



University of the
Highlands and Islands
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CVs

CVs

'CV' stands for 'curriculum vitae' and literally means 'the path of your life'. The purpose of a CV is to summarise all your main educational and work experience so that an employer can decide whether or not to employ you.

How to use a CV

- **As an aide-memoire:** you may choose to keep a very basic version of your CV for yourself. It can be useful to have a summary of all your experience and education in one place.
- **Uploading to job-sites:** You may upload your CV to a jobs website to let employers search for and find your details. However, you should use websites like this cautiously – make sure you check the credentials of sites to make sure that your information will be used in a way that you're happy with, and don't rely on these sites as your only method of job-search.
- **To apply for a specific job:** Some jobs ask you to 'apply in writing', this normally means sending a CV and covering letter.
- **As supporting information for a job application:** Sometimes if you apply for a job using an application form you can include a CV as supporting information alongside an application form – however, it is best to read the application information carefully as some jobs specifically ask you *not* to send a CV.
- **As part of a 'speculative application':** If you identify a company that you would like to work for, but that isn't currently advertising any vacancies then you may send out a speculative application. The application normally consists of sending in a CV and covering letter 'speculatively' to express an interest in working for the company in the future or to enquire about work experience or placements.
- **To seal a job** – some jobs are gained through networking and informal interviews – this commonly happens in contract, self employed and voluntary work, although it can happen in other areas too. As a way of 'sealing the deal' an employer may ask you to send a CV.

How to write a CV – Starting out

Your CV should contain: your personal details, details of your education, your work experience and your referees. These are normally split up into different sections, although how you lay out these sections is up to you. CVs can also contain other, optional, sections such as a skills or achievements section, a hobbies or interests section and other specialist sections.

The rest of this guide will introduce you to the key and optional sections of a CV and provide you with some guidance in terms of what to include. However there are some things that are useful to bear in mind before you start writing your CV:

- **Keep it short and easy to read:** a CV should be printed on white or cream A4 paper and be no longer than two sides long. Use of headings, bold and italic fonts and bullet points can help to split up the text and make it easier to read. Avoid anything that is overly fussy such as unusual fonts or overly distracting such as brightly coloured fonts or styles.
- **Look at templates and examples:** this can help you get a sense of different kinds of CVs and what kind of CV would suit you best.
- **Make it your own:** although CV templates can provide a good starting point, it is also recommended that you make a CV your own – you can choose exactly what sections to include and what titles to give them. Subtle design including the kind of font you use, use of bold and italic, style of underline, style of bullet points can help to differentiate your CV from others.
- **Target your CV to the job.** *Always* check what an employer is looking for. Write a CV with this in mind. *Never* send a ‘general’ CV – employers want to see why you are the right person for them, and this involves editing and rewriting your CV to match the requirements of the job or employer. You can do this through three steps:
 - **Step one:** identify what the requirements are for the job. Many application packs include a ‘person specification’ – this is a list of skills and attributes that you *have* to possess or are *desirable* to possess in order to get the job. If this is provided you *must* make sure that you show evidence that you meet each one of the essential criteria at some point in your CV. If there isn’t a person specification you should go through the job advert and information and underline any skills, experience and qualities that are asked for.
 - **Step two:** Once you’ve identified the skills, experience and qualities you need to demonstrate, make reference to these throughout your CV. Think about the wording you’re using and the ordering of information in your CV. For example, one key decision is whether to list your education or your employment first in your CV. This will depend on how relevant your education is for the job you are applying for and how long ago you completed your education.
 - **Step three** after you’ve written a first draft of your CV go back through and check that you have included enough information or detail on your relevant experience, knowledge and skills.

Key Sections

1. Personal Details

Your CV should contain your full name (but you don't need to include middle names), address and contact details (telephone numbers and email address). It is conventional to put these at the top of your CV, with your name in large or bold lettering to act as a title.

