

CVs & Covering Letters



This guide is part of the **Applications and Interviews** series.
For more guides in the series please visit the website below.

Careers & Employability Service

www.mmu.ac.uk/careers/guides



**Manchester
Metropolitan
University**

CV WRITING – THE FACTS

A CV is a marketing tool designed to attract a future employer and get you an interview. Your CV must highlight your skills and achievements in a clear, concise, focused and positive light. But beware - many applicants fail due to poor presentation, careless spelling and grammar and lack of evidence of relevant skills and achievements.

Essential preparation

- You should find out about employer requirements from job adverts, employer websites or by talking to employers. Be clear about the skills they are looking for.
- What are your key experiences which demonstrate these skills? Think strategically - what do you want the employer to know about you?
- It pays to spend time presenting your CV in a professional way – design it to the highest standard to emphasize the attributes you possess.

“What do you want the employer to know about you?”

Typical content

All CVs need to include some standard information including:

- Name (in a larger size font), address, telephone number(s) and email address.
- Education and qualifications.
- Employment and work experience history
- Interests, activities.
- Additional information to demonstrate your skills and achievements and interest in the industry applied to.
- References.

Commonly used CV formats

- A Chronological CV provides a detailed list of your education and work history in reverse date order. Your skills and experience are described throughout, making this style easier for you to construct and for the recruiter to assess. This is the most common style of CV and suits most situations.
- A Skills-based CV demonstrates your suitability through a prominent, detailed skills section which draws on the full range of your experience. This is particularly useful if you are looking for a significant change of direction and want to highlight the transferability of your skills.

To help you plan your CV, refer to the CV templates later in this leaflet. Remember to use and add alternative headings if appropriate. You can also change the order of the information. Use your judgment to give impact to *your* selling points. Remember, it is essential that you provide evidence to demonstrate you are right for the role, whichever format you adopt.

Presentation

- You should aim for two pages of A4. However, 2 pages is an aim and not a “black and white rule.” Some students may need to go on to 3 pages, depending on how much relevant information they have. If you do produce a one page document (sometimes referred to as a Resume) ensure all the relevant information is included in an easily readable format.
- Your CV should not look cluttered; the reader should be able to pick out key information even if just glancing at it. Make good use of spacing.
- Draw attention to important points by using headings, bold text and bullets.
- Use a standard font that is easy to read and looks professional. Use the same font style throughout. Accurately line up text.

CV language

Most CVs can be improved by revising the language used and the first step is to check the spelling and grammar – ask for help from a proof-reader you can trust and don't rely on Spell Checker. Next, try to include 'action words' into your content.

Examples:

'Coordinated a customer satisfaction survey to evaluate a new product range.'

'I organised a programme of activities to celebrate Black History Month.'

'Established new approach to production by researching a range of alternative options.'

See the list of useful descriptive and action words at the back of this guide.

When describing your experiences you must ensure that the reader understands what you did – language that is too wordy will quickly put off the busy recruitment manager; too concise and you won't get your message across.

Your 'CV' online

A wide range of online approaches allow you to share information for the purpose of finding a job. Applying for a job online or developing your online presence through use of social media networks such as LinkedIn and Twitter are options that could work for you. You could even develop your online profile through your own website or blog your way to success!

You need to:-

- Devise a job seeking strategy that works for you – this may or may not require you to develop an online profile.
- Refer to our leaflets covering networking and social media for an introduction to developing an online strategy.
- Utilising these opportunities enables you to present your CV in dynamic and creative ways but the content that you present remains vitally important – you need to highlight your key selling points and and quote any reference given.

THE COVERING LETTER

This has to be written in such a way as to make recruiters want to go on and read your CV – it creates the all-important first impression.

You should not think in terms of producing one 'standard' covering letter. Whilst you may well use similar material for all your letters, you must aim to provide specific information relevant both to the job you are interested in and to the organisation concerned.

Planning your letter

- Go through the attributes that the employer is looking for and decide which aspects you will cover in your letter.
- Try to get a contact name and job title and use these (exactly as provided by the employer) in the letter and envelope/e-mail as appropriate.

