

How To Write A Successful Curriculum Vitae



By Andrew Barker

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1.0 Introduction

Most people don't know how to write a good CV. The result is that they end up missing out on some of the best jobs and career opportunities available.

It is important to be aware that your CV is typically first contact with a potential employer. It is the bases upon which they will form first impressions about you. It is the key that unlocks the door to the interview. As a result it's crucially important that you make a good first impression and do your best to stand out from the competition.

In reality what normally happens is that people will just borrow a friends CV and copy its already poor qualities. Alternatively they'll just drag out an old copy and just make a few minor changes. They just want to secure a job as quickly as possible without the hassle of writing effective CV. As a result the majority of people are very poor at writing a successful CV.

2.0 Common Mistakes

Most CV's contain irrelevant and outdated information that are just dull, boring and do not sell. The first step is to keep in mind that there are two main questions the employer will be asking while reading your CV. They are;

- Can this person do the job?
- What value can they bring to the company?

First let's just look at the common mistakes that people make when writing a CV.

- ✗ No covering letter.
- ✗ Title the CV – CV or Curriculum Vitae. You don't title a book – Book.
- ✗ Copy a friends poor CV.
- ✗ Drag out an old CV and only make minor changes.
- ✗ Makes unbelievable claims of success.
- ✗ Lack relevancy and do not customise the contents for the job.
- ✗ Apply for jobs for which they're not qualified.
- ✗ Overloaded the contents with clichés such as 'good communicator', 'goal orientated', 'honest' etc...
- ✗ Use of Jargon PDM, THG, DSA etc...
- ✗ It is too long (More than 2 pages)
- ✗ Inconsistent format, look and feel.
- ✗ Difficult to read & follow.
- ✗ Composed of long rambling sentences.
- ✗ Poor quality paper that feels cheap. Print out the CV on good stock paper.
- ✗ Obvious spelling & grammatical mistakes.

- ✗ Contains irrelevant information (for example, marital status, partner's name, date of birth, referees, hobbies, height, weight, children's names).
- ✗ Not targeted towards the job.
- ✗ Just a copy of the employer's advertisement with their qualities repeated.
- ✗ Featuring obvious headers (e.g. Name, Address) throughout the CV.
- ✗ Don't lie or change dates of employment on your CV so that it looks like you've been employed when you haven't.
- ✗ Don't include reasons for leaving your last job.
- ✗ Don't give a long list of past employment. Stick to the most recent and most relevant. Employers are usually most interested in your work history for the past 10 years.
- ✗ When submitting your CV you shouldn't send a whole folder full of information. Just send in your CV with a covering letter.
- ✗ Don't waste valuable space on your CV. Aim to make every word sell your capabilities and suitability for the job. As you read your CV you should be thinking, "Will this help me to land a job interview?"
- ✗ Don't mention 'I' or 'me'. It should be written in the third person in a telegraphic style.
- ✗ Don't attempt the 'one' size fits all approach. A successful CV is crafted for a particular job. Make sure that you customise the CV for each employer.

3.0 Preparing To Write A Successful CV

The sole objective of a good CV is to get you an interview. You get to an interview by selling your benefits. Therefore a well written CV should clearly communicate the benefits you can bring to the company.

There is a simple 8 step process to follow you should complete before writing your CV. They are;

✓ **Step 1: Define your ideal Job**

What do you want? What are your career goals? What are your 5 year and 10 year objectives? Now, build a profile of your ideal job.

Consider the activities you enjoy doing. What responsibilities are you prepared to take on? Do you like working in an office, being outside or a mixture of both? How do you feel about working hours? How far are you willing to commute?

✓ **Step 2: Define your ideal Company**

What type of company do you want to work for?

- Large Blue Chip Company, small company, family sized company.
- A fast expanding, dynamic business going through lots of change or a more solid robust and predictable business.
- A high-tech business or a more traditional business.

Put these thoughts in your subconscious mind and think about them for a while. Let them rattle around in your head for a few days. You'll then have some well thought out answers. By going through this process you'll be more deliberate and purposeful in your job hunting. You'll end up applying for the jobs that you actually want.

