

Writing successful CVs

Your CV is a great chance to prove that you have the specific skills and experience required by an employer. To promote yourself effectively, identify the skills required in the vacancy and provide evidence of you having them.

You should use *positive power words* and any headings you want to promote your specific skills and experiences - here are some of the headings you should consider:

Personal details

- This is usually the first heading on a CV and you should keep it short.
- Print your name at the top in a large font.
- If necessary, include both your term-time and home addresses (with dates when you will be at each).
- Create a professional voicemail reply message and email address incorporating your name.
- Generally, no need to include information relating to your age, sex, nationality, marital status or health.

Education

Provide details of your education (in reverse chronological order) going back to your secondary education (or equivalent).

Summarise your high school results or public examination results, but promote your recent education and training more fully. Relate your degree(s) to the job you are going for. For example, you could list relevant modules, outline related projects and/or promote the skills you have gained.

Experience/work experience

All work experience counts, whether paid, voluntary or shadowing (working alongside someone for a short time to see what their job is like). Outline your responsibilities and achievements that were/are relevant to the job you are seeking. Provide more information for recent and relevant roles. Some experience can be grouped together.

Positions of responsibility/achievements/interests

Choose one of these headings to outline extracurricular accomplishments which demonstrate your personal initiative and career motivation. Briefly describe what you have done, how you have succeeded and the relevant skills you have gained.

Referees

You can either provide the contact details of two referees or tell the employer that your references are 'available upon request'. Ideally, it is better to have one of your referees be related to your work, e.g. a manager at work, and one should be an academic.

Layout

It should be easy to scan your CV and see your key skills and experiences. To do this effectively:

- use an appropriate type of CV (chronological, skills-based or academic);

- highlight relevant skills and experiences;
- place key information at the top of the CV where it can be easily seen;
- use bullet points to break up text;
- use positive headings such as 'Skills gained' and 'Relevant experience';
- list your experiences in reverse chronological order (most recent first);
- make dates easy to see and leave no unexplained gaps in time.

Presentation

- To create a good impression:
- use good quality paper (if sending a hard copy);
- in most instances, use two full pages (investment banks may expect a one-page CV, and academic institutions may want a longer academic CV for academic roles);
- use a simple consistent format;
- promote yourself with positive words and phrases;
- spell everything appropriately and use correct grammar;
- avoid graphics and tables as they can look cluttered;
- use a larger font size for headings and use bold for emphasis (but do not overdo it);
- keep it simple and attractive even if a job calls for artistic creativity (you can always provide a portfolio of your work);
- avoid too much white space.

Covering letters

Whenever possible, send a covering letter with your CV which demonstrates your motivation, commitment and relevant skills.

- Always tailor your covering letter to the specific role.
- Show you have researched the role, the organisation and the industry.
- Outline why you are attracted to the specific opportunity.
- Highlight your unique selling points.

When applying by email, add the letter as an attachment.

Style

- Use one page of A4 paper and four or five paragraphs.
- Address your letter to a named person, even if you have to contact the organization to ask who deals with recruitment.
- Include your contact details and the employer's (including their title).
- Make sure your grammar and spelling are perfect.
- Use a professional tone.
- Link your writing style to the industry, e.g. covering letters for a job as a waitress will be less formal than those for an internship at a bank.

Content

Use the following format as a guide for your letter. You may also want to include an extra paragraph to explain any personal circumstances or anomalies such as low grades or a career change.

5-Paragraph format

- a positive, formal introduction outlining how you heard about the opportunity, listing the documents you have enclosed (such as your CV).
- outline why you are interested in the role and the organization, demonstrating indepth research and mature reflection on how the opportunity fits into your career plans.
- highlight your key skills and experiences.
- highlight your key personal characters and strength.
- end positively outlining when you will be available for interview.