

CV Writing Guide



What is a CV?

- A **CV** (or **Curriculum Vitae**) is a factual summary of your key skills, experience, qualifications, achievements, and career objectives. A CV should be a clear, unambiguous and concise overview, which encourages potential employers to invite you to interview.
- The sole purpose of a CV is to get you an interview. It is a marketing tool and sales brochure that maximizes your chances of being offered an interview.
- Most employers and recruiters will spend less than 30 seconds reviewing your CV. Therefore, it must capture the reader's immediate attention and make a positive impact. The impact your CV makes will determine whether you are invited to interview.
- Most employers will interview the candidate who has the best CV, not necessarily the candidate who is best suited to the job. The candidate who gets hired is typically the one who knows how to create a high-impact CV, not necessarily the one who can do the job best.

What should you include?

Your CV should include the following sections, in the following order:

- **Personal Details** – these should be clearly displayed at the top of your CV, and should include: full name, address, contact numbers, email address, nationality and transport (full, clean driving license). If you hold security clearance or a work visa, this is also the place to include this. Avoid unprofessional e-mail addresses and voicemail messages. First impressions count.
- **Profile** – a concise professional statement and 'sales pitch', which clearly summarizes your skills, experience, strengths and primary career objective. It should be short and crisp (around 5 lines), and should answer the question "why hire me?". This section can quickly be tailored and to meet the individual requirements of each job application. For example: *"A Senior Project Manager with 10 years of professional experience in the Telecoms sector. Now actively seeking a new challenge in the Financial Services sector."*
- **Achievements** – this section demonstrates *how* you have applied your skills and attributes to deliver measurable, quantifiable benefits for employers. List your top 5 – 10 most recent career achievements as evidence to substantiate your experience (money/time saved, increased productivity, improved customer feedback, etc). Employers are interested in candidates who can clearly demonstrate 'real-life' success stories and back them up with concrete examples.
- **Career History** – your professional experience should be detailed in reverse chronological order (most recent first). Ensure that your job title, employer name and employment dates (month/year), are clearly displayed. Your role descriptions should highlight your key duties, responsibilities and successes. They should be factual and to-the-point. Use bullet points.

- **Education & Qualifications** – unless you are a recent graduate or school leaver with minimal career experience, this section should be listed towards the end of your CV. It is advisable to separate out ‘academic’ education from ‘professional’ qualifications and training. There is also no need to exhaustively detail your GCSE or A-level grades. This is only relevant if you have just left school or college. Start with your most recent qualifications and work backwards to your university and school days. Include names of institutions, dates attended, and grades awarded.
- **Interests & Hobbies** – this section can set you apart from the crowd, and breathe life into your CV, giving future employers an insight into your personality and character, and building your personal brand. Most employers are looking for the right personality and attitude (often referred to as ‘culture fit’), as well as relevant experience. They want enthusiastic and positive individuals who are down-to-earth and easy to work with. Select the hobbies and interests that reflect this, and try to avoid pass-times that could be perceived as clichéd or run-of-the mill (reading, listening to music). What makes you different?

What should you leave out?

- Date / Place of Birth
- Marital Status – including details of children
- Photos
- Ethnicity
- Religion
- Salary / Rates
- Health Status – height, weight
- Passport / NI number
- Business jargon / buzzwords
- References – don’t include specific referee details on your CV. A simple statement stating ‘references available on request’ is sufficient

Do’s & Don’ts...

- **Presentation** – prioritize the content of your CV by detailing the most relevant information first. Keep it clear and simple. Avoid flashy colours and font styles (stick to Arial, pt 10–12). Your CV must be inviting to read and easy on the eye. It must communicate quickly and clearly that you are the right person for the job. Ensure that the CV text is well spaced and includes some ‘white space’. Avoid large, unbroken blocks of text. Use short sentences and succinct, bullet-pointed lists to organize your experience. A cluttered, poorly structured CV will simply be consigned to the dustbin.
- **CV Length** – keep your CV as short and concise as possible. The general consensus is to keep your CV to 3 pages or less, although this is not a hard-and-fast rule. This can be difficult if you have many years of experience to offer. However, this can be managed by devoting more page space to the past 5 years of your career history. Be selective. Most employers are only interested in your most recent professional experience, so it makes sense to focus. An over-long, waffling CV can be interpreted as an inability to prioritize.



