



Top tips on how to write a compelling CV

(for applicants changing jobs)

Does writing your CV fill you with enthusiasm, mild trepidation or even sheer terror?

The purpose of a CV is to provide sufficient information to a prospective employer for them to decide whether or not to interview you. The CV is, in effect, the first impression that prospective employers will have of you so it's important that you pitch clearly and concisely. Here are my top tips on composing a CV that will get you noticed for all the right reasons!

If you're applying for a job, you will at this point have a job or career path in mind. My first top tip is to be familiar with the job requirements, the job description and person specification or personal qualities that are essential or desirable for the post. This goes beyond the job advert and accompanying documents. I would encourage you to check out their website, their vision, values and facts about the company, if you haven't done so already and get a feel for the company culture and ethos. By doing this, you will gain useful insights that will reinforce your desire to get that job because your values match. You may even learn that your values are mismatched which will help you to decide whether or not to proceed with an application.

When carrying out your research, my top tip is to note down key words and terminology that stand out to you as you may be able to incorporate them in your CV and this will resonate with the prospective employer. For example, if you are seeking a sales post and the job description says they are looking for someone who can "maintain excellent relationships with clients" or "will go the extra mile to achieve targets", you may find it useful to repeat some of this wording in your CV as the prospective employer will be seeking someone who has these attributes. You will need to be able to back up your statements with evidence which I will come on to later.

Usually a CV contains five main sections; personal details, personal statement, experience, qualifications and extra-curricular activities.



Personal Details

Personal details include name, location, email address, phone number. In terms of Equality there is no requirement to provide your date of birth or address but historically it has been common practice to do so. Employers are used to seeing these details and, in any event once the employer has viewed your career history, they can work out roughly your age from dates of employment. You may also choose to include an appropriate picture of yourself. The benefits are that should you be called to interview the employer will already be familiar with your image and it will help the employer to remember you after the interview.

Personal Statement

The benefit of a personal statement is that it provides a punchy summary of your main core strengths and often includes a career goal so the employer can see at a glance your main attributes and can also gain a feel for your personality. After all, not only does the employer want to fill a post with someone who can perform the job role, they want the successful candidate to fit in with the rest of the team. The personal statement says something about you, your drive, motivation, aspirations and ambition.

Employers are very busy people so they may decide whether or not to read all of your CV depending on the information you provide in your personal statement. Many people struggle with drafting their personal statement so the key is to keep it brief, specific and relevant.

I see many CVs where the applicant has made some unsubstantiated self-flattering claims about their performance or personality such as “highly motivated, ambitious with excellent communication skills”. There is no evidence here to corroborate these attributes and will therefore be viewed unfavourably by the employer. My top tip is that you need to identify the attributes, personal qualities and role that the employer is seeking and tailor your statement to incorporate this with a specific example.

Example:

Toby left school at eighteen having secured 3 A Levels. He didn't know what he wanted to do for his career but needed to get a job and was able to secure a position in an insurance company dealing with customer enquiries and performing administrative skills within a small team. Within a few months he gained a promotion to another section within the company dealing with more complex pension calculations. He realised, through research,



that he really wanted to become a quantity surveyor and saw an advert for an apprenticeship with a local company that would lead to a full Quantity Surveying qualification. He investigated the skills and qualities that the company were seeking and tailored his personal statement to highlight his attributes to the best possible advantage.

“I am motivated by delivering exceptional customer service, demonstrating honesty, integrity and being prepared to go the extra mile, which has resulted in me securing a promotion within my first year in my current post as a calculations officer in an insurance company”.

“In my current role I have had the opportunity to develop my communication and business skills, as part of a team and on my own, contributing to team performance through exceeding laid down company productivity measures. I have demonstrated my success through completing complex insurance and pension redemption calculations and queries accurately and within set timescales, whilst managing customer expectations. I am now seeking an opportunity to further develop my learning and forge a career at entry level as a quantity surveyor in the construction industry”.

Toby went on to describe his key skills, directly relating examples to the role he was seeking.

Experience

Employers will be impressed if you are able to demonstrate that you have recent, relevant experience for the position being advertised. You will therefore need to have suitable relevant examples that you can draw upon. I advise you to use your strongest examples as these will provide the greatest impact. Usually your experience is detailed by setting out previous jobs with corresponding start and finish dates. You would also include main responsibilities of each job so this is an opportunity to echo some of the responsibilities set out in the job description for the advertised post, if appropriate. For example, if the employer is looking for someone who works well as part of a team and this is something that you have successfully done in a previous job, include it in this section and accompany it with a brief example of how you have demonstrated good teamwork. If you are able to also demonstrate leadership skills within the team or that you have taken responsibility for a task within the team, this will further strengthen your CV. Make sure that you are succinct and avoid rambling, consider the use of bullet points.



