

Making your CV work for you

Until your interview, you are only as good as your paperwork and perhaps telephone manner. This makes your CV and covering letter crucial. They are essential tools in most job searches. Like any marketing document, a CV should help you sell yourself.

What should your CV include?

PREPARATION

Think about your skills, competencies, qualifications and experience. What are your unique selling points and strengths? Think in terms of what you have achieved.

If you are replying to a specific job advertisement, review what key words and tasks were used in the advertisement. Which of these words applies to you? Use these words in your CV.

HELPFUL HINTS

Remember that you want your CV to be read and responded to. Include enough information to stimulate interest, but not so much that you bore the reader. If you provide small, digestible pieces of information you stand a better chance of having your CV read. Three pages maximum is preferred, but keeping it to one page is even better! Every word must contribute to the overall message – so keep it brief and ensure that the content is relevant to the job you are applying for.

Ensure that your CV is well structured and well laid out; this gives the impression that you think logically and makes it easier to

review. Remember – a CV that is hard to read is often put aside and forgotten. When writing a CV, remember that self-opinion is best avoided. Aim to include factual information or objective evidence and remember to focus on the benefits of your achievements.

Pay close attention to reply instructions in advertisements (e.g. spelling of a contact's name). Always have someone else on hand to check your spelling and grammar. Nothing can ruin your chances of getting a job faster than easily preventable mistakes. Avoid coloured paper and fancy points, if you plan to fax or e-mail your CV, you'll get a much better result with clean fonts and a simple lay-out.

THE FIRST PAGE

This should contain your personal details, your home address and contact details located right at the top, followed by a brief summary of educational credentials and qualifications. An overview statement should be included covering your strengths in the relevant area, skills and experience, and the type of position sought.

PAGES TWO/THREE

Here you should highlight your employment history. Present this in reverse chronological order, (i.e. last job first). If you have only worked for one company, break it down with an entry for each position or project dealt with. For each position held, briefly describe responsibilities and work undertaken.

Do include achievements, not just regular tasks; if possible, quantify them in sales, financial or production terms.

Each professional position that you have had must include at least one statement of accomplishment. For your current and recent positions, you may want to have several bulleted items under the job that list your significant experiences.

List your hobbies and interests in no more than three lines. Any voluntary or charity work, or external posts you hold are worth including. Always include any languages, courses or training you may have done, or any professional memberships.

It is recommended that two referees be given – including the referees' official titles, addresses and telephone numbers.

THE COVERING LETTER

CVs are seldom used alone; they should always be introduced by a letter or telephone call. The letter can really let your personality come through. Remember, recruitment consultants and employers read hundreds of CVs, an interesting introductory letter can make yours stand out.

Your letter can be used to pick up points which modesty or space prevents you from including in your CV (i.e. to highlight your key strengths relevant to the job). An introduction letter can save you from having to rewrite the CV each time you want to target your application to a specific advertisement or sector.

Nevertheless, keep your CV up to date. Using an out of date CV looks sloppy at best and may exclude you from consideration.

Recruitment Consultancies and CVs

The Recruitment and Employment Confederation, (REC, formerly FRES) has an important role to play in raising recruitment industry standards through members who must adhere to a Code of Practice.

Always ask the recruitment consultancy for a copy of the CV they are intending to send clients on your behalf

Ask the recruitment consultancy to explain its policy on submitting your CV or details to a prospective employer. Will they always contact you before your name is put forward? If you always want to be consulted before your name is put forward for a vacancy, tell the consultancy – but bear in mind that employers often put consultancies under a great deal of time pressure. To avoid missing opportunities you will need to stay in close contact with the consultancy.

If you are happy not to be consulted on each occasion, again tell the consultancy, but make sure you inform them in writing of any companies that you do not wish to receive your CV.

Only allow the consultancy that first contacts you about a specific vacancy to act on your behalf. Multiple submissions by different consultancies can confuse potential employers – they do not multiply your chances of success.

Always ask the recruitment consultancy if it is a REC member. Members of REC comp with Codes aimed at giving you a high standard of service and they are subject to REC complaints and disciplinary procedures.