

How to...
write and develop a curriculum
vitae (CV)



Introduction

Welcome to the first booklet in the 'How to...' series on writing and developing a curriculum vitae or 'CV'. Other booklets in this series include How to Write a Covering Letter, and our Student Guides to Job Hunting, Psychometric Tests, Assessment Centres, Job Hunting, Student Finance, and Useful Websites.

The aim of this booklet is to assist you in writing a CV from scratch. It includes helpful hints and tips alongside advice on how to convey your skills, abilities, work experience and other elements to write a concise but comprehensive CV.

You can use the guidelines on pages 5 - 8 to give you an idea of the structure and layout of a CV. Further advice on getting it right is given in the Hints and Tips section, pp 8 - 10. Then, there are examples of the two main styles of CV in Appendices 1 and 2; personal profile examples are included in Appendix 3; and there are useful lists of powerful words for you to use in your CV in Appendix 4.

Finally, remember that a CV is a work in progress and that it needs to be developed as you develop. It will also need to be adjusted for different roles that you apply for, giving emphasis always to the particular skills you know the employer is looking for.

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What is a Curriculum Vitae?

A Curriculum Vitae, often called a CV or a resumé, is a document that outlines details about you, your skills and experiences, which you have gained throughout your career history. A CV should show, in an ordered and methodical way, how your profile matches the employer's needs.

When employers ask for a CV, they are setting you the task of inventing an 'original' application for the job. This is different from an application form, which asks all candidates to fill in the same boxes under the same headings. The CV really is a unique selling document. It's an opportunity to make yourself stand out. It will be different for every application you make.

The decisions about which CV style to use, what to include and omit, what to emphasise, and how to order the information, are all determined by what is the best way to sell yourself to an employer who has a specific vacancy. Your CV is never 'done'. It needs to be constantly revised and rewritten for each new job application.

A good CV should:

- Attract attention
- Create a good impression
- Present your relevant skills and qualities clearly and concisely.

The purpose of a Curriculum Vitae

The purpose of a CV is to show a prospective employer that you have the necessary qualities and qualifications to do the job you're applying for. Its aim is to get you an interview with that employer, so it needs to demonstrate clearly that you have:

- The specific skills needed for the job
- The right sort of experience for the job
- The personal qualities for the position
- An understanding of the specific requirements of the job.

When should you use a Curriculum Vitae?

A CV can be used for several different purposes to assist you in gaining employment. A few examples are:

- To send in response to an advertised vacancy when the employer has asked for a CV to be included with your application
- To send to an organisation you would like to work for – a speculative application (only 40% of vacancies are advertised)
- To keep for personal reference to help you to complete forms.

Always remember that a CV is a forward looking document to get you interviews, not a life history.

Where do you start?

There are several ways to begin writing a CV: you can use the template below or you can use online resources (see useful websites on page 11). But the most important part is understanding what are your skills and abilities and conveying them in a positive manner. In this pack there are several resources to assist you in starting the process.

What should you include?

A Curriculum Vitae should include the following sections:

- **Personal details:** This should include your name, contact details, email address, and if you have a driving licence. If you have an alternative term-time address, include both. From October 2006 with the Age Discrimination Act in force, it is no longer mandatory to feature your date of birth.
- **Profile:** This section is optional on a CV, but if you use a profile, keep it to three or four lines maximum. Use it to demonstrate your current aims, career focus and evidence of two or three main strengths. Avoid generic skill statements like 'team worker with good time management and analytical skills' – try to be specific, e.g. "five years experience as team leader". This is the part of your CV which is most likely to change with each employer, so make it relevant to the employer and the vacancy. There are some sample profiles on pages 11-14.
- **Education:** Details about your education should be listed in reverse chronological order, with your most recent experiences and qualifications first. You must include the name of the institution, dates, and town. You do not need to list the full address or tutors' names and details. You should include the qualifications you gained within each institution. Think about the relevance of each qualification, summarise your earlier qualifications and list in more detail those taken most recently and those which are required for the position. You can find examples of this section on page 11.
- **Achievements:** If you have any other qualifications or major achievements i.e. climbing Everest, sports coaching qualifications, charity fund-raising, or professional qualifications, then include them here with the date achieved.
- **Employment or work experience:** Like education, start with the most recent and include three or four jobs (go back 5 years). If you have had several jobs, list the roles that are relevant to the new post you are applying for. If you have no employment history, include voluntary work and work experience. You need to list employer details, the dates you worked, job title and a few lines on key roles and responsibilities.

