

## CVs and covering letters

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### What is a CV?

CV stands for 'curriculum vitae'. It is a marketing document to demonstrate your relevant skills to recruiters. In the UK employers usually expect a two page document.

Your CV is not simply about outlining the skills you have to offer. You should carefully identify the skills required and prove you have those specific attributes. For example, if an employer expects you to have teamwork skills, an ability to write websites, and good IT skills, then these are exactly the attributes you need to promote.

No two vacancies require exactly the same skills and experience so you should always amend your CV to make sure it is targeted, and grabs the attention of the recruiter.

You can demonstrate your skills by outlining when you have recently used them, using examples from your education, your extracurricular activities and especially during your time at work. Skills gained in the workplace are especially attractive to employers because they are easily transferable. Make sure all your examples are recent (within the last two or three years).

It is up to you how you draft your document and what sections you include. See 'Writing a CV' and 'Types of CV' sections to find out more.

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### Types of CV

There are three common types of CV which can be adopted or amended as you see fit, these are shown below. Choose the style that best highlights your relevant skills and experience (based on the specific job/company requirements).

If you are emailing your CV or uploading it to an online database:

- use a common word processing package;
- target your CV to the career you want to enter;
- use key words and phrases from the job description to outline your relevant skills and experience;
- use a normal typeface such as Verdana or Arial, and do not underline or use italics.

### The chronological CV

This is the traditional CV format which directly links your education, work experience, achievements and interests to your relevant skills. Experiences are listed in reverse chronological order (i.e. your most recent studies and jobs are shown first).

This format is particularly effective if you have relevant experience because it highlights:

- what you have done;
- who you have worked for;

- how you have progressed.

## The skills-based CV

In this type of CV you briefly list your education, work experience, achievements and interests in one section and outline your relevant skills in a separate 'skills profile'.

CVs with well targeted skills profiles are particularly effective when:

- your experiences are not obviously relevant;
- you have changed jobs frequently;
- you have a wide range of experiences;
- you are looking to change career direction.

This is because your skills profile shows that you have addressed the needs of the employer and you have gained all the transferrable skills required.

## The academic CV

If you are looking for a research role you should demonstrate your relevant academic knowledge and achievements. Your headings could be:

- dissertation;
- research abstracts;
- research interests;
- areas of expertise;
- teaching experience;
- administrative experience;
- publications;
- presentations;
- conferences attended;
- professional memberships;
- fellowships and awards.

Remember - your research interests should be comprehensible to people outside your field but scholarly enough to interest fellow researchers.

Do not neglect your transferable skills and always use a professional layout. Academic employers want academic staff who are motivated team players, and can manage projects, bring in funding and communicate concisely and professionally.

If you are a postgraduate but not looking for an academic career, your CV should follow an alternative layout.

## Further information

- [What will they ask](#)
- [Alec.co.uk](http://Alec.co.uk)

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## Writing a CV

Your CV is a great chance to prove that you have the specific skills and experience required by an employer. To promote yourself effectively, identify the skills required in the vacancy and provide evidence of you having them.

For example, you could prove your teamwork skills by describing a specific activity at university and outlining how you:

*"Listened to colleagues, encouraged them and responsibly carried out my personal role, resulting in a mark of 71% and a business recommendation."*

You should use positive power words and any headings you want to promote your specific skills and experiences – here are some of the headings you should consider:

## Usual headings

**Personal details:** This is usually the first heading on a CV and you should keep it short.

- Print your name at the top in a large font.
- If necessary, include both your term-time and home addresses (with dates when you will be at each).
- Create a professional voicemail reply message and email address incorporating your name.
- As a rule, do not include information relating to your age, sex, nationality, marital status or health.
- If you are not from the European Economic Area and have permission to work here you may want to make this clear to employers (information about working in the UK is available from the [UK Border Agency](#)).

**Education:** Provide details of your education going back to your GCSEs (or equivalent). For each school, further education and higher education institution you have attended (or are attending), list the following:

- the institution's name;
- the town (and country, if it is overseas);
- when you were there (from start to finish);
- your qualifications and grades (especially if they are good), and their UK equivalents if they were taken overseas).

Summarise GCSEs, but promote your recent education and training more fully. Relate your degree/s to the job you are going for. For example, you could list relevant modules, outline related projects and/or promote the skills you have gained.