Some tips:

- Use your name as the heading of the document. Don't put 'CV' or 'Curriculum Vitae' as a title – it should be obvious what it is
- You don't need to include date of birth, marital status, gender or nationality on your CV.
- You shouldn't add a photo to your CV
- Make sure you use an email address you regularly check and phone numbers that are current.
- Make sure your email address is 'professional' in tone. Addresses such as 'drunkard@...' or 'partygirl223@...' should be avoided. Your name or a variant on it is the best kind of address.

<p>Miriam Jones</p> <p>13 The Park Highland Town IV1 1HT</p> <p>Miriam.jones@yahoo.co.uk 01463 272727 or 07880328675</p>

2. Education

Your CV should contain an 'education' section where you list all your qualifications by title, educational institution and grade (if applicable). You should put these in date order starting with the most recent qualification first. Exactly how you lay out the section depends on personal preference. The examples here are examples only, you should try out different layouts and styles to find the one that suits you!

<i>Education</i>		
BA (Hons) Child and Youth Studies, 2:1	University of the Highlands and Islands	2010
Higher English (B)	Forres High School	2002
Higher History (C)	Forres High School	2002

If your studies are relevant to the job you are applying for you may wish to put further details or achievements under the qualification title.

2010 University of the Highlands and Islands

BA (Hons) Child and Youth Studies (2:1)

- Modules in: child development, childhood practice, children's rights.
- Dissertation into the importance of outdoors play in social development of the child

Your education section normally only includes details of longer qualification courses. If you have also completed a number of short courses, or certificate courses then you may wish to include a 'Further Training' section underneath your 'Education' section. In this section you would list your courses by title, date and training provider

Further Training

Gaelic Awareness (one day training)	2010	University of the Highlands and Islands
Basic First Aid Certificate	2009	Orkney College

Some tips:

- You can lay out this section in different ways (three different examples are given above) but make sure that it is clear, easy to read, starts with your most recent qualification and contains all the required information: course title, date and training provider
- Include any qualifications you are currently studying for, but instead of the date of completion put a phrase like 'due for completion in....'
- It is normal to include details of school qualifications, however, if you have got quite a number of qualifications you can summarise your school qualifications such as: 'three Highers at grades A-C in Physics, Chemistry and Maths' or 'eight standard grades'

3. Work experience

Your CV should contain an 'employment' section where you list all your employment by date order (starting with the most recent first).

Employment

Youth Worker	Moray Council, Elgin	Aug 2004-Aug 2007
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Supporting a mixed group of young people at a community youth club</i> • <i>Designing engaging activities and developing resources</i> • <i>Managing challenging behaviour</i> 		

If you haven't had much employment experience but have had some voluntary work or work experience you can title this section 'work experience' and include details of both your employment and your unpaid work. Alternatively you could include two separate sections 'employment' and 'work experience'.

Work Experience

Aug 05-Sep 07

Suzie's Shoes, Inverness
Retail Assistant

Serving and assisting customers in a busy retail outlet, dealing with complaints, cash handling, maintaining window displays, cleaning and maintenance of the shop.

Some tips:

- How you lay out this section depends on your personal preferences, but make sure that you include the key details: dates, employer, location and job title for each job. You don't need to give the full address of an employer.
- If you didn't have a formal job title then make one up yourself that explains your role, for example 'general assistant'. If you have had a period in your life where you did lots of similar kinds of work you can sometimes group these together under one title e.g. 'various temporary contracts in the hospitality industry'.
- It is optional, but normal to also include some information about your responsibilities or your duties. However, if you have had a lot of jobs you don't need to list duties for all of them. Jobs you had more than five or ten years ago, or less relevant jobs with a self-explanatory job title may be listed by title, employer and date only.
- When you list duties and responsibilities target these to the job for which you're applying. This involves selecting the most relevant responsibilities, wording them appropriately and putting the most relevant responsibilities first in the list. So, if you're applying for work as a benefits adviser and you had retail experience you may choose to mention 'customer service' and 'handling complaints with care' rather than 'laying out shop displays' – this is a duty you might emphasise if you were going for a job as a designer.
- Avoid 'gaps' in your history – if you took time out to raise a family, for education or for another purpose then mark this in your employment record. Employers would rather see that you were doing something than see a 'gap' in your history.

