

Your CV: A story about you



Writing or updating a CV is not something many of us look forward to doing. Fearing your CV will just be consigned to the trash because you omitted a key word may be enough to bring on serious procrastination that sees you staying in a job that isn't really you – but, well, it's ok.

Take heart! Your CV is one of the few chances most of us get to write a story about ourselves!

Sure, the aim is to give an account of some, or all your work history, education, training, skills and accomplishments. You can also record something of your interests and life outside the workplace.

But your CV needs to be much more than a list of details and dates. It needs to tell a story – for particular readers or audiences - in agencies, departments, organisations, panels and the like.

The way you write and present your CV conveys what's important to you but also your understanding and consideration of your readers what they're looking for, the time they have available, and lots of other professional, personal and situational factors.

Your readers



Your CV story must have audience appeal. It needs to draw readers in, create interest, take them along. Clarity, brevity and visual appeal and cues are your allies! Go easy on your readers; help them make sense of your account as the chapters unfold. It needs to have a storyline, themes, to flow, give signpost along the way, and maybe a few surprises for added interest.

To do that, you need some understanding of your readers - those you know, or imagine, will be reading your CV. Being able to picture the organisation, industry or sector, its culture, norms, standards, location, principles, expectations, requirements and preferences will help immensely in telling your story effectively.

So that means some thinking and work on your part. Of course your career details are vital ingredients. But the focus needs to be broader than you and what you've done.

A traveller's tale?



So, think of your CV as a story about you. But it's not a fantasy, a mythical tale you tell. It needs to gather together details and highlights of your educational and working life. But that's just the start. An effective CV brings those details together in a way that convinces readers (that you don't know and probably haven't even met) that you are the person they need to fill a position or do the job they have in mind.

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Like any story your CV will comprise actions, events, people, times and places. But as the main character, you'll tell your story tracing your work journey, its developments, shifts and highlights over time.

How personal does this story get?



Certainly our readers will want to know about your skills and experience, but also, at least something about who you are, what attributes, values and strengths you might bring to the workplace.

If you are offered an interview, that will be another opportunity for you to demonstrate those facets of who you are. But your CV can do quite a lot, in the way you tell and present your story to demonstrate aspects of who you are. Your attention to detail, care in presentation, consideration for your readers, understanding of requirements – or otherwise – can all show through in the 'sub-text', styles, layout and overall presentation and delivery of your CV.

So my CV is one consistent story?



You'll probably need to have versions suited to different audiences and scenarios. You'll no doubt highlight various sections for some readers, then re-order, add detail or leave bits out for others.

If you've just starting out in your work life you may just have enough experiences and work examples to neatly fill a page. That's fine. You can add a bit more detail or explanation.

Further along in your work life you'll need to focus and draw threads together more. This applies especially if you've taken the now fairly typical meandering short-term contract and gig economy career-route.

There's likely to be a mountain of detail and variety that can be a challenge to shape into some kind of coherent trajectory that demonstrates commitment and focus, still considered hallmarks of employability in some sectors. Draw attention to commonalities, threads and connections which can be found within seemingly disparate work locations and responsibilities.

Summing up



The important thing to remember is – your CV is a story about you – told to a particular audience or set of readers at a particular point in time. Once you have the key information, you just need to keep it updated and ready for the next tweaking for a new audience!

There's plenty of free information on-line. And of course, professional CV writers if you choose to go down that path.

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A few practical pointers for putting together a CV

- I. **Key words** - software scanning is commonly used to pick up key words and identify applicants most likely to meet the desirable and essential criteria listed for the position. Ensure you include words that reflect these descriptors to increase the likelihood that your CV gets through this initial process and will actually be read by interview panel members.
2. **Usual document readability considerations are very important:**
 - I. Present your name and contact details clearly at the top centre of the first page – and on every page footer
 - II. Convey a compelling story that focuses on your reader and their needs
 - III. Consider who is likely to be reading your CV e.g. time availability, preferences, knowledge levels
 - IV. Ensure the content and style is appropriate/relevant, brief and clear.
3. **Document format**
 - I. Length – 3 to 5 pages
 - II. Consistent legible font – e.g. Palatino 11 (avoid shrinking to fit to desired page length)
 - III. Sparing use of – colour, underline, italics, bolding, bullet lists (2 points smaller than text)
 - IV. Personal photo – not usually recommended unless relevant to the job
 - V. Keep the layout clear, consistent and uncluttered for eye appeal and to facilitate scanning/readability
 - VI. Number the pages (1 of #) to avoid pages being missed.
4. **Career profile/ highlights.** Consider Tag line (1 line) and/or summary statement (brief paragraph or introductory sentence followed by bullet point list of key strengths. Generally use first person pronoun – “I”
5. **Essential and desirable criteria** - address specifically (with examples)
6. **Career history** – list most recent first, usually for 10 years with consistent format:
 - I. Dates
 - II. Job title
 - III. Employer (describe industry position)
 - IV. Key responsibilities.
7. **Education and training** -significant outputs/out comes (most recent first). Include in-service training; your aim is to show ongoing updating/learning and commitment to professional development.
8. **Achievements** – highlights for last 2-3 jobs:
 - I. Role
 - II. Company (describe industry position)
 - III. Responsibilities
 - IV. Achievements (including things like change management, team building, awards.
9. **Hobbies and interests** (optional and usually where company culture is familiar)
10. **Professional memberships** and any held positions e.g. committee member, newsletter editor
11. **Referees** – Take care and consider appropriateness for the application/position. List with contact details (with permission) or statement regarding availability on request. Line up in advance and email them a copy of your CV and, if you are offered an interview, send your application as well.

