

How to write a CV

A CV should not be a list of everything you have ever done. It is a document that a recruiter should be able to scan quickly and see how your skills and experiences make you the best person for the job.

Steps to building a great CV

1. Start with the job specification

The starting point for CV writing should always be the skills and experience the recruiter is seeking.

You will find this on the list of job requirements in the job advert, job description or person specification. If you are applying speculatively and there is no job description, search for similar roles to work out what skills are likely to be the most attractive to this employer and for the kind of role you are looking for.

You should clearly evidence each of these requirements on your CV, and use examples to demonstrate what you are saying.

2. Active language

Make sure to use active language in your CV to convey your achievements (see table below for examples), and avoid using passive terms like “I had to”, “I was involved in” and “I was required to”.

You should also consider starting some sentences with active verbs rather than always using pronouns like “I”. This makes them much more interesting to read!

Examples of active words

- | | |
|---------------|---------------|
| • Achieved | • Improved |
| • Coordinated | • Increased |
| • Developed | • Planned |
| • Evaluated | • Prioritised |

3. Brainstorm your skills

Think of the skills you have gained and how you acquired them. Draw examples from your work, internships, volunteering, study, and interests.

Match these skills to those required for the job you are applying for, where possible reflecting some exact skills words from the job details. Use the examples you have thought of to back up your points.

4. Attention to detail

One spelling or grammar error can be all it takes for a CV to be rejected, as many employers regard it as an indication of poor attention to detail.

Triple check all spelling and grammar and ask someone else to proofread your final draft. Reading it out loud to yourself is a useful technique that can help you identify any errors.

Guidelines on CV length

There is no one rule about CV length, but in general two pages is the norm for a UK graduate CV. Exceptions are –

- Investment banking where a one page CV is generally preferred (see second example)
- Academic CVs tend to be longer (see the title CVs for PhDs for guidelines).

Always follow the recruiter’s instructions on length!

Example job advert: Part time Marketing Assistant

In 2019 Frog Marketing helped over one hundred clients grow their brand through creative communication of values to the consumer. We're looking for someone who is **passionate about marketing and building brands**.

To support our projects you will be **well organised** and a **problem solver**. **Excellent client service** and **communication skills** are essential. **Experience of writing creative content** is desirable.

To apply send your CV and a covering letter by 15th September to b.coan@frog.co.uk

You don't have to include a profile. Jo has used hers to make a strong first impression by highlighting some of her most relevant and impressive examples.

For most students and graduates, "Education" comes before your work history. However if you have a lot of relevant industry experience, you might choose to swap these sections.

Focus on the elements of your degree most relevant to the job. Include the same terms for skills that the employer has used to attract their attention e.g. "client service" and "problem solving".

Don't take up too much space talking about school. It is less relevant than university.

If you already have experience in the field, draw attention to it in the section heading e.g. "Marketing Experience".

Otherwise group all of your experience together using the title "Work Experience" or "Work History".

Quantify and show results where possible. These details help to persuade the employer of your skills.

Jo Sharma

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PROFILE

- Passion for marketing and building brands: created new Facebook page and events programme resulting in 20% growth in membership for University Geography Society
- Client service: exceeded sales targets two months running at Curry's through up-to-date product knowledge and quick response to needs of clients
- Organisation skills: won the Wapping Community Award 2016 for my management of a children's football summer school

EDUCATION

BA Geography, King George University, London **2018 - 2021**

- Focus on ethics and the consumer: interest in this area developed through Year 1 project on the developing role of Corporate Social Responsibility in businesses (grade A achieved)
- Writing skills: researched and delivered 5000 word essay on how CSR can build brand loyalty for presentation in Business Ethics Workshop (82% achieved)
- Problem solving: managed the analysis and interpretation of complex data using SPSS statistical package

Hart Secondary School, Poole **2011 - 2018**

A Levels: Geography (A), Business Studies (B), Biology (B) AS Level: Maths (B)
10 GCSEs including Mathematics (A*) and English (B)

MARKETING EXPERIENCE

Marketing Officer, Geography Society **Jan 2019 – present**

Responsible for ensuring Society is promoted across both university campuses

- Passion for marketing and building brands: surveyed members to analyse preferences, and using results built brand of Society through three new alumni networking events and a Facebook page. Resulted in a 20% increase in membership and events series is now part of annual Society programme.
- Writing creative content: set up and maintain society Facebook site www.facebook.com/kggeogsoc, which now has 330 active users. Develop engaging content and post twice a week using Hootsuite.

FURTHER WORK EXPERIENCE

P/t Sales Assistant, Curry's, Wapping

Dec 2018 - present

Responsibilities include handling financial transactions, advising customers, dealing with complaints and ordering products.

- Client service: exceeded sales target in June and July through actively listening, responding quickly to needs of client and staying up-to-date with product knowledge.
- Communication: received positive feedback from client after negotiating with external supplier to speed up late delivery. Invited by line manager to train new staff.

