

Student and graduate special interest series

# Applications, CVs and covering letters



Selling your skills  
Putting together an effective CV  
Covering letters  
Application forms  
Speculative applications  
Unsuccessful applications?  
Contacts and resources



**Graduate Prospects**

Available online at  
[www.prospects.ac.uk/  
links/appsinterviews](http://www.prospects.ac.uk/links/appsinterviews)

The writers of the Special Interest Series are members of the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS). The Special Interest Series is edited by the Information and Content Development Department (ICDD) of Graduate Prospects and distributed by Graduate Prospects. Full editorial control is exercised by AGCAS.

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Published autumn 2009



## Graduate Prospects

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# Contents

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<b>1. Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>	<b>5. Application forms</b> .....	<b>18</b>
<b>2. Selling your skills</b> .....	<b>1</b>	Education	
What do employers want?		Employment/work experience	
Transferable skills		Interests and achievements	
Relating skills to opportunities		Competency-based questions	
Analysing job adverts		Personal statements	
<b>3. Putting together an effective CV</b> .....	<b>5</b>	References	
Content		Approaching difficult questions	
Layout		Common questions	
Example of a chronological CV		Online applications	
Example of a skills-based CV		<b>6. Speculative applications</b> .....	<b>21</b>
Example of an academic CV		<b>7. Applications FAQs</b> .....	<b>22</b>
Types of CV		<b>8. Persuasive applications</b> .....	<b>23</b>
<b>4. Covering letters</b> .....	<b>15</b>	<b>9. Unsuccessful applications?</b> .....	<b>24</b>
Style		<b>10. Contacts and resources</b> .....	<b>25</b>
Content			
Disclosure of disability			
Example of a covering letter			
Example of a covering letter from an international student			

# 1. Introduction

## What this guide is about

This guide will help you make effective applications to the full range of graduate opportunities. It:

- examines the methods and tactics you might use to sell your skills on paper and online to prospective employers;
- provides advice, with examples, on CV formats that match your skills to the employer's requirements;
- guides you on how best to approach and handle online application processes and forms;
- helps you to construct covering letters with the employer's perspective in mind.

Making a good application involves much more than updating your existing CV with your degree classification and your latest part-time job. Graduate applications are not a history of your life but a clear picture of the parts of your experience and skills that are relevant to your prospective employer and the position for which you're applying.

With a dip occurring in the national economy and more people becoming unemployed there will be stiff competition for the jobs that do become available. Your CV needs to be competitive. You need to show that you know what the employer is looking for and to market your relevant skills and experiences accordingly.

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# 2. Selling your skills

## What do employers want?

Employers ask for evidence that you have:

- motivation for the role;
- the ability to adapt to and share the organisation's vision and ethos;
- relevant skills and competencies.

Many roles are open to graduates of any discipline as employers are often interested in your potential rather than your existing knowledge. Even for those jobs that require specific technical or scientific expertise, the successful candidate will be the one who demonstrates motivation and the personal and transferable skills needed to succeed.

The application procedures of many major graduate employers have become explicitly focused on motivation, organisational fit, and competency. It is not uncommon to find that a personality profile is a part of the initial application process and to be asked to provide very detailed examples of competencies such as 'teamwork' or 'problem solving' on the application forms.

## Transferable skills

The competencies or transferable skills that are particularly popular with graduate recruiters include:

- **communication** - ability to communicate orally, in writing, or via electronic means, in a manner appropriate to the audience;

- **teamwork** - being constructive and willing to take on less attractive tasks, contributing practically to the team's success;
- **leadership** - being able to motivate and encourage others, whilst taking the lead;
- **initiative** - ability to see opportunities, to set and achieve goals and act independently;
- **problem solving** - thinking things through in a logical way in order to determine key issues, often also including creative thinking;
- **flexibility/adaptability** - ability to handle change and adapt to new situations;
- **self-awareness** - knowing your strengths and skills and having the confidence to put these across;
- **commitment/motivation** - having energy and enthusiasm in pursuing projects;
- **interpersonal skills** - ability to relate well to others and to establish good working relationships;
- **numeracy** - competence and understanding of numerical data, statistics and graphs;
- **IT knowledge** - a basic understanding of common office equipment and programs and the ability not to be daunted by a change in the technology.

In addition, private sector employers like applicants to have some commercial awareness and knowledge of the business world and its relevancy to their organisation. You should therefore research the companies you apply to. Knowledge of their competitors can also provide you with a deeper level of understanding. It is not enough to mention that you are a good communicator, or a team player, on your CV - you need to qualify it with a description of relevant experience. For further information on competencies, refer to *What Do Graduates Do?*, [www.prospects.ac.uk/links/wdgd](http://www.prospects.ac.uk/links/wdgd).

Employers often have set criteria when selecting applicants. These may be laid out clearly in the person specification or be identifiable from the job description, advertisement or the organisation's web pages. Alternatively, if there is little information about the role, you could draw up your own list of the competencies

likely to be required. The job profiles in AGCAS Occupational Profiles [www.prospects.ac.uk/links/occupations](http://www.prospects.ac.uk/links/occupations), have useful sections on the skills and qualities usually needed for entry into particular careers.

### Relating skills to opportunities

How do you know what skills to highlight when compiling a CV, covering letter or application? You should focus on presenting evidence of the skills and qualities that the employer is seeking, including your academic projects and achievements and also responsibilities you have held during work experience or voluntary activities, involvement in societies, or management of sporting activities. Recruiters want to see skills and qualities that match their selection criteria. When examining your past involvements more closely, consider:

- What exactly have you done?
- What were you responsible for?
- What were the outcomes?
- How did you achieve success?
- Is there evidence of 'how' you have demonstrated relevant skills?

Although it is important to be concise, it is not enough just to list your skills. Where is the evidence? Employers cannot simply take your word for it. Thinking about how to express the evidence for your experience can also be a challenge. Focus on active verbs. The descriptors of responsibilities and language suggestions in the 'Persuasive applications' section may help.

- Consider how your motivation, personal qualities and aspirations reflect the ethos of the recruiting organisation and the post you are applying for.
- Understand the skills and competencies required for the role. This will be transparent where a job specification is made available. It may be more difficult when there is only an advertisement to go on, as is more commonly the case with small to medium-sized employers.
- Decide on the best way to sell your skills. Which CV format will you use? What should you put in your covering letter?

## Analysing job adverts

The following two advertisements are typical of the opportunities you'll see advertised in graduate directories. Imagine this is the only information you have

on which to base your CV application. See beneath each vacancy how they can be analysed in terms of skills, attributes and qualities.

