

Writing compelling CV and covering letter



Module 14 Topic 10

Effective CV Writing



**To get yourself noticed it is
important to use a CV format
which will best represent you in
the jobs market**



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- There are any number of ways of laying out a CV, but these can in fact be reduced to 5 basic examples:
 - Chronological CV (traditional approach - superseded by the Performance CV)
 - Functional CV
 - Performance CV (an updated form of the Chronological CV)
 - Targeted CV and
 - Alternative CV



Performance CV

- In a Performance CV your employment history is shown in reverse chronological order, with your most recent job first
- Job titles and company names are strongly emphasised and duties and achievements are described under each job title
- You should use a Performance CV when you are seeking a job which is directly in line with your past experiences or your last employer was a household name
- The only difference between a Chronological CV and a Performance CV is that the Performance CV highlights a list of your major achievements near the start of your CV



Advantages:

- If you are planning to stay in the same field/work area
- If you want to show-off your promotions.
- If the name of your last employer is highly prestigious
- Most people prefer this format to the other formats listed here because it is easy to see who you have worked for and what you did in each particular job



Disadvantages:

- If you are planning to change career direction
- If you have frequently changed employer
- If your work history has been patchy in recent years, either through unemployment, redundancy, self-employment, ill health, etc.
- If you do not have many achievements (you could just leave out the achievements section as in a traditional Chronological CV) or your achievements are not in line with what you want to do now - either leave out the achievements section or consider using a Functional or Targeted CV



Functional CV

- This type of CV highlights the main functions/achievements of your whole career and it can therefore be very useful if you have had a varied career or you are seeking a change of career direction. In this format, job titles and company names are given less dominance or even omitted in some cases



Advantages:

- If you want to emphasise abilities and achievements that have not been used in your most recent job(s)
- If you are changing career direction
- If you have had a large number of jobs and you would prefer to describe the experience you have gained in total
- If you want to include voluntary/unpaid experience.
- If your work history has been patchy in recent years, either through unemployment, redundancy, self-employment, ill health, etc.



Disadvantages:

- If you want to highlight promotions/career growth - you could include this sort of information on the second page of your CV, but it would not be as prominent as on a Performance CV
- If your most recent employer is highly prestigious, because their name will not be prominently displayed on the first page. You can get round this by putting their name in both the profile and cover letter
- If your job has only a limited number of functions
- Unusual CV format - may not be liked by everyone



Targeted CV

- This type of CV emphasises your abilities and achievements which are directly relevant to a specific job target. It is best used when you are planning a change of career direction



Advantages:

- If you want to emphasise abilities and achievements that have not been used in your most recent job(s).
- If you are changing career direction
- If you have had a large number of jobs and you would prefer to describe the experience you have gained in total
- If you want to include voluntary/unpaid experience.
- If your work history has been patchy in recent years, either through unemployment, redundancy, self-employment, ill health, etc.
- If you have several completely different job targets and you need a CV for each



Disadvantages:

- If you want to highlight promotions/career growth - you could include this sort of information on the second page of your CV, but it would not be as prominent as on a Performance CV
- If your most recent employer is highly prestigious, because their name will not be prominently displayed on the first page. You can get round this by putting their name in both the profile and cover letter
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Alternative CV

- This sort of CV is suitable for creative careers in, for example, writing, public relations and fashion designers. It is not suitable for senior managers/executives who would be better advised to use the Performance CV.



Advantages:

- If the job requires exceptional talent in either the written or visual mediums
- If you will be applying directly to the person you will be working for



Disadvantages:

- Not to be used if you are seeking a management position
- If you are planning to apply through normal channels such as advertised vacancies/the Personnel Department
- This CV format may fail utterly if your ideas are not well received by the recipient of your CV



Why are CVs rejected?



Why are CVs rejected?