**Experience/work experience:** All work experience counts, whether paid, voluntary or shadowing (working alongside someone for a short time to see what their job is like). Outline your responsibilities and achievements that were/are relevant to the job you are seeking. Provide more information for recent and relevant roles. Some experience can be grouped together. For example:

*"Summer 2009: A variety of customer service roles including bar work, waitressing and telesales. Developed an awareness of customer relationship management and improved my teamwork skills whilst working with challenging customers in high pressure environments."*

**Positions of responsibility/achievements/interests:** Choose one of these headings to outline extra-curricular accomplishments which demonstrate your personal initiative

and career motivation. Briefly describe what you have done, how you have succeeded, and the relevant skills you have gained. For example:

*"As President of the University Karate Club I organise regular meetings to discuss possible events and successfully collaborate with a wide range of people including undergraduates, postgraduates, administrators, senior academics and sponsors."*

**Referees:** You can either provide the contact details of two referees or tell the employer that your references are 'available upon request'. One of your referees should be work-related, e.g. a manager at work, and one should be an academic at university – most people use their personal tutor.

## Optional headings

You can also create any other headings which highlight your particular attributes for the specific job. Some options are shown below.

**Personal profile/career objective:** This is a short (three/four line) summary of your relevant attributes and specific career aims. Well targeted profiles can attract attention but general statements often create a bad impression.

Follow these rules:

- use the third person (do not use 'I' or 'my');
- focus on just one or two of the key skills and experiences required.

For example:

*"Pro-active marketing graduate with over three years' experience organising and publicising successful events. Created a popular marketing campaign during internship with Virgin Airlines. Looking for a challenging and creative marketing position in the airline industry."*

**Relevant experience and Additional experience:** If you have a wide range of employment experience, you may want to highlight your most relevant work history under a 'Relevant experience' heading and list your other jobs in an 'Additional experience' section.

**Other possible headings:** You may want to include any number of additional headings such as: 'Career summary', 'Technical skills', 'Publications', 'Additional skills' and 'Accountancy experience' (if relevant to the job role).

## Layout

It should be easy to scan your CV and see your key skills and experiences. To do this effectively:

- use an appropriate type of CV (chronological, skills-based or academic);
- highlight relevant skills and experiences;
- place key information at the top of the CV where it can be easily seen;
- use bullet points to break up text;
- use positive headings such as 'Skills gained' and 'Relevant experience';
- list your experiences in reverse chronological order (most recent first);
- make dates easy to see and leave no unexplained gaps in time.

## Presentation

To create a good impression:

- use good quality paper (if sending a hard copy);
- in most instances, use two full pages (investment banks may expect a one page CV, and academic institutions may want a longer academic CV for academic roles);
- use a simple consistent format;
- promote yourself with positive words and phrases;
- spell everything appropriately and use correct grammar;
- avoid graphics and tables as they can look cluttered;
- use a larger font size for headings and use bold for emphasis (but do not overdo it);
- keep it simple and attractive even if a job calls for artistic creativity (you can always provide a portfolio of your work);
- avoid too much white space.

Ask a careers adviser for further help and feedback.

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## Covering letters

Whenever possible, send a covering letter with your CV which demonstrates your motivation, commitment and relevant skills.

- Always tailor your covering letter to the specific role.
- Show you have researched the role, the organisation and the industry.
- Outline why you are attracted to the specific opportunity.
- Highlight your unique selling points.

When applying by email, add the letter as an attachment.

## Style

- Use one page of A4 paper and four or five paragraphs.
- Address your letter to a named person, even if you have to contact the organisation to ask who deals with recruitment.
- Include your contact details and the employer's (including their title).
- Make sure your grammar and spelling are perfect.
- Use a professional tone.
- Link your writing style to the industry, e.g. covering letters for a job as a waitress will be less formal than those for an internship at a bank.

## Content

Use the following format as a guide for your letter. You may also want to include an extra paragraph to explain any personal circumstances or anomalies such as low grades or a career change.

**Paragraph 1:** a positive, formal introduction outlining how you heard about the opportunity, listing the documents you have enclosed (such as your CV).

**Paragraph 2:** outline why you are interested in the role and the organisation, demonstrating indepth research and mature reflection on how the opportunity fits into your career plans.

**Paragraph 3:** highlight your key skills and experiences.

**Paragraph 4:** highlight your key skills and experiences.

**Paragraph 5:** end positively outlining when you will be available for interview.

## Disclosure of disability

Legally, you do not have to declare your disability before you start a new job, but you must not lie and say you do not have a disability if you do. If you are asked on an application or medical form and you do not wish to disclose, simply do not answer the question. If false information is given and your employer finds out at a later date, you will not be protected by the Equality Act, 2010. Your employer may also have an issue with the fact that false information was given in the application.

If you decide to disclose, only discuss your disability in terms of its relevance to your performance in the job and stress your positive attributes and outline the benefits of your disability, for example:

- highlight your relevant skills;
- outline the extra skills you have gained as a result of your disability.

In your covering letter you could also give examples of how you have successfully dealt with challenges in the past brought on by your disability.

If you choose not to disclose your disability at the application stage, you can still do so later on. For example, you may not need adjustments during the early stages of your recruitment, but may find that you do in your day-to-day work. The employer may be funded for reasonable adjustments to your role and workplace.

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