

Group HR – CV Writing Tips & Tools

This is a useful booklet developed by Group HR, which is full of suggestions and recommendations for successful CV writing ... from new graduates to senior executives ... there is something in here to help you! You will find some useful tips, tools and practical suggestions to help you design an appropriate CV for the position or career path you are seeking.



What is a CV?

A **CV** (or **curriculum vitae**) is a marketing tool all about you which you present to prospective employers so that they can consider you for an existing or future vacancy/opportunity. More formal than a resume, and more common in Australia, a CV is usually no more than 2 pages for those job-seekers with limited experience, and no more than 4 for more experienced job-seekers. The CV is a document which contains some limited personal information and a summary of your education/qualifications, work experience, interests and achievements. Some professional CV writers also suggest the inclusion of a career objectives or goals section, but it really depends on where you are in your career or what sort of role you are applying for, as to whether that is appropriate.

Using a well designed CV, you will be able to promote yourself to an organisation where you would like to work. Imagine the CV as being a brochure that will list the benefits of purchasing or using a particular service (in this case ... you!).

Why is the CV so important?

When developing and writing your CV, look at it from an employer's point of view. Would you stand out against the competition (ie. other candidates) and would the recruiting manager want to talk to you based on the content in your CV?

When starting out in the early part of your career, gaining an interview is essential so that you can expand on your CV and sell yourself despite having limited experience. Your CV is the first contact point with potential employers and a critical step to getting your 'foot in the door' for an interview. If you are invited for an **interview**, you are then in a fantastic position to explain and expand on what is in your CV and use your interpersonal skills to help secure the position.

When you are fairly advanced in your career path plan, the structure of the CV may seem less important because it is the background that you assume recruitment managers are looking at. A poorly designed CV which doesn't impart the relevant information, may restrict your ability to secure an interview. Additionally, networking skills become more essential at this stage in your career.

What are the critical elements of a CV?

The major critical sections of a CV are:

- Personal Information
- Education / Qualifications
- Job / Work history
- Achievements & Skills
- Career Objectives (optional)

Let's expand those areas and clarify exactly what at a minimum, should be included in each section.

Personal Information

- Name (first & last name only)
- Local address
- Email address
- Phone number (if applying for an overseas role, include your international dialling code)
- Mobile number

Education / Qualifications

List all of your qualifications in this section, including the year of graduation and the name of the institution where you may have obtained any tertiary qualifications. Include all of your education, including certifications or courses from non-academic institutions, especially those that are related

to the job you are seeking. Make sure you include the year of study. Highlight clearly those courses which are more relevant or directly related to the job you are applying for. If you have tertiary qualifications which are not necessarily related to the role you are seeking, then highlight any specific subjects or aspects of the course which may have been. If specific academic titles or qualifications are required, then you should highlight your achievement in this important criteria. Here is a general guide in inverse chronological order:

- List institution name, all post-grad and undergraduate degree(s) received, and dates earned or expected;
- Include major, minor, areas of concentration, specialisation or certifications;
- List city and state as employers may be unfamiliar with your place of study
- Don't include institutions you attended, but didn't receive a degree from, or where your GPA was under 3.0.
- List all other courses, special projects, relevant educational seminars, any Honors, Masters, PhDs, scholarships, thesis topics.

Job / Work History

This section should include any work experience that you have had in the field that you are applying for, even if the post was unpaid, voluntary, practical components required for a course or internships. If you are a school leaver, or only just starting out in your career and have had no relevant experience, then it is appropriate to put all your work experience to date, including part-time positions and highlight skills that you may have gained in those roles that could be relevant for the current position sought. Ensure you include the employment capacity next to each item (ie. voluntary, unpaid, part-time, casual etc.).

Each item of work experience should include this minimum information:

- Title of position
- Length you held the position
- Brief summary or responsibility of the role
- Name of organisation
- Town/city and state where role was based (include country if overseas position)
- Accomplishments, achievements & highlights

Achievements & Skills

This area is optional, but certainly recommended for anyone who has a core set of skills or is 5+ years into their chosen profession which has resulted in the attainment of a key set of knowledge skills or abilities. If you are an expert in your field, a senior executive/manager or from a knowledge-based industry, then this section should follow immediately after the Personal Information section, as it quickly highlights what your key selling points are.

This area can be titled **Skills Summary** and should include a keyword list of your key competencies or skills. Do not go into lengthy discussions or descriptions of your skills. This section is sometimes referred to as a **Personal Profile** and is sometimes found immediately under the Personal Information section.

