

CVs & COVER LETTERS



Careers Service
information • advice • opportunities
CENTRE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT



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INTRODUCTION

Whether you're applying for a job, scholarship, further study, holiday work, internship or funding, you're going to have to submit an application package – usually a CV and cover letter are required, or you may be asked to complete an application form. If these submissions are average, chances are they will end up in the NO pile, but if you put in the effort and do a great job of writing them, there is a strong likelihood that the reader will notice you and invite you for an interview.

While this publication refers mainly to job applications, the information is relevant to all types of applications. It aims to guide you through the process of applying in today's highly competitive job market. Annual research conducted by the South African Graduate Recruiters Association (SAGRA) consistently shows that top companies receive over 1000 applications from graduates each year. That's a lot of CVs and cover letters for recruiters to wade through; these figures only emphasise the need for your application to be outstanding and unique.

It is normal for graduates to have to apply for numerous jobs before even landing an interview – this is hard work and there are no short cuts. However, if you take your time and embrace the application process, you'll not only produce effective applications, but you'll also discover a whole lot about yourself and develop lifelong skills for your personal career management.



UCT CAREERS ADVISOR TOP TIPS

As you develop your CV, portray yourself sincerely and in the best possible light. Concentrate on what you DO have to offer from the range of experiences in your life. Remember to adhere to the requirements of the opportunity or position you are applying for.

Your CV should be an authentic representation of who you are and what you have to offer, not just a list of skills and activities that you think a recruiter is looking for.





THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS

➤ Application ➤ Shortlist ➤ Interview ➤ Job offer ➤ Negotiation ➤ Hire

Finding a job is not as simple as just completing and submitting your application. Let's quickly look at how the entire process of recruiting normally works.

The CV and cover letter are just part of the process of finding employment. In basic terms, the stages look like this:

Written/online application > Screening and shortlisting > Interviews and assessments > Job offer > Negotiations > Hire

In other words, your written application needs to get you over the first hurdle so that you can actually meet the potential employer. Your CV is your marketing tool in that it needs to promote you to the recruiter – or at least provoke their interest or a reaction. This is no easy task when you remember that the recruit-

er has never met you and has no idea who you are and what you might be able to offer their organisation.

Be aware that there are a number of people in the recruitment process who may read your CV: Human Resources Manager, Recruitment Consultant, Line Manager and possibly even the Director or a Board Member. These people are often involved in screening applications in order to short-list a certain number of candidates to be interviewed and checked more thoroughly; your challenge is show them clearly why you should be in their YES pile.

WEARING THE RECRUITER'S HAT

Understand what recruiters are looking for – keep this in mind when you write your CV and cover letter.

Hiring is a time-consuming and expensive process and the employer who is responsible for recruiting a new staff member is determined to get it right. It is also a stressful and lengthy process, but in being very thorough, the recruiter hopes to hire the best person for the position.

While scanning through your application, a recruiter will firstly be checking that you meet all the criteria for the position and will also be forming a first impression of you from how your application is presented. Then they will be assessing your skills and where you have developed and displayed them. They'll be interested in your knowledge and experience as well as your personal attributes. All of these things will help them to get a sense of whether you have the potential to do the job well and benefit their organisation. Recruiters sometimes use a check-list or tick-box system to screen applications, while others search for specific key words or evidence.

When hiring a graduate, employers usually want to see sound academic results and then there are some fairly generic skills and attributes they are after; it is important to understand these and keep them in mind when applying for positions:

- Technical: Numeracy, IT, languages, subject expertise
- Thinking: Critical analysis, problem solving, attention to detail and creativity
- Organisational: Organisation, planning, stress management, time management, coping with complexity
- Interpersonal: influencing, negotiating, presenting a viewpoint, resolving conflict, team work, networking, written and oral communication
- Awareness: global awareness, business acumen, political understanding and sensitivity, self-awareness
- Personal attributes: emotional Intelligence, adaptability, initiative, responsibility, can-do attitude, drive and motivation, decisiveness, balance, mature approach, commitment.

Remember, this is not a comprehensive list of skills – there are many other skills that you may have developed and that might be relevant to a particular role. It is also important to note that you will definitely not possess all of these skills and should do some introspection so as to assess what your individual skills and personal attributes really are.



WHAT MAKES A CV EFFECTIVE?

There is no one correct way to write a CV, but there are some simple ways of developing a really good CV.

If you ask around for advice on your CV, you'll get a different opinion from everyone you consult. Not to worry – CVs are subjective and so you can make yours personal and present it how you choose. There are however some CV norms you should follow, certain things you must include (and those best left out!) and clear guidelines to help you put together a great CV.

CV is short for the Latin 'curriculum vitae', literally meaning 'course of life', or 'life story'. While this does describe what a CV is, it is perhaps not quite encompassing of all that it should be these days, as it is not only about summarising your life story. You may also have

heard of the term 'resume', which is basically the same thing as a CV (sometimes shorter) and the words are often used interchangeably; a single page resume is popular in America.

So, we've mentioned that your CV should be your marketing tool and tell your life story and more, but what does this mean? A CV is not just a list of all the things that you have accomplished during your lifetime. Yes, it includes the relevant things you have done and achieved, but it has to tell the reader more about who you are and what makes you unique. To do this, you need to highlight your skills and show how you developed them, and refer to involvements, achievements and aspects of your life

that make you the person you are...and the person to be hired!

It helps to start by thinking carefully about what specifically it is that you're applying for and who will be reading your CV. What do they need to know? What will be of most interest to them and how can you show them that you're worth interviewing?

Most important is that your CV shows your personal strengths and experiences and is tailored to each job you're applying for; you can give most space and priority to what is relevant to that particular role. CV content is usually presented in sections and in reverse chronological order, as what you have done most recently is normally most pertinent.

There are some standard sections for a regular CV (see page 20) and it should usually be no longer than 2 pages – unless the requirements state otherwise or if you are applying for academic or research posts, in which case you will compile an Academic CV (see pg 27) that can be substantially longer. CV content must always be divided into clear sections with headings, and it must look good, be easy to read and 100% error free.



