

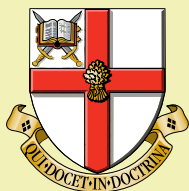
Essential Career Skills

Careers and Employability

Writing a Graduate CV & Covering Letter



Shopping for Success



University of
Chester

Introduction

This booklet is written for students and graduates to help you to create and update your CV, to write an effective covering letter and to write a competent personal statement. This resource is designed to help you get started and should be used alongside other support available from Careers and Employability. Staff will provide specific feedback on how you can enhance your CV and applications further. You are welcome to drop a draft CV, covering letter or personal statement into Careers and Employability or email careers@chester.ac.uk or warrington.careers@chester.ac.uk for us to look at and suggest amendments to you.

The CV

Why do you need a CV?

A CV has become the most popular way for applicants to present relevant information to employers. CVs are still very much used in sectors of employment where speculative applications are welcomed and markets are fluid. Although there are other employment sectors where only application forms are used, the benefits of preparing a CV help you to sell yourself at both the application stage and at interviews.

You will need a CV for the following:

- If you are applying for a part-time job advertised in our Job Shop
- If you are applying for a part-time skills-based placement on our Business Bridge Scheme
- If you are applying for voluntary work
- When you apply for a Work Based Learning Placement in level 5
- When you apply for graduate employment in level 6 and after your course
- If you apply for a postgraduate course

Members of the Careers and Employability team deliver CV workshops during your course, in Level 5 as part of Work Based Learning preparation and in Level 6 through subject departments. Watch out for poster and IBIS postings advertising the sessions!

What is a CV?

As you probably know, the word 'CV' is short for "curriculum vitae", which translates as "stream of life". It is a factual document that presents to an employer your career aspirations, motivation, skills, qualities, qualifications and experience since leaving school. A CV should be continuous and not contain obvious gaps in time. Your CV is more than a dry list of qualifications and previous employers – it is a way of selling yourself. It is a dynamic document which changes and develops as your experience grows throughout university and during your career, and it's never too soon to start.

The benefits of keeping your CV updated

A CV can be a crucial first step in the job application process. Get it wrong and your application will go no further. It is much easier to amend an existing, well prepared CV than to start from scratch, particularly when you're under pressure because you've just seen that dream job advertised. Not all job applications require a CV, but keeping yours up to date means that you have to hand most of the factual information you are likely to need when completing a paper-based or an electronic application form.

The process of preparing your CV allows you to review and reflect on your past positive and negative experiences. It shows you how you have personally and professionally developed over a period of time, enabling you to think about your future direction and identify any areas or skills you wish to develop further. A CV helps you to consolidate your learning and development.

A tool to help – Your E-Portfolio!

Your E-Portfolio is a fantastic electronic personal development planning tool that can help you reflect on your experiences, by asking you searching questions about what you have done, why you have done it and what you have learned from doing it. It allows you to record all your experience whether this is educational, voluntary, social or employment, so at the end of your degree you have a full and updated record of your career to date.

You can choose to share your E-Portfolio with your Personal Academic Tutor (PAT) and Careers Adviser, who are available to discuss your academic and personal development progress. Your PAT will need to see your E-Portfolio at the end of your course, as it will help to inform your academic reference.

Presenting your CV

A CV creates a first impression. It is therefore crucial to present your CV clearly, professionally and in the most appropriate style for the job/sector for which you are applying. Although there are various formats for constructing a CV; most British employers expect the following conventions to be followed:

A CV should be:

- Concise - no more than two sides of A4 (some employers in the Media sector ask for one side of A4).
- Easy to read quickly - word-processed in a clear font such as Arial, Tahoma, Verdana or Times New Roman and in size 10-12 font.
- Presented in black ink on good quality white paper so that it photocopied well and feels good!
- Well set out, using spaces, indent, bold, underline, and bullet points consistently and in a way that aids clarity.
- Constructed so that the content is relevant to the job for which you are applying.

Avoid using coloured paper or ink, photographs or illustrations, or elaborate folders. Quite apart from the photocopying problems, flashy presentation can be assumed to disguise poor content.

