



Understanding CVs Workshop

CIPD Guernsey

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Hints on writing a good CV

Writing your first CV can be difficult. This factsheet is designed to help you understand the purpose of a CV and how best to present your skills and experience to potential employers, so they are interested in meeting you.

What is a CV and why do I need one?

- Your CV is a piece of work completed by you, almost like a sales pitch on a sheet of paper.
- Your CV is used to show a potential employer that you have the right experiences (not just paid work experience) and the ability to perform. It shows the skills you can bring to their company, your motivation to succeed and highlights that you are the type of employee they are looking to recruit for that particular job.
- Your CV should be a maximum of two pages long. A potential employer doesn't want pages of information about you. Make sure you put the important things right at the beginning. If your CV is too long, the employer won't have time to read it.
- Print out your CV on quality paper. And make sure that you save your CV on your computer so that it's ready for any other applications.
- Use a font size no smaller than 10 and use a normal font such as Arial or Times New Roman. If an employer can't read about you, they won't want to meet you!
- Use simple, plain and positive English with clear and concise content – don't waffle!
- Check the spelling and grammar before sending your CV to employers. If you are unsure of how to spell a word, use a dictionary to check it. Have a family friend or neighbour check that your whole CV reads well – a fresh pair of eyes will spot any small errors that you may have missed

There are hundreds of websites that will tell you how to lay out your CV, but they are all the same and employers have seen dozens of these. The layout should be easy to read and nice to look at. Look at a 'standard CV template' online and then add your own small touches to make yours different.

Avoid using fancy borders because this will take the focus away from the important parts.

What you need to put in your CV and what you don't

Contact details

Dos:

- Your full name should be at the top of the page (not the nickname that your mates use!)
- Full home address including postcode (if you don't know it, find out).
- Mobile phone number and home telephone number if possible – give the employer some different contact options.
- An email address – make sure this is appropriate (using an email such as juiceylucy@gotmail.co.uk is not acceptable and employers will sift you out straight away).

Don'ts:

- Driving license – you don't need to put down that you hold one (unless you are applying for driving jobs).
- Photograph – unless you are applying to be Britain's Next Top Model, an employer won't need to know what you look like.
- Date of birth – unless you are applying to work with alcohol, this is also not needed.

Mini profile

- This is the most important and useful part of your CV because it highlights you as a candidate and why you are different from the rest.
- Make it either a short and snappy paragraph, or use bullet points highlighting your best skills.
- Ask someone to check it for you or, better still, get someone you know to give you a few points on the type of person you are; this should help you highlight your best personal qualities.

Key skills and achievements

- If you have any achievements (certificates) that are relevant to the job for which you are applying, list them. For example, if you are applying for a waitressing role and have a food hygiene certificate, put that down because the employer will be keen to see it (don't forget the dates that you completed the certificate).
- If you don't have any relevant achievements, it's nothing to worry about. You can leave this section out.

Career history

- List your most recent job, work experience or voluntary work first and work your way back. Employers will want to see your up-to-date employment at the top.
- Don't forget to list your main responsibilities, your job title and the dates you were employed.
- Make sure that the dates all match up; this is something that an employer will look at and, if there are gaps, make sure you can explain them.
- Don't make up tasks to make yourself look better. Be honest!

Training and education

- List your education (school) as additional to any others you have put in the key skills and achievements section.
- If you have done training as part of previous employment or voluntary work, for example customer service, list this as well because it will show a new employer that you are willing to learn.
- If you have any outside of work skills, for example public speaking at a local community group, include this also because it shows your commitment.

Interest and hobbies

- These may sometimes be used as an ice breaker; if you are called for an interview, so make sure that they are genuine interests.
- Put relevant hobbies to the job for which you are applying, for example cooking if you are applying for a chef's role (things such as socialising with friends are not relevant).
- Make sure that you have examples to back your hobbies up if called for an interview.

References

- Not required on your CV – they will only take up unnecessary space. The best thing to say is: "References available on request."
- When requested, for your first role it is fine to give the details of a teacher, or perhaps a volunteer leader or sports coach as reference. If you have had a previous job then an employer would normally expect to get a reference from your old job as well.

How to write your first ever CV

When you write your first CV, don't worry if you have little or no work experience. There are plenty of other ways to show employers that you have the right skills and abilities to work for them and highlight that you are the best candidate for their company. Think about the following:

School

- Were you part of a club or group at school where you had responsibilities?
- Did you help to organise school events? Did you have to keep records? Hold meetings? If so, these are perfect examples of being organised, working in a group, using your initiative and sticking to deadlines.

Awards

- Have you taken part in any Duke of Edinburgh awards or similar? These are also examples that you have worked within a team and followed instructions.

Voluntary

- Have you done any voluntary work? Girl Guiding? Local charity shops? Local elderly home? Helped at a local church group? These are good examples to use as well.

All of the above will show that you are able to complete tasks, work with other people and are a committed individual.

