

CVs and Covering Letters

A CV should always be targeted at the opportunity you are applying for whether that is a job, a work placement, volunteering or post graduate study. There is no such thing, therefore, as a “general” CV: you should always be prepared to adapt your document to make it relevant to the opportunity.

Possible headings

Commonly CVs begin with “personal details” and, if included, will end with “references”. The order in which other headings/sections appear is your choice; information should be prioritised so that your most important and relevant information appears early in your CV.

Personal Details

Name - you can use this as a heading for the overall CV

Address - if you have a term time and a home address, use the one at which you want an employer to contact you. Giving two addresses might lead to confusion

Email - a neutral address, e.g. j.smith@gmail.com is preferable to an informal one e.g. dancingfeet@gmail.com

Telephone number - as with the address, just provide one telephone number.

Personal Profile/Career Objective/Summary

This is an optional section, and if you decide to include it, it should be brief (no more than four lines), highlight your key strengths such as a related degree subject, related work experience and one or two relevant skills. You might also indicate the type of experience you are currently seeking.

Education and Qualifications

Provide details of your education in reverse chronological order (starting with the most recent) going back to GCSEs/age 16. For each stage, show the dates you attended along with the title of the qualification and the name and broad location of the institution. Students with international qualifications should give the original title of their qualification and state its UK equivalence e.g. broadly equivalent to A levels.

For your degree, include examples of topics studied or projects completed if you feel they are of interest or relevance to the employer; you might also want to give the title of your final project/dissertation.

For GCSEs and qualifications where you studied numerous subjects, summarise the information e.g. seven GCSE grades A-C, including Mathematics and English.

Work Experience/Employment History

Include full time and part time work and any volunteer roles and work placements.

Aim to describe *how* you performed the roles more than *what* you did because your CV needs to talk about *you* rather than give purely factual descriptions of tasks you’ve carried out e.g. “Provided a responsive and friendly service to customers using good product knowledge and problem-solving skills” rather than “Served

customers and dealt with enquiries”. If you have had several jobs which are similar to each other, then there is no need to provide detailed descriptions for each – you could provide a detailed description of the first role but not for those following.

Skills

It is important to include information about relevant skills, either in a separate skills section or, if you use a chronological CV, by referring to skills within the description of your studies or work experience. “Relevant” skills are those which the employer has indicated that they are seeking or, in the absence of a detailed job description, they are skills which you will be able to identify through researching the occupation. A useful resource for this is the [Prospects Job Profiles](#). Careers Consultants can also help you identify skills relevant to specific occupations and sectors.

Interests/Achievements

In this section, aim to convey your initiative and other personal qualities rather than simply give a list of “hobbies”. This is an optional section so omit it if you wish.

References

Unless the employer has specifically asked for referee details, it is acceptable to just say “references are available on request” at the end of your document. If asked to include details, provide 2 references, one academic and one work-related. For each, provide the phone number and email address and indicate their relationship to you e.g. Personal Academic Tutor, line manager. Always ask the referees’ permission before including their contact details in your CV.

Common Formats for CVs

The Chronological CV

This is a traditional CV format listing your education and work experience, in reverse chronological order. It is particularly useful when applying for roles in which you already have a track-record or similar experience. Be sure to refer to the skills you have developed in the various sections of the chronological CV. This is illustrated in the Sample Chronological CV that follows.

Although it is usual to record work experience in reverse chronological order, there are situations where this may not be to your advantage. If, for example, you have relevant work experience, but not through your current role, you may prefer to introduce an additional heading, “Relevant Experience” which allows you to give these roles prominence. The remainder of your experience could then be presented under a heading such as “Additional Experience”.

The Skills Based CV

This style of CV is useful when you do not have direct experience of the role or sector you’re applying for but you can demonstrate your suitability for it through highlighting relevant transferable skills. For mature students with substantial work experience, a separate skills section in your CV can act as way of summarising your

key strengths and selling points rather than providing possibly repetitive information on each job held.

The Academic CV

The academic CV is mainly used by people involved in academic research, such as PhD students and lecturers, who are applying for research-related roles. For more details on this type of CV, refer to the Vitae article on "[Creating Effective CVs as a Researcher](#)".