✓ **Step 3: Know your Profession**

It is important that you make a decision upon your profession. Then state your profession on your CV. Your goal is to align your targeted job as closely as possible to your previous job and experience.

Professions include being a teacher, engineer, accountant, salesperson, builder, surveyor, nurse etc... So when people ask you what you do. Don't reply "I'm in.". State your profession, "I'm a....".

✓ **Step 4: Know your field of expertise**

Now that you've decided what your profession is you now need to decide upon the industry you work in. For example, engineering is a profession. But the field of expertise can be very different. An engineer in electrical circuit design operates in a very different field to an engineer in construction. A salesman selling farming equipment works in a very different field to an enterprise software salesman.

However, avoid using specific job titles. This will narrow your suitability and eliminate you from being considered for wider job roles. Instead use a job title that covers a broad category of jobs. Define a bracket of responsibility that would be well suited to your skills. Cover both the higher and lower levels that you would consider.

✓ **Step 5: Know your salary requirements**

Money is always important. Work out what money you need to live on. Now work out what money would be nice to have. Then work out your market worth. You can do this by looking at comparables in the industry. Look at what other job adverts are saying for someone in your profession, in your industry with your level of expertise.

Of course you should expect a reduction in salary if you are looking for roles that differ from your past experience, successes and track record.

✓ **Step 6: Identify you qualifications**

Employers like qualification because they are factual. Their importance does vary from company to company and job to job. Detail the qualifications you have. Break them down into two main categories.

1.) Education qualifications

- A Levels & BTec's
- Degrees or HND's
- Professional Qualification (MIEE, CIMA)

Remember you must never lie about your qualifications. You will get found out. This is illegal and you'll probably get immediately fired.

2.) Job Qualifications

- Number of year's experience
- Experience working in your chosen profession & field
- Track record

- Professional qualifications

In job adverts you'll see that employers typically break down qualifications into essential and desirable. This will help you to filter jobs to which you both want and are most suited.

- ✓ **Step 7: Identify a job opportunity**

Once you have completed the steps above you can begin to look for job opportunities. The reason you need to look for job opportunities prior to preparing your CV is because we're going to show you how to write a targeted CV. Targeted CV's are the most successful because they are custom written for a specific job opportunity.

It will take more time to prepare a targeted CV but the results are worth it. You'll save more time in the long run by writing a targeted CV.

- ✓ **Step 8: Research the target company**

The next step is to research the target company. Today this is easy because you can get most of the information you need off their web-site.

4.0 Writing A Successful CV

Key qualities of a good CV

Here are the qualities of a good CV:

- ✓ Sells your capabilities, strengths and achievements.
- ✓ Contains relevant skills.
- ✓ Clearly details the benefits of employing you.
- ✓ Communicates your personality.
- ✓ Interesting to read.
- ✓ Written in the third person.
- ✓ Easy to read.
- ✓ Easy to understand.
- ✓ No more than two pages in length.
- ✓ Targeted for the job.
- ✓ Communicate your 'personality'.
- ✓ Brief and to the point.

Be specific about your accomplishments and achievements. If you've helped to reduce costs by £217,000 or exceed sales targets by 203%, then you should say so. By being specific it improves your credibility and helps to build confidence.

In the job history sections show how you've made a difference at each company. How did the company benefit from your performance? The employer wants to see career progression and the impact that you made in each role.

It is important to communicate your personality in the CV. Avoid the dull boring CV's that are devoid of all human qualities. You don't want to be a faceless candidate. Create an image of yourself by using active words that describe your personality. For example, use active words like eager, competitive, assertive, friendly, kind etc..

There has to be compatibility between you and the company. Employers are looking for commitment and capabilities match. Therefore think about...

- What key capabilities are important to do the job you're applying for?
- What key skills are important to do the job you're applying for?

Now choose the top 5 capabilities as headings in your CV. Under each capabilities heading provide reasons that demonstrate you have these capabilities. Remember to customise the capabilities and skills

to the job to which you're applying. This can be easily done by putting yourself in the employer's shoes.

Here are some extra tips if you're a recent graduate, have gaps in work history or have too little experience.

- Gaps in work history.

If you have a legitimate reason then you should include it like any other job. Minor gaps of a few months don't need explanation.

