

Ultimate Guide to Your CV

An advertisement for Chesterton Gray Limited. The background is a panoramic view of a city skyline, likely New York City, with the Empire State Building and One World Trade Center visible. In the foreground, a blue laptop is open on a desk, with a small notebook and pen next to it. The company logo, 'CHESTERTON GRAY LIMITED', is in the top left corner. A white box in the bottom right contains the text 'Career Advice & Support' and 'Your Next Career'.

**CHESTERTON
GRAY**
LIMITED

*Career Advice &
Support*

Your Next Career

Ultimate Guide to your CV

- Do I still need a CV?
- Preparing your CV
- To bespoke or not to bespoke
- Seven ways to improve your CV
- Why doesn't my CV fit?
- Reasons for leaving: the good, the bad and the ugly
- CV Checklist
- FAQ



Do I still need a CV?

With everything being on-line nowadays and the force and reach of social and professional networks you would be forgiven for thinking that the days of the humble CV are numbered. Although I wouldn't shed a tear just yet! Whilst the younger generation (under 30) may be more used to online applications than some older folks, the majority of recruiters (all, in fact) still expect to receive the candidates' CV.



However, a recent survey has put some doubt on the future of the CV with more than a third of respondents, who are executive hiring managers, saying that it is now a less important part of the job search process. Networking, it seems, is king. You still need a CV, but it doesn't carry the same weight as it once did to the hiring manager.

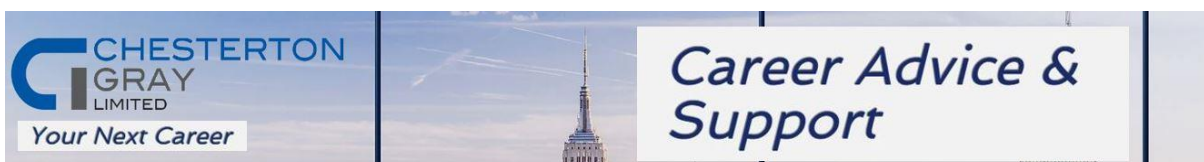
We have been asking candidates for CV's since I was in short trousers and everybody seems to have one, whether well written or not. Look at the major job sites and you will see that they sell themselves on the basis of the number of CVs they have on their system.

However, we have in the last few years been getting more applications from candidates that refer us to their LinkedIn page or personal website and do not attach a CV.

Is it the end for the CV?

Articles I have seen recently suggest that yes, it is the end since all your details are on LinkedIn (true if you have completed a full profile, but it is not an application for a job, rather business networking) or on your social media (partly true, plus pictures of your cat), or you can add your details to the online application form (true, but not all companies use this method). Also, how do companies hold your information for any future opportunities without a CV?

Obviously, many large organisations have embraced automated online job application systems that utilise powerful software to filter out those that match their criteria. However, I have not come across many SME's that do, nor many recruitment firms that are undertaking the first round and shortlisting for the client. In these cases, a CV is a must.



Applying for roles

You could be asked to apply online via an AI powered, application system that asks specific questions about you, your work history and your experience in key, job related areas. This will be looking for key words and phrases, relevant to the role.

Some applications also ask you to upload examples of your work and/or your CV. What information though is filtered down to the hiring manager if they do not have a CV to look at?

So, what is a CV for?

The purpose of a CV is to record your personal details and your career history giving a 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; ***its only purpose is to get you an interview.***

Most organisations embrace some form of technology in their hiring process, with some being fully automated but there is still a place for the humble, analogue powered CV.

Flexibility

There does seem a disconnect between the technology savvy generation, who want fast feedback and quick decisions, preferably on-line, and the 'seasoned' recruiting manager who still likes a CV and takes his time with the recruitment process.

Perhaps as AI takes over the recruiting process and application systems get more widespread the need for a CV will start to disappear. But for now, you still need one!

A CV can be stored (for future reference) and shared, printed off and written on, scanned into a database, searched on a database and used to discover hidden talent. Companies can also use it as part of an internal skills base for hiring on future projects.

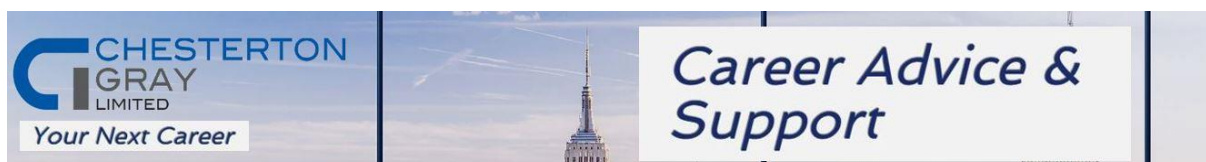
So, don't give up on it yet!

