How to write a CV

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How to use this booklet

We recommend using this booklet alongside the CV examples on our website:
www.sussex.ac.uk/careers/cvs

You can also use our e-learning course **How to write your CV** for more guidance.

What is a CV?

'CV' is an abbreviation of 'curriculum vitae', which means 'course of life'.

It is a document which sets out the skills, experience and knowledge you have which will enable you to perform well in a job, course, or other opportunity.

Your CV is usually one of your first chances to communicate with an employer.

It should do several things:

- provide a clear timeline of your major activities in recent years;
- show where you have built up the ability to do the job or other opportunity you are applying for;
- demonstrate professionalism with its logical, appropriate layout and wording.

Why do I need a CV?

Whatever type of career you want to pursue, you will almost certainly need to write a CV and covering letter at some stage.

For certain sectors, and especially with smaller organisations, a CV and covering letter is the standard type of written application.

How do I get started?

Your CV is a crucial opportunity to market yourself – to show the reader how you meet their requirements and get them interested in interviewing you.

To give your CV the best chance of success, it is important to understand what the employer or opportunity provider is looking for, before you start writing.

It is essential to tailor your CV to the opportunity in order to show the recruiter that you have what they are looking for.

If you are applying to an advertised job vacancy or course, go through the person specification or entry requirements and identify where you have evidence of the skills, knowledge or experience needed.

If you are writing a speculative application, research the career area and find out what skills are in demand.

You can use our sector guides to help you: www.sussex.ac.uk/careers/researchingcareers

What are the different types of CV?

- **Chronological** – this is the most popular style of CV for new graduates. Education, work experience and other major activities are listed in date order. This is usually the best choice if most of your adult life has been spent in education, or if you have followed one career path.
- **Skills** – this type of CV centres on a list of the main skills you have to offer, with examples of when you have demonstrated them. This can be a good choice if you are changing direction, have little experience, or need to tell the employer about multiple technical skills.
- **Academic** – for academic careers after completing a PhD, CVs tend to be much longer, with details of research carried out, and lists of publications, conferences attended, etc.
- **Alternative/creative** – for certain creative industries, it is important to demonstrate your creativity by taking a bold approach to designing the CV so that it shows off your talents.

What do I need to include in my CV?

There are few hard and fast rules about what to include on your CV, and in what order. However, most people include the following sections.

Contact details

- Name: use the name you are usually known by in a work context.
- Postal address: increasing numbers of CVs leave this out, as employers will usually contact you by phone or email. If you include it, give your university address if applying for work locally. Use your home address if it is closer to the location of the opportunity – it can help to show a local connection.
- Phone: give one number and use a mobile number, if possible.
- Email: it is fine to use your personal email account, and this has the advantage of not expiring when you leave Sussex. Ensure you have a professional-looking username, preferably a variant of your actual name.
- Social media: it is increasingly essential to have a positive social media profile for certain areas of work, so it is a good idea to include the details of your accounts, especially LinkedIn and Twitter.

Profile/introduction/summary

- Increasingly, CVs include a short introductory section, highlighting your key skills to encourage the reader to read the rest of the document.
- Explain briefly where you are now; what you have to offer; and what you are looking for.

Education

- For many current students, your most significant achievements to date come from your education, so it makes sense to place this section towards the top.
- List your current or most recent course, and then work backwards to A-level and GCSE.
- You can summarise the number of your GCSEs and total grades obtained. Do mention if you have English and Maths.
- Give the start and finish dates, title of the course, and name of the institution, followed by the result if known.
- If you don't have A Levels or GCSEs, give the original name and grade of your pre-Sussex qualifications, with UCAS points if possible.
- For your most substantial qualifications, and any which are relevant to the job you are applying for, you can give more details, such as a selection of the modules

studied; a brief description of your dissertation; transferable skills which you gained during the course.

Work experience/career history

- This section should also be laid out in reverse chronological order.
- You can include any type of work, including part-time, temporary, and voluntary experience.
- It is a matter of choice how far back in time to go, and whether to include every work experience you have had – think about what is most relevant to what you are applying for, and how much space you have available.
- Lay out the information in a similar way to the education section – dates, job title, name of employer.
- It is usually better to use bullet points to describe your experience, rather than paragraphs.
- Your experiences can be divided into those which are relevant to your application, and others.
- Highlight any achievements, with supporting evidence, e.g. 'increased membership 20% with social media campaign'.
- For experience that is not relevant to what you are applying for, focus on transferable skills. If you have worked in retail, for example, you could write about building teamwork, communication and customer service skills.

Other activities/interests/extra-curricular activities

- Mention any structured activities, especially those in which you have an official role, for example: student societies which you help to run.
- Put the most recent or current activities towards the top of this section, although you can be more flexible than in the previous two sections.
- Specify your level of involvement e.g. 'I have played football regularly since early childhood and am Vice-Captain of the 1st XI at University'.

Skills

- Avoid lists of skills without explanation, e.g. 'teamwork'. Either produce a skills CV, or use bullet points in your Education, Work Experience and Other Activities sections to show where you have gained most of your skills.
- Most people include skills such as IT and languages. Be informative but brief, e.g. 'Excel – can create pivot tables and design charts', and/or 'Spanish – intermediate written and spoken'.
- Only include your driving licence (if you have one) if the job is likely to require you to drive.

Referees

- Traditionally, CVs included full details of referees, but this is less common now. Of course, you should include them if the job or course entry requirements ask you to do so.
- For most purposes, you can write 'Details of referees are available on request'.
- If you are asked for referees, it is usual to give two: one from your current or most recent course, and one from a current or recent employer if possible.

What to leave out of your CV

In the UK, it is not customary to include a photograph, date of birth, marital status, or any other personal details which are irrelevant to your ability to do the job.

Your nationality is also not usually needed, but if you are from outside the EEA and have permission to work in the UK, you may want to include this.

What writing style should I use?

For every vacancy, several good applicants don't get an interview because their CVs contain poor spelling or grammar. Always check your CV before you send it, and ideally get someone else to read it.

Once you have written your first draft, ask yourself if it can be written more simply or concisely. Try reading your written documents aloud. Shorten long sentences or divide them into two shorter ones.

If you use bullet points, you don't have to write in full sentences. It is usually better to write brief bullet points than full paragraphs.

Use active, not passive language. Write, for example, 'I strengthened my practical problem-solving skills', rather than 'problem-solving skills were developed'.

And say what you did – 'I answered queries from a wide range of people', rather than 'I had to answer queries from a wide range of people'.

How should I format my CV?

Your CV should not be longer than two pages (except for academic CVs). A one-page CV can work well when applying for part-time jobs.

- Use conventional fonts, such as Arial, Calibri or Helvetica.
- Use black ink – colours can look unappealing and grey if they are printed in black and white.
- Use bold, underlining and other emphasis sparingly and consistently, e.g. for section headings.
- Don't fit in more text than you can fit in comfortably. Leave reasonable margins at the edges of the page. Leave at least a line between sections.

Need more help with your CV?

We can review your CV before you send it to recruiters.

You can book an appointment in CareerHub or send your CV to us via Ask a Question for feedback: www.careerhub.sussex.ac.uk

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