writing the perfect CV

An effective CV will showcase your most relevant skills and experiences, whilst telling a prospective employer why you are right for the job.

Follow the simple steps laid out in this guide and you'll be well on your way to achieving the perfect CV.

put yourself in the employer's shoes

Before you apply for any role you need to gain an understanding of the type of person the prospective employer is looking for. Whether it's from a job advert, person specification or conversation with the company itself, use this information as a blue-print for your CV. The more effectively you show a clear match between the skills required and those you possess, the more likely you are to secure an interview.

be honest and factual

Your CV will typically be used to structure the interview and could be the foundation on which the job is built, so providing inaccurate information will only lead to problems further down the line. Give yourself the edge by using your CV to accentuate your real skills and abilities, and to promote achievements and successes.

make yourself easy to contact

It seems obvious but not everybody does it. Include all of your contact details on all of your pages as you never know if your CV will get split up. Always include your name, address, telephone number and e-mail address and, if you have a website that you think will add value to your application, include that too.

proofread, proofread and proofread again

It's critical that each area of your CV is easy to read and allows the key points to stand out. Use a universal font such as Arial, Times New Roman, Palatino or Courier, rather than one that may not be available on the recipient's computer. Always check your CV for spelling and grammar errors, as a mistake could cost you the job. If in doubt, ask someone else to double-check it for you. And always include a covering letter!

making your CV stand out

focus on value

Remember, the reader is asking themselves two basic questions: can you do the job and will you fit their organisation?

- Introduce yourself with a strong positioning statement that sums up your personal and professional attributes, taking into account the role blue-print. This should act as a focused summary of what you have to offer, so keep it simple and snappy.
- Concentrate on how your involvement with projects showed return on investment. It's no good saying: "I ran a team of three people".
  Instead, think about what your management did for that team:
  - Did it improve productivity?
  - Was the team responsible for rolling out a new programme?
  - Did your management result in cost-efficiency savings?
- Every statement that you make should focus on your achievements and successes. Try to support each statement with numerical evidence, such as: "reduced downtime by 15%".
- Your CV should be a living document. To make the most of it you'll probably need to adapt it to specific roles or blue-prints. Employers don't have time to read between the lines, so the more you do to promote your suitability, the greater your chance of success. Make it easy for them by:
  - Moulding your CV to their requirements
  - Highlighting where your skills match their needs
  - Pointing out the value that you could bring to their organisation

mind your language

- Keep copy concise and jargon-free
- Use short sentences and bullet-points - you can expand on these at the interview
- Don't refer to yourself as 'I' or by name
- Make sentences more direct by using verbs and nouns on their own (e.g. 'Increased sales by £50k' or 'Major achievements include')
- Use the past tense to describe your career ('Led a team of…') but the present tense for your transferable skills and competencies ('Offers experience in…')
- Quantify outcomes in numbers, not words ('Retained 100% of staff…') as it's quicker to read or scan

layout

- Use an uncluttered layout with plenty of white space and wide margins
- Choose a single, common typeface such as Times New Roman, Arial, Palatino, or Courier
- Follow best practice: 10-12 point body text, 16 point maximum for headings, no capitals (especially on internet CVs where capitals are seen as SHOUTING), and embolden headings
- Don't reduce the font size or margins to fit more in. If you need another page, use one
- Print on one side of the paper only, and number the pages if there are two or more

structure

personal information

- Name, address and contact details are a must. You might want to add these details to the header or footer of your CV in case pages go missing

work experience

Employers are usually interested in your most recent jobs, so concentrate on your last two positions – although you might occasionally want to highlight earlier roles if they are relevant to the role you're applying for.

- Start with your most recent position and work backwards
- Provide a job title, start and finish dates, the name of the company and a brief description of what they do. Treat a promotion like a separate position and add content accordingly
- List relevant responsibilities, achievements, duties and skills
- Describe the scope of your job and level of responsibility, rather than listing a job description
- If you've had a lot of jobs or a long career, you might want to summarise under such headings as 'Previous employers' or 'Earlier Career'
- Make sure you explain any significant gaps in your career as, even if you're not working you may have gained valuable transferable skills and experience from other pursuits

qualifications, education, training and development

- Usually these come near the end, but if particular qualifications are essential for the job and make you more marketable, put them on the first page after your profile or key skills
- Include relevant professional qualifications and academic ones, but don't include 'bought' memberships
- List degrees and any executive programmes that you may have attended; giving the subject, awarding body and year. Be honest as it may be checked
- Mention relevant skills such as languages, technology, vocational or on the job training
- Include relevant training or skills acquired while unemployed, on sabbatical, or doing part-time or voluntary work

reference and client endorsements

- You may want to include the names and contact details of your references on your CV, but there is no obligation. Whether you include them or not, it's wise to have your referees ready and willing to represent you
- Include client endorsements and recommendations in the achievements section of your CV, for example: 'Given a special award by ABC for contribution to ABC project'

future proofing

Remember to keep your CV up to date, even when you're no longer looking. You'll be thankful when the time comes and it'll prevent you from forgetting important dates, details, projects or successes.

if you follow these simple rules and put all of our tips into practice, you're more likely to impress on the strength of your cv. good luck!

T: 01274 865 878
E: enquiries@elite-personnel.co.uk
W: elite-personnel.co.uk

elite
personnel ™
Established 1998