

As you no doubt already know, a CV is an essential part of finding a job, not only because it's what you will be initially judged by when you apply for a job, but also because it can be used to make yourself visible on websites that allow employers to search for candidates manually. As everyone else will also be sending in their CV, if you don't beat the competition, you will be buried at the bottom of the pile.

Likely, you have already completed some of these steps, even so, it may still be worth checking you haven't missed anything before you skip towards the end. As your CV is the quickest and easiest way to sell yourself, it can never be too good.

And yes, I know it's a lot, but many people won't do all these things and as a result, you will be in front of all of them from the start if you do.

CV Introduction

It's standard to start with your name, contact details (email and phone number) and address. Make sure these are kept up to date, it can be easy to forget to update your CV and if you can't be contacted, or a recruiter never gets a reply, well, you can imagine what that does to your chances.

Next up, a brief summary of yourself, written in 3rd person. Try to sound professional, confident and motivated, rather than boastful, casual and indifferent about working. This should be no longer than two short paragraphs, giving general information about yourself. For example:

"A proven self-starter, with a strong history of leading business development", "Highly experienced at developing professional relationships, ensuring stakeholder satisfaction", "Currently looking for new opportunities to develop their skills in X sector/industry" or "They are a driven and ambitious individual with a proven track record in X".

These are examples of the style and tone you will want to employ in order to suggest to the reader that you are a talented and motivated individual, who will bring these qualities to the role. Make sure you avoid saying things not backed up by your experience, and avoid using convoluted language just to sound intelligent. You want to be honest, formal and to the point, I am talented and here is why...

Experience

Now the introduction is done, you will want to write down your past employment and experience. This will be written in reverse chronological order with your most recent role at the top. Place your experience directly underneath your introduction, so that it's seen immediately.

You are going to want to include your position, the company name and period that you were there for as a heading, followed by bullet points of your duties and achievements. Each bullet point should demonstrate the experience you got from the position, for example:

- "Worked to implement new training policies, increasing staff efficiency"
- "Handled customer relations, developing positive relationships with all clients"
- "Worked as part of a team to handle stock rotation and replenishment"
- "Achieved record sales during X period, surpassing the previous years sales record"

It is recommended that you give reasons for any gaps in employment, it is much better to give the reason for any time you haven't been employed than leaving it to the imagination of the reviewer.

If the gap is a month or two between two jobs, you can leave it blank as it's likely to be assumed that you were finding your new job, but a gap of a year or two raises questions. Reasons like family or health will not be viewed poorly by any reasonable person.

Achievements and Qualifications

Near to your experience, you may wish to include your key achievements and skills, written in a similar style as the above examples. This is just to highlight things that you want the reader to pick up on, that may or may not be from your past employment.

As for your qualifications, give more prominence to further/higher education and training, than general education. Keep it short and to only the details. At some point further in your career, you may want to exclude GCSE, Scottish National qualifications or low level BTEC qualifications from your CV, not just for space, but also because you will want to highlight your job experience, which is both more relevant and recent.

References

References: available on request. Usually placed at the end or near the contact information. Just make sure you actually have people you can ask to be a reference and make sure you get their permission first.

Formatting

Bullet points, boxes, background colours and headings are all useful tools to organise the information in a more readable way. **Important information can be made to stand out** and it can be made very clear where one section ends and another begins. Generally, you want the most important information at the top; contact details, personal summary and experience.

Templates can be used as a good reference if you want to make your own CV from scratch, or you can copy them and just fill in the empty spaces with your information. What matters is that the person reading the CV can easily find what they want to know, or what you want them to know, at a glance.

Customising

Finally, make sure that your experience relevant to the position you are applying for is highlighted in your CV. Keep the CV you've created but when you apply for a job, customise it. You may even need to rephrase, rewrite or sentences and reorder sections to get the best results. What the reader wants to know is why do you fit the criteria they are trying to fill, make sure that they sit there ticking each and every box of the reasons why they should choose you.

What's important is what is written underneath the job title in your experience, what did you do in your previous role that means you meet the job specification for this one. Some companies even have electronic systems that automatically screen candidates, and machines don't understand implications very well so don't be vague.

Clarity and Grammar

I cannot emphasise this enough

Proofreading is not optional, it's mandatory. Proofread your CV and ask someone else to do it too. I have seen sentences repeated end on end, headings with no paragraph, words that don't grammatically fit, similar words accidentally typed or autocorrected and a CV that cuts out halfway through a page.

Software can help identify mistakes with your spelling or grammar, but people are far better at this and at understanding whether a sentence flows, is easy to understand, and accurately conveys the point you are trying to make.

Another benefit of having a person proofread your work is that they can tell you what your CV is like to read through for the first time. "Are things laid out poorly?", "What impression does the writing give?", "Would you hire me and why?" and "What can be improved?". These are just some of the important questions an unbiased proofreader can answer.

The pitfalls of different file formats

The quick version is this, if you are sending your CV to a person, use a PDF. If you are submitting it to a computer system, use a .doc file, which is a type of Microsoft Word file. You can usually select the file type you want to use when saving a copy of your CV, select either PDF or "Word 97-2004 (. Doc)". Keep a copy of both if you can.

Sometimes it may be tempting to add images, put everything into text boxes or an interesting layout. Unfortunately, a CV that looks beautiful to you, may not look so good for everyone else. Depending on what software you use and what they use, the formatting can become broken.

Recently I saw a CV that looked fine in Microsoft Word, was missing all the contact information in WordPad and when converted into a pdf, appeared as a blank screen. So make sure to check everything before sending anything off. Using PDF is your best bet to keep the formatting of your CV the same, no matter what opens it. PDF also appears more professional than .doc, which is why you should send it to people. However, there are downsides.

Applicant tracking systems (ATS) are used by companies to automatically scan a CV for keywords, or for certain criteria. An ATS cannot read graphics and if you can't highlight the text with your mouse, then it's likely they can't read that too.

Most modern ATS can read both PDF and .doc (word) formats, however, since you probably do not know what system you are dealing with, just use .doc format. Today .docx is the standard Microsoft Word format, however, if you can use .doc you should.

Ready?

So, you should now either have a CV or know what you need to do. Once you have finished it Isme People would be happy to help you with your job search, why not send a copy of your new CV to hello@ismepeople.co.uk and we can arrange further discussion.

As the fastest and easiest way to sell yourself, your CV will prove very useful and the effort you have put into it will pay off. The more you put in, the better your chances. Don't be afraid to send your CV if you don't meet every single piece of criteria on the advert.

We wish you all the best with your search.