

## Non-academic applications

Non-academic applications typically consist of an application form or CV and covering letter. Sometimes you may be permitted to send your CV along with the application form.

When putting your application together you may be faced with a recruiter who doesn't know much about doing a PhD and consequently doesn't have a full understanding of the skills and experience you will have gained during your PhD. As a result it is up to you to put the relevant information highlighting your key skills, abilities and experiences in front of the employer effectively within your application.

The recruiter should not be made to work hard sifting through mountains of semi-relevant information to find out why you are suitable for the job. Do not assume that the person reading your application will be able to infer what some tasks involved. For example; if you have written a thesis as part of your PhD it automatically means you can use a computer, word process and produce a professional looking document. However if you simply say you have written a thesis, a recruiter may not make this connection so it will have to be specified within the application that you are proficient in using IT, word processing and producing professional documents.

## Non-academic CVs

CVs for posts outside academia are shorter (usually 2 sides long, or perhaps 3 if you have a lot of relevant information) and focus much less heavily on the PhD and subsequent research. Instead they should focus on transferable skills which are highly sought after by employers such as; team working, analytical abilities and communication skills.

The exceptions to this are research related posts, e.g. a policy analyst for a think tank or a scientific researcher within industry. When applying for this kind of role you will need to talk a bit more about your research.

When putting together your CV you need to think carefully about what information to include as well as how to prioritise it and lay it out so that it catches the readers' attention. You need to strike a balance between being concise, but also including all the information required.

With CVs there are no hard and fast rules. There are a range of ways you can present information about yourself and the type of CV you will use will depend on the roles you are applying for and what you think will demonstrate your skills and experience in the best light.

Traditionally references were incorporated into CVs but it is not always necessary to do this. If references are required during the application stage then do supply them.

But if not you will be able to provide them later in the application process and use the space on the CV for other information.

## CVs for research-related roles:

For research-related roles outside academia such as think tanks or industry, the CV should include:

- A **synopsis of your PhD** at the beginning or as an appendix plus other education including previous degrees
- For roles within industry mention any **contact with industry** that you have had, such as placements
- List of **scientific techniques used** e.g. NMR, HPLC etc
- For FOH/SSF/HUM researchers a list of **research methods used and software packages** used for analysis e.g. Atlas TI, SPSS
- Give **evidence of IT, time management, project management and report writing skills**
- Make sure your CV also shows how your **experience and skills match the specification of the job**, e.g. we know industry is looking for researchers who can show general business skills and an understanding of commercial awareness
- Usually **2 references** are sufficient - one should be your supervisor

## CVs for non-research related roles

Chronological CV:

Traditionally a chronological CV was most commonly used. This simply details your skills and experience in reverse chronological order and the focus is on your career progression. If you are seeking a job in an area completely unrelated to your research this type of CV will not show the recruiter the most relevant information first, and so is not likely to grab their attention.

However chronological CVs can be useful for researchers returning to previously held or similar posts as is often the case with FOH or EDU researchers.

A chronological CV should include:

- education and qualifications, including PhD, other degrees and possibly A levels

- List all paid or unpaid work experience include the responsibilities and skills for each post
- Make sure your CV shows how your experience and skills match the job description provided by the employer
- Give **evidence of IT, language, time management, project management and report writing skills**
- Include a short section on **activities and interests** particularly if they evidence a key skill e.g. member of a sports team as evidence for team working
- Usually **2 references** will suffice

#### Skills-based CV:

The skills-based CV aims to show the employer that you have the skills and abilities they are looking for in a format where it is easy for them to see this. Many employers outside academia do not know much about doing a PhD and what it involves. This means they need to have the relevant information prioritised within the CV and easily accessible.

- Consider using a **short profile** at the top of your CV. Focus the employer's attention by highlighting some **key skills and abilities** e.g. "excellent analytical and problem solving skills" which make you ideal for the job. You can then state what you're looking for and where you'd like to go in the **future** e.g. "currently seeking a position in...". The profile is useful for researchers who are considering a career change and want to draw the employers attention to their transferable skills
- If applying for a job where your PhD subject is not directly relevant – **only give basic outline of PhD** (concise explanation for non-academic audience)
- Include a short section on **education**, this does not have to be on the first page
- Ensure the **skills highlighted** are relevant to the position applying for and give evidence to back up claims
- Research carried out with **employers tells us they highly value leadership skills, teamworking, presentation skills, report writing, problem solving, project management, organisational and administrative skills**. Consider including a skills profile using some of the above skills as subheadings. **Be explicit** – numbers of people attending events you have organised etc

- Give **evidence of IT and language skills**
- Include a section on **relevant work experience, paid or unpaid**. Give a brief outline of responsibilities and how this matches the job description
- Usually **2 references** are sufficient - one should be your supervisor
- Include a short section on **activities and interests** particularly if they evidence a key skill e.g. member of a sports team as evidence for team working

Before you write your CV take the time to see some examples. It is worth looking at a range, even if not in your subject area, to compare different CV layouts and sections headings before deciding what will suit you best.