RECRUITERS' COMMENTS

A CV that will always stand out is one where you can see the applicant has taken time and care to present him/herself in the best possible way. Comprehensive, but to the point – with all relevant contact details. We often receive CV's that look great, but seem to have omitted any form of contact detail!

Carol van Blerck, Ernst and Young Inc

CVs should be concise, to the point and neatly and clearly presented.

Sarah O'Brien, Bell Dewar

Include leadership roles in high school and university, vacation work experience and involvement in sporting activity.

Azvir Rampursad, Unilever SA

I want to see good marks and a lack of spelling and grammar mistakes.

Anne Hart-Davis, Korbitec

A neat CV. One with no grammatical errors and one that is clear and succinct. Ideally it should also include the individual's full academic record.

Jacques Pienaar, Shoprite

A structured format with clear headings. The CV should not be longer than two to three pages.

Lyndsay Shaw, Standard Bank

A CV that is easy to read with bullet points for duties as opposed to long drawn out stories.

Tanya Smith, L'Oreal South Africa



BASIC GUIDELINES

The best way to put together your CV is to develop it slowly and thoughtfully, rather than doing a rushed, last-minute job. Ideally, you should take some time to read through each section of this publication, but if you just require a quick checklist, here it is!

WHAT YOU MUST INCLUDE

- Contact details (name, address, email, phone number)
- Education
- Work experience (can include part-time, voluntary work, internships)
- Skills
- Referees.

SECTIONS YOU MAY WISH TO INCLUDE

- Profile
- Leadership positions/roles of responsibility
- Interests/involvements/memberships
- Achievements.

IT IS NOT NECESSARY TO INCLUDE

- Marital status
- Gender
- Dependants
- Date of birth
- Nationality
- Health issues
- Religion
- Political affiliation
- Salaries
- Reasons for leaving past jobs
- A photo.

Once you have considered everything you could possibly include, edit it down to the relevant content and order it with the most important things first. You can group your content into sections that are most suited to you and the opportunity, with headings of your choice; contact details need to be at the top, and referees are usually last. Your CV should normally be a maximum of 2 pages.

STYLE GUIDE

- One clear font, all the same size (11 or 12)
- Consistent layout (use of capitals, indents, bullets etc)
- Simple, note-form language (no long sentences/personal pronouns, such as 'I')
- Uniform grammatical style and correct tenses
- Accurate, professional and clear.

THINGS TO AVOID

- Exaggerations, generalisations and untruths
- Unnecessary words and repetition
- Abbreviations, jargon and slang
- Unsubstantiated, self-flattering terms
- Errors and typos.



UNDERSTANDING WHAT YOU'RE APPLYING FOR

Before you start putting together your application, you need to fully understand what it is that you're applying for. This will help you target your application and will enable the recruiter (and you!) to see clearly why you're suitable.

Most positions that you apply for will be advertised in a vacancy announcement. However, if you're applying in a more general way, you can still do some of this research – particularly into the company itself.

The first thing to do is to analyse the advertisement by taking a hard copy and highlighting the important aspects:

- Sector
- Organisation
- Type of person sought/attributes required
- Skills and qualifications required
- Key work activities.

Once you have got a clear picture of these aspects, you can get to work. Firstly, it is vital to research the organisation and sector. This you can do by looking at the company website, reading media reports, finding out

more about the relevant sector and issues, and talking to anyone in your network who may be able to give you useful information. It is also helpful to explore industry or occupational profiles, which you can do at your Career Information Centre, or on websites such as www.prospects.ac.uk and www.careerplayer.com.

Informational interviews are becoming a popular way to find out more about roles, companies and the world of work. An informational interview involves contacting someone in an organisation (either through your network, via their website or cold calling) and requesting that they meet with you (or talk to you) so that you can ask them questions regarding their work. You make it quite clear in this first contact that you are not calling to ask them for a job, but rather to get some insight into their role and/or company, as part of your ➔

UNDERSTANDING WHAT YOU'RE APPLYING FOR

career research. It can sometimes be very useful to talk to a recent graduate or a trainee in the organisation you're considering; often the Graduate Recruiter will be happy to set up such a discussion for you. In an informational interview you can enquire about general aspects of the person's role and the company, but you can also ask about things that are not found on the website – such as the organisational culture, a day in the life of the job, things the employee enjoys and doesn't enjoy about their role.

After doing some thorough research, the next step is to look at the specific attributes and skills required for the role whilst compiling a list of what you have to offer that corresponds. For each skill or attribute, note what you have done that shows you meet the requirement or have the skill. You need to look for evidence in your life to highlight so that the recruiter can clearly see your suitability. This evidence can come from your studies, work experience, involvements in extra curriculars, interests, positions of responsibility etc.

CONNECT YOUR SKILLS AND EXPERIENCE TO JOB REQUIREMENTS

- Happy to relocate; family in Uitenhage
- Highlight interests and involvements at university
- Successful artist, solo exhibition in 2010
- Completing Post Grad in Education
- Bilingual family
- Sport has developed team skills and expertise
- Played provincial soccer
- Involvement in SHAWCO tutoring for 4 years

Vacancy **Grade 5 Teacher**

Willowmead Primary, Uitenhage

Dynamic and creative individual sought to teach Grade 5. Must have teaching qualification, be fluent in English and Afrikaans and enjoy working in teams.

Required to coach sport, be involved in extra-curricular programme and show commitment and passion for youth.

Apply to principal@willowmead.org.za by 30 September

CV TAILORING EXERCISE: THEY SAY, I SAY

WHAT DO THEY SAY THEY ARE LOOKING FOR? <i>Skills, experience, qualifications, attributes</i>	WHAT CAN I SAY I HAVE TO OFFER? <i>What have I done/developed/achieved? (Think of examples from studies, sport, involvements etc)</i>
<i>Must have experience in data analysis</i>	<i>Gathered and analysed data on Geology field trip to Karoo Data analysis for thesis, using SPSS Refer to studies & projects, eg. Stats II, Geology III</i>



CV

COMPILING YOUR CV

➤ Contact details ➤ Profile ➤ Education ➤ Work experience ➤ Skills ➤ Referees

Not only should your CV look professional and read clearly, it also needs to cleverly match you as an individual to the specific requirements. While your CV is personal and you can choose the style and what to include under which headings, here are some guidelines for writing an effective CV.