Format and Layout

Some employers receive thousands of CVs, so it is important to consider how you will make your CV 'stand out from the crowd'. You may have the best experience and qualifications for the job, but if the information is poorly presented, your CV will not

attract an employer's attention and your attributes will be easily missed. Your choice of format or layout will affect the overall presentation of your CV.

Although there are several formats to use, it is helpful to consider how you could create your own CV layout that best presents you. Creating your own layout will enhance your 'uniqueness', enabling your CV to 'stand out' from other standardised CV formats.

The following layouts are commonly applied:

- Chronological – where the CV presents educational history first. This layout can be helpful if you have little relevant experience, as it prioritises your qualifications.
- Skills-Based – where specific and/or transferable skills developed over time through paid or voluntary experience are prioritised. This layout can be helpful if you are seeking a career change or if you have entered education later in life.
- Experience-Based – where relevant experience is prioritised. This layout can be helpful if you are seeking career advancement or applying for promotion.

Whichever format you choose, there is no need to begin with *Curriculum Vitae*, as it is obvious that it is a CV, enabling you to free up precious space.

What are Employers looking for in a CV?

Employers are not just looking to recruit a person who meets the minimum criteria for the job, they are looking for someone who can add value to their business, bring new ideas and contribute to their organisation's service or operation. Consequently, a CV has not only to present skills, capabilities and qualities; but it must convey enthusiasm and a positive outlook. Although, communicating attitudes can be tricky, the following suggestions may help you:

- Think about how you can demonstrate your interest or passion for the job/sector you are entering. Have you sought to gain experience in the area? Have you a thorough knowledge of the job/sector you are entering gained

through research or networking? Are you aware of the opportunities and challenges faced by the organisation? Have you produced or originated work relevant to the sector on either a paid or voluntary basis and can this be evidenced in a portfolio, electronically or in another format?

- Reflect on what you can bring to the organisation. Are you really interested in working for the organisation? Do you share the same ethos as and values of the organisation? Does your past/present experience reflect similar outlooks and if not how will you explain the change?
- Consider your past experiences. Do they demonstrate your positive attitude, willingness to learn or a 'can-do approach'?

Whichever CV layout you are considering to use, it is important to remember to present and demonstrate your skills and attributes. Employers are looking to see firstly, if you can do the job; secondly whether you would like to do the job (assessing you motivation and commitment); and thirdly, whether you will integrate into the team and get along with people. Try to consider the employer's perspective as it will help you tailor your application.

Demonstrating your Skills and Attributes

Some skills and attributes will be specific to the job you are applying for, whilst many skills will be transferable, sometimes regarded as 'employability skills'. Some examples of employability skills include:

- Team-working
- Communication (oral and written)
- Planning and organising
- Initiative
- Decision-making
- Problem-solving
- Computer/IT competence

For more information about the skills employers want see www.prospects.ac.uk.

It is important to read and analyse the job advertisement, job description and person specification before applying for a job, so that you can tailor your CV accordingly. These documents (known as 'job particulars') are usually included in the information the employer supplies to applicants about the job. Occasionally however, the only information you have is the job advertisement and you should analyse it carefully to identify the key skills and experiences being sought by the employer.

Consider the following job advertisement and think about how you could sell yourself for this job.

PR Graduate opportunities...

XXX is a highly focused technology PR and marketing agency based in Surbiton. Established in 1990, it continues to grow and as a result is looking for motivated, enthusiastic graduates who want to break into a PR career in our lively, fun, (and often hectic) expanding business.

The right people can expect to receive the training and support that will develop their skills and motivation to gain a firm foothold in the PR world. And there are great prospects here if you have the drive and determination to succeed and a keen interest in technology.

Fancy a challenge? Please email your CV and a covering letter telling us your salary expectations and why you are interested in a career with us.

Contact details at www.xxx.co.uk

In replying to this advertisement, your CV will need to provide evidence that you meet the person specification, i.e. that you are:

- a graduate
- motivated and enthusiastic
- seeking a career in PR
- interested in further training
- interested in and knowledgeable about technology
- knowledgeable enough about PR to have an understanding of what will be expected of you, i.e. the job description.

