

Writing a good CV

When you're applying for a job, a great CV is essential. Find out what to include and what to avoid for the best chance of getting an interview.

Before reading

Do the preparation task first. Then read the article and do the exercises.

Preparation task

Match the definitions (a–h) with the vocabulary (1–8).

Vocabulary

1. neatly
2. bullet points
3. to exaggerate
4. to highlight
5. potential
6. the layout
7. selective
8. relevant

Definition

- a. possible in the future
- b. deliberately choosing some things and not others
- c. to bring attention to something important
- d. directly connected with what is happening or being talked about
- e. the way that something is designed or arranged on the page
- f. symbols, usually small black circles, used in a text to separate each item in a list
- g. to make something seem bigger, more important, better, worse, etc. than it is
- h. in a simple and tidy way

Writing a good CV

When you're looking for work, you need an attractive, clear and memorable CV (curriculum vitae) that shows your potential employer all the skills and experience you have for the job.

What should you include in a CV?

This article mainly focuses on writing a UK-style CV. If you're applying for a job internationally, be aware that the standard length, format and tone can vary from country to country. It's a good idea to check the expected format in the country or company you're applying to.

Contact details

Make sure the potential employer has a way of contacting you. Include your full name, telephone number and email address.

Photo?

In many countries, employers expect to see a professional-looking photo on a CV. In others, like the UK, Canada and the USA, the law prohibits employers from asking for a photo, and it is

better not to include one. Try to find out if it is usual to include a photo in the working environment you're applying to.

Education

List and date the most important qualifications you have obtained, starting with the most recent. You can also include any professional qualifications you have.

Work experience

List and date the jobs you've had and the companies you've worked for, starting with the most recent. It's usually enough to cover the last ten years of your work history. Include your job title, responsibilities and achievements in the job.

If you have a lot of work experience, give the job titles but be selective about which responsibilities and achievements you highlight. Reduce the detail about jobs that are less relevant to the role you're applying for and draw attention to the most important experience you bring.

Skills

These could include the languages you speak, the computer programs you can use well, the class type of your driving licence and any other professional skills you might have that are relevant to the job you're applying for.

Eight useful tips

Before you start getting ready to list your qualifications and work experience, here are eight useful tips to think about.

1. Keep it short ... but not too short!

Your CV should be one to two sides of A4 paper. If you find you've got too much information, summarise and select the most relevant points. If it's shorter than a page, consider including more information about your skills and the responsibilities you had in your previous roles.

2. Use active verbs.

When you describe what you have achieved in previous jobs, use active verbs for a strong positive effect on the reader. For example, to make a change from *was responsible for*, use verbs like *led* or *managed* (*a team / a project*); *created* or *developed* (*a product / a positive atmosphere*); *delivered* (*results/training*); and *provided* (*support/training*).

3. Fill in the gaps.

Avoid leaving gaps in your employment history. If you were travelling the world, on maternity leave or looking after small children, include that in your CV.

4. Make sure it's up to date.

Always ensure your CV is up to date. Include your most recent experience at the top of each section.

5. Don't exaggerate or lie.

Your potential employer can easily check information about where you have studied and worked. Don't be tempted to lie or exaggerate about your expertise, because sooner or later this will be discovered and may result in you losing the job.

6. Spend time on the layout.

Make sure your CV is clear and easy to read. Use bullet points and appropriate spacing, keep your sentences short, line up your lists neatly and use a professional-looking font (e.g. Arial font size 12).

7. Check for mistakes.

Mistakes on a CV create a bad impression. Use spell check, reread your CV and ask someone else to check it for you too before you send it.

8. Include a cover letter.

When you send your CV to apply for a job, you should send it with a cover letter or email to introduce your application. The cover letter should show your personal interest in the role, highlight the skills and experience you bring and encourage the employer to read the attached CV.

Writing a good CV takes time and is hard work, but these tips and your effort will help you get the best possible start in your job search. Good luck!

Tasks

Task 1

Are the sentences true or false?

	Answer	
1. It's always a good idea to include a photo.	True	False
2. When you list your work experience, you should put the first job you did first.	True	False
3. The longer your CV is, the better it is.	True	False
4. Using active verbs rather than passive structures helps to create a good impression.	True	False
5. It's better not to mention periods of time when you were not in paid work.	True	False
6. You should always tell the truth on your CV.	True	False
7. Presentation and small mistakes don't matter – it's the content that's important.	True	False
8. Cover letters are nice to have but not entirely necessary.	True	False

Task 2

Put the details in the correct groups.

Responsible for production in a reputable Seoul-based design firm	Led a team of designers to develop graphic and production materials	MA in Creative Arts and Design, Leeds Arts University (July 2011)
Developed over 200 graphic design projects	Diploma in Graphic Design, York College (July 2008)	Proficient with Microsoft Office, Adobe Photoshop and Sketch
High levels of critical thinking, creativity and problem-solving skills	Excellent communicator who brings friendliness, confidence and empathy to leadership and delegation skills	BA in Philosophy, Politics and Economics, University of Oxford (June 1998)

Skills	Education	Work experience – Chief Graphic Designer, BEE&BONN Ltd

Discussion

Which tips do you think are the most useful for writing a good CV?

Answers

Preparation task

1. h
2. f
3. g
4. c
5. a
6. e
7. b
8. d

Task 1

1. False
2. False
3. False
4. True
5. False
6. True
7. False
8. False

Task 2

Skills	Education	Work experience – Chief Graphic Designer, BEE&BONN Ltd
<p>Proficient with Microsoft Office, Adobe Photoshop and Sketch</p> <p>High levels of critical thinking, creativity and problem-solving skills</p> <p>Excellent communicator who brings friendliness, confidence and empathy to leadership and delegation skills</p>	<p>MA in Creative Arts and Design, Leeds Arts University (July 2011)</p> <p>Diploma in Graphic Design, York College (July 2008)</p> <p>BA in Philosophy, Politics and Economics, University of Oxford (June 1998)</p>	<p>Responsible for production in a reputable Seoul-based design firm</p> <p>Developed over 200 graphic design projects</p> <p>Led a team of designers to develop graphic and production materials</p>