CONTACT DETAILS

Always put your name (big and bold) and contact details at the top of your CV. Include the phone and/or cell number, address and email that you would like the recruiter to use in order to reach you most easily. So, for example, rather don't use the reception number for your university residence or your parents' landline number when you're not staying at home. Make sure your email address sounds professional – if yours is something like sex-ysam@hotmail.com, then change it!

PERSONAL PROFILE

This is optional (and used these days in place of a career objective) and a useful way to start your CV, as it gives the recruiter a quick overview before they start reading the details. When you're writing your profile, think of the busy recruiter who is probably scanning your CV in under a minute. What, in a nutshell, do they need to know about you and how can you grab their attention? It can include relevant studies, experience, achievements, specific skills and attributes. Try to make it punchy (a few sentences or bullets) and personal, rather than generic.

Dynamic and creative Film and Media Studies graduate with over 2 years' experience in campus radio and numerous published articles. Top mark in final year group film project. Invaluable experience gained through internship at Media24 and various holiday jobs in film industry. Fluent in English and Xhosa.

EDUCATION (AND TRAINING)

Start with your most recent or current course of study and give the dates for each item listed working backwards chronologically. Always use the full name of the institution and programme. You can include relevant modules or subjects, but don't list everything – you're trying to make life easy for the recruiter! You can also note

anything else of importance: thesis, relevant project, skills developed and achievements or recognition. (If you have many achievements, you may want to consider a separate section for them.) If you have completed some short training courses, these can either be included here or in their own section if there are quite a few.

2011-present: University of Cape Town (UCT) – Bachelor of Social Science Honours (Politics)

Spent 3 months in France, researching essay on French attitude to refugees.

2007-2010: UCT – Bachelor of Social Science (Politics)

Relevant modules include: Business French, Development Economics and International Politics.

2007: French is Fun, Cape Town – Advanced French – Level 3 (full-time course for 12 months)

2006: St Agnes High School, Cape Town – National Senior Certificate

A aggregates attained in English, Accounting and French.



COMPILING YOUR CV

WORK EXPERIENCE

All jobs (full/part-time), internships and voluntary work experience can be included – the important thing is to highlight relevant responsibilities, achievements and skills that you developed. If you only have a few jobs to list (holiday, longer term, voluntary), then it makes sense to group them all together. However if, for example, you have worked on a number of voluntary/community projects, you could group them in a separate section.

March 2010-present: UCT Department of Environmental and Geographical Science - Research Assistant (part-time)

Urban Food Security Project: gathering and recording data from vulnerable areas of Cape Town so as to establish determinants of urban food security and its relationships with HIV/AIDS

December 2009-February 2010: Salt Restaurant, Cape Town - Waiter (part-time holiday job)

Developed skills in customer service and influencing, team work, time management; learnt to deal with difficult clients and to work under pressure

December 2008: EcoStats (NGO), Kruger National Park - Project Assistant (volunteer)

Recorded feeding patterns of elephant with team of 6 volunteers; assisted in developing and running workshops on environmental issues at 3 local primary schools.

SKILLS

This section is useful for all CVs – especially if you don't have a lot of experience, but can show that you have developed the skills required. As with everything on your CV, it is important to highlight your skills relevant to the role. Provide evidence of where you have developed and displayed each skill you list. Some of the transferable skills commonly required are:

- Numeracy
- Languages
- Leadership
- Teamwork
- Communication
- Organisation
- IT
- Problem solving.

Leadership: Head Student of Tugwell Residence in 2009: ran weekly committee meetings, delegated projects and monitored progress; dealt with all serious residence problems and co-chaired Disciplinary Committee. Participated in UCT Emerging Student Leaders Programme in 2007.

Planning and Organisation: Researched, planned and arranged 4-week study trip for final year Statistics class (45 students) to Namibia; organised transport, accommodation, food, permits, study programme – trip completed under budget. Member of 5-person organising team for UCT Emerging Student Leaders Programme in 2008.

REFEREES

Many organisations will want to contact someone who can give a reference about you – these are your referees. Even if not asked to do so, it is useful to list 2-3 referees at the end of your CV. Ideally, one should be able to discuss you in an academic context, and the other should be someone you have worked for. List their full names, title and employer, email address and contact number.

If the referee is a family member, it is better to be transparent and mention this fact. Perhaps your most developmental work experience has been in your uncle's shop – if there is no other supervisor to use as a referee, then list your uncle with the relationship noted.

It is very important that before you list someone as a referee, you ask their permission. It is also helpful to let them know what you're applying for and to send them a copy of your

CV, so that they are prepared when having to answer questions about you.

If you are asked to attach written references, then make sure you do; if you have written references that you feel would be useful to share with the recruiter, you can write at the end of your CV: 'Written references available on request.'

OPTIONAL EXTRAS

Make sure all the information on your CV is grouped logically with headings that make things clear and work well for you. Other sections you may wish to include in your CV could be:

- Achievements/awards
- Leadership positions/roles of responsibility
- Community/faith-based activities
- Extra-mural involvements
- Workshops and conferences attended
- Membership of associations or professional bodies and societies.



COMPILING YOUR CV

If space allows and you choose to include your interests, mention those that are unique or provide an engaging topic of conversation for the interview; consider your interests or passions that show involvement and attributes like independence and balance (eg. travel, ballroom dancing or playing in a band). Listing interests such as 'socialising' and 'clubbing' is not necessary or useful, as they are mostly quite common

and often don't say a whole lot about you.

Often an advert will refer to the type of person required – for example: 'Must be proactive, responsible and committed'. These attributes (personal characteristics or traits) will usually come through in the evidence and experience you write about in your CV, so there is no need to list them. You can also refer to them in your cover letter (see page 36).