Keep your CV up to date and make sure that you 'tweak' it for each job you apply for, matching your skills and experience to the role and putting these on your CV. You can even use it as a reference document for that online application...

You might think that in our cloud based, social and online world the good old CV is an anachronism, but it is still an important part of the job search process, albeit not the most important.

Discard it at your peril.

The CV is dead; long live the CV!



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 and employers who are hiring as well as 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

Bear in mind that there is no such thing as a 'perfect CV' fit for every occasion, since every employer, and their job, will have a different set of requirements and priorities.

Your CV Style

The most popular styles of CV are:

- Chronological. This focusses on your experience and achievements
- Functional. Highlights your skills and abilities
- Combination. Includes both your experience and your skills

For most situations the chronological CV will be closest to the ideal: it is easy to read and follow, can be scanned by an automated CV reader and it puts your experience to the fore.

Studies have shown that the average recruiter spends under ten seconds (yes, 10 seconds), reviewing your CV.

What It Should Include:

Ask a hundred hiring managers and you will get a hundred preferences, since all prospective employers look for different information.

The most important thing it should contain (and this is mentioned many times in this guide) are **KEYWORDS**. These are words and phrases that demonstrate you match the job you are applying for.

However, your CV should contain the following as a minimum:

- Personal details including contact details
- A short personal profile/summary
- Employment History
- Qualifications and Education
- Your Skills

Remember

- Use a professional looking font, such as Arial, Calibri or Times New Roman and keep a consistent font size
- Keep your CV to two sides of A4 (if possible)
- Check, and re-check your grammar and spelling

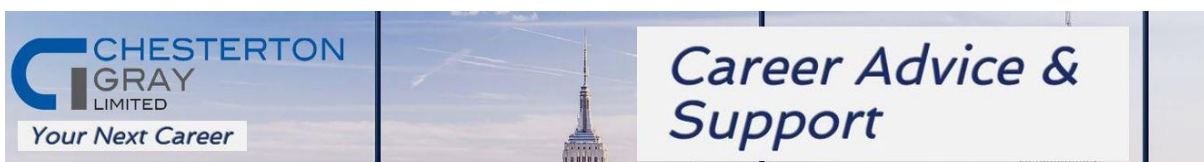
Your Personal Details:

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 their 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.

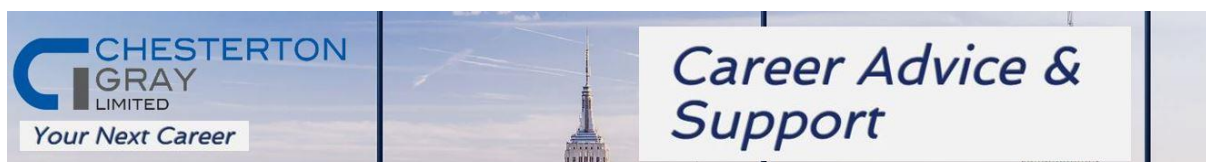
For each employer, particularly your most recent employers, you should include a brief description of your duties, your areas of responsibility and also what you feel you achieved during your time in the position, that will be relevant for a future employer.

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 (keywords) 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 and it will be read on screen; it will probably be scanned by an automated system and loaded onto their database electronically.

You should try to keep your CV to two pages or three at a push, keeping the layout and design simple. As well as making your CV readable it helps those who copy and scan CVs onto their systems.

Also, the reader may have hundreds of CVs 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 this page. You can also start to put your employment details on this page.

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.

Key Words

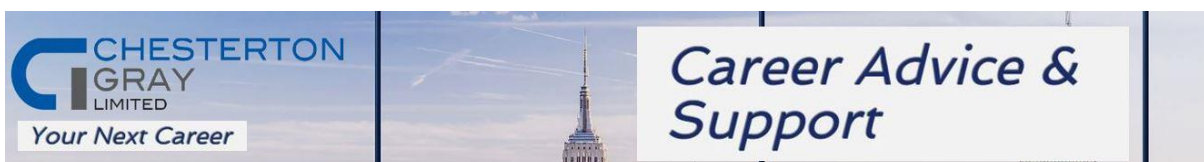
The prospective employer will be looking for key information on your CV to help them judge your suitability to go to the next stage.



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.

Tell the truth!

You should always be truthful on your CV since you do not know the background of the individual who may be 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!



Keep it unique

However, when you prepare your CV remember that it is unique to you, and you should therefore be comfortable with it.

Up to date

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?

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 that your contact details and email address are on your CV!

Who will read my CV

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 want 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 or email which should be used to highlight points of interest relevant to the role you are applying for.

