Useful websites

uea.ac.uk/careers/cvbuilder
CV Builder is everything you need to chart your activities, identify your skills and construct your CV.

uea.ac.uk/careers
Get your graduate career off to a solid start via UEA's careers portal.

employability.uea.ac.uk
UEA's student job shop. Soon to include graduate-level jobs and alumni contacts.

uea.ac.uk/volunteers
Enhance your community, your life, and your CV with volunteering activities.

www.gradseast.org.uk
Graduate vacancies and work experience across the East of England.

www.prospects.ac.uk
The national website for graduate–level vacancies, advice and online careers services.

Careers & Employability
University of East Anglia,
Norwich Research Park, Norwich NR4 7TJ

w: www.uea.ac.uk/careers

e: careers.centre@uea.ac.uk

t: 401603 593452

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University of East Anglia

Applications, CVs and covering letters

Contents

Curriculum Vitae (CVs) 3
– What is a CV? 3
– Why do you need a CV? 3
– Types of CV 3
– Tips for compiling your CV 4
– Format 4
– Sections of your CV 6
– CV Builder 8
– Commercial awareness 8
– Disappointed with your grades? 8

Covering Letters 9
– What is a covering letter? 9
– How does a covering letter differ from a CV? 9
– Format, Style and Content 9
– Emails 9

Application forms and online applications 10
– Competency based questions 10
– Personal statement 11
– Demonstrating attributes employers want 13
– Action words and phrases 14

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General Note

A lot of the information and advice we provide is based on common sense and may appear obvious or even trivial. However, evidence shows that many job applicants, even very bright and otherwise capable ones, frequently make elementary mistakes which could be avoided by following exactly those simple pieces of advice. This booklet should educate and act as an aide memoire.

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Curriculum Vitae (CVs)

What is a CV?

A CV is a summary of your experience and skills to-date that highlights your strengths and suitability for a particular job or employer. A CV is your unique marketing tool, your personal document that demonstrates to employers why they should interview you.

Why do you need a CV?

You will need to supply one as part of a job, work experience placement or further study application (always sent with a covering letter or email).

- For speculative job or work experience applications.
- For posting onto job and recruitment agency websites.
- For careers fairs, recruitment events and other networking opportunities.

Types of CV

Chronological

Stating the most recent information first, this CV lists details of your education, experience and other activities in reverse chronological order.

Skills-based

This style of CV places an emphasis on the particular skills needed for a job by using a different subheading for each skill. Skills are sometimes referred to as competencies.

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.

Academic

The academic CV differs from conventional CVs because the emphasis is placed on academic qualifications, research interests and experience. It is common to produce an appendix page with a list of publications, conferences attended and papers presented.
We offer specialist advice for postgraduates and researchers.

Curriculum Vitae (CVs)

Tips for compiling your CV

- Always research the employer, and ideally the post, for each application, tailoring your CV to match.
- Identify competencies they value, particularly if listed in the job advert or recruitment literature.
- Keep your objectives clear; what are you trying to say? Who are you saying it to? Why should they be interested in you?
- Be creative, especially if the role requires it.
- Compile a reference CV recording details of all your experience and skills, from which you can extract information relevant to each application. (See CV Builder, below.)

Format

Length, layout and style

- Keep to no more than 2 sides of A4 unless you are applying for an academic post or you have considerable relevant employment experience.
- Arrange all sections in reverse chronological order, most recent first.
- Use clear headings.
- Use consistent, legible fonts (smallest size 10pt) and format throughout.
- Avoid providing a photograph, unless asked to do so.
- Good spelling and grammar is absolutely essential. Get someone to check it before sending and do not rely on a computer spellchecker alone.
- Check it again.

Content

- Use concise and positive language. Pare the text down to short statements giving essential information about what you personally have done and the skills you have developed.
- Avoid drawing attention to any negative points or lack of experience.
- You could begin some of your sentences with action verbs like 'demonstrated' or 'initiated'. (See Action Words, below.)
- Avoid jargon and explain any abbreviations.
- Always provide evidence to back up each of your claims by using examples. Avoid general and vague statements like 'a good communicator'. An employer will want to know how you have gained these skills and when you have used them.

