dear Sir/Madam', then you would use 'Yours faithfully'.

SETTING OUT YOUR COVER LETTER

A few companies will ask for hand-written letters, but usually cover letters should be printed. It's best to be consistent in style with your CV - use the same font, for example. As with any business letter, the addresses and content should be neatly laid out, neither squashed up nor with big gaps. The letter should be no longer than one page of A4. If you have been asked for a handwritten letter, however, you may need to extend it over two pages.

WRITING STYLE

As with your CV, grammar, style, clarity and fluency are extremely important. Employers will take note of spelling or grammatical errors and may screen you out based on even minor mistakes, so it's vital to proof-read your writing thoroughly. Getting a friend or a

Careers Adviser to review your letter is also a good idea.

Keep your prose style simple. Don't think that long words and convoluted sentences are more impressive than short, simple statements. This isn't necessarily the case! Everyday words and shorter sentences are usually much more effective than complicated ones. Similarly, long paragraphs are daunting to the eye. Smaller paragraphs are much more appealing and invite the reader to continue reading. Bear in mind that the employer has many letters to read, so the simpler and more direct your prose, the better.

Don't repeat your CV. Keep it *short and sweet*. Make sure it's clear why you're relevant for the post. Most importantly, explain why the role is of interest to you!

Marlon Franklin, Atkins

CONTENT

There is no "one way" to write a cover letter, but the contents can broadly be broken down into four main parts.

Introduction

A short opening paragraph introducing yourself to the reader and explaining why you are writing. Use phrases such as:

I will be graduating this summer with a degree in from the University of and enclose my CV in response to your advertisement.

Or

I am in the second year of a degree at ... College, University of ... and am looking for summer vacation work.

Why you want the job

Paragraphs 2 and 3 are at the heart of the cover letter. This is where you say why you want the job and why they should look seriously at you. Read the employer's literature and website to make sure you fully understand the role you're applying for.

In talking about why you want the job, you should sound keen and enthusiastic while demonstrating that you've done your homework on finding out about the position. Give real, convincing reasons why you want it. Don't

make up a reason you think the employer will want to hear - it will sound false and they've probably heard it before anyway. Have you done vacation or part-time work in a similar area and enjoyed it? Have you researched several careers and found this one particularly appealing? Are there aspects of the job, such as research, writing or working with numbers that you find particularly appealing? Perhaps your education and degree lead naturally into this particular kind of career: if so, you will need to point this out and highlight one or two areas of relevant study that you've found particularly interesting.

You will also need to demonstrate why you are interested in this particular company. Have you done vacation or part-time work with the company, or visited their offices? Have you met employees at recruitment fairs and if so, what did you learn from them? Are you particularly attracted to certain aspects of their training program? Perhaps you have read something in the press about the company that particularly interested you. Again, the key is sincerity and genuine interest. Don't invent a reason, and don't simply regurgitate facts you've read on the company's website, though it is important to show you've done some research. Treat your letter as another opportunity to impress the employer by demonstrating your knowledge.

I think a cover letter is far more *important* than a CV. A CV is obviously useful, detailing facts and dates, but a covering note puts an applicant's *personality* across and shows why he or she thinks they would be best suited to the job. The applicant can also *tailor the letter* to fit the job in question, highlighting relevant experience.

Lesley Wright, The Independent

Selling yourself

You need to give reasons why the employer should be interested in you by showing that you have the qualities the job calls for. This section should reflect your relevant skills, interests and past experiences. The information you give could relate to your work experience, education, extra-curricular activities, voluntary work or life experiences generally. Don't just repeat the phrases you've used in your CV. Your job here is to indicate clearly to the employer the link between your skills and the requirements of the job by bringing the reader's attention to particularly relevant aspects of your background.

Read these three examples, which show different ways of dealing with the same information. Which one do you think comes across as the strongest?

a) *I believe that I have all the ideal personal characteristics for this job. I am a goal-orientated achiever and have very strong interpersonal, organising and leadership skills. I am good at team work and can also work under pressure and alone. I am an excellent communicator who enjoys human interaction.*

b) *I was captain of my college women's football team in 2006 where I developed skills in leadership, organising, decision-making, managing a very lively group of people and encouraging team work. At school I participated in the Duke of Edinburgh Gold Award: this involved community work, sports, adventure training, and voluntary work, which took great perseverance, team work and self-discipline.*

c) *You will see from my CV that I can demonstrate several skills, specifically:*

Team skills. *At school and college I participated in several sports and plays and I enjoy working with a wide variety of people and personalities.*

Organising. *I helped to organise several charity events at school and at college I was the producer of a major play in the drama society.*

Communication. *As an elected representative on the staff/student liaison committee, I had to liaise with academic staff and students, getting my points across during regular forum meetings.*

Examples b or c would carry more weight as they have actually got evidence backing up the claims for the skills. Example c could look a little out of place in the context of a letter, but on the other hand it does come across as quite business-like.

