

Let's be Clear – The Objective

A CV has only one objective:-

TO GET YOU THROUGH SOMEONE'S DOOR

To do this it must capture and hold the interest of the reader, who may be busy, or bored, or have a pile of similar documents on his desk. A successful CV will have some of the qualities of an advertisement while conforming to accepted norms of the recruitment business.

It should -

- * attract attention
- * develop interest
- * arouse curiosity
- * clearly define the product (you !!)
- * highlight key selling points
- * be attractive in layout and easy to read
- * be truthful and accurate in detail

It should NOT -

- * leave the reader in doubt about the main thrust of your career or your entitlements in this field.
- * omit facts which are generally regarded as basic essentials for a CV - eg. Name, Address, Qualifications or age. (Note: Age should not be included in CVs sent to USA or certain other countries.)
- * leave unexplained gaps in an otherwise continuous career outline.
- * puzzle the reader with technical terms or obscure abbreviations without explanation.
- * force or encourage the reader to perform mental arithmetic eg. to convert a date of birth to age, or to see if a percentage turnover increase is compatible with absolute figures given elsewhere.
- * make the reader search for the information he needs - most commonly latest job, qualifications and age.

A CV should preferably be confined to two pages. This is discussed in more detail later. However, some people, such as computer experts, may need to describe their experience or usage of particular technology or equipment which may best be covered by a short Appendix. In this Appendix technical terms may be used as you may assume it will be studied by someone appropriately qualified.

So long as your target appointments lie broadly within the general parameters for which your entitlements are strong, there should be no need for more than one CV. Indeed it is difficult to handle a search using more than one at the same time.

An application for a job which is known to require experience not emphasised on the CV, (and therefore almost certainly marginal), can be strengthened by reference to this experience in a covering letter.

Preparation

Before you can begin to write a successful CV it is necessary to draw up a detailed inventory of skills, experiences and achievements in your career to date, assess their relevance for the type of appointment you feel would suit you and define key areas of strength to support a realistic objective. The Detailed Information Form (DIF) and Asset Register - a key part of your Product Chart - are designed to help you do just this.

Once the objective is established, supporting stories must be selected to illustrate relevant achievements. These stories need to be worked out in detail for use at Interviews and then condensed into one or two lines for possible inclusion in the CV. While doing this it is important to consider if a result can be quantified - turnover or profit increased, productivity improved, costs reduced, targets met and so on.

When every facet of your career history has been examined, the next stage is to decide the basic format for your draft CV.

Format

There are 2 acceptable formats for the CV - HISTORICAL and FUNCTIONAL. The HISTORICAL is preferred by the great majority of Recruiters and is well suited to those whose next appointment is to be a continuation or development of an existing career path. The FUNCTIONAL format may be appropriate if you anticipate a significant change of direction in your career so the past record gives little relevant support for the future or makes the change more difficult.

Historical CV Format

1. Name, Address, Phone Numbers) at the top.
The recruiter must know who you are and how to find you.
2. Heading or 'Profile'
A brief (3 lines max.) statement of what you are, what is your main claim to fame and what special expertise or industry knowledge you can offer.
If well written this is enormously useful to the less experienced CV reader and should be heavily slanted towards your objective. But it is NOT an overt statement of objective. It is a statement of what you ARE and must be fully supported by the body of the CV.
3. Career History
A series of dated (years, not months) paragraphs describing each appointment, starting with the current or latest job which will generally be of most interest to the reader, and working backwards without gaps. In each of these paragraphs - most particularly in the more recent jobs - you must give brief examples to illustrate how you met the challenge and achieved a beneficial result. In your early career it is easier to stress the value of the learning process, as dramatic achievements may lack credibility.
4. Other Details
Summarise facts such as Qualifications, Memberships (the former by examination, the latter by election, recommendation or experience), Courses, Appointments, Publications, Languages and Personal details, eg Nationality, Age, Marital Status and number of children.. As a general rule Education and Hobbies have some relevance for younger candidates but are less significant for those over 35 in terms of achieving interviews, and may actually be counterproductive. Details of Salary and Referees should NOT be included.

General Hints

The factual details - name, address, dates, etc. obviously cause no difficulty. Note the treatment of career paragraphs if you have held two or more appointments with the same company. By using a shortened form of dating the individual job sub-paragraphs will indent without upsetting the overall style. The three elements which need most thought and care are -

- a) Selection & key role summary
This should start, if possible with words such as 'Selected', 'Promoted', 'Appointed',

'Invited', rather than the boring 'Responsible for - ' Try to go straight to the heart of the job, its essential challenge, without bothering about marginal tasks or responsibilities. Quantify if appropriate - eg "to develop sales through a dealer network"? Say how many if it will impress.