Some skills which might be contained in the Skills Summary might be:

- Languages other than English
- Computer / IT skills (ie. specific software programs – make sure you include level of proficiency)
- Strong problem-solving skills
- Highly effective negotiation skills

Career Objectives

This section is optional, and should basically answer the question “what is the next step in my career?” or for newly graduated applicants “which occupational field do I wish to enter”. It should be a short, concise statement that informs the reader what kind of position you are looking for, what your career aspirations are, and what skills, experience and background do you have to offer. Do not include anything about your economic objectives.

Often, job-seekers will tailor both the **Skills Summary** and the **Career Objectives** sections to correlate with the position being applied for which in turn provides a specific profile or objective for the CV. Some job-seekers may be open to a range of different positions or roles and will use these sections of their CV to differentiate between the different roles being sought so they might have several different CVs with different profiles or objectives. For example, you might have a CV for a Nursing Unit Manager position and another for an Educator role. The Nursing Unit Manager position might highlight strong commercial acumen and specific demonstrated leadership skills, and the Educator CV might highlight achievements in instructional design and mentoring and facilitation of graduate nurses. This way, your CV is actually more relevant to the particular job in terms of specific criteria required for the role and presents you as having career aspirations and objectives which are consistent with the role.

Some additional inclusions

Hobbies & Interests: Many school-leavers or more junior job-seekers will include hobbies or interests at the end of their CV, particularly if they can be related to the job role. This can be purely leisure based activities such as reading, biking, cooking, movies. Some people might include participation in clubs or student bodies such as having worked for the school newspaper ... this shows initiative and may support another of your listed skills. These type of items might also evidence leadership qualities so don't underestimate their importance at the early part of your career.

The inclusion of hobbies & interests is not recommended for more senior professional job-seekers or management candidates. However these type of job-seekers might like to include their professional associations (see below), any licensures, published papers or any military or community service.

Professional Memberships or **Professional Associations:** Include any relevant industry memberships, directorships etc.

Referees: See detailed section below.

References

References can be provided through use of a **written reference** from a previous manager or a **verbal referee**, where the prospective employer will call your identified referee and ask a set of specific questions about your character, personal traits, performance and skills. Some job ads will be specific and will ask you to provide a number of referees with your application. In this instance, they are usually seeking verbal referees. If you wish to comply with the request and have referees available, then you should do so. If written references are requested, then a copy should be attached to your CV.

Generally, school leavers and early career path roles might rely on written references, which can be sought from any manager who has had some direction or supervision over you in a previous or existing job role or worked with you on a work-related project. Personal or character references can also be sought from school leaders or senior figures within the community who may be able to comment on your character and person. These are not often used as a basis for selection in recruitment processes so unless you are a school-leaver and have no other means of obtaining a work reference, then you should not include personal or character referees with your CV.

Most employers will rely on **verbal reference checks** before making a formal offer of employment. This will involve calling your previous manager or supervisor, whose details you have provided, and satisfying themselves that you are the right person for the job. It is absolutely critical that you have sought prior permission from the relevant previous manager/supervisor to act as your referee and have obtained a suitable contact number for provision to your prospective employer.

If the job ad is silent on references, it is generally accepted for this sentence to be included at the very end of a CV: "Referees available on request."

Just a final comment on referees, it is very important to remember to thank your referee, regardless of whether you have been successful in securing the role.

How to get started on your CV

Before writing up and sending your CV in response to job ad, you must ask yourself a few questions. Write the answers to these questions, to help you shape and tailor the CV:

- What do I think the company and/or the selection panel are looking for?
- What abilities are required in somebody to develop and carry out the position?
- What achievements and functions in previous positions have I carried out that can help me to do well in this job?
- Do I have the correct academic preparation? Have I updated my knowledge?
- Do I have other life experiences that have helped me to develop skills and capacities to solve problems (eg. travelling abroad alone, volunteering, taking on responsibilities at university)?
- What type of position is ideal for me? Do I like to work alone or in a team? Am I creative or do I prefer to be directed in a project?
- What did I like about my previous position? What aspects or functions I would rather not have this time?
- For what reasons am I changing or looking for a new job? Always be honest with the answer. It is not necessary to lie, but neither is it necessary to give all the details or to speak ill of the former employer and/or colleagues/managers.
- Are there periods of inactivity in my professional history? How I can explain them positively? What have I learned and what abilities have I used, for example travelling, taking care of and raising my children, looking for work for a long time?