So, when preparing your CV think about examples of situations where you have used or developed the skills stated in the job particulars. Examples can be academic, social, work-related, extra-curricular activities, voluntary experience, home/family life or leisure activities.

Now for the individual headings in your CV.

Contact details

Your CV should start with your name, home address (and term-time address if applicable), telephone number, mobile phone number and email address at the top. Highlight your name in bold, perhaps enlarging the font to help your CV 'stand out'. Ensure that you have an appropriate message on your answer phone and an appropriate email address with which to correspond to employers i.e. do not have an answer phone message which says "Hi babe, its juicy Luc here, leave a message if you want and I'll get back to you when I have a mo..!" Try to convey a professional image at all times! It is not necessary to include your date of birth or your marital status. If you need a work permit, you could include your nationality.

Career or Personal Profile

This is a short, focused and positive statement, written in the first person at the beginning of a CV informing the employer of your key attributes and skills; including your career aspirations. Your profile will be read first thereby, providing a 'taster' of your CV, creating a first impression. Imagine the employer only has time to read the profiles on all CVs, what message or impression do you wish to convey? Ensure that it ties in with your covering letter.

Example: "A final year undergraduate of Business Studies with German, now seeking a graduate training programme with a company with European links where I can apply the skills and knowledge gained in my degree".

Note: there are some categories of employer e.g. law firms, who dislike Career Profiles, so seek further advice from Careers and Employability.

Education and Qualifications

This section needs to be written in reverse chronological order, i.e. with your most recent course or qualification first. Include dates of study, the institution attended (note the title is University of Chester) and the qualification(s) obtained, including details of any relevant modules studied and the title of your dissertation. Try to explain what you have studied simply in plain English and briefly, to help an employer understand, preventing any misunderstanding. Your current degree course should be written in the way the example shows below:

BSc (Hons) Biology and Psychology 2:2 (predicted)

If you do not know your predicted grade, leave it out altogether.

Also include your secondary school. List your A level subjects, BTEC, Access, GNVQs (or equivalent) that you have passed including grades; followed by your GCSE subjects and grades (C and above) and any other substantial qualifications you have achieved. A-Levels and GCSEs (or equivalent) should be listed with the best grade first. It is not necessary to include your UCAS points.

Short courses and certificates such as First Aid, Life Saver, sports coaching, language certificates and IT qualifications etc... could be included here if they relate to your profession or career; or if not, they could be included later on in your CV perhaps under the heading of "Skills and Achievements".

Employment Experience

This section lists your experience. You can subdivide this section in the following ways:

- Relevant experience (related to your career direction)
- Other experience (unrelated experience)

You can include both paid and voluntary employment experience, but ensure that you clearly state whether your role was paid/unpaid or full-time/part-time/temporary/casual. Alternatively, if you prefer you could include a section in your CV which just lists voluntary experience. Remember to always include your Work Based Learning placement or Experiential Learning if it was workplace-based.

It is important to think about the skills developed during your employment that are relevant for the job for which you are applying. As well as including the name of the

organisation for which you have worked and the duration, always include a job title (or if absent, a brief description of your role). Try to use positive words (see page 13) such as “achievements” or “responsibilities” rather than “duties”, mentioning the key areas rather than small daily tasks.

If you have worked in a routine role, you may feel this experience is hard to ‘sell’ to an employer. If you feel this is the case, try to think about using words that could enhance and demonstrate your skill development. Here are a few examples to help. You could replace the following “duties”:

- “serving customers” with “customer service”
- “filing, photocopying and typing” with “office administration”
- “stacking shelves” with “managing stock and merchandise display”

Reflect on the situations in which you have been involved and mention some of the key skills you have developed to include when describing your role.

To help you in this process think about the example of “dealing with people”. What skills have you developed when encountering people in different situations? You may have used the following skills: building rapport, negotiation, persuasion, advising, conflict management, selling, comforting etc. Identify the skills most relevant to the job for which you are applying and incorporate them when describing previous job roles. Alternatively, you could include these skills in a “Skills and Achievements” section of your CV. Think in particular about other “transferable skills” you have developed which could be applied in a graduate job – communication, planning and organising, record keeping. There’s no such thing as irrelevant work experience!