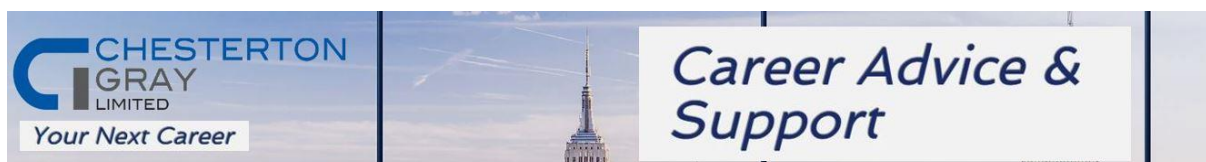
You should also include your salary details and salary expectations, if requested, together with any location details that might be relevant.

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:

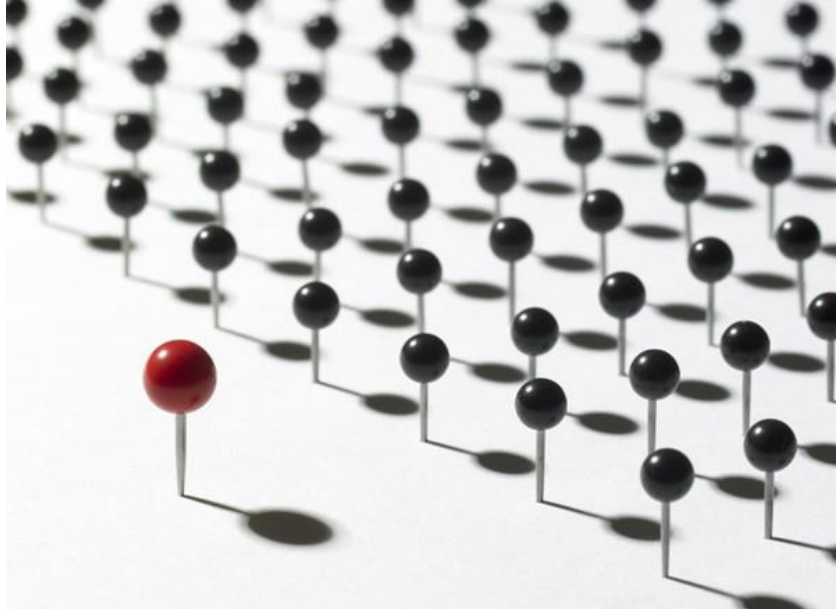
- Ensure that the name, title and address of the recipient is correct
- Indicate what you are applying for, who you are and why you are interested
- Refer to your enclosed CV



Bespoke or Not Bespoke?

Why you should customise your CV

There is a good choice of candidates for many roles, particularly where the employer cannot find or attract a 'ready-made' candidate from a competitor or doesn't want one.



The 'recruiter' could be an AI powered process with no human involvement until the interview stage

If this is the case, how do you make yourself and your application stand out? Particularly as research suggests that candidates' CV's have just ten seconds to impress the recruiter, with more than 70% of CVs being discarded by them before they have read to the end of page one!

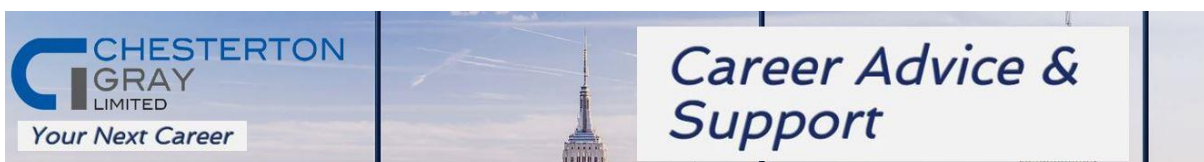
Firstly, it is not about being loud, brash, aggressive or colourful – you do after all want to be remembered for your skills and experience rather than the images on your CV!

It is more about making your application stand out and presenting the right information to ensure that the employer is aware of your skills relevant to their vacancy.

Keywords

We get many CVs for roles that seem to bear no relation to the vacancy on offer; although the candidates say in their covering letter that they have experience of a sector, there is no mention of it in their CV.

Automated systems/databases read and store CV's, not covering letters, and when asked to find key words and phrases they won't find what is not there.



Similarly, if your CV is read by a person, they are probably looking for keywords, phrases, companies and sectors; again, if it is not there, they can't read it!

Customise Your CV

The answer? Rewrite your CV for every job you apply for including information that is relevant to the role and the employer.

How long does it take to do this? Minutes.