### Game for a Laugh

Game for a Laugh is a top ranking sports gaming company and we are looking for a recent graduate to join us as our **MARKETING AND EVENTS COORDINATOR**. You will work alongside both the Marketing and Promotions team helping to organise various kinds of hospitality and events in the sporting world, including football, rugby, golf, cricket, ice hockey and racing. You will also be the first point of contact for clients, event management/ticket companies and venues. Other duties include new business activity, helping to research, prepare and write presentations, maintaining databases, generating target email lists and involvement with a variety of campaigns.

We are looking for a graduate who ideally has some marketing, organisational or business development experience. An interest in sports is a must! You must be articulate and have excellent writing skills and an eye for detail, along with good MS Office skills to produce high quality work. You will enjoy responsibility and work well as part of a team. You will be a hard worker with a professional approach but will also have a sense of humour and know how to have fun. Send your CV and covering letter quoting ref VB7A 09 to Claire Jones.

- **Organisational ethos:** they stress being professional but fun loving.
- **Skills/qualities required:** being articulate, with excellent writing skills and an eye for detail, MS Office skills and enthusiasm for sport.
- **Skills desired:** some marketing, organisational or business development experience.
- **How might those be expressed?** Your CV will need to be immaculate to give evidence of 'high quality work'

A traditional CV will be useful if your experience is an obvious match. If this is not the case, you can try a skills-based CV. The ad refers to having an interest in sports generally. You can list the sports that you participate in on your CV, but you could also use your covering letter to give more detail about sports you follow. It would be useful to discuss any roles or responsibilities you have held that demonstrate promotional or organisational skills, especially if you have had to ensure customer satisfaction.

**Whittear Travel Consultancy**

One of the UK’s leading specialists in tailor-made tours and cultural holidays to North Africa, the Middle East, and Asia, is looking for a recent graduate to train as a Travel Consultant. We are committed to providing the best service to our clients while supplying a unique holiday adventure to suit their individual needs. We believe you will thrive with our 10-month training plan which will give you the opportunity to experience all aspects of our business.

Responsibilities will include dealing with client enquiries; selling worldwide tailor-made holidays and creating itineraries; booking tours and reserving flights through suppliers; preparing client travel documentation; managing bookings and general customer service.

Candidates must have a relevant degree (2:2 or higher); good administrative skills; experience of travellers’ needs; excellent customer service skills; sales knowledge and preferably language skills.

To apply, send us your CV, or upload it directly to our website.

- **Organisational ethos:** interested in delivering a great experience to customers. They see the client as an individual and offer them a unique experience.
- **Skills required:** a 2:2 or better in a relevant subject as well as administrative skills and customer service experience.
- **Skills desired:** languages.
- **How might these be expressed?** This vacancy focuses very much on the candidate’s qualifications and experience. Therefore you may find a chronological CV to be the most effective. You may wish to highlight all relevant experience in your covering letter. (Check if there is a facility to include your covering letter if uploading your CV.)

**Lecturer/Post Doctoral Research Associate – University Research Dept of Psychology**

Applications are invited for the post of Post Doctoral Research Associate in the Research Department of Psychology. The position is full-time for 3 years, working on a Research Grant: ‘Affective Processing in Childhood’ held by Dr David Leaman.

The post holder will be responsible for conducting research in the cognitive neuroscience of affective processing in children. This role will entail development of experimental paradigms, subject recruitment, testing child participants and data analysis. The ideal candidate will have a PhD in Psychology, including excellent experimental and data analysis skills. The role will also include preparing and delivering lectures and hosting open days, so proven teaching experience is required. Interested candidates should send a letter of application, curriculum vitae, and the names of at least three academic referees to the department before the end of the month. We anticipate many responses and intend only to contact applicants we wish to call for interview. If you do not hear from us, please assume that your application has not been successful in this instance.

**PhD vacancy example**

The vacancy above is one for which a PhD student might apply.

The skill set required is academic and specific. It is not a role open to postgraduates in general. Transferable and

soft skills will be helpful but not as important as specific qualifications. The department expects applicants to be familiar with the research and the grant holder, so if you are not, you would need to do some research yourself. Chapter 3 shows how an academic CV addresses this vacancy.

# 3. Putting together an effective CV

The term 'curriculum vitae', or CV, literally means 'course of life'. In North America, the term 'résumé' is often used to refer to a brief document (about a page long) relating an applicant's skills to a particular role, while a 'CV' would list the applicant's complete work history. In the UK we only use the term 'CV', and it means the same as a 'résumé' in the US. Do not list all your achievements and experiences on your CV, but only include the most current and those that are the most relevant to the role for which you are applying. It should be a methodical presentation of how your profile matches the employer's needs, without being too wordy or detailed.

Unlike an application form, a CV allows the applicant to decide which information is most relevant to the role or company. It is an opportunity to sell your skills, and highlight your strengths and achievements and should aim to grab the interest of the recruiter.

Every time you complete a training course, volunteer or gain new responsibilities in your current role you should update your CV. It is a living document. You may feel old items have become outdated or even irrelevant, and decide to remove them. This keeps your CV fresh and terse. Being captain of a football team ten years ago may have demonstrated leadership and organisational skills at the time, but if you have not played since then, the outdated entry might imply that you have not held a more recent position of responsibility, or worse – that you have not paid attention to the details in your CV.

Employers will use your CV to get an idea of the type of person you are. There is no excuse for spelling mistakes or typos. You may not have perfect spelling, but you should certainly use an automated spell checker, or preferably ask someone with a good eye for detail to check it.

## Content

The style of your CV will also reflect on you. There is no perfect format, as you cannot please every taste. You need to consider that an employer is likely to receive a lot of CVs and will not have much time. A clear, brief CV with details laid out so they are easily scanned will be appreciated.

It is generally recognised that all CVs tend to include the following sections:

### PERSONAL DETAILS

Keep this section clear and brief – no more than a quarter of a page, ideally positioned at the top of the main page. Follow these tips:

- Use your name as the title of the document – it will help recruiters refer back to your CV more easily.
- Never use 'CV' or 'Curriculum Vitae' as a heading – recruiters know it is a CV and cluttering the title makes it harder to remember your name.
- It is not necessary to include your middle names.
- Ensure you are easily contactable at the address you provide. If necessary include term-time and home addresses.
- Your telephone numbers should be current, and if you have a personalised reply message for your voicemail, ensure that it is professional.
- You may wish to create a specific 'work' email address if your usual address is informal or comical – *iamamuppet@hotmail.com* will not do! Try to include your name in your email address for clarity.
- It is not usually necessary to include information relating to your age, sex, nationality, marital status or health. Applications for some roles may still legitimately require this information, but it is common practice for HR departments to remove candidates' personal information from CVs before presenting them for the consideration of departmental managers.