If you are changing your career or have held a variety of jobs, you could summarise this experience as follows:

“1992-1998 – Held a variety of part-time/full-time jobs in retail, catering, finance”

You could include a few examples of the names of organisations for which you have worked as well.

If you have spent time at home looking after dependents, you can summarise this as follows:

1992 – 1998 Bringing up my family

You may find that you can include activities during this time in your Skills and Achievements section (see below) if you have developed work-related skills in this way.

If you feel that you have very limited experience to offer, speak to a member of the Careers and Employability Team about our Business Bridge projects with local employers, and look at part-time jobs in the Job Shop. You could also think about voluntary work - Student Development in Student Support and Guidance can provide you with information about volunteering opportunities on campus and in the local community.

Skills and Achievements

This is a much more positive heading than “other information” and enables you to draw attention to other certificates, short courses, prizes, awards and driving licence etc. As already mentioned you could include a summary of your transferable or employability skills in this section if you prefer not to mention them in the “Employment Experience” section. Try to quantify your work achievements, explaining the significance of the outcome, for example, instead of saying “dealt with customer complaints” you could say “dealt with 80 customer complaints on a daily basis, resolving 95% complaints successfully informally”. Pose the following questions when you are considering your work achievements:

- What new ideas have I contributed to the organisation?
- How have I saved the organisation time?
- Where have I increased sales, revenue, profits?
- How have I reduced costs?
- How have I made a difference to the organisation, client or customer?

You could also include your interests and extra curricular activities. Avoid using the word “hobbies”, as this portrays a casual communication style. When mentioning your interests again think about the skills and experiences you are developing and

how they could be useful in your career. Consider the image you are presenting when expressing your interests and what to include, for example, what message are you conveying when you say “I enjoy socialising with friends”? Although, “socialising” may convey that a person is friendly, approachable and has good communication skills; most of us enjoying socialising and therefore it doesn’t add any extra information for an employer. Also, be aware of any potential conflict of interests between your external interests and the job for which you are applying.

If you are in your first year and thinking about developing your interests whilst at university, now is the time to try something new and join a club, society, learn a craft or another skill.

Published Work

This section includes details about any work that you may have had published or produced. Work could include articles/photos printed in newspapers, websites or web pages uploaded, academic journal articles, DVDs, artwork exhibited, CDs, show reels. Remember (if appropriate) to include hardcopies in a portfolio to take to interview.

References

You need two referees. One must be an academic referee, who must be your PAT (Personal Academic Tutor) and the other should be an employment referee, from your previous or current employer or Work Based Learning supervisor. If you are not able to identify an employment referee, as a last resort you could use a character referee, what is known as a “person of good standing”, perhaps a family friend who has a responsible job and who knows you well enough to write about you. Never choose a relative. Ensure that you provide the name, job title, postal address, (email address if applicable) and contact phone number. It is always courteous to ask referees if they are prepared to be a referee; they are unlikely to refuse! You need only ask them once, not each time you apply for a job.

Action words for use in your CV

accelerated	demonstrate	introduced	reported
accomplished	designed	invented	resolved
achieved	determined	invested	restricted
activated	developed	investigated	reviewed
acquired	devised	launched	revised
addressed	directed	led	revitalised
administered	discharged	lightened	saved
advised	disposed	managed	scheduled
amplified	distributed	maintained	selected
analysed	diversified	measured	set up
anticipated	documented	merged	shaped
applied	doubled	minimised	simplified
appraised	edited	modernised	solved
appropriate	effected	monitored	specified
approved	eliminated	observed	staffed
arranged	enacted	obtained	standardised
assessed	enforced	operated	started
assimilated	engaged	organised	stimulated
augmented	enlarged	originated	streamlined
authorised	established	performed	strengthened
averted	estimated	persuaded	stretched
avoided	evaluated	pioneered	structured
bought	executed	planned	studied
built	expanded	positioned	succeeded
centralised	expedited	predicted	surpassed
collaborated	extracted	prepared	supported
combined	familiarised	presented	superseded
compiled	forecasted	prevented	supervised
completed	formed	processed	surveyed
composed	formulated	procured	taught
computed	generated	produced	terminated
conceived	guided	programmed	tested
concluded	implemented	promoted	tightened
condensed	improved	proposed	trained
conducted	improvised	proved	translated
consolidated	inaugurated	provided	transferred
contracted	incorporated	published	treated
controlled	increased	purchased	trimmed
converted	initiated	recommended	tripled
corrected	inspired	redesigned	uncovered
counselled	installed	reduced	unified
created	instigated	recruited	unravelling
cultivated	instructed	regulated	utilised
decentralised	insured	regulated	vitalised
decreased	integrated	rejected	wrote
defined	interpreted	renegotiated	
delivered	intervened	reorganised	