Order

- Prioritise your information to grab reader's attention and motivate them to invite you to interview.
- Don't have the information that will get you the job on the final page – they may not read that far.
- Provide relevant evidence under each heading.

Curriculum Vitae (CVs)

Sections of your CV

You should include your personal details, education, experience, skills, interests, achievements and references.

Personal details

- Ensure that your name stands out. This should be your main header rather than the word Curriculum Vitae as employers already know this.
- Use up-to-date and reliable contact details. These should include email, phone, mobile, and both term time and home addresses. Use a sensible email address.
- Recent age discrimination legislation means you do not have to provide your date of birth.
- Marital status is best excluded from a CV.
- Health issues or disabilities are normally disclosed on a separate form.
- Nationality is optional.

Education and qualifications

- 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 (e.g. presentations, research skills), year abroad and project placements.
- List A-level subjects and grades (or equivalent).
- GCSEs or equivalent can be listed horizontally to avoid using too much space. Group them by grade, starting with the highest.

Employment, work experience and voluntary work

It is common for graduates to begin a CV with their education. However, it is your wider experience, and what you make of it, that is more likely to set you apart from other graduates having done a similar degree. It is therefore important to begin listing your work experience on the first page. 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? The employer will not know any of this unless you tell them, so don't leave them guessing.

Additional skills

Include a section that lists additional useful skills, such as knowledge of computer software and languages.

Interests and achievements

You can include anything that you feel is relevant including: voluntary and community work, membership of professional organisations, positions of responsibility, music, arts and sport. Activities such as reading, socialising and going to the cinema are common to most people, so try to make your interests sound unique.

Covering Letters

What is a covering letter?

The covering letter accompanies an application form or CV in response to advertised jobs or when making speculative applications.

How does a covering letter differ from a CV?

The covering letter is usually the first document that recruitment staff read when they receive your application. Its purpose is to make a positive first impression by highlighting the most relevant parts of your experience and capabilities for the role.

Use the covering letter to demonstrate your enthusiasm and suitability for the specific role, detailing why you are applying for that job at that particular organisation. You do not need to repeat factual information already included in the CV.

Format

Length and layout

- Use one side of A4 only and a maximum of three strong paragraphs.
- Address the recipient by name if possible – even if you have to make a phone call to find out. Use the appropriate title and surname or first name and surname, e.g. Dear Miss Burton, Dear Diane Burton.
- Where you know the name, sign off 'Yours sincerely'.
- If you cannot find a name to write to use 'Dear Sir/Madam' and sign off 'Yours faithfully'.
- Double check your letter and show it to a trustworthy friend to check over again for typing, spelling or factual errors.

Style

- Style should be positive, engaging and professional sounding.
- Be persuasive – show the reader how they will benefit from your skills and achievements.
- Avoid starting too many sentences or paragraphs with 'I'; use alternative starting words such as 'Whilst'.

Content

- Explain the purpose of your letter early.
- Use the letter to highlight and expand the most relevant points on your CV and to add other information in your favour. Focus on your strengths and achievements.
- Demonstrate that you have taken the trouble to find out something about the organisation especially recent news, but don't quote from the graduate recruitment literature unacknowledged.
- Show you know about the type of work you seek and how your skills match.
- Use the last paragraph to state what the next step will be. Speculative applications require you to be proactive, so state that you will follow up by phone. Make sure you do what you say.

Emails

- Either write the covering letter within the email, or attach as a separate document.
- Follow the same principles as with a covering letter.
- Keep it brief; people spend much less time reading text online.
- For speculative applications do not send a group email, which publicly displays every address. Adapt and send each one individually.
- Sign off 'Kind regards' or 'Best regards'.
- Use a sensible email address.

Application forms and online applications

There are many types of application form in either paper or online formats. Employers use a variety of different questions to help them to assess your suitability. As with CVs and covering letters it is vital to target what you are writing to the job description and person specification. The employer will match the evidence you give against their criteria for the job.

Competency based questions

This type of question asks you to demonstrate how and when you have used a particular skill. The employer will score how effectively you back up your claim, for example:

'Please give an example of a time when you have had to work in close collaboration with others'.