GRADUATES' COMMENTS

Read Business Day and all other financial publications to get an understanding of the market and the transactions that are taking place. Ensure that you enrol for vacation programmes during the year
Danielle Magidson, BA LLB, Eversheds

Study hard, read widely and have a balanced student life
Laura Maree, BCom PPE, Honours PPE,
Rand Merchant Bank

I think it is very important to use the time as a student to not only study hard, but also to expose oneself to business in the real world within your field of interest. I would definitely recommend enquiring and applying for internships during the vacs (even if it is not compulsory) as it definitely gives one an upper hand
Dominique Jacobs, BBusSci Honours
Marketing, L'Oreal

Build good relationships with lecturers (they have valuable networks in the world of work); any administrative work exposure is beneficial as it helps with developing those competencies essential for work; engage during lectures
Jacques Pienaar, MBBusSci, Shoprite

The best way to use your time at university so as to get a competitive edge in your field: invest time and effort to understand your own personality. Hang around people who empower and motivate you to be the best at what you (want to) do. Focus your efforts on activities that are aligned to your aspirations. Get vac jobs. Volunteer your knowledge. Be open to meeting people and take part in team activities. Remember to have FUN – and always celebrate your achievements!
Buzwe Gxulwana, MSc IT, Rand
Merchant Bank

OBJECTIVE

RICULUM VITAE

REFERENCES

EDUCATION

EXPERIENCE

SKILLS

EMPLOY

ABILITIES

Ann Another

Address

10 High Street
Jobsville

01234 567890

Telephone

Objective

obtain employment as a software dev

CV LAYOUT AND STYLE

You may do a great job of analysing the job ad and thinking about what to include on your CV, but unless you can present the information really well, the recruiter probably won't give your CV the attention it deserves.

LAYOUT

The most important thing is that your CV represents you – so you need to choose headings that work for your content, order sections according to what you want to prioritise and block/separate your sections clearly.

You want the recruiter to see that you have made an effort, and a good design can help with this, so play around until you find a layout that looks professional and clear. It's important to make sure the layout is consistent: ensure that all your headings are the same (eg. bold, capitals, italics) and that if you use things like bullets/borders/indents, they are uniform. Try not to use too many different effects and be

wary of underlining as it tends to make your CV look a bit old-fashioned.

While you want your CV to look smart and stand out, don't try anything too fancy or complicated. Weird and funny fonts, coloured paper, graphics and whacky design ideas probably won't score you extra points – unless you're applying for a design job...and even then you need to be careful!

Work hard at editing your CV so that it is no more than 2 pages, with a font size of 11 or 12 and enough white space. Remember that not all sections have to be the same length – you can give extra space to those with more content and which you want to emphasise.

STYLE

CVs are written in simple, note-form language – meaning no long sentences and no personal pronouns, such as ‘I’ or ‘me’. This makes it read easily and quickly and keeps it objective, albeit personal. While writing and editing your CV, always keep in mind the reluctant, tired reader! Try to avoid unnecessary words (eg. ‘Duties involved...’) and repetition of words or phrases – take a good look at each sentence and see if there are words that can be cut. It is fine to remove the articles (‘a’, ‘an’, ‘the’) so long as it still reads easily. Stay away from very descriptive, self-flattering and unsubstantiated terminology, but keep your language positive.

Along with layout, your use of grammatical style should also be consistent – meaning your points should all be structured in the same way. For example, verbs should be in the same form – usually action verbs are most effective: ‘planned’, ‘trained’ etc. If the action was in the past, use the past tense, and if it is something you’re still doing, then use the present continuous tense: ‘researching the effect of...’. Other aspects to check carefully for consistency are: use of capitals letters, British/American spelling and punctuation.

Everything written on your CV must be 100% accurate and written clearly and unambiguously. You don’t want the reader to get confused, misunderstand you or have to ask you to clarify something. Wherever possible, use numbers to quantify: how many people in the team you managed, how much the fundraiser raised, top in class of how many?

Avoid all jargon, slang or abbreviations – often something you may think is very obvious, is totally unknown to the recruiter. Certain acronyms (eg. HIV AIDS) are broadly known and can be used, but others are not familiar to everyone and should not be used (eg. LRC, must be written in full as Learners’ Representative Council). It can also help to explain things that are not common knowledge – for example if you have been on the Dean’s Merit List, you can clarify: ‘recognises academic excellence of students who achieve overall average above 70%’.

Above all, there can be no errors or typos on your CV. Once you have proofread it yourself, ask (or bribe!) at least 2 others to proofread it carefully for you. The computer’s spell-check function does not know that you actually mean ‘Extra-mural Activities’ when you have written ‘Extra-marital Activities’!

CV EXAMPLE

ANDILE BEBEZA

32 Grotto Road
Rondebosch
7700

Cell: 083 998 7245
Telephone: 021 685 9463
email: andile@gmail.com

Outgoing and energetic Information Technology graduate, currently completing post-graduate Marketing diploma. Experience in data collection and analysis, web design and project management. Developed successful T-shirt business during studies. Chairman of Science Students' Council and member of winning team in 2010 Global Game Jam competition. Fluent in English and Xhosa.

EDUCATION

2011-present: Postgraduate Diploma in Management (Marketing), University of Cape Town

- Thesis topic: Use of Social Media in Marketing

2008-2010: Bachelor of Science (Business Computing), University of Cape Town

- Majors: Computer Science, IT Management
- Modules: Statistics, Mathematics, Systems Development

2006: National Senior Certificate, Hoerikwaggo Secondary School, Cape Town.

ACHIEVEMENTS and LEADERSHIP POSITIONS

2010: Placed on Dean's Merit List (for students with overall average above 70%)

2010: Elected Chairman of Science Students' Council;

April 2010: Member of three-person team that won Global Game Jam competition, with over 100 participating teams worldwide

2006: Head of Students' Representative Council (SRC), Hoerikwaggo Secondary School (Cape Town).

WORK EXPERIENCE

2011: Limelight (Party and Event Production Company) – Events Assistant (part-time)

- Excellent experience in working under pressure and as part of team; have learnt to manage time and deal calmly with crises and difficult customers

.../page 2

WORK EXPERIENCE (Continued)

2009-present: Andi Pandi™ (online T-shirt Company) – Founder and Manager (own business, part-time)

- Developed business plan, conducted extensive market research, established business – included liaison with funders and media, hiring of staff
- Designed own website www.andipandi.co.za
- Managing online marketing, production and distribution

2007: Gap year spent working and travelling

- Volunteered in Gugulethu community: developed networking and liaison skills whilst raising over R500 000 of corporate sponsorships; enjoyed being part of team that built preschool – was responsible for project planning
- Backpackered around Asia for three months, quickly discovering my independence and resourcefulness!