Closing Paragraph

End simply, on a polite, optimistic note:

- *I am available for interview at any time. Please contact me if you require any further information.*
- *I look forward to hearing from you.*
- *I hope you view my application favourably and I look forward to hearing from you.*
- *Thank you for taking the time to consider my application. I will be available for interview at any time except for the following dates...*

EXAMPLE COVER LETTER

47 Everton Street
London
SE14 9AB

Ms C Bishop
Director of Human Resources
Murray Clarke Advertising
3 Cranwich Street
London
WC1A 4AA

22nd April 2007

Dear Ms Bishop

Assistant Account Manager

I enclose my CV for consideration for the position of Assistant Account Manager with Murray Clarke Advertising. I am currently a 3rd year English student at King James' College, University of London.

My interest in advertising was initially triggered during my first year at University, when I attended a lecture organized by the Advertising Council entitled "Is Advertising Dead?". I was intrigued by the ideas discussed concerning the cultural significance of advertising and the near-cult status of many brands, and I started to read widely on the subject. I also became a regular subscriber to *Campaign* and started to follow trends in the industry closely. This led to an introduction to Fergus Bean, the Head of Account Management at Martin//Langley Advertising and an opportunity to spend the summer of my second year working as an intern in the Account Management Department, where I provided administrative assistance to the account team on the Fruitful account. My experience confirmed - and heightened - my interest in the field.

I am particularly interested in account management because I believe my skills and experience lend themselves most readily to this area. During my internship at Martin//Langley, I observed that account managers need to be highly organized, to work well in teams, to set and adhere to tight deadlines and to thrive under pressure. My organizational skills were honed during my first year at university when I juggled two part-time administrative positions as well as my course work, and received excellent grades despite pressures of time. I am well accustomed to working successfully in teams, as I am the captain of the college netball team and also play football regularly. As for keeping cool under pressure, my experience working at the Student Union bar demonstrates my ability to handle stressful situations with tact and patience, while achieving desired results.

I read recently in *Campaign* (20 Mar) that with the unexpected hiring of Saatchi's Josh Wimple as Creative Director, Murray Clarke Advertising is now "one of the fastest-growing young agencies on the planet". I feel that this growth is reflected in your impressive new campaigns for Uncle Ben's Rice and Pepperoni, and I would very much like to be part of such a dynamic company.

Thank you for taking the time to consider my application. You can contact me at any time on 07841 989345 or s.hall@hotmail.com. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Sarah Hall

WHAT TO DO NEXT...

You've created your masterpiece CV and feel happy with your cover letter. Someone has looked over them for you and you're certain that there are no typos, no grammatical howlers and that you've definitely spelled the company name correctly. Equally, you're pleased with how you've sold yourself, matching your skills and competencies with the company's requirements.

All being well, you should now be receiving invitations to interview - but we'd need another entire book to give you guidance on conducting those with confidence!

If you're not happy with your CV and letter, or you're not getting the interviews, perhaps it's time to look a little harder and find some more help.

Make sure you're in touch with your University careers service, or find out where the nearest one is that can help you. www.prospects.ac.uk has a list under

Careers Centre. Careers Advisers are trained professionals who can assist in identifying issues with CVs and will provide constructive feedback on your situation.

Alternatively, join GradClub or contact C2, part of The Careers Group at the University of London. See www.careers.lon.ac.uk for details of services on offer.

There are plenty of good books and websites offering advice so take advantage of them too.

Finally, don't forget that you'll be given different advice on your CV by every different person you talk to. Ensure you've done your research on the company or organisation you're interested in, be confident you've analysed critically your own abilities and experiences, and go for it!

SAMPLE CVS

This section includes three CVs we've chosen for you to take a look at. They're by no means perfect, don't relate to any particular job or organisation, and you should view them with a critical eye.

However, they offer a range of ideas on layout, how to present yourself, and the kind of analysis you might do on your own experiences.

