

CV Writing Tips

Writing a CV is one of the most important parts of a job hunt, yet it's often one of the areas where job-seekers have the least amount of confidence, or the fewest ideas about how to do it properly.

It's important to remember that a strong CV is your key to the rest of the interview process. It's crucial to follow some simple rules in order to make your CV work as hard for you as possible.

These 10 tips will help you to avoid the pitfalls that so many job seekers fall victim to!

Sell, sell sell!

When you're writing your CV, always bear in mind that it is your primary selling tool – prospective employers will consider very little else making the decision of whether to take you forward to interview or not. Your CV needs to be a strong, relevant and personal expression of your achievements and useful skills.

Your CV needs to convince an employer that you have the right skills and experience to perform well in their company business. Don't shy away from selling yourself confidently and with passion – prospective employers want to sense your enthusiasm.

Moreover, it needs to accurately convey what you're all about as a person, so that when it comes to a face-to-face meeting there is an obvious link between the "person on the page" and the person they're interviewing.

Keep it simple

Use clear, legible fonts. Lay the CV out in a precise and logical way. Maintain consistency – don't use lots of different fonts, different sizes or different layouts. Use a plain white background with a black font. Don't use pictures or graphics where they're not required. Where they are necessary, ensure they're clear and striking.

Keep your CV to 2 pages of A4, **MAXIMUM** – going beyond this will simply mean that the prospective employer gets bored of reading, and won't give the information within their full attention.

Telling your story

You can be flexible with the way that you present the information within your CV. However, you need to make sure that you cover the following basic areas:

- Name, address and contact details
- Personal profile
- Education
- Career history
 - o When
 - o Where
 - o For how long?
 - o Key responsibilities and achievements
- Additional training and industry qualifications
- Interests
- References

Write about facts. Make sure that you communicate these facts clearly and simply – reading CVs can be tiring and difficult if the language used in them is too complicated or vague. Use short sentences and use bullet points appropriately to ensure your CV is as easy to digest as possible.

Make sure that you consider the level of knowledge that the reader of your CV has – if you're writing about technical or specialist skills then make sure that they are immediately understandable to the reader. If in doubt, explicitly define the terms.

Personal profile

Personal profiles are very important – they can really help a CV to shine, or make it dull and forgettable.

Your personal profile should be brief, punchy, and informative. It should talk about professional achievements, results that you're particularly pleased with, key skill sets that are extremely relevant to the role you're applying for, and it should talk about your personality, especially within a professional context.

Remember, however, two crucial things:

- Don't simply restate what you're writing in your career history: use the profile to go further than this and express some more personal emotion about your achievements/why you're proud of them
- Write about your professional personality, rather than your "at home" personality. The profile is a chance to sell you in your "work mode".



Customise

Change your CV to fit individual applications. If you're applying for a role where a particular area of your experience is especially relevant, make sure that you put more emphasis on it by extending that section and adding more detail. Don't be afraid to change things around to play to your strengths for a particular job opportunity.

Narrating

Talk about yourself in the first person – ie: “I attended Glasgow boarding school” – rather than the third person – ie: “Phil attended the Glasgow boarding school”.

Talking about yourself in the first person sounds more personal, and means that you can more naturally talk about your experience and achievements. Talking about yourself in the third person sounds impersonal, artificial, and alienating. Often, discussing achievements in the third person will sound extremely boastful and strange – ie: “Paul was the top performing sales person in his company for 3 years running. He consistently broke his sales targets”.

References

If you're going to include details of referees in your CV, make sure that they're for professional references and not personal ones. More importantly, make sure that the details you're including are accurate and genuine. Fake references never helped anybody!

There is also a point of etiquette that should be remembered when including referees details – if you're going to put someone's contact details on you CV as a prospective referee then you should ask their permission to do so first.

As well as being polite, this will avoid the embarrassment of having one of your “referees” refuse to give a reference for you when asked by a prospective employer.

Covering letters

Always include a covering letter in your application, and make sure that it is unique to the role you're applying for. Keep it reasonably short – about half a side of A4 paper is sufficient – and make sure to include:

- Reasons for your interest in the company
- Reasons for your interest in the role
- The key areas of your experience that make you an ideal candidate
- Your salary expectations and notice period



Top loading

You should always ensure that the most relevant areas of your experience are written about in detail on the first page of your CV. Likewise, any training that is relevant should be drawn to the top of your CV. These points are your primary selling tools and will have maximum impact if pushed to the top of your CV.

Tone

Be conscious of the tone of the writing in your CV. Write in formal, full prose – don't use abbreviations unless they are industry-standard and obvious to the reader.

Don't be flippant, or overly familiar. Whilst you may think that writing something jokey or tongue-in-cheek will set you apart from other candidates, be wary of appearing to lack seriousness or professionalism. Always re-read your CV putting yourself in the mind of the prospective employer – does it make you sound like a mature and intelligent person? Does it strike the right balance between the formal and the personal? Every job is different – roles with creative, “young” companies will expect less professionalism and more personality. Roles in large corporate organizations will require a CV that is more formal and corporate in tone. Make sure that you hit the right mark.

For more information:

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