

Basics of Writing a CV

A CV presents your unique combination of qualifications, experience, skills and interests to an employer. It is updated regularly to reflect what you have to offer.

Put yourself in the shoes of the employer. If you were advertising a job and received 50 CVs, which ones would appeal to you? Would it be the five-page CV containing information with little relevance to the job? Would you have the patience to make sense of a messy or badly structured CV? Consider how refreshing it would be to come across a focused, concise, clear CV when wading through a large number of applications.

You might feel that you don't have enough information to put on a CV. However, once you make a start you will be surprised by how much you have actually done, and you can add to this as you gain more experience.

Employers are looking for CVs that:

- supply information relevant to the job. Recruiters for semester jobs do not usually want or need to know the specific details of the course you are studying or every club and society that you have joined
- summarise your educational qualifications, your work experience, skills and interests and make you stand out as an individual

If you have never been in paid employment a one page CV will provide all the details required by the employer. Even if you have lots of experience, your CV should not be more than two pages long.

What information do I include on my CV?

Your **name** and **contact details** (address, telephone number, email address) should be clearly displayed at the top of the CV.

Your **Education** - use **reverse chronological order** starting with your current university studies and going back as far as secondary school.

Remember to:

- name the degree you are studying – you can briefly list main subjects but there is no need to go into more detail for semester jobs
- list your Higher or 'A' level results and, if relevant, your Standard grade results

When presenting your **Work Experience/Employment** use **reverse chronological order** starting with your present or most recent employment.

For example:

- Name of employer - no need to put the full address but state the location (e.g. Edinburgh).
- Start/finish dates - no need to give precise dates, the month and year will be fine. For vacation jobs you can say 'summer' + relevant year (e.g. 'Summer 2004').
- Your job title and a **brief description** of your main duties.

There is no need to list every job you have done. List jobs which you held for a reasonable length of time or that you feel are particularly relevant to your application. If you have had lots of short-term temporary jobs, you can group these together, for example, *'Worked in a variety of temporary jobs which have included ...'*

Most employers are also interested in the **skills** you have gained from your studies or leisure pursuits, and your interests. These might include:

- IT skills and software packages used
- driving licence if it's relevant to the job
- languages spoken
- positions of responsibility held while at university or school
- interests and hobbies, as well as sports activities and team events
- awards, prizes and scholarships, academic related and outside of education

Employers expect to be provided with names of **referees**. You can include names and contact details for two referees or, if you prefer, you can state that references will be made available on request. Usually at least one referee will be a recent or present employer but if this is not possible ask your Director of Studies or a course tutor if they will provide a reference for you. Never provide referees' details without asking their permission first.

Golden Rules for CVs:

- Employers generally need to know about your education background, your work experience (paid or unpaid), your skills and your interests.
- Your CV is usually the first impression an employer has of you so it should be laid out attractively with close attention to spelling and grammar.
- Most student employers do not want to be given a detailed account of your academic achievements and specific components of your degree. They are more interested in any work experience you have and the skills you could bring to the post.
- If you have little or no work experience, don't panic! Highlight your skills by including other activities and achievements.
- Ask someone to read it and give you some feedback.

Basics of Writing a Covering Letter

A covering letter should always be sent with your CV or application form unless an employer specifically instructs you not to send one. Your letter is the first document the employer will see and should catch their interest so that he/she will invite you to an interview.

Your letter should not be more than one page of good quality A4 paper. Use a business letter format with your name and address and the date at the top right hand side and the employer's name and address at the top left hand side. If possible, address the letter to a named person.

Your covering letter will:

- introduce you, say which job you are applying for and where you saw it advertised
- explain why the job interests you and why you want to work for this employer
- explain why you are a good candidate for the job, highlighting areas on your CV that are particularly relevant to this application
- close in an upbeat, positive tone
- **support** your CV rather than **repeat** it

Pay close attention to grammar by:

- signing off with 'Yours sincerely' if you have the name of the person who is recruiting
- signing off with 'Yours faithfully' if you do not have a named person
- using Mr, Mrs or Ms, never the person's first name
- typing your name at the bottom of the letter and signing it

Checklist for covering letters:

Do:

- address it to the most appropriate person
- let the language used reflect your enthusiasm
- ensure your letter supports rather than repeats your CV
- ask someone (a Careers Adviser, friend, relative) to read over it

Don't:

- send the letter without checking for spelling and grammatical errors
- address it Dear Sir / Madam if you know the name of the recruiter
- underestimate the potential for a good letter to make a positive impact

Example covering letter and CV for part-time semester work

Overleaf are examples of a letter and CV for a part-time semester job.