- **Skills:** This is the section where you can sell those skills you have in relation to the job advertised. Pick five or six key skills and match with a time you used them effectively or developed them. See pages 6 and 12 for examples.
- **Interests:** You can either write a short paragraph or list your key interests in bullet points. Be careful not to say you like something if you don't: there is nothing worse in an interview than being asked a question that you cannot answer!
- **References:** It is usually more appropriate to state that references are available on request, rather than listing them here, unless you have had a short career so far and have space to fill. You will have the opportunity to provide a reference at interview or at a later date. Most companies will not contact your referees without your consent.

How do I decide what my skills are?

Deciding what your skills are can be quite a minefield. The first point to remember is: Be positive about your attributes and state clearly what they are, avoiding including any negative points. If you got on badly with a boss or your peers, focus on the positive aspects of what you learned on the job.

Stage 1:

Firstly, look at what experiences you have had, either at work, through voluntary activities or socially. For example:

- Working as a Barmaid/ Deputy Bar Manager
- Baby sitting
- Stuffing envelopes
- Office work
- ECDL course
- French for beginners

Stage 2:

Next look at each item of experience you have listed and list some of the key roles that you undertook. For example:

- Barmaid/Deputy Bar Manager
 - Organised the time sheets for 4 members of staff
 - Inputted the data for payroll
 - Managed the levels of customer service
 - Dealt with complaints
 - Ordered new stock
 - Stock taking
 - General bar work (including shift work)

Stage 3:

Now that you have listed your key duties you can determine the skills it took to achieve each one. For example;

- Barmaid/Deputy Bar Manager

- Organised the time sheets for 4 members of staff
 - Planning, time management, decision making
- Inputted the data for payroll
 - Organising and co-ordinating, software experience with payroll systems and paye systems
- Managed the levels of customer service
 - Communication, developing relationships
- Dealt with complaints
 - Problem solving, communication, customer service
- Ordered the stock
 - Decision making, analytical skills, mathematic skills, planning
- Stock taking
 - MS office database, planning
- General bar work (including shift work)
 - Time management, communication, organisational skills

Stage 4:

Now that you have your experience, duties and skills you can start to build your CV. If you find that your CV is more skills-based then use the template on pages 13 and 14.

How much should you write?

It is important that your CV is concise and very relevant to the position you are applying for. Most companies will receive several CVs for the position and do not wish to read people's life stories. Therefore, you need to keep your CV to two sides of A4 and make a visual impact while being easy to read. Under no circumstances reduce the font size below 10pt Arial as it will make your CV hard to read! Similarly, don't make the font too big as it gives the impression that you are trying to fill the page.

How should I display the information?

Depending on the position you are applying for different styles of CV might help to highlight particular information. Or you can combine the styles to create your CV. There are two main styles of CV:

- **The Chronological CV:** This is the standard type of CV, in which you list sections like those above, for education, employment, achievements and interests. Put the information in reverse chronological order. This format is particularly good for showing how your career has progressed over time within one or two employers or single employment field. However, if you have changed employer frequently or changed career direction, you might like to consider the Functional (or skills-based) CV.
- **The Functional CV (also known as the skills-based CV):** This CV is ideal for those who have either changed jobs several times or have a lot of experience because they have been working for a long time. The focus is on illustrating the skills and experience you have gained from your employment so far, rather than illustrating a career progression. It

can be harder to write, because you have to think carefully about which skills you want to highlight. It is good for showing that you are aware of what the employer is looking for, but you need to ensure that you give examples of how your skills have been used. The career and education history sections can be kept brief. The person or job specification for a particular role will be invaluable in assisting you in writing this sort of CV.

