

## Creating a winning CV

### Introduction

The main way to sell yourself on paper is a CV. There is no such thing as one perfect CV; you will produce a number of different CVs to fit different purposes. The chances of success or failure of your CV will depend entirely on how far it meets the criteria, background, needs and sometimes the bias of the person reading it.

This document provides you with the information that you will need to create a CV that will meet the needs of the employers you are sending it to.

When producing a CV, many students:

- Fail to identify what the employer is looking for
- Undersell and underestimate what they have to offer
- Fail to provide the right evidence to meet or exceed the skills and competencies requirements of the employer

### Five steps that you can take to help you create the winning CV

#### Step 1 – Know yourself and understand what you have to offer

- Identify your strengths and weaknesses with regards to the world of work. What are your unique selling points? Try listing the positive experiences and achievements in your life to date, and the skills you have acquired, drawing on your education, work experience and other interests
- Do not forget that activities beyond school, university and work, for example, volunteering, part-time working and overseas travel/ work experiences, can be of interest to employers. This will boost your confidence and help you to create a broader range of positive images
- Think about how to develop and evidence a balance of skills that will make you employable

#### Key transferable skills that you may wish to include in your CV

- Communication – the ability to communicate orally, in writing and electronically
- Teamwork – being a constructive team member and contributing practically to the success of the team. It is useful to consider the elements of teamwork to help you. For example sharing ideas, listening to team members, supporting, motivating
- Leadership – being able to motivate and encourage others while taking the lead
- Initiative – the ability to see opportunities and achieve set goals
- Problem-solving – thinking things through in a logical way in order to determine key issues
- Flexibility/adaptability – the ability to handle change and adapt to new situations
- Self-awareness – knowing your strengths and skills and having the confidence to put these across
- Commitment/motivation – having energy and enthusiasm to pursue and complete projects
- Interpersonal skills – ability to relate well to others and establish good working relationships
- Numeracy - competence and understanding of numerical data, statistics and graphs
- IT - confidence in use of information technology

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### Step 2 – Know the market

- Keep up to date with what is going on in the economy including the impact on the global, UK-wide and regional jobs markets. This will improve your commercial awareness and your understanding of developing/ declining sectors
- If you have a specific job or job sector in mind, do more in-depth research in these areas to ensure that you are developing the specific range of skills required to be successful

### Step 3 – Identify the employer's needs

#### Read

- You should read all the information available to you on the job and the company including paper-based literature and online information, for example, publicity material and the company website
- Look carefully at the job advert, person specification and job description for the role. Studying the advert can tell you a lot about the employer's key requirements for the role. The job description will help you identify the general tasks, functions, and responsibilities of a position. The person specification will highlight all the essential and desirable skills, knowledge and qualifications you will need to have to meet the recruitment criteria for the position
- Consult your current CV or the range of CVs that you have previously developed. Do you have anything that can be appropriately adapted to meet the needs of the position that you are applying for?

(If you are not applying for a specific job at this stage, and just want to get a CV prepared to use as basis for making applications for a particular type of job or job sector, go to [www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk) and click on 'Jobs and Work Experience' and then 'Types of Jobs'. Look at the details of the jobs you are interested in; this will help you to identify the range of skills, knowledge and experience they want you to demonstrate in your CV).

#### Think

- Think about the range of skills and competencies that are required, the evidence that you will need to demonstrate these skills, and how you can tailor your skills and experience to meet employer requirements
- Think carefully about the layout, design, style and content and consider ways to get your CV to stand out from the crowd

#### Act

- Write a clear list of the skills, qualities and experiences that are essential for the position. Check the person specification carefully for the required skills and experience
- Consider whether you have any skills gaps that you need to work on. If you identify some skills gaps – how could you evidence these positively within your CV? If you are unsure, ask a careers consultant
- Get feedback on your current CV from a careers consultant and/or look at other examples to give you inspiration

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### Step 4 – Make the connection and plan how to sell yourself

Now that you have examined what employers are looking for and identified your key skills, you need to take a fresh look at yourself through the eyes of an employer. You also need to decide what type of CV to use as there a range of approaches you can consider.

#### You should ask yourself:

- What are the features that are really going to make me stand out?
- How am I going to be able to evidence the statements I make about my skills, knowledge and experience?
- What benefits am I offering to the employer? Why should they interview me?

#### Types of CV

Every CV you write will be targeted to a specific job or organisation and the format can also vary according to your own circumstances, experience and personal preference. The style of the first three CV formats below will generally be simple, uncluttered and straightforward:

**Chronological CV** - The traditional chronological CV is still preferred by many employers. Information in each section is presented in reverse chronological order, so that your most recent experience or achievement comes first.

**Skills based CV** - A skills based CV is a good format for highlighting your most relevant skills and experience from all areas of your life. It is therefore useful if you have no directly relevant experience or if you have an extensive employment history which you need to summarise.

**Academic CV** - An academic CV highlights your research, teaching experience, and publications and is normally used to apply for postgraduate study and research or lecturing posts in a university.

The following CV formats are generally considered to be more creative and therefore suitable for very specific types of industries:

**Creative CV** - Creative CVs are suitable for those interested in pursuing creative professions, for example, graphic artists or musicians etc..These often come in more than one part: a creative 'construct' that reflects the creator or maker's style, a more standardised CV which contains readable information and a portfolio.