It is the employer's responsibility to ensure recruits are legally permitted to work in the UK when hiring them, and so you do not need to state this on your CV. However, international students may still feel it is an advantage to declare their work permit status on their CV. If your CV already includes details of a UK work history, employers will be less concerned. Information about working in the UK is available from the UK Border Agency (UKBA), [www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk](http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk).

### PERSONAL PROFILE/CAREER OBJECTIVE

It is not necessary to include a personal profile in your CV. If space is an issue, you could drop it altogether and

include the information in your covering letter. A well-written profile is a charm. In reality, most candidates write the same clichéd profile and bore the recruiter with their lack of imagination. A profile should be brief (three or four lines maximum). Use it to state your career focus and/or aims and perhaps evidence of two or three main strengths. Target your profile to the specific role or company – this means it will have to be changed continuously. (See our example CVs.) Avoid generic skills statements such as ‘hard worker’, ‘good communicator’, ‘motivated’, ‘team player’, ‘people person’, ‘ability to meet deadlines’, and ‘strong analytical skills’. People tend to use these descriptions as standard. Keep in mind that no candidate will say they are lazy, unmotivated and hate working with others! You need to qualify your statements to give them more gravity. Have a look at this example:

Pro-active **MARKETING GRADUATE** with over three years’ experience organising and publicising successful campus events; participated in well-received group project creating a complete marketing campaign and presenting to peers and professionals; invaluable experience gained via summer work with Virgin Airlines. Seeks a challenging and creative position in a marketing environment.

An alternative to a profile is a bulleted list of achievements in which you give examples of three to six accomplishments relevant to the role you are applying for.

#### EDUCATION

Details about your education are usually stated in reverse chronological order, with your most recent experiences first, going back to your secondary-level education. Include dates, the name of the institution, and town. Full addresses are not required. Summarise GCSEs, but market your later education and professional training more fully. Mark the equivalent of non-UK qualifications in parenthesis. It is not worth highlighting low grades but you must be specific about exactly what you have achieved. Use language that will be familiar to the employer. They may not have kept up with recent changes or variations in qualifications. You might include a list of relevant modules, information about projects and dissertations, received grades or predicted results, and/or skills developed.

#### EXPERIENCE

All work experience counts, whether paid, voluntary or shadowing. International students are often reluctant to list experience gained outside the UK, but this is just as relevant to an employer as experience in Britain. Focus on your responsibilities and achievements in the role, and how skills were used or developed. Try to use job titles and terminology relevant to the post you are applying for. You may wish to create a separate section for related experience with headers like ‘relevant experience’, or ‘technical experience’. Some experiences can be grouped together. For example:

##### Summer 2007

A variety of customer service roles including bar work, waitressing and telesales. Developed an awareness of customer relationship management and improved my influencing skills when working with challenging clients under pressure.

#### POSITIONS OF RESPONSIBILITY, ACHIEVEMENTS, INTERESTS

Here you can demonstrate that you are motivated to pursue other activities, and take the initiative to develop your skills. Mentioning interests and hobbies serves two purposes:

- to show you are a well-rounded person;
- as potential subject matter at interview. Hopefully, the interviewer will relate to your interest, or engage you in discussion on the topic.

Beyond this, listing outside interests has little use. There is even a risk that recruiters may make judgments based on their own stereotypes of those hobbies. If you decide to list your interests avoid generalisations such as ‘reading’, ‘socialising’, ‘going to the cinema’, and ‘listening to music’. These are not unique to you and do not reveal much about your character, but actually highlight a lack of specific outside interests. The risk with terms such as ‘socialising’ or ‘clubbing’ is the image they conjure of late nights and hangovers – not an ideal image for a potential employee.

#### REFEREES

Most companies will not hire you without checking your references first; but they will usually contact you before they do this. It is therefore not necessary to include your references on your CV unless this has been requested.



Always ask your referees for permission before you provide their names and check that you have accurate contact details. You will need their full name and title, full postal address, email address and telephone number. Referees often prefer not to be named in your CV as this may result in their details being sent to several employers or agencies, or even posted on jobsites. After you send in an application, it is a matter of courtesy to contact your referees to let them know they may soon be contacted by a potential employer. It is also useful to keep them informed of your career aspirations and achievements to date. You should keep several potential referees in mind in case some are unavailable at the crucial time, or slow to respond.

You will usually be asked to supply the names of two referees. A good mix would be to have one academic and one work-related, or a character referee if this is allowed. If you are already in employment and a reference from your current manager is not possible, consider using someone else in the company. If using an overseas referee, it is a good idea to confirm with them that they can send a fax or email in English.

## Layout

The CV layout should first and foremost effectively show how your skills match the requirements for a particular post. In the first instance, the employer is looking at your ingenuity in making the connection between yourself and their vacancy. Be familiar with both the details of the advert and the ethos of the organisation. You can easily get a grasp of the latter by reading company literature or visiting their website.

Your CV layout itself demonstrates motivation and, if it is clearly designed, will show how you meet the skills specified in the job advert. The recruiter will then be more likely to shortlist you. The care you take to target, interpret and prioritise your experiences also demonstrates effective written communication skills. You should come across as positive and upbeat, professional and respectful. Some people like to be quirky or use humour in their CV, believing that it shows creativity and will stand out from others, but very few recruiters and organisations respond positively to this. Most will think that using coloured paper or unusual fonts is eccentric

rather than creative. Humour is particularly likely to come across in the wrong way in a CV. If a job calls for artistic creativity, the best way to show your talents is to provide a portfolio of your work, and this will speak for itself.

**Ensure that the CV is accessible to the reader** - The employer will probably prefer to scan rather than read the CV, so it is essential that the layout makes it easy to navigate. This means clarity, defined spacing and short sensible blocks of information. Headings are very useful for scanning and you must be consistent in style throughout. Make sure you are giving the reader strong visual signals about how the CV should be read. Ideally the font size of regular text is 11 or 12. You should be able to hold your CV at arm's length and still read it comfortably.