Sending your CV by Post

If you are sending your CV by post you need to enclose a covering letter with your CV. A CV without an accompanying letter of application almost guarantees rejection. Avoid bending your CV and letter, so send your documents in an A4 (preferably) hard backed white envelope.

Sending your CV by Email

It is now common practice to send a CV and covering letter by email. In this case, the covering letter should form the body of the email and the CV should be an attachment. It is important to maintain the formality of a written letter and not to use a more casual style often used in emails.

Ensure that your documents can be read by the organisation and that it complies with any electronic specification required. If you are emailing from your hotmail account, check that the organisation can receive this email as some email accounts are not recognised and are rejected or 'junked' by electronic security systems. Some security systems and employers may delete incoming mail if the title or message in the subject line is questionable, so type a subject line that is easily recognisable that it is in response to a job advertisement or application. Also, check in which format the organisation would like to receive any attached documents. Beware that some formatting tools may effect electronic transmission. You could send yourself a trial email first and cc yourself into the final email you send to the organisation.

The Covering Letter

The purpose of a covering letter is to distil from your CV – which should contain everything that is good about you – the very specific attributes (skills, qualities, abilities, experience, training etc.) that qualify you to be considered for appointment to the job in question. The letter should 'add value' rather than duplicate what you have already mentioned in your CV. It should highlight key areas and skills, expanding on relevant points as necessary. Your letter should also be tailored to the role and organization to which you are applying.

Your first contact with an employer by letter might be in one of the following ways:

1. Letter requesting an application form
2. Letter of application accompanying a CV for an advertised post
3. Letter of application (CV not specially requested)
4. Letter of application accompanying an application form
5. Speculative letter of application accompanying a CV

A good first impression is of vital importance in all of the above examples, so your letter should be clear and well presented.

In example 1, a letter requesting an application form should be brief and courteous – save your detailed information for the application form itself. Similarly, a letter accompanying a completed form (example 4) should be brief, unless the form specifically invites you to expand on your application in a covering letter.

Whether you are making speculative applications or applying for an advertised position the covering letter must:

- **Attract** the recruiter's attention - Avoid using fluorescent or unusual stationery, typefaces or layout.
- Structure the letter in a **formal business format**.
- Communicate in a **professional style**.
- Raise **interest** by being positive and by showing what you can do (for a new employer).
- Create a **desire** in the recruiter – for a meeting with you.
- Stimulate **action** by the recruiter.
- Convey **enthusiasm**.

Structure and Layout

There is no single correct way of laying out a letter. However, whichever style you choose, there are some basic rules you should follow.

Always include:

- Your address, postcode and telephone number
- The date
- Any reference which you have been asked to quote
- The name and address of the recipient including postcode. If at all possible, find out who you are writing to. If you know their name, use it and finish the letter with “Yours sincerely”. As a very last resort use “Dear Sir/Madam” and finish with “Yours faithfully”.

One example of a layout structure for a covering letter is as follows (also see example of letter on page 19):

<i>Heading or letterhead, your contact details</i>	
<i>Reference</i>	<i>Contact details of recipient</i>
<i>Date</i>	
<i>Dear.....</i>	
<i>First paragraph</i>	
<i>Middle paragraph(s)</i>	
<i>Final paragraph</i>	
<i>Complimentary close</i>	
<i>Legible signature and name under your signature</i>	
<i>Note of enclosures</i>	

- The golden rule of job-related correspondence is **keep it short and to the point** – to the recruiter’s point that is. Speculative letters of application and requests for further information should be confined to a single page of A4 text. Application letters should not extend much beyond one and a half pages. Ideally, job-related correspondence should be word-processed unless the recruiter expressly requests a handwritten format.

