

Top tips: how to write a perfect CV and cover letter

A profile section is always necessary: For practically all types of jobseeker a profile section is a very good idea: it gives a brief introduction about you and your background, and gives you an excellent opportunity to sell your application. Include the most relevant and standout facts about you which match you to the job being advertised. Write one or two sentences that summarise your experience, skills, and perhaps a standout achievement. To be concise, merge your personal statement with your skill areas to make your profile even more striking.

Clare Whitmell, qualified [business communication trainer](#)

Have structure in your job search: Create a spreadsheet, start with industries you're interested in, then take each industry individually, and identify employers within the sector. Use job sites to build a list of target companies, and start finding out who you need to talk to in each. Methodically send your CV, tailoring it and your cover letter to the role (or company if it's a speculative application). It will take time and commitment, but it will help you structure your jobseeking campaign.

Lydia Fairman, HR and resourcing specialist, and owner of [Fairman Consulting](#)

Talk through your CV with a friend: A competency-based CV is pretty much what you need for all [CVs](#) now. It means that instead of just writing a list of your previous duties, you look at exactly what the employer says they are asking for and you show that you have what they need. My suggestion is go through each one of their selection criteria and think of where you have demonstrated it. It is helpful to talk it over with a friend or coach as sometimes it can be difficult to think of examples yourself.

Corinne Mills, managing director of [Personal Career Management](#)

Work experience is becoming vital for graduate applications: In a graduate CV you should be able to demonstrate your excellent academic

credentials along with some work experience/internships/voluntary engagements you may have undertaken parallel to your degree. Work experience is becoming more and more important for employers when they screen potential candidates for graduate full-time positions.

Dasha Amrom, founder and managing director of [Career Coaching Ventures](#)

Write your cover letter in the body of the email: The email is the first impression that you will give a recruiter. Therefore you are going to need to give some information about yourself and why you're right for the role. Too many times I see the comment: "I am applying for X role and attach my covering letter and CV". I'd like to see something about you in the email. I'd also like to see a cover letter as well. Emails have a tendency to be seen as having little value compared with a letter. So why not include a cover letter as well that goes into more detail than the email.

Jonathan Burston, founder of [Interview Expert Academy](#)

Do your research when applying abroad: If you'd like to work abroad then by all means do start exploring opportunities. However, if you are looking abroad because you think you can't find work here, then I'd suggest spending time investigating the line of work you want to do, which organisations you'd like to work for, and what ways you could break into the sector. Depending on what you're looking to do, don't discount small businesses or startups as a way of getting started, if it seems competition for places at the larger companies is fierce.

Sarah Byrne, online editor, [Careershifters](#)

Seek work experience in your chosen field: A good route for voluntary experience is to look at the website of your local volunteer centre. Usually you can select the kind of experience you want – research, policy work, administration, or frontline work. Or perhaps offer the research skills from your degree to a local charity who might jump at the chance to commission a short project and give you more of an insight into social research.

Lizzie Mortimer is a careers consultant for the [University of Edinburgh](#)

Use numbers to back up CV examples: It is quite important to concisely provide examples of your best work, often from a numbers perspective. If this can be packed with your key skills this will enable your CV to reach the top of a CV search. For example, if I am looking for a front end web developer with Java, JavaScript, CSS, HTML etc., I will search all those key terms as well as location. Using numbers to back up examples will help push your CV to the top of the pile when recruiters are searching.

Oliver Meager, head of the permanent hiring division at [Capita IT Resourcing](#)

Key words are essential for competency-based CVs: Key words are essential today, if only to get past the software scans. Don't spam your CV though by repeating tracts from the advert unnecessarily – you'll be rejected before anyone's even read your application. Examples are always good – try to show a good story about why you're doing this line of work, why this job is the next step for you. Add information which supports your assessment of the key competencies required for that role.

Jon Gre **Tailor your CV – and always keep it short**

“Employer feedback tends to point towards a preference for shorter, snappier language on a CV. Long paragraphs of text can be a real turn off, and will run the risk of being skim read. Using bullet points is a great way of getting information across clearly and concisely,” advises Caroline Thorley from [Birmingham City University](#).

The important thing to remember is that recruiters and employers will see a huge number of different [CVs](#) every day. You have a small window of time to make a good impression, so keep your content concise, to the point and tailored to the job you are applying for.

“For a new graduate, you should aim for two sides of A4 – no longer,” says Annie Peate from [CIPD](#). Including a picture isn't necessary, and can take up valuable space. Paul Young, director of [Grad-Careers Ltd](#), recommends using this space to “communicate an extra point or two about why you should be selected for the next recruitment stage.”

Create a consistent brand

In some industries, creating an online or video CV in addition to a traditional format can be a useful asset. Similarly, a good understanding of social media and a strong online presence can help your application.

“My advice to students is to always ensure consistency across all of their applications and sites, so that they complement each other and promote the same key messages,” says Caroline Thorley. “Students need to think about their ‘overall brand’ and how this is managed both on paper and online.”

Don’t wait until graduation: build your networks now

John Cusworth, head of partnerships at [Gradcore](#), points out the huge volume of opportunities and experience available within most universities. “Why wait until you graduate? There are loads of opportunities to get excellent experience in marketing while still at university. Pursue opps with the student union, societies or even organising or promoting events you personally create.”

Jon Gregory, author of the book *Winning That Job* and editor of [win-that-job.com](#), agrees that you should start networking now, even if you’re still studying. “Don’t expect jobs to come up: go out and proactively approach people in the types of organisation you want to work for,” he advises.

“Try to make contact with people already doing the job you’d like, ask them how they got those jobs, tell them you’re looking and ask if they know who to contact or if there are any vacancies coming up. Try to reach real people – most of them will applaud your initiative and be willing to give advice.”

All work experience is relevant

If your experience is primarily in a different sector from the one you are applying to, that doesn’t mean you should take it off your CV. You may still have learned valuable transferable skills that could translate into another industry: focus on these and try to relate them to the role you are applying for.

Don't forget about volunteer work. Paul Young believes that volunteering is important as "it shows areas of interest outside of your studies and you will have gained a number of essential skills."

Actions speak louder than words

"Make your CV tell a story, says Jon Gregory. "Don't say, 'I'm passionate about ...' or 'I'm excellent at ...' Show it! Show progression and include examples that allow your natural talent, experience and enthusiasm to show through. Let the recruiter reach the conclusion that you're perfect, passionate and excellent."

gory is a job search, application and [interview coach](#)