To answer this question well you must demonstrate where and when you have used teamwork, initiative and problem solving skills. Employers expect a structured answer, and the acronym CARL can help you do this:

C Context – gives a brief background to your answer.

A Action – explain what action you personally took in the situation.

R Result – for example gaining a high score for a presentation, getting positive feedback, winning an award or achieving a target.

L Learning – if relevant show what you learned from this experience.

Following is an example of how to answer a competency-based question (taken from the Prospects website www.prospects.ac.uk):

'Please demonstrate your commitment to promoting Equal Opportunities:'

Example answer:

'I have always tried to ensure in my personal and work life that I am sensitive to and inclusive of the cultures and circumstances of other people. In 2006, I worked as a mentor and facilitator to a group of students on the Aim Higher project to encourage pupils from non-traditional backgrounds to consider university. I designed projects and activities that recognised and focused on the diverse experience within the group to ensure participation. The programme was successful for the pupils and a rewarding learning experience for me. The experience showed me that working together with mutual respect is more productive and rewarding.'

Demonstrating attributes employers want

Applications are increasingly scored using evidence-based methods, so you should always try to provide brief written evidence to demonstrate the validity of your claims.

Written communication
- Essays, dissertations, project reports.
- Secretary of a student society.
- Publicity materials for a voluntary organisation.
- Letters to raise sponsorship for an event.

Planning and organisation
- Managing and prioritising your personal workload (time management).
- Project work, dissertation, revision timetable.
- Organising social, sporting, charity events.
- Arranging a travel itinerary.

Adaptability and flexibility
- Working part-time whilst studying.
- Successfully changing courses.
- Combining study with family commitments.
- Shift work, working at short notice.

Problem solving
- Creative solutions to coursework problems.
- Leisure activities such as chess, logic games, computing, role playing.
- Overcoming obstacles to achieve an ambition.
- Dealing with difficult situations.

Numeracy
- Work experience in a job involving significant use of numbers.
- Treasurer of a committee.
- Reading the financial press (eg: track a company or industry that interests you).
- Cash handling.

Computer literacy
- Reports, essays, spreadsheets, statistics, charts and graphs.
- Designing a web page.
- Using PowerPoint for a presentation.
- Specialist software and data analysis.

Initiative
- Getting relevant work experience, project work, sponsorship.
- Starting a new club or society or resurrecting an old one.
- Creating your own website.
- Independent travel.

Teamwork
- Opting for group project work.
- Team sports, outdoor pursuits.
- Work experience and any group work.
- Travelling with friends or playing in a band.

Interpersonal communication
- Work experience (eg: market research, telesales, bar work).
- Course or hall representative.
- Students' Union work.
- Being a mentor e.g. in schools.

Verbal communication
- Giving presentations, talks or campus tours.
- Workshop participation.
- Customer based work experience.
- Being a student ambassador.

Leadership and management
- Directing or producing an event.
- Editing a paper or periodical.
- Working with young people in summer camps, schools etc.
- Captaining a team or training others.

Action words and phrases

You can use some of these words to suggest how you have made an impact. Remember that if you use some of these words and phrases, you still need to make your CV stand out.

Experience

- Extensive academic or practical background in …
- Experienced in all aspects of …
- Provided technical assistance to …
- Coordinated …
- Organised …

Ability

- Trained in …
- Knowledge of, experienced as ...
- Proficient in, competent at …
- Expert at …
- Working knowledge of …

Success

- Promoted to …
- Proven track record in …
- Instrumental in …
- Awarded ...
- Achieved ...
- Delivered ...

Responsibilities

- Supervised or delegated …
- Experience involved or included …
- Familiar with …
- Employed to or handled …
- Assigned to …
- Project managed …
- Member of ...

Roles

- Established, created, designed …
- Formulated …
- Initiated …
- Managed …
- Presented …

Personal attributes

- Committed to …
- Confident
- Diplomatic
- Enthusiastic user of …
- Actively sought …
- Motivated to …

Communication

- Collaborated with …
- Supported ...
- Worked closely with …
- Led team of …
- Dealt tactfully with …
- Supervised ...

Research

- Created ...
- Developed ...
- Investigated ...
- Solved …
- Interviewed …
- Surveyed ...
- Designed ...