

### Getting into the right mindset

How many CVs do recruiters have on their desk? What stories have you heard from other people about the number of applicants there are for vacancies?

The job market is mostly in the recruiter's favour at the moment, which means that they usually have more potential candidates than they need (or even want). You need to put yourself into the recruiter's shoes and think what it would be like to look your CV, compared to other people.

Therefore think about:

- How easy is it to get a quick understanding of you and your experience from your CV?
- How easily does the information jump off the page?
- How long do they have to read your CV to understand what you have to offer?
- Is there something about you that makes you stand out from other people?
- Have you provided a blend of information from the facts about your experience and education through to some interesting information about you as a person and your character?
- Have you explained what you are looking for or what you want?

In these circumstances, it is worth remembering that often recruiters will scan your CV first to decide whether it is worth coming back for a proper second read. People say recruiters can spend as little as 6 seconds through to about 20 seconds on this first scan. Whatever the figure, it is worth remembering that the overall impression of your CV, and the ease of accessing key information is paramount. Think of it as the same as when you are searching for information on line. If it is frustrating to find the information you are looking for, you are prepared to quickly move on to the next site.

All of these thoughts will help you get into the right mind-set and move away from thinking about what you can sell the recruiter, to what can the recruiter learn about you quickly and easily.

*Remember: it is as much about the recruiter as it is about you.*

### Types of CV

There are four types of CV format. Each format has its positives and negatives, advantages and disadvantages.

#### **The chronological CV**

The chronological CV is a common, frequently used and accepted CV format. It lists work experience in reverse chronological order outlining your job history from the most recent job backwards with greatest emphasis on the most recent job. It provides clear information on job titles, areas of

responsibility and periods of employment for each employer. Accomplishments are clearly tied to companies and time frames.

This type of CV should be used when:

- Your career history shows growth and development
- Your previous employers have been prestigious and well known
- You are applying for a position in a traditional field or organisation

Beware of this type of format when:

- You are having a career change
- You have patchy work history
- You have frequent change of jobs/employers
- Your more recent employment is not related to the role you are applying for
- You have been unemployed frequently or for long periods

## **The skills CV**

This type of format is designed to emphasise the skills of the jobseeker with less focus on the details of specific employers or dates of employment. The skills format is suitable for people seeking to make a significant change in their field or functional area. You must be careful when making the decision to use this type of format as many employers prefer the more traditional chronological format and can be suspicious of this type of CV.

The skills CV is useful when:

- The role you are applying for is very different from your experience
- You wish to emphasise skills and abilities not recently used
- You have a large number of jobs and would prefer to describe the experience you have gained in total
- Your experience has been gained in different, relatively unconnected jobs
- You want to include voluntary/unpaid work
- You are entering the job market after an absence

The skills CV should not be used when:

- You want to focus the recruiter on your career growth
- You are applying for a position in a highly traditional organisation or field

## **The performance CV**

In a performance CV your employment history is shown in reverse chronological order, with your most recent job first. You should use a performance CV when you are seeking a job which is directly relevant with your past experiences or your last employer was a prestigious organisation or familiar to the job you are applying for. The only difference between a chronological CV and a performance CV is that the performance CV highlights a list of overall achievements near the start of your CV.

The performance CV is useful when:

- You are planning to stay in the same field/work area
- You want to show-off your achievements

The performance CV is less useful when:

- You are planning a change in career direction
- You have frequently changed employer
- Your work history is patchy in recent years
- You do not have many achievements
- Your job has a limited number of functions

## **The alternative CV**

This CV is used in very specific circumstances, perhaps by designers or artists. Sometimes it involves a dramatically different approach to layout or content of a CV. Or sometimes it may avoid paper altogether but be a presentation on YouTube.

The alternative CV is useful when:

- You are applying for a role in a creative industry
- You really want to stand out as being unconventional or different
- You want to demonstrate your expertise or skills

Be careful with an alternative CV when:

- The role or industry you are applying for is more traditional

## **Structure**

Whichever format of CV you choose, it is customary to have the following content in the following order:

### 1. Personal / contact details

Name, contact information, address. It is increasingly less common to put your date of birth on your CV. Make sure you include anything specific to the role if required, such as a clean driving licence, your right to work in the UK etc.

### 2. Personal statement / Summary / Personal profile

Whatever you call it, this is where you give a summary about who you are, the experience you have and what you are looking for. You can either choose to put lots of key qualities and/or achievements in this section, or list them below each job in the Experience section (see below). Whatever the content, it is often more effective to write it in the first person ("I am a ....")

