

Make your CV work for you

A CV is your chance to sell yourself, to show what you have done and what you can do.

It must be a quick and easy to read, giving the employer/client an immediate indication of how you meet their requirements.

To do this effectively, keep these suggestions in mind:

MAKE AN IMPACT

Your CV must be instantly readable. Many decisions on CVs are made within the first few seconds of reading. So, your CV must be a quick and easy to read. Choose carefully what information you want to give and how you want to convey it.

People won't read it if you write too much, so take care to draw out the major points you wish to convey.

A NEW CV FOR EVERY OCCASION

A CV is a 'living' document not a one-size-fits-all. It must always be individually tailored to the work brief you are applying for. Think: what do they want? This does not mean that you have to write a new CV each time but you must ensure that the most relevant information for the particular work/employer you are targeting is clearly emphasised.

It also means that you can have many versions with different content and length. In some cases a short one-page CV will be just as effective as a longer one. In any case, most CVs should not be longer than two or three pages.

TELLING AND SELLING YOUR STORY

Employers will want to know what you've been doing and when, including what work you have done most recently – the story of your working life.

So, a chronological CV, working backwards from your last/latest job, is the norm. Some people want to put an extensive list of 'key skills' before their career/work history. Be aware that if you do this, it may well hold up the employer who wants to know what you've done most recently, and it may put them off from reading any further.

LAYOUT IS CRUCIAL

Use a contemporary font (eg Arial, 10 point.) A clean, well set out CV will look professional, and, crucially, keep that easy-to-read rule. Make careful use of emboldening, bullet points, underlining, italics but don't overdo it. Too much of this can be off-putting. Simple, clear layout is highly effective.

LOOKING GOOD IS CRUCIAL

Hard copy CVs – these are still asked for by employers. Make sure that you choose a high quality paper to print them on. For all formats – ensure that spelling and grammar are correct. Employers are put off by spelling mistakes and sloppy grammar. Your CV is a reflection of your professional identity. Look your best.

THE PROFILE

An increasingly common feature of CVs is the short paragraph that appears at the top of your CV, known as the 'profile'.

The profile should be a short, factual statement that gives the most relevant and important information that you wish to convey to the employer first.

Your CV will then go on to fill in the details of this statement. Profiles are not compulsory but many employers say that they prefer them, that they can give a useful snapshot of the person. If you decide to use a profile, remember that, as with the CV, your profile will not, and should not, be the same every time – you can tailor how you want to describe yourself to suit particular employer/client needs. It should be written in the 3rd person.

Above all, do not be overblown. Avoid self-aggrandising terms such as, 'highly talented', 'enthusiastic', 'passionate', 'team player', etc. These qualities may well be sought – and you may well have them – but just writing them down does not prove that you possess them. Keep your profile short, factual, positive.

TRAINING AND QUALIFICATIONS

Ensure that you give dates for these, especially in the case of training – an employer will want to know how up-to-date your skills are.

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Personal information is just that – personal. It is your business. In some cases the law forbids employers asking – one example is your age. If you are asked to provide information that you feel uncomfortable doing, then check your legal rights.



REFEREES

You can keep your options open by just putting: 'Referees available on request'. That way, when asked, you can choose exactly whom you might think is the best referee for a particular employer.

Alternatively, if you are fortunate enough to have a widely recognised and highly respected referee, then give their details.

SUPPORTING YOUR CV

The covering letter or email is as crucial as the CV. Many of the above points are relevant here. Keep it short and to the point.

Don't worry about repeating some of what you have said in your CV. But remember: only use the most relevant points for the particular employer you are aiming your CV at. Finally, ensure that the covering letter and CV are addressed to the right person – you don't want all that hard work to go to waste!

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