Presentation and style

- One side of A4 only and use the same paper for the letter as for your CV. Choose a business-sized envelope in a matching colour (usually white). Lay out the letter like a business letter.
- Generally avoid using bold, underline or subheadings – these can appear out of place in a letter. Bullets can help to emphasise key points. Give some thought to the spacing.
- Be concise but avoid creating a list or using abbreviations. Your tone should be professional, but not too formal. Be factual and positive, not arrogant.
- Check your spelling and grammar – avoid any typing errors. Read and re-read through your letter to check the content and presentation. Consider how the reader might react to the words without knowing you.

Content

- State what you want at the beginning of your letter. If you are applying for a specific vacancy, say where you saw it advertised.
- Summarise concisely the evidence of your suitability but do not simply repeat what is on the CV. Do not introduce completely new information.
- Show that you are genuinely passionate in this particular job and organisation. Outline your career objectives in your covering letter rather than in the CV.
- Round the letter off in a polite and professional way e.g. a comment on your availability to discuss the role further.
- If the letter is part of a speculative application, state your intention to follow up the letter.

Emailing a covering letter

- Don't simply put 'please see attached' in the body of an email. Be as professional in tone as you would with a covering letter sent through the post.
- You can include the covering letter in the body of an email or send it as an attachment. Sending as an attachment is generally preferable – this will help to retain the correct format.

Protecting yourself from identity fraud

It is all too easy for criminals to post bogus vacancies on the internet for the purpose of identity fraud. It is also possible to access sensitive personal data through social media networks and you should always take care of your personal information and consider what information you are sharing and who can gain access to it.

Top tips to help protect you from identity fraudsters: -

- Be careful who you share your career information with and make sure they are a real business particularly when posting your information to the web or on a job board database.
- Be wary if the email address you have been given does not contain the name of the company.

- Take extra care when accessing personal information when using public computers, such as those in internet cafes, or when using a laptop in a WiFi hotspot.
- Do not include your date of birth, your marital status and your place of birth.
- Only give your first and last name.
- Shred or destroy old copies of your CV.

For further information on protecting your identity online refer to www.getsafeonline.org

Equal Opportunities

Prospects provides information on handling discrimination at www.prospects.ac.uk/equal_opportunities.htm

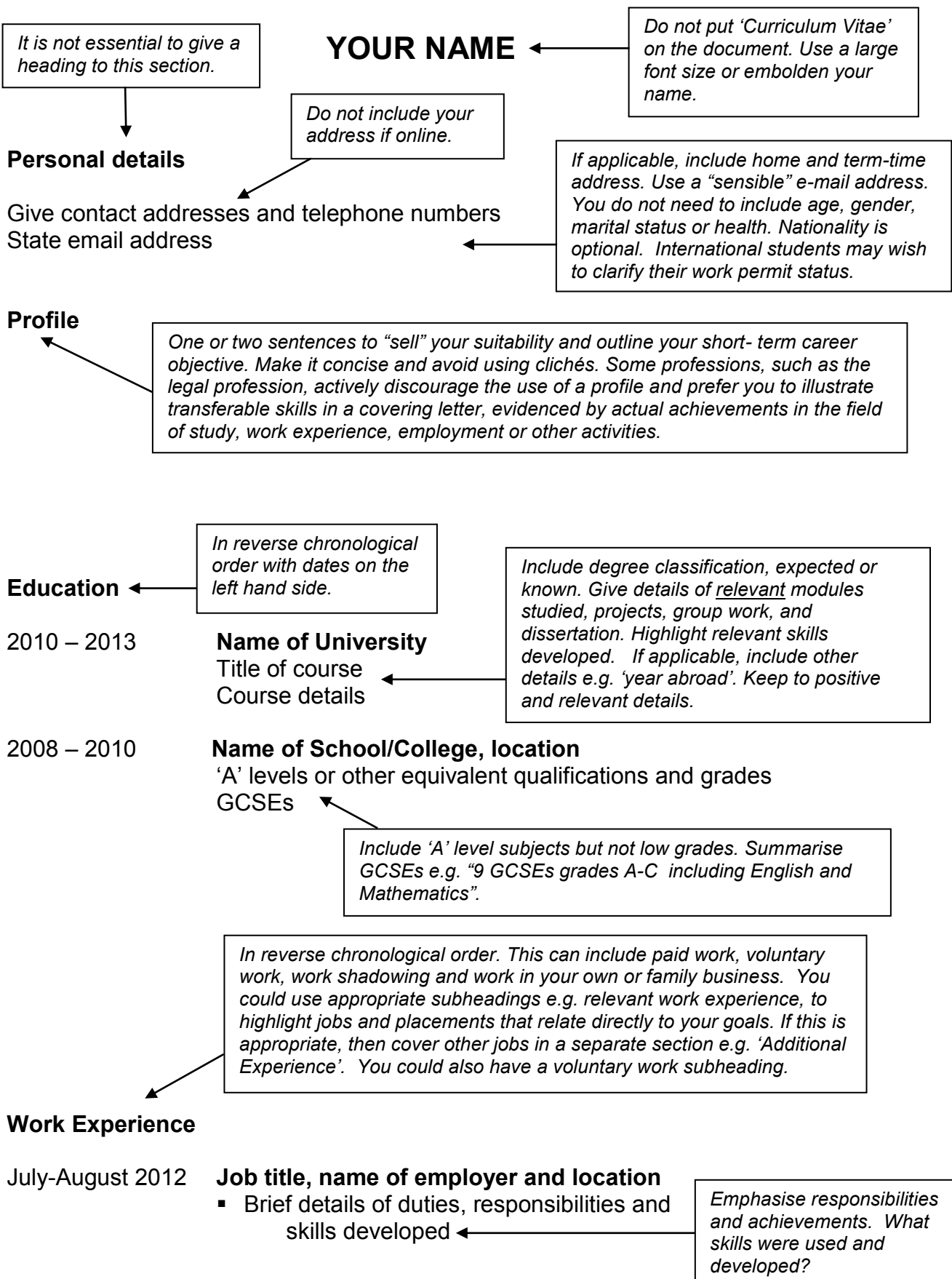
✓ If you are unsure whether or when to disclose information about a disability to a potential employer, you can also access the Skill website www.skill.org.uk