Those important changes to your current CV to make you stand out

Having more than one CV is perfectly normal because most jobs for which you apply are completely different from the last, and you will need to amend your CV to suit each job

- If you are applying for a job that requires a specific skill, for example gardener, make sure that you highlight this skill – you have to show that you are capable.
- Take out any unnecessary skills. This will take up space and the employer won't want to know about things that aren't relevant to their vacancy. Use the job description for the vacancy.
- If you don't have one, look at the company's website or use any brochures you can find. This will help you to establish the kind of candidates that particular company is looking for.
- Think about what you have to offer to the specific employer – how are you different from the rest? Use words from the job advert and put these in your CV. This can also be included in your covering letter. This will prove that you have read the advert properly and paid attention to detail

Hints on how to conduct a successful job search

Beginning your job search can be a daunting experience as there is a lot of information available in many different areas. This factsheet is designed to help you navigate the obstacles and make your search as effective as possible.

Step 1: What are your skills, your knowledge and experience so far? What kind of work would you like to try?

- Identify your interests, hobbies, skills, accomplishments, experience and goals. Think about how these can benefit an employer and in what kind of environment.
- Think about what kind of job you would like to do - perhaps you like interacting with lots of people or making things? When you think about this try and think about what you enjoying doing at school and college, but also the kinds of activities you enjoy in your spare time.
- Think about where you would like to work. Perhaps you would you like to work in an office or you might prefer to work outdoors. Also think about whether you would enjoy a job that involved travelling around the region/country, or if you would like to stick in one place.

Step 2: Research and explore career options

Using the internet, careers advice services at school/college or family/friends to help you, try to match your experience, skills and interests to different job roles. Find out the different possibilities within career paths, there are a lot more than you think.

If you are interested in applying for an apprenticeship, then a lot of information on the different types you can apply for is available locally.

Step 3:- Choose a career field (or two) and then target potential employers

Perhaps you have identified computers as an interest and you are creative and artistic. What about jobs in graphic design, web design, or creating new computer games...? Think about what local and national companies offer these types of jobs. Do you know anyone that could help you?

Step 4: Plan and conduct job search campaign

- Look for jobs adverts in local papers, at the Jobcentre, on the Internet or word of mouth.
- Develop a contact network – family members, friends and anyone on your Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn network that can be relevant to your career interests. Contact employers directly, send them your CV and ask if there are any work experience opportunities available, if not vacancies
- Keep a record of your applications, responses, interviews and any follow-up actions. The best way to do this is by creating a table in Excel.
- Be persistent and ask for feedback! – If your search is not producing the results that you would like, avoid blaming yourself and try a new strategy. Talk to other people, both employed and unemployed, ask them what they have done and grab yourself some free advice! Ideally employers should provide you with feedback if you have not been successful at application or interview stage. If they do provide this, make sure you use this feedback constructively to make changes to your approach; you are more likely to get better results next time.

Step 5: Applying for an apprenticeship

If you are keen to continue learning, alongside working then you might consider doing an apprenticeship. There are lots of benefits to doing an Apprenticeship. You can earn while you learn, and learn in a way that best suited to you – through hands-on experience on the job. Key benefits of being an apprentice include:

- Earning a salary
- Getting paid holidays
- Receiving training
- Gaining qualifications
- Learning job-specific skills

For more information on the benefits of doing an apprenticeship and a step by step guide look at the apprenticeship scheme available locally.

Hints on how to research a company

In order to impress an employer when you apply for an apprenticeship, job or go for an interview, you need to go out of your way to research the organisation – its purpose, its products, even its history. This sounds like a huge task, but fortunately there are lots of resources you can turn to that will help you in your search.

What is a 'resource'?

Anyone and anything can be a resource. Time and money, for example, are two very useful resources. A place that holds the information you need, such as a library, is also a resource, as are people with the skills and knowledge you are looking for. In your search for information the following places might be of help:

- Libraries – they are often staffed by people who are very skilled at helping you find information, they may also have a selection of trade or business magazines that might be useful
- The internet
- Friends and family, and their friends, and their friends...
- Social networking – Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn
- If applying or interviewing for an apprenticeship then there is lots of information available on www.apprenticeships.org.uk

Make a list of all the resources you can think of that are available to you (places and people).

How to research an organisation: a step-by-step guide

Imagine you find a job or apprenticeship advertised on the internet, or in the local newspaper. You are interested, but the advert doesn't tell you much about what the company does, or how long they've been in business, or who their customers are... so...

Step 1: Call or send an email to people in your network; you think may be able to help. Perhaps a relative or friend knows someone who works for the organisation – you never know so it's worth asking around.

Step 2: Search on the Internet – enter the company name into Google (or a search engine of your choice) to see whether they have a website or LinkedIn/Twitter page.

Step 3: Look for the relevant pages on their website: "About us" "Our people", "Careers" or "Working with us" sections might be particularly useful. The organisation might also have its Twitter feed or LinkedIn page – have a look to see if any information on there might be of use.

Step 4: You want to find out what the company *culture* is like – what is really important to them – so, if they have one, make sure you look at the Mission statement or Values" page on their website. If they have a News page this might also be helpful as it will give you an idea of the current issues that are relevant to the company.

Step 5: Make a note of useful words and phrases that you come across in relation to the organisation, and think about how you can link these to your knowledge, skills, and attitude within your application or interview.