Hints and Tips

Keep it simple

The easier a CV is to read the better. An advertised job vacancy will often attract hundreds of replies, and even the most conscientious employers have very little time to digest every CV that crosses their desk. So, the best way to make sure that yours does get read is to:

- **Keep it short:** No more than two A4 pages. If it is longer than this you are not focusing on your key points. Some recruiters say they can sum up a CV in 20 seconds!
- **Keep it clear:** Make it easy to read. A CV should always be typewritten, and well laid out with wide margins, clear section headings, and the information organised in a logical, easy to follow way
- **Keep it relevant:** The employer usually has two main questions in mind when looking at an employee or potential employee:
 - Is this person able to do the job?
 - Will this person fit in with the rest of us?

Think about the key messages you want to get across to the employer and relate this to:

- Your skills
- Your experience
- Your achievements.

Create an impression

As well as keeping your CV short, clear and relevant, make it look business-like and professional too.

Choose a format or layout to use: plain rather than fancy, unless you are applying for a role in creative areas such as media, advertising or design; use white or cream heavy duty paper, not pink or green. Use active words that describe your skills, experience and achievements e.g. organised, initiated (see the list of power words in Appendix 4). Make sure that as a result of the CV the employer wants to interview you. Your CV is very likely to need to be varied depending on who you are sending it to and will need checking and editing for each job application.

Style

The appearance of your CV is important and it can make your application stand out. It must be on good quality paper and typed or word-processed with clear black type. Pay attention to the layout and overall appearance and obviously to your spelling and grammar.

If you have access to a word-processor, experiment with different typefaces and headings and find a look you like. The best typefaces to use are those “sans serif”, like this one here (Arial), rather than, say Times Roman. Look at the difference between this paragraph and the next one to see how much difference it can make to the speed of reading. They are both 12 point...

A CV should be kept to no more than two sides of A4. More experienced mature candidates may think they need to use more space, but remember that a CV is an exercise in presenting information concisely. If it is longer than two sides you are probably not focusing sufficiently on your key messages. The only exception is for an academic CV where extra pages are used to list publications: articles, books and conference papers.

Sub-headings and bullet points

Sub-headings and bullet points can be really useful because:

- They break up long chunks of text
- They reduce waffle
- They signpost the reader
- They provide white space to make the CV more readable.

Be positive

It is really important on a CV to remain positive about your life and your achievements. Rather than using words like ‘I feel’ and ‘I believe’ say ‘I am’ or ‘I do’. Again, see the section below on CV power words.

Revise and edit

A CV is never ‘done’ it needs to be a continuous piece of work adapting to each job you apply for.

To summarise...

Use:

- Plain white or cream A4 size paper
- Good quality paper - 100 gsm weight
- A good, clear typeface
- Plain black ink
- Aim to make the layout clear, neat and easy to read
- Bullet points to highlight key skills
- Bold headings to separate different sections of the CV

And ensure:

- The content is brief and to the point - avoid trivia
- There are no mistakes or corrections
- It is typed or word-processed
- You don’t leave out important information about your skills and experience
- You use it to be positive - remember your CV is advertising you!

Avoid:

- Gimmicks
- Sending photocopies (unless they are very good quality)
- Spelling and grammatical mistakes
- Alterations and amendments - always print off a fresh, correct copy
- Using long sentences.

When you send your CV, remember the following:

- Always send your CV to a named individual within the company, not just to The Personnel Department. If you don't know the name of the person to send it to, ring up and find out
- Include a covering letter written specifically to match the requirements of that job
- The letter should be as well presented as your CV and similarly typed on good quality, white or cream A4 paper
- Send your CV and covering letter unfolded in a white or cream A4 sized envelope
- Make sure your application is sent off in good time to allow for postal delivery before the closing date
- Applications received after the deadlines are rarely, if ever, considered
- Take time in preparing your CV - time spent does pay
- Keep one copy of your CV as a master and take photocopies, or run several off the word-processor to send to employers
- Don't forget to update it
- Don't highlight problems e.g. divorce, illness
- Don't include salary information
- Make sure that the style you adopt is appropriate for the vacancies you are applying for

Finally remember, your CV needs to be accompanied by a covering letter to introduce and elaborate on your application.