**Imagine the reluctant reader** - Use headings likely to engage the employer such as 'Relevant Skills & Experience'. Better still, use headings taken from the employer's original advertisement or job specification, if appropriate. Avoid large blocks of text that won't be read. Split information into individually focused bullet points. Start sentences with competency-based words that emphasise the skill, quality or attribute you are presenting.

As a rule, your CV should be one or two pages maximum. It will need to be longer if you are applying for an academic research position, or if you are already well established and are applying for an executive role. The average CV does not benefit from being longer as the employer is unlikely to read it all and may use its length as an excuse to remove it from a large pile of incoming CVs. Your CV should be on good quality paper and should always be checked for correct spelling and grammar. If you use a CV originally written for another employer, make sure you adapt it appropriately. Ask a careers adviser or third party to read through the final version.

In the main, graphics and gimmicks are to be avoided. Using tables and charts can make a CV look cluttered and detract from the information given. Use a consistent style and format and don't overdo underlining and capitals. Try a different or larger font for headings and use bold for emphasis.

## Chronological CV

### JANE BROWN

24 FINSBURY ROAD, LONDON NW1 3JT

07732548888

BROWN70@HOTMAIL.COM

#### PROFILE

A bilingual Travel & Tourism graduate with several years' customer and administrative experience seeking a challenging role that will develop and add to these skills.

#### EDUCATION

- Oct 2005 - Jun 2008 **Thames Valley University**, London  
BA Travel & Tourism Management (2:1)  
• Legislation; European Geography; Sales & Marketing; People Management; Retail Travel; Policy and Strategy; Ecotourism
- Sep 2003 - Jun 2005 **City of London College**, London  
Diploma in Travel & Tourism Management  
• Tourism, Marketing; Travel Agency Management; Airline Fares & Ticketing Levels 1 & 2; Airline & Airport Management; Computer Reservation Systems
- Sep 2000 - Jun 2002 **Evendine College**, London  
A-Levels (Geography & Business Studies)
- Sep 1996 - Jun 2000 **Marlow School**, Henley  
8 GCSEs

#### EMPLOYMENT

- Aug 2006 - Present **Simpson's-in-the-Strand**, London  
Part-time Waitress  
• Providing excellent customer service  
• Explaining various menu items, staying informed about ingredients and food preparation  
• Informing customers of daily specials  
• Training new staff members

Apr 2004 - Jul 2006 **The Millennium Hotel, London**

Part-time Breakfast Waitress

- Took telephone bookings
- Greeted customers and allocated tables
- Assisted at banquets and corporate events

Aug 2002 - Aug 2003 **Buyoung Fashion Company, London**

PA to Managing Director

- General administration and secretarial duties
- Organised the MD's schedule and diary
- Maintained confidential records

Mar 2001 - Jul 2002 **Hanil International Trade Ltd, London**

Part-time Administrator

- Worked in the import/export department
- Issued and processed all import and export documentation for raw materials and finished products
- Liaised with insurance and shipping companies in person and over the telephone

## SKILLS AND QUALIFICATIONS

- Skilled internet researcher competent in MSOffice (OCR Certificate 2006)
- Fluent speaker of Korean with basic Japanese (currently studying)
- 'Welcome Host' certification 2006 (customer care, handling pressure and problem-solving)
- Food & Hygiene, Health & Safety and Customer Service training (all completed in 2006 with The Savoy Group)

## INTERESTS

- Travel and languages
- Music: R&B; classical and soul
- Sports: swimming and tennis

## Skills based CV

**Jane Brown**

24 FINSBURT ROAD  
LONDON  
NW1 3JT  
07732548888  
BROWN70@HOTMAIL.COM

### OBJECTIVE

A graduate with a BA in Travel and Tourism Management (2:1), over two years' administrative experience and over five years developing excellent customer relations skills, seeks career in events promotion and management.

### RELEVANT SKILLS

#### ORGANISATION:

- Took lead in final group project work organising a team of four in delivering a holiday package for a tour group of 50
- Administrative experience including one year managing MD's diary and calendar
- Arranged meets for school swim team (coordinating training and transportation for one year)
- Event management skills developed in degree course and from experience working in a hotel
- Coordinated suppliers and necessary complex paperwork in an import/export environment
- Compiled customer lists and completed mail shots

#### CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE:

- Trained to high customer service standard waitressing for historic London landmark restaurant
- Experienced working with large international groups
- Administrative roles involved being comfortable interacting with people at every level in business
- Developed strong communication skills ensuring details and expectations are met to the highest standard

#### OTHER RELEVANT SKILLS:

- Have completed course modules on Sales and Marketing including appropriate coursework and research
- Managed client databases in a confidential manner
- Hospitality experience and knowledge of arranging travel
- Presented project works individually and as part of a team
- IT skills (MSOFFICE - OCR Certificate 2006, presentation packages, internet research and database systems)

**RELEVANT ACHIEVEMENTS**

- BA Travel and Tourism Management (2:1), Thames Valley University 2008:  
Modules included: Legislation; Sales & Marketing; People Management
- Languages: Fluent in Korean and studying Japanese
- Sports: Tennis player with three years as part of a doubles team winning local competitions  
Swimmer (competitively for seven years)
- 'Welcome Host' certification 2006 (customer care, handling pressure, and problem solving)
- Food & Hygiene, Health & Safety and Customer Service Training 2006

**RELEVANT WORK EXPERIENCE****SIMPSON'S-IN-THE-STRAND, LONDON**

- Part-time waitress, Aug 2006 - Present
- Providing excellent customer service; training new staff
- Explaining various menu items: ingredients and food preparation

**THE MILLENNIUM HOTEL, LONDON**

- Part-time Breakfast Waitress, Apr 2004 - Jul 2006
- Took telephone bookings; Greeted customers and allocated tables
- Assisted at banquets and corporate events

**BUYOUNG FASHION COMPANY, LONDON**

- PA to Managing Director, Aug 2002 - Aug 2003
- General administration and secretarial duties

**HANIL INTERNATIONAL TRADE LTD, LONDON**

- Part-time Administrator, Mar 2001 - Jul 2002
- Import/export department; processed all documentation; liaised with insurance and shipping companies

**OTHER EDUCATION**

Diploma in Travel & Tourism Management, Sep 2003 - Jun 2005

A-Levels (Geography & Business Studies), Sep 2000 - Jun 2002

8 GCSEs, Sep 1996 - Jun 2000

## Academic CV

## Dr. Liam Phelan

Thames Valley University  
20 Plantation Road  
Summertown, Oxford  
OX2 3EF  
07724 79797

