



careers advice pack

8. How to write a great CV



Getting onto the 'yes' pile

The purpose of a CV is to get you an interview. Recruiters typically spend about 30 seconds looking at each CV before they decide whether to put it on the 'Yes' pile or the 'No' pile. They are scan reading (at least first time round) so make it easy for them to put you on the 'Yes' pile by presenting clear, **relevant information** which matches your skills and experience to the job applied for.

Although 'Curriculum Vitae' means a 'running through of life', you don't need to give recruiters your life history. Be selective!

Your CV should:

- Honestly reflect your career and achievements
- Focus on aspects of your career that are relevant for the particular job you're applying for
- Make it easy for a recruiter to invite you for interview.

Do you need more than one CV?

For most people, one CV is enough as a base document but you'll need to target it (tweak it), for each application you make. This shouldn't take too long – it could mean spending as little as 20 minutes changing the order of things or amending your profile, so that you draw attention to aspects of your skills and experience that match the particular job description. Remember the aim is to make it as easy as possible for the reader to put you on the 'yes' pile.

However, if you're applying for different types of roles it makes sense to have more than one CV. For example, if you're looking for jobs in marketing and also in business development, you'll need separate CVs that each focus on relevant aspects from your career history.



Three steps to a successful CV

There is no magic formula or single 'right' way to put your CV together. It's your document and you need to feel comfortable with the way it represents you. However, whatever your approach, you'll need to work your way through these three steps:

- 1. Target** - know who your CV is aimed at and what they are looking for.
- 2. Offer** - know what skills you offer and back these up with evidence (examples).
- 3. Presentation** - present what you offer so that the reader can easily see that you have what they are looking for (use bullets, headings etc).

We'll now take each of the 3 steps in turn, giving you an outline of best practice from which you can select the ideas and approaches that will work best for you...

Target

Do you know what job you want to do? If you don't, it's probably too soon to think about writing a CV. People often think that their job search should start with a CV, but before you can begin to write it, you need to know what sort of roles you want to apply for and what employers recruiting for those roles are looking for.

If you need some help to decide what sort of job you'd like, take a look at our Advice Pack 'Returning to work - Choosing your next career step'.

Once you know roughly what sort of role you want, you'll need to speak to contacts and recruiters and look at job adverts and job descriptions. This will tell you what skills and experience employers are looking for, and show you the sort of language recruiters are using to describe those skills and experience. You'll need to use the same language in your CV and cover letter.



Offer

Clarify what skills, experience and knowledge you offer. Here are some ways to prompt your thoughts:

- Put your thoughts down on paper. To begin with, it can be helpful to do this in a fairly unstructured way. If it helps, write a one-page life story to get you started.
- Write a list of the main jobs you have had. Jot down the skills, experience and knowledge you gained in each role. Think through a typical day to help jog your memory.
- Dig out your old appraisals if you still have them or contact ex colleagues to remind you of past achievements.
- Coming back from a career break? Consider relevant things you have done during your break such as studying or voluntary work.
- Use the research you did for your target job, particularly a job description if you have one, to give you headings (e.g. organisational skills). Write your skills, experience and knowledge under these.
- Include evidence as you write. Your CV will be much stronger if you are able to back up your skills and experience with brief examples of achievements that provide evidence that you can do what you say you can. An achievement is a work example (or other relevant example) with a good outcome. The CAR approach (see below) will help you here.
- For each area of skill and experience you plan to include on your CV, think of two examples to include as evidence. You may not need all of this material for your CV, but anything not used will be useful when you get the interview.



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To help you think of achievements and be specific in your language, use the CAR approach:

- 1. Circumstances** - What was the situation or task?
- 2. Action** - What did you do? What skills and experience did you draw on?
- 3. Result** - What was the positive outcome? What impact did this have and how was it measured?

Begin each achievement with a strong action verb, e.g. achieved, delivered. A list of words to help you write your CV can be found in our 'CV language' advice pack.

Presentation – which CV format?

You have identified your target job and what you offer. Now you can think about how best to present the information in your CV.

You need to choose a format that makes the most relevant information (that matches you to the role) stand out. Your CV also needs to be a clear, concise and well-presented document that will help to open doors for you.

There are two main formats for a CV. These are:

- Reverse chronological
- Functional/skills based

Read the notes below and then take a look at the CV templates, downloadable separately on the Women Like Us website, to help you choose the format that's best for you.

When to use a reverse chronological CV

This type of CV works backwards through your experience, starting with your most recent job.



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It is the traditional format, emphasising your career history. It's a good format to use if:

- You want the reader to focus on your most recent one or two jobs.
- You are seeking work in a field in which you have recent experience.
- You've not had many changes of direction in your career.
- You've had a career break but are confident that you can describe some relevant key skills and experience gained during this time.

When to use a functional/skills based CV

This type of CV breaks your experience down under skills/functional headings before summarising your employment history. You group your skills, developed at different times in your life, under headings (ideally headings drawn from the job description) and provide evidence (examples).

This is a good format to use if:

- You want to use your skills in a different area to your most recent job.
- You want to draw attention to skills gained earlier in your career and avoid being 'pigeon-holed' into the type of work you did most recently.
- You've had a long career break and don't want this to be the first thing a recruiter sees on your CV.
- You've done different types of work during your career and you want to help the reader make sense of this and see clearly what you offer.
- You've done lots of brief, freelance roles or part time roles that overlapped and find this looks 'bitty' in a traditional format.



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Presentation tips

Do

2 sides A4

Font - simple and clear (e.g. Calibri or Verdana)

Font size - no smaller than 11

Remember the first half of the first page has most impact

Start sentences with strong action verbs

Use bullet points

Use titles and give dates

Use language from the job advert

Give evidence for your skills and experience

Use numbers in your achievements e.g. 'Increased sales by £30,000'

Focus on relevant information

Use the past tense (e.g. 'Organised...')

Don't

No personal pronouns (no 'I...')

No fancy formatting

No dense text

No joke email addresses

No photos

No spelling mistakes

No gaps in your dates