Useful websites

<http://www.nextstep.org.uk>

<http://www.prospects.ac.uk>

<http://www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk>

There are hundreds of websites out there to help you in gaining employment which will also assist you in building a CV. However, look at a few to gain the information you require and always be careful about publishing your personal details online.

Appendix 1: Sample Chronological or Performance CV

David Jones

14 Green Drive
Faygate
West Sussex RH14 5XT

Telephone: 01403 2248653
Mobile: 07717 345980
Email: djones@hotmail.com

A mature and experienced trainer with a proven track record in the design and implementation of training, complemented by a background in counselling. A clear and concise communicator with the ability to motivate and encourage, along with a good ear for the underlying problems that can hinder efficient learning.

EDUCATION AND QUALIFICATIONS

University of Leeds Leeds	From: September 2003 To: June 2006 BA (Hons) Social Policy 2.1
Wyggeston and Queen Elizabeth I College, Brighton	From: September 2001 To: June 2003 3 'A' Levels, Geography A, Media Studies B, Maths C. 1 'AS' Level Physics D.
Faygate Community College, West Sussex.	From: September 1999 To: June 2001 9 GCSE's grades A – B Science A/A, Geography A, Maths B, English Literature B, English Language B and French B.

EMPLOYMENT AND WORK EXPERIENCE

Dates of Employment:	From: May 2005	To: August 2006
Company Name:	Canyon Marketing	
Job Title:	Field Sales Representative	
Responsibilities:	Initially I was responsible for acquiring new customers for several blue chip companies, but as the role developed I progressed through the company and was responsible for the management, training and organisation of a team of 10 people.	
Date of Employment:	From: July 2004	To: January 2005
Company Name:	Surveyors	
Job Title:	Long Distance Driver and Property Photographer	
Responsibilities:	The main responsibilities of the role involved driving to UK destinations to photograph properties and development sites for estate agency catalogues. This included driving an average of 2000 miles per week as well as the additional office work.	
Dates of Employment:	From: November 2003	To: May 2004
Company Name:	RGR Lake Louise	
Job Title:	Head Ski Lift Operator	
Responsibilities:	During my Gap year in Canada I was responsible for the operation of one of the main ski lifts within the ski resort of Lake Louise. I worked closely with a broad spectrum of customers, with a wide range of abilities. I was also responsible for the safety of all those who used the lifts.	

Skills

Throughout my travels and range of past employment I have gained many transferable skills that I can apply to all new and challenging situations.

All of my roles within employment have expected me to work to long hours with consistent targets. This has enabled me to develop my attitude towards work to a more focused approach and I feel that I have developed in to a high achieving hard worker due to my aim to consistently reach high targets.

During my work as a ski lift operator I immensely improved my communication skills. This was due to the broad spectrum of clientele that passed through the lift on a daily basis. I was expected to be polite, welcoming and informative in a jovial manner. My communication skills have since developed further with my position at Montana Marketing due to the communication with approximately 80 customers a day.

During my work with Mark Witty I was required to independently navigate myself through several major cities each day whilst trying to take the most economical routes and avoiding major delays.

After completing my 'A' Levels I decided to travel to Canada. During my time there I organised a successful road trip from the West Coast of Canada to the East Coast of the USA via Car, Train and Bus. This trip not only gave me the confidence to work independently but it greatly improved my organisational skills.

Whilst working for Montana Marketing I was responsible for the recruitment of new Field Sales Representatives. This included advertising positions, interviewing prospective candidates and organising the training upon employment. As the recruitment was successful my role as a manager meant that I was managing a Sales team of 10 people who consistently met the company targets.

Through my work for Mark Witty Surveyors and during my 'A' Level studies I have gained a working knowledge of Microsoft Office and several photo editing suites.

During my gap year in Canada I had to develop my team working skills. Apart from my main responsibilities I had to help keep the moral of my team at a high level when temperatures dropped below -40°C .

When building a team in a sales environment, attitude and atmosphere are very important, over the last 15 months my leadership and team working skills have had to move to a different level for me to become successful.

Interests

I have a very active life in which I participate in several hobbies and sports. I am a keen snowboarder, footballer, and climber and enjoy trying new and exciting activities at every opportunity.

