What is a CV?

Commonly referred to as a CV, a curriculum vitae is a document that contains a summary of your professional and educational background. Companies will often request a CV as part of their initial screening process. But it's also a fantastic personal marketing tool and an opportunity to excite and engage employers.

Because recruiters may only spend a minute or two scanning a CV, knowing how to grab their attention is vital. Keeping it to two (2) pages is essential. Any longer risks being overlooked. Because of this space (and time), it's important to include only the most essential/relevant information in order to not lose impact.

When writing a CV, get right to the point. At this stage, the specific details aren't essential. Keep your sentences short and the information accurate. And tailor your CV to the role you're applying for. This way, the recruiter will quickly see your compatibility and is more likely to put your application forward.

Here's a breakdown of what to include:

1. Select a unique writing format.

There is no strict format when it comes to CVs but using a portrait Microsoft Word document or similar is a common and universally accepted option.

Depending on the sort of role you're applying for, it's worth thinking about whether or not you could put a CV together in way that stands out. There's nothing wrong with adding a bit of personality. Tools like Canva offer great access to templates, are fun to use, and offer you the chance to be creative. Just make sure to include all the relevant information in a way that's digestible, logical and accessible to all.

It's also an option to use AI generation tools like EnhanCV and Resume.ai. These are great template generators for first time CV writers but will require a bit of extra finessing to ensure accuracy.

Use simple fonts like Ariel, Helvetica or Calibri and ensure all information is well spaced. If you're going to use a colour, stick to black and one other. Red or Blue stand out nicely.

Use a maximum of TWO fonts with a total of three varieties. E.g.

Calibri bold. Calibri light. *And Calibri light italic.*

Or

Arial black. Calibri bold. *And Calibri light italic.*

Use the boldest fonts for titles and headings.
Regular and light fonts for main sections of body copy.
And italics for things like dates and extra details that you want to include.

2. Your contact details

In recent years, the information you're required to include in applications has changed drastically. With the rise in what's known as 'blind' applications, there's no longer a need to state gender or age for example. Some applications don't even require a name. However, unless specifically asked, we recommend you include the name you go by and basic contact details at the top of your CV. A rough location and a photo are nice to haves but by no means essential. E.g.

A photo:
Name:
Email address:
Phone number:
Location:

3. Writing a professional summary

The next thing to include is a summary of yourself as an individual. See this as your elevator pitch to the organisation. Keep it honest and write it in a way that uses pronouns sparingly. The less I/he/she/they the better. Start sentences with action verbs and use language that not only makes you sound human but highlights your skills, makes you sound interesting and really sells you as an asset.

You can write a generic summary statement but, depending on the role you're applying for, this might need to be edited from role to role.

4. Your work history

Your work history is an opportunity to highlight the brilliant work you've been up to in your career. If you're new to the professional world or have had a career break / gap, include the most relevant positions for the role you're applying for. Each of these should include tangible metrics of success and exciting developments; each position you've held should bring something to the table that an employer will be interested in.

But this isn't a time to gloat. Be sure to stick to the facts and humbly convey your success. Use this as an opportunity to prove you're capable. E.g.

Work History

Name of employer, broad location *(dates of tenure)*

- Overview of role and responsibilities

- Then include highlights / successes

- As well as achievements / tangible metrics

5. Including your personal skills

Personal skills can also be included in a CV. They can help cover employment gaps or a 'lack of experience' due to you starting your first job or switching careers. Personal skills can therefore be used to emphasise and exhibit your capacity for a role without specific experience. Every role will differ but doing some top-level research into what's required for a role will give you an indication as to what's expected. It's always worth checking to see if you already possess these skills and then include them in a simply bullet point list. E.g.

- **Relevant skill number one**. And then go into a bit more detail about how you acquired this, whether it's a passion of yours, a hobby or something you were interested in at school.

6. Writing an academic history

Your academic history should include anything from your GCSEs and beyond. Try to limit this to just three institutions, ranging from secondary education through to further education. If you have a PhD, a master's degree and a BA, your A-levels and GCSEs may be unnecessary. E.g.

Education

Name of institution, location *(years of attendance)*
Qualifications
Extra-curricular activities

7. Checking your CV

This one is self-explanatory. Make sure you proofread your CV before saving and submitting it. The last thing you want is for your application to be littered with errors. Especially if the person skimming across it only notices a rogue spelling miskate (like that one).

8. Writing a Covering Letter

You'll often be required to write a Covering Letter to accompany an application. This is, when it comes down to it, the real application. Your opportunity to truly show that you're interested and engaged in a position and that you're the right person for the job.

Talk passionately and confidently about the organisation and why you want to work there. Dive into the departments and the specifics of the role itself. Be sure to address and prove each one of the required skills and areas of knowledge in the job description. You can even use this as an opportunity to go into more detail regarding how your successes at previous roles match these requirements.

NB. Ensure your covering letter is within the specific word limit as this can play a big part in whether or not your application is read.