- If the letter is accompanying your CV, use the same good quality white A4 paper. Good quality white paper is preferable to coloured paper unless you are applying for a creative job.
- Send the letter of application together with your CV or application form unfolded in a large/A4 envelope.

Content – Beginning the Letter

The content of the covering letter will differ according to its purpose. If you are applying for a job in response to an advertisement your first paragraph should mention how you became aware of the vacancy/advertisement. (Employers are keen to know which form of advertising produces the best results). If you are making a speculative application, your first paragraph should explain your enquiry. Whichever situation you are approaching, it is important to research the organisation and sector to which you are applying and understand the role to which you may be employed.

Researching the Organisation and Sector

You can research an organisation in the following ways:

- Internet search
- Published materials i.e. Annual Reports, Business Plans, promotional materials
- Press reports and newspaper articles
- Professional bodies
- Professional or trade journals
- Personal visits
- Networking and contacts in the sector
- Job particulars i.e. job description and person specification

Consider the following factors and themes that might have an impact:

- **PESTLC** – Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal and Competition
- **Opportunities** and **Threats**
- **Key Players**
- **Trends**
- **Current Issues** (local, regional, national and international)

- **Current Affairs**

Note: not all the above factors will be relevant for your organisation or sector.

Using Person Specifications

The Person Specification details the criteria by which an employer will be assessing candidates. The criteria specify the requirements of the role-holder, comprising qualifications, experience, skills, personal qualities and other attributes. Some criteria will be essential, whilst other criteria will be considered desirable. You need to meet all essential criteria, but partially meeting the desirable criteria is acceptable as long as you state your willingness to learn, train or develop. A useful way to prepare your covering letter is to draft how you match each of the criteria with examples of evidence. Sometimes it can be useful to group together related skills such as oral and written communication, time management and organisational skills demonstrating your claim with evidence. A variety of areas in your life can provide examples of evidence including: academic, employment, personal/social, leisure and interests. Think about your transferable skills and provide a range of examples of why you can do something. Avoid saying “I have good IT skills”, give evidence to prove this. The person specification describes the employer’s ideal candidate and covering letter should show how closely you resemble that ideal candidate.

The beginning of the letter should also briefly refer to your qualification for the most important specific requirements of the job and your expression of interest.

Content – Main Body

First draw attention to the attached papers. Then **explain why you have applied to that particular organisation** – this is where you need to mention what has attracted you to the job and organisation and demonstrate that you have researched the organisation. **Explain why the employer should be interested in you** – then again using your research, set out your skills, abilities and experiences that meet the remaining requirements of the advertised job. Highlight any specific selling points, comprising relevant work experience, related interests and skills (especially if these are not fully covered elsewhere) and relevant aspects of your course. It is not

appropriate to add any further information which should have been included as part of the application form or CV.

Content – Ending the Letter

Summarise your suitability for the job and express the view that you are looking forward to hearing from them, avoiding saying when. Mention any dates on which you will be unavailable. End the letter on an optimistic note. Sign your letter in the usual way and print or type your full name underneath. Employers will not look kindly on a letter if they cannot read the name of the person who sent it.

Example of a letter of application accompanying a CV

Mr G Brown
HR Officer
Summerbee and Partners
43 Kippax Street
Liverpool
L1 3YH

14 Maine Road
Manchester
M14 4GF

14 April 2007

Dear Mr Brown

I am writing in response to your recent advertisement in "*Prospects Today*" for a trainee market research analyst. I am in the final year of a four-year degree course in International Marketing with French at the University of Anytown and will graduate in June.