Remember

To make your application stand out, an employer wants to know:

- **Why** you want to work for them (what you know about the company and what they do) *and*
- **What** you will bring to the company (your skills, knowledge and attitude).

Use the same words as the employer, where possible: if they say they are a “responsible employer” make sure you state you are a responsible person/can handle responsibility. If they say they offer a vibrant, supportive environment, make sure you state you have a vibrant personality and are a supportive team member.

Hints on how to read job adverts, write a covering letter and complete applications

In order to grab an employer’s attention, you need to write a covering letter or application that will stand out from the rest. This factsheet will give you some ideas about how to write an effective covering letter or application that will address specific job adverts and present yourself in a strong light. Information is also provided on how to apply for an apprenticeship scheme.

Reading a job advert

Make a note of the following details – you will need to refer to them in your cover letter or initial communication with the employer:

- Job title – this sounds obvious but it is very important to get right, especially if you are sending out lots of applications using jobsites or online recruitment tools.
- The company’s name, brand and/or logo – you can use these for your research into what the company is, what it does, what its values are, who its customers are, and so on.
- Hours of work – is it full-/part-time, or shift work?
- The salary
- The job description/person specification – this tells you what skills, knowledge and attitude the employer is looking for. You will find key words and phrases that you can match in your application.
- Contact details to send your application to. This may be either an email or postal address, and your application will usually be sent to a particular person or department.
- The closing date for applications.

Your covering letter

The letter or email you send with your CV is your opportunity to grab the attention of the employer and get them interested in reading more about you. Here are some things you should consider when writing an effective letter:

- Tell the employer why you are applying to their company. What is it about the company that makes you want to take the time, and make the effort, to send them an application?
- This is also your chance to tell the employer what specific skills/experience/interest you have that could be useful to them. Show the employer what value you can add to their business.
- Just like your CV, you will need to amend each covering letter for each job for which you apply to make it suit that particular employer.
- A covering letter gives you the opportunity to get recruiters interested in you and your CV, so every CV needs a letter!
- Have a draft copy saved on your computer so you can adapt it each time you apply for a job.
- Make sure your spelling and grammar is correct. If an employer spots an error, they won’t look at your CV.

What to include in your covering letter

- Address it to a named person if possible, if not use 'Dear Sir/Madam'.
- Tell them why you are writing to them.
- Explain what interests you about the job.
- Point out your key skills, experience and/or qualifications that are relevant to that particular job.
- Explain why you want to work for the company and what you can bring as an individual.
- End the letter with a positive, expressing your willingness to discuss your application at interview.

Stand out from the crowd

Think about particular skills and knowledge you have that others might not. Include these on your cover letter (if they are relevant to the job) to give yourself an advantage. For example:

- Do you get on with people really easily? Do people come and ask for your advice often?
- Are you a social media whizz?
- Are you always on time and/or well organised?
- Are you brilliant with technology: mobile phones, iPads, and computers?
- Maybe you're good at carrying out research using the Internet, magazines, television, your social network. Do you enjoy doing this type of work?
- Have you had some previous work experience, a Saturday job or done some voluntary work that involves talking to members of the public? Any experience like this is really useful and important to an employer – this includes having a good telephone manner
- Have you ever played a team sport? Think about the skills and behaviours you have gained: dedication, reliability (turning up for training/matches), motivating others (if you've just lost a game!) organising and leading others.

Style of your covering letter

- Make sure the letter is typed and is in the same font and size as your CV.
- One page of A4 only – it doesn't need to be too long.
- Three or four paragraphs are acceptable.
- Keep to the point – don't waffle.
- End the letter with "Yours faithfully" or "Yours sincerely" and sign your name (type it if you are sending it electronically).

Completing application forms

When you are completing an application form, whether it's online or in a paper format, you must make sure that you check it thoroughly before sending it. Why not get someone to check it for you? Once it's been sent, you won't have an opportunity to change it. Often it is best to make a copy of the application form and have a practice first and then copy on to the original.

Online application forms

Companies may ask you to register yourself on their website and apply for their vacancy online. This is becoming more and more popular, so you need to make sure that you complete all sections before you press the submit button, it is worth taking your time.

- Check your online application form for spelling and grammar before sending it. If you are unsure of how to spell a word, use a dictionary to check it because not all sites will have a spell-check facility.
- If you are having problems submitting your application, don't just hope for the best. There is always a helpline number or email address to contact. This will ensure that your application is received properly and on time.
- The company will probably have a lot of online applications to sift through, so you need to make sure that yours will stand out from the other applicants.
- Use the contents from your CV to complete any skills section.
- Don't forget about the draft covering letter you have written. It's a good idea to use this on any additional information spaces that the online application has.

Applying for an apprenticeship

If you are keen to continue learning, alongside working, then you might consider doing an apprenticeship. The steps you need to take for applying for an apprenticeship are slightly different to other jobs. There is an apprenticeship website that allows you to search via the careers website

For further information or assistance

For further information, please feel free to contact:-

CIPD Guernsey at guernsey@cipdbranch.co.uk