20 Plantation Road  
Kings Road, Reading  
0118 921 7456  
Liam.Phelan@tvu.ac.uk

- PERSONAL PROFILE** An intelligent, focused and enthusiastic individual comfortable within both office and academic environments. This candidate also has extensive teaching and research experience, including data collection, critical analysis/evaluation and concluding, and can also demonstrate digital imaging and web design as additional skills.
- ACADEMIC PROFILE** Research has centred on the development of memory and learning processes and reactions within the maturing brain. This has involved recruiting, selecting and working with young children in a sympathetic setting; collecting, interpreting and presenting data. This candidate seeks an opportunity to continue this research in the related fields of neuropsychology and development.
- QUALIFICATIONS**
- 2008 Thames Valley University**  
*Post-Compulsory Education Training (ITT)*
- Studied part-time for in-service post-compulsory education teacher training. Research project looked at progression aspirations in level 3 vocational subject areas.
  - Research was supervised by Prof Brian Lendon – authority in teaching techniques.
- 2005 University of Reading**  
*PhD*
- Psychology: ‘The Development of Memory for Actions’ focusing on how an aspect of children’s memory develops between the ages of seven and eleven.
  - Supervised by Prof Karen Smith and Dr Don Taylor as this concerned their joint research ‘Education and Brain Receptors as a Process’.
  - Gained experience completing applications for funding.
- 2000 University of Reading**  
*Degree*
- Psychology BSc. (2.1)
- 1996 Peter Symonds’ College, Winchester**  
*A-Levels*
- PUBLICATIONS**
- ‘HE: Academic Reasoning and the Teenager’ *TVU Newsletter* 2008.  
‘Education and the Brain’ *British Journal of Health Psychology* 2005.
- PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS**
- The British Psychological Society; Institute for Learning;  
YHA Lifetime Member.
- CURRENT EMPLOYMENT**
- Since August 2007 Thames Valley University, Reading**  
*Towards HE Team Leader*
- This new post extends the University’s work in higher education by focusing on developing and extending programmes supporting students’ transition and progression from further to higher education.

- Responsible for leading a small multi-site team.
- Also responsible for coordinating the capture, monitoring and tracking of student progression and retention related to HE projects. Project and people management, organisational and time management skills and collection of confidential data are all crucial for this role.

**PROFESSIONAL  
WORK EXPERIENCE**

**2005-2007 Thames Valley University, Reading**  
*Towards HE Officer*

- A new position for the University - required good contacts with local schools and colleges to promote HE work. Project management, organisational and time management skills were all crucial for this role.

**2004 - 2005 Thames Valley University, London**  
*Towards HE Assistant*

- Office-based role to support work with schools and colleges encouraging progression into higher education. The position required good organisational skills together with excellent IT and communication skills. Occasionally, the position also required some presentation skills and project management.

**1996 - 2000 MBA Systems Ltd, Winchester**  
*Web & Graphical Designer*

**KEY SKILLS**

- Software knowledge includes: Macromedia Dreamweaver; Adobe Photoshop; EndNote; MS Office; Quark Xpress; SPSS; Windows 3.1-Vista

**PRE-  
PROFESSIONAL  
WORK  
EXPERIENCE**

- PsyPAG: Communications Officer (2001-2004) - Designed and maintained group website
- Delegate on GradSchools course re PhD skills
- Web designer: University Department of Psychology (2000)
- University of Reading Graduation Ceremony Helper (2000-2004)
- Psychology Department Open Day Assistant - Marketing the Department to prospective University students (2000-2003)
- Organiser and administrator for a one-day Summer School teaching Psychology to post-GCSE students (Summer 2001)
- President of University Psychology Society (1997-2000)
- TVU First Aider (First Aid at Work)
- Fully qualified 'Train-The-Trainer'
- Participated in 'Managing An Effective Team' short course

**ACADEMIC  
REFERENCES**

- *Dr Greg Baker:* Thames Valley University, London
- *Dr Jude Bell:* School of Psychology, University of Reading
- *Dr Tom Frice:* School of Psychology, University of Reading
- *Dr Andrew Ward:* Brunel University, London

**INTERESTS**

Music, computers, cycling, racket sports, literature, theatre

## Types of CV

Particular CV styles can help to highlight your relevant strengths, depending on your experiences to date. Many people find a combination of styles effective. All CVs should be targeted either to meet the requirements of an advertised vacancy or, if you are making a speculative approach, to appeal to a particular employer.

### THE CHRONOLOGICAL CV

This is the most familiar format and its effectiveness is based on the assumption that recent experience outweighs past roles and responsibilities. This CV outlines your experiences in reverse chronological order (latest first) with sections for education, experience and achievements. It is easy to organise and demonstrates how you have progressed over time. This makes it the clearest for an employer to read, but it may not be suitable if you have changed jobs frequently, have had disparate past experience or are looking to change career direction. (See the example on pages 8 and 9.)

### THE SKILLS-BASED CV

This CV focuses on demonstrating evidence of relevant skills. Use relevant skill headings to present your evidence – educational and work experience descriptions are kept brief. This style of CV is more difficult to organise but, if you focus on the right skills, it can show you have considered the needs of the employer. It is a good opportunity to highlight transferable skills if you feel your work experience does not directly relate to a role but that you still have acquired the necessary skills. (See the example on pages 10 and 11.)

### THE ACADEMIC CV

This type of targeted CV differs mainly in the degree of emphasis given to knowledge and academic achievements. For an academic or research career, appropriate headings might include:

- dissertation and/or research abstracts;
- research interests and/or areas of expertise;
- teaching and/or administrative experience;
- publications;
- presentations given or conferences attended;
- professional memberships;
- fellowships and awards.

(See the example on pages 12 and 13.)

Remember that your research interests should be comprehensible to people outside your field but scholarly enough to interest fellow researchers. In addition, pay attention to potential transferable skills and use a professional layout. Academic employers want academic staff who are motivated team players, and can manage projects, bring in funding and communicate concisely and professionally. For further information on marketing a PhD effectively, see the AGCAS Special Interest booklet *Your PhD... What Next?*, [www.prospects.ac.uk/links/yourphd](http://www.prospects.ac.uk/links/yourphd). If you are a postgraduate but not looking for an academic career, your CV should follow an alternative layout.

### ELECTRONIC CVS (ESCVS)

When submitting a CV online, be aware of who will see it.

- Is your formatting readable by all IT packages?
- Will an elaborate layout travel electronically?
- Will a generic CV template used by an online agency be sufficiently targeted to your preferred career?