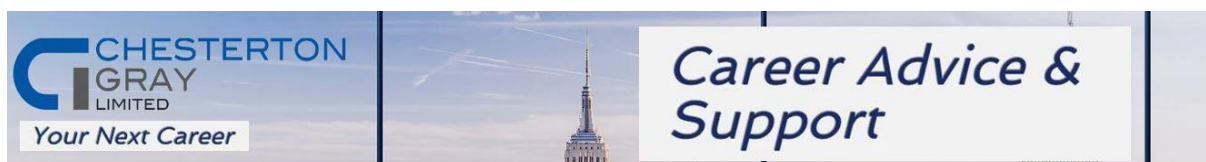
Explain on your CV what the companies did that you worked for, the sectors they were in, who their customers were and what part you played in the success of the company.

If they ask for candidates with experience of the AMP cycle for example, and you have this, make sure the employer knows rather than assuming that they know.

Simple? Certainly.

A bit of work on your part? Certainly.

Effective? Certainly.



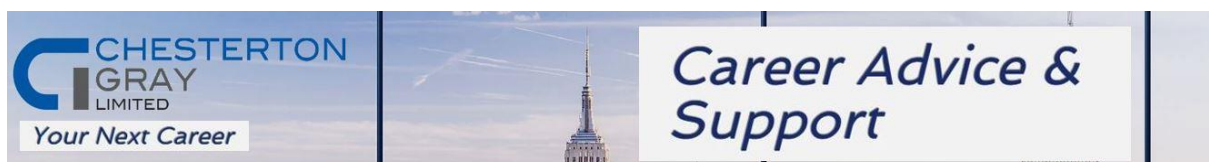
Seven easy ways to improve your CV

- 1. Banish the buzzwords**
- 2. Check your grammar**
- 3. Contact details**
- 4. Your Employer**
- 5. Keep it simple**
- 6. Add keywords**
- 7. Help the Hiring Manager**

We get to see hundreds of CV's and Profiles of candidates and whilst many are 'good' in that we can at least see and understand what they do, quite a lot are pretty poor, and most could do with being made fit for purpose!

You don't want the first impression that your CV makes to be its last, so it's worth a little effort to make sure it is not discarded too easily or remembered for the wrong reason.

Don't forget that the only reason for your CV is to get you an interview...



It is surprisingly easy to update and improve your CV in seven easy steps:

One: Banish the buzzwords

Enthusiastic, focused, passionate, dynamic, ambitious, successful, natural leader...you may think that you are being original by using these words to describe yourself but, believe me, when everyone includes these words on their CV, they are no longer stand out traits.

Two: Check your grammar

In our connected, automated world it is easy to rely on your computer to spell-check and grammar check your CV. Don't.

Make sure you check it and get someone else to check it also. Words like form, manger, roll and fro are proper words but they are not the same as from, manager, role and for! If left in your CV they make you look at best lazy and at worst, very poor at writing.

Three: Put your contact details at the top of page one

Most CVs are read on a screen rather than printed and there is nothing worse than hunting around for your contact details; also, if it is being read by software in order to place it on a database then if it can't 'read' it, your details won't appear on their system.

Amazingly, at least 5% of the CV's we receive have no contact details on them whatsoever, which makes it very hard to contact you: if we can be bothered, we could try and find your original email with them on.

So please make sure the details of who you are and how to contact you are prominently displayed, preferably at the top of the first page.

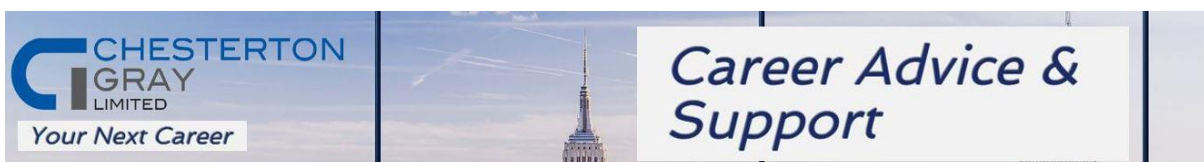
Four: Tell them what your employer does

There are over one million companies in the UK and, believe it or not, we don't know what all of them do! If you can tell us what your employer does, what sector it is in and how big it is that would be enormously helpful, especially where the client wants someone from the same, or a similar, sector.

Five: Keep it simple - avoid messy layouts

Boxes, headings, side bars, graphics and different fonts and sizes may look good, but they are hard to read and analyse: I am sure you would rather we focused on your experience instead of marvelling at your splendid document.

Granted, if you are an Architect, Interior Designer or Artist, we'll let you off!



Six: Add keywords

All recruitment systems and ATS (applicant tracking systems) all trawl CVs for keywords relevant to the job concerned.

So, in order to get through the initial stages, you need to ensure your CV is full of appropriate keywords.

