

## **Preparing your CV**

The selection process for a particular position really begins when you forward your Curriculum Vitae (CV) to an organisation or to the search and selection consultancy representing it. At senior level it is unlikely, unless you are applying for a public sector role, that you will be asked to complete an application form. Therefore, you will need an up to date CV.

The purpose of a CV is to record your personal details and your career history giving the prospective employer a thumb-nail sketch of your ability and experience in order that they can decide whether to invite you to an initial interview. It is there to sell you and is a marketing tool; consequently good presentation is important.

Before preparing your CV take a moment to consider what it is for and who will read it. The answer to these questions should be obvious: the purpose of a CV is to get you an interview; it will probably be read by HR professionals, employers who are hiring and recruitment consultants.

You should consider the following when preparing your CV:

- What it should include
- The format
- What HR Professionals/Hiring Managers are looking for
- Who is going to read it

### **What It Should Include:**

Bear in mind that there is no perfect CV; ask a hundred hiring managers and you will get a hundred preferences, since all prospective employers look for different information. However, it should contain the following as a minimum:

#### ***Your Personal Details:***

Such as name, address, contact telephone and e-mail details, qualifications, and general availability. Avoid non essential information such as height, weight, health, ages of children, religion etc. Most individuals do not put their salary details or expectations on their CV but these should be included, if asked for, on a covering letter when you apply for the position. You do not have to put your age or date of birth on a CV now and it is illegal for the employer (or his agent) to ask you for this information.

#### ***A Short Profile/Summary:***

This is where you can put down your qualities, skills and motivation etc.

#### ***Your Employment Details:***

This should include your current employer and your current job function, showing the length of time that you have been at the company. You should also list of all your previous employers, your functions within these companies and length of service, right back to when you started work. It is not a good idea to leave any gaps. If you are out of work ensure that you update your CV with the date you ended your employment.

For each employer, particularly your most recent employers, you should include a brief description of your duties, your areas of responsibility and also what you feel you have achieved during the position, that will be relevant for a future employer.



It is also very useful to indicate the nature of business of your employer in terms of size, turnover, products and services. Wherever possible, you should also include information that is relevant to the position that you are applying for; for example, you may currently work for a competitor but this may not be immediately clear on your CV.

### **The Format**

The format for your CV should be simple and it should be easy to read, bearing in mind that the standard of your presentation will give prospective employers an idea of your suitability as an applicant. Also bear in mind that many firms will no longer print your CV off and it will be read on screen; it may also be loaded onto their database electronically.

You should try to keep your CV to 2 or 3 pages, keeping the layout and design simple. As well as making your CV readable it helps the many companies who copy and scan CV's onto their systems. Also the reader may have hundreds of CV's to get through so ensure that all the relevant information can be easily found. For this reason you should use small blocks of text with standard typefaces making the headings clear and consistent. It also helps to put your name on each page.

Page one should contain your personal details and a short profile. Your contact details should be at the top of page one; page two and three your employment details. Put your interests, hobbies and details of any voluntary work that you do on the bottom of the last page.

The employment details on most CV's are in reverse chronological order with the most recent position detailed first. You should reduce the amount of detail for each role as you go back in time, remembering to outline the job title, responsibilities, dates and achievements for each position you have held.

The prospective employer will be looking for key information on your CV to help them judge your suitability to go to the next stage. This may include the fact that you work for a competitor, that you have a knowledge and understanding of their particular industry, that you may deal with the same customer base, that the companies that you have worked for are of a similar size and nature, and that you have had experience of working in the same function at the same level that they require.

You should always be truthful on your CV since you do not know the background of the individual who is reading it and it is very easy to get caught out. Also don't make sweeping statements about yourself - it is up to the interviewer to decide if you are brilliant not you!

However, when you prepare your CV remember that it is unique to you and you should therefore be comfortable with it. You should also keep it up to date as employers do not like to meet candidates who they think are in work but in fact left their 'current employer' six months ago and forgot to change it on their CV; what else might they be hiding?

Although around 99% of CV's will now be sent electronically, if you are posting it use quality white paper and never bind it (most companies have standard sized files and photocopiers/scanners!). Also bear in mind that you want your CV to stand out for the information that it contains not for the fact that it is the biggest, brightest and brashest that they are looking at.

One useful tip is that if you e-mail your CV to an organisation, please do not call it cv.doc as everyone else does! Call it "Steve Smith CV" for example so that the company can find it again when it files it on their electronic system.

One of the most important things to keep in mind is that it is very unlikely that your covering email will be saved or printed – so make sure then that your contact details and email address are on your CV!



### **What HR Professionals/Employers Prefer:**

- CV to be emailed; if posted then not bound and on plain paper
- Two pages
- Short profile/summary at the beginning
- Reasons for leaving included
- Salary details on the covering letter
- Email and contact details
- Statement about your location

### **What they don't like:**

- Photos!
- Professionally written CV's
- Different fonts
- Poor grammar and presentation
- Use of buzz words and jargon
- Over the top selling of yourself
- Personal statements

It is a useful exercise to think about who is likely to read your CV; you hope that it will be the CEO, Director or Hiring Manager but it may be a recently employed Assistant who has been asked to review the applications. In this case they may have been given a list of key words/experiences to find and not know much about the company, what they are really looking for and who their competitors are.

Consequently you will have to help them along by ensuring all the information that is relevant is easily found on your CV. Each time you apply for a role change your summary to focus on what they want and check that your experience that is relevant has been included.

### **The Covering Letter**

You should always send out your CV with a covering letter/email which should be used to highlight points of interest relevant to the role you are applying for. You should also include your salary details and salary expectations, if requested.

Do not though write a three page covering letter comprising most of your CV - this will rarely be read by anyone!

The only function of a covering letter is to ensure that your CV is read, and that you get a meeting to discuss the role concerned. Consequently it should be brief, enthusiastic and interesting:

- Ensure that the name, title and address of the recipient is correct
- Indicate what you are applying for, who you are and why you are interested
- Refer to your enclosed CV



## Checklist

- Think about your skills, achievements, qualifications and experiences
- Never falsify your employment history or qualifications - many companies check and you will be found out
- Do not overstate your hobbies and interest to make them more interesting - the reader may well be an expert in that field
- Ensure your spelling and grammar is correct - ask someone to check it for you
- Make sure your contact details can be easily found
- Do not leave any gaps in your employment dates
- Never include graphs, cartoons, photographs, certificates or gimmicks
- Do not put the reason you left a job on the CV - explain it at the interview
- Try to avoid technical and sector jargon
- Put your salary details onto your covering letter/email
- Try to tailor your CV to each application where possible so that it does not look like you have sent it to everyone
- Do not put 'Curriculum Vitae' at the top of page one - put your name and contact details instead
- Do not include references or certificates
- Do not email your CV, fax it, post it and then call to ask if they have it - one method should suffice!