Great tips to help make your CV more effective

- If the bulk of your skills have been gained by a strong work experience history and you have limited education/qualification information, then put your work experience before your qualifications.
- Ensure absolute honesty in the content of your CV – this is critical. Be positive and sell your best points rather than highlighting your negative points.
- Do not include hobbies or activities you do in your free time if you are applying for a more senior role. Your CV should be geared towards a more professional audience.
- Never include your activities or interests if they relate to politics, religion or more controversial topics. This items could alienate a biased reviewer.
- No more than 2 pages for school-leavers or junior job role seekers; no more than 4 pages for more senior or experienced job seekers.
- Always use clean, good quality white paper if you are providing a paper copy of your CV and do not include any fancy decorations or décor unless for a creative or arts-related role.
- Never hand-write a CV unless specifically requested in hand-writing. Use a clear typed form devoid of decorative or fancy fonts and excessive colour.
- Your CV should transmit clarity and professionalism visually (short phrases, visually appealing, emphasis on key areas which are relevant to the position sought).
- Strong use of action verbs to commence each sentence (eg. commissioned the commencement of ...; managed the implementation of ...; coordinated the development of ...;)

- Do not include supporting documentation unless specifically requested.
- Do not include a resume or CV cover sheet – it does not need introduction or heading – it is clearly a CV.
- Ensure correct use of punctuation, use clear and concise wording, try to display a high standard of written expression, and be absolutely certain there are no spelling errors!
- Try to use different synonyms to avoid both repetition and the image of limited vocabulary. Strive for verbal fluidity and avoid abbreviations except where they are highly recognised and accepted in English language (eg. Street to St.; Avenue to Ave.)
- Structure the CV based on what you consider to be your strong points for the specific position highlighting either the skills & abilities you possess that are required, or experience in a similar position.
- Your CV should be tailored to suit the position you want, not a summary or history of your life.
- Write in inverse chronological order so that the most recent education/qualification and work experience is contained at the commencement of those sections.
- Do not refer to salary or your salary expectations in your CV.
- Do not include your reasons for seeking new or alternative employment in your CV – this can be discussed at interview.
- Do not include a photograph.
- Use general vocabulary, not technical or colloquial/slang words, which cannot be understood.
- Only attach written references if specifically requested.
- Think of how the selection panel will view your CV inclusions in line with the job role. For example, if your history, work experience and personal traits display evidence of a kind person who has volunteered frequently at hospitals and finds joy in working with persons who have been marginalised, then you are not presenting yourself adequately for a hard-nosed sales & marketing role or a difficult debt collection role. The panel is unlikely to think that you possess the skills required to work in a competitive or commercial position, where people may often come second after sales and financial targets. Consider all aspects of the job before finalising your CV.

Other CV Formats

There are several different types of CV formats which you can use as a guide depending on where you are in your career and what you are trying to highlight. The points raised above will help you to create a Chronological CV primarily (although there are overlapping areas with other formats).

1. **Without Experience CV**

Objective of this CV: to show the capacity and the potential of the candidate. What they offer in particular that might be different to other candidates. Normally, experience is very limited (less than two years) or none and they might still be studying. Therefore it is necessary to concentrate on inherent abilities, knowledge, achievements obtained in studies, qualifications, acquired responsibilities, voluntary work, travel/trips, languages etc. May have no **Job / Work History** section.

2. **Professional CV**

Professional CV is a style used for people who already have a minimum experience of 5+ years and that are in intermediate positions with significant responsibility level. It concentrates on the obtained objectives, solution of problems, applied abilities, promotion and development of the career to date. Studies may have less importance than the acquired experience in this instance.



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3. Executive CV

Executive CV is used for people in high professional positions. It concentrates on the objectives obtained as a senior manager or a champion of some area who has significant leadership and problem solving experience, whose experience might include development of projects, use of abilities and motivation of teams. In summary, to emphasize the competencies that they have and that are applied.

4. Chronological CV

Most commonly used CV format that does not always make the main target easier: to obtain an interview.

The academic education and the experience appear in inverse chronological order, beginning by the present or last work and later the previous ones, and finishing with the studies.

Disadvantages of this format: it can show any periods of inactivity (months, years) and/or frequent changes of work. This often makes the candidate cover these spaces with irrelevant information for the position.

It emphasises the person's progression in work: promotion and increase of responsibilities are reflected, which has the disadvantage of showing if a person, although very effective in his or her work and satisfied with their role, has not ascended or taken more responsibilities.

When to use the chronological resume: If you have good professional experience; if you haven't had periods without work; if you have not changed jobs much; and if you are looking for work in the same type of sector.

