

Get the interview: Writing the perfect CV

A Huxley Associates career guide

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Introduction

Writing a professional CV is your first step towards securing a new job. It is the first impression a potential new employer will have of you and can either open or close doors – showing how important it is to get it right. Job hunting is a very competitive process, often because of the number of candidates in the job market, and it is your CV that can put you ahead of other candidates and secure you an interview. The key to a successful CV is to present your skills and experience in the best light possible. Your CV should therefore be viewed as a selling tool rather than just a summary of your working history.

Follow our simple guide to writing your CV to ensure you capitalise on your most valuable asset.

“ Your CV can either open or close doors - showing how important it is to get it right. ”

The basics

According to research employers spend an average of 30 seconds screening a CV - highlighting the importance of demonstrating your suitability for the role from the outset. Before writing your CV it is therefore essential that you have clear career objectives and can communicate where you are now and where you want to be.

Your personal profile and the language used throughout your CV should be in line with the direction you want to go and reflect your career goals. You need to be clear about your core experience and qualifications and what your personal strengths and weaknesses are. By emphasising your strongest skills and experiences you will be able to demonstrate how you would fit the role and position yourself correctly for your next career move. Your CV is also an opportunity to communicate your personal traits, for example by demonstrating a positive attitude to all of your previous roles and highlighting your ambition and willingness to learn new skills.

Tailoring your CV

Your CV isn't just a short-term investment - you need to know what your next role needs to be to meet your long-term career goals and tailor your CV to fit this profile accordingly. Always remain focused on what you want to achieve in the long-term and strengthen your CV wherever possible to help you reach this goal.

It is important to customise your CV for each role you apply for. For example, if a role requires you to have worked across international teams make sure you pull out and highlight your relevant skills and international experience. The key is to emphasise the areas where you fit the job profile, making it easy for the recruiter to draw out quickly why they should invite you to an interview.

During the shortlisting process many recruiters will screen CVs for 'must have' qualities. If these aren't included in your CV, you won't even make it past the shortlisting process, so make sure your CV covers all of the key requirements in the job description or shows the recruiter you are willing to develop relevant skills.

Selling your skills

Remember to sell yourself through your key achievements and successes, rather than simply listing your responsibilities. By demonstrating how you can add value to the department and wider company you will gain the attention of a potential employer. Similarly, talk about what you were personally responsible for rather than talking broadly about what your team may have delivered.

“ Employers spend an average of 30 seconds screening a CV. ”

Formatting your CV

Ideally your CV should fit on two A4 pages - this means you will need to be succinct and selective with the information you include. There are different ways you can format this information including chronologically or by skills and attributes, these formats are outlined on the following page.

Whichever format you choose it is essential that your CV is easy to read. Use clear headings to break up the content and ensure your personal details can easily be found at the top of your CV. Use a clear universal font such as Arial and avoid going smaller than 10pt.

Chronological CV

A chronological CV focuses on presenting your employment history on an employer-by-employer basis, with your most recent role listed first and all previous positions listed in reverse order. This allows you to focus in more detail on your most current and relevant experience. A chronological CV will also usually contain a personal statement, education and qualifications and interests. This is the most common type of CV.

An example of a chronological CV can be found on the following page.

Skills based CV

A skills based CV focuses on the skills, abilities and expertise you have gained across your career history, rather than when you gained the knowledge. A skills based CV can help highlight the abilities and skills that are relevant, without focusing on your previous employers and industries. This is particularly useful if you wish to communicate the transferable nature of your skill set, however, it limits descriptions of your past roles and responsibilities.

An example of a skills based CV can be found on the following page.

Jane Bloggs

123 Anystreet, Mytown, London
T: 01234 567 890 E: jane.bloggs@email.com

Personal profile

This is the initial pitch; it will act as a positioning statement and provide the hook for your CV. It will include your skills, achievements and provide a functional summary.

Employment history

Key Account Manager

Sep 2007– present

Global Recruitment Consultancy

- This section will include your key roles and responsibilities
- This information must be relevant to the role you are applying for
- Use a bulleted list to ensure you remain concise and the information is clear and easy to read
- Do not waste space on minor skills or by repeating facts shown earlier in your career summary
- Summarise the early part of your career and focus on the things that will make employers want to invite you to an interview
- Create a brief sketch of yourself that positions you as the right person for the job.

Key achievements

- This section allows you to highlight where you added value. It should list your principal achievements in the role referenced
- These will be bullet-pointed concise statements of fact, and should be quantified where possible; for example:
 - Established a key account team focused on delivering cost effective recruitment solutions the result of which increased profit margins by 3%
- Make sure the achievements listed are linked to the role/s you are applying for
- You do have the option of linking roles and responsibilities and key achievements together to focus on how you added value in each part of your role.

Education & training

- Include those qualifications that are directly related to the job and would specifically enhance your chances of moving to the next phase of the job search
- For example, if you have an MBA in Marketing and are applying for a Marketing Director role, you should include that qualification in this section
- Non-tertiary qualifications should only be included if they are particularly relevant.

