



A guide to writing a winning CV

We get asked for advice about writing CVs all the time and the first thing to keep in mind when writing a CV is that you won't please everybody with just one document. When looking for that next challenge usually the first glance a potential employer will have of you will be via your CV. Be prepared to invest time in amendments and alterations as time goes on!

Below you will find some interesting Guide and FAQs. Beyond this we have a separate document regarding CV structure. Remember, this is a guide based on many years of experience of recruiting and reading CVs – it's a very subjective topic indeed.

The most important rule

Imagine you are providing a service or product to a customer. The customer asks for a specific product with specific functions, technical specifications and establishes a list of their requirements. Now to satisfy your customer's need the most sensible thing to do is try and provide a product that meets the requirements and specifications.

If you can't, you may need to provide the closest thing you can or perhaps negotiate the requirements until you can provide a solution.

Presenting your CV to a potential employer should be no different. A job vacancy will often list key skills, knowledge and experience required of the ideal candidate. Hence it is best to reflect your most relevant skills, knowledge and experience that meet these criteria when applying.

In short, if the employer cannot recognise your matching skills and experiences then you haven't provided "a product that meets the need!"

Who will read my CV?

Sometimes the first person to read your CV won't be the hiring manager. They may be somebody with unrelated skills and experience that is merely following a process. In which case they won't understand technical jargon. Keep this in mind!

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How long should my CV be?

This is a very popular question indeed. Our golden rule is that CVs should be no more than 2-3 pages of clearly written and laid out text that people don't need a microscope to read (11-point work well.)

Remember, you may need to tailor a CV to some roles emphasising some experiences over others. Also, be mindful of providing too much detail of roles from a long time ago (e.g. that job in 1986 is probably not the game changer for this application.... Spend more time on the most relevant and recent experiences.)

I have too much experience and too many skills for 2-3 pages! What do I do

Its amazing how many people face this problem but, it's more important to point out that 10 to 15-page CVs are by far the minority (fortunately!) Take pity on the reader that may be faced with a pile of CVs to read. Its important to mention that often we hear of candidates that do not get considered as their CVs are too long. Help the reader to understand you and your experience by being concise and clear. The interview is where you can impress the hiring manager with your experience don't try and provide a lengthy CV as a substitute, it just doesn't work!

What about a covering letter

Yes, a covering letter is a great idea to help emphasise your interest in a role or company but be careful of standard "boiler plate" text that attempts to please everybody. Be personal and make sure that you substantiate your interests. Don't just say you are keen and interested in the role and company but say why.

Keep it brief, relevant, factual and interesting. Again, this letter will help form the initial opinion of you.

Don't make the reader work hard

Some people love a good spreadsheet, big pictures, crazy fonts, diagrams or charts. Also coming up with whacky ways of presenting information about yourself that looks different may not always impress. Generally, the reader is a busy person and recruiting is a small part of their role that can easily take up a large part of their time.

Of course, there are professions where creative flair and spreadsheets count for a lot but let's not get carried away. Portfolios are more than adequate ways of representing creativity. The CV needs to be clear, factual, concise, well laid out, not scarce of information, easy to read and easy to follow with clear timelines and leaves no room for wrong assumptions (i.e. explain gaps and short employments.)

Try and use a friendly font and font size that is easy on the eye (e.g. Arial, Calibri, Times New Roman etc.)

The harder the reader needs to work to gather the information they need from your CV the less appealing the rest of the read will be! Don't be the unlucky applicant whose CV doesn't get finished or gets "binned" early. This is not a joke, it happens.

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A note concerning social media:

Your CV may be the first glance at you as a person. However, these modern times its not too hard for the reader to locate more information about you online. Be mindful that opinions can easily be formed, rightly or wrongly, by what people see online. Think about your social media profiles and what you post, comment on and offer on social media.

Most commonly the professional World turns to LinkedIn Xing and others. However, think about Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and the countless others.

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