Volunteer, local children's football team, Wapping

Summer 2018

- Organisation skills: booked pitches, arranged transportation and equipment for Summer School. Promoted closing tournament, liaising with community groups. Attendance was over 75, a 25% increase on the previous year. Won the Wapping Community Award 2014.

OTHER SKILLS AND INTERESTS

- IT: intermediate level Word, Excel, Access and PowerPoint
- Languages: conversational Spanish
- Music: write creative content for a friend's music reviews blog once a month.
- Organisation skills: scheduling concerts and weekly practice sessions for the band I play with.
- Travel: planned independent travel around Spain this summer to develop language skills and cultural awareness.

References available upon request.

Start with the most recent activity and then work backwards.

Use your part time jobs and volunteering to give evidence of the skills the employer is looking for.

Add a third party endorsement if you can (e.g. grade, promotion, or as listed here added responsibility).

This experience only lasted a few weeks, but is still a useful showcase for one of the skills the employer is looking for (organisation).

Even hobbies and interests can demonstrate relevant skills.

Ask your referees before you list their details. If you do not wish to disclose names or don't have space, you can state instead: "References available upon request".

How to write persuasive, evidence based, examples

When writing a CV it can be useful to put yourself in the shoes of the recruiter. Imagine you are looking to hire a graduate with strong team working skills. Consider the excerpts from two CVs below. Who would you choose?

Candidate A

"Demonstrated strong team working skills during stock-taking at STL Retail".

Candidate B

"Teamwork - supported team of four to achieve full stock take of STL Retail in 16 hours by: arriving early to receive briefing on behalf of team; taking on extra tasks for a colleague who was unwell, and organising a night out to keep us motivated."

The second example is more persuasive. You can achieve this by:

- Placing the skill word at the start to make it easy for the employer to pick out after a quick scan
- Allocating maximum space to how you applied this skill
- Using action words to convey achievement and impact
- Adding quantifiable data (e.g. numbers, timescales) to make your examples more concrete and convincing

Including a tangible outcome e.g. grade, increased responsibility or hours to prove the impact of your contribution (in this example a completed stock-take)

Example job advert: Porticum Investment Bank

We are looking for someone who is a **confident communicator** with **strong analytical** and **project management** skills, together with the **drive to succeed under pressure**. We are looking for innovative individuals who **think creatively** and are **able to build relationships**, both across internal teams and with external clients. To apply please send a one page CV and cover letter outlining your suitability for the programme. Application deadline 10th November.

You don't need to add the title Curriculum Vitae, as it is clear what the document is.

Consider whether certain modules in your masters are particularly relevant to the job you want to apply for. Is your final dissertation/project on a topic related to the area of work you are trying to get into? If so, include the title and the type and scope of the research involved.

Avoid simply listing skills. Use examples to provide evidence that you have used a skill successfully in the past. Recruiters will look for this to confirm your ability to do the job.

Draw out the skills listed in the job advert, providing examples of exactly what the recruiter is looking for.

Use part time work as another way to demonstrate ability to use the skills the recruiter is looking for in a professional context.

Clear section headings make the document easy to read.

Sam Chester

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EDUCATION

MSc Banking and Finance, Queen Mary, University of London (2.1 expected) 2020-2021

Modules include: Commercial and Investment Banking, Investment Management, Quantitative Methods in Finance, Financial Derivatives

- Dissertation topic: Impact of low interest rates on global asset prices (72%)

BSC Economics, Queen Mary, University of London, (2.1) 2017-2020

Modules include: Corporate Finance (80%), Econometrics and Macroeconomics (75%), Mathematical methods in Economics and Business (70%)

Hart Secondary School, Poole 2010-2017

A Levels: Mathematics (A), Business Studies (B), Biology (B)

AS Level: Psychology (B)

10 GCSEs including Mathematics (A*) and English (A)

WORK EXPERIENCE

Associate Member, QUMMIF September 2020-Present

- Developed theoretical and practical understanding of financial markets, trading strategies and risk management
- Demonstrated analytical and technical skills, carrying out the research and valuation of chosen equity stock
- Analysed vast amounts of data on Bloomberg Terminal and other resources
- Worked in a team of four to compile detailed investment report
- Developed strong communication skills, presenting to Senior Fund Management
- As a result of research and presentation investment proposal was included in fund's portfolio

P/T Sales Assistant, Topshop, London September 2017-Present

- Ensured efficient running of shop area in highly demanding and busy environment
- Provided excellent customer service – awarded Customer Service Star award after three months
- Collaborated with colleagues in order to ensure constant stock replenishment during peak times
- Demonstrated strong ability to multitask, dealing with customer queries while keeping shop area organised

POSITIONS OF RESPONSIBILITY

- **Economics Society Committee member:** Role involves working closely with a team of five to increase society membership, organise and run social and careers events and liaise with the department. We currently have 100 members and I have worked with two others to run three events off-campus with a turnout of 40-50 at each.
- **Football coach for local youth team:** This position involves organising training and matches, teaching, motivation and encouraging young people aged 12-14

OTHER SKILLS

- **IT:** MS Office Suite (Word, Excel, Access, and PowerPoint), Bloomberg Terminal
- **Languages:** Conversational German

REFERENCES

Available on request

Example job advert: Graduate Field Operations Engineer (Mechanical)

To work at locations around the UK and overseas, installing and commissioning structural health monitoring systems.