I have become independent in living, working and learning through my travels and past employment. I have lived and worked with people from different walks of life and countries, in England and abroad. I have entered many environments of work from kitchens to warehouses to fruit farms. At every job I have worked hard and achieved employers' targets and my own goals. I feel this has helped me become versatile as a person and as an employee.

Appendix 2: Sample Functional or Skills-based CV Sample Layout

David Jones

14 Green Drive
2248653 Faygate
345980
West Sussex RH14 5XT
jones@hotmail.com

Telephone: 01403
Mobile: 07717

Email:

A mature and experienced trainer with a proven track record in the design and implementation of training, complemented by a background in counselling. A clear and concise communicator with the ability to motivate and encourage, along with a good ear for the underlying problems that can hinder efficient learning.

KEY SKILLS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

Business Awareness

- Experience in financial roles within the commercial sector with competence in payroll administration
- Active member of young enterprise throughout school and college
- Customer service awareness and experience from part time work at Canyon Marketing.

Initiative and adaptability

- Self funded my degree studies with relevant employment to increase my knowledge of social policy
- Successful study in Canada and France demonstrate my ability to adapt and thrive in new and different environments
- Working as a missionary in Tanzania and within a children's home in the Ukraine has required initiative, dedication and discipline

Team Working and Leadership

- Worked within several teams both professionally in Canada and socially for a football team
- Built team spirit as a missionary within a small development in Tanzania
- Planning and co-ordinating roles within an English school in Ukraine

Effective Communication

- Strong interpersonal skills developed within my missionary experience
- Ability to build a rapport with customers as demonstrated within my time as Canyon Marketing
- Strong presentation skills developed within my social policy degree

IT skills

- Competent with all MS Office applications, Flash, Java, HTML and Photoshop
- Level 1 and 2 Web Design (Dreamweaver)
- Experienced user of EBS and Pegasus

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EMPLOYMENT AND WORK EXPERIENCE

Dates of Employment: From: May 2005 To: August 2006
Company Name: Canyon Marketing
Job Title: Field Sales Representative
Responsibilities: On commencement at Canyon Marketing I was responsible for acquiring new customers for several blue chip companies. As the role developed I progressed through the company and was responsible for the management, training and organisation of a team of 10 people.

Date of Employment: From: July 2004 To: January 2005
Company Name: Surveyors
Job Title: Long Distance Driver and Property Photographer
Responsibilities: The main responsibilities of the role involved driving to UK destinations to photograph properties and development sites for estate agency catalogues. This included driving an average of 2000 miles per week as well as the additional office work.

Dates of Employment: From: November 2003 To: May 2004
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Job Title: Head Ski Lift Operator
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Appendix 3: Personal Profile Examples

When compiling your career objective, include the following points:

- Say what you do - offer a job title or job description
- Include some of your key strengths
- Say where you are coming from - background and experience
- Say what you're aiming for - how you would like to use your skills and experience.

Here are some example profiles to give you an idea of what to aim for:

- A smart, intelligent, experienced retail professional with an extensive background in fashion and women's wear both in large department stores and small boutiques. Creative, adaptable, versatile and, above all, tactful and diplomatic, with an excellent sense of colour and design.
- Bilingual postgraduate - hardworking, self-motivated and responsible, with an articulate and outgoing personality. Enjoys meeting new challenges and seeing them through to completion, while remaining confident and good-humoured under pressure. An individual who adapts well to new situations and has consistently worked effectively as a team member.
- A qualified trainer for PC spreadsheets, data management and graphics presentation software, supported by expertise in information management and data analysis acquired in a range of business and financial environments.
- A highly trained sales professional with a thorough background in sales management, and specific experience in business-to-business negotiations. A successful, profit-driven individual with a proven track record in business systems, office supplies and business machines.
- A professional caterer with considerable experience in all aspects of catering and specific expertise in catering management for large-scale operations.
- A highly experienced, professional confectioner with a considerable background in all aspects of catering and retail. A businessman with a thorough understanding of bookkeeping, marketing, stock control and staff management obtained through business start-up and development.
- An experienced personal assistant and secretary with a background in blue-chip companies and a thorough understanding of the computerised office, including word-processing and desktop publishing, electronic mail systems, spreadsheets and databases.
- A skilled graduate English-Spanish translator, fluent in Business Spanish with complementary office and computer skills. Excellent language skills

developed through experience of teaching English as a Foreign Language in Spain, Portugal and Venezuela.

