

YOU ONLY GET ONE CHANCE TO MAKE A GOOD IMPRESSION

Your CV is much more than just a list of jobs and responsibilities. It is the most direct illustration of your communication skills. You are applying for a job in a profession where drafting skills are of paramount importance – so it makes sense to ensure your CV is beautifully set out, easy to read, and has no grammar and spelling mistakes.

EVERYTHING about it must be right. If you send your application by post, even the appearance of the envelope can be taken into account. Make sure it is correctly addressed!

LANGUAGE

Use Plain English (see How to write in plain English - Plain English Campaign (www.plainenglish.co.uk/files/howto.pdf)). This means no legal jargon, no convoluted sentences and no multi-syllabic words. Simple and elegant is what you should be aiming for. Do use your computer's spell checker but don't rely on it – try and get someone to proof read it for you as well.

LENGTH

Try and keep to three pages at the absolute most. Two is better. If you have a fairly short employment history, don't pad it out by adding every part-time job that you did through university. If you have a long job history, focus on the last couple of roles and then provide a concise summary of your previous work. In reality, what you did more than five years ago is probably not very relevant.

STRUCTURE

Put your current employment details first and put your greatest area of responsibility first within those details - it is very likely that the potential recruiter will do little more than glance at the first paragraph of your CV so you need to make sure it really counts!

Put your professional qualifications and memberships towards the end of your CV (set them out in detail, no jargon, acronyms or strings of initials) and your educational qualifications last.

School prizes, marathons and mountain climbing are lovely, and well done you! - but, despite what your teachers might have told you – all these additional achievements are not very relevant. If you feel you absolutely have to include them, just mention them in one brief sentence.

NEVER, NEVER, NEVER start off your CV with a third person description of how great you are. "X is an exceptionally experienced lawyer looking for a chance to display her outstanding knowledge of conveyancing..." So wrong, on so many levels!

CONTACT DETAILS

If you are trying to condense your CV to two or three pages and trying to make a real impact on your first page, put your contact details in the header. This frees you up to use the main body of the text more effectively.

KEY SKILLS

Key skills are skills and experiences relevant to the job you are applying for or the job you are currently doing. This is your opportunity to "sell" yourself and your experience in a short list of punchy words or notes. They are not about your character or personality. The ability to conduct research is not a key skill; getting on well with your colleagues is not a key skill.

Think through your current job role in real detail. Make a list of exactly what you do each day and pick out the most important elements. These are your transferable key skills.

EMPLOYMENT HISTORY

List your jobs in reverse chronological order, most recent first. Put a description of what you did/do in each job role.

Don't write a description summarising all your job experience and then a list of employers underneath. Putting a description of what you have done in each job role demonstrates how you have increased your level of responsibility, knowledge and experience on an ongoing basis.

If you have a really substantial level of previous experience, you might complete a detailed description of the last two or three roles, and then summarise the rest.

If you have a long list of reported cases and projects in which you have been involved, pick out two or three that illustrate something relevant and perhaps make a summary of the rest.

INTERESTS

Not really that relevant (see STRUCTURE) so don't include unless something particularly striking. Sports if you are an Oxbridge Blue, represented the UK or are an Olympic champion perhaps. Something that demonstrates a real commitment to charitable work. Running your own business, writing a novel would be great – but golfing, reading, entertaining, going to the cinema – are probably not that relevant.