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Candidate Information Pack

CV Writing



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Introduction

Despite high volumes of job applicants, 68% of organisations still find recruitment difficult and struggle to fill their roles with suitable applicants. A good CV is therefore an essential tool to tell prospective employers why you're the best person for the job and make sure you stand out from the crowd.

If you find yourself looking for a new job in 2012, our Grassroots Guide to 'CV Writing' will tell you everything you need to know about compiling the perfect CV and using it to your advantage.

Suitable for candidates of any industry background or skill-level, we're here to help you understand why your CV is so important, how it is used by employers (and recruiters) and what it takes to get you noticed. From what to include to where to put it, we explain the importance of keywords and targeting your applications to boost your chances of CV success.

About Us

Grassroots Recruitment is rapidly emerging as one of Manchester's leading commercial consultancies. Specialising in the recruitment of office-based personnel across all sectors, our team of industry-qualified consultants are passionate about matching high quality candidates to local employers. If you're looking for your next career move, why not get in touch with the Grassroots Team to find out how we can help you.

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The importance of your CV

What is a CV for?

A CV (or curriculum vitae) is a brief summary of you, which should include details of your employment history and practical experience. Its purpose is to showcase your skills and qualifications and to highlight the core competencies you have to bring to your next company.

Ultimately it should tell an employer (or a recruiter) that you have what they're looking for and that you match the requirements of their job description. However, from a candidate's perspective, the main purpose of your CV is to get you to interview stage.

Highlighting your Strengths

Contrary to common belief, it's important to recognise with CVs (and with interviews), that you are not being asked to 'sell yourself'. Unless you have a career in advertising, most candidates admit they are not very good at 'selling' themselves to employers and this isn't really the point of a CV anyway. Prospective employers are not looking to 'buy' your labour; they are simply looking for information about you which will help them make the best hiring decision possible.

A certain amount of self-promotion is necessary however. An employer needs to know about your skills and what you are good at so that they can make a comparison with the needs of their job. You don't need to exaggerate or dress-up your experience with complex descriptions and fancy terminology.

Stick to the facts and include as much information as you can. Try not to down-play your skills, but be positive about your accomplishments and highlight them in a confident, constructive manner. Don't forget that many talented candidates can go unnoticed due to their inability to adequately promote their skills, a lack of confidence or a desire to remain modest. A CV is your chance to shine so, rather than see it as a test, make sure you use it to your advantage.

Getting the basics right

First impressions

Employers (and recruiters) may receive 100s of applications to any single advertised vacancy and will initially only spend 20-30 seconds reviewing each CV. Therefore you have to make sure your CV gets noticed and makes the right first impression. Essentially, the reader will be looking to match your skills, experience and qualifications against the Job Description and Person Specification for their vacancy. The candidates who represent the closest match will then be invited to interview.

Make it count

In order to decide which applicants to invite to interview, employers will first of all rule out any CVs that are not an obvious match to their requirements. This may include candidates who have little or no relevant work experience, who do not possess the minimum standard of education requested, those who are under- or over-qualified, as well as any CVs that contain an unacceptable amount of spelling mistakes, grammatical errors or are poorly presented.

So the first lesson is to get the basics right. Read through any job advertisement carefully before you submit your CV and only apply for vacancies where you meet the minimum requirements. If you do not have the necessary skills and experience, you need to consider other job opportunities which are within your capability and interest you. If you are looking to move into a new career or sector, research any required qualifications and available courses, or try to gain temporary or voluntary work experience to reassure employers of your long-term aspirations.

In the same way, make sure your CV looks the part. Use a spell-checker to correct any errors, but don't rely on it to find every mistake. Make sure you read your final version thoroughly and ask friends or family members to give a second opinion. If you want an employer or recruiter to spend their time reading through your CV carefully, make sure you have taken the time and effort to get it right.

Targeting your CV

Using Key Words

After selecting the most relevant CVs, employers are left with a more manageable pool of applicants to choose from. They will then scan each CV looking for key words to match you against their job description. These will be the specifics of the job itself and will be included in the job advertisement you applied to: for example 3 years' administration experience, intermediate MS Office skills, 5 GCSE passes including Maths and English, audio-typing or minute-taking etc.

Whereas an employer will manually search your CV for a snapshot of matching key words, a recruitment consultant will enter these words as search terms in their database (or in online Job-Boards like Monster or Total Jobs) to shortlist the most relevant candidates.