Layout and Presentation

- A maximum of two sides of A4. A one page CV might be stipulated by some employers but otherwise, assume that a two page CV is acceptable
- Aim for an organised and consistent layout with a font size of 11 or 12
- Use bullet points to break up the text
- Be concise, avoiding long sentences and paragraphs
- Use positive language including "action verbs"
- Check and double-check spelling and grammar
- Keep language and layout simple avoiding graphics and tables
- Consider using a larger font size, capitals or bold to make headings stand out
- Avoid having large areas of empty white space
- Unless otherwise stated, attach a covering letter to your CV ensuring that the font and contents are consistent between the two documents.

Further Resources and Examples of CVs and Covering Letters

Access examples and further guidelines using the following links:

Careers Portal [CV Builder](#)

Prospects [CVs and Cover Letters](#)

Target Jobs [CVs Applications and Tests](#)

In addition, Careers Consultants can provide 1-1 feedback on your CV / Covering Letter – [email careers](#) for support or book an appointment on [mycareer](#).

Example Chronological CV

Anne Marie O'Sullivan

68 Moorside North
London SE4 1XY

Tel: 020 8320 2380
Email: AMO@yahoo.com

Education

2019-2022 **BSc (Hons) Business Information Technology (2:1)**

London Metropolitan University

- Topics include Network operating systems, mobile applications, Advanced database systems t, Project planning and management
- Final Year Project: 'The effect of internet banking on the retail industry'. Identified a range of sources, evaluated and analysed data, gained experience of project management
- Designed and developed database tables, queries and views using Oracle 11g and SQL Plus
- Created an e-commerce website using HTML, Dreamweaver and Flash. Enhanced problem solving skills and demonstrated the ability to work to deadlines within a given specification
- Familiar with Windows OS – Windows 7 and Vista
- Competent user of MS Office including Access, Excel and Project

2012-2019 **A level** French D, ICT D, Economics E

6 GCSEs at A – C grades including Maths and English
La Sagesse High School, Islington

Employment Experience

2018-present **Cash Office Administrator**

DIY World, Tottenham Hale

- Created a hyperlinked indexed document system for cash office. Involved assessing system requirements and using a methodical approach to produce the optimum outcome
- Work to tight deadlines to prepare, generate and distribute sales and banking reports, using Excel and Word
- Liaise with colleagues to resolve queries
- Created and accurately maintain a financial transaction database
- Manage 2 staff, providing training, scheduling rotas, and agreeing targets

2017-2018 **Customer Service Assistant**

Phonestop, Oxford Street

- Dealt effectively with customer enquiries and complaints
- Worked co-operatively as part of a busy team during peak sales periods
- Identified appropriate products by accurately assessing customer need, clearly explained technical features
- Consistently exceeded sales targets through positive promotion of goods and services

Voluntary Experience

2016-2017 **Tour Guide**

Textile Museum, Kensington

- Provided advice and information to visitors, promoted the work of the museum

Achievements

Elected as Student Representative, 2019/20

Acted as point of contact for student enquiries, identified current issues for discussion and negotiated potential solutions with academic staff.

Achieved company award for success in customer care training programme, 2018

Additional skills

Working knowledge of French and Spanish

Full UK driving license

References

Mr Tom Green
Senior Lecturer
School of Computing & Digital Media
London Metropolitan University

E: t.green@londonmet.ac.uk

T: 020 7123 0033

Mrs Pam Delaney
HR Manager
DIY World

E: p.delaney@diy.com

T: 020 7003 9221

Example Skills Based CV

Anne Marie O'Sullivan

68 Moorside North

Tel: 020 8320 2380

London SE4 1XY

Email: AMO@yahoo.com

Profile

An enthusiastic Business Information Technology graduate with experience of database design and development using both SQL and Oracle. Also offer experience of database maintenance in a business environment, now seeking to use these skills within a database management role.