Additional information

- This could include things such as computer skills, (genuine) foreign language skills and whether or not you have a driving licence (preferably clean)
- It will also include your membership of relevant professional bodies
- Make sure to avoid irrelevant and trivial facts.

Hobbies and interests

- Keep this brief and to the point;
- As your career progresses this should become reduced as you focus more on your experience and expertise
- If you are starting out in your career and you have done something that could be valuable to potential employers, you might want to include that here, for example:
 - Running an annual skiing trip for 12 people including research, budgeting etc.

References

- If you are in a position to include your references at this stage then do so
- If not, then it's fine to say 'Available on request'

Joe Bloggs

123 Anystreet, Mytown, London
T: 01234 567 890 E: joe.bloggs@email.com

Personal profile

This is your initial pitch; it will act as a positioning statement and provide the hook for your CV. It will include your skills, achievements and provide a functional summary.

Account Management: include a section for each key area of your career

- For each area of your skillset focus on your key roles and responsibilities
- This information must be relevant to the role you are applying for
- Use a bulleted list to ensure you remain concise and the information is clear and easy to read
- Do not waste space on minor skills or by repeating facts shown earlier in your career summary
- Create a brief sketch of yourself that positions you as the right person for the job.

Training & development: key areas should be driven by the role applied for

- These sections do not have to reflect your career history but focus on key areas of responsibility
- Group all activities under the main heading no matter how long ago you were responsible for them
- You might want to include key achievements within each area
- See the section example below:

Reward management

- Devising new and effective company incentives schemes – the result of which reduced absenteeism by 10% and attrition by 8%
- Managing the development of flexible benefits packages, including payment of quarterly and annual bonuses, annual salary benchmarking and salary review processes
- Managing pay and grading initiatives, including external benchmarking and internal review procedures
- Development and administration of the executive reward strategy.

Work History

- 2007 – present: HR Manager: 123 Company
- 2004 – 2007: HR Advisor: ABC Ltd

Qualifications & Training

- List formal training and qualifications and soft skills training, where relevant to the role, for example:
 - CIPD Diploma in Human Resources Development
 - Presentation skills training

Education

- List your formal education history; this usually means qualification earned at University, High School etc.
- You may want to join together this section and your qualifications section shown above.

Additional information

- This could include things such as computer skills, (genuine) foreign language skills, whether or not you have a driving licence (preferably clean)
- It will also include your membership of relevant professional bodies
- Make sure to avoid irrelevant and trivial facts.

Hobbies & interests

- Keep this brief and to the point
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Use of language

Once you've organised your CV content into a structured framework, review and revise your language and grammar so that it follows CV writing conventions. By using the correct language your CV will have more impact and will help ensure the reader understands what you are trying to communicate as quickly as possible.

Word power

- Use positive words to describe yourself and your achievements.
- Use language that you feel comfortable with.
- Use keywords that recruiters or hiring managers will use when looking for CVs on job boards or databases – if you're looking for another IT Manager role, put "IT Manager" in your CV instead of "Technology Business Leader".
- Less is more – don't use three words where one word will do.
- Keep your sentences short and simple - complex and overlong sentences can distract from the point; there's also a danger that the recruiter or hiring manager reading your CV will lose interest.

Tone of voice

- Keep it professional – don't use colloquialisms, slang or swear words.
- Use the active voice not the passive form
 - The active voice takes the form of "A does B"; the passive takes the form of "B is done [by A]".
 - The active voice gives a stronger, more confident delivery.
 - Passive constructions can clog up sentences and the message loses clarity and impact.

Technical jargon and industry acronyms

- Ensure you use relevant industry terminology – this will help your CV to be picked up by recruiters and hiring managers when they run keyword searches. Be mindful, though, that overstuffing your CV with technical language could be perceived as pretentious, and result in confusion rather than clarity.

Write in the first person understood

- That is, write without using pronouns – instead of writing "I managed a team of 5", write "Managed a team of 5"
 - Do not use first-person pronouns (I, we) - your name is at the top of your CV, so the recruiter or hiring manager knows it's about you.
 - Do not use third-person pronouns (he, she) when referring to yourself – this will make you look pompous.

Word power – less is more

- Where possible, remove articles (the, a, an) – word count is precious on a CV, don't waste it or bore your reader with unnecessary speech. Use "responsible for budget" instead of "responsible for the budget".
- Omit helping verbs (have, had, may, might) – these words weaken claims and credibility. Write "managed" instead of "have managed".
- Avoid being verbs (am, is, are, was, were) - they can make you sound stagnant. Try "data collated" rather than "data was collated".

Be consistent with your tenses

- Don't switch back and forth between tenses:
 - Use the present tense to talk about your current job.
 - Use the past tense for previous roles.

“We have firsthand experience of employers rejecting candidates who are perfectly suitable for a role, simply because their CV didn't sound professional, or worse still had spelling errors.”