SKILLS

Languages: fluent Xhosa and English, basic Afrikaans

IT: proficient computer user and programmer; competent in web design using Dreamweaver; advanced Excel and SPSS (data analysis), Java and C++

Communication: oral communication skills developed through many presentations and business interactions; high essay marks at university due to strong writing skills

Networking and Liaison: developed through community work and running own business

Leadership and Teamwork: enjoy being part of team and taking on leadership roles and responsibilities, such as leading Science Students' Council and school SRC

Data gathering and analysis: studies provided solid understanding of statistics and ability to work with complex data

Project Management: experience gained managing pre-school building project and own business.

INTERESTS AND INVOLVEMENTS

- Avid Science Fiction reader and member of Sci-Fridays Book Club at UCT
- Tenor in University of Cape Town choir and involved in organising related events
- Travelling and hiking.

REFEREES

Professor Isaac Kahn: Senior Lecturer, Computer Science Department, University of Cape Town

Tel: 021 650 2539

Email: isaac.kahn@uct.ac.za

Ms Jennifer Gale: Human Resources Manager, Limelight

Tel: 021 797 8540

Email: jennifer@limelight.co.za

HIGH-IMPACT WORDS

It is vital to use clear, strong and varied words when writing your CV. Here are our favourite action verbs:

accelerated	assigned	classified	coordinated	drafted
achieved	assisted	coached	corresponded	economised
adapted	attained	collaborated	counselled	edited
addressed	audited	collated	created	educated
administered	authored	collected	dealt	effected
advised	balanced	combined	delegated	eliminated
advocated	benchmarked	communicated	demonstrated	empowered
allocated	boosted	complemented	designed	enabled
analysed	broadened	composed	developed	encouraged
approved	built	computed	devised	engineered
arbitrated	calculated	conceived	diagnosed	enlisted
archived	campaigned	conducted	directed	established
arranged	catalogued	consolidated	discovered	evaluated
assembled	chaired	contracted	dispatched	examined
assessed	clarified	convinced	doubled	executed



expanded	invented	oversaw	reorganised	summarised
expedited	investigated	performed	repaired	supervised
extracted	launched	persuaded	represented	supported
facilitated	lectured	pinpointed	researched	surpassed
filed	led	pioneered	resolved	surveyed
forecasted	liaised	planned	restructured	synergised
formulated	maintained	prepared	retrieved	systemised
founded	managed	presented	revamped	taught
grew	marketed	prioritised	reviewed	trained
guided	mastered	processed	revitalised	transformed
headed	mediated	produced	scheduled	translated
identified	mentored	programmed	screened	triggered
illustrated	minimised	promoted	seized	triumphed
implemented	modernised	proposed	selected	uncovered
improved	modified	proved	set up	unearthed
increased	monitored	provided	simplified	unified
influenced	negotiated	publicised	solved	upgraded
informed	networked	recognised	spearheaded	urged
initiated	obtained	recommended	specified	utilised
inspired	orchestrated	reconciled	started	validated
instituted	ordered	recorded	stimulated	volunteered
integrated	organised	recruited	streamlined	widened
interpreted	originated	reduced	strengthened	wrote
interviewed	outperformed	referred	structured	
introduced	overcame	remodelled	succeeded	



TRICKY CIRCUMSTANCES

You may have some complicated issues or events that are hard to explain on your CV – gaps, failures, changes. While this is quite normal, the challenge is to present such information in a positive way so that it does not detract from the bigger picture. You may well need to get advice from a Careers Advisor on presenting your unique circumstances, and could rather choose to clarify certain things in your cover letter.

CHANGE OF PLANS

You can't hide things like a change in course or place of study. Rather try to reflect it simply (but accurately) and offer a short explanation underneath: 'Decided against pursuing career in Engineering, and chose to do a general degree in Business'.

HEALTH ISSUES

Health (personal or family) can obviously affect your studies, so if this has been the case, you can explain: 'Took extra year to complete de-

gree due to ill health in 3rd year. After complete recovery, passed degree with distinction'.

FAILURES

If you have simply failed certain courses and taken longer than usual to complete your studies, there is no need to try and explain this – unless there were extenuating circumstances. Perhaps you had to work nights to fund yourself and this had an impact?

If you did not complete your studies, you need to reflect which level you attained, and



then reasons for stopping, such as the need to earn or the decision to gain some experience before continuing with studies.

POOR RESULTS

Most recruiters are interested in your academic results and many will ask for a transcript, which you must then provide. If not asked for a transcript, you can choose to highlight particularly good results and simply not refer to bad ones.

GAPS

It is quite normal to have breaks or 'gaps' between the various points that you are referring to on your CV. Things such as travel, gap years, time out to care for a family member, taking on family responsibilities, involvement in community projects or working to earn money, can all be presented as developmental experiences.

LITTLE OR NO WORK EXPERIENCE

Even if you have undertaken no formal work or 'professional' jobs, you will probably have some experience of working at university or as a volunteer in the community. You can even refer to work you have done as part of your studies – perhaps a project involving starting a business, or a research assignment. You can consider a section called 'Research and Project Work' if this is more appropriate than 'Work Experience'.

LOTS OF LITTLE JOBS

It may be that you have done many odd jobs, rather than a couple of big ones. Sometimes it is better to simply group them: list them all (date, employer, position) and then explain underneath what skills they developed. You will often find that a number of the jobs you have done (eg. babysitting, waitressing, tutoring) have common skills, allowing you to highlight these skills and give evidence as to where you developed and displayed them.

TOO MUCH TO WRITE, TOO LITTLE SPACE

You won't be able to list everything you have done on your CV, so you need to be clever in editing and tailoring. A targeted CV is so much more effective than a rambling one. Generally, you can leave out most things from long ago – even achievements at school don't all have to be listed, especially if you have been involved and recognised at university. Not all part-time and temporary jobs must be listed. And there is no need to include personal information, other than your contact details. When all else fails and if you can almost fit things into 2 pages, you can always steal a bit of room from the margins...but not too much!



