

Starting Points: How to write an effective CV

There is no one definitive way to structure and write a CV. Layout and content should be designed to highlight the skills and experience relevant to the position you are applying for. Once written, take 30 seconds to scan read your CV as if you were an employer - does the evidence that you have the skills and experience they are looking for stand out clearly?

Layout and format

- No longer than two sides of A4 - and in some situations one side is appropriate, such as for part-time work, and for creative and media industries.
- Clear and neat layout - don't overcrowd the page, and avoid large blocks of text.
- Make use of bullet points to emphasise key information.
- Use clear headings and sub-headings, using bold/ italics/different font sizes.
- Be consistent – format headings in the same way throughout.
- Make sure there are NO spelling or grammar errors.
- Be concise, and use short, punchy sentences.

Content

Not every CV will have the same information in the same order or format. The following highlights the information you should include and suggests possible sections and headings. Choose the best format to highlight your attributes and strengths.

Personal details

- Name, address, contact telephone number and an appropriate, professional sounding email address. It's useful to include a link to your LinkedIn profile too.

Personal profile

- This is recommended and is useful to highlight key strengths and achievements that will set you apart from other applicants.
- Should be focused on the vacancy you are applying for, aim for a maximum of three - four lines.

Education and qualifications

- Most recent qualifications first - don't forget to include relevant degree modules.
- Focus on your degree, highlighting any aspects that are relevant to the role, such as particular modules, projects, achievements or final year dissertation.
- Summarise GCSEs, for instance - Nine GCSEs grades A-C, including Maths and English.

Employment history or work experience

- Could be set out as "Relevant" and "Other" or "additional" work experience.
- Put the most recent, relevant work experience first.
- Include details of placements, voluntary work, casual summer jobs – anything which can help demonstrate your skills and experience.
- Experiences such as bar work are excellent for demonstrating skills such as attention to detail, interpersonal skills, and the ability to work under pressure.

- Summarise your main responsibilities and achievements in the most relevant roles - and quantify to add detail, for instance: 'I led a team of five, and we had three weeks to develop a scheme...'

Key skills/skills and achievements

- Optional, but is a good way of summarising what you think your strengths are, and can be effective on the first side of a CV.
- Good if you have developed skills in different areas of your life, such as your studies, placements, paid work, voluntary work, social life...
- Pick four or five key skills, and give examples of where you have demonstrated them
- if there is a person specification/ job description for a position you are applying for, pick out the skills they are looking for .
- Skills you will have developed as part as your degree might include: research, data analysis, evaluation and interpretation, problem solving, IT, creativity, teamwork, project management, written and oral communication, and the ability to work under pressure.

Interests

- A good way to show that you are a well-rounded person who enjoys learning new things.
- Also good for showing an employer what you are like as a person.
- Demonstrate any skills you have gained from extracurricular activities, such as committee roles in societies, participation in sport, or volunteering.
- Give details of two or three interests rather than producing a long list.
- Alternatively you could place this information in a 'Positions of responsibility' or 'Achievements and interests' or 'Achievements' section.

References

- Usually give your tutor as a first referee and ideally a previous employer as your second, but always ask permission first.
- Write "References available on request" if you run out of space (unless instructed otherwise)

Use action words - create a positive impression

Achieved Coordinated Created Designed Developed Initiated Managed
Negotiated Organised Proved Researched Succeeded Persuaded Planned

Demonstrated skills in... Considerable experience in... Familiar with... Project managed...
Knowledge of/experienced as/proficient in... Trained in... Working knowledge of....

Further information

- Visit the CVs section of Careers Central

Want to talk it through?

Contact Careers and Employability for further advice and support via the below contact details. This information is available in alternative formats on request.