



Harper
Adams



UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

Harper Adams Careers Service

Guidance On Constructing CV's

INTRODUCTION

CV's and covering letters combined form a package that should provide an employer with sufficient information for them to select you for the next stage of the recruitment process. Together they should be attractive, informative and interesting yet concise and to the point.

Many of us find these two documents difficult to construct because, unlike application forms, there is no structure to follow. Whilst this can be disorientating, it has the advantage of allowing you to sell yourself how you want.

The following pages give you some idea of how to approach constructing CV's and covering letters in a way that allows you to sell yourself effectively and get that interview:

ie. you have demonstrated you have the strengths that link you to the job.

THE CURRICULUM VITAE

Purpose:

- To get you to the interview stage of selection
- To tell an employer that you have skills, qualities, knowledge and experience that they need in the post for which they are selecting.
- To enable you to market yourself to employers in a way that you decide is appropriate.

THE BASICS

CV's do not have to follow a standard format. You can design them to suit the purpose for which they are needed.

They should be two sides of A4 in length or less, even if you have substantial work experience behind you.

Information needs to be easily accessible i.e. clearly labelled, not hidden in lengthy paragraphs and well spaced.

They should look professional – use the best quality print and paper possible. Think carefully about the use of coloured paper and to whom the CV is intended.

You should be consistent in use of format, layout, style etc. It should be possible to pick out your main 'selling points' with just a quick scan of the CV first – many employers scan CV's before reading them in depth.

A good test of this is to see a pile of CV's together and at a glance think which ones stand out. Which would you want to single out and read?

CONSTRUCTING THE CV

The steps in constructing a CV:

- Study the advertisement/job description and analyse the experience/abilities/skills required.
- Collect the evidence from your experience/qualifications which meet these requirements.
- Prioritise the importance of your evidence.
- Decide on the headings you wish to use.
- Design the layout.
- Write the CV

Before you start anything you will need to find out about the skills, abilities, knowledge and experiences required for the career you have chosen. What you are aiming to do is make the match with some of the qualities the employer is looking for.

The next stage is to gather together the evidence of these skills. This could come from your course, your work experience, leisure activities, student experiences, previous courses, family responsibilities etc. You could have several pieces of evidence that demonstrate a specific required skill.

What you may believe to be mundane experiences can be used to demonstrate valuable skills acquired. For example, you can use restaurant work as evidence of ability to cope under pressure, effective communication, exercising tact and diplomacy, numeracy, being flexible and using persuasion.

You may find you have more evidence of certain experiences than others. This would indicate that they are going to be the most important pieces of information to incorporate within the CV.

HEADINGS – what headings are appropriate to display these valuable pieces of information. Some suggestions are listed below:

- Education
- Skills
- Position of Responsibility
- Activities & Interests
- Achievements
- References

All headings should be positive – you should avoid headings like “Additional Information”, “Other Information” etc. as these do not tell you what you are going to find in that sections and can tend to undervalue the information contained within it.

Which heading should come first is another important issue. The simple answer is that the section containing your best quality information should be the first thing the employer sees.

If your degree is relevant to the type of work you want, then education could well come first. If your career choice is some way from you degree content then you could start with skills, achievements or work experience depending on which is going to show you in the best possible light.

HOW TO WRITE A CV

- Focus on achievements, skills and results – skills if there is limited work experience.
- Never include statements or achievements that can not be substantiated.
- Keep sentences short and punchy.
- Your CV should be attractive and easy to read – good spacing, margins and bold printing. Avoid overcrowding.
- Do not use abbreviations when there could be doubt as to the meaning. Be clear and precise.
- Keep it short. A good CV will be as short as possible, certainly no longer than 2 pages.
- Do not use personal pronouns (I/We).
- Use action words to describe each achievement.
- Wherever possible, show results in figures.
- Try to be original and avoid exaggerations and flowery items.
- If you have a sense of humour, let it show a little in your CV.

WHAT YOU SHOULD (AND SHOULD NOT) SAY AND HOW YOU SHOULD SAY IT

The language you use in your CV should be positive, concise and straight forward. It needs to convey the maximum effect in as few words as possible.

PROJECTING FORWARD

CV's should show the employer what you can do rather than just reflect on what you have done.

If you have worked in practical farming but are now trying to get a job as a food technologist with a leading multiple, a listing of your jobs in farming that only lists your responsibilities, will read as though you still want to work in practical farming. However, if you use the content of the job to display evidence of the skills required by a food technologist then the CV starts to look forward rather than backwards and employers can see you doing the job for which you are applying rather than the one you did before.

WHAT YOU SHOULD REVEAL ABOUT YOURSELF

Many CV's contain a lot of information about gender, marital status, children, nationality, age etc. The principle to stick to is that you should only reveal as much as you feel you need to disclose. This way you stay in control of the picture the employer is forming of you.