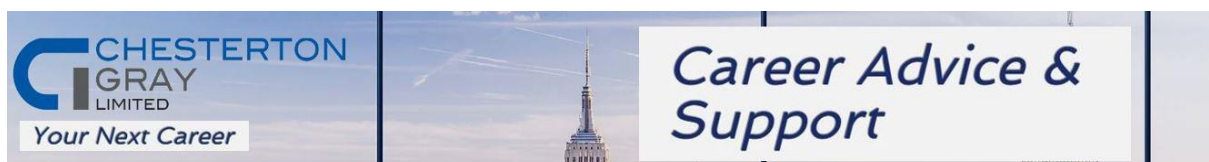
What is a keyword you might ask? Answer: anything that is crucial to the job!

Examples might include manufacturing, business development, acquisitions, growth and any sector or job specific things like software packages, accounting systems etc. If the job asks for it and you have done it, then tell them!

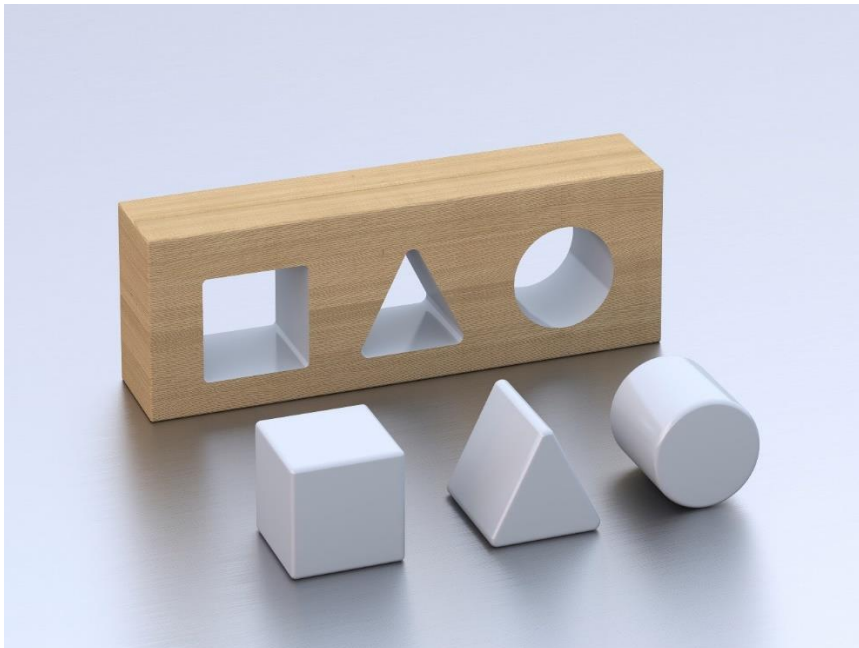
Seven: Help the Hiring Manager

What they want to see is who you are, who you work for, what role you do and what experience you have in the sector and role they are recruiting for.

Many CV searches are electronic and look for keywords – company names, sectors, job titles, qualifications, industry keywords and so on. If they are not on your CV, the search cannot find you...



Why doesn't my CV fit?



You may well see an advertisement online or a job description that you feel is the 'perfect' fit for you and your experience, only to find that you get no answer from the company (and assume that you have been unsuccessful) or a rejection stating that other candidates have come forward whose experience and background is more in line with their needs....

What went wrong?

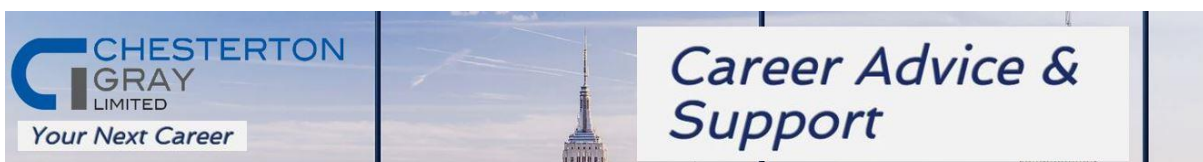
So why didn't your CV fit? There may be several reasons for this including the fact that you are not suitable. However, there are certain things you can do to help get your CV through the initial application process.

Help them out

You will never know exactly what the Hiring Manager is looking for, but you can second guess quite a lot from the text of the advert and job description.

Generally, they will have around 6-10 must have, key areas, relevant to the experience and background they are looking for.

These 'keywords' could include for example: someone who currently (or recently) works in their sector; has experience of similar/the same products or services; knows their customer base; has managed a team/operation of the same size and complexity; has established a new operation or facility; has turned a company around...and so on.



Add your keywords

The key is to read the advert/description carefully and pick out these key areas and then ensure they are prominent on your CV and your covering letter/email – providing of course that you have done them!

