

Tips for writing a great CV

The Curriculum Vitae

A CV is a selling document and it has only one purpose — to secure an interview. One of the main things to understand about the job market is that it is a market. Within it there are buyers and sellers, and the laws of supply and demand are as valid as anywhere else. Being good at your job is not enough; many other people are. To an extent, therefore, success depends on your ability to sell yourself, and the first stage in this process is your CV.

In particular recruiters want to know:

- What you can do.
- What you have done

Only if you are able to satisfy them on these two points in your CV will you get the chance to satisfy them on the third :

- What sort of person you are.

Therefore, a CV should emphasise what recipients want to know about you and not what you want to say about yourself.

In the same way you need to establish your own characteristics, strengths, weaknesses and track record so that you can present them in a way that will appeal to the sort of employer you are trying to attract.

A CV needs to be:

- **Short.** A two page CV is the norm, but three pages are acceptable provided you have enough useful information to fill them.
- **Attractive.** Easy to read and well laid out, it should be typed but not bound into fancy folders that do not fit into recruiters' files.
- **Complete.** There should be no unexplained gaps in the history. All information that makes you seem an interesting candidate should be included.
- **Accurate.** Facts and figures can be checked ! Do not misrepresent yourself : liars get very short interviews.
- **Positive.** Use active words. The way you express yourself says something about you.
- **Results Oriented.** Focus on achievements and things that you have done. Show what you have made of your opportunities. Employers want achievers.

The format should include the following:

- **Full name**
- **Home postal address:** including postcode
- **Telephone:** home or mobile number only, unless you are prepared to be contacted at work
- **Email Address**
- **Date of birth:** Whilst this information is not mandatory, we advise that you state your date of birth as omitting your age, may betray your sensitivity about it. The reader will merely calculate it from other information and is likely to penalise you for her/his effort
- **Marital status:** This is not mandatory and is your personal choice as to whether to include this information
- **Nationality:** important and should always be included. If you are a non EU resident, add information on your valid work permit

- **Summary:** five or six lines that labels you and allows the reader to focus attention on the sort of role you might be seeking
- **Education:**
 - Show your highest level of education
 - List with dates in chronological order showing the establishment where the course was taken
- **Academic qualifications:** list with dates
- **Qualifications:** include membership of professional bodies that reflect genuine attainment. Recruiters know which ones are simply bought by paying a subscription
- **Other Training:** list dates and training organisation. Whilst this is an opportunity to mention specific additional skills of knowledge you may have, avoid one day courses or those of a trivial nature
- **Languages:** list those in which you can conduct business. State whether fluent in speech or writing
- **Employment history:** date from and to, company name and brief description of its business i.e. products, turnover, number employed
- **Job title:** if obscure use a more widely understood term, but do not mislead. Show accountabilities with scale e.g. size of budget, number of people, tonnes per annum, etc. Identify achievements, specific, and quantified. Show how the job developed while it was yours
- **List all jobs** in reverse chronological order with fewer details as you go back in time. The history should show a pattern of progression and development. Specify and quantify results under the job where they occurred
- **Interests:** they say something about the sort of person you are (caring, active, competitive, practical, and intellectual) so be aware of this. Useful to mention community work or positions of responsibility (e.g. Chair of Parent Teachers Association). A chance to show skills not obvious elsewhere in the CV (e.g. computing)

A word about your **photograph** on your CV: it allows the reader enormous scope for prejudice and discrimination, it is much better to exclude one unless it is requested.

The covering letter

You will seldom send out the CV on its own, so you can use the covering letter as the means of personalising your approach to the particular application. Use it as a bridge between the CV and the advertisement to amplify or add points of particular relevance to the job (*see our document on tips for writing a covering letter*). If you have two rather different career objectives, you may need two 'standard' CVs, each worded and focused for their particular target markets.