

How to Write a Resume

By Rich Vicar

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Introduction

A CV is a means of introducing oneself to a prospective employer and documenting the qualities you have to offer - nothing more. However, without an effective CV, those first interviews will seem somewhat elusive. Your CV is the single most important document you will be involved with in your life. This piece of paper, like it or not, will shape your future. The Latin term 'Curriculum Vitae' actually translates to 'Course of Life'.

The basic principles of writing a CV may seem obvious, but the same mistakes seem to crop up occasionally and unless the right first impression is made, these CVs tend to end up in the recruiter's bin. Recruiters can spot a mass mailing a mile off. If you can get a friend to give an objective view over your CV do so; attention to detail is essential.

Layout and Presentation

The format of your CV should depend on the position for which you are applying and you should focus your list of skills and experiences on those given in the job description. If you are not applying for a specific position but sending your CV to an agency or sending unsolicited into a company, then it would be helpful to start your CV with "Position Sought"

The second consideration is presentation. Ideally it should be written on a word processor and saved to disk. This also gives you the added benefit of being able to forward your CV to prospective employers by e-mail. However, if you still have one of those antiquated dot matrix printers, try to print out your CV at the library instead. The end product tends to look like toilet paper, and employers might use it likewise. Also, it doesn't fax.

Try to make the CV itself limited to two or three sides of A4 MAX! Unless you've led a life like Mother Teresa, after 3 or 4 pages the recruiter tends to lose interest. Remember; this is just an overview of your background. Too many CV's are too lengthy and recruiters don't have enough time to read each CV from cover to cover Tailor your CV for each application so as to bring out the relevant skills. If the recruiter is interested in you, s/he will call you in for more questions. (We will come onto the interviews later). Most importantly, keep it simple. Do not use flowery language or write it from a third person perspective (unless you are a member of the Royal Family). Also, do not be afraid to use note form, especially when sending your CV to a recruitment agency.

Use black ink on good quality white A4 paper with ONE font no smaller than font pt 10 for text and font pt 12 for headings. Also, bold headings to heighten visual impact. Try not to leave too much white space. If need be, you can widen the right hand margin or create two columns on one page.

This makes the CV look busier rather than you just run out of things to say. Play with your word-processor.

Personal Details

Things to include in this section are name*, contact details, date of birth, nationality/passport/visa and date CV was updated. Things to leave out are marital status, number of children, pets and collar size. The golden rule in this section is 'if it seems interesting to you, do not include it under your personal details'.

'Round-the-clock' contact information will maximise your exposure and ensure that you will be presented with all available opportunities because you are easily contactable.

Do not include a Personal Profile. If you want to impress that you are hardworking or energetic, include it in the Employment History or Interests & Achievements section, "...this role required me to be energetic because...". Therefore your claim is substantiated. If you include it in this section, out of context, the recruiter will discount it until they see some evidence for it. It also makes you look arrogant.

However, modern day personnel staff use databases and search engines to find candidates with discrete skills. So, you may want to include a skill set - Literally a list of your skills. For example, for a web developer list: HTML, Flash, Dreamweaver etc. For an accountant, list: ACCA, Sage, Excel, and so on. Try not to leave out any skills that may be searched on. If you have not included it in the main body, then make sure it is in this list. A also a list of skills is easy to scan visually.

*Use the name by which you like to be addressed. If you do not like to be addressed by your full name or second name, then do not include it.

Education and Professional Career

Always start with the most relevant information first. The best guide is, if you have been in full time employment for at least two years, then start with your employment history. Otherwise, start with your educational background. A recent graduate's CV, for example, will go straight into education after the profile section, whereas a seasoned professional should list educational qualifications after their employment history, typically on the second page of their CV.

Educational Background

This should include a list of schools and higher education establishments attended together with dates and exam successes, both academic and professional. If you have a degree or professional qualifications/specific skills, it is probably best to only include how many O-levels or GCSEs grade C or above you have rather than list each subject individually. However, only leave off the grades of A-levels or degrees if they are bad. Recruiters are a cynical breed and will tend to assume the worst.