Further Help

You will need to spend time developing your CV and covering letter by adopting the advice provided throughout this leaflet. MMU Careers and Employability Service offers a range of other services, starting with our comprehensive set of career development workshops, designed to help you create effective applications. Further details of these workshops can be found at www.mmu.ac.uk/careers/events

The Careers & Employability Service is available if you require further assistance. We provide a variety of additional services designed to improve your CV – contact us to discuss.

Conventional CV Outline



December 2011

Job title, name of employer and location

As above

← *Keep these sections concise but avoid creating just a list. Bullet points can be helpful to describe each separate area of responsibility. Avoid large blocks of text.*

July-August 2011

Job title, name of employer and location

← *Where work experience is extensive, it is not essential to list every job but do not leave big gaps. You may include jobs together under one heading e.g. several bar jobs or agency work (however, even work that appears unrelated could demonstrate skills).*

Skills

← *Additional skills (those not covered in the Education and Experience sections) can be outlined here. Sub-headings can be a helpful way of presenting the information.*

IT Skills

Specific packages used and level of competence

Languages

Details of language skills, indicating proficiency level, written and spoken

Others?

e.g. Driving Licence, First Aid

Additional Information

← *Sub-headings, as above, can be helpful in presenting other positive information e.g. 'Positions of Responsibility' such as Secretary of the Rowing Club and 'Achievements' such as Duke of Edinburgh Gold Award. Could be combined with the 'Skills' or "Interests" section.*

Interests

← *Focus on what you do and give some detail of responsibilities and level of success. Be concise but avoid 'one word' lists (2-3 lines will do) e.g. travel – where did you go, how was it organised? Is your interest in sport active or passive/ and which sports – team or individual?*

References

Either include referee contact details or a statement such as 'References are available on request'

→ *If you do include referees, typically one academic and one employer, you should provide name, job title, address and telephone number and e-mail address. Ensure in advance that your referees are aware that you plan to use them as a referee. You should also give them details of the jobs you are applying for and a copy of your CV.*

YOUR NAME

Personal details

Give Contact addresses and telephone numbers
State Email address

*See notes for the
Conventional CV.*

Profile

Key Skills

This is likely to be the longest section of this CV. Pick out the key skills for the job you are interested in and which you believe the employer is looking for. Give evidence to back up your claims.