Advantages:

The format is traditional and accepted by most recruitment managers as easy to read and understand. It evidences job stability. It reflects your increase of responsibilities and/or promotion. It emphasises the type of position and the companies in which you have worked. It describes your roles and achievements.

Disadvantages:

It emphasises clearly any changes in company or "job-hopping". It allows a reader or either work out or focus on age of candidates. It may show a lack of recycling or updating training. It reflects any gaps in work activity.

5. Functional CV

The Functional CV avoids the disadvantages of the Chronological CV type and facilitates the exhibition of abilities and achievements obtained, although the dates in the work experience are not continuous, helping to disguise the periods of inactivity or successive similar jobs without promotion. The functional resume type is used when you want to highlight the professional career or enter a totally different activity in which the type of company and/or studies is not relevant but the abilities, capacities and type of work are.

You can use the Functional CV: If you want to emphasise your abilities over the duration of your work experience. If you want to return to the job market after a long period of inactivity. If there are many periods of unemployment between each job. If you have changed jobs quite often. If you are looking for a job in a completely different sector. If you think that your age can be a barrier ("very young, very old"). If you have worked in freelance / self-employed capacities. If you have just graduated without experience.

Advantages

It shows the person's capacities and strengths. It allows you to reflect the abilities and knowledge that are more relevant to the position you want to obtain. It eliminates the role repetition in similar positions. Flexibility to present /display your person and achievements obtained. Useful in new technologies, Internet, telecommunications, media, publicity etc.

You can speak of abilities, interests, motivations, that you do not always use in your work, but which may be useful.

Disadvantages:

It does not emphasize the names of the companies for which you have worked. The period of time in each position is not important. It limits the description of the position and its responsibilities.

6. Combined CV

Combined CV formats mix the formats (chronological and functional CVs). The CV begins with the functional format and finishes with the chronological format. The combined format is more difficult to write and more complex but it has the advantage of emphasising the experience and abilities that the candidates have towards the new position they are applying for, as well as to reflect in a dynamic format their experience and training.

Advantages

It shows very clearly that you know what you want to do and that you have the capabilities necessary to carry out the position. It includes the section "Goals Achieved". It allows more flexibility and creativity in reflecting abilities. It helps to obtain a particular position.

Disadvantages

You need a different summary for each job that you choose. It is time-consuming. It eliminates information on your abilities and experience that you may prefer to exclude if you are applying for more than one position in the same company.

... and finally, always be honest.

It is acceptable to highlight your positives and ignore your negatives, but never lie.

Cover Letter

The **cover letter** is a document of equal importance to the CV. The **cover letter** is the first impression the selector will have of the candidate and its negative or positive impact is going to influence his or her further reading of the CV.

A Cover Letter must be very professional, well written, without misspellings. The content directly explains the candidate meets the requirements for the position, emphasising and directing the attention of the selector towards the abilities, skills and knowledge the candidate has proved, with concrete examples based on previous experience or non-work experience (ie. if you have never worked or have been outside the job market for a while).

Why is the resume cover letter useful?

- Cover letter highlights the difference with the rest of candidates.
- Cover letter has to convince the selector to invite you to an interview.
- Cover letter shows your motivation.
- Cover letter reflects your skills for written communication.

Paragraph 1: present and explain the aim of the cover letter.

Paragraph 2: why you are interested in the company that you are writing to, in this industry and in this particular position.

Paragraph 3: what you contribute (achievements, experience); abilities and capacities that you will use to carry the position's functions.

The order of paragraphs two and three can vary based on how you want to write the cover letter.

Paragraph 4: invitation to the interview. Be creative when finishing the letter; do not use the expression "I wait for your call". Mention that you can call to arrange an appointment or meeting, not an interview.

Warm goodbye, full name and sign the letter.

Remember to **make your cover letter eye-catching**; you want the reader to be taken in, **read on to your CV and give you an interview**. You want to distinguish yourself from the rest! Bearing this in mind, think about your main strength for the position and highlight it from the beginning – don't let your potential employer read through lots of irrelevant data and miss the good part! Your main strength will be something that isn't in the requirements for the job – all the other candidates will have these so think outside the box, what else can you bring to the table? Maybe you have worked for a competitor and so can educate your (potential!) new company about the competition they face.

The cover letter must be directed to somebody in particular (avoid using phrases like "dear sir/madam" or "to whom it may concern"). You should try to find out the name of the person with hiring power. If this is not possible, you may address the letter to a title or to the Human Resources department.