4. References

If you are using the CV to apply for a specific job then you should normally give the names and addresses of two referees. One of these would usually be your current or previous employer (or this could be a tutor if you've just left college or University). You should have spoken to the people who you name and make sure they are happy to be your referee. If you are applying speculatively then you may wish to leave details of your referees off the CV and simply put the line 'References available on request'

Optional Sections

Depending on your personal preferences and how you want to use your CV you may also choose to add one or more special sections including: a summary or personal profile; skills or achievements; hobbies or interests; or specialist sections.

5. Summary, Aim, or Personal Profile

Many CVs contain a short paragraph towards the top of the document outlining your experience, skills and qualities and your career aim. This can be helpful to introduce your CV and should 'hook' the employer in and encourage them to read on. Your summary can be one line long:

'I am an experienced... (IT professional, teacher, manager etc)... with a strong background in... (people management, software systems, various support roles etc)... Looking for work in... (a further education setting, software development etc)'

'I have just graduated from... (an HNC in... a degree in...) during which time I developed strong background knowledge in.... and excellent skills in.... and I am keen to find work in ...'

Or your summary can be a longer paragraph, although as a guide this shouldn't be more than 3-4 sentences long. Your aim is to highlight your key relevant experience and skills for the job, and to express enthusiasm and interest in the job for which you are applying.

Some tips:

- Do keep the tone positive and enthusiastic
- Do mention your key skills. Choose skills that you genuinely feel you possess (and can evidence from your education and employment) and skills that set you apart from other applicants. Generic skills like 'time keeping', 'communication' and 'personal presentation' are unlikely to set you apart from other applicants, whereas 'customer service', 'sales' and 'project management' are more specific skills.
- Avoid sounding over-confident or arrogant – use 'always' and '100%' with care, in reality none of us is ever 'always' anything. Also treat 'excellent' and 'first class' and other phrases with care. It is better to say what skills you have and give evidence for these than to use big words – so 'a consummate professional with excellent management skills' says less than 'five years management experience leading a small sales team to meet weekly sales targets' or 'a strong understanding of a range of business and management functions including accounts, human resources and project management from my studies on my BA Business and Management'.

- It is conventional to keep your job aim generic sounding, and avoid referring to the job or company you are applying for by name. In most instances you would send a CV with a cover letter or cover email, and this is where you would address a specific company and emphasise your interest in them. In your CV try to describe the kind of work or the kind of organisation you are interested in instead of naming an individual company – ‘looking for a role in student support or guidance’ or ‘looking for work in a software development setting’.

6. Skills or Achievements

Some people choose to have a skills or an achievements section on their CV. These sections would normally come after the personal profile section. They can work very well if you are applying for a job where you don't have exactly relevant experience, but where you can evidence all the skills and interests you need for the job from different areas of your life – say for example if you wanted to apply for a retail manager position, and had only got work experience in waitressing and bar manager jobs, but also had a degree in business management.

Skills

- **Research:** I completed a dissertation on the Scottish Clearances as part of my BA (Hons) Scottish History.
- **Writing:** I have strong written communication skills both in terms of academic writing (for essays during my degree) and in terms of business writing (for example reports and letters produced while I was an intern at Scottish Power).
- **Presentation:** I frequently delivered presentations in my work as a volunteer RSPB warden

An achievements section is normally used when you have specific achievements that don't 'fit' anywhere else but which you want to highlight. You can sometimes include reference to skills in this section but phrase them as achievements, for example you could highlight financial management skills by saying 'successfully managed a budget of £1.5K' or 'treasurer of the football club':

Achievements

- Successfully managed a small team through a difficult transition process when 'Bestbuys' was bought out by 'Superbuys'.
- Chairperson for a local voluntary organisation: YoungPeopleNow
- Captain of the golf club 2009-2010.

