

Writing your CV

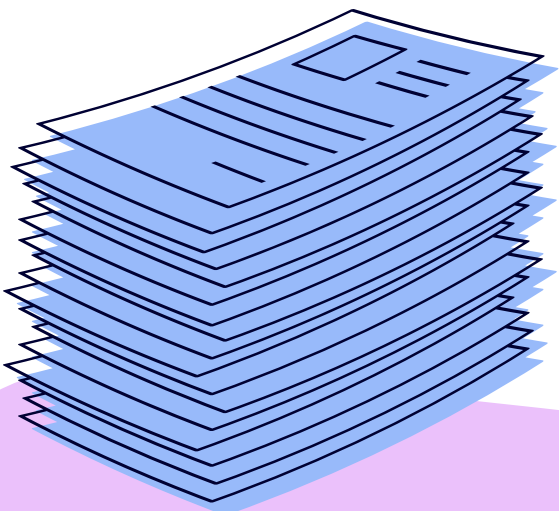


Writing a CV can seem quite daunting at first. How to distill your education, employment, skills and strengths onto one or two pages can seem pretty tricky but this guide will support you writing a CV by exploring what makes a good CV, identifying key aspects to include, and pitfalls to avoid.

An employers first impression is often based on the CV, so it is critical to make an impact in order to progress to the next stage.

On average, recruiters scan CVs for 6–8 seconds to decide suitability for a role. Whilst this will vary depending on the number of applicants received, time constraints, and resources, etc., it's important to keep in mind when creating your CV. Your CV will need to answer the recruiter's question:

Does this person have the experience and skills required to perform the role?



Core CV sections

Let's take a deeper dive into the sections that make up your CV.

Personal profile or statement

This is a short paragraph at the top of your CV which sums up your offer as a candidate in a nutshell. Often includes your skills, strengths, and career goals.



Example:

Hard working, confident and proactive individual who enjoys producing high quality work and being part of a team. I have a positive attitude and passionate about positively representing the company I work for. I am seeking a new challenge where I can use my skill set and build a career through personal and professional development.

Key skills

Highlighting your key skills and strengths that are relevant to the role being applied for, these would include both hard and soft skills, i.e., those you've been trained in and are proficient in and those which have developed over time that are often transferable. This section might work well as bullet points and should support the essential criteria for the post being applied for.



Example:

Graphic Designer post

- Innovative
- Motivated
- Creative
- Project management
- Adobe Suite
- Videographer
- HTML coding



Example:

- **MSc Psychotherapy** (completing in 2025) – University of Roehampton
- **BSc (Joint Hons) Psychology and Sociology** – University of Surrey (2001)
Relevant modules: Criminal Forensics, Health Psychology, Language and development, Social Policy
- **Counselling skills (RQF) Level 2** – Northbrook College
- **A-levels: 3** (grades A–C)
- **GCSEs: 10** (grades A–D)

Education and qualifications

This section can incorporate a lengthy timeline of achievements from school grades to post graduate, dependent on your age and accomplishments.

If you are a recent school leaver, then the focus would very much be on our achievements in secondary education and beyond, whilst if you have a doctorate in a relevant field of study to the post applied for, then secondary education grades become less of a focus. It is important to place the most important accolade at the top and work backwards.

So for example, if you have postgraduate qualifications you could start with those and go back progressively to educational merits. Listing grades is a good idea but rather than list individual subjects, especially with GCSEs or A Levels, you could save space by summarising. Additionally, if you studied specific modules relevant to the post at graduate level and beyond, you could list these.

If you have or are studying towards an additional qualification or attending a relevant course, do include this but perhaps indicate the progress or end date.

Employment history

Depending on the number of jobs you've had in the past and your career journey, it might be best to distill your employment history into those most relevant to the role being applied for and most recent. For example, referencing your first job in your 20s might be less important when you are in your 40s and looking for a different position.

Whilst you don't have to put exact start and end dates you may want to add the duration or the post or month/year so that employers can understand the length of time you were in a post for.

If you have gaps in your employment history or you're concerned that the duration of a position gave the wrong impression you could always supply more details. For example, you may have had a career break whilst becoming a parent, or cared for an elderly parent, or the post might be a maternity cover or fixed-term contract.

You can include other information in this section like volunteering, professional placements, etc., if they add additional information as to your suitability for the role. If you spent six months at a veterinary placement but are applying to be a counsellor then it wouldn't be relevant to include it.

It is usual to place employment history in reverse chronological order, specifying the job title, company name, employment length and brief overview of the responsibilities.



Example:

Mail Sorter

**DPD Local, Worthing |
January 2017–May 2018**

- Responsible for sorting and distributing incoming deliveries.
- Responsible for ensuring all paperwork was completed correctly.
- Unloading and reloading delivery vehicles.
- Use of electronic scanning systems to update tracking information on parcels.
- Working within a team to ensure deadlines were met each shift.