My CV outlines my education and experience but I would particularly draw your attention to my language skills and market research experience, which I hope would be an asset to an international firm like Summerbee and Partners. During my degree I have chosen options in both Marketing and Market Research and, in my final year, I undertook an ambitious and demanding research project looking at the differences between British and French consumers' buying habits. This involved travel, interviews, data collection and analysis: an important introduction to some of the key features of a career in market research. My vacation job, with Skellett and Raymond, confirmed my commitment to this career and gave me additional practical experience.

As well as having relevant knowledge and experience, I believe I also possess the personal qualities that you ask for in your advertisement. I have shown imagination and creativity, especially when trying to stimulate bored French business executives and sell canoeing to sceptical students. I am a good communicator and have seized every opportunity to give presentations both inside and outside university. I have the analytical skills you seek, demonstrated by a good Maths A level, relevant undergraduate courses and a demanding and responsible vacation job. Finally, I have shown myself to be motivated by business and want to be part of a successful international organisation.

To learn more about Market Research, I have attended careers fairs, talked to practitioners and read recruitment brochures. I first learnt of Summerbees at an evening presentation at UMIST and was impressed with the enthusiasm of the staff I met. But what made me determined to apply was your absolute commitment to training and development, which, as I learnt from my degree, are the prerequisites of a growing business.

I am available for employment in July this year and I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Georgia Symons

Enc

The Personal Statement

When completing an application form, you may be asked “why you think you are suitable for the job?” or “please provide any extra information about yourself that you feel would be of relevance to the job”. This is your personal statement, an opportunity to sell yourself on an application form and your chance to convince employers why you are the best person for the job. It is a narrative, explaining how your attributes, activities and interests best match the job requirements. There may be a restriction on space and a word limitation, so it is important to structure and focus your response communicating concisely. The personal statement should always be word processed. If the application form asks you to provide a personal statement on a separate sheet, provide one or a maximum of two sides of A4.

General Guidelines

- Avoid repeating information that you have already written elsewhere on the application form.
- Always write a personal statement specifically for the job to which you are applying. Avoid using a standard template. Make sure whoever will read it knows you are interested in that particular job.
- Vary the beginning of each paragraph, and don't use clichéd overused sentences such as “I have always wanted to...”
- Show your motivation to do the job, supported by evidence of things that you have done.
- You can write in an essay style or in bullet points.

Check, Check and Check Again!

Failure to proof-read can mean the difference between being selected for interview and not. Typos, incorrect spelling and punctuation will prevent you from progressing further through the selection process. Remember your CV demonstrates the following skills and abilities to an employer: written communication, attention to detail, accuracy and conscientiousness. So it is crucial to take time to read your CV

and if necessary ask a friend or a member of the Careers and Employability team to check it through with you.

Avoid using lots of “I”s at the beginning of sentences, trying to structure your prose in a flowing style. Avoid humour at all costs, ensuring your vocabulary is professional and not casual or familiar. Also, avoid conveying negative messages. Think how you can turn any past negative experiences into positive learning outcomes, always expressing yourself positively. Read through your CV and letter, asking the following questions:

- Is it too verbose?
- Have I repeated myself?
- Can I edit it to be more concise?
- Are any points ambiguous?
- Could I be more precise and focused?
- What messages am I conveying?
- Is it relevant and appropriate?
- Is it positive?

Check your CV for the following:

- Spelling (never use ‘text speak’!)
- Grammar
- Punctuation
- Writing numbers in figures, unless under ten.
- Capital letters – avoid applying capital letters to every noun.
- Sentence structure – is your written expression coherent and concise?
- Professional language – avoid using informal language, slang, abbreviations or jargon.
- Positive Action words (see page 13) – have you conveyed a positive, capable approach?
- White space – ensuring it your CV is not overcrowded and easy to read.

If you wish to seek further support or advice on written communication, spelling, punctuation and grammar please see Learning Support Services.

Further Sources of Information

AGCAS Booklet: Applications, CVs and Covering Letters

Alec website, provides advice on CVs and interviews: www.alec.co.uk

Prospects website <http://www.prospects.ac.uk>

Reference books available in Careers and Employability.



This document is available in alternative formats upon request. Please contact Careers and Employability on (Chester) 01244 513066 or (Warrington) 01925 534235 or email careers@chester.ac.uk or warrington.careers@chester.ac.uk

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