

## CV TIPS

### Introduction

First of all, remember the purpose of a curriculum vitae (CV) is to help get you to an interview\*. Therefore its contents must be targeted, focussed and error free, and it should not be longer than two pages.

Second, it should be set up in the generally accepted format for CVs unless the firm requires it to be in their own particular format or on a specified template.

Third, if printed, it should be printed on plain, high quality, white paper using a common 12 size font such as Times New Roman, Arial or Calibri. It should preferably not contain any underlining, italic script or odd symbols in the event it might be scanned and therefore confuse the scanning software to your detriment. Bolding is acceptable but should be limited to headings.

*\* Avoid using the word "résumé" which is used in America.*

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## One What your CV should contain

The information that is contained on your CV only needs to be what is required for the reader to quickly make up their mind whether you are worth interviewing or not. Generally speaking, this means your CV should include:

- Your contact details
- Your work experience
- Your education and qualifications (or skills)
- Any further information which supports you as a candidate for interview

It is not necessary for your document to list referees or interests unless you think either will directly contribute to the overall aim of securing you an interview.

#### Your contact details

Your contact details should be easy to find and include a telephone number and an email address as a minimum. Typically this information is placed at the top of the first page a bit like a business letter header. It should not be on any subsequent pages.

#### Your "work experience" section

In this section of your CV you should show the month and year, job title and firm of each job you have had in reverse chronological order. It should be in this order because the reader is more likely to base a decision to interview you on what you have been doing recently.

## WORK EXPERIENCE

**September 2007– present**  
**Corporate/Commercial Solicitor**  
**Profit Law, Norwich**

- Advising local, national and international companies from start-up businesses through to public limited companies.
- Advising on a range of issues including acquisitions and disposals, mergers, takeovers, management buy outs, equity financing, restructuring, group restructuring, shareholders' agreements and joint venture agreements. Providing general advice on company, commercial and contractual issues.
- Actively marketing the firm's corporate/commercial team which has resulted in a number of new clients; those relationships have then been nurtured and in many cases have become significant sources of income for the firm.
- Training and supervising at least one trainee solicitor at all times.
- Consistently billing an average of at least £15,000 per month.

**September 2005– August 2007**  
**Trainee Solicitor**  
**Profit Law, Norwich**

- Completed four six-month seats: company/commercial, employment, insolvency and commercial litigation.

**September 2003– August 2005**  
**Commercial Property Paralegal**  
**Profit Law, Norwich**

If you have had more than 10 years' experience, you may not need to show much more than the last 10 years (unless it is relevant). Under each job, you only need to include the parts of your work experience that are relevant to the position you are applying for.

If the firm/recruitment agent you are applying to has a detailed job advertisement or job description, match your experience to that description where applicable and use of some of the same wording if appropriate. It helps to include any specific facts or figures, if you can, to highlight the overall commercial value of the work that you do.

Finally, the judicious use of bullets can help the professional look of this section. An example of a CV's "work experience" section is given in the box below:

*Note in the above section the present tense has been used to describe current work activities whereas the past tense has been used to describe your previous work experience. Also note the same grammatical style is used from bullet point to bullet point.*

## EDUCATION

**September 2002 – July 2003**  
Anglia Polytechnic University, Cambridge  
Legal Practice Course (distinction)

**September 1999 – July 2002**  
University of East Anglia, Norwich  
LLB Law (2:1)

**September 1995 – July 1999**  
Norwich High School for Girls  
English Language (A), English Literature (A), Law (A),  
History (B)  
10 GCSEs grades A\*, A and B

## Your "education" section

Your education section should also be in reverse chronological order (because the reader is usually more interested in what you have done recently). You only need to go back as far as necessary; this might mean stating your GCSE and A level grades (or equivalent), or omitting them, depending on the context. Include any awards you might have received if relevant. In the box below is an example of a CV's "education" section.

## "Skills", "interests" and "other" sections

You have to decide which of these sections you want to include or possibly combine.

## Two

# What your CV does not need

A large number of candidates, for some reason, take up additional space in their document with irrelevant or generic information. Let's look at some examples:

### Irrelevant information

This includes anything in your document which is not directly contributing to the sole aim of securing you an interview. For example, writing at the top of your document that it is a "curriculum vitae" arguably is obvious. Equally, writing that your referees are "available on request" is not a valuable statement insofar as it is unlikely to sway the reader either way, and therefore should be omitted.

If you are applying for a position as a solicitor, you do not need to detail half a page about irrelevant experience that you have had at some point in the past. If you are returning to practice after a career break, you do not need to include vast amounts of detail about what you did during your career break, unless directly relevant. The more irrelevant information you list on your document, the more it detracts from the detail that is contributing to the aim of achieving an interview. The more irrelevant information you have on your CV, the more the reader might be persuaded that you are not capable of communicating relevant information succinctly.

### Generic information

Taking up valuable space with generic information is likely to be wasting the reader's time (if indeed they bother to read it). Examples of generic information are stating that you are able to "work well both in a team environment and individually" or possessing "the ability to work to tight deadlines" – without providing any examples. Without evidence of how these directly relate to the position you have applied for, they are useless statements which are unlikely to persuade the reader to interview you.

### Some other CV errors

The following are some other CV errors we have noticed:

- Not following instructions (if they are given)
- Omission of key information (e.g. contact information) or contents not reflecting essential requirements of the position
- Grammar, spelling, punctuation and typographical errors (these can be red flags to any reviewer)
- Messy, poorly laid out or inconsistent formatting (these reflect poor organisation or professionalism)
- Inclusion or insertion of a photograph (this is not necessary as it does not provide any useful additional information as such)
- Handwritten insertions (not professional looking)

Since it is hard to spot errors yourself, it is best if someone else reviews or checks your CV before you submit it.