

How to write a CV

Why you need a CV

A CV is a short, written summary of your skills, achievements and experience which relate to a role you want. You use it in the first stage of applying for jobs. Employers often ask for a CV instead of an application form but sometimes you'll need both.

It's your first chance to promote yourself to an employer. A good CV will get you to an interview.

Use it to apply for advertised jobs, or to introduce yourself to employers you'd like to work for. They may have vacancies that aren't advertised.

Start your CV

Start with the job advert for the role you're applying for, so you can refer to the:

- job description
- person specification
- company details

Think about how your skills and experience match what the employer is looking for and gather the information you'll need, including:

- your qualifications
- your past jobs and volunteering experience
- your past employers' details
- evidence of any training courses you've completed

You should tailor your CV to suit the job description and the company. If the job you're applying for does not have a job description, you can look at our job profiles to understand the skills you'll need and the typical things you'll do in that job.

Layout

There are different CV styles, so use the one which best matches the role and the stage you're at in your life or career.

- traditional CV or chronological CV - lists your work and education history, starting with the most recent
- skills based or targeted CV - focuses on your job-related skills and personal qualities
- technical CV - used in professions like IT and engineering, it highlights the skills you have that are important in your industry
- creative CV - used in creative and digital arts and can link to an online portfolio, contain video or infographics, or include digital tools that make you stand out from the crowd
- academic CV - generally longer than a traditional or skills-based CV and often used for teaching and research careers

Your finished CV should be no more than 2 sides of A4 unless it's an academic CV.

What to include in your CV

There are some things that you need to put in your CV. You can change the order of these to suit your situation and the type of CV layout you want to use.

Contact details

You'll need to provide details of how employers can get in touch with you if they want to offer you an interview.

You should only include your:

- name at the top of the page - no need to add 'CV' or 'curriculum vitae'
- phone number which employers can reach you on during the working day
- email address - always use a professional sounding email address

You can also provide a link to your professional networking profile, like LinkedIn.

Do not include your:

- age
- date of birth
- marital status
- nationality

Personal profile

This is a few short lines that sum up who you are and what you hope to do. It should go just under your name and contact details.

Think about the job you want and what the employer is looking for. Make your profile sound like you're the right person for the job.

Education history

You can add this section after your personal profile if you're early on in your career, or if you don't have much work experience. Whatever order you choose, you'll need to include the:

- names of your qualifications
- school, college or university where you studied
- dates you attended

If you're older and have had a number of jobs, you might want to change the order and show your work history and skills first.

Work history

Include placements, volunteering and any paid jobs you've had. You should list these with the most recent first, and include:

- the employer details
- the job title
- the dates you worked there
- what you did (usually 2 to 3 lines)

Use active words to highlight your strengths and skills, to describe things you've done like:

- organised
- created
- built
- managed
- planned

Give positive examples of your achievements rather than just listing responsibilities. Use the STAR method to help.

If you've had a lot of jobs, you can use a skills-based CV to group them.

Gaps in your CV

A skills-based CV is useful when you have gaps in your work history. Give examples of skills you've developed during the times you were out of work and how you got them.

If you're applying for your first job, you can focus on skills you've learned through:

- projects
- part-time work
- work experience
- internships and placements
- volunteering

Hobbies, interests or achievements

Try to show the skills you have through your hobbies and interests. Focus on examples that show you have relevant skills for the job.

This section of a CV is useful if you do not have much work experience.

References

You can leave out the details of your references at this point, or mention that 'references are available on request'. The recruiter will ask for these when you get through to the next stage.

CV tips

Employers get lots of CVs to look at and have to decide quickly who they are going to interview. Here are some tips to make your CV stand out for all the right reasons.

When writing your CV remember to:

- research the company and the job before you start
- choose a CV style that fits your situation or one that employers in that sector prefer
- use a clear font like Arial, Times New Roman or Calibri, size 11 or bigger. Always use the same style throughout
- use headings, bullet points and spacing to break information up to make it easier to read
- keep it to 2 sides of A4
- be clear and to the point
- match the words you use to the keywords in the job description
- get someone else to read it, and double check your spelling and grammar
- save a backup copy and convert it to PDF format for emailing
- always send a cover letter with your CV