

CV writing

Your CV, no matter how little time the recruiter spends looking at it, speaks volumes about you and is the single most powerful tool when looking for a job.

Get it right and you get a foot in the door, so it is worth tailoring your CV to each job you apply for.

Structure

There are various theories on how to structure a CV, all of which have their merits. In general, the accepted structure of a modern CV is as follows:

- Name & Contact Details
- Summary or Profile or Mission statement
- Work Experience
- Education & Qualifications (always after Work Experience)
- Skills
- Interests

Photos are only really necessary if you are applying for a job in Europe. In the UK they aren't expected. If you do put a photo on, make it passport sized and smart.

The summary / profile are not always included but are a good opportunity to tailor your CV to the role you are applying for. Only 3 to 5 lines long, it should summarise your personality, motivation, key skills and what kind of role you are looking for and why you are suitable for it. Here you must be positive and confident – no 'sometimes' or 'quites' here please – whilst maintaining a personable and not arrogant tone of voice.

Your work experience should start with the most recent and work back.

It should include your title, company name, dates worked and a few lines on your key responsibilities but more importantly **your measurable achievements within this role – this is what they're looking for!** If you can quantify an achievement or put it into some perspective then do it; for example: 'salesman of the year' sounds good, however 'salesman of the year - first out of 300 employees nationwide with 160% of target achieved' sounds miles better. These should be tailored to show achievements likely to interest the recruiter you are applying to.

If you have managed people, make sure you specify how many.

If your career is lengthy, you only need give details of the more recent, meaty roles, say, for the last 5 years, as you can summarise with a line such as '1980 – 1999 Various roles in a management capacity within the retail industry - details available on request'

Education need only go back to A-levels. It is also worth mentioning that you got A-C grades in English and Maths GCSE or O-levels (if you did). If you don't have A-levels then O-levels or GCSE's should be included.

Skills are important to list although normally brief. These should be specific to your industry but can also include general skills such as driving licence and computer literacy (specify software). If you haven't included a profile / summary statement then here is your chance to list behavioural skills such as 'naturally analytical' or 'exemplary organisational skills', but if you have done a profile then keep it minimal.

Interests often provide a discussion point in any interview so be honest here but also try to put something interesting and specific. Rather than 'Reading', put 'Reading autobiographies' or rather than 'Football' put 'supporting Arsenal FC and playing in my local pub league'. Do not put it on if it's obscure or most people won't be able to relate to it – it scares people off.

Key Words

Most recruiters won't read your CV thoroughly, they will skim read it, so make their job easier by putting key words in the CV. These should be words relevant to the job; it's helpful to use the advert or job description and the words used in there to tailor the words in your CV to reflect the role. For example if they are looking for an **experienced Store Manager** with **Ladieswear** experience and **creative** flair, make sure the words we've highlighted appear somewhere in your CV.

Honesty

Be honest and give details of all of your career history including any gaps. You do not have to detail how badly you did in a certain role but you do have to say that you worked there and for how long. A good consultant or interviewer will normally ask you about reasons for leaving a role and any gaps in employment. Do not invent qualifications, jobs or experience. You will be found out.

Font / Design / Administration

Keep it clean, simple and short.

2 pages are normally enough, much more and you need to be more concise in the way you write. Your name should be larger than the rest of the text and in bold.

Help the person reading your CV by putting section headings (i.e. Education) in bold.

Make use of simple bullet points. This will help you keep it short rather than using paragraphs. This also helps an interviewer come up with questions related to your CV because they can pick key words out.

Put your job titles, job dates and the company you worked for in bold.

Avoid italic or underlining things as this does not help them to scan through to the detail. Do not put text in boxes.

You do not need to put your date of birth on your CV.

Things we hate

- People who don't do a spell-check
- Candidates with 15 years' experience will still put their education at the beginning
- People who put their 1st job at the top
- People who don't put their key achievements or make them really vague
- Taking work history so far back that we are aware they were milk monitor at nursery!!
- CVs with repeated words – use a thesaurus and find another way to say it!
- People who write a lot about their current role but are very general with info about previous ones
- People who use capital letters all over the place – use it for headings, names and job titles only
- Using funky colours, text, templates and boxes
- Comedy remarks or goofy comments
- Large photos or inappropriate photos – I once received a CV with a photo of a girl in full porn star makeup in a PVC top on a night out clubbing – hardly the professional image she should be portraying!
- Some people put their kids' names on their CVs - too much info!
- Times New Roman font
- Doing a skills profile + profile + mission statement
- No location details
- Story-telling
- 3 pages

Common mis-spellings:

Curriculum Vitae, Driving License (mis-spelt Licence), Focussed (mis-spelt focused)

Filling out an Application Form

Some employers still require you to fill out an application form. Whilst this may seem laborious, for the employer, it allows them to get the specific information they require, and because of the time it takes to do it, they see you are committed to applying for the role.

Preparation

Read the instructions carefully (if they say put your education in an order, make sure you put it in the order they specify)

Check the deadline

Research the company you are applying to and make sure you have lots of information on the job role. Keep in mind the qualities that the employer is looking for, you can then tailor each answer to illustrate your suitability for and interest in their job and their company.

Plan & Drafts

Write a draft version first then write / type out carefully once you're happy

Be concise and to the point but use all the space provided – empty spaces make your effort look half-hearted

Competency based questions (those starting "Describe a time when you " or "Give an example of") are the most important questions. For these, compose a paragraph for each, outlining the context, the task or problem, how you approached it and what the outcome was. Interviewers want to know what your role was in achieving the desired result so keep it focused on your input. If you failed to achieve your objective say what you learned and what you would do differently next time.

Give evidence and specific, relevant examples when making a point

Use different examples for each question if you can.

If asked for referees, employers normally ask for an academic and a personal reference but check. Always ask the referee first and try to make them as relevant to the role as possible.

Checking

Use block capitals if it is a paper form and your handwriting is messy.

Spell-check it or get a friend to check it before you send it off / press submit

Photocopy it or save it before you send it off so that if you do get an interview you can re-read what you wrote so that you can prepare for any of their questions