Some recruiters use scanning equipment for CVs submitted online, so try to consider any key criteria or attributes they may be looking for. A company will usually warn you in advance if they are using this system.

- The system extracts key data such as name, address, phone number, skills and qualifications, previous employers and positions. Data relating to your qualification levels, competencies and specific and transferable skills are matched with requirements for the job on offer. Make sure that you are using key words and phrases relevant to your chosen vocational area. See 'Persuasive applications' for advice on useful words and phrases to use.
- Use a normal typeface such as Times New Roman or Arial.
- Do not use underlining.

Try to establish the policy regarding the privacy of your personal details. Some people prefer to give only an email address or a hyperlink to their own website. Be aware that there are blog sites that list fictitious vacancies and forward your CV to hundreds of employers. Look for established user protection with password controls.



## 4. Covering letters

When possible, your CV should always be accompanied by a covering letter. Use it to put your CV in context with the position or organisation, outlining how you relate to its values, ethos and aspirations. While your CV sets out the skills you have for the post, your covering letter more explicitly presents your motivation and adaptability. A covering letter should:

- demonstrate to the employer your interest in and knowledge of the company;
- highlight particular parts of your CV that are your unique selling points;
- give extra information that does not fit easily into a CV;
- explain any personal circumstances or anomalies in your application.

A well-written covering letter is essential for speculative applications.

### Style

- Address your letter to a named person, even if this means you have to phone the company to ask for the name of the person who deals with recruitment. This will ensure that it reaches the right person. It also gives you a contact name for a follow-up call or email.
- Think from the employer's perspective rather than your own. Tell them what you can contribute to the organisation rather than how it can benefit you. Do not send them a standard letter with only the key details changed.
- Your covering letter should be no more than one page long and with short and clearly themed paragraphs (aim for no more than four paragraphs as a rule).

### Content

The following format provides an overview for a letter:

- Briefly introduce yourself, state the post you are applying for and where you saw it advertised. For a speculative letter, specify the type of work you are looking for.
- Explain why you are interested in this type of work and show an understanding of what it is likely to involve.
- Explain why you are interested in working for this particular employer. Demonstrate enthusiasm and evidence of research into such aspects as their successes, involvements, values or clients.

- Highlight what makes you suitable for this position. Provide evidence of your key strengths by referring to experience listed on your CV. Aim to show that your key strengths reflect their requirements.
- Take the opportunity, if necessary, to explain any anomalies in your background, such as time gaps or ways in which you do not match the selection criteria. Explain how any hurdles you have encountered have helped you develop in a positive way.
- If the role and organisation are creative, you should reflect this in your writing style. If the organisation is formal, you are more likely to be successful if you write a formal covering letter.
- Ensure there are no errors and spelling mistakes and that you have written the addressee's name correctly.
- Respectfully request an interview or an opportunity for an informal discussion.
- The letter should be typed, but a nice touch in formal letters is to use a fountain pen to hand write 'Dear ...' (with the recruiter's name) and to sign 'Yours sincerely'.

### Disclosure of disability

If you have a disability, you may feel that it does not affect your ability to do the job, and that the employer may not view you objectively if the disability is declared. Disclosure before interview is not a legal requirement, so you can make your own decision on this; disclosure could highlight your personal skills and qualities to the employer.

Disclosure also improves your access to equal opportunities and training schemes in place under current legislation. There may be a health and safety implication, e.g. a requirement for workplace adaptations, which the employer needs to know from the outset. Also, funding is available to help employers make necessary changes.

Failure to disclose a disability on an application form when you are specifically asked, or on a medical form, could give rise to dismissal later on. You may choose to disclose a disability in your covering letter. Remember to be positive and highlight the skills you have gained as a result of your disability. If there are matters likely to be of concern to an employer, you may wish to deflect them by suggesting solutions, or giving examples of how you have successfully dealt with these challenges in the past. More information can be found at [www.prospects.ac.uk/links/discrimination](http://www.prospects.ac.uk/links/discrimination).

## An example of a covering letter to accompany Jane Brown's CV for Game For a Laugh

24 Finsburt Road  
London  
NW1 3JT  
11 January 2009

Claire Jones  
Personnel Manager  
Game For A Laugh  
PO Box 22  
Reading  
Berkshire  
RG2 2UG

Dear Claire Jones,

### REF VB7A 09R MARKETING AND EVENTS COORDINATOR

I spotted your recent advertisement for the above position on the Prospects website. The role sounds very interesting to me and I would like to apply. Please find my CV enclosed.

I have come across Game For A Laugh several times in recent years when attending rugby events with my family and again at the Cumberland Trust Tennis Tournament. All these occasions have been noted for their success.

As you will see from my CV, I am a recent graduate with a degree that involves aspects of the leisure industry and marketing. I have several years' experience in customer service, administration and hospitality. I am comfortable using presentation software, databases and writing correspondence. I am also well practised at keeping a professional and calm attitude while juggling the many issues that can arise in a busy work environment. Further, I am bilingual (English/Korean) with a basic knowledge of Japanese and I have found this useful in working with an international clientele.

I have experience of playing a support role in many events that have taken place in the hotel where I used to work, and the restaurant where I am currently employed. This has given me the opportunity to work closely with event planners and managers. The experience has also helped with my degree modules relating to event management. I now feel I have gained a strong insight and working knowledge of what is involved in arranging a successful event.

What is not covered in my CV is my love of sports. Having grown up in a sports-mad family I am used to both taking part in sport and being a spectator. I am a particular fan of rugby, rowing, football and tennis. I have personally competed in both tennis and swimming events, as well as field hockey long ago in my youth. There is more to me than sports, and hard work, however, and I would love the opportunity to discuss my skills and experience in relation to this role.

Thank you for taking the time to consider this application and I look forward to hearing from you in the near future.

Yours sincerely,  
*Jane Brown*  
Jane Brown

## An example of a covering letter from an international student

Bank House  
Sherwold Close  
Swindon  
SN3 2KJ  
11 January 2009

Mrs Laura Hinds  
Human Resources Manager  
Ashford Brent & Associates  
Milton Keynes

### Graduate Trainee Technical Writer

Dear Mrs Hinds,

I am writing to apply for the position of Graduate Trainee Technical Writer as advertised in the Prospects Directory 2009. Please find my CV enclosed for your consideration.

I have always been interested in correct grammatical usage because of the influence of a strict English teacher I had at school. As English was not my first language, it became imperative to learn it correctly and I became fascinated by the origins of words and phrases. Doing my degree in the UK was an obvious choice and I planned the move for years. I got a first in English Literature and my dissertation topic centred on the language used in eighteenth-century (English) literature.