Dos and Don'ts for creating your CV

Dos

- **Simple:** employers may be scanning and speed-reading numerous CVs so keeping it simple is an easy win. Ensure layout and format is clear and consistent (e.g., clear bold titles, consistent font and size, etc.), keep sections concise and not too wordy (e.g., consider bullet points as opposed to long paragraphs of text).
- **Honest:** if you were offered an interview could you evidence the contents of your CV? Some details can be approximated, such as not knowing the date you started a job, but lying about a qualification should be avoided. Not telling the truth on a CV could cause discomfort at a later stage when quizzed about the content.
- **Proofread:** an obvious one but sometimes left out in haste. When you've worked closely on something you can make mistakes, so asking someone else to read your CV can be really helpful. Look for spelling, punctuation, and grammar, but also see where you can cut out unnecessary waffle or awkward and long sentences. Don't forget spell checks don't pick up correct words used incorrectly and ensure your computer is set to English UK and not defaulting to US.

Contact details

The easiest of sections that includes the different ways you can be contacted. It is preferable to have a minimum of two, i.e. phone and email address, but you can add further information should you wish to and have the space.

If you have an email with something other than your name in it, such as: babygirl123@gmail.com, you may want to set up a new email just for your job applications, but don't forget to check it.

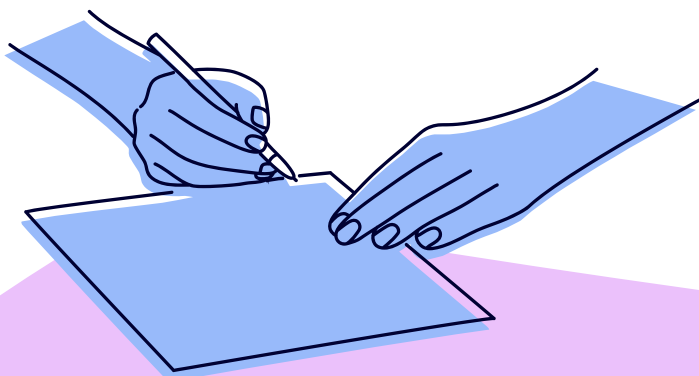


Example:

Email: j.blogs123@hotmail.com

Mobile: 07123 000000

Address: 32 Steel Avenue, Worthing,
West Sussex BN11 3NE



- **Relevant:** it's tempting to write more than needed but try and keep focused on the skills and experience required for the post applied for. Whilst CVs can be used for different posts, a degree of tailoring would ensure unnecessary experience or skills are removed and others more relevant enhanced.
- **Unique:** whilst there are merits to keeping a traditional CV layout and appearance, there might be aspects you want to amplify to illustrate relevant skills or simply denote your own unique offering to make your CV stand out from the crowd.
- **Specific:** whilst not being too detailed, where you can do so, demonstrate an achievement or outcome by stating figures where they are positive. For example, if you held a fundraising event you could provide the amount raised, or if you saved overheads you could add a figure.
- **Power words:** language is key when writing your CV and power words can really transform the impact of a sentence. Use words such as: launched, oversee, or developed, as opposed to start, run, or make.
- **Cover letter:** a tailored letter detailing why you are the best candidate for the post is essential. Regardless of whether the letter is printed and posted or whether it is included in an email, it is important to make the most of the opportunities in the cover letter. It is an opportunity to reinforce the key points in your CV.

Don'ts

- **Generic CV:** whilst it might be more expedient to send out the same CV to all the opportunities you find, it would be best to tailor each of them to the post being applied for.
- **Gaps:** if you have employment gaps you could address them in your CV to avoid any assumptions or confusion. You could explain in the covering letter, or you could use month/year instead of specific dates for employment history.
- **References:** these days, references are often provided upon request, so you can use that space to amplify your strengths and skills.
- **Overload:** it's important to review your CV once written. Can anything be put more succinctly? Would bullet points help, or is there content that could be removed altogether? A CV should be between one to two pages, any longer and you may run the risk of the subsequent pages not being looked at.
- **Cliches:** be careful not to use common language or phrases in a CV that would indicate to others that you may have copied it from somewhere or not spent time on your CV.
- **Overshare:** personal information such as how many children you have or the names of your pets doesn't really belong to a CV. Oversharing can really put some employers off. Remember they are scanning to see if you can deliver on the post you are applying for.



- **Jargon or unfamiliar words:** you might think that using abbreviations, jargon or lofty words might impress but it could also alienate and confuse. If it isn't something you would say in an interview then don't use it or at least put it in plain English.
- **Risky CVs:** if you're taking a risk in creating a CV that doesn't conform to the standard expectations, you must assess whether it is worth the risk. Consider whether it would land well or appeal in the way you hoped. Your skills and experience should do the talking and creative flourishes may detract.
- **Humour:** unless humour is intrinsic to the post applied for, it is best to shy away from anything comical because it could imply you lack professionalism or haven't taken the application seriously.
- **Visuals:** there might be some variation in font size and colour within your CV, but it's best not to freestyle and create visual confusion with different fonts, indents, multiple colours, etc.
- **Vague:** whilst you don't want to overload your CV with too many details, it's important to elaborate on some of the statements, providing examples to demonstrate your achievements.
- **Humble:** it can feel uncomfortable and be difficult to write about your accomplishments but this isn't a place to hold back and be humble. Speak about your achievements and evidence the outcomes and benefits.
- **Money:** salaries don't belong in a CV. Financial information should be discussed later on in the application process.
- **Negatives:** you don't need to provide information on anything that could be considered negative such as an incomplete qualification, failed start up, management problems, etc. Don't give any reasons for the employer to reject your CV.



Find out more

[mentalhealth-uk.org/into-work](https://www.mentalhealth-uk.org/into-work)