What do you like about them? Why? Do you like the fonts? Can you see why the PhD one is longer than the others? Why do you think they've chosen to include, or not, their gender and date of birth? Could you be similarly analytical about what skills your degree and work experience have given you? Can you spot any

spelling or grammar errors - if there are any, how do they make you feel about the person?

What is there you don't like? Are they more or less detailed than you thought? What about the 'Motivation' statement on the PhD CV? Good or bad? What about the language these people have used - can you identify the strong, active terminology used?

Most importantly, perhaps, can you see how they've all chosen formats and sections to suit their own backgrounds and needs? These CVs could all be adapted, prioritised and changed depending on the job the person was going for.

• Even though this CV was to accompany an application for postgraduate study, the smart, business-like approach of the CV gives confidence in her as an efficient and capable student.

• You could question why she has provided this personal information - she could leave it out and save some space.

• Excellent detail on her final year project; this uses effective, directed language to describe the stages of the project.

Brianna Stewart

Mobile: 07744 754 000
Telephone: 020 7274 0000
Email: BStewart@ful.ac.uk

100 Nottingham Close
Church Field
Wimbledon
London
SW19 8NN

PERSONAL INFORMATION

- **Gender:** Female
- **Date of Birth:** 1st April 1984
- **Nationality:** British

EDUCATION HISTORY

Sep 2002 - Jun 2006 Fulworth College London, University of London
BSc Computer Science (Awaiting result, GPA: 77.5%)

Final year modules:

- Compression Methods for Multimedia
- Computer Communications and Networks
- Software Measurement and Testing
- Software Engineering of Internet Applications
- Cryptography and Information Security
- Internet Systems

Final year project:

- Designed and developed a Sudoku puzzle generator and solver, using Java, which mimicked the human solving process and enabled users to request hints on possible number placements.
- Performed initial research into the various approaches that could be adopted in order to develop the end application. This included research into the techniques used by humans to solve Sudoku puzzles and the application of artificial intelligence.
- Successfully developed an algorithm which completed 90% of all entered Sudoku puzzles and an additional algorithm which generated puzzles of a Mild and Moderate difficulty level.
- Produced a comprehensive technical report, which detailed the development of the application from the initial analysis stages to the overall evaluation and conclusion of the end application.

Sep 2000 - Jun 2002 Hainault Forest High School Sixth Form, Hainault, Essex

Achieved A levels

- Chemistry (A), Computing (A), Media Studies (A)

Achieved AS level

- Mathematics (C)

Sep 1998 - Jun 2000 Hainault Forest High School, Hainault, Essex

Achieved General Certificate of Secondary Education

Art (A*), History (A*), Business Studies (A), Double Science (AA), English (AA), German (A), Mathematics (A), Media Studies (A), Religious Education (B)

- Brianna has made the most of her varied work experience, using technical language but being analytical about all the parts of her different roles. ▶

CAREER HISTORY

Aug - Sep 2005 IT Intern (Fixed Income IT), Credit Suisse, Canary Wharf, London

During this one-month internship I was able to gain a deeper understanding of how my interests and skills may apply to an IT role at a financial institution. I was also responsible for developing a prototype application that would update the contents of XML files using JSP and Servlets.

- Conducted detailed requirements analysis in order to determine user specifications and expectations.
- Performed research into the construction of XML files using DTDs and XSL.
- Determined the Java classes that could be used in order to read and write to XML files, and established the most appropriate strategy to adopt.
- Developed an end application that extracted, deleted and updated data from XML files using Servlets and displayed this information to the user using JSPs.
- Presented the developed prototype to the end user and provided the appropriate technical documentation.

Aug 2004 - July 2005 IT Support Manager/Web Developer, East London Alliance, Leamouth, London

As part of my voluntary post at this organisation I was required to help the IT Manager oversee the deployment and maintenance of all ELA's IT systems, provide onsite and off-site user support and manage the ELA website. I was also responsible for managing the redevelopment of a new website for the Schools Mentoring Programme.

- Re-coded the ELA website using the ASP.NET framework, reducing the time taken to carry out essential updates by 75%.
- Helped to increase the quarterly newsletter readership by 100% after responding to an internal request for suggestions on how to make it a more interesting and captivating read.
- Used ASP to create an XML parser that would display syndicated news on the ELA extranet.
- Analysed and redesigned ELA's online database enabling volunteers to filter voluntary opportunities based on their own search criteria as well as redesigning the back-end administration.
- Designed and developed a new interactive website for the Schools Mentoring Programme utilising HTML, CSS, XML, JavaScript, ASP and SQL in addition to setting up internal RSS feeds.
- Assisted the IT Manager with daily tasks, user support and troubleshooting.
- Designed MS PowerPoint presentations for key corporate events.
- Set up user workstations including software and hardware installation, network configuration and maintenance.
- Provided users with basic level training of IT systems and applications.