Initially, I met Dave Lenders and Frankie Gage at my university's graduate recruitment fair and learned about the work being done at Ashford Brent & Associates. As I am a computer buff, I found the bespoke software you design very interesting and would enjoy the opportunity to work on the manuals. I have since read about your new release software and am excited by your plan to enter into international markets.

Currently, I am employed on a short term contract with the technical department of a local toy manufacturer. This has been a useful experience as I have been working on their instruction leaflets. I have listed in my CV the software and programming knowledge I have and would be happy to forward samples of my written work as well. I not only speak English and Sango (the language of the Central African Republic), but am also fluent in French which may be useful to your expanding international client base.

As I am not a British citizen, I will need to renew my visa within the year. Further, you will see that my pre-university grades do not follow the pattern of grades expected in the UK education system, but I can provide a copy of the transcript that was accepted by my university. I can also provide you with academic references to confirm my ability.

I hope you find my skills and experience interesting and look forward to hearing from you in the near future.

Yours sincerely,

*Didier Hut*

Didier Hut

## 5. Application forms

Many recruiters ask graduates to apply using a company application form so that they can compare applicants on a like-with-like basis by considering their approach to and completion of a standard form. This usually indicates that the employer has a more transparent and scientific approach to recruitment. It is useful to make a copy or download a few applications so you can practise. Keep copies of your applications for future reference, or to avoid making similar errors if an application is poorly received.

This approach tends to include a 'job specification' and notes on how to complete the application form. When you submit a CV, you could imagine selling yourself to a reluctant reader whose attention you need to capture, but when you fill in an application form, imagine a systematic reader checking that you meet clearly set criteria.

### Education

If there is little space to list all your qualifications or modules, it may be possible to summarise key results or module titles. You may even refer to a fuller listing on a separate sheet, or put details in the additional information box, or mark as 'available upon request'. If in doubt, contact the employer to confirm. You may also wish to do this if your qualifications do not translate into UCAS points and there is no space for explanations. It may be helpful to visit the UCAS website, [wwwucas.com](http://wwwucas.com), to check their section on the comparability of international qualifications. Most careers advisers have access to ENIC-NARIC, [www.enic-naric.net](http://www.enic-naric.net), for advice on this.

### Employment/work experience

List your jobs in reverse chronological order by job title. If you did not have an official job title, try to think of one that describes your position well. Full addresses are not usually required. Describe your responsibilities or achievements in your roles, bearing in mind the skills the employer is seeking. You can group together or prioritise some experiences if space is limited. The section on

'Persuasive applications' has some useful suggestions for terminology.

### Interests and achievements

Similar principles apply as for your work experiences. Emphasise key words that demonstrate evidence of your skills. Focus on demonstrating appropriate behaviours rather than seeking to impress an employer with an amazing achievement.

### Competency-based questions

Some recruiters use an application form (on paper or online) made up of competency-based questions. These ask the applicant to provide detailed answers, based on personal experience, to demonstrate a skill required in the job. Before you respond, consider whether the question is closed, asking for specific, quantifiable information, or whether it is open and you can decide the direction of your response. An example of the latter might be: 'Think of a time when you have had to influence others to do something they were reluctant to do. What was the situation? How did you do it? What was the outcome?' There is often a word limit attached to the answer. The employer is looking for a clear, succinct and disciplined answer. For this question you should try to:

- briefly outline the situation;
- explain what you did in terms of the skills and processes that YOU used in some detail;
- describe a positive outcome or personal learning point.

As there is likely to be a series of questions covering a range of personal skills such as 'problem solving', 'teamwork' and 'communication', avoid using the same scenario twice. Draw on the breadth of your work, personal life and study to provide a variety of answers. This type of application form is most commonly used for public sector graduate training schemes. It may be useful to consult with your university careers adviser, who is likely to have seen many attempts at tackling these questions and can give you some first-hand guidance on the standard required.

## Personal statements

Many application forms require you to complete a personal statement in support of your application. You might be asked to give your reasons for applying and other information relevant to the job specification, including your knowledge, skills and experience. Your personal statement should relate directly to the specifications of the job or course you are applying for. It is important that you address all the points in the job specification in the order in which they appear. Imagine this being used as a checklist by the person short-listing.

Address each point on the job specification in a clearly themed paragraph:

- In your first sentence you might make a short STATEMENT summarising how you meet or relate to the requirement.
- The next few sentences should provide a concrete EXAMPLE of the assertion(s) you have just made.
- A final sentence that shows REFLECTION will add depth to the point you're making.

**Example** - When asked about commitment to promoting equal opportunities:

'I have always tried to ensure in my personal and work life that I am sensitive to and inclusive of the cultures and circumstances of other people. In 2006, I worked as a mentor/facilitator to a group of students on the Aim Higher project to encourage pupils from non-traditional backgrounds to consider university. I designed projects and activities that recognised and focused on the diverse experience within the group to ensure participation. The programme was successful for the pupils and a rewarding learning experience for me. The experience showed me that working together with mutual respect is more productive and rewarding.'

[The first sentence is the STATEMENT, the second and third sentences describe the EXAMPLE, and the last sentence is your REFLECTION.]

Avoid simply repeating the words used in the job specification in your responses (e.g. 'I am committed to Equal Opportunities'). Make a personal interpretation of the criteria and quantify with clear examples.

You will often be asked to provide a personal statement, giving your 'reasons for applying for this post'. You may choose to introduce or conclude your statement with a summary of why you are applying for the job and what attracted you to the organisation. Use language and phrasing that show enthusiasm for both the role and the company. Provide a brief summary of how your set of skills matches the post advertised. Show that you have done your research on the company and highlight their strengths as an employer.

## References

The same rules apply as for CV content. Here you may need to state referees' full contact details. Remember to ensure referees are agreeable and let them know that they may be contacted.

## Approaching difficult questions

Ensure you understand the question. Provide relevant evidence, use concise language, and include key words if there is a chance the form will be electronically scanned. Remember to use a variety of experiences to evidence your skills and attributes and be aware that, once you have thought of one experience, it may easily be the first example you recall for answering other questions. Credit colleagues (collectively) when referencing teamwork. This is important for competency-based questions aimed at understanding the role you played.

## Common questions

**Give details of your main extracurricular activities and interests to date. What have you contributed and what have you got out of them?** Extracurricular activities can provide evidence of skills and attributes that would be useful in the work place. These may be in teamwork or business awareness. Answer with examples of personal development and achievement.