Communication

Describe situations in which you communicate with others e.g. face to face work with customers demonstrates verbal communication skills. Writing a project report during a placement demonstrates written communications skills.

Team Working

Outline your role in a group, what you did and how you contributed to the outcome. Important that you stress your own role and contribution to the team, not explain the whole teams activities.

Problem Solving

Explain a situation where you identified a problem, explored possible solutions and how you tackled (successfully) the issue.

IT Skills

Name the programming languages you can use, operating systems, software packages etc. Indicate level of competency and how used.

This is a list of typical skills an employer might be looking for but what skills do you need to include? Think about when you have demonstrated each skill and briefly describe the experience. Any part of your life could qualify as valid experience, including education, work and social and leisure activities – the more recent the better.

There are many more key skills than referred to here – research what is relevant to the job/organisation you are interested in.

NB. Additional skills (those not described in the Key Skills, Education or Employment sections) can be outlined in a separate section on the second side of the document.

Education

This section could be covered on side one, if space permits.

2010 – 2013

Name of University

Title of course

Course details

See notes for the Conventional CV.

2008 – 2010

Name of School/College, location

'A' levels or other equivalent qualifications and grades

A summary of achievement at GCSE

Employment

July-August 2012

Job title, name of employer and location

Brief details of duties and responsibilities

December 2011

Job title, name of employer and location

As above

Keep this section concise.

July-August 2011

Job title, name of employer and location

As above

Skills

Additional skills (those not described in the Key Skills, Education or Employment sections) can be outlined here. Sub-headings can be a helpful way of presenting the information.

IT Skills

Specific packages used and level of competence

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e.g. Driving Licence, first aid

