

Your CV

There is no such thing as a perfect CV. As long as you are guided by common sense, and the four golden rules below, you have total freedom to create the sort of CV that meets your needs. A CV is a useful thing to have when you want to apply quickly to an advertisement, when you want to apply speculatively to employers or when you want a calling card to thrust into someone's hand at a careers fair. So it pays to give it some thought.

It's got to look good

Go for decent quality A4 paper, a modern typeface, attractive layout. Plenty of white space makes people want to read it. Densely packed, unparagraphed text does the opposite. Avoid coloured paper as this makes your CV hard to photocopy but pale cream would be acceptable.

It should be targeted

There's no such thing as an all-purpose CV: no matter how well presented, if it sounds like a circular, it will be treated like one (i.e. binned) Think of the kind of job(s) you are applying for and emphasise the relevant parts of your life experience, knowledge and skills that make you suitable. A CV for a banking job will look different from one for a social work position. Each application merits an individual and fresh approach.

Use the space sensibly

Allocate space in strict accordance with the importance of the information. Your degree, for example, should receive more coverage than your A-levels. Don't bury the best parts of your CV by hiding them at the bottom of the page or in the middle of a lengthy paragraph. Decide what's important, and give it some prominence.

Always send it with a covering letter

Your covering letter is your opportunity to add a human touch to the application. Draw the reader's attention to the best bits of your CV. Show your enthusiasm, interest and suitability. Try, wherever possible, to target the covering letter, too. A standard letter is so easy to spot. On the following pages are examples of three different CV formats and a covering letter. Please read them carefully and digest the messages they contain. Resist any temptation to copy these or other peoples' CVs. Your aim should be to create a CV that will work for you, and you will find this will work better anyway.

Chronological CV

Hints and Tips

- This is a traditional CV in reverse chronological order. Reverse chronology has the effect of focusing the readers attention on your most recent, significant information - your degree if you are a student.
- Two-page CVs are the norm these days, but many people design them shorter or a little longer (but not too much longer).
- The degree is explained in reasonable detail. Sarah has decided which are the most relevant components, and has gone into these in more depth. Don't simply list all the modules you have studied.
- It is not usually necessary to list all GCSEs or equivalent qualifications but you should let them know you have pass grades in English Language and Maths.
- 'Work Experience' includes a description of each job, broken down into duties and responsibilities. But don't state the obvious *e.g. "Whilst working as a waitress my duties included serving food and clearing tables"*. This is your opportunity to show you have developed the skills the employer is looking for.
- Bullet points make it easy to read.
- 'Interests' should contain enough information to help the reader understand more about Sarah the person, the kind of things she does in her spare time and how involved she is. Such phrases as *"Socialising with friends"* or *"reading"* are simply too vague to bother including.
- CVs will usually include the names, address and 'phone numbers of two referees. One of these should be an academic referee, especially if you are a student or recent graduate, and the other ideally should be from your work experience. As a last resort you could use someone who has known you for a long time.
- Before you include somebody as a reference, always check that they are willing and available - previous supervisors and line managers may have moved on.

Skills-based CV

Hints and Tips

- This is a skills-based CV with the emphasis on the particular skills and experience needed for this job.
- A 'Career Aim' (or Personal Profile) can focus the reader's attention but avoid making it sound pompous, contrived or over-long. Don't simply state that you are "*hardworking and ambitious*" - employers expect you to have these qualities anyway if you are a graduate.
- In order to emphasise her skills, Sarah has included less information on her degree and work experience.
- Sarah has identified a knowledge of IT and Market Research as important selection criteria and has made a separate section on her CV to highlight them.
- She has also identified, from the advert or the brochure perhaps, five key personal qualities that the employer is looking for. In describing these, she uses examples from all parts of her life – study, work, leisure.
- You may want to experiment and use elements of a traditional and skills-based CV to create your own unique CV

One Page CV

Hints and Tips

- Although a two-page CV is the norm there's nothing wrong with one-page CVs and an employer may specifically ask for one. You will need to include more detail in your covering letter.
- This CV looks OK but the writer has made it clear, by the allocation of space, that her GCSEs are approximately five times more important than her degree.
- We know the job titles but what did Sarah actually do in her work experience?
- Listing activities and interest says nothing about why you do them, how involved you are or how you benefit from them. Avoid lists and avoid the word 'hobby'.
- This CV would probably not get Sarah an interview. She has wasted valuable space and consequently not given the reader enough information to select her.

Covering Letter

Hints and Tips

- Use the same quality A4 paper as your CV
- Hand-written covering letters are OK if your handwriting is good
- Typescript is usually acceptable but don't make covering letters look like standard letters
- Your covering letter should tell them a) why you want the job and b) why you are suitable for the position
- Try to personalise letters by mentioning the organisation and showing that you know something about them
- Use your letter to highlight key points of the CV, but don't use the same words or phrases. It must make the reader want to look at the CV
- Send letter with the CV unfolded in a large envelope.