Therefore, when applying for a vacancy, you should make sure your CV is a close match to the job description by using key words to highlight your main skills. Before you send off your CV, put yourself in an employer's shoes, compare your CV to their requirements and ask yourself whether you really have what they're looking for.

It's down to you

We've already established that your CV is probably the most important tool in your job search as it represents the first step in finding a new position. However, exactly what goes into your CV is something that you can control and take direct action to improve. If your CV isn't having the desired effect, you can change it. Therefore, if you aren't getting invited to interview, it's likely that your CV isn't doing its job properly.

Unlike an application form where employers decide what information they would like to receive about you, a CV allows you to decide what information is most relevant for each particular vacancy. Therefore, a good CV should be targeted, engaging, concise and accurate.

Writing your CV

Preparation

Before you start writing your CV, get yourself into the right mind-set by compiling a list of adjectives that best describe your key skills. This will help you initially when writing your Personal Profile, but will also jog your memory about all the strengths you have to offer a potential employer. You should include positive words (e.g. 'enthusiastic', 'flexible' and 'proactive') which relate to the type of skills an employer may value in the jobs you're applying for.

What to include

There are certain pieces of information your CV should contain and others that should be left out, but ultimately you decide what is most important and relevant to include. Rather than use your CV as a summary of your life to date, you should use your CV to highlight the skills and experience required by the job you're applying for. If you are considering several types of jobs, why not prepare 2-3 targeted CVs for each? Equally, if the jobs you're interested in are very competitive, you may need to tailor your CV to each individual advertisement to make sure you stand out from the crowd.

1. Contact Information

Make sure you list your telephone number and email address so that employers (and recruiters) can get in touch and update you on your application. A postal address is also advisable so that they know whether you are based locally or within a reasonable commute. If your contact information changes for whatever reason, make sure you update your CV (including any copies sent to agencies, employers or posted on job-boards). As obvious as it sounds, a lack of accurate contact information could be the main reason you don't receive a response to your job applications.

2. Personal Profile

This is the brief introduction at the top of your CV which summarises your main skills and highlights what you have to offer. It should be a short paragraph (2-3 sentences) that tells the employer why you are the right person for the job. It is usually the first thing to be read on your CV so make sure you include the key words you know they will be looking for.

3. Skills Summary

This can be included in addition to or instead of a personal profile, either by using bullet points to list your key strengths or in short paragraphs with brief examples of where you utilised / developed that strength. It is particularly useful for candidates with little or no relevant work experience to demonstrate their main skills, but can also be beneficial for candidates with a wide range of diverse skills. If you are unable to include all of these competencies in your Personal Profile, listing them underneath this section will ensure they are still included. Alternatively, this section could be substituted with a list of 'Key Achievements'.

4. Education, Qualifications & Training

You should include the name of the certification, the grade attained (where relevant) and the educational establishment you studied at. Only include qualifications or training which are relevant to the job that you are applying for. If the qualifications are essential to the job itself include them on the front page of your CV; if your work experience is the most important factor then add your qualifications at the bottom.

For job-seekers with a lengthy list of qualifications, you should perhaps consider using the most recent or most highly ranked. Equally, if you have a poor educational background try not to let this section take up too much focus on your CV by listing individual grades, but instead emphasise the qualifications you have attained – for example, 10 GCSEs studied including passes in Maths and English.

5. Employment History

As a minimum this needs to include your dates of employment, job title and name of employer, with your most recent experience listed first. If you have plenty of space (or if background sector is important to your application), you may want to include a brief description of what the company does. You should then include a summary of your core duties, ideally in a bullet point list as again it helps an employer to scan for relevant key-words and assess whether your last job is similar to the post they are recruiting.

Do not write a half-page essay on every task you performed or simply replicate your current job description. Keep it brief and succinct: if an employer or recruiter is interesting in finding out more, they will ask you about it in an interview. If you have had a large number of jobs, only go into detail on the most relevant or most recent; for irrelevant, short-tenure or temporary jobs just include the dates, job titles and company name.

If a high number of your previous jobs have lasted less than 12 months each, it is understandable that an employer may have concerns about your commitment and ability to stay in a job long term. If you are able to explain why these roles did not work out (or similarly you have valid explanations for any gaps in employment), you may wish to briefly summarise these to address potential concerns from the out-set.

