

How to create a successful CV

In today's competitive job market, you only have thirty seconds to impress a potential employer with your CV. With many employers now receiving hundreds of applications for each advertised vacancy, how do you know what they are really looking for and how can you make your CV stand out from the crowd?

Simple, professional layout

Your Curriculum Vitae is your marketing pitch and should be presented in a professional, business like format. As with any marketing document, it is important to ensure that the reader can absorb the key points quickly – the quicker they engage, the more likely they are to buy. CVs should be no more than three pages; layout should be simple, concise and easy to read.

Importance of the first page

If the first page of your CV does not capture the attention of an employer, you will not be shortlisted for interview. An employer needs to be able to make an immediate decision as to whether you have the appropriate skills and qualifications to perform the role. Including a profile at the top of your CV, is an effective means of matching your background to employer specification and ensuring that the employer knows that you have all of the essential ingredients to be successful in this job.

Highlight your achievements

CVs should be drafted in an achievement driven format. Employers should be listed in reverse chronological order, with more weight given to your most recent roles. Under each position, briefly outline your responsibilities but place the focus on what you have achieved in each role. If possible, quantify your achievements as this creates a strong impact e.g. "through the introduction of robust controls and procedures, I reduced the debtor days outstanding from 50 to 40 days in the first six months of 2009."

If you are struggling to identify your achievements, try to focus on what made you a valued employee. Were you adept at streamlining processes and procedures or did you find a more efficient way to do something? Were you given the post of "super user" on your IT system and given the responsibility of training staff? This adds personality to your CV and helps create a much stronger impact than simply listing duties and responsibilities.

Review regularly

Many people fall into the trap of simply adding to their CV each time they move job, resulting in CVs becoming too long and too much space being given to early roles. Review your CV on a regular basis. You may even need to consider adopting a different CV layout to take account of the new skills, qualifications and experience gained, to make sure that they are presented in the most effective light.

Edit

Like all good pieces of literature, a Curriculum Vitae needs to go through the hands of a strong editor. Less is more. Only the most relevant information should feature and this will be determined by the specific role you are applying to.

Conclusion

Writing your CV is an art not a science. But one thing is clear; you have to make a connection with an employer in seconds. By carefully choosing what appears on the opening page, placing emphasis on achievements and what made you a valued employee, you can engage the attention of an employer and create that vital strong first impression.

About the Author

Laura McGrath is the owner of *Interview Techniques*, a leading provider of interview coaching services. She has spent the last 15 years in staffing and recruitment and is a regular contributor with *Recruit Ireland* and the *Sunday Business Post*.

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