



CV Writing Guidelines

What is a CV?

A Curriculum Vitae, or CV, is an outline of your educational and professional history written in such a way as to market you when applying for job vacancies. It is an essential sales tool, demonstrating to a potential employer that you have the necessary experience, knowledge and desire to do the job for which you are applying.

Your CV ultimately has one job – to secure you an interview, where you will have the chance to present yourself in person.

Overview

Your CV should be written in the first person, be clear, concise and up to date. If you have been temping most recently ensure you keep your CV updated after each assignment.

There is no need to head the document up as 'CV' or Curriculum Vitae – this has become a bit old fashioned.

The tone should be positive, professional and you must be entirely honest.

Structure

Personal Details

You should start with your name, address, phone number and email address.

Please ensure that your email address is an appropriate one for seeking work. Rude or offensive email addresses will almost certainly exclude you from being considered for the job and daft ones won't fare much better. Whilst you might think a 'funny' email address demonstrates a sense of humour a recruiter may disagree and decide you lack maturity or professional judgement.

Personal Profile

Whilst a personal profile is probably the hardest part to write it is an invaluable overview of your suitability for the job. Keep it short and use the space to summarise your skills, experience, knowledge and career aspirations. Don't be drawn into listing a whole ream of skills and experience which are about to be covered below in your career history, just precis and keep it concise.

Career History

Your career history should be listed chronologically with your most recent post at the top since the most relevant duties are those that have been undertaken most recently.

This is what should be included:

- A list of all the positions you have held chronologically.
- For each position, detail the job title, the name of the company and the period of employment. The employment dates should include both the month and year.
- Outline briefly which industry sector each company are in and their annual turnover. This is useful information to a potential employer.
- Next, detail your key responsibilities, duties and outline any achievements. This is best done in bullet points and the content should be clear and concise.

- Recruiters do not like gaps in your CV and areas of unemployment should be explained, for example travel.
- Ensure that your CV demonstrates all the skills and experience for the job you applying for, not least because it's not always the hiring manager who is vetting your CV for the first time and they won't necessarily be able to read between the lines. In reducing 30 CV's to 8 for the hiring manager yours might not make the pile if you miss out a critical piece of information.

Qualifications & Education

Take the same approach to your education as for your employment history, listing the most recent first including dates and grades (unless poor).

If you are a fresh graduate, it is more appropriate to list your education before your career history.

IT Skills

These should simply be listed and, where relevant, the level of expertise. For example Advanced Excel including Lookups, Macros and Pivot Tables.

Hobbies and Interests

This section can be more important than you might think (dependent upon the recruiter) since it says something about you that your professional profile may not. So don't dismiss it.

If you play sport a recruiter may think that you take care of yourself and if it's a team activity then a recruiter can expect that you work well in a team environment. If you prefer solitary activities like knitting or reading then maybe you work best alone. Or maybe it says that you enjoy quiet time or love creating and learning respectively. Your hobby may demonstrate a need for extreme care or be detail orientated. It may be creative or require great skill. Maybe you have learned to play the piano or speak a second language. Maybe you love travel and experiencing new things.

And whilst you may be thinking that you don't have time for 'hobbies' because you have a job and a young family then think about those things that you enjoy doing with your family. Maybe your hobby is in fact taking long walks with your dogs or taking days out to the seaside. Both are outbound activities, getting exercise with the people or animals that make you happy and they are equally valid.

'Socialising' can be construed as getting drunk on a regular basis (i.e. unreliable) so be careful using this phrase.

This section should be short – you are selling your professional self here.

References

It is advisable to put 'available on request' rather than list referees at this point. References are rarely sought until the offer stage and referees do not want to be approached frequently unless it's with good reason.

Presentation

Visual first impressions really count and are as important as the content of the CV.

- Your CV should not exceed 3 pages since recruiters rarely look any further. However it should not appear squeezed onto each page. You can experiment with font size if you need to.
- Use subheadings so that the reader can cast their eye through the CV for the information they require.
- Use a clear and simple typeface, with no gimmicks. And if you are printing your CV, ensure you print on good quality paper.
- Ensure the typeface is consistent and that you are not mixing several fonts and never type in capital letters (shouting).
- Underlining is distracting – use bold where you want to make words and phrases stand out.
- Keep the language formal and short and avoid jargon and abbreviations and make sure you check the grammar and spelling!

Frequently asked questions

Should I add a photograph?

In short, no, unless you are applying for a job as a model or actor. European CV's often have a photograph but they are not widely used (or welcomed) in the UK. There are some who believe this only aids equal opportunities discrimination.

Is there one particular way to construct a CV?

No. Everyone you encounter will have their views on how a CV should look. What is contained within our guidelines is readily acceptable and gleaned from many decades of experience within the recruitment sector. It is your CV and how you choose to present yourself is entirely up to you, we just believe we know how employers want to see you present yourself.

I have been professionally contracting for many years and find my CV has now become 6 pages long. What can I do to shorten it?

There are several things you can do. They include:

- Check the relevance and age of all the positions, removing older posts that no longer have relevance, where short positions have been held and the responsibilities are similar to those to another position held. You can summarise your position there with dates, company name and job title rather than listing all duties. But remember to list achievements here if relevant.
- Consider changing the layout of the CV – use space wisely when paragraphing.
- Experiment with font size - making it slightly smaller may have little or no detrimental effect on the overall appearance of the CV and give you a lot more space.
- Don't be tempted to summarise all your experience on one page and then list all the jobs and dates separately. Recruiters want to see where and when those skills were gleaned so putting them all in one list doesn't help.

I've seen lots of CV templates online. Should I use one of them?

By all means use every tool available to you to make the job of writing your CV easier but be careful.

- Make sure the template has all the required fields and doesn't sell you short.
- Ensure you complete the template correctly and fully to avoid odd blank areas – this is a giveaway that you have used a template but not taken the time to check the completed document.
- Whilst some beautiful templates are available which will make your CV look extremely well presented they are often not liked by recruitment agencies since their IT systems import data from your CV into their databases to aid your search for work and/or use their own templates and rehashing your complex CV can be difficult (and probably not welcomed by you since it will be a far cry from your original document). Sometimes simplicity is best. Our advice is invest more time in the content.

I am applying to different types of jobs. How do I tailor my CV for both?

Don't try. If you create one CV to do more than one job it won't work.

Have more than one version of your CV – one for each type of work you are seeking.

Is my CV good enough?

Is it getting you interviews? If it is, then it's probably good enough.

If it's failing to get you interviews the problem may lie in your CV and it's worth revisiting it. Get a friend to take a look over it – they may spot shortfalls which you have not.

However, your lack of success may be down to other issues including the fact you might be applying for the wrong jobs.