6. Hobbies & Interests

If you have room at the bottom of your CV, try to include a brief description of your hobbies away from work so that the reader can find out something original about you. However, if you don't really have any hobbies, avoid using standard past-times like 'reading' or 'going to the gym' unless you are able to give further details on your favourite author or the objective of your fitness regime. Instead, why not include a summary of your interests (for example, 'cooking world foods' or 'current affairs'). This will add value to your CV by again differentiating you from other candidates and creating topics to discuss at interview.

Optional Extras

What to leave out

You should leave out any information which is not relevant to the job application at hand or which could potentially give rise to discrimination. It is illegal for employers to discriminate against applicants on a number of factors, but to avoid the risk of this happening be sure to remove your date of birth, race, religion, marital status or similar personal information.

There are a range of other details which are optional. For example, listing the full contact details of your referees is not necessary as an employer (or recruiter) will request these at a later stage if your CV is of interest. Feel free to add in information like this if you have extra space on your CV, but try not to make it too long or add in irrelevant details just to fill in the gaps.

Content over Colours

There are a wide variety layouts, templates and designs to choose from when writing your CV and clearly no employer would want every CV to look the same. Whilst you want to make your CV stand out, the best way to do this is via the information you include rather than the colour font you decide on. Importantly, your CV should be a professional document containing relevant, accurate and up-to-date information to support you in a targeted job search so the contents and layout you choose will be dependent on the type of job you're applying for.

Essential

You should never lie, falsify information, omit or remove essential details from your CV that an employer is entitled to know before offering you a job. Ultimately they will find out the truth resulting in your application being rejected, any job offer being withdrawn or, if you have already started work, your dismissal.

Formatting your CV

Layout

For some job applications your experience will be the most important factor, for others it will be your key skills and for others your qualifications. Whichever information will be relied upon most to make a decision about your suitability for interview, prioritise by placing this at the top of your CV with less relevant information towards the bottom.

Format

In general terms, it is advisable to use a traditional font (such as Arial, Calibri or Times New Roman) in black colour and a reasonable size (11-12). Use line spacing to make the information fit the page and stick to the same formatting throughout to maintain consistency.

Use bold, italics or underlining to highlight the relevant information only (for example, your qualifications rather than the school you attended) and do not use these to excess but simply to draw the reader's eye to the key points. Ideally your CV will be 2 sides of A4 but should be no more than 3 pages, even for those with extensive experience.

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Personal Profile
A self-managed and well-motivated Senior Administrator with 10 years' experience providing one-to-one and team support across a range of professional services companies. Highly organised with a methodical approach to tasks and keen attention to detail. Flexible, proactive, dedicated and enthusiastic attitude, with the ability to work effectively on own initiative and to deadlines.

Key Skills

• Polite, professional, well-presented	• Effective team-player
• Willing to take on responsibility	• Good problem-solver
• Manages own time effectively	• Intermediate user of MS Office, SageLine 50 and SAP
• 50 wpm copy typing skills	

Employment History:

Sept 08 – present Printscape Ltd, Cheadle
Project Administrator

In this role I supported a team of 15 sales consultants and 2 managers in all aspects of day-to-day administration. My main duties included:

- Diary management, booking travel and accommodation
- Opening, sorting and distributing incoming post
- First point of contact for customer enquiries by telephone or email
- Typing and formatting documentation to required standards
- Producing reports and spreadsheets for meetings
- Maintaining an accurate filing system in line with ISO9001 procedures
- Undertaking ad hoc projects to support the team as required

June 06 – Aug 08 RJB Group, Sale
Senior Administrator

Here I worked as the senior member in a team of 3 administrators supporting an office of 50. It was a very busy and fast-paced role where my duties included:

- Booking appointments for engineers and sales executives
- Liaising with customers to communicate delivery and pricing information
- Gathering information for quotes and preparing invoices
- Updating CRM database with progress of current jobs
- Responsibility for handling complaints and solving problems professionally

Education & Qualifications:

GNVQ Level 2 in Business Administration (Merit)
8 GCSEs, including Maths and English at Grade C

About Me:
In my spare time, I like to keep fit by jogging, swimming and playing weekly for a five-a-side football team. I recently competed in the Great North 10KM Run and raised £650 for Cystic Fibrosis. I also have an interest in jazz music and try to see as many live bands in my local area as possible.

Using your CV

Once you're happy with your CV (or CVs), don't leave it sitting on your desktop or hidden away on your hard drive. Start using it straight away and put it in front of a range of audiences to maximise your chances of success. Keep it updated, monitor the results you receive, ask for feedback and keep making changes until you have the perfect the version that guarantees you an invitation to interview every time.