- Consider the cover letter as a business letter, a professional one.
- Never more than a page for writing a resume cover letter.
- Quality paper, white or very clear (same type and colour of paper that was used to print the resume).
- Brief explanation of what you offer and want, without forgetting that the cover letter must be in accordance with what the company needs.
- Bring (from your CV or resume) only aspects relevant to the position (abilities, capacities, achievements). Do not make a new summary of your resume. Your resume talks about you, your cover letter about the company, the target...
- Use the cover letter to convince, to persuade the reader that you are the most appropriate candidate for the position, that you can perform the functions.
- Show enthusiasm and interest in the company. Write something about the company or industry that shows you know about them.
- Check your spelling, grammar and expressions before approving the letter.
- Use short phrases, concise but with a rich lexicon writing a cover letter. No more than four or five paragraphs.
- Avoid very formal expressions and facts. The cover letter is a measure of what you want to obtain.
- Use action verbs writing a cover letter.
- Do not overuse "I", it can give an egocentric image of the candidate.
- Do not use copies of cover letters or paragraphs previously used for other selection processes. Send an original cover letter to each employer.
- Write a resume cover letter in a creative way, oriented towards the client (the company), be flexible and always willing to work in a team and learn.
- Don't forget to make your letter stand out and mention something which makes you special; make your potential employer want to go on to read your CV or resume. If you did a special course or have a great qualification, mention it and let yourself shine!

Why write cover letter instead of sending only the CV?

- Writing a cover letter you are sure that you do not forget important things, excludes misunderstandings and also serves as reminder.
- You can select your words and context meanings carefully.
- Because of the one-way-communication, you are able to structure your line of reasoning, without interference, thus not only gaining time, but also influencing the other party more effectively in less time.
- People take the written words with more attention than a phone call to introduce your CV, and always not interrupting to other people in their work

Can a cover letter be personal and effective?

Everyone of us must have the experience of receiving letters that could have been written for any person; nothing shows the sender is directing him/herself to you especially. The use of standard phrases leaves the reader (in this case the Human resources manager) to think that they and the company are not important for the person who is writing the cover letter. The can be read with only limited attention.

Example:

- If you start the cover letter with: "I refer to your advertisement in the where you ask for a"

The manager will not be surprised and will search for the real start of the letter.

You will want him to think from the moment he starts reading, that your letter is worth reading a lot more than all the others: SO, BE ORIGINAL!! Always remember that the letter you write is representing you and you want to be invited for a interview and show that you are the most suitable candidate for the position you are applying.

The letter as an image-builder ...

Imaging reading a letter with the following sentences:

- In reference to your advertisement of ... looking for....
- Please, find enclosed...
- Thanking you in advance...
- I hope to be invited for an interview...

Your cover letter is formal, standard, boring. The text in this kind of cover letters lack character, personality and impact. The overall image will be one of pure routine.

If you learn to be creative, you can change your way of thinking and your creative sentences can be used more than one also. Show in your cover letter something more about you than only the academic background and experience. Show your interest in that company, show the skills you have and you have developed in many professional and personal areas...

Disadvantage of writing a resume cover letter...

A cover letter lacks intonation, facial expression and posture (body-language). This has to be balanced by the careful selection of words, action verbs and creative writing skills. Try something like this:

Dear Ms. Smith

I am currently a nursing student at and will graduate at the end of December this year. I am passionate about nursing and wish to work for a progressive, private health care company such as Ramsay Health Care.

Through my studies, I have achieved a great appreciation and understanding evidence based nursing practice and am an enthusiastic student who is keen to begin a career in nursing.

Before commencing my nursing studies, I worked in the financial sector with Deutsche Bank in advisory services. During this time I consulted and liaised with customers and assisted the CEO with a number of stakeholder objectives providing me with critical and valuable customer service skills, which I believe are second to none. I am keen to transfer my excellent customer service skills to the clinical environment.

Yours sincerely,

OR THIS:



Dear Mr. Smith

I am responding to your exciting ad in regarding the Pharmaceutical Representative opportunity. Please regard this letter as my formal application. Enclosed is my CV detailing my extensive education, experience, and background.

I have had over 7 years experience in the sales and marketing field, and 5 years experience as a nurse. I have maintained a number of key contacts in the health care sector and would be keen to use my strong networking skills to help expand your organisations into new market areas.

Throughout my sales and marketing career I won top sales awards, and trained other sales representatives specific sales techniques to increase their sales. I enjoy working with the public, as well, demonstrating products, and educating others in their uses. I believe I would excel in pharmaceutical sales because I truly find sales a challenging and rewarding career. Additionally, my nursing background offers me a competitive advantage in providing a strong clinical background and understanding of products.

I am available for an interview at a mutually convenient time. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Yours sincerely,