Some tips

- Put your most relevant skills or achievements first. Employers notice the first items in a list more than the later items in a list
- Find out what skills an employer is looking for by checking the person specification for a job

(or failing that, by checking the job description). If you have a 'skills' section make sure that each of the skills you list is one that the employer has asked for.

- Back up each skill you list with evidence of that skill. So it is common to write a list of skills writing the skill itself in bold, italics or underlined type and then having a sentence, or sentences that states where you built up that skill.

7. Hobbies or Interests

A 'hobbies' or 'interests' section is sometimes included at the end of a CV before the 'references' section. This is an optional section but it can be useful to highlight key achievements or interests not mentioned elsewhere. Some employers value a hobbies or interests section because it shows that an applicant is a rounded person who maintains a good work-life balance.

Some tips:

- Keep this section short – two to four interests or hobbies would be normal.
- Avoid general hobbies like 'reading' and 'watching films' which don't really tell the employer much. More specific statements tend to work better: 'Reading crime fiction' or 'attending European Cinema Night' are better.
- Think about the impression you are giving, 'Samurai sword collecting' or 'Clubbing' might make your CV stand out for all the wrong reasons....
- The more senior the post you are applying for the less likely you are to have a 'hobbies' or 'interests' section.

8. Specialist sections

Professional Memberships

A 'Professional Memberships' section is often included if you are applying for a job which requires a professional membership, e.g. 'Member of the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy'. You may also include student memberships if these are relevant as this shows you are aware of relevant professional bodies and engaged with them even if you are not a professional member e.g. 'student member of the British Psychological Society'.

Publications, Residencies and Projects.

A 'publications' section is often included in Academic CVs or in CVs for writing jobs. You would normally list publications by date including the title of the article and where it was published. You may also include presentations or conference papers. CVs for the Visual Arts may include a list of residencies that you have held or a list of projects you have been involved in.

Putting it all together

Once you have a first draft of all the sections for your CV you will want to check that it works as a whole document.

Some Tips:

- **Proof read your CV:** check it includes all the essential information such as name, address, phone number; and details of *all* your major qualifications and jobs.
- **Read your CV as if you were the employer:** think about the employer and what they are looking for in candidates (if you have a job description and person specification, re-read these). Then read your CV as if you were the employer – ask yourself, what kind of person does this CV present? Do they have the skills and qualities I would be looking for as the employer?
- **Write an appropriate Covering Letter:** You should always send a CV with a covering letter (or covering email). The covering letter should be a little bit more personal than your CV and start by explaining where you saw the job advertised (or why you are writing to the organization). If you are sending in a speculative application then explain what you are looking for – e.g. a week's work experience, a day's work shadowing, an opportunity to volunteer one morning a week etc. You should then write a couple of paragraphs that highlight key aspects of your skills experiences or interests that you think would make you particularly suitable for the job. You should also explain why you *want* this specific job – why this company? Why this role? Let the covering letter show your enthusiasm and motivation for the job, and summarise key aspects of your experience and skills that are shown in more detail in your CV. Also make sure that you say that you have enclosed your CV!
- **Get Feedback:** Ask someone you trust (a parent, friend, tutor or careers adviser) for feedback on your CV.

Further Help and Resources

Information on CV writing:

- The UHI Career Centre website: www.uhi.ac.uk/careercentre
- The Prospects website for information about graduate CVs: <http://www.prospects.ac.uk/cvs.htm>
- Littleford D (2004) *Career Skills: Opening Doors into the Job Market*, Palgrave: London.

UHI CV checking service

- Submit your CV to a careers adviser on www.uhi.ac.uk/careercentre for feedback