Oct 2003 - May 2004 Lab demonstrator, Fulworth College London, University of London

As a Lab demonstrator I was required to make a weekly commitment to help run timetabled lab sessions that first year students could attend in order to complete assigned programming exercises.

- Worked with students on a one-to-one basis to help determine appropriate solutions to problems.
- Helped students to analyse scenarios from a number of different angles and propose ideas.
- Managed the use of the Computer Lab to ensure all first year students had access to a computer.

- It is very impressive to see these different technical skills divided out and the indication of her competency at each.

TECHNICAL SKILLS

● Software packages:	Microsoft Office	Advanced
	Adobe Photoshop, Macromedia Dreamweaver	Intermediate
	RDMS:MySQL, PostgreSQL	Intermediate
● Operating Systems:	Windows 2000/ME/XP	Intermediate
	RedHat Linux	Basic
● Servers:	Windows Server 2000	Basic
● Languages:	ASP/VBScript, HTML	Advanced
	CSS, DHTML, Java, JavaScript, SQL, XML	Intermediate
	DTD, XSL, ASP.NET	Basic

INTERESTS AND ACTIVITIES

- She has the space on the CV to go into some detail here which is helpful for a recruiter.

- **Technology:** I enjoy keeping up-to-date with the latest technologies and advancements in the computer industry, and am particularly keen on understanding how they can be adapted. I am also an enthusiastic web developer and enjoy using software packages such as Adobe Photoshop to aid in graphic design.
- **Volunteering:** Since my contribution to the Hainault Forest School Autistic Unit, I have been actively involved in various voluntary schemes and one-off opportunities, including Reading Recovery schemes and Marie Curie street collections. Most recently, I volunteered full-time at the East London Alliance as an IT Support Manager and Web Developer.
- **Reading:** I have a keen interest in literature both for researching academic studies and as a dedicated past-time. This has allowed me to read into specialist areas in greater depth, which has proven to be invaluable at University.
- **Sports:** In my spare time I like to watch and participate in football, tennis, cricket and badminton. I also enjoy going to the gym and step-aerobics.

REFEREES AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

Sam Monford

62 Haversham Road, London N6 4AZ.

Mobile: 07584 392951 | EMail: s-monford@hotmail.com

EDUCATION

Queen Jane College, University of London

Sep 05 - Jun 08

BSc Hons Biology, expected grade 2.1

Topics covered included: Cellular & Molecular Biology, Microbiology, Molecular Virology, Genetic Systems, Genes to Organisms and Human Genetics.

Final year project: Assessing expression levels of cancer genes in tumour cell lines.

- Cultured human tumour cell lines in sterile conditions over several weeks.
- Assessed ideal conditions for extraction of protein from cell lines and for immunological analysis.
- Separated proteins by gel electrophoresis and assessed levels of cancer genes present by immunological methods.
- Analysed results, wrote 6,000 word report and presented findings in a seminar to 20 members of the department and 23 fellow students.

Stockport Comprehensive

Sep 99 - Jun 05

A levels: Biology B, Mathematics B, Chemistry C

2005

GCSEs: Eight, including Maths A, English B, Science C

2003

WORK EXPERIENCE

Langford NHS Trust, Stockport

1 Jul - 10 Sep 07

Diagnostic Laboratory Technician

- Worked with 3 others in round the clock team to apply diagnostic tests to approximately 30 patient samples per day.
- Tests often spread across shifts and accurate results needed rapidly to ensure appropriate patient treatment
- Communicated and worked effectively with colleagues during handover and kept tight control over quality under pressure.
- Kept accurate records of all samples and test results using hospital database and paper forms.
- Interpreted and communicated results effectively to medical staff.
- All patients were appropriately medicated during my term.

Farleigh and Laing, Insurance Brokers, London ECI

1 Jul - 14 Sep 06

Administrative Assistant

- Gathered research information chiefly by telephone from clients, analysed the results and presented the findings to colleagues in written reports.
- Composed letters to clients, negotiated appropriate insurance packages, maintained accurate records of customer details.