Education and Qualifications

2019 – 2022 **BSc (Hons) Business Information Technology (predicted 2:1)**
London Metropolitan University

- Topics include: Database and web-based information systems, E-commerce and e-business, Advanced database systems development, Project planning and management
- Final Year Project: 'The effect of internet banking on the retail industry'

2012– 2019 **A level** French D, ICT D, Economics E

6 GCSEs at A-C grades including Maths and English
La Sagesse High School, Islington

Skills Profile

Information Technology

- Designed and developed databases using Oracle11g and SQL plus
- E-commerce website design and implementation using HTML, Dreamweaver and Flash.
- Experienced in MS Office including Excel, Access and Project
- Familiar with Windows OS – Windows 7 and Vista

Analysis and Problem Solving

- Created a transaction database for cash office, DIY World. Involved identifying and analysing system requirements, and resolving technical problems arising during development
- Evaluated and analysed data on the impact of internet banking
- Created an e-commerce website including development of the specification and evaluation of technical solutions

Organisation and Planning

- Organise workload at DIY World, consistently meeting end of period deadlines
- Managing projects at university provided experience of identifying key tasks, prioritising, reviewing progress and meeting project specifications
- Create work rotas for team members at DIY World to ensure that all tasks are completed on schedule

Communication

- Provided consistently high level of customer service at Phonestop, including handling all queries effectively and dealing with complaints
- Created system documentation, demonstrating the ability to write clearly and concisely for a non-technical audience
- Delivered presentations both in university and work contexts, and as a student representative confidently contributed to discussions within formal meetings

Teamwork

- Lead a small team at DIY World, supporting and motivating others to achieve goals
- Consulted and collaborated with team members to coordinate and schedule group project activities at university
- Worked co-operatively and flexibly as part of a busy team during peak sales periods at Phonestop, contributing to team targets

Languages

- Working knowledge of French and Spanish

Employment Experience

2018-present **Cash Office Administrator**
DIY World, Tottenham Hale

- Preparing financial reports
- Developing and maintaining a financial transaction database
- Managing a team of 2 staff

2017-2018 **Customer Service Assistant**
Phonestop, Oxford Street

- Responsible for sales, processing transactions, issuing contracts and delivering a high standard of customer service

Voluntary Experience

2016-2017 **Tour Guide**
Textile Museum, Kensington

- Provided advice and information to visitors, promoted the work of the museum

Achievements

Elected as Student Representative, 2019/20

Acted as point of contact for student enquiries and contributed towards improving the student experience

Achieved company award for success in customer care training programme, 2018

References available on request

Covering Letters

Generally when sending a CV to an employer, you should also send a covering letter unless the advertisement specifically says not to or an on-line recruitment website does not provide the facility to do so.

The purpose of the letter is to highlight the key reasons why the employer should be interested in you. It therefore needs to be persuasive and convey your motivation and enthusiasm for the role. Like the CV, it needs to be targeted at the opportunity and the organisation concerned, so every covering letter should be unique.

Guidelines for a covering letter

- One side of A4, written as a “business” letter so include your address, the organisation’s address and the date at the top of the letter
- Use the same font used in your CV
- Ideally, address the letter to a named person which means you sign off at the end with ‘Yours sincerely’. If you do not have a named contact, address the letter to Dear Sir/Madam, and sign off with ‘Yours faithfully’
- Keep your sentences brief and to the point and use clear paragraphs.

Contents for a covering letter

- Introduction. State why you are writing. If applying for an advertised vacancy, give the job title and if appropriate, the job reference number, and say where you saw the position advertised. If making a speculative approach, be clear about what you are asking for.
- Paragraph 1 – convey your motivation and interest, explaining why you are interested in the role and in the organisation.
- Paragraphs 2/3 – identify and highlight aspects of your skills and experience of particular relevance to the target opportunity to demonstrate your suitability. Do not introduce any new factual information in your letter, which is not included in your CV.
- Conclusion. End on a positive note e.g. ‘I would be happy to provide any further information’ or ‘I would welcome the opportunity to discuss my application at interview’ and ‘look forward to hearing from you’.

Also in paragraphs 2/3 you can if you wish explain any gaps in your CV or give additional information, for example, regarding a disability (although you are not legally required to disclose this) and present such information in a positive light. Talk to a Careers Consultant if you are unsure how to explain such instances.

Links to further advice about covering letters

Prospects: [CVs and Cover Letters](#)

Target Jobs: [Four Covering Letter Blunders \(and how to avoid them\)](#)

Careers Portal: [Cover Letter Builder](#)

In addition, Careers Consultants can provide 1-1 feedback on your CV / Covering Letter – [email careers](#) for support or book an appointment on [mycareer](#).