TOP 10 CV MISTAKES

1. Spelling, typing and grammatical errors
2. Too long
3. Confusing, hard to read or unstructured
4. Too much irrelevant information
5. Too fancy or trying to be clever
6. Boring and generic
7. Overselling or underselling
8. Template/example CV copied or friend's CV adapted
9. Repetitive words and phrases
10. Skills listed, but no evidence

RECRUITERS' COMMENTS

Incorrect word usage, misspelt words, poor syntax construction and grammar usage

Trishana Moodley, Genesis Analytics

Failure to use spell check. Use of text messaging language. Spelling out long term career aspirations as short term goals. Formalistic language –herewith, whereupon, hitherto. Exclusion of work experience no matter how mundane
Zodwa Mhlanga, Barloworld Equipment

Often people put too much info on the CV and it lands up looking like a personal biography. Remember no-one cares if you have a driving licence (unless of course you are applying for the role of chauffeur), how many kids you have or whether your health is good or not (who would put 'bad health' anyway?). Also, don't put your criminal record status (they do checks anyhow). Remember 2 pages max, and stick to the important and relevant information only

Tracey Ashington, Rand Merchant Bank

SMS speak is very common, but very unprofessional. Poor grammar and spelling creates a negative impression
Elizabeth Landsberg, Moore Stephens Chartered Accountants



SPECIAL KINDS OF CVs

➤ Academic ➤ Research ➤ Skills-based

ACADEMIC OR RESEARCH CV

If you are applying for posts in academia (research or teaching), your CV will look different, can be longer and needs to include headings such as:

- Personal details
- Qualifications
- Publications
- Teaching experience
- Administrative experience
- Presentations given
- Conferences/seminars/workshops attended
- Professional memberships
- Fellowships/awards/funding
- Dissertation/research abstracts
- Research interests
- Areas of expertise
- Other work experience
- Skills
- Referees.

When looking at your skills, remember that other than research and teaching, you probably have many useful and transferable skills that

are of great interest to employers in higher education and more broadly. Some of these may be: IT, languages, presentation, report writing, project management, planning, communication, fundraising and team work.

While you will need to use scholarly terminology specific to your field of expertise, try to make your CV comprehensible to 'outsiders' too. If you are applying for jobs outside of higher education, you will need to adjust your academic CV to a more standard version, and be sure to highlight some of your transferable skills.

SKILLS-BASED CV

It can be useful to present a skills-based CV when your professional experience and qualifications are not obviously related to the job. This type of CV is usually only used by those who have a significant amount of experience and is structured around relevant skills with clear evidence presented. A skills-based CV can be effective in demonstrating that you have considered the needs of the employer and possess the transferable skills required.

EMAILING APPLICATIONS

In today's electronic and global world, most organisations ask you to submit your CV by email. Sounds simple enough? Just take note...

When submitting your CV by email, use the subject line to clearly refer to the position for which you are applying. The email itself should then be written as the cover letter, but don't be tempted into writing it in casual email language – it is written in exactly the same style as a cover letter (see page 36), however without the addresses and date. And remember: no inappropriate email addresses, funny fonts or wacky email signatures!

Having written and checked your email, you then need to attach your CV. It should always be saved with a useful name, such as 'David Erasmus CV'. Attaching it to your email as a Word document is fine, although some people prefer to convert it to a pdf document so that it cannot be tampered with.

It's a good idea to do a check and send your email (with attached CV) to yourself first. This way you can see that everything comes out correctly and without the CV attachment getting jumbled in the process. Having your CV in pdf format usually avoids these issues.

Always ensure that you have the correct email address, and only send to one recipient

(at one organisation) at a time. Remember that although you are probably very familiar with email and use it for fast exchanges, when you are submitting an application electronically, you need to take the same amount of time and care that you would over a hard copy – which you would edit and proofread and check thoroughly before posting or delivering. Don't be caught out by thinking that electronic applications are quick and easy; take your time and pause to double-check before hitting the 'Send' button.

Copying and pasting from one email to another can also be dangerous, and you need to check thoroughly that you have the correct version of your letter and CV, addressed to the right person.



BIG MISTAKE!

Sending one email to many companies and not bothering to individually address the application

Sarah O'Brien, Bell Dewar





ONLINE CVs AND FORMS

It is becoming increasingly common for recruiters to ask you to complete a CV or application form online, rather than allowing you to submit your own version. This makes their life easier, though perhaps not yours!

In terms of online applications, some organisations ask you to paste your CV into a box or upload it to their website and this allows you to submit your individual CV. However many others have a CV template that you need to complete. For this you can cut and paste from your CV, just being sure that everything transfers correctly, and that you are putting in information relevant to their sections. You may well find that they have different sections to you, and so you will need to adapt your CV content accordingly, editing and adding information where necessary.

Online forms differ from CV templates as they usually are longer with more sections and specific questions to answer. You are obliged to answer all sections honestly – even those about disabilities and criminal record for example;

failure to disclose something specifically asked about on a form could hamper your appointment or result in your dismissal. If a section or question absolutely does not apply to you, just write 'Not applicable'. Make sure you stick to any word limits given.

Many forms and online CVs have optional sections, such as Additional Information/Comments. You should definitely use these sections, as they provide a chance for you to differentiate yourself and highlight important and relevant aspects that have not been covered. Sometimes online applications do not allow you to add a cover letter, so utilise these optional sections to write some of what you would have written in your letter.

It is vital when completing online applications to read the fine print and instructions carefully,

and to follow them exactly! Use a black font that is clear and large enough, and avoid underlining. All the same CV style rules apply to online CVs and forms – don't be tempted into using abbreviations, text speak or incorrect grammar.

You will need to adapt your terminology for online applications, as it is common for recruiters to use scanning software to screen online CVs and forms. In this process they search electronically for particular words, meaning that you need to use some of their key words and terminology (attributes, skills, qualification levels). For example, if the advert says: 'Must have project management skills', then use the term 'project management skills' in your online application (rather than something else you might have used, such as 'planning/organisation skills').

