

Tips for putting your CV together

How have you titled your CV?

With your name and critical identifiers.

Everyone groans when they see another identical template CV with the name in great big letters and little address boxes. All people need to know at the top of your CV is your name, how to contact you by phone and email and roughly what your professional role or level is. Trivial details belong at the back of your CV.

Does your CV have any kind of introduction?

I've highlighted a brief sort of summary of key points.

A very brief summary that will soon be corroborated by the content of your CV makes the most acceptable opening. It does not need a heading and should not be in long sentences starting I. Think of a sales or marketing leaflet for a style pointer. Unsubstantiated superlatives in a list have no meaning for most people at first glance.

Rather than launch into a profile or a long list of achievements, try something like this (for an office manager): High volume and high quality process: deadlines always met; systems constantly improved; burdens lifted from senior management; expert at delivering a combination of certainty and positive client image in a multi-functional role covering admin, account tracking, document production and customer enquiries.

- * skilled and loyal team developed
- * contribution to new IS development strategy
- * effective use of global project management network
- * diary, logistics and contacts for international expert teams

What is the overall length of your CV?

Exactly two pages plus a brief covering letter

One page of unrelated claims tells people nothing and anything longer than two pages looks like hard work for an employer. Intelligent précis and design means most careers can be fitted effectively to two pages. You can always prepare a longer CV to produce upon request if your experience goes beyond two pages.

How have you tackled your education and training?

Focused on my acquired skills that are as important as my education.

Each career path and job role has different demands in terms of knowledge and skills. It is best to take a creative and imaginative approach to communicating what these are, not to stick to any kind of format. Ask yourself: what will the employer want to know for this type of role - and give them just that.

Where have you described your education, training and skills?

In a carefully structured 'professional' section.

Some people slavishly follow the old 'Education' heading and take things right back to primary school; others scatter vital information all over their CV; you need one focused, brief and prominent section in which all this vital background information is available at a glance, separated by type and prioritised as to significance. Instead of listing all your skills, qualifications, memberships and courses, try grouping them under functional headings, giving priority to the most impressive and relevant and simply summarising the old and less vital items.

How have you formatted your work experience section?

Sets the scene and communicates the nature of my contribution.

A good CV combines a clear chronology of your career, but not at the expense of describing accurately your roles/functions. For example if you had a break to work in a field unrelated to your current job, you could list this elsewhere. Whatever you write, just keep it brief and use bullets to mark off units of meaning, which could be either roles or different stages in each role. Never forget that you write your CV to generate interest in YOU so it should not be an exercise in merely filling the page!

Have you thought about the design elements of your CV?

Simple layout, universal font, sized to fit and read well.

When design detracts from content it has overstepped the mark. If you are going to use the Internet you need simplicity, universality and readability. Arial and Times Roman are the most universal fonts, even if the latter looks somewhat staid. Point sizes down to 9 are readable in both of them. You do not need wide margins or huge headings. If you choose a more sophisticated font you have to embed it in the document in case it is not installed on the receiving computer.

What is the likely first impact on picking up your CV?

They know my role, level and unique skills at a glance.

If it hasn't yet achieved this level then what do you expect from a recipient who has to look at hundreds of CVs every day; do you read stuff that isn't fascinating? A good CV takes them to the point, excites them with its lively style and originality, reassures them that it is true and confirms that you are a potential candidate; in less than a minute. They can read the rest of it later.

How does your CV line you up for an interview?

Leaves open some questions for later discussion.

A really great CV arouses curiosity in such a way that people immediately start thinking of questions they want to ask you at interview. An exceptional CV would actually place questions in the reader's mind, ready for interview. One of the hallmarks of a mediocre CV is the attempt to cover every single detail of everything that ever happened in your career. Be selective with your detail and leave some room for curiosity to get you the interview.

Does reading your own CV fill you with confidence for the future?

Definitely; it helps me prepare myself for interview.

Simply creating a great CV boosts confidence and focuses the mind on effective career planning. Anything less than that is like shooting yourself in the foot. A CV that works is a tool for life: if it gets you an interview and a job at an extra £5000 next year, this puts you at least that one step higher for the rest of your career. Time invested in your CV might be the highest hourly rate you ever earn.