How to…..
Write a CV & Covering Letter

CAREERS & EMPLOYMENT SERVICE

What is a CV?

In Latin Curriculum Vitae means *course of life* and is a record of your personal details, work experiences, qualifications and achievements. Essentially it is a marketing tool, written by you selling your skills and experience to potential employers

Where is a CV used?

CVs are most commonly used in job applications submitted with a cover letter or application form. The CV is usually the first part of the application process and could be the first time a potential employer hears your name. They are used to filter applications so companies can select the most appropriate candidates for interview

They are also often submitted to a recruitment websites or agencies where they can be indexed by search engines so that recruiters come to you.

Also they are used in speculative applications, this is where you see an employer that you like to work for and submit your CV to them even though they may not be advertising for a role. Doing this can boost your networks and lead to future job offers.

Why are CVs so important?

You are marketing yourself to a future employer and a poor CV could stand in the way between you and your dream job!

Recruiters make their minds up on the quality of a CV in just a few seconds, so it is important that yours contains clear and concise messages.

For employers interviewing candidates is time consuming and expensive, therefore they will only select the best CVs to progress.

Your CV is also your own reflective tool and you should be adding to it continuously as your progress through college with details of different projects and work experiences.

What Should your CV Include?

Personal Details

Name and current contact details, there is no point having a great CV if employers cannot get hold of you because your old telephone number is on there.

Personal statement

This is a short introduction you yourself and should be tailored to match the role that you are applying for. Tell the employer briefly that you have the skills they are looking for and entice them to read the rest of your CV

Qualifications

Include your most recent or current education first and give a brief description of what you are studying, your favourite subjects, any interesting projects and assignments that you have produced. You can also include any extracurricular activities you have engaged with such as Union of Students activities or charity events.

You can also include any professional qualifications such as First Aid training or sports coaching badges.

Work & professional experience

With your most recent employment first give a description of what you have been doing and the outcomes. To help you frame the text, you may wish to use the STAR technique.

Situation – Set the scene and give context, ie 'I was on work experience at a graphic design agency'

Task – What were you doing? Ie' I was asked to design a poster for a festival'

Action – How did you complete the task? Ie 'I visited the festival site, took photographs and then used Photoshop to edit them

Result – What was the impact? 'The poster was produced and printed 500 times and distributed all over the county, the employer was very pleased with my work they asked me to work on more projects'

Final tips:

As a personal reflective tool your CV can be as long as you like, however when it comes to sending it out to employers, it is important to keep it down to two sides of A4, so only include the most relevant information.

Use a professional san-serif font such as Calibri, or Veranda size 10-12 and avoid including large blocks of text, use spacing and paragraphs to break up the page. You may want to consider setting yourself a style guide where you agree to use the same font, titles and formatting of dates and job titles throughout the document. This will make your CV easy for the reader to navigate.

If you have a Linked In account or online portfolio you can include the URL to these on your CV so that employers can find out more about you.

There is no need to include a picture, your date of birth, nationally or gender.

So, what about a covering letter?

Just like your CV Covering letters help employers screen candidates to see how you might fit into their business, how much you know about the role and how passionate you are about the industry.

They can either be submitted physically, printed out with your CV or used in the body of the email you are sending with your CV attached. Some recruiters may ask for a covering letter to be uploaded to their online application forms.

Try if you can to address the name of the person you are writing to. This could be the manager of the business / department or someone in the Human Resources department. Linked In or the company websites can be good places to research this. Unless you have no choice, don't use *'Dear Sir / Madame'.*

Begin the body of the message with an attention grabbing sentence or two, such as a relevant achievement that's exciting and engaging to read. Then describe how your skills, interests, or experience make you a perfect fit for the position and company. Make it memorable and a touch of your personality.

Thank the recruiter for their time and say that you're looking forward to hearing about the next steps. You may also wish to include details about how you found out about the role, this will help the recruiter tell which of their recruitment methods are most effective.

Don't repeat what's on your CV. The purpose of a cover letter is to entice the reader to check out your CV and show them that you have written a personalised letter for that role, demonstrating the research you have done into the job or the company. The company websites are a great place to start as well as industry news and even online reviews

Keep it short, clean, and straight to the point. We know, it's difficult to mention everything above in just a few paragraphs. However, your cover letter should be around 250-300 words. After you're done writing it, proofread everything, three times. Spelling and grammar mistakes make you look sloppy and show a lack of attention to detail.

Contact Us

Careers and Employment Service

Room DO/G01, Devonshire Campus, Buxton 01298 591316, careers@derby.ac.uk