- First impressions
 - First impressions matter; if your CV does not attract the reader's attention in the first 20-30 seconds then your chances of obtaining an interview are greatly reduced.
- An employer may have a hundred or more CVs to look through and probably only a couple of hours in which to make their selection.
- So put your work experience at the start of your CV, not personal or educational details, unless you have only just left education.



Why are CVs rejected?

- What an employer really wants to know is why they should invite you for an interview. For this reason a short summary of your capabilities and/or a list of your major achievements can often be a good idea
- This should make an employer want to invite you for an interview - but please be careful that you do not oversell yourself



Why are CVs rejected?

- Poor visual layout
 - The visual layout of your CV is very important.
 - Even though the wording you use may be correct, if people cannot find the information they want quickly they will move on to someone else's CV.
 - You should use plenty of 'white' space in your CV and appropriate headings and section breaks.
- Always use a word-processor/DTP package.
- Use good quality A4 paper, preferably 100gram for both your CV and cover letter



Why are CVs rejected?

- Length of CV
 - It is usually best to try and keep your CV to two pages of A4, unless someone specifically asks you for a longer CV. If you cannot keep your CV to this length then you probably have not understood an employer's requirements. Employers do not want to know your whole life history - just enough to decide whether they should interview you or not
- Organising the information on your CV
 - If your CV is not well organised then the reader will find it hard to follow and will not be able to build up a picture of you quickly. Remember the reader will not spend very long looking at your CV - so if they cannot find what they want they will not bother to read any further



Why are CVs rejected?

- Overwritten - long paragraphs and sentences
 - This makes it difficult to read quickly - try and keep your sentences short and punchy and use bullet points to break up the text under section headings
- Too little information
 - A lot of people do not include enough details about their previous jobs and experience and an employer therefore does not have enough information - they will therefore have to reject your application



Why are CVs rejected?

- Not results orientated
 - You need to shout about your achievements. Please remember that your CV is your sales document to an employer. If it does not tell an employer why they should employ you then it has failed. An employer will only want to employ you if they can see a benefit in it for themselves. So do tell them the benefits of employing you
- CV makes you look too young/old for the job
 - In general being too young/old can be a real problem and a barrier to future advancement, or even to getting a job in the first place. There are a number of ways round this problem - but this depends very much on your individual circumstances and the industry/job you are applying for. There are further hints and tips throughout this website to help you



Why are CVs rejected?

- Mis-spellings, typographical errors, poor grammar
 - Your CV should be carefully checked for such errors before you send it out to employers. Tiny errors in your CV can detract from an otherwise good CV and make you look lazy or careless - not the sort of qualities you want to portray to an employer. As you will probably be 'blind' to these errors you should get someone else to check your CV for grammar and spelling errors



What should you leave out of your CV?

- Photos - the only people who need to include these are models, actors, actresses and possibly air cabin crew
- Any sort of failure - exams, marriages, businesses, etc.
- Reasons for leaving each job.
- Salary information - this can only be used to reject your application. If an advertisement specifically requests this information you can always include the information in your cover letter
- Fancy patterns/borders - these detract from your presentation



What should you leave out of your CV? (contd)

- Title pages, binders and folders are usually unnecessary and can be off-putting (though if you are doing a special presentation, enclosing your CV in a binder may look more impressive)
- Do not include a list of publications if you are a scientist, unless they are asked for
- Leave out age (put in date of birth instead - but, even date of birth may not be required), weight, height, health, or any other personal information that is irrelevant to your application
- Do not use poor quality photocopies of your CV - they make it look as though you are sending off your CV to lots of companies and that you may not be too bothered who you work for



General CV tips

- These days you can write your CV in the first person (i.e. I have) or the third person (i.e. he/she has). However, you do not need to use 'I', 'he' or 'she' in a CV because its use is implied
- Do mention things you are good at, but do not go over the top. You can oversell yourself
- Don't mention things that you are bad at or say negative things about yourself in your CV



General CV tips (contd)

- Make sure that the CV you write conjures up the right image of you and your skills, capabilities and achievements. If you do not match the picture you have painted with your CV at the interview, then your application will not be taken further
- Be careful when you use abbreviations - they can be misunderstood



Preparing Your Cover Letter



How to plan, write, and
customize a winning document

Cover Letters

- What experience are you offering?
- When do you need one?
- Why do you need one?
- What will you accomplish with your cover letter?
- How can you use your cover letter for networking?



