

How to write an effective CV

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Applying for jobs can be a daunting prospect. And in most cases, you may have just one opportunity to show a potential employer that you're the best person for the job - and that's by sending them your CV.

But with the number of applications for jobs continuing to rise (studies suggest applications for entry-level jobs have almost doubled during the last couple of years), it's essential to make sure your CV creates the best possible impression. The person opening your CV may have hundreds of others to look at, which means yours has to stand out if you want any chance of getting an interview.

Did you know?

You may spend hours crafting your CV but one study suggests employers may spend as little as eight seconds looking it. (Source: *National Citizen Service*).

Common CV mistakes

Before you start writing your CV, it's a good idea to be aware of the mistakes people often make. This list includes the top 10 CV errors, as outlined by a survey of 500 employers:

1. Bad grammar

2. Spelling mistakes
3. Poor formatting
4. CV longer than two pages
5. Casual tone
6. Use of jargon
7. Unusual font style or size
8. Exam grades listed in full
9. Generic interests listed, such as cooking or reading
10. Lack of activities related to personal development

What to include

How you structure and format your CV is up to you. However, most people start with their name and contact details (including details of professional social media networks you belong to, such as LinkedIn), followed by a personal profile.

This is your chance to catch a potential employer's attention: start with a headline sentence that sums up your experience and the type of position you're looking for. Bear in mind that this section may be the only part of your CV a prospective employer will read, so it must show them instantly why you're perfect for the job.

Follow with a brief mention of your key qualifications, your track record and what you hope to achieve in your career - all in 100 words or less.

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Work history

If this isn't your first job, the next section should outline your work history, including work experience placements. Include the name and location of each company you've worked for and the dates you worked for them, along with your job title (and, where relevant, the department).

With each job, briefly mention your skills, achievements and duties. If you can think of examples to illustrate your skills and achievements, include these too, as examples are much more powerful than statements.

Try to think of specific work-related examples that might show a potential employer you have the right technical skills and expertise for the job, as well as any transferrable skills such as the following:

- You're good at solving problems
- You have strong organisational skills
- You work well with other people
- You have great communication skills
- You have a flexible attitude and can adapt to change easily
- You're good at using your initiative
- You make a good leader
- You're good at time management

Employers are particularly interested in reading about your work history, so try to use this section to really sell yourself. But be specific and concise, and try not to waffle.

Also avoid including anything that isn't relevant, such as a Saturday job. And if you have a lot of work experience to list, keep the details of your earliest positions as short as possible.

Education and qualifications

In the next section, write about your education and qualifications. However, avoid giving too many details of exams and grades unless the job you're applying for requires a specific qualification - in which case you could go into a little more detail.

You don't have to write about your hobbies and interests unless they relate directly to your career or the job you're applying for. It is, however, a good idea to mention any relevant non-work activities or skills, such as having a driving licence or the fact that you can speak one or more other languages.

Other things you shouldn't include are your date of birth, nationality, your marital status and whether or not you have children. Some experts also advise omitting details of referees and simply stating that these are available on request.

But if you do include referees on your CV, at least one of them should be related to work (include their job title and how they are related to you professionally - for example, they may be your line manager).

(Note: some people include their education and qualifications before the work history section - neither way is more correct than the other, it's a matter of personal preference.)

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Keep the layout simple

When it comes to the format and layout of your CV, keep in mind that it should be short - no more than two pages (one page is even better). Employers and managers may have too many CVs to get through and not much time, so if your CV is much longer than two pages it may not get past the first screening stage.

Most importantly, it should be uncomplicated and easy to read. So try to keep your sentences short and avoid using jargon. Also avoid lots of dense blocks of text by keeping your paragraphs short (make sure all paragraphs and bullet points - if you're using them - are correctly aligned and formatted). You may, however, want to add simple line breaks between each section to make things as clear as possible.

In terms of font, it's best to stick with something traditional:

- Times New Roman is a favourite with CV writers
- Alternatively, try something fresh and modern such as Ariel or Helvetica
- Or try using both - Helvetica or Arial for section headings and Times New Roman for the main body text
- If you feel you must add a personal flourish, use a different font to highlight your name (Mistral and Copperplate are popular examples) - but nothing else.

Meanwhile, avoid using fonts that are too small to read comfortably - aim for a minimum of 10 points. And while it may seem that adding colour to your CV could help make it stand out, coloured text can be difficult to read - so stick with black.

Also resist the temptation to include boxes or graphics. You may think these little extras show you're creative and that you know about document design, but the more cluttered your CV, the more likely it will be discarded before anyone reads it (aim for plenty of white space instead).

Tailor your CVs

It may seem tempting to have just one CV that you can use for a range of different job applications. But experts these days advise customising your CV for each individual job you apply for, as it could give you a better chance of getting an interview.

First, look at your personal profile - is it relevant to the job in question? Does it sum up the most relevant experience you can think of that might persuade the employer in question that you're an ideal candidate?

Try to think of ways in which an employer could see immediately that you're right for that particular job. Study the job description for the position you're applying for, and look for any key words or phrases that you could use in your personal statement - this shows a prospective employer that you've done your homework.

Also try to make sure your employment history outlines the type of skills any particular job requires, and that you give examples where possible that strengthen your application. And if you're not sure whether something is relevant to a particular job, ask yourself why you're telling a prospective employer about it. If you can't give yourself a good answer, don't include it.

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All of this means a little extra effort, as you'll have to edit or even rewrite your CV for every job you apply for. But it will be worth it.

Write a covering letter

If you're sending a CV - either by post or email - rather than uploading it onto a website, you also need to write an effective covering letter to go with it. Like your CV, your letter should be brief (try to keep to five short paragraphs or less), and should include an explanation of what you're applying for. Print your letter out, don't write it by hand.

You may also want to reinforce your application in your covering letter by mentioning the key skills and achievements you have for the job you're applying for, and what you could offer if you were the successful candidate. And if your CV's employment history has any gaps, you can explain them in the letter rather than in the CV itself.

Keep your covering letter simple, straightforward and professional and make sure it's addressed to the right person (if you don't know who that is, call the company and ask).

Finally, end your letter by pointing out that your CV has more information about you and your work history, and point out the best way you can

be contacted, making sure your contact details are correct.

Grammar and spelling

Poor spelling and grammar are among the most common mistakes in CVs and covering letters. So read your CV thoroughly, several times, before you send it. Use a spell checker if you have one - but don't rely on it. If possible, ask a friend, relative or colleague to check your CV and covering letter first. Also check any dates you've given are accurate.

Once your CV is finished, try to revisit it once a month to make sure anything new that's of importance is added and that old or irrelevant content is removed.

Useful links

If you are experiencing any of the issues covered in this guide, in the first instance call our free helpline on 0808 801 0550. Our Advisors will listen without judging and will work with you as best they can to achieve a positive outcome. If you prefer you can email: helpline@ltcharity.org.uk Visit our website: www.licensedtradecharity.org.uk It's full of useful information about the kind of issues we know people who work in the licensed trade face.

Other sources of information

National Careers Service

<https://nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk/home>
Advice on choosing or changing career, including help with writing CVs and covering letters.