

**So you want to  
improve your CV?**  
**The Basics...**



### Why do you need a CV?

If you're trying to introduce yourself to a business or organisation either through letter, applying online or through an agency, a CV is a straightforward way to let them know you exist and that you have skills and experience which may be of use to them.

### What is a CV for?

Its main purpose is to get you past step 1 in a recruitment process. Ideally resulting in a meeting or interview with someone relevant to finding you that suitable role. The CV is a sales document. Think of it as the glossy marketing brochure that makes someone want to find out more information about the unique product - you.

### Who will read it?

Anyone involved in your job hunt. This can include people who know you well, network contacts, recruitment consultants, Human Resource professionals, Talent or Resource Managers, or someone hired to go through a pile of 500 CV's to reduce it down to 50. Your CV has to be easy to read, jargon free and readily understood by all of them, so before you write it, make a list of the people who may read it. When you've finished your CV, check it meets the majority of needs of the people on your list. Will they for example understand your previous or current company specific job titles and acronyms?

In addition and with the increasing use of online submission of CVs our view is to be choosy and selective about where and how your CV is distributed. Especially if you have a range of CVs tailored to different roles. It is quite common to find and receive different versions of an individual's CV from different sources and of different vintages. This could be great news in that multiple versions appear on the recruiters table but it could also indicate a lack of focus and commitment to a specific potential employer or role.

### How long will they spend reading it?

For professionals whose job involves reading CVs, this may be less than 10 seconds! It's suggested that recruiters increasingly make use of smart phones to read CV's and if they can't see what they are looking for on the first screen they move on! In addition increasingly computer software is used to review 'key words' against multiple CV's and generate a league table of 'key words' determines which CV's are opened and which ones go to the bottom of the pile.

This is why the first impression and the information on the top half of the first page is crucial to gain interest. Keep the overall length reasonable - you should be able to get the relevant information into two pages maximum. If you're selected for interview, the recruiter will then spend much longer reading your CV prior to the interview. Hopefully your overall CV will increase their interest.

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### The main points of a CV

#### Get it right first time!

Reading your CV gives a recruiter the opportunity to understand more about you as a potential candidate or employee. It would not surprise you that spelling mistakes and lack of attention to detail within a CV counts against you.

Common mistakes include the use of spell check without reading the outcome of the change. 'Running a major business' could just as easily spell check out as 'ruining a major business! Missing punctuation, overuse of words and phrases such as 'successfully delivered' for example, missing out words and 'homophones'. Homophones are words that have different spellings and meaning but sound the same for example 'role', 'roll', 'their', there.

Spelling mistakes and bad grammar won't necessarily stop you achieving your ideal role but in today's challenging marketplace it may be one of the elements the recruiter chooses to whittle down the CV pile.

### Contact Details

It is clearly vital that these are accurate. And make sure you list the best and easiest way to contact you. For example, don't put your mobile phone number if you don't always carry it with you. Or use an email address you don't check regularly.

### Profile

This is a short statement about you at the top of the CV. It helps the reader understand who you are quickly, and hopefully will make them want to spend more time reading the rest of your CV. This is vital and often the only part of a CV the recruiter reads. Gain interest through the profile and they might read the rest of the first page! Try to avoid common general phrases such as good team player, works well under own initiative or as part of a team, with good communication skills, excellent manager and similar.

There is nothing wrong with these but regular CV readers see them so often they cease to have any impact and are largely ignored. Ensure your description is more original and showcases your main talents and achievement - all in 30 words or less!

### Skills and Achievements

This is essential to a successful CV. You can either list them separately to your career details, include a short section of around six key skills and achievements to highlight at the top, or include them within the relevant sections of your career history. Be specific for example "increased sales of product A by 23% in my region compared to a UK average of 14% over a 6 month period" is measurable, specific and can be proven.

### Career History

Your most recent role comes at the top of the list, and the others in order below. Generally you won't need to go back further than 15 years. Breaking up long periods with one employer into different job roles can help explain your work more clearly. If adding to an existing CV, ensure the style is consistent, and edit and cut back on early work to make it relevant.

'Less is often more' and don't be tempted to cut and paste job accountabilities from profiles, and go through in huge detail everything you do in a role. Assume any recruiter with an interest will also look at social media including LinkedIn so make sure that there is consistency in the information available about you from different sources.



### Qualifications

List your relevant academic qualifications. Don't include too much detail unless the qualification was gained in the last five years. You can also include company and personal training courses and can then entitle the section 'Professional Qualifications and Training'.

### Personal Details

This is where you would put your age, nationality, driving license, marital status and any other personal information if you want to include it.

### Hobbies and Interests

There is an on-going debate about the relevance of this to a CV but it can help the recruiter understand your work life balance and tell more about you as an individual. It will also often be used in the interview so as always be truthful! If you say you run marathons don't be surprised to find out that the interviewer is a keen runner and will soon work out whether your claim is accurate or not!

### Summary

A CV is a tool to help you in your job hunt and career. You are the best person to write it, as you know the most about its subject. Think about what you want it to achieve, and then write with that goal in mind. You will probably need to tailor it for different opportunities, and it will almost certainly evolve and improve as your job hunt progresses.

However as you know most about yourself and your previous roles you will most likely be prone to want to give lots and lots of detail. Ideally you should share the draft CV with a colleague or your partner to give you an alternative and constructive review. In addition and where English might not be your first language it is helpful to share your CV with a friend or colleague who can help tailor what you aim to say into an easy to understand form.

### And finally

**Stand out from the crowd because of the content of your profile and the quality of your CV. Using unusual and whacky fonts, coloured pages, images and adding your photo will often count against you.**