Principal Accountabilities:

- Compile Risk Assessments and Method Statements (RAMS)
- Lead installations onsite and install a wide variety of sensors and logging systems
- Compile technical reports based on system measurements

Job Requirements:

- Ability to adapt to changing technical and business needs
- Ability to communicate effectively both verbally and in writing
- Good organisational skills, self-motivated to learn, successful experience working as part of a team.

Mike Canics

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Education

MEng Mechanical Engineering - Grove University, London **2015 - 2019**

Relevant modules: Mathematical Techniques for Engineers, Computational Risk Assessment and Mechanical Sensory Feedback

Second Year Project: 76%. Combustor testing for a microgas turbine in collaboration with Rolls Royce. Technical report presented to senior engineers.

Industrial Visits: Independently arranged a visit to Merstham Design. Work shadowing highlighted the importance of adaptability as the firm restructured its efforts away from alloys to composites for sensory systems.

Technical Systems Used: MATLAB, Creo and AutoCad

International Baccalaureate Diploma - St John's School, Bahrain **2012 - 2015**

Grade: 37 points (523 UCAS points); Bilingual Diploma (English and French)

British International School of Istanbul, Turkey **2006 - 2012**

11 GCSEs (including A*s in Mathematics, Sciences and Languages)

Work experience

JCB - Reliability Engineer Summer Internship, UK **July-September 2018**

- Adaptability: After six weeks of compiling risk assessments for new sensory installations, observed that client team was overloaded, so volunteered to take on weekly client caseload alongside installation duties. Also used knowledge gained as secretary of the Commerce Club to draw up strengths and weakness business case and replicate this for all clients.
- Communication: Liaised with upwards of 30 clients to better understand increases in their failure rates. Compiled and presented a report to senior management recommending changes to sensory circuits.
- Organisational skills: Maintained an accurate timeline document to include all relevant information and milestones for Russian, Kazakh and Global Marketing teams.
- Second Year Project: 76%. Combustor testing for a microgas turbine in collaboration with Rolls Royce. Technical report presented to senior Rolls Royce engineers.

Grades for relevant modules have been added to show achievement in these topics.

Use your degree to emphasise skills relevant to the job.

Allocate space on your CV according to importance and relevance. For example, your degree is more relevant than your GCSEs so should take up more room.

Clear and consistent formatting makes the document easy to read. Bullet point lists make best use of space and keep sentences concise.

Essilor - Marketing and Sales Intern, France June-August 2018

- Self-motivated: Interpreted feedback reports from a product-training scheme for opticians using meaningful statistics and graphics to identify most successful marketing approaches.
- Written communication: Wrote a scientific pamphlet to inform a community of 400 ophthalmologists of the latest innovations at the company.

Quantifiable results have been used throughout the work experience section to communicate the impact of actions and prove successful use of skills.

Indiana Cafe Restaurant - Waiter, France Summer 2015

- Communication: Liaised with upwards of 400 customers a day in one of the busiest districts of Paris. Engaged with queuing customers from diverse international backgrounds.

Leadership and team experience

Commerce Club - Secretary, Grove University 2017-2018

- Established and led a six-person committee to ensure the smooth development of the club. Oversaw a 26% membership boost compared to the previous year
- Coordinated two charity fundraisers, and single-handedly organised a four-day team trip to Paris, where we competed in the “Les Parisiennes” international commerce convention

Extra-curricular experience has been used here to demonstrate relevant skills.

Additional information

Languages: French (native), English (fluent), Spanish (business proficient)

Applications: MS Office Suite (Word, Excel, PowerPoint) and Minitab

Interests: Travel, sports

References available upon request.

Usually employers will want one academic reference and one from a former employer, but you can also use a personal referee. It is advisable to ask your referees in advance.

Final checks

- **Look at your CV as if you were the recruiter.** After a quick scan, can you pick out evidence of each of the job requirements?
- **Check that it is formatted correctly.** Make sure your CV fits the guidelines this specific employer has set in terms of length. Make sure your sections are correctly formatted and that the information is evenly spread across both sides of the page.
- **Proofread** Double check you have no spelling or grammar mistakes. It's always useful to have somebody else proofread your CV too.
- **Have your CV checked by your careers department.** Ask if somebody from your careers department can check what you have written is suitable for the role that you are applying for.
- **Update your LinkedIn.** If you have a LinkedIn profile, upload your updated CV so that any employers who search you on there can see it.