Richard Booty, Director, Huxley Associates

Avoid common CV mistakes

- Don't just list the jobs you've had, always include a short and precise description about your key responsibilities and achievements.
 - Keep your CV professional at all times. Personal details about your religion, parents and siblings or even details of your primary school must not be a part of your CV.
 - Do not include information on courses that are not related to the position you're applying for.
 - Avoid exaggerating your skills. Lying about your abilities may cause an unpleasant situation in your interview where you will be probed further.
 - Don't just rely on the spellcheck, instead ask a friend or family member to proof read your CV for you.
 - Don't leave unexplained gaps in your CV; always explain the gaps and be prepared for further questions regarding those gaps.
 - Focus on accomplishments rather than the plain responsibilities your jobs included.
 - Include relevant keywords so that recruiter and companies can find your CV - no matter how well written it is, it won't help you find a job if no-one is able to find your CV.
- Check the frequency of keywords in your CV. Search results will display in order of suitability based on the numbers of times the keywords appear in the CV.
 - Avoid irrelevant keywords – your skills and experience should be clear to anyone skim-reading your CV.
 - Keep refreshing your CV online – recruiters often search for new CVs only. To keep your CV at the top of the pile, upload it every month.
 - Include keywords associated with the industry you work in, the products you work with, jargon, acronyms and technical words, job titles (especially if there is more than one descriptor for what you do) specialist areas, brief company details and systems and processes.
 - Most importantly, don't just list keywords in your CV. Use them to describe, concisely and intelligently, what you did and how you did it.

Getting your CV found online

To make the most of your CV, you should also post it to online job boards and recruitment websites. When posting your CV online, there are several methods you can use to get your CV found, which will allow prospective employers and recruiters to contact you about relevant roles.

How to be found on a CV database

If you are dealing with a recruitment agency it is highly likely that your CV will end up on their CV database but you should also put your CV on the many job board databases out in the market.

Recruiters look for candidates on CV databases using keyword searches. If you want your CV to be found, make sure your CV has the appropriate keywords in it.

- Use descriptive words - the search programme will be looking for specific phrases.

Tips for raising your online profile

If you are at management level or advancing in your career then chances are someone may look for you on the search engines with a view to checking you out. So how do you make sure you will get found?

- Blog – you can set up your own Blog page. Don't forget to link to your CV from your blog.
- Buy and create your own webpage - you can buy your own domain name - get it as an exact match, i.e. "FirstnameFamilyname.com" or .org .net .co.uk .org.uk.
- Google Universal Search - this is Google's new emphasis on bringing non-traditional returns, such as photos, books and PowerPoint, to a Google search. Recreate your CV in PowerPoint and you can use this new online tool to heighten the visibility of your CV. There's no rule that every CV has to be created in Word, and PowerPoint does give you certain design functionality that is missing in MS Word.
- After you have finished creating your PowerPoint CV, you need to post it where search engines can find it. SlideShare (a free service) is a good place to start. All PowerPoints on SlideShare are searched by Google, and since Google is eagerly searching for PowerPoint as a search return, you should be a top return for at least some of your keywords. Use this leverage to establish yourself as a credible expert in your field.

- Host your CV with Google Docs (<http://docs.google.com/>), create an account and upload your CV. You can then easily link to your CV, collaborate with others about your CV, set your CV to be searchable by Google, embed your CV right onto a website page and most importantly, publish your Google Doc to the web. Remember to enable it to be indexed by the Google search engine so that recruiters and hiring managers can find you online (pick the “Public on the web” sharing option). You can even create a customised bit.ly link to your CV, so that you can share and track clicks to your CV online more easily.
- YouTube – if your personality is your greatest asset, why not showcase it on YouTube? A video CV will give employers an idea of your presence and persona. However, be careful with this option - you don’t want to become a YouTube sensation for all the wrong reasons!

For more information about how to manage your online reputation, see our guide: ***Get the profile: Managing your online reputation***

CV checklist

Before you send out or upload your CV take a step back and run through our quick CV checklist. Remember your CV is one of your most valuable tools for opening doors and securing that all-important interview, so make sure it’s perfect before you release it to prospective employers.

- Are my personal details up-to-date and easily visible?
- Is it easy to read and well structured?
- Do my most important skills and experience stand out?
- Are the spelling and grammar correct?
- Is my tone of voice appropriate?
- Have I given a brief summary of the main duties and responsibilities for each of my previous roles?
- Is the CV tailored to the job I am applying for?
- Is there any irrelevant info? If yes, remove it.
- Would I want to read it?
- Have I included relevant keywords so employers and recruiters can find my CV online?

Our career guides

This guide is part of Huxley Associates' dedication to supporting our customers and delivering market-leading recruitment solutions. As one of the world's leading recruitment consultancies we pride ourselves on being a key recruitment partner for professionals and organisations across a range of sectors.

Our series of career guides offer best practice advice and an insight into the latest recruitment news to help you secure your next job.

Other career guides in the series:

Get the job: Successful interviewing
A Huxley Associates career guide

Get the profile: Managing your online reputation
A Huxley Associates career guide