Professional Career

This is the most important section of the CV. Your aim is to impress how you have applied your education, skills and personality in a work environment and what experience you have gained. But remember, keep it simple. Make it clear to the recruiter what are your core skills and experiences. Don't be frightened to pepper keywords relevant to the position throughout your CV. And don't be put off by using the same keywords again and again. Busy recruiters like CVs that state the obvious. Nowadays all recruitment companies store CVs on a search database, which picks up on key words.

Employment history should be written in reverse chronological order. Starting with your present/last position (which should be the most detailed), include your job title, dates of employment and name

of company and what they do (unless it is immediately obvious).

A useful tip is to write a brief overview of your job role and then use bullet points to highlight your key responsibilities and achievements with APPROPRIATE detail. Keep in mind the position you are applying for and concentrate on the skills and experience relevant to the position: interpersonal skills, technical skills (include technical terms), decision-making abilities and computer literacy.

For each of your detailed employment entries, you should begin the description by offering 10-20 words on what the company actually do - if a recruiter knows what kind of environment you were working in, then the rest of the description will make twice as much sense to them. Many candidates don't realise the importance of this particular point and lose out on valuable opportunities. Give a positive description of your role and objectives within the job. Be sure to mention any equipment or systems you became adept at using.

Do not leave chronological gaps. Again, the suspicion factor is activated if time is unaccounted for. So if you spent the time finding your inner self in a Kibbutz in Israel, then say so and dispel the assumption that you have spent that time less productively at Her Majesty's pleasure.

Tailor Your CV To Suit the Job

Be sure to adjust the profile, employment history and achievements to more relevantly reflect the specification of the job that you are applying for. This will give your application enhanced credibility and suitability.

Examine the advertisement or job specification carefully and ponder the qualities sought by the prospective employer. Whilst remaining completely honest (NEVER fabricate details on your CV - untruths are all too easy to uncover at interview stage), match your CV and its content to the requirements of the particular job. You can do this by highlighting those aspects of your experience that have the greatest relevance to the requirements of the job.

Interests & Achievements

This is the section where you have the opportunity to get something of your personality over to the recruiter. Try and include organised past times that you might be involved in. Although it might be more truthful that you spend 80% of your free time playing computer games/in the pub (more positively described in most CVs as "socialising")/reading trash novels, try to accentuate the other 20% when you are playing organised sports or are involved in charity work and the like.

Try to include relatively recent achievements. Your role as milk monitor or Cub Scout badges are unlikely to impress now you are supposedly mature. Do not lie about being a team captain. This is an old cliché, and if CVs are anything to go by, then there are more team captains in the world than there are teams. Instead, try to include something intriguing. A recruiter might just invite you in for an interview for the sake of curiosity. A candidate who put his name as P Robert Smith was once invited to an interview simply because the recruiter wanted to know what the P stood for.

Above all, do not lie or oversell yourself. You will be caught out eventually and you will end up only wasting your own time. Everyone has his or her strengths. Recognise what these are and present them in the best light you can using past experience to back them up. Do not make out to be something you are not.

References

Don't bother to list any references on your CV. Your experience and suitability alone should decide whether or not you are called in for interview. You should take details of referees to interviews with you, however, as this is the most likely point when a prospective employer may require them.

You should choose your referees carefully. The best references are those that come from current or recent employers as they give the most accurate measure of your abilities. Also, you should make the referees aware of the possibility that they might be contacted. Unsolicited reference requests are often met with ambiguity, which will have a damaging effect on your application.

For helpful information on cv dos and donts please try
<http://www.cvandresumetips.com/cvdosanddonts.html>

Please feel free to email me at info@cvandresumetips.com with suggestions and content for this newsletter. Remember that my site is a free resource and all assistance is welcome in building an informed community.

If you have a similar newsletter and would like to swap adverts I would be happy to hear from you. Also if you are a webmaster and would like to swap links contact me afterall that's what the web was made for.

Regards
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