Be upfront – if it asks for experience of selling appliances to commercial kitchens and you have done this say so – do not assume that they should know that the company you work for is a competitor.

Who will read your CV?

Your CV may be read by the Hiring Manager, Line Manager, Recruitment Consultant, an Assistant, or by an automated system. All will sift through CV's and pick out those that match their requirements.

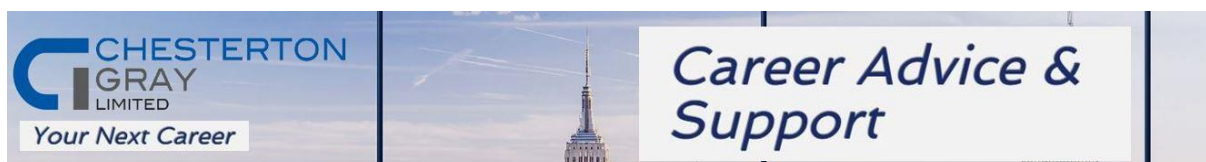
Customise your CV

So do not rely on just one generic CV, rewrite it for each job you apply for – this is so easy to do, but seldom is.

A word of warning though – don't see what you want to see from the advert/description, rather, be objective and honest about your 'fit'.

In our experience the majority of clients seek candidates who fit closely their requirements and can fit into the company immediately without extensive training which means they will look for those candidates doing a similar role in their sector.

Some do indeed want 'fresh eyes' from outside of their sector; either way you need your keywords to bring your skills, experience and knowledge to the fore.

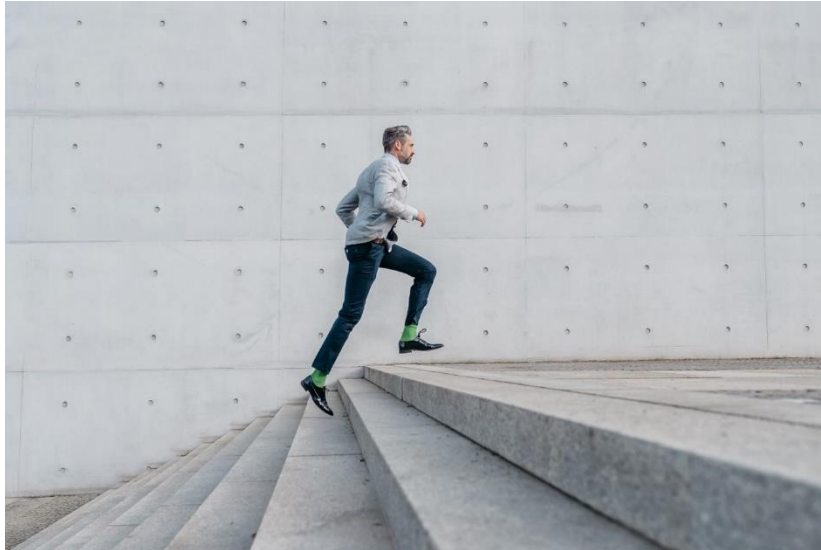


Reasons for Leaving

Do you put this on your CV for each job or do you not? A conundrum...

Here is our take on ***the good, the bad and the ugly...***

More so than ever it is important that you have a 'good' and a 'real' reason for leaving your job or moving on and not just one that sounds good.



Companies today are keen to find out everything they can about a candidate and some firms will use third parties to 'dig' into your background. If you are reluctant to say why you are leaving or the reason you give doesn't sound plausible, this will set the alarm bells ringing and your application may be downgraded or rejected.

It is always one of the first things that candidates get asked at interview and may be phrased in several ways as they try to find out what is motivating you to move:

- What is/was your reason for leaving?
- Why did you leave your last role?
- Why would you move from your current role?
- What might tempt you to move on?
- Is there anything missing in your role at the moment?

These questions are designed to find out what motivates you, whether you can work in the new company's environment or culture and whether you are likely to leave in the future if similar circumstances arise. More importantly, to find out whether the situation at the new company is the same as where you are now.

Most people don't put why they are leaving, or have left, their current employer on their CV, covering letter or on-line Profile (LinkedIn) so you can assume that at some point you will be asked.

So, what do you say?

This is where the fun starts for recruiters because, believe me, we have heard everything over the years from being rude about your employer to showing how good you think you are versus reality!