1. Start applying for Jobs

You will find advertised vacancies in your local newspaper, job centre or post office, as well as on radio or TV and even on billboards outside a company's office building. The internet is an endless source of job vacancies, which you can find either by trawling specialist job boards or by entering general terms into your search engine (e.g. "Secretarial jobs in Oldham"). If you don't have access to a PC or the internet at home, you can use these services for free at your local library or community centre.

2. Upload it onto Job Boards

There are 1000s of 'job boards' in the UK alone: these are specialist websites where candidates can save their CV online free of charge, employers can pay to advertise vacancies their vacancies, and recruiters can pay to access the database of uploaded CVs. By creating a User Profile on job boards (such as Total Jobs, Monster or Jobsite), you will not only be able to apply directly to employers' jobs but you may also be contacted by recruitment agencies who identify your CV in their candidate search.

When choosing which job boards to use, select those with the highest number of vacancies that match your criteria and make sure that you keep your Profile and CV updated if your circumstances change.

Be prepared for agencies and employers to contact you by telephone or email if they come across your CV in response to an advertisement. Make sure you are polite, professional or let them know if you're unable to speak and ask to call them back later.

3. Send it to Employers

A large number of jobs are never advertised so it is worthwhile sending your CV directly to employers with a covering letter or email asking if they have any current vacancies in your area or requesting your CV to be kept on file for future opportunities.

Create a list of target companies using newspapers, trade or telephone directories (for example legal companies in Bolton) and send each a copy of your CV. Be sure to follow this up within 2 weeks to confirm that your application has been received and make sure it has been kept to one side. The benefit of using your CV this way is that you won't be competing against a large pool of other candidates, as when applying to job advertisements. Employers frequently encourage speculative applications and if they can find somebody without advertising it saves them time and money.

Many companies also advertise internal vacancies on their own website and will allow you to create an electronic User Profile to submit your CV to them in the same way as a job board.

4. Send it to Recruitment Agencies

Equally, there are a high number of North-West based recruitment agencies who can assist you in finding temporary or permanent work. After sending in your CV, the recruiter will save your application on their internal database to be considered for current or future opportunities. Often you will be invited to participate in a 'Registration' process or interview to find out more about your skills and experience, however in the current climate many agencies will not be able to register all candidates in this way and may communicate with you via email or phone instead.

In order to make the most of the services offered by recruitment agencies, try to register with 4-5 companies and keep in regular contact with them to demonstrate your keenness to find work. Select agencies based on word of mouth recommendations or prioritise those with the most number of vacancies that meet your criteria.

Hints & Tips

Ask Around

Friends and family members are a great source of information when it comes to looking for work in general, but you should also consider sending them a copy of your completed CV. You never know when they might hear of a company who is recruiting, see a job advertisement they think will suit you or find out that their own employer is looking to hire.

Be Persistent

Make sure you use your CV in a variety of ways to maximise your chances of success. Don't rely on recruitment agencies to find you work or become disheartened if you don't receive a response to some of your applications. It is a very competitive employment market at the moment and finding your dream job takes time. Be patient, resilient and try to stay positive. Keep asking for feedback and make changes if your actions aren't yielding the results you expect. Remember that finding work is within your control and that you need to be proactive if you want to make things happen.

Have you tried LinkedIn?

LinkedIn is a social networking site for business professionals. Your home-page or profile is essentially your CV, containing a summary of your previous experience, qualifications and references from key contacts. You can 'connect' directly to employers and recruiters, join groups of like-minded job-seekers, ask questions from career experts, book your place on open days or events, as well as applying for advertised jobs. Visit www.linkedin.com to find out more.

Additional Resources

Useful Websites:

If you would like further information to help you write your CV, there are a range of tools designed to help.

http://nextstep.direct.gov.uk	For advice on writing a CV and covering letter
http://cv.monster.co.uk	Everything you need to create a CV from scratch, including an online CV-builder, free templates and video advice
www.businessballs.com	CV tips, templates and examples for writing an effective CV
www.alec.co.uk	Several professional templates for your CV, depending on the types of jobs you are interested in and the different experience, skills or training you have
www.prospects.ac.uk	The best resource for students, graduates or those with limited work experience to find out more about available career paths, entry level opportunities, qualifications, work experience and CV writing

Any Questions? Get in touch...



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