Ideally, you should print out an online application form and do a draft version; alternatively you can prepare your answers in Word and cut and paste into the form. Remember to save your work regularly and not to leave the submitting to the last minute – there are often technical glitches. Do a very thorough check of the entire form and only hit 'Submit' when you are sure it is perfect.

So that you can keep track of your applications and prepare for interviews, save a copy of each online application you submit.

Although you absolutely shouldn't, if you do miss the online application deadline (for some extremely good reason!), you will need to contact the organisation and find out if it is possible to submit it late and how this can be done – usually the online system for applying closes on the due date.

Things sometimes do go wrong in cyber-

space, so it is advisable to follow up a few weeks after submitting an online application, if you have not had confirmation that it was received.

There are a number of job sites where you can post your CV. If you use this option, first check that there are features to protect your privacy and confidentiality. Never include an ID number or physical address as this could compromise your security. And remember to update your CV regularly.



RECRUITERS' COMMENTS

The most common and very detrimental mistake that I find students make when completing an online application are spelling, grammar and coherence. As a recruiter, I want to see that the applicant takes time to review the responses that they send to what could be their future employer
Shesnee Naidoo, Teach South Africa

Submitting application forms which are incomplete i.e. not answering compulsory questions
Azvir Rampursad, Unilever SA



COVER LETTER

COVER LETTERS

When submitting an application, you should always (unless impossible) send an accompanying letter. This is usually known as a cover (or covering) letter – it introduces you and covers the key elements: what I am applying for, why I am interested in you and why you should be interested in me.

Cover letters can also be referred to as motivation letters – normally this is when you are writing to apply for a bursary, scholarship or placement and a longer letter is required – or letters of introduction, when you are writing for networking purposes or to introduce yourself to an organisation of interest.

The cover letter will probably be the first thing that a recruiter reads about you, so you really need to promote yourself and convey some of your personality and passion in your letter. While your CV will detail your experiences, achievements and skills, your cover letter will highlight particularly relevant points about you so as to grab the interest of the reader – who is scanning for specific elements.

Don't simply repeat information from your CV in your cover letter. The idea is to draw out certain aspects, give some examples and

expand where necessary – all in line with the position. There is absolutely no point using a standard cover letter for all applications.

It is best to write your cover letter once you have completed your CV for a particular application – this will mean that you have researched the organisation and gained a thorough understanding of the role, which will help you in writing a targeted and effective letter.

Cover letters are typed and if they are submitted in hardcopy, the signature should be in pen.

STRUCTURE

A cover letter should not be longer than a page – or about 450 words when written as an email. It must always be divided into 3 or 4 logical paragraphs and have a formal salutation and closing. Ideally, you should address your letter to a named individual, otherwise 'Sir' or 'Mad-

am'; if you have written to a named person, conclude your letter with 'Yours sincerely', and for 'Sir' or 'Madam', use 'Yours faithfully'.

You can give your letter a heading after the salutation, but it is not compulsory; in an emailed letter the heading will be the subject line of the email.

- Paragraph 1: mention your situation ('about to graduate with...') and what you are applying for. Note that there is no need to start with 'My name is...' as your name will be at the end of your letter.
- Paragraph 2: why you want to work for the organisation specifically (show that you have researched them and the sector) and in the role that you're applying for
- Paragraph 3: why they should want you, showing how you meet their requirements (you can't address all, so maybe the top 3 or 4) and selling your unique points (with some brief evidence)
- Paragraph 4: any logistics (dates, availability) and a reference to an interview.

YOU DECIDE: WHICH SOUNDS BETTER?

I feel that I am the ideal person for the job as I am a high achiever and have excellent communication skills. I believe that I am good at teamwork and brilliant under pressure!

or

As evident in my CV, I have demonstrated the skills required for this position. During my time at UCT, I was twice elected as class representative and was Chairman of the African Business Society. In these roles I developed leadership and communication skills. My work experience in restaurants taught me how to perform well under pressure and I enjoyed working as part of a team.

Can you see that while the first example sounds rather boastful and weak, the second provides concrete evidence, making it sound more fac-

tual and enabling the reader to get a genuine picture of your skills and envisage you in the role?

POSSIBLE CONCLUSIONS

Thank you for taking the time to review my application. I look forward to hearing from you and am available for an interview at any time.

or

Please contact me should you require any further information. I am available for an interview at any time -except between 11-15 December, when I will be representing Gauteng in the SA Judo Championships.

or

Thank you for reviewing my application. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss this further with you in an interview.

If there are additional elements that did not fit into your CV and that you'd like to raise in your application, you should include these in your cover letter. Sometimes it is useful to explain a complex situation or anomaly, but it is entirely up to you as to what you decide to include. For example, some people with disabilities prefer to be upfront about this; some foreigners want to mention that they have a work visa. If you are uncertain about specific issues, you should seek help from a Careers Advisor. If you choose to write about hurdles, failures or negative experiences, try to do so in a way that shows positive elements of learning and development.

STYLE

Unlike the CV that is written in note-form language, your letter affords you the opportunity to show that you can write well. So you need to make sure that you do! It must be professional: clear, correct and concise. Without being contrived, you can slightly adjust your style of language to the type of job or organisation – some are more formal, others adventurous, upbeat, creative or exciting.

Formal writing does not mean that it should be stiff or loaded with big words and long, convoluted sentences. It should rather reflect some of your personality, without being casual.

Don't use jargon, slang, text/Mxit language or abbreviations. There is also no need to go into personal issues or explanations, and you should avoid any negative references (eg. 'I hate working at ABC Book Shop and am desperate to find a new job!').

Try not to start every sentence with 'I' – even though you're writing mostly about yourself, you can vary the sentence structure.

While it is good to convey your enjoyment, enthusiasm and passion, you have to try not to overdo this and sound false. Don't use adjectives and unnecessary words. Rather than writing 'I feel...' or 'I believe...', you'll find that it sounds more positive and less subjective to say: 'I am confident that...' or 'I am convinced that...'.

Remember that giving facts and figures helps to add weight to your evidence – for example: 'In my role as head of our school's Interact Society, I organised a charity fun run with over 500 participants, raising R57 000'.

