

# CV Advice

## 1. CVs and the Voluntary Sector

CVs are less common in the voluntary sector. However sometimes some voluntary organisations will request a CV either in support of a standard application form or short-term consultancy contracts and agency staff to fill in a crisis stage

### What is a CV?

Curriculum vitae' is a Latin term meaning 'the course of your life'. However in a CV you are not actually telling your life story - you are selling yourself! If you remember this you will be well on the way to composing a CV that has a realistic chance of getting you an interview (which is the whole purpose of sitting down to write one).

A good CV should both **inform** an employer of your skills and experience and **persuade** them that you are worth interviewing.

### Why send a CV?

Either,

- an employer has specified this in a job advertisement; or
- You are approaching employers speculatively about jobs.

### What should a CV contain?

Employers have a 'shopping-list' of the knowledge, skills and experience they are seeking in candidates, so your CV is your opportunity to provide evidence of these attributes. (Their recruitment literature as well as your own knowledge of the requirements of the particular career for which you are applying should help you to do this.) Remember that you are not only seeking to inform employers about yourself but also to persuade them that you are worth interviewing.

An employer might well be reading a stack of CVs and will certainly be appraising them quickly (very quickly!) so this means you should work on the presentation as well as the content.

Highlight the most appropriate information and present it in a way that has most impact. Having said all this, some essential details must be in your CV, although the exact order in which you put them depends on you:

### Before you write your CV, you need to understand:

- What the job involves
- Which skills or qualities the employer value or is looking for in particular

## 2. The Ground Rules

- Your CV should be no longer than three pages long. Ideally two full pages.
- **Pay attention to the employer's instructions** – do they have particular requirements of what to include? Follow these to the letter.
- **Presentation should be clear, plain and simple** – Don't crowd your CV by using too many different margins or fonts. Try to avoid tables and boxes. Have some white space. In general, bold works well and underlining does not.
- **Spelling errors** are unforgivable and convey carelessness. Don't just rely on the spell-checker; ask someone to read it through for you too.
- Avoid long paragraphs - CVs are read quickly. You need just enough information to capture the reader's interest. Bullet points can be very helpful.

## 3. Structuring Your CV

### Standard Sections of Information

Usually a CV is organised into typical standard sections of information. Typical headings you might use are listed below, but you do not have to use all of them.

- Personal Details
- Education and Qualifications
- Work Experience
- Relevant Skills
- Interests and Activities
- Achievements
- Positions of responsibility
- Career Aims or Objective
- References

### Personal Details

Your name, address or addresses (if living away from home; telephone and mobile numbers; email address/ es). Details such as your date of birth, nationality, gender or place of birth are discretionary and, depending on your circumstances, you may either include these or not. If you are concerned about age discrimination you could omit it. For the same reasons, don't include a photograph unless it is specifically asked for.

### Education and qualifications:

Only as far back as secondary school and in reverse chronological order with more space devoted to details about qualifications that matter most, normally your highest level of

education. If you feel that the content of your qualification will not interest an employer, write about the skills that you developed whilst attaining it.

You determine what you reveal, so don't emphasise poor grades. You don't need to list all your results; giving an overall result or predicted result can work well. Bear in mind that omitted results will be assumed to be low.

### **Work Experience:**

This is your chance you market yourself so sell your experience. Highlight what you gained from it, your achievements and the skills you developed. Use as much detail to impress the reader, quantifying and qualifying where possible to add impact.

This can include paid situation in which you were working e.g. term-time or holiday jobs, paid and unpaid work placements, voluntary work. They may all be used legitimately to show your suitability for the job in question by virtue of the particular skills and experience you developed. Don't undervalue or humble your experiences.

Put dates in reverse chronological order. - Name of company, town, country - Job held and details of tasks (remember to use action verbs); give a snapshot of what you did and what you learned, i.e. which skills you've developed.

### **Relevant Skills:**

A section listing these is increasingly common on CVs. Start by identifying which particular skills the employer is seeking and then give details. Use specific examples from your course, work experience, voluntary work and interests; in short, from any area of your life that seems appropriate - These may include:

#### **Languages**

Where you have ability beyond GCSE, or where the language is unusual or likely to be particularly useful in the job. Indicate proficiency level, if applicable in spoken and written form. Don't exaggerate, as you could easily lose a good opportunity when you are caught out at the interview

#### **Driving licence**

May or may not be relevant depending on the nature of job being applied for. However if you do hold on, it always helps do include it.

#### **General Transferable skills**

Describe your skills in the context in which you have developed them, whether education, work experience or other activities. Using enough detail and qualifying where possible will make your case more convincing

#### **Other Skills and Qualifications**

Computer literacy (what packages can you use competently). First aid qualification or any other certificates you may have

### **Interests and Activities**

These can show evidence of suitability through reference to the skills you have learnt. Being involved in sports can demonstrate team working ability, for example, or travel can show your adaptability and independence. Don't give a long list of interests but concentrate on two or three and write about what you have learnt from them.

Most importantly, use this section to show that you have a range of desirable skills and attributes. Activities which engage you with other people are generally preferable to solitary activities.

### **Achievements**

This is an optional section as most of the things can be incorporated into the more general Interests and Activities section. Describe your achievements so that you emphasise positive personal attributes and well developed transferable skills that add to what you have already said. These may include scholarships, school prizes, awards - Any roles of responsibility from your extra-curricular activities at college - Work abroad/voluntary work

### **Positions of responsibility**

This is an optional section, which can be useful if you have a good track record of leadership positions. Otherwise, if there are only one or two things to include here, they might be better described in your Activities and Interests; section. Give some detail to explain what the roles entailed.

### **Career Aims or Objective**

This is an optional section. If you include it make sure that your objective matches what is available with the employer you are targeting. Avoid vague language here. Very often, this section is best omitted. You can communicate your objectives most effectively in the covering letter or email which will always accompany the CV.

### **References**

You shouldn't need to include your references at this stage (although it is perfectly OK to do this). References are normally taken up at the interview stage. The exception of course is when the advert for the job explicitly asked you to apply giving reference. When you do, the normal practice is to include two of these, unless more are requested. One should be an academic referee, probably your tutor, and the other someone who can comment on you from a different perspective such as an employer or long-standing family acquaintance. Do not use family or people whose relationship to you is not clear and always get their permission first.