Powerful Language – CV's should be positive, powerful documents. Therefore the words you use should be strong and very descriptive.

Terms such as 'liaised', 'worked with' and 'was involved in' do not quantify what you actually did. They merely say you were there. Instead use strong active, descriptive verbs such as:

Designed	Produced	Solved	Co-ordinate
Led	Resolved	Arranged	Persuaded
Managed	Assessed	Negotiated	Supervised
Decided	Organised	Presented	Devised
Analysed	Influenced	Initiated	Facilitated
Controlled	Achieved		
Researched			

Describing Skills – Here it is important to accurately name the skill and then substantiate your claim by providing concrete evidence of your using that skill.

Therefore, your skill section could look something like:

- IT:** **European Computer Driving Licence Certificate** – competent in all Microsoft Office packages including Excel, Word, Access, Powerpoint. Regularly used for academic and work projects. (The ECDL is available from Harper Adams, ask at the Computer Helpdesk).
- Team Work:** Successfully co-ordinate work of course project team presentation – monitored progress, delegated tasks, ensured completion to deadline
- Negotiation:** Secured co-operation and use of facilities with J Bloggs & Co for final year project
- Languages:** Fluent spoken and written Spanish, some knowledge of French
- Driving:** Full, clean licence

This layout will enable the name of the skill to stand out when the CV is initially scanned and also throw more light onto some of the experiences mentioned elsewhere on the CV.

Describing Your Course: If your course is relevant to the type of work you want (and because of the vocational nature of the courses at Harper Adams it probably will be) then this will be a major selling point for you. In this case you will need to prioritise the elements of the course that best fit with the job requirements.

It is also important to bring out specialisms you have developed within the course, especially through investigational projects or course research based work.

If your course content has nothing to do with the job you want, it is a good idea to examine the way in which you have studied to bring out the skills you have developed. For example, 2002-2006 BSc Agriculture with Land and Farm Management – included module on computer applications,

development of critical reasoning through a study of land usage, presenting seminars and the meeting of frequent deadlines.

Avoid just listing names of modules you have studied. Employers prefer to hear about experience and achievements.

Visual Impact: Employers will want to find the key information they need quickly and easily. Therefore keep the CV simple.

Information presented on the CV should look sharp, be easily found, be concise and be in small chunks.

References: You should give the names and addresses of two referees. One should be from the University, normally you Course Tutor, Dissertation Tutor or a Tutor who knows you well. The second should be either a recent employer (especially if you have done a placement who has known you for a long time, holds a reasonably responsible position and is not related to you.

Occasionally people say that references are available on request. This is usual when you are already in work and do not want your employer to know that you are job-hunting.

COVERING LETTERS

Covering letters need to be different depending on whether the application is speculative or is answering an advertisement. They should be individually written for each application you make. Covering letters can be typed unless the firm specifically asks for a hand written letter. However, if you do word process you letters, make sure they do not read like a standard letter.

Speculative Applications: Here you need the concise, simple four paragraph letter:

Paragraph 1:

The Introduction:

Here you introduce the CV, explain that you are about to graduate/have recently graduated, giving your subject where it is relevant and that you want to develop a career in e.g. farm business consultancy.

Paragraph 2:

Here you make the case for why you want the type of work you are asking for. You need to answer the question of what is motivating you towards this career and then provide some supporting evidence for why you are the ideal candidate for the job.

To do this you may want to refer to some of the skills you have mentioned in your CV where this is the case you should not merely repeat what is said on the CV. You would either expand on that information or draw the employer's attention to the fact that they will find details on the CV.

Paragraph 3:

This could be used to explain why you want to work for the company to whom you are writing. This is a good ploy provided that your reasons show that you have done some research into the firm.

Phrases such as "I am applying to you because of the challenging and dynamic opportunities you can offer" do not work. There is nothing in this statement that shows any knowledge of the organisation. If information on the firm is difficult to come by, you can use this paragraph to highlight other experiences or achievements that help show you as having skills, knowledge or qualities that the organisation needs.

Paragraph 4:

This merely closes the letter and invites a reply or further contact with the organisation eg. You could mention your availability for interview.

Applications to Advertised Vacancies: Here the letter is short and simple. It should open by introducing the CV saying which post you are applying for and where you saw it advertised.

The next paragraph should say why you are applying and should briefly mention what points make you the ideal candidate and link you to the job. These could be based on experience, skills, part of your course or a combination of these factors.

Following this you should close the letter again inviting a reply or further contact with the organisation.

REMEMBER

In both the CV and covering letter make absolutely sure that there are no spelling mistakes and that it is grammatically correct.

In many jobs today written communication is an important skill. Your CV and covering letter will be judged as evidence of this skill. At this stage these pieces of paper are all the selector has to go on in order to make judgments on whether to call you for interview.

If in doubt, ask a Tutor, the Careers Office or a friend to check it for you.