Students' Union, Queen Jane College

1 Oct 06 to date

Part time bar work in term time

- Negotiated tactfully and firmly with difficult customers.
- Maintained integrity under pressure and developed stamina.

Tesco, Stockport

Jul 03 to date

Saturday/holiday work as a sales assistant and in cash office

- Learnt to cope with physically demanding tasks for long periods and with unsocial hours.
- Maintained accurate documentation for accounting purposes.

- The section on this student's CV about their project is quite technical which would be fine for application to a scientific job. It could be re-thought using less scientific language to appeal to a broader range of employers.

- Nice concise details of the school results.

- The student has used effective, targeted language to describe all of their work experience. It is good to see them use shop and bar work to show off skills acquired there though there is scope to develop these more. Information about cash handling, health and safety, working in teams and so on could be usefully extracted from these roles.

- In this instance, it might be helpful to put in referees' details as there is so much space left on the page. This space could have indicated to the student to use a different size font and write more about their different work ► roles.

ADDITIONAL SKILLS

- Computer literate
 - Good understanding of Microsoft Word and Excel
 - Familiar with various statistical packages
 - Can learn new packages quickly
- Reasonable keyboard skills (around 45wpm)
- Conversational French
- Clean driving licence for three years

LEISURE ACTIVITIES

Publicity Officer, College Biology Society

Oct 06 - Jun 07

- Organised with other members of the society committee 3 annual social events for staff, students and invited guests including alumni and well known scientists. Money raised at the events exceeded the previous year by 120%.
- Negotiated and managed the budget for the year.

Cellist in school and college orchestra

Sep 00 to date

- Performed with 20-30 other orchestra members at school and college concerts which required strong commitment and the ability to organise my time to meet deadlines.

Travel around Eastern Europe

Sep 06

- Organised four week trip for 3 people across 5 countries.
- Learnt to cope with the unexpected.

REFEREES ARE AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

Look at the focus on action verbs! This is a very strong description of his role. ▶

- Strong synthesizing, writing, and information technology skills: wrote scientific articles in international peer-reviewed journals, as well as the highly technical replies to the questions raised by the reviewers. Wrote funding application and produced regular progression reports.

Interpersonal skills:

- Coached and collaborated with other scientists, outlining objectives, methodology, and conclusions, actively listening to people and stimulating interest and discussion.
- Exchanged constructive feedback and support and learned delegating responsibility.

Adaptability:

- Collaborated and communicated at all professional levels, and with people from diverse origins and cultures. Can work both independently and in team settings.
- Adapted to living abroad, increased my command of English, learned perseverance and self-motivation.

Management and organization:

- Managed several projects and collaborations in parallel, planned work to achieve goals and targets on time, set realistic objectives, developed creative solutions to problems. Attended introductory courses of management.
- Used to seek and critically assess large amounts of information, to define the cause of problems, determine available options and to use my own experience and that of others to move things forward.

Teaching:

- Supervised and taught technicians and M.Sc. students, adapting to different scientific levels and backgrounds, stimulating discussion and reflexion.
- Participated in evaluation juries and marked M.Sc. essays.

Clinical Research Associate - 1999

Searle Pharmaceuticals, Belgium

- 4 months placement as Clinical Research Associate at Searle Pharmaceuticals
- Worked following SOPs and ICH's GCP on several projects in parallel and met deadlines.
- Integrated the global development process of drugs and the business and entrepreneurial culture.
- Developed my interpersonal skills at all professional levels: actively participated to staff meetings, met investigators to discuss inclusion and exclusion criteria for new clinical trials, helped design and correct new trials, followed up current trials by visiting, phoning and writing to investigators, helped set up a large investigator meeting.
- Prepared a vast dossier about Alzheimer's disease to teach staff and discuss the feasibility of trials for a new drug indication. This sequentially led to the start of my Ph.D. thesis.
- Was offered a fixed position at the end of the placement.

Pharmacist - 1998

Pharmacy open to public

- 8 months placement as Pharmacist: counselling, preparation of drugs, selling.
- Developed communication and business awareness.
- Took the initiative to largely reorganize stock and improve its handling, learned team work, meeting deadlines and doing several works in parallel.

This student has chosen to list his publications and conferences under this title; for a scientific role you would be more likely to use 'Publications' as a title but in this instance it is another example of where he has recognised that to a possibly non-scientific employer, he's better off using less academic jargon.