### 3. Experience

Provide information of the companies you have worked for including a short statement about what the company was (if necessary), perhaps where it was (if this is relevant), the dates you worked there, the responsibilities you have/had, and any particularly noteworthy achievements. This

information must be provided with most recent first, going backwards in time. Use bullet points and specific action verbs, and provide specific facts, figures and evidence of how you were able to make an impact on the business. List key achievements (ie, things of which you are really proud) under each employer if you have not listed them in the Personal statement section. Usually this section is written in the third person (“Responsible for ....”)

Example:

|   |                            |
|---|----------------------------|
| <p><b>TREE ESTATE COMMUNITY FORUM</b> – Organisation providing Youth and Community work, South London<br/>Part time Voluntary Accountant</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reworking from scratch all previous accounts thereby enabling the management team to have better management information on spend and effectiveness of activities</li> <li>• Installing and running all aspects of a Payroll system</li> <li>• Monitoring Petty Cash spend by Youth Workers, identifying and resolving issues</li> <li>• Rectifying incorrect declarations to grant making bodies including identifying shortfalls of spend, which prevented funding being terminated</li> <li>• Maintaining all receipts and payments made</li> </ul> <p>Systems used: Microsoft Excel, Sage Instant Payroll and other Microsoft software</p> | <p>Sept 2005 - current</p> |
|---|----------------------------|

Be careful of swamping the recruiter with every last detail of every job going back decades. You might want to put one summary section in “Various retail and hotel industry jobs in the early stages of my career” to summarise.

Do not leave any unexplained gaps. Some recruiters may come to inaccurate conclusions about where you were.

#### 4. Education and qualifications

A summary of your education and job specific qualifications. Again, highest and/or most recent things first. There is no need to list every last school exam especially if it is from a long time ago unless it is particularly relevant (eg, if a recruiter is looking to see if you have GCSE Maths).

#### 5. Other information

Use this section to provide something about you as a person or character such as hobbies you have. Try to avoid the temptation of reproducing a list of things that perhaps you do once a year or that everyone else will put. But if you like fiddling in the garage taking old motorbikes apart, then mention this, because it says something about your character and is memorable. Only put things in here that you really do – in case you get asked about them.

Produce your CV in Microsoft Word using clear sections. It is important that things are laid out well and it is really clear which section the recruiter is looking at.

For other example templates try searching under “Images” for CV templates on Yahoo or Google.

## Things you must get right on your CV

### 1. Two pages

Ideally, try to get your CV onto two pages (this is customary in the UK). This means you must be efficient with space. Do not take up half a page (ie, 25%) of your CV providing your name, address and contact details centre aligned at the beginning. Be clever about how you provide this information through use of footers or tables if necessary.

You may be able to save space by omitting other information such as referees. Unless you have a referee who is somebody really useful for your next role, or really famous, omit this information totally as it can be provided at a later stage.

Also, be careful about how you use space presenting your education. If you did your O levels 30 years ago, does the recruiter need to know every single grade you achieved in a bullet format taking up one line for each? Rather, just say that you got 5 O levels in one line.

### 2. Consistent font, underline, bold, caps and type size

Be absolutely consistent about the font you are using, and the style you are using for section headings etc. If a section heading is **BOLD, CAPS AND SIZE 14**, make sure it is the same format all the way through. Some recruiters prefer bold to emphasise sections rather than underline.

### 3. Consistent verb endings

If you are describing skills in your role, try to use bullet points and start each bullet with a verb and a consistent tense and ending. Write in the third person. For example:

- *Managing* a team of 3 people
- *Summarising* data for management reports
- *Collating* information for inclusion in the monthly magazine

OR:

- *Managed* a team of 3 people
- *Summarised* data for management reports
- *Collated* information for inclusion in the monthly magazine

### 4. Spelling

Try your utmost not to make any spelling mistakes. It is an easy way for a recruiter to discount your application as they will think “this person can’t even put the effort in to check their CV properly”. If necessary, ask someone else to review your CV to double check for spelling mistakes.

### 5. Tailoring

This is an absolute must. Take time with every application to tailor your CV to the role you are applying for. This may mean putting an extra sentence or two in about some particular experience,

and down-playing others. It could also mean tweaking what you written in the personal profile. Perhaps you could put more information in about non work experience in your life such as being Chairman of the rugby club. You should try to use words that are used in the advert or job description (for example if the advert talks about customer service, don't talk about client support but phrase it as customer service). A recruiter will always be able to tell when a CV is a generic and again, they will think "this person hasn't even bothered to put the effort in for this role".

Another easy but important way to tailor, is to include a covering letter. Further information about this below.