**Infographic CV** - This type of CV focuses on the attractive presentation and innovative differentiation of your information. CV's within this category may be image or graph based. They could be focused on a well known media platform, for example, Amazon or Google. This category is most suitable for those wishing to enter art, media or marketing related sectors such as graphic design, marketing or PR.

### Step 5 – Turning plans into action

Now study examples of good CVs and start developing or adapting your own.

Remember to keep the focus on who the CV is for and consider the best way of

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presenting the benefits of what you have to offer to employers.

Some examples are available at the end of this section and careers consultants are available in Careers and Add+vantage to guide and support you.

### Typical CV topics/sections

There are common CV categories, which can be given more or less emphasis according to the nature of the post and organisation.

- **Personal details** – avoid unnecessary information and anything that could be seen as negative. This often goes at the beginning of a standard CV but there are no fixed rules
- **Career profiles/objectives** – designed to provide the reader with concise information about what you are looking for or why you are suitable for this particular position. It gives the employer a quick snapshot of you at the beginning of the document
- **Education** – give space to the most recent and highest level qualifications
- **Employment/work experience** – concentrate on showing relevant and transferable skills drawn from all your work experience. Try not to just list what you have done in the jobs but concentrate on what you have learned, how you have developed and what you can offer as a result
- **Interests** – concentrate on activities that can demonstrate relevant transferable skills and be prepared to talk about them at interview. (Avoid creating unsubstantiated lists of random interests)
- **Additional Skills** – this can allow you to highlight additional information that is not already covered in the document. Here you could include sub sections on topics such as languages, IT and driving skills
- **Achievements** - the use of this heading can help you focus on what you want to tell employers about your achievements that mean something to you
- **References** - If you need the space for evidence you consider to be more relevant/impressive to the job role, just write 'references are available upon request' at the end of your CV. Alternatively, if you think specific information relating to your referees would be more interesting to the potential employer than any other additional evidence you could add to your CV to enhance its content, provide the names and contact details of a minimum of two referees at the end of your CV (one should ideally be an employer and if you are still at university, or are a recent graduate, the other should be a lecturer).

Other possible headings or topics that could be covered include: positions of responsibility, awards/prizes, voluntary work, languages, publications and membership of professional organisations.

### Formatting your CV

Following a few basic formatting rules is the safest way to produce a readable and attractive CV. Some formatting is desirable to distinguish between different parts of the document. It helps break up the text and should make it easier to read.

#### Do use:

- Bold (use sparingly) to highlight headings and subheadings
- Different font sizes to distinguish between headings and other text. As a general rule use:
- No less than font 11 for main text. Use font size 16-20 for your name heading at the

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beginning of the CV to help it stand out

- A font style that is easy to read such as Arial, Helvetica or Times New Roman
- Tables to align columns of writing, but don't have the borders visible

### Don't use:

- Too much bold or nothing will stand out
- Too many variations in font size. It confuses the reader's eye
- Headings entirely in capitals. They are difficult to read and can look like you are 'SHOUTING'!
- Bold and underlining together. They serve the same purpose and bold is generally preferable
- Background images. They distract attention and make the text harder to read

### CV prompt list – use of language

The use of language can affect a CV considerably. Use positive words (action verbs) to start your sentences:

Accurate	Engineered	Negotiated
Achieved	Enterprising	Open-minded
Active	Enthusiastic	Organised
Adaptable	Entrepreneurial	Participated
Administered	Established	Positive
Ambitious	Evaluated	Persuaded
Analysed	Expanded	Practical
Assertive	Experienced	Presented
Capable	Facilitated	Proactive
Confident	Flexible	Processed
Communicated	Focused	Productive
Competent	Honest	Promoted
Controlled	Imaginative	Professional
Coordinated	Implemented	Proficient
Co-operative	Improved	Profitable
Created	Influenced	Qualified
Creative	Initiated	Resourceful
Designed	Knowledgeable	Responsive
Developed	Led	Specialised
Delivered	Listening	Successful
Directed	Logical	Supervised
Dynamic	Managed	Supported
Energetic	Monitored	Trained

### Summary – a winning CV checklist – before sending out your CV, ensure that:

- The information is accurate, truthful, relevant and appropriately targeted to the job
- The CV is interesting to read, and flows in a logical order. Important facts should be prioritized; the most important supporting evidence must be prominent
- It fits on two whole pages or one whole page. The length of CV that you choose can depend on specific employer preferences, the type of industry you want to go into, the type of job you are applying for and their level of skills, knowledge and attributes you possess relevant to the role
- You have demonstrated all your relevant skills, both transferable and subject

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related; evidence must be provided for every claim you have made about yourself

- It is clear, easy to read and pleasing to the eye
  - The spelling and grammar are correct and have been checked and double checked. Be careful not to use American spelling if you are applying outside of America. Microsoft Word uses an American spell check by default.
- You ask someone to proof check it for mistakes typographical errors
- You have included a covering letter which draws attention to the impressive and relevant information (where relevant to the type of application)

For further Information consult with a careers consultant in Careers and Add+vantage in **TheHub**. You should also visit the student portal, [students.coventry.ac.uk/careers](http://students.coventry.ac.uk/careers) and follow the link to the Resources Section or visit [www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk)

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