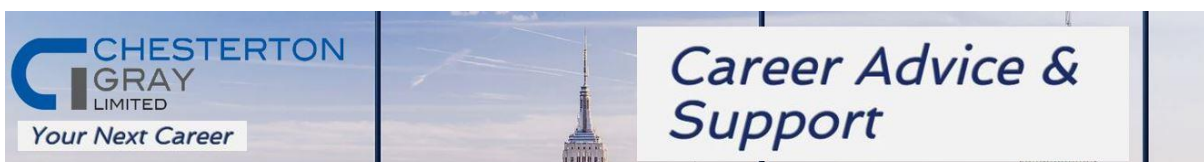
Obviously, with the current economic situation it may be that you simply cannot afford to stay in your current role and need a higher paid one...however...here is our light hearted look at some reasons for leaving.

Here are some 'good' reasons for leaving:

- Redundancy
- Your company is relocating, and you can't move
- Your company has merged/been acquired and you are surplus to requirements
- You are moving back to the area/country
- Your commute is currently two hours each way
- You are on a contract, and this is permanent
- This role is a step up – ie: you want to be promoted
- This role is with the number one company in your sector
- The role will use more of your core skills
- It is in an area that you want to get into, but your current employer is not

A few 'bad' reasons for leaving:

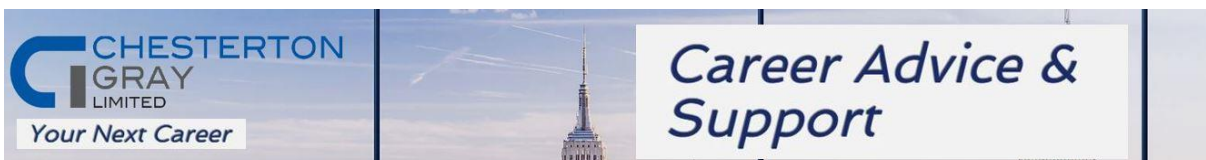
- Redundancy (you were the Sales Director, and the company sank through lack of orders)
- 'I was headhunted' (more of that later)
- Higher salary (you think you are underpaid, and an offer may get you a rise)
- You 'fancy a change' (undoubtedly not the real reason)
- Personal reasons (unspecified!)
- To go travelling around the world
- This is a lower-level role but you want to go back to the coalface (you are a terrible manager or you are about to be fired))
- It's a lower salary but your lifestyle has changed so you don't need as much (you are about to be fired)
- 'I don't really want to move but I'm looking at opportunities' (all of the above plus you hate your boss)



- You've been there over twenty/thirty years and fancy a change (no you don't – something has happened to upset your comfortable existence. A new boss perhaps that you do not like?)

And now for the 'ugly':

- 'I was headhunted'. So, if a stranger calls you up and says come join my company, you do, just walking out the door and leaving your employer in the lurch. If you are approached you still need a legitimate reason for moving, even if you weren't looking!
- Personality clash with the new boss 'we didn't see eye to eye' (he made you accountable and do some work which you reacted against. How do we know you'll get on with your next boss?)
- You are in Sales and want to leave after 10 months as 'the company doesn't support the client' (we are all allowed one career mistake but if this is a recurring theme then perhaps it's your sales ability...)
- Anything that involves theft, bullying, fighting, racism, harassment, refusing to work longer/flexible hours...



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



What HR Professionals & Employers say they look for in a CV:

- Keywords demonstrating that you match their requirements
- Your relevant achievements, with supporting evidence
- Full, relevant work history
- Your qualifications
- Skills that match their requirements
- Evidence that you will fit their company culture
- Easy to read format over two pages
- Email and contact details
- Good grammar and spelling – no typos!

What they don't like:

- Photos and images!
- Obviously professionally written CVs
- Different fonts, text boxes, graphics
- Overuse of buzz words and jargon
- Over the top selling of yourself
- Personal statements

FAQ

I have a LinkedIn profile – is that not enough?

No. Your details may be on LinkedIn (if you have completed a full profile), but it is not an application for a job, rather business networking.

How long should my CV be?

Keep your CV to two sides of A4 (if possible). Page one should contain your personal details and a short profile. Your contact details should be at the top of page one.

Do I need to change it for every job I apply for?

Yes, if possible. Bear in mind that there is no such thing as a 'perfect CV' fit for every occasion, since every employer, and their job, will have a different set of requirements and priorities.

What are keywords?

The most important thing your CV should contain (and this is mentioned many times in the guide) are **KEYWORDS**. These are words and phrases that demonstrate you match the job you are applying for. Examples include industry knowledge, working for a competitor, experience of specific technical skills, specific qualifications...

Can I add pictures and graphics?

You can but hiring managers do not like them and nor do applicant tracking systems! So, try to avoid them at all costs.

I've had lots of jobs – should I include them all?

Yes, you should include your full work history from when you left school or college.