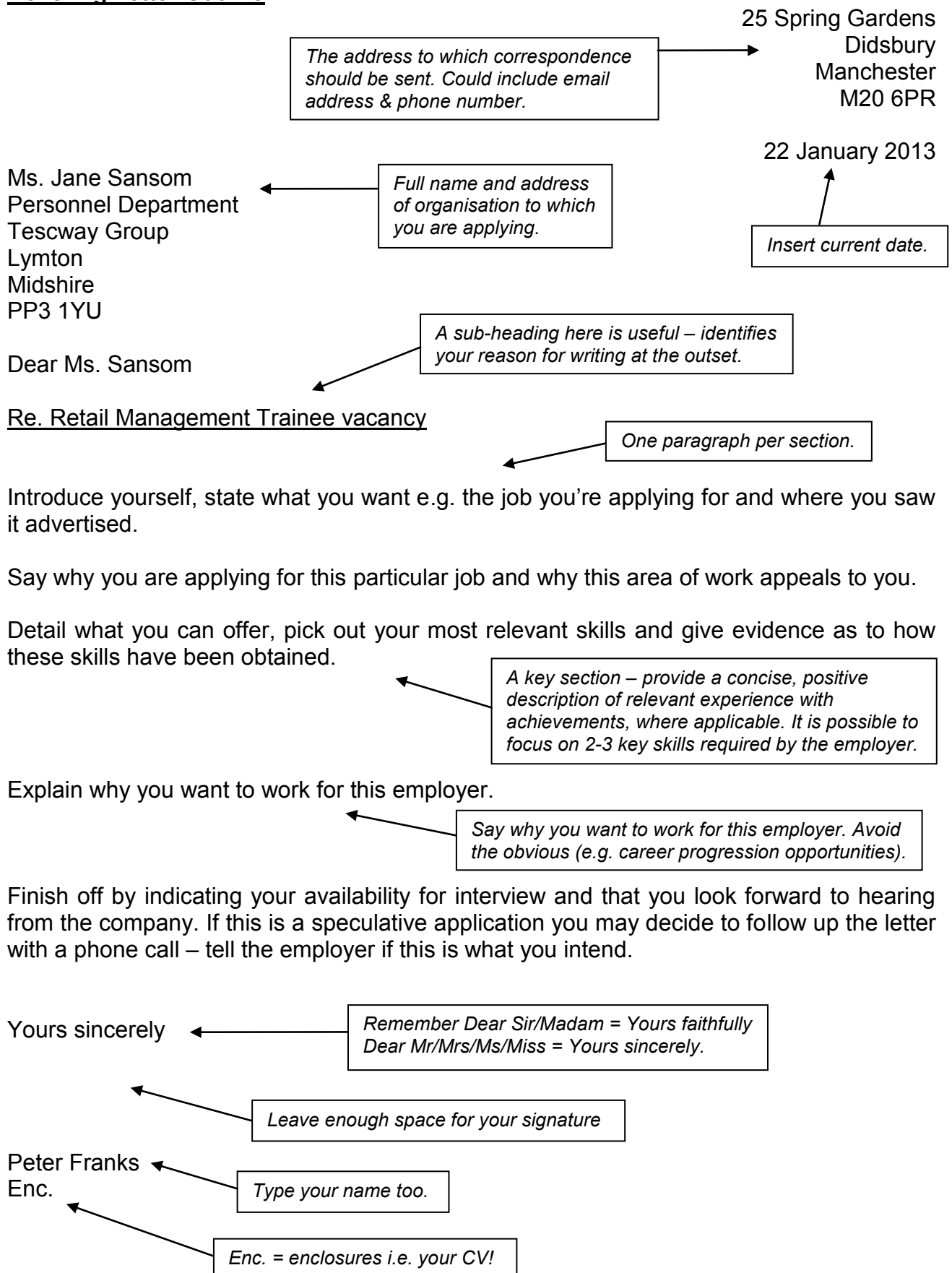
Additional Information

Interests

See notes for the Conventional CV.

References

Covering Letter Outline



Powerful Action Words

GETTING IDEAS ACROSS.....

Addressed	Advised	Controlled	Coordinated	Counselled	Demonstrated
Performed	Directed	Encouraged	Guided	Instructed	Interviewed
Liaised	Presented	Marketed	Mediated	Motivated	Negotiated
Ordered	Promoted	Delivered	Recommended	Processed	Provided

ANAYLSIS, PROBLEM SOLIVING, ORGANISING.....

Analysed	Arranged	Assessed	Budgeted	Classified	Collated
Composed	Conceived	Conducted	Controlled	Coordinated	Decreased
Defined	Distributed	Edited	Eliminated	Established	Evaluated
Identified	Improved	Investigated	Itemised	Modernised	Operated
Organised	Planned	Prepared	Processed	Produced	Redesigned
Reduced	Refined	Reorganised	Researched	Resolved	Reviewed
Revised	Scheduled	Simplified	Solved	Streamlined	Transformed
Verified	Vetted				

FINDING OUT...

Analysed	Assessed	Classified	Collated	Defined	Designed
Devised	Established	Evaluated	Forecasted	Identified	Interpreted
Interviewed	Investigated	Researched	Tested	Traced	Verified

DEMONSTRATING IDEAS/TEACHING.....

Advised	Coached	Conducted	Directed	Demonstrated	Guided
Illustrated	Instructed	Led	Managed	Organised	Performed
Presented	Taught	Trained			

SHOWING INITIATIVE, IDEAS

Composed	Conceived	Created	Designed	Developed	Devised
Established	Founded	Generated	Implemented	Initiated	Instituted
Introduced	Invented	Launched	Led	Opened	Originated
Pioneered	Planned	Prepared	Produced	Promoted	Started

MAKING CHANGES FOR THE BETTER.....

Broadened	Combined	Consolidated	Converted	Cut	Decreased
Developed	Devised	Doubled	Edited	Eliminated	Expanded
Improved	Increasing	Innovated	Minimised	Modernised	Recommended
Redesigned	Reduced	Refined	Reorganised	Resolved	Restructured
Revised	Saved	Serviced	Simplified	Solved	Streamlined
Strengthened	Transformed	Trimmed	Uncovered	Unified	Widened

LEADING

Administered	Approved	Conducted	Controlled	Coordinated	Delegated
Directed	Headed	Led	Managed	Ran	Represented
Supervised					

Some Useful Adjectives too

Ambitious	Able	Analytical	Confident	Capable	Creative
Dynamic	Effective	Energetic	Experienced	Enthusiastic	Imaginative
Resourceful	Responsible	Successful	Thorough	Versatile	High-achieving