It's a good idea to use information from the organisation's website and the advert, but there is no point simply regurgitating what you have read – this will sound really silly to the recruiter!

Take time writing your cover letter and do a number of drafts for each application, so that you get it just right...with no errors or typos!



RECRUITERS' COMMENTS

The cover/application letter serves two purposes: firstly it should set out exactly what the applicant is applying for and secondly serve to introduce the candidate. It should be focused and to the point. It should make the recipient want to read the CV

Robin Westley, Cox Yeats

The shorter, punchier, concise and factual cover letters do better. However, if applying online and required to write a motivation – this should be lengthier and consist of selling points or correlations on the graduates interest, and relevance to the role as well as understanding of the opportunity and exposure etc

Sheshni Moodley, Merrill Lynch South Africa

Cover letter is for telling what skills you have and what makes you outshine on the job you want

Smanga Ncube, Liberty Group

The role of the cover letter should be to highlight why you would fit within the firm, showing that you have researched the firm and identified with its core areas of practise or values

Sarah O'Brien, Bell Dewar

When you are screening 3000 CV's you don't always have the time to focus on them and give them the attention they deserve. If you write a cover letter keep it to a paragraph or two and tell them something personal and interesting about yourself (info they wouldn't necessarily see in your CV). Include a bit of humour if you can and if appropriate. That makes a cover letter stand out

Tracey Ashington, Rand Merchant Bank

This is a summary of their skills but more importantly insight into who they are. It needs to be concise and well written

Trishana Moodley, Genesis Analytics

ANNOYING ERRORS

Spelling, spelling, spelling; not writing specifically about opportunity applying for. Too lengthy cover letter (if email submission)

Sheshni Moodley, Merrill Lynch South Africa

Not answering all the questions asked, and telling a long story on cover letters

Smanga Ncube, Liberty Group

When applying at more than one company, make sure to change the company name and contact person on covering letters

Elizabeth Landsberg, Moore Stephens Chartered Accountants

Applicants copy and paste cover letters that are addressed to the incorrect employer

Lyndsay Shaw, Standard Bank

Incorrect spelling of the recruiter's name. Using a "blanket cover letter" irrespective of the role they are applying for

Tanya Smith, L'Oreal SA

The covering letters are often too long and contain irrelevant information. For example, if the firm the applicant is applying to is a commercial firm, the covering letter should not refer to the passion the applicant has for criminal or family law. The covering letter should be tailored for the position the applicant is applying for

Robin Westley, Cox Yeats

COVER LETTERS

COVER LETTER EXAMPLE

407 2nd Avenue
Rondebosch East
7780
24 June 2011

Mr Graham Petersen
The Human Resource Manager
GreenCo Petroleum Ltd
PO Box 701
Cape Town
8000

Dear Mr Peterson

Application for Engineer-in-Training Position

I am currently completing my Bachelor of Science degree in Chemical Engineering at the University of Cape Town. I listened to you speak on campus last week, and would like to apply for an Engineer-in-Training position with GreenCo in 2012.

Your presentation confirmed for me that GreenCo is where I would like to start my engineering career. I am extremely impressed with your Graduate Training Programme, and particularly like the mentoring aspect to it and the fact that you rotate graduates and facilitate exposure to various roles and functions. As you will see from my CV, I have gained some experience through internships and a variety of part-time jobs, but would welcome the opportunity to explore the many interesting options in chemical engineering and to develop within your reputable and environmentally-friendly organisation.

During my last holiday I worked for 3 months on a research project at TWC Chemicals and developed hands-on laboratory expertise; I was praised for my meticulous approach and attention to detail. I thoroughly enjoyed working as part of a team, writing up the final report and assisting with the presentation to management. I have also grown accustomed to team work through my involvement in sport and am currently captain of the UCT 1st hockey team. In terms of handling pressure, I am convinced that my various student jobs in bars and restaurants demonstrate that I am able to deal calmly with stressful situations and difficult people.

Please contact me should you require any further information or documentation. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss this in an interview.

Yours sincerely

E van Rooyen.

Emile van Rooyen

• Your address and the date

• Who are you applying to?

• Who am I and what am I currently doing

• What am I applying for

• This paragraph reveals why you're interested in them

• Show them that you have done your research

• Highlight what you have done that relates to what they need

• Mention a few of the skills they're after, showing where and how you have developed them

• Positive, assertive ending mentioning interview

• Sincerely as you used the recruiter's name

• Sign if hard copy

CV CHECKLIST

		YES	NO
Heading	Your name is in bold at top of page?		
Contact details	You list your correct phone number, address and email?		
Profile	It is just a few lines or bullets?		
	It is punchy, strategic and highlights your key relevant skills and experience?		
Education Section	You start with the most recent course and work backwards?		
	You have the dates, full name of institution and programme for each course?		
	You list any relevant modules or projects?		
	If there is a thesis or dissertation, you describe it briefly?		
	You list any additional training and relevant short courses?		
Work Experience Section	You start with your most recent job and work backwards?		
	You list the dates, full name of organisation and job title for each position?		
	You explain, where necessary, the nature of the organisation?		
	You list a few responsibilities and achievements for each role?		
Skills Section	Have you included a skills section?		
	Skills outlined match the skills sought?		
	You give clear evidence for each skill, showing where it was developed or displayed?		
Referees	You have 2-3 referees?		
	You give the full and correct name and title of each referee?		
	You include their organisation's name and their job title?		
	You provide the correct telephone number and email address for each referee?		
	Check with your referees that they are willing and able to give a reference and inform them of what you're applying for?		
Other sections	You include other sections and they make logical sense in terms of how your content is grouped?		
Final check	Your CV sections are arranged in the best order to highlight the most relevant information?		
	You title each section clearly and leave a line between sections?		
	You use simple, black font that is size 11 or 12?		
	Your CV is 2 pages or less?		
	You edit your CV and avoid long paragraphs?		
	You use note-form language?		
	You use consistent tenses, grammar, punctuation and formatting?		
	You have run a spell check?		
	You avoid all jargon and abbreviations?		
	Someone has proofread your CV?		
	You find your CV interesting and readable?		



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