- **Customisation** – create one primary ‘core’ CV and then tailor this document to meet the specific requirements of each job application. Avoid a ‘one size fits all’ approach. Many people also have a ‘summary’ version and a longer, more comprehensive version of their CV.
- **Spelling, Grammar & Accuracy** – double check the final draft of your CV to ensure that there are no spelling or grammatical errors, and for general inaccuracies. Nothing makes a worse first impression than poor spelling or grammar. Avoid using the ‘third’ or ‘first’ person. Instead of using “I” or “we”, use power sentences. For example: *“Managed a diverse team of 15 sales professionals.”*
- **Action Words** – use active ‘power verbs’ to energize your CV. For example: managed, delivered, led, negotiated, coordinated; rather than passive language such as ‘worked for’. Sprinkle your CV with positive and energetic language. This will help to ensure that you are substantiating your claims with hard evidence.
- **Be Specific** – your CV should be concise, clear and specific. What did you contribute as an individual? How did you go about it? Avoid talking in overused clichés. For example: *“I am a hard working individual who works well alone or within a team, with strong communication skills and the ability to work under pressure”*. Employers have heard this all before. This takes up valuable space on your CV without actually saying anything concrete. Instead, capture their attention with clear, factual statements and specific examples. Don’t expect employers to ‘read between the lines’. Make your CV as easy as possible for them to interpret and digest.
- **Employment Gaps** – don’t gloss over gaps in your career history. Make sure that any breaks are accounted for. Tackle them head on. Turn CV gaps into a positive by highlighting any travel, professional training or volunteer work. Unexplained career gaps will raise alarm bells with potential employers and make them suspicious that you have something to hide.
- **Don’t Lie** – it may sound obvious, but tell the truth on your CV. Be honest and transparent. There’s nothing wrong with selling yourself and casting your experience in the best possible light, but don’t lie or exaggerate. For example, employment dates, qualifications and job titles. You will lose job opportunities and risk gaining a bad reputation with employers and recruiters alike. Bad news travels fast. Many employers now use ‘competency-based’ interviews, which are designed to route-out candidates who lie on their CVs. They will also take references. It’s now more likely than ever that lies will be unearthed.
- **Covering Letters** – when applying for a job and submitting your application to a recruiter or employer, it is advisable to include a brief covering letter, email or ‘supporting statement’ to accompany your CV. This will highlight why you are a good fit for the role, how your skills and experience will benefit the employer, and will cite several examples of recent supporting evidence. It should also briefly cover practicalities such as your work availability, preferred rate/salary, and location preferences. A well-crafted covering letter can also negate the need to completely re-write your CV for each job application.



- **CV Style** – the most common and typically used form of CV in the UK is the ‘chronological’ CV. An alternative form is the ‘functional’ or skills-based CV, which is more focused on core skills and competencies. This ‘executive’ CV style is more common to the US. It is also used by graduates and individuals with career gaps looking to highlight their core skills and draw attention away from career breaks.
- **CV Format** – it is advisable to write your CV in MS Word format rather than in PDF format. More recruiters and employers are set up to read documents created in commonly used MS Office applications, rather than PDF format.
- **Sell Yourself** – a CV is your personal ‘sales brochure’, where you are the product. Don’t be afraid to showcase your talents and achievements. Your CV is not the place to be modest or coy. However, take care not to exaggerate or ‘over-sell’ yourself. You may find yourself in a situation where you are out-of-your-depth and unable to deliver. Strike a balance.
- **Professional Advice** – don’t be afraid to contact your agency and ask them to review your CV, and to give you an honest, impartial appraisal.
- **Further Reading** – there are some great hints & tips available on topics like: CV writing, sample CV templates, interviews and career development can found at [Reed](#), [Monster](#) and [CV Library](#).