Tips for Creating a Powerful Cover Letter (contd)

- Send an original letter
 - Keep it short, specific, and to the point
 - You CAN use several basic cover letter, templates, customized for the particular position and company to which you are applying
- State the job title
- Explain why you want this job
 - NOT to “make money”



Tips for Creating a Powerful Cover Letter (contd)

- Describe specific ways you will contribute
 - Refer to, but don't repeat, your resume
 - Reflect your own self-confidence
- Keep the content professional
- Maintain a tone of warmth
- State your follow-up plan



Tips for Creating a Powerful Cover Letter (contd)

- Proofread, revise, and edit...
...this is extremely important....



Business Letter Format

- Your Contact Information
- The Date
- Employer's Name, Position, and Address
- The Greeting
- Introductory Paragraph
- Body of the Letter
- Summary Paragraph
- Closing
- Your Name and Signature



Opening Information

- Street Address
- City, State, Zip
- Telephone Number
- Current Date
- Employer's Name
- Title
- Department
- Organization
- Street Address
- City, State, Zip
- Dear Mr./Ms./Dr./Individual's Name:



Introductory Paragraph

- Limit paragraphs to two to five complete sentences
- Use appropriate vocabulary
- If this is a repeat contact type of letter:
 - Give specific details of any previous correspondence or conversation.
 - State appreciation for past consideration.
- Supply your credentials.
- List a specific job title.
- Indicate your knowledge of the company.
- Mention the name of a contact.



BODY OF THE LETTER

- Elaborate on your resume
 - Use real examples (mini-STARs)
 - State applicable work/internship experiences
 - List relevant coursework
 - Stress your key assets as they relate to this specific job
- Highlight applicable skill sets
 - Technical skills
 - Writing ability
 - Proficiency in languages
 - Job-applicable personal interests
- Make reference to attachments



Some Variations

- You can use BULLET POINTS for emphasis within a paragraph
- You can list qualifications mentioned in the job listing in BOLD print, then describe your corresponding skills or experiences
- You can try a two-column approach

Employer's Needs Your Skills



Closing

- Ask for an interview
- Indicate your next action
- Appropriate closing line, such as:
- Sincerely,
- Truly yours,
- Typed name
- Enclosure:
- cc: (indicates to whom a copy has been sent)



Every Word Counts

- Use powerful action verbs (See examples)
- Search out appropriate self-descriptive adjectives (See examples)
- Use a thesaurus to select precise words
- What five key descriptive words will your letter convey?



Action Verbs

- Achieved
- Administered
- Attained
- Built
- Coached
- Completed
- Coordinated



Action Verbs (contd)

- Delivered
- Demonstrated
- Developed
- Effected
- Established
- Expedited
- Formulated
- Generated
- Headed



Action Verbs (contd)

- Implemented
- Improved
- Invented
- Launched
- Led
- Maintained
- Managed
- Motivated



Action Verbs (contd)

- Negotiated
- Organized
- Originated
- Planned
- Presented
- Proposed
- Reinforced
- Reorganized



Action Verbs (contd)

- Researched
- Set up
- Simplified
- Solved
- Tackled
- Taught
- Updated



Self-descriptive Words

- Adaptable
- Analytical
- Assertive
- Confident
- Conscientious
- Creative
- Disciplined



Self-descriptive Words (contd)

- Efficient
- Energetic
- Enterprising
- Enthusiastic
- Expressive
- Extroverted
- Ingenious
- Innovative
- Manager
- Personable
- Persuasive
- Precise