Usually you would detail your most recent or current job first and then cover the remaining jobs in descending chronological order.

A top tip when setting out your work experience in each role is to include your main responsibilities, matching them to the job requirements if possible and concluding by making an accomplishment statement such as “Answering customer queries face to face and on the telephone. No customer complaints in 3 years” or “Completing income and expenditure spreadsheets within deadlines. 98% accuracy achieved over last 12 months”

Qualifications

If you have impressive qualifications and grades or you meet/exceed the qualification criteria set out in the job specification you may well want to include all the details. If they fall short of what is required yet you still feel that you have all the relevant experience required to fulfil the post advertised, it would be prudent to provide a summary rather than include specific grades. Some employers will differentiate between essential and desirable qualification criteria while others will not stipulate qualification requirements.

If you have gained additional qualifications since leaving full time education or within your current or previous job, my top tip is to include the details particularly if the qualification is relevant to the post advertised. If you have a driver’s Licence, include it here and any other memberships where a qualification has been achieved. Generally, employers view continuous professional development positively. If you are a foreign national, confirmation that you are permitted to live and work in the UK should be included here.

Usually you would cite the most recent qualifications first followed by the remaining in descending chronological order.

Extra - curricular activities

Including extra – curricular activities does provide you with an opportunity to demonstrate your personal qualities further. For example, if you have captained a winning team it suggests that you are motivated, driven and possess effective leadership and communication skills. Be cautious about what information you include here. Make sure that the examples you provide are relevant to the job responsibilities and avoid statements



such as “I enjoy socialising with friends” as it does not add value and may be detrimental. My top tip is to include examples of being a member of a club, group or society and highlight special talents that you have developed as a result. If you subscribe to relevant industry magazines include the details in this section.

For those with little or no work experience, you will need to draw upon all of your life resources such as any activities where you held a position of responsibility or took part in a successful event. You may be a member of a club outside of school such as sea/air/army cadets, scouts, guides, rangers, a sports team or an amateur dramatics group, music group or band. Just remember to relate your experience to the role requirements if you can.

Format

Research has shown that most employers prefer a clear and professional looking CV rather than a creatively designed one. My top tip here would be to use a clear font such as Ariel or Calibri and font size 11 or 12 on a white background. Contain your CV within 2 pages. If you are short on space leave out referee details but include a statement “references available upon request”.

Personal details traditionally are detailed first; name, location, email address, phone number. In terms of Equality there is no requirement to provide your date of birth or address but historically it has been common practice to do so. Employers are used to seeing these details and, in any event once the employer has viewed your career history, they can work out roughly your age from dates of employment. You may also choose to include an appropriate picture of yourself. The benefits are that should you be called to interview the employer will already be familiar with your image and it will help the employer to remember you after the interview. Usually your name would appear in a larger font than 11 or 12. I suggest 14 or 16 in bold. Personal details are placed in the centre of the page at the top. If you wish to insert a line underneath your personal details to separate them from the body of the CV you can do so but this is personal preference. Try it with and without to see which format you prefer.

Following on from your personal details will come your personal statement as described above.

We then have qualifications, experience and extra-curricular activities. Usually the extra-curricular activities are placed at the end so you need to decide whether to go with experience or qualifications after your personal statement. My top tip would be that you



are guided by the job requirements so if the employer is looking for a graduate or entry level employee where the qualifications may be more of a focus than experience, then include qualifications before experience. If, however, the employer is emphasising experience required and does not seem to focus on qualifications as a priority, or if your qualifications fall short or are average rather than impressive, then place experience before qualifications.

Finally, you include extra-curricular activities and remember to include activities that are relevant to the post and will portray you favourably.

Once you have completed your CV, read it back to yourself as if you are the employer. Does it sound impressive? How could you improve it? Is it appropriate and relevant? Do you come across as sounding enthusiastic and competent? Would you select yourself for interview?

Ask a trusted friend or family members to review your CV and come up with suggestions as to how it could be even better.

Remember that a CV is work in progress. It can be amended and improved at any time so keep it up to date and tailor it to each job for which you apply.