## Application forms

Application forms tend to contain the same type of information as a CV but require you to present it in the way the recruiter wishes to see the information. These are often now online forms. They can be more limiting as you do not have the free reign to present yourself and allocate space to the information in the way that you can with a CV. The advice for writing CVs above and elsewhere within the Careers & Employability site is just as relevant for application forms, as with these you still need to choose your words and examples carefully to project the desired impression and capture the readers' attention.

Within application forms generally there is often a section called 'Additional Information' or 'Personal / Supporting Statement'. This section is your chance to elaborate and show the recruiter why you are the best candidate for the job. It allows you to expand on aspects that maybe you can't within the CV or application form due to space constraints. It should be very tailored to the role and your response should demonstrate that you understand fully what the role involves and how you can deliver these aspects.

Application forms for non-academic roles can also include competency based questions. These are questions which ask you to demonstrate certain skills or abilities. For example; Describe a time when you were under extreme pressure, how did you manage this? Or, What approach do you take to managing people?

Competency-based questions:

For competency based questions, **STAR** is a useful mnemonic to think about when giving examples of your skills, experience and capabilities. It is useful for CVs, application forms and within interviews too.

When describing something think about it in terms of:

- **Situation** – Give a brief overview of the background.
- **Task** – What the specific task was that needed to be undertaken.
- **Action** – What action you took. Highlight what your particular role was even if it was a group activity as the recruiter will want to see what you have done. Avoid saying 'we did'.
- **Result (and Learning)** – Explain what the outcome of the action was and what you learnt as a result (especially important if the outcome was not perfectly successful).

Your examples should concentrate on the **A** and **R**, rather than the first two points, and clearly demonstrate your impact and the outcomes.

In general for applications and interviews it is useful to think about examples you can use to illustrate different skills and experience. You will probably find that you can use a few key examples to demonstrate a range of skills within different applications.

Top tips:

- Complete the application form fully.
- **Personal Statement** – this is the most difficult part of the form requiring careful planning and structuring. Thoroughly research the position, department and institution to which you are applying.
- Make sure you highlight key skills and experience referred to within the job advertisement, job description and person specification. Use the key words the recruiter has specified within your application.
- Provide evidence that you meet the selection criteria and qualify for the appointment. Evidence of suitability, highly relevant training and experience – provide good recent examples to support what you say.
- List or highlight any achievements that make you stand out from the crowd, eg. Prize for project work.
- Use the STAR mnemonic to help you develop examples for competency based questions.

## Covering Letters

It is important to have a good covering letter as it is often the first part of the application the selector sees. The cover letter is the place for you to display your

motivation and enthusiasm for that particular role which does not come across in the CV. It gives you a chance to say things you can't fit into the application form and elaborate on your experience or skills that you want to draw attention to.

Your covering letter is where you should make your 'sales pitch'. It should encourage employers to read on and persuade them that you are worth pursuing.

If you are sending the application as an email then send the covering letter as an attachment.

Make sure you address the letter to the right person. This will be given on the job advert, or you will have to do some research (e.g. looking at their website or telephoning the organisation).

The letter should be no more than one A4 page long and written in the style of a business letter with your address at the top.

Explain who you are, what you are applying for and how the application came about (advert, personal contact, reasons for speculative approach). **Be explicit and positive about career change / demonstrate commitment to new career and your understanding of the different work environment**

Outline what makes you perfect for the job. What is unique about your blend of knowledge, skills and experiences that makes you ideal? Don't just repeat what is in your CV. Give the employer a flavour of what is in your CV by highlighting your most relevant skills rather than your background. The covering letter puts the CV in context. Include information that is difficult to present on the CV (motivation for applying, impressions of the company from visits or contact with staff).

Explain why you are interested in the job and their organisation. Do some research around the organisation so you can include some specific information. Find out as much as possible about the organisation, job, work ethos and the people. The wider sector, competitors? Reflect this in your application e.g. Recent projects they have worked on. Mention any contact you have had e.g. telephone/ in person. What is the organisation's unique selling point and how you can contribute.

Take the opportunity to explain any anomalies in your experiences, such as a gap in your career history or where you do not match the selection criteria. Explain how these hurdles have developed you in a positive way.

Conclude the letter positively – indicate availability for interview e.g. *I look forward to discussing my suitability for this position with you at interview.*

Top tips:

- Explain the purpose of writing (indicate why you are changing career) and what attracts you to the industry / type of role.

- Highlight your selling points. Expand on aspects you could not fit into the CV or application form.
- Demonstrate why you are suitable for the job.
- Explain why you are interested in the job and their organisation.
- Positive and professional tone.
- Address it to a named individual.
- Varying formats of three to five paragraphs.
- No more than one page long.
- Incorporate keywords they are looking for.