

CV writing

When you are looking for a job it is very important to understand how to present yourself in the best way to an employer. This is done by writing a 'CV' or 'Curriculum Vitae' (Latin for 'life story'). In some countries this is called a 'Resume'.

What is a CV for?

A CV resume is quite simply an 'advert' to sell yourself to an employer. The purpose of your CV is to show you as an attractive, interesting and worthwhile candidate to the company. Your aim is to be asked to attend a job interview.

An employer may have several hundred enquiries about a job, and he or she will only choose a handful of people who appear suitable for interview.

General advice

- There are fact-sheets of advice available online describing how to prepare a CV. Make full use of them. However, employers do not want to see CVs which are all written in exactly the same way, so don't just copy standard CV samples.
- Your CV should be your own, personal, and a little bit different.
- Using a computer means you can easily customise your CV, and change the layout and tone for different employers.
- A CV should be well laid out and printed on good quality paper by a good quality printer.
- Picture yourself to be a busy manager in the employer's office. He or she may have to read through 100 CVs in an hour, and will make two piles - 'possibles' and 'not suitable'.
- Chop your CV up into easily digestible morsels (bullets, short paragraphs and note form) and give it a clear logical layout, including only the relevant information to make it easy for the selector to read.
- When you have written a first draft of your CV, get other people to look at it and suggest ways to make it better. Ask your friends, your family, and any family friends in business.
- What you have written may seem simple and obvious to you, but may not read the same way to an employer. Go through it again and again with a red pen, making it shorter, more readable and more understandable.

Before you start

- Sit down with a piece of paper. Look at the job you are applying for. Consider how your skills, education and experience compare with what the specific job requires.
- Do you have enough information about the job? Do not be afraid to ask for more detail if needed, this shows the employer you are serious about the role.
- Spend time researching the job role, and the employer's company - their structure, products, successes, and approach. You can get information from:
 - Company website
 - Company social media pages

- Google search on company name
- Company's own publicity, reports and publications
Newspaper reports
- Employees currently working at the company
- Employees who previously worked at the company

What to include

Personal details

- Name, address, phone number, email address
- Choose a sensible email address. Unbelievably, some candidates spend hours constructing a professional CV and then ruin it by having a ridiculous email address for the employer to respond to. Addresses such as boozyben@ or lovebunny@ are not going to show you in a good light to an employer!
- Make sure your voicemail is professional. If an employer calls to speak to you they don't want to hear your favourite music or encounter some form of comedy routine.

Education

- Detail the names and places where you have studied, putting the most recent first.
- Include the name of the course/subject taken, and where applicable include your grades / level of achievement.
- Courses taken a long time ago that may not be relevant to the job will not need as much detail, and you may choose to leave them out altogether.

Work experience

- Use action words such as developed, planned and organised.
- Even work in a shop, bar or restaurant will involve working in a team, providing a quality service to customers, and dealing tactfully with complaints.
- Don't mention the routine, non-people tasks (e.g cleaning the tables) as these things will be considered a given by the employer, and will detract from the information that they really want to see.
- Relate your skills to the job.
e.g. a finance job will involve numeracy and analytical and problem solving skills so focus on these, whereas for a marketing role you would place more emphasis on persuading and negotiating skills.

Interests

- Potential employers will be interested in activities where you have demonstrated leadership, responsibility and teamwork.
- A one-person interest, such as stamp-collecting, is not likely to be of interest to an employer, unless it connects with the vacancy specifically.
- Do not go into too much detail: if you were captain of a sports team, they do not want to know the exact date you started, how many games you played, and how many wins you had. Keep it precise. They will ask more at the interview if they are interested.
- If you have published any articles, jointly or by yourself, give details.
- If you have been involved in any type of volunteer work, give details.

Skills

The usual ones to mention are:

- Computing
e.g. "good working knowledge of MS Access and Excel, plus basic AutoCAD skills"
- Driving
- Languages (good conversational French, basic Spanish)

NB - If you are a mature candidate or have lots of relevant skills to offer, consider a skills-based CV.

References

Ideally provide two references from your most recent jobs. A perspective employer will want to see the name of your referee, his/her job title, the name of the company and contact details (email address & telephone number). There is a good chance an employer will contact your references to find out more about you, so make sure they know to expect a call, are that they are willing to give you a reference. If possible, give both their day and evening phone numbers.

Alternatively you can simply write "References available on request". In this case you should take your reference details to the interview.

Length

Perhaps all you need to say will fit onto one sheet of A4, but do not crowd it; you will probably need two sheets. Three sides of A4 is the maximum a CV should ever be.

Style

There are two main styles of CV, with variations within them.

1. Chronological - Information is listed under general headings (education, work experience, etc.), with the most recent events placed first.

2. Skills-based - You think through the necessary skills needed for the job you are applying for. Then you list all your information under these skill headings. This is called 'targeting your CV', and is becoming more common, at least in the UK.

However, it can be harder to do. So take advice on whether it is suitable for the job in hand, and how to do it best.

Optional extra

It can be good to start with a 'Personal profile' / 'Personal statement'. This is a two or three sentence overview of your skills, qualities, hopes and plans. It should be very precise and to the point; and encourage the employer to read on.

Presentation

Do:

- Use bold and/or underline print for headings
- Use plenty of white space, and leave a good border round the page
- Check that all spelling is correct
- Consider using bullet points to start sub-sections and lists
- Insert page numbers at the bottom of the pages; this is a little detail that may impress
- Consider using a two-column table to list your educational qualifications and courses

Do not:

- Use lots of different font types and sizes. You are not designing a magazine cover.
- Clutter the page with too much text. Employers want a simple snapshot of your skills and achievements

You may vary the style of your CV according to the type of job you are applying for. Usually, a big company will expect a formal CV on white paper. However, a CV applying for a television production job, or graphic designer position, could be less formal: coloured paper, unusual design, etc.