- A well-organised, reliable administrative assistant and secretary, with extensive knowledge of good office practice and a wealth of experience gained in both large and small companies. Hardworking and reliable, with the ability to remain good-humoured and unflappable under pressure.
- A competent, highly motivated project leader seeking a senior management position where enthusiasm, skill and experience can be put to good use in an environment where research produces solid results.
- A dynamic, people-orientated communications professional, wishing to focus on a career in public relations where specific skills and experience can be put to effective use.
- A computer professional looking for a position in IT training using well-developed skills to help those people making the transition from 'streetfighter' to spreadsheets.
- A chartered engineer with ten years' experience in management, looking for a senior position where knowledge and skill will make a significant contribution towards corporate goals.
- An innovative and intelligent electronics engineer, having designed and installed a range of systems for a variety of clients. Adept at working effectively within a multi-disciplined team at senior level, with many years' experience of understanding and evaluating problems in the field.
- An engineering graduate with a keen interest in computers seeking a career in computing, especially in a scientific or industrial field, where a background in problem solving would be an advantage.
- A versatile, quick-thinking personal assistant looking for the opportunity to make use of an arts education in the field of publishing.
- A systems analyst with a background in business systems, interested in a position where the application of information technology can be used to improve company efficiency.

[Adapted from *Readymade CVs* by Lynn Williams, Hogan Page Ltd (1999)]

Appendix 4: Power Words to use when writing your CV

<p>Experience:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Experienced in• Demonstrates• Extensive• Knowledge of• Provided <p>Ability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Trained in• Proficient• Competent• Initially employed to• Expert• Working knowledge of• Organised• Skilled <p>Success</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Promoted• Succeeded• Proven track record• Experience• Successful• Instrumental• Negotiated• Developed• Impact• Outcome• Resulted in	<p>Responsibilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Managed• In charge of• Supervised• Delegated• Coordinated• Familiar with• Employed to handle• Assigned to• Project managed <p>Roles</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Analysed• Evaluated• Established• Created• Designed• Formulated• Initiated• Managed• Presented• Led team <p>Personal Attributes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Committed to• Confident• Enthusiastic• Actively sought• Creative• Innovative• Positive
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More CV Power Words

Accomplished	Documented	Negated
Achieved	Doubled	Negotiated
Administered	Drove	Obtained
Advised	Earned	Operated
Analysed	Edited	Organised
Approved	Eliminated	Performed
Arranged	Encouraged	Planned
Assessed	Engineered	Prepared
Assisted	Ensured	Presented
Attained	Established	Processed
Budgeted	Estimated	Promoted
Built	Evaluated	Redesigned
Calculated	Expanded	Reduced
Captured	Facilitated	Reorganised
Centralised	Forecast	Represented
Checked	Formulated	Researched
Collected	Founded	Resolved
Combined	Generated	Reviewed
Completed	Guided	Revised
Composed	Identified	Scheduled
Conceived	Implemented	Sold
Conducted	Improved	Solved
Consolidated	Improvised	Specified
Consulted	Increased	Standardised
Controlled	Initiated	Started
Converted	Inspired	Strengthened
Coordinated	Installed	Structured
Corrected	Instigated	Supervised
Created	Instructed	Supported
Cut	Interpreted	Tested
Decreased	Introduced	Trained
Defined	Launched	Translated
Delivered	Lead	Uncovered
Demonstrated	Liaised	Utilised
Designed	Machined	Verified
Determined	Maintained	Widened
Developed	Managed	Won
Devised	Marketed	
Diagnosed	Modernised	
Directed	Monitored	
Distributed	Motivated	

For further information contact the Information, Advice and Guidance Team:

Email: iag@racc.ac.uk

Tel: 020 8439 8956