My CV only shows my last job, not the current one

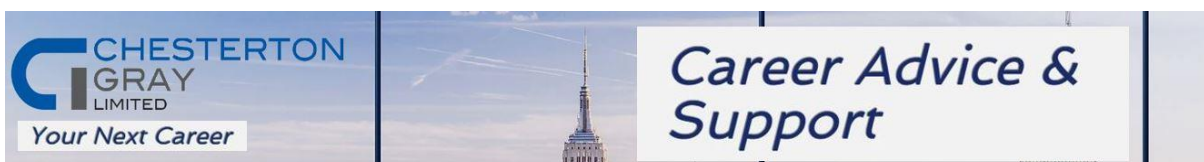
Then it needs to be updated to reflect your current status. At best this shows you are lazy; at worst it may be perceived as dishonest.

Do I need to add my reason for leaving?

No, if they ask for them put them in your covering letter/email.

What about references?

You do not need to add these to your CV. When they want them, the employer will ask you for them.

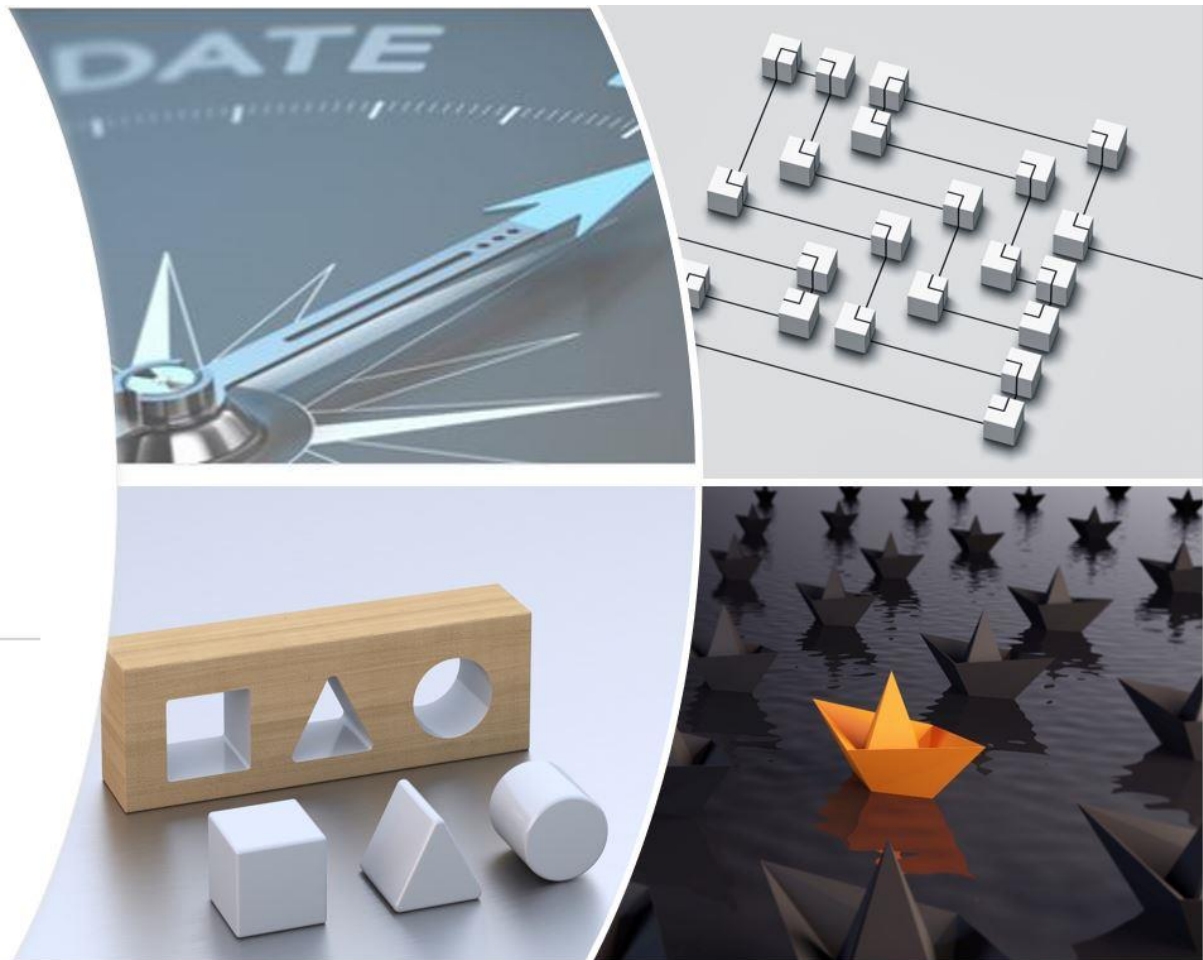


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