*Remember: anything that a recruiter can use to slim down the pile of CVs on their desk, they will take.*

## Personal statement

Your personal statement, summary profile, or summary information, is the paragraph that appears on your CV and summarises who you are, what you are like as a person and your career objective. It can also be used in certain sections of an application form as well. Features of a personal statement include:

- It should be a few sentences only.
- It should clearly state what you are (“as a chartered civil engineer”, “experienced electrical engineer”, “freelance journalist”) and what you are looking for. Use a job title that you know is used within the company, or the job title of the vacancy.
- It should contain some information about your style that is personal and specific. Phrases like “My year spent happily and successfully in temporary positions shows that I can adapt quickly and easily to different organisations and personalities”. Avoid trite phrases without any evidence such as “a good team player”.
- It could contain some significant achievements (best moments, times when you were achieving great things) especially if that will be attractive to the recruiter. Include any specific facts and figures as these are easily remembered (eg, “designed a new storage system which reduced time from a customer’s point of order to dispatch by 30%”).
- Do not be afraid to sell yourself and be clear about what you have to offer and what you are good at. If you do not, somebody else will.

Here is an example of a personal statement and how it is constructed:

(1st sentence is your route to where you are now) I come from a practical farming background which, combined with my academic achievements and research and innovation, has led me to run a successful and diverse educational-based farming business. (2nd sentence is about what you like) I really enjoy a combination of practical hands-on work plus leading research, innovation and development of farming systems. (3rd sentence is about your personality) People I work with have commented on my excellent work ethos and my easy going but effective style of leadership. (4th sentence is what you are looking for now) I am now looking for new challenges and opportunities in practical farm management.

*Remember: make it personal, tailored and memorable.*

## Covering letters

You must always send a covering letter with your CV. It should contain different information from your CV. The following things are important about a covering letter:

### 1. One page

Make sure your covering letter is only one page long. Again, this may mean being clever with usage of space on the page. Do not take up half a page with your address and the recipient's address.

### 2. Include why you are applying

This is the main place for you to state why you are applying for the role. Make sure the reason for applying is true, and also makes the recruiter feel you really care about the role and/or their company. Base your reasons around what attract you about their role rather than why you are leaving your previous role; a pull rather than push approach.

If you do not meet the full job criteria, you must address this in your letter. (eg, "I realise that I do not have the full 3 years' experience you have asked for. However, through my experience in xyz, you can see that I am quick learner and I believe this will bring value to your organisation instead").

Write the letter in the first person (using "I").

### 3. Include a comment about or praise for the company

Do some research about the company to illustrate that you know why they are recruiting, or what their plans are for the year. This will help you demonstrate that you are motivated for the role, care about their organisation and that you are a natural fit for them. If you can link this in with your specific application, it will help (eg, "I notice that you are expanding your product range into wind farms. When I was at University I completed a Master's dissertation on the aerodynamic qualities of different blades, and am very keen to see if my conclusions will be of value to you/if I can continue this fascinating contribution to energy efficiency"). This illustrates again that you are serious, have put some effort in and it will make your application stand out.

### 4. Tailored letter

You absolutely must tailor the letter for the organisation and not send a "to whom it may concern" or a generic letter. This is a sure way of your CV being rejected straight away. You should also address any specific aspects mentioned in the job advert such as any potential question marks about your location, your willingness to take a pay cut or retrain.

### 5. Spelling

You absolutely must spell the company and/or recruiter's name correctly. Your CV will be rejected straight away without.

*Remember: your covering letter is about demonstrating your genuine interest in working in that role for that company. You are not "just" looking for a job, any job. If you do not put the effort in, someone else will.*

## Application forms

Usually, an application form contains the same sections and information as your CV and covering letter combined. You may be able to prepare your application in Microsoft Word first then cut and paste the information into the online form. If you can, try to make a copy, or at least print screen so that you can remember what you submitted if you are called for interview.

Some online application forms use technology to spot key words (a bit like Google key word optimisation). Therefore, make sure that any key words or useful phrases mentioned in the advert or job description are included in your application.

If it is a paper form, photocopy the blank form first to practise writing your application in the spaces provided. There is nothing worse than a poorly laid out application form, or one with mistakes in.

If there are competency questions in the application form, you should shape your answer using the following structure:

S – what was the Situation

T – what were your Tasks

A – what Actions did you take

R – what were the Results

## Further information

People Decisions can offer specific tailored feedback on your CV and covering letter. Further information and can be found on our website or email for details: [info@peopledecisions.co.uk](mailto:info@peopledecisions.co.uk), or call us on 01768 753 001