

# Creating an effective CV

## The CV and how it differs from a covering letter

A CV is your marketing document and opportunity to present yourself to an employer who may know nothing else about you. A CV is a summary of your experience and skills to-date that highlights your strengths and suitability for a particular job or employer. The job of a CV is to get you an interview or the next stage of selection.

The covering letter is often the first document that recruitment staff read when they receive your application. Ideally it is addressed to a named person. Its purpose is to make a positive first impression by highlighting the most relevant parts of your experience and capabilities as included on your CV. See our pdf article on how to write a covering letter for more details.

As a rule of thumb, put factual information and experience into the CV and use the covering letter to demonstrate your enthusiasm and suitability for the role, saying why you are applying for that job at that particular organisation.

## CV Essentials

**A CV is your personal document** and will reflect your unique combination of experience, interests and abilities. It is best to avoid CV templates for this reason.

**Target your CV** to the opportunity or organisation you are applying to; a simple list of your qualifications and work experience is not enough. Highlight your relevant skills, experience and achievements that will interest the employer, based on the job description and your research into the organisation.

**Best first.** Prioritise the information you put on your CV, ensuring the most interesting and relevant information goes first. Think about what you want to go on the front page that will make the employer want to read on.

**Accessibility at speed.** Recruiters rarely have sufficient time to review applications. As a rule of thumb, assume that the person reading your covering letter and CV will have only 30-60 seconds to make initial decisions about the quality of your application.

**It takes time.** Writing a marketable CV cannot be done perfectly the first time and will evolve as you make more applications.

## Types of CV

**Chronological CV:** The commonest style of CV, this states the facts about your education, experience and other activities in date order, with the most recent information first. The

information on this page relates mainly to the chronological CV, as it is easier to write and can be effective in most cases.

**Functional or skills-based CV:** This style of CV places an emphasis on the particular skills needed for a job by using a different subheading for each skill. Employment and education is then listed as relevant under each heading. This approach can be useful if for whatever reason you have gaps in your work or education history or other details you would rather not draw attention to on the first page of your CV. Visit this link to view an example of a functional CV.

**Academic CV:** The academic CV differs from conventional CVs mainly in the emphasis that is placed on academic qualifications and research experience. It is common also to produce an appendix page with a list of publications/ conferences attended/ papers presented. Take a look at the Vitae website for further advice.

## CV Layout & Style

- Length should not usually be more than 2 sides of A4 unless you are applying for an academic post or you are confident the recipient will have time to read more than 2 pages.
- Use consistent fonts - smallest size 10pt, consistent bullet points and style in CV and covering letter.
- For postal applications, consider printing on good quality paper.
- Remove spelling mistakes or poor grammar. Get someone to check it over before sending and do not rely on computer spellcheckers alone.
- List most recent first. Arrange all sections in reverse chronological order.
- Do not include a photo for the majority of UK employers.
- Use concise and positive language. Strip the text down to the essential information and facts.
- Avoid drawing attention to your negative points or lack of experience.
- Begin some of your sentences with action verbs such as 'developed...', 'initiated...'.

## Be creative with sub-headings

You don't have to stick to the same old headings used in so many CVs - be creative. For example, 'work history' as a heading forces you to write all your previous work experience in chronological order. By using instead headings like 'relevant experience' or 'professional experience' you can draw the employer's attention to the more relevant information so they do not have to scan through your entire employment record.

## Key sections on your CV

Here are some tips on what to include in each section of your CV.

### Personal Details

- Ensure that your name is prominent and stands out. This should be your main header rather than the word Curriculum Vitae as employers will know it is a CV.

- Use up-to-date and reliable contact details - this could include email, phone, mobile, and both term time and home addresses.
- You no longer have to give your date of birth on a job application due to age discrimination legislation passed in the UK in 2006.
- Marital status and state of health are best excluded from a CV. Health issues or disabilities are normally disclosed on a separate form and your marital status should not affect your eligibility for a job in the UK.
- Nationality is optional.
- If your gender is not clear from your name alone you may wish to indicate this.

## **Education & Qualifications**

- Reverse chronological - include your most recent course first.
- Unless you tell them, employers are unlikely to know what your course has involved, even less your specific choice of units and projects. You can list relevant units taken, dissertation title and subject, notable skills developed such as research skills, analytical skills and presentations and you can also list year abroad and project placements.
- List A level subjects and grades.
- GCSEs can be listed horizontally to avoid using too much space and you can either give all grades or group them into categories such as 5 at grade B including Maths, English and Drama.

## **Work Experience**

It is common for graduates to begin a CV with their education. However, when you think about it, it is your work experience that is more likely to set you apart from other graduates having done a similar degree. This is why it is important to listing your work experience on page one.

- Work experience includes paid work, internships and placements, part-time jobs and voluntary work.
- What was your job title? What were your responsibilities? What skills have you developed as a result? Were there any notable achievements? How did you work as part of a team?
- The employer will most likely not know any of this unless you tell them, so don't leave them guessing.

## **Additional Skills**

It is often appropriate to include a section that lists additional useful skills such as your IT ability and other languages that may not have been referred to earlier in your CV. Again, give enough detail to evidence your competency in each.

## **Interests**

- Employers can be interested in this section as it gives clues to your motivation, interests and personality and yet it can be the most difficult to write.

- You can include anything that you feel is relevant including: voluntary and community work, membership of professional organisations, positions of responsibility, music, arts and sports.
- The same principles apply as the work experience section. Think what message you are giving to an employer. Activities such as reading, socialising and going to the cinema are common to most people, so try to make your interests sound unique to you by giving more detail. How long have you been involved? What level have you achieved?

## Referees

- It's usual to list two contacts: one academic and one employer.
- Character references are sometimes required and these must not be by relatives or close friends.
- Ask permission from your referees before you begin sending out your CV.
- Provide them with a copy of your CV and applications so they have positive information to refer to when they are writing your reference.
- For speculative applications or occasions where you have provided your references on a different form, it is fine to use 'references available on request'.

## The Personal Profile

Also known as a 'career aim' or 'profile' this is a short summary of what you have to offer in a nutshell that is usually included near the top of the first page of your CV. The aim of a statement like this is to enhance an employer's positive first impression of your CV by appearing professional and focused.

### Example

*A motivated BSc Management graduate with strong computing abilities and excellent communication skills seeking work in an IT environment. Experience includes placements within both computing and retail sectors and advancement to a management role within a part-time job during the degree at UEA.*

The only general rules are to keep it short, punchy and positive and to create something that you feel comfortable with. Looking at examples by other people will help, but do not use one unless you feel happy that it represents you and adds to your application.

Profiles can be useful when you are handing out your CV in person without an accompanying letter or statement of interest.