

How to Write Your CV

A curriculum vitae (CV) gives you the opportunity to create a powerful personal marketing tool, and to draw an employer's attention to those things you would like to discuss at the interview.

There are a number of different ways in which you can present the information in a CV. However, whatever format you choose, you need to include

Personal details. Give your surname and given names, but indicate the given name you prefer to be known by. Provide your full address and as many other methods of contact as possible (telephone, mobile phone, email, fax etc.)

Educational qualifications. Concentrate on your most recent qualifications or what you are studying at the moment.

Employment history. Provide information on any periods of employment in reverse date order, that is, apply the 'most recent, most relevant' rule. This should include your job title or role, responsibilities and achievements.

Skills. List any skills you possess that are relevant to your application. For example, you may hold a full UK driving licence, be able to speak another language, or have specific computer skills.

Interests. Provide details on two or three interests that help to demonstrate your suitability for the job in question.

Contact details for referees. Provide the titles, names and addresses of referees. Employers also find it useful to have telephone numbers.

As you can see, there is not a great deal of difference between the raw information in a CV and the details you are required to provide on an application form, but there should be an enormous difference in the way in which you explain and present the information. To do this you need to reflect in an intelligent way on where you are now, and to project your experience in the most effective form you can.

For many students the core of their CV will be their present studies. These should not just be presented as a degree title followed by a tedious list of course units and an anticipated grade. You need to say why you chose a particular course, what you have learnt and the skills you have developed.

By the way, if you have already got qualifications include your grades, otherwise employers will assume you have low grades.

When you talk about interests it is better to focus on a small number and say what they are, what you get out of them, and the knowledge and/or skill you have gained that may be useful in a work context. For example, if you are a martial arts expert you could describe the way in which it has given you personal discipline and an effective technique for unwinding after a stressful day.

As for the work history section, if you have substantial work experience flaunt it! This is what will make you stand out from the crowd.

Remember that employers are looking for people who know what it is like to work. Convince them that you have learnt important lessons from your experience. The name of the game is to respond to the employer's needs by providing the right evidence.

As for presentation, you can produce a CV in the same order as the list above or use a skills-based format. The skills approach allows you to link your experience directly to the employer's requirements, to include a personal statement, and crucially to provide details in the most persuasive order. The last point is well worth making, as it is estimated that most managers spend as little as 30 seconds reviewing a CV. In consequence you have to make an impact - fast.

Note that if you include a personal statement it should be no more than 40 - 50 words in length. You will also need to provide evidence for what you say in the rest of the CV.

Action steps

- A good CV is a short CV, so follow the advice given and try not to cover more than two sides of A4-sized paper
- Make sure the employer can easily see what you can do. Put things in the most logical and/or persuasive order and use bullet points.
- Check for any gaps in your CV. Employers will view any unaccounted-for periods of time with suspicion.

Etiquette and letters

If you are asked to complete an application form never just send a CV without the application form, or worse still, attach a CV to an application form with a note saying 'see CV'. Also make absolutely certain that the address you provide on your form or CV is the place you are likely to be resident when the employer replies. If there is any doubt, provide two sets of contact details.

You do not need to provide a stamped and addressed envelope (SAE) for the employers' response unless specifically requested.

Whenever you return an application form or submit a CV it must be accompanied by a covering letter. This is as important as your application, as it is the first document that the employer will read. Indeed some employers seem to pay more attention to the covering letter than the CV. Whatever, a good letter can only increase your chances of getting the job, while a poor one is almost certain to lead to rejection.