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SECURING AN INTERVIEW

A guide to creating CVs and defining your skills

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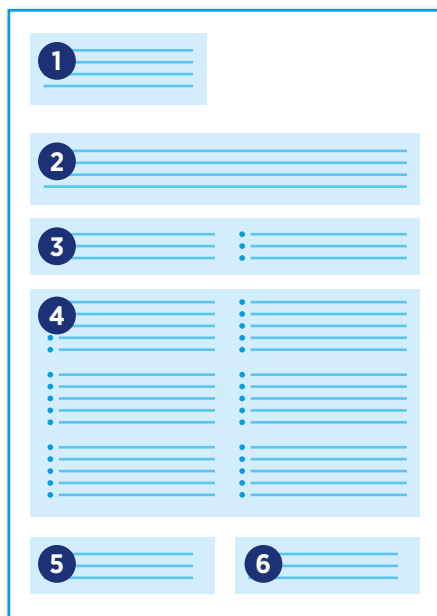
Applying for jobs can be a daunting prospect, but it doesn't have to be. We've helped millions of jobseekers find their next role and know what employers look for when they're seeking exceptional candidates. This guide will help you to put your best foot forward and present your skills and talents effectively to a potential employer.

YOUR CV

The first step in any job hunt is to make sure your CV says what you need it to. Even in the midst of the digital age this simple document is an employer's first stop when they're looking to find out more about you, so make sure you give it the attention it demands.

CVs should be tailored to each role you apply for, but to save time, first create a general CV which can be easily adapted for each employer based on the job description.

Basic CV structure



1 Contact details

Make sure use the phone number and email address that you use most often. You don't want to miss an opportunity by failing to respond to their invitation to an interview in a timely fashion.

2 Personal summary

Ensure the first area at the top of your CV is a summary of your experience and includes specific applicable experience in relation to the job ad as opposed to generalities.

3 Skills

Your recruiter or employer may not have more than a few seconds to read your CV so including a skills section can capture their attention by making it clear what you can offer. Use a brief bulleted list of the skills and experience that you possess that are relevant to the role, such as software packages you have worked with.

4 Experience

This section should include your work history and any relevant volunteer or work experience placements. Talk about business or project successes and showcase your skills and experience. Work backwards from your most recent job and don't leave any gaps; if you took a year out, carried out an interim assignment or travelled for six months, say so.

If you are a graduate, you may not have a great deal of work experience. In this case, highlight the relevant skills that you gained in your course or in any work experience.

5 Education and training

List your highest qualifications by institution, course name and grade achieved. Make sure you also include any training courses that you have done that are relevant to the job that you are applying for.

If you have any professional or industry standard qualifications you should mention them here, along with any memberships to chartered institutes or relevant organisations.

6 References

Actual references are rarely included on CVs. It is usually fine to simply say 'References are available on request'.

IDENTIFYING YOUR KEY STRENGTHS


If you're having trouble pinning down your skills and thinking of applicable situations, you can try undertaking a personal SWOT analysis.

As you write it, you'll be able to see how your strengths can be presented on a CV, LinkedIn profile or cover letter. This is also a great tool for interviews, as it can give you a new insight into your abilities, and more talking points with your potential employer.

- Firstly, fill out the **strengths** box with positive traits such as good technical skills, project management, written communication and stakeholder management.
- Secondly, fill out the **weaknesses** box with personal challenges to overcome, such as disorganisation, difficulty presenting and poor time management.

- Next fill out the **opportunities** and **threats** sections. These are external forces which can improve or damage your chances of getting a job.
- Opportunities could be things like further training or seeking out public speaking, and should complement your strengths while counteracting your weaknesses.
- Threats stem from your weaknesses and are things like competition from other candidates. Use your strengths to find out how you would overcome them.

In each of the centre boxes, write how each of the SWOT factors relate to one another:

 <p>By being honest in your personal SWOT analysis, you can create a more accurate CV and in turn be prepared for potentially difficult questions at interview. For more information on how to succeed at interview, download our Ultimate Guide to Interviews.</p>	<p>STRENGTHS</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 3. 	<p>WEAKNESSES</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 3.
<p>OPPORTUNITIES</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 3. 	<p>How can your strengths lead to opportunities?</p>	<p>How can opportunities overcome weaknesses?</p>
<p>THREATS</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 3. 	<p>How can your strengths overcome threats?</p>	<p>How can your weaknesses lead to threats?</p>

PRESENTATION AND LAYOUT

It is imperative that your presentation and CV structure is of a high standard in order to give a good impression:

- Keep the format clean and well laid out. Use white space to make it easier for the employer to read, don't overcrowd it
- No longer than two pages unless your industry has its own standards. For instance, if you are expected to include your successful projects
- Use clean, professional fonts like Arial, 10pt. Avoid using italics and use bold text for headings only
- Start each bullet point with a verb such as 'created', 'managed', 'increased', 'improved' etc
- Spelling and punctuation must be perfect, so after you have proofread and spell-checked it, give it to a friend to check it over for readability and any errors you may have missed

TAILORING YOUR CV

When it comes to tailoring your CV for a specific role, you need to thoroughly read the job description and research the company.

Once you have done this, you need to adapt the skills and experience sections of your CVs to reflect the language they use and the skills they are prioritising. Wherever possible, use the same adjectives as those used in the advertisement. If the job description specifies someone who has 'effective administrative abilities and excellent interpersonal skills', these should be addressed under your skills section, preferably in the same order to make it easier for the reviewer to cross-check.

OPTIMISING YOUR ONLINE PROFILE

Social media is used by employers to get a better sense of who you are, it should certainly be part of your professional brand, along with your CV. You should consider the impression you make on all forms of social media but pay particular attention to your LinkedIn profile, which in many sectors is almost as important as your physical CV. Make sure you optimise your profile whenever you're applying for jobs, as it is likely to be looked at by any interested recruiters and employers.

There are several steps you can take to make your LinkedIn profile reflect your interests and ambitions:

Offer insights

- Post articles that are of interest to you and relevant to your industry
- Share other people's posts, share other member's posts and ask questions

Make connections

- If you see someone you'd like to connect with, personalise the message you send with your connection request
- Only connect with people you feel are relevant to you

Get involved with groups

- Groups are where professionals from the same industry or sector come together to discuss relevant subjects
- Groups are tailored to interests and industries, so search for the ones most relevant to your industry and location

Follow companies

- You can choose to follow any company you would be interested in working for
- By looking for people working for the company with a similar job title to yours to get an idea of what you should be aspiring to



If you've not created a LinkedIn profile, or need more information on using social media for your career, download our guide to Building Your Online Brand.

You can find your local Hays recruiter at hays.co.uk/offices, or search for jobs today.

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