"to manage major projects in Middle East"? For "Major" read "£10m"!

If the job title gives no clue of seniority and was in fact senior, try "reporting direct to the Chief Executive".

If the job involved staff management, end "60 staff. If only one or two, don't bother.

b) Achievement statements

The 'Action' words are such as - Introduced, Designed, Implemented, Planned, Negotiated and many others. Launch straight in - NEVER use personal pronouns, they sound pompous. Go for detail and be specific. If you start with a big broad statement "Increased turnover over five years" it is difficult to say anything else. Such global statements can be effective as a summary at the end of a string of detailed achievements.

Nearly every action has some beneficial effect for your company - increased sales, reduced costs, faster completion, larger market share, greater productivity. Think hard and try to quantify your achievements.

Don't just say you improved production. How could you measure the improvement in production? Now work out how best to express that improvement. If for example a factory was working at 90% capacity, 10% downtime; it is better to say that you reduced the downtime by 50% rather than that you increased the production from 90% to 95% of capacity.

A good test of a CV achievement line, when you have written the Action statement is to say "SO WHAT?" If you have a good answer to that question, put it in. If there is no answer review the value of your statement. However, DON'T OVERDO IT as you will be caught out by a good interviewer.

Don't repeat the same achievement in different words. It may be that one result followed from several different actions. Put them in a single statement if not too long, or split them up, put them one after the other and have a really big achievement with the final action.

If achievement statements describe disconnected events and not steps in a developing story, you do not have to keep to chronological sequence. You could put the best achievement first and the next best last; a reader's attention is at its lowest in the middle of a section.

c) Profile

The purpose and content of a Profile has been explained above. As it must be supported by the body of the CV it is often easier to write it last. It will probably be the most discussed part of your CV.

Functional CV Format.

This may be more appropriate if the next appointment involves a significant change of direction from one career to another or from one discipline to a new one. In this CV, instead of listing your achievements against specific appointments in date sequence they are sorted into functional areas such as MARKETING, PRODUCTION, TECHNICAL, FINANCIAL.

The CV heading or PROFILE is still required, but it may be necessary to add a specific 'Objective' statement under the profile because it will be very difficult to relate current description and skills (as given in the Profile) to the new area of work. One has to be careful in drafting the 'Objective' not to make it hopelessly vague eg "Seeking a new challenge with a UK based industrial group", while not making it so specific that it inhibits the use of the CV for all but a very narrow range of jobs.

The remaining three main sections of the CV - shown as:-

Experience & Achievements (subdivided into functions).

Career Summary.
Qualifications, Personal details etc.

The sequence is discretionary. If qualifications are particularly worth emphasis put them first. The Career Summary goes low down the page as that is the part you are trying to de-emphasize.

An achievement statement for a Functional CV is very similar to one in an Historical CV. You may have to help the reader a little more by relating an achievement to a particular appointment. Compare the following -

Historical

1983-89: Sales Manager XYZ Co. Ltd

* Increased calling rate of sales reps from 5 to 9 per week by reorganising territories.

Functional

Sales Management

* Increased calling rate of sales reps from 5 to 9 per week by reorganising XYZ Co. territories. (Note - dates of service with XYZ Co. appear in Career Summary).

After the achievements there must be a brief 'Career Summary' giving Dates, Appointment & Company for each job held. As the idea is to divert attention away from your previous career, the less detail in this section the better, so long as it appears to be complete without gaps in dates.

Essentially there are 3 ways of handling the block of information contained under headings such as QUALIFICATIONS, MEMBERSHIPS, COURSES, PERSONAL etc.

- a) Put the whole lot at the bottom of the page, exactly as in an Historical CV.
- b) Put the whole lot immediately above the Experience and Achievements section. This has the beneficial effect of leaving the Career History, which may be something of an irrelevance in a job change situation, right at the bottom of the CV.
- c) Split the block. Put strong Qualifications, Languages etc., if they really are strong, below the Profile as in b) above, but leave Personal Details and any weaker lines at the bottom.