Don't hide it if you've been out of work for sometime. Most employers have been out of work at some point. In fact one in five people have experienced extended gaps of unemployment. More people will have an understanding than you may realise.

- Recent Graduates.

Change job history to experiences section. Include recent education and training that are relevant to the job. Show off any skills you have that show you're trained in the latest trends or techniques.

- Too little experience.

Recent graduate suffer from this problem. You need to write skills focused CV. If you've been in higher education you need to show job related skills you've developed while in full time education, like "hardworking" or "ability to learn quickly".

- Being Fired or Career Changes

If you were fired from your previous job there is no reason to include why you were fired. Focus on what you did that was a positive contribution.

If you are changing direction in your career then this will require some explanation. You need to provide an explanation so that it makes sense to the employer.

Format of a good CV

Page 1 – The sales page. Answer quickly and easily why the employer should consider you. Contains:

- Personal details
- Capabilities

Page 2 – The Proof page. Provides the proof that you have the capabilities you say you do. Contains:

- Education
- Work Experience (Featuring roles, responsibilities, achievements)

Presentation & Layout

See the **appendix** for a template showing you how to lay out a good CV. The template is also provided in MS word saving you some time. All you need to do is fill in the blanks.

5.0 Covering letter

Always include a personalised covering letter when applying for a job. It's another chance to sell your key capabilities, strengths and benefits. Here are the key sections of the covering letter;

1. Advise that you're applying for the job.
2. Highlight your strengths & key areas of expertise.
3. Answer any specifics requested for in the job advert.
4. Resolve any concerns that the employer might have. It's better to tackle any obvious disadvantages of interviewing you right up front in the covering letter. That way you're seen as honest with good integrity. A very important attribute.
5. Close with a proposed action. For example, you will follow-up with a phone call on a set dates & time.
6. Sign with a quality pen

Dos and don'ts of the covering letter;

- ✗ Don't try and be funny.
- ✗ Don't try to tell the employer what they want
- ✗ Don't be arrogant
- ✓ Do be confident.
- ✓ Do communicate enthusiasm & interest.
- ✓ Do highlight your value to the employer.
- ✓ Do use good quality paper for covering letter and CV
- ✓ Do hand write the envelope to the relevant person

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APPENDIX

A Winning Curriculum Vitae Template

Email address here@.com
etc..)

Full Name Here, letters (e.g. Bsc,BEng, Ba

Profession Here (e.g. Accountant, Sales

Executive)

Home Telephone Number

Mobile/Cell

Address 1

City

Post Code

Positive Word & Profession Name Here (e.g. Successful Structural Engineer)

– This is your tag-line (Who you are and what your speciality is?)

One Paragraph explaining “Why the employer should choose you?” Feature the most important benefit from hiring you. What is the one point you want the potential employer to remember about you. What one thing that makes you stand out from the competition? This is your elevator pitch. It’s written in a way so that it does a hard-sell on your suitability for the job. Highlight any other key skills and capabilities relevant to the position being sought.

Capabilities

- **Key Capability 1**

Description to back up and expand on the capability claim

- **Key Capability 2**

Description to back up and expand on the capability claim

- **Key Capability 3**

Description to back up and expand on the capability claim

- **Key Capability 4**

Description to back up and expand on the capability claim

- **Key Capability 5**

Description to back up and expand on the capability claim

Education

Degree qualification/University name/Year

College qualification – Subject 1 (grade), Subject 2 (grade) etc.. College Name

High-School Qualifications – Subject 1 (grade), Subject 2 (grade) etc.. Name of School

Month/Year
started –
Present

Name of most recent employer one sentence description about what the employer does. When you joined and what you did.

Show how you've made a difference at each company and how the company benefited from your performance.

Major achievements

- Major achievement #1
- Major achievement #2
- Major achievement #3

Month/Year
started –
Month/Year
Left

Name of next employer one sentence description about what the employer does. When you joined and what you did.

Major achievements

- Major achievement #1
- Major achievement #2
- Major achievement #3

Month/Year
started –
Month/Year
Left

Name of next employer one sentence description about what the employer does. When you joined and what you did.

Major achievements

- Major achievement #1
- Major achievement #2
- Major achievement #3