Responsibilities: ● Elected representative of the Ph.D. students and post-docs at the Council of the Department of Physiology and Pharmacology.
Organizing member of the EURON Ph.D. days in 2002 and 2003.

Other Skills:

- IT: extensive knowledge of standard office software, Photoshop, SPSS, SAS, Prism.
- Languages: French (mother tongue), English (fluent), Dutch(moderate).
- Full clean driving license.
- Efficient, organized, reliable, fast-learner, highly motivated, get the job done.

Interests: I have great interest in history, particularly antiquity, and organize readings, museum visits and travels accordingly. I also enjoy practicing martial arts.

Achievements: Selected publications and communications:

- Parnelle P., Octave J.-N. (2004) Presenilin I stabilizes the C-terminal fragment of the amyloid precursor protein independently of-secretase activity. *The Journal of Biological Chemistry* 279, 25333-25338.
- Best oral communication prize: Sf9 cells provide new insights in the role of presenilin I in the gamma-secretase activity, EURON meeting, September 25-26 2003, Brussels, Belgium.
- Sf9 cells as a new model to study the influence of PSI on gamma-secretase activity and amyloid beta peptide production (poster), 6th international meeting on AD/PD, May 8-12 2003, Seville, Spain.
- Parnelle P., Kienlen-Campard P., Octave J.-N. (2002) Failure of the interaction between presenilin I and the substrate of gamma-secretase to produce Aβeta in insect cells. *Journal of Neurochemistry* 83 (2), 390-399.
- Is presenilin I the long-sought gamma-secretase, EURON Workshop on neurodegenerative disorders, April 3-6 2001, Bonn, Germany.
- Processing of the amyloid precursor protein of Alzheimer's disease in insect cells, EURON meeting, September 14th 2000, Maastricht, The Netherlands.

Technical Skills:

Cellular biology:

- Cell culture: Sf9 insect cells, blastocyst-derived cells, CHO, COS, HEK-293, SHSY, primary cultures of rat and mouse cortical/hippocampal neurons. Transfection and nucleofection.
- Microbiology: liquid and solid culture of bacterias, isolation and transformation; preparation and purification of baculoviruses and adenoviruses, work in class III laboratory.
- Microscopy: confocal, fluorescence and light microscopy.

Molecular biology:

- Vector design: primers design, digestions, ligations, cloning.
- Cloning: transformation, RNA extraction, reverse transcription, PCR, DNA purification (CsCl gradient, mini- and maxi-preps), DNA gel analysis, quantification and extraction.

Biochemistry:

Western blot, (co-)immunoprecipitation, pulse-chase, ELISA, enzymatic assays.

Animal manipulation:

Handling, feeding, breeding, marking and genotyping of transgenics; dissection of embryos for primary cultures of neurons.

Analytical methods:

Titration, spectrophotometry, chromatography (thin layer, ion exchange, exclusion, HPLC), sound theoretical knowledge and interpretation of most analysis techniques (NMR, MS,...).

READING LIST

A level playing field, 3rd ed AGCAS, 2005 - Helpful guide around different difficult circumstances candidates may have to deal with in presenting themselves on a CV

Brilliant CV, Jim Bright, Prentice Hall, 2005

Career Skills: Opening doors into the job market, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004

Creative CV Guide, Jan Cole & David Whistance, Surrey Institute of Art & Design University College

CVs and Job Applications, Judith Leigh, OUP, 2004

CVs for High Flyers, Rachel Bishop-Firth, How To Books, 2004

How to Find Work When You're Over 50: Make the most of your maturity and experience to find the right job, Jackie Sherman, How to Books, 2006 - Includes a chapter on producing a CV.

Perfect CV, Max Eggert, Random House, 2003

The Global Resume and CV Guide, Mary Anne Thompson, John Wiley & Sons, 2000

The Job Application Handbook, Judith Johnstone, How To Books, 2004

The Ultimate CV Book, Martin Yate, Kogan Page, 2003

The Ultimate CV: Win senior managerial positions with an outstanding resume, Rachel Bishop-Firth, How To Books, 2006

WEBSITES

See www.careers.lon.ac.uk for useful information across a broad range of job-hunting skills

www.prospects.ac.uk - Explore Working Abroad section has information including tips on CVs in the Application Procedures section for each country.

www.grad.ac.uk - "Just for Postgrads" section contains some useful tips on managing a PhD effectively and presenting your PhD in CVs and applications.