Writing & Correcting

When drafting a CV in manuscript using one of the formats described above you should be aware that about 3 fairly closely written sides of A4 will approximately cover one side of A4 when typed, is better not to worry about making it too long. It is easier to reduce a long CV than to lengthen a short one. You may find it easier to write a skeleton with dates and headings and fill in the detail afterwards, starting with your first job and putting in more achievements as you approach the present. If there is a job only held for a short time and you have nothing significant to report, or may consider leaving it out - but there must not be an obvious gap in dates.

When your draft has been typed, read it through very carefully and consider what message each word and each phrase is conveying.

Are there any areas of relevant experience which you have not covered? Are you reiterating unnecessarily? Study the line lengths throughout, and change or abbreviate the words wherever necessary to ensure the optimum use of space and avoid empty lines with only one or two words on a line.

Once you have studied the draft carefully you should then consider if lines should be deleted to condense it onto a single page. Read it from top to bottom to get a general feel of how you have portrayed yourself before considering any detail.

Now check the detail. Start with the name and address and telephone number and confirm their accuracy. Next look at the personal details, followed by languages, qualifications etc.

•Bow consider the body of the CV and go through your wording line by line and word by word, Ask yourself: -

- 1) Are there any typing errors or words wrongly spelt?
-) Are all the statements true and supportable in an interview?
- ;) Does each line convey the "story" in the best way?
- 1) Is there anything relevant in that job which does not come across?
- i) Have you confused the issue by introducing too many achievements which are NOT relevant.
- I) Which of your strengths or "assets" lie behind each story.

SOME TYPICAL PROBLEMS WITH CVs

1. Incorrect use of English, particularly related to consistency of tense.
2. Using Company/Job description as an achievement rather than as part of the Company/Job profile: use it only if it can be expressed as an achievement.
3. Writing complex and wordy statements of achievements which can be simplified and gain more impact if split into separate short statements.
4. Omission of quantification i.e. size of budget/size of spend/value of contracts, etc.
5. Failure to describe companies' size and function - if not well known.
6. Repeating the same words within a few lines. An example is the use of words such as 'improve' or 'effective' in two adjacent lines.
7. When including turnover figures/staffing/profit, etc. omitting to do simple sums to ensure that they make sensible reading. Failure to distinguish those figures which refer to the 'Group' and those which refer to your own responsibility.
8. Writing two superficially different statements which, on examination, prove to be the same event.
9. Failure to be consistent in detail such as "expatriate" - "Ex Patriate" - and "ex patriate" all in the same CV.
10. Using jargon without examining in detail what is meant and then translating it into simple terms, eg:-
"Planned integrated human resources and career development programmes to achieve Group policy for technology transfer on a viable basis" - which turned out to mean "Developed programmes to train Third World Nationals to expatriate standards".
12. Overstating responsibilities:
"Forecast requirements and implemented £100k investment to automate the London Office" - it transpired that he had bought a rather superior photocopy machine.
13. Using terms like "specially chosen" when this is totally inappropriate and exaggerates both the position and the circumstances.
14. Giving too much space to unimpressive and irrelevant early career performance at the expense of later achievement and to the detriment of the overall picture, eg one and a half inches of valuable space given over to singularly unimpressive periods of catering experience when the CV is devoted to presenting an Export Sales Manager with an industrial background. Conversely one must try to demonstrate a continuing level of success from the start.
15. Incorrect use of words such as "merchandising" and "marketing".

16. Using generalised statements. Either be specific or say nothing. Examples in regular use as follows:-

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| "offered rapid promotion" | - | was he 'rapidly promoted' or 'offered promotion'. In this case he had been in the position for over a year. |
| "responsible for all <u>aspects of</u>" | | it may be valid, but needs to be considered. |
| "Participated in a <u>variety of</u>" | - | NB. "Participated" always begs the question - HOW? |
| "...etc..."-!!! | - | "in a variety of needs to be more specific. |
| "...with a depth of expertise...." | - | Never! |
| "Controlled the system...." | - | How can you quantify this? |
| "Reviewed methods/systems .." | - | without indicating what system! |
| "Recommended (or made recommendations)" | - | without stating what resulted or what was achieved! |
| | - | without saying whether the recommendations were implemented, and with what result! |

CV PREPARATION

CHECK LIST;

Have you -

1. Assembled ALL the necessary information
2. Decided on the format - HISTORICAL - v - FUNCTIONAL
3. Determined a clear objective.
4. Assembled your achievements into a logical order of priority.
5. Written a Profile which clearly indicates the product you are offering.
6. Made sure that every word in the Profile is supported by the CV.
Companies