Self-descriptive Words (contd)

- Productive
- Reliable
- Responsible
- Self-reliant
- Self-starter
- Skilled
- Tactful
- Team player
- Technical



Use Active Verbs, but not Cartoonishly Active

- Verbs have either active or passive voice. The active voice is more powerful
- Active: Pat Smith wrote the report
- Passive: The report was written by Pat Smith
- A passive verb always consists of a form of to be followed by a past participle
- (was seen, had been taught, is guaranteed)



No-no's

- Glib or cute
- More than one page
- Too many attachments
- Errors in grammar or spelling
- Too little information
- Non-standard terminology

.....and, watch out for the “Notorious Confusables”...



Lay/Lie

- To lay means to “put down”.

place=lay

- To lie means to “assume a horizontal position”.

recline=lie

| PRESENT | PAST | PAST PARTICIPLE |
|---------|------|-----------------|
| lay | laid | laid |
| lie | lay | lain |



Affect/Effect

- **Affect**, as a verb, means “influence”.
- **Effect**, as a verb, means to “bring about”. As a noun, **effect** means “results”.

In most cases, you will be safe if you remember to use affect for the verb and effect for the noun



All Together/Altogether

- **All together** means “in a group”.
- **Altogether** is an adverb meaning “entirely”.



Bring/Take

- One **brings** something to a place where one is or will be
- One **takes** it when one is leaving for somewhere else



Accept/Except

- **Accept** is a verb meaning to “agree” to something
- **Except**, when used as a verb, means to “exclude”. As a preposition, **except** means “with the exclusion of”



Less/Fewer

- Use **less** for money and things that are not countable, often singular nouns.
- Use **fewer** for things that are countable, often plural nouns.

less time, fewer clocks



Review of The Notorious Confusable

- His dismissal (affected, effected) me
- My goal is to (affect, effect) a change in this company
- We know that many obstacles (lay, lie) in our path
- You can (lay, lie) the report on my desk
- We were (all together, altogether) in the conference room



Review

- His argument was (all together, altogether) wrong
- Be sure to (bring, take) your laptop to the meeting in Chicago
- Please (bring, take) me that memo
- I (accept, except) your offer
- John's boss (accepted, excepted) him from the general criticism



Review

- (Less, fewer) than 100 people work for our company
- Now that he's earning (less, fewer) money, he's making (less, fewer) large expenditures



Avoid “X-rated” Expressions

There is no x in:

- Espresso
- Etcetera
- Especially



Spell-check won't catch these!

- Cite/site
- Complement/compliment
- Council/counsel
- Farther/further
- Liable/libel
- Principal/principle
- Stationary/stationery
- There/their/they're



Avoid Pompous Wordiness in Speech and Writing

- At this point in time-NOW
- In spite of the fact that-ALTHOUGH
- Cooperate together-COOPERATE
- Owing to the fact that-BECAUSE,SINCE
- On account of the fact that-BECAUSE
- During the time that-WHILE
- In an efficient manner-EFFICIENTLY



Use Non-Sexist Language

- Nouns-chairperson, spokesperson
- Pronouns- he or she, his or her
- Use examples from both sexes
- Find out your company's policy on "sexist language" regarding nouns and pronouns.



Revise, Edit, Rewrite

- Proofread the next day
- No errors are allowed
- Read the letter aloud
- Seek advice from qualified sources such as career counselors, professors, business associates, relatives, and friends



The Follow-up

- Encourage communication
 - Enclose a reply postcard
 - Request an email reply
 - Suggest dates and times for an interview
 - Follow up with a phone call (Be careful not to annoy the recruiter)
- Request an application form- Deliver it Personally
- Advise the employer when you will call to schedule an interview
- SHOW PERSONAL INITIATIVE, NOT OBNOXIOUS PUSHINESS