**Give an example of a problem you have solved that required analysis. What methods did you use and what conclusions did you reach?** A competency-based question that requires you to provide an example. Concentrate on the process you used to solve the problem rather than on the problem itself. Highlight examples of personal initiative, creativity or effective use of resources in solving the problem.

**Describe a time when you were working under pressure with competing deadlines and it was impossible to meet them all. What was the situation and what did you do?**

This question looks at your ability to work under pressure. Try to pick an example that reflects well on your organisational skills (i.e. not chaos of your own making). Show how you: prioritised the tasks; made efforts to renegotiate on the least urgent deadlines; delegated tasks to others; and communicated progress. What extra efforts did you make to resolve the situation? Your answer will cover a range of inter-related organisational and communication skills, as well as your attitude.

**Tell us about an occasion when you had to communicate complex information. Why did you have to do this and how did you go about it? Did you achieve your desired result?** Employers are looking for particular competencies. Show your ability with a relevant example of your skills in communication with people at various levels. Remember that communication is not just about talking, but also about listening effectively, responding, writing and even using body language. You may draw on a personal or professional experience. Be clear, concise and specific as your response will itself demonstrate part of your communication skill.

**Describe a difficult team project you have worked on, the result that was achieved and how you achieved it.** This type of question asks you to address not only teamwork, but also leadership, time management and problem solving skills. You need to show how you have worked effectively with others. Describe your role and the roles of the others. What were the hurdles? You may not have had an experience exactly like this. In that case, you might reply by stating that this is the case, but then give your observations on what someone else did when you were working in a team, or what you might have done.

**What is your greatest achievement to date?** Your answer will show what you consider to be important or difficult and what you count as success. If possible, discuss possible answers to the question with a careers adviser to determine their weight. You should emphasise why you consider your example a great achievement and say what it has taught you and how you have used the experience. This may be picked up for further discussion in an interview.

When you think you have completed the form, ask someone to check through it as you may not be able to see your own mistakes. Keep a copy of your application and job advertisement details in case you need them for interview preparation.

## Online applications

Online recruitment has grown rapidly over the years and has proved advantageous to both recruiters and applicants. A good, tailored online application requires the same advance preparation as a targeted CV or a hard copy form, but may be harder to check.

**Access** - a registration password will allow you to save and return to online forms so that they can be completed and submitted when you are ready. You may be required to undertake a timed test online. Make sure that you are focused and prepared. Go to [www.prospects.ac.uk/links/online-tests](http://www.prospects.ac.uk/links/online-tests) if you want to take practice tests online.

**Style** - formality in your application is still a must. Make time to check it through and ensure it is effectively targeted to the position and employer. It is often possible to copy the questions into MS Word. Plan your answers in a Word document (or similar) and get them checked for content and style by a careers adviser in advance. Sometimes the online form will restrict you to a particular font style and size. Be aware of this when you draft your answer.

**Accuracy** - grammar and spelling again! Even if you cannot access spell-check facilities on the site, you can download the text into MS Word and spell-check it there.

**Personality profiling** - some application forms include multiple-choice questions about your likes, strengths and preferences. These can be used to identify whether your preferred style of working fits with the culture of the organisation and the skills they require. Be as honest as possible – there may be repeats of questions to ensure your answers are consistent and some questions that test whether you are trying to make a favourable impression.

Select Simulator, [www.selectsimulator.com](http://www.selectsimulator.com), is an online resource designed to help graduates understand and be confident in making online applications.

## 6. Speculative applications

Making speculative approaches can be an effective way of gaining entry to work and in some industries it is the norm.

- Identify employers who recruit graduates with your degree; who might be interested in your dissertation; or who you feel suit your skills.
  - Research is the key to speculative applications and the internet is a good place to start. Learn about the company, their organisational structure, trends in your field, competitors, and any areas of growth or change.
  - Find out the name of the person you need to send your CV to and address it for their attention.
  - Ensure that your letter states clearly what you are looking for – a job, work experience, work shadowing, project work – along with what skills and experience you have to offer. Include the dates when you are available and whether you require payment or are primarily looking for an opportunity to gain experience. Joining a company as an intern, summer temp or for work experience can be a useful way to open doors, network and gain references.
  - Follow up your letter with a telephone call to show your genuine interest and see if you can arrange a meeting to discuss job possibilities, review your application, or gain further contacts.
  - Create a network of influential people. To be most effective, combine contacts from all sources, such as your personal and professional networks. Ask people, including lecturers or past students, for contacts who may know of opportunities in a particular sector.
-

## 7. Applications FAQs

### **Is it the same process if I want to work in another country?**

Application styles vary from country to country. Some countries prefer CVs that emphasise factual information or personal details. Employers in other countries may require written references and exam transcripts to be sent with your application. Some might require two CVs, one accurately presented in their native language and perhaps another in English. Consult AGCAS Country Profiles, [www.prospects.ac.uk/links/countries](http://www.prospects.ac.uk/links/countries), for information about over 50 countries.

### **I am applying for postgraduate study. Is it the same process as applying for a job?**

Universities often have a specific postgraduate application form for you to complete and their guidance notes usually make clear what information they would like. The principle is the same – targeting your application content to meet the perceived interests of the reader. If you are unclear, possible areas to include are:

- why you are interested in this area of study, research ideas or proposals;
- experience of relevant study to date; evidence of academic attainment including prizes and awards;
- how you hope to benefit from this study and how it fits into future career plans;
- evidence of relevant research or related skills, such as use of initiative during past projects, project management, report writing, familiarity with techniques or equipment;
- details of any relevant practical or work experience or work shadowing that will show motivation for study or an intended future career.

Speaking to other postgraduates or having a mentor could be useful and it is always worth contacting the academic department you are applying to, or your own tutors, for suggestions.

If attaching additional information to your application, about one A4 sheet is usually sufficient.

### **Will my personal circumstances, such as my sexuality, ethnic origin, age, gender, or political affiliations affect my application?**

You do not usually need to supply any of this information. However, in reality, your name may indicate your sex or ethnic origin and it may even suggest your age if it was a fashionable name during a particular period. None of these factors should affect your ability to do the job and so should not be taken into account by a prospective employer. However, there are indications that some unfair discrimination can and does still take place, despite legislation.

One of the best ways to reduce the risk of unfair discrimination is to market yourself so effectively that employers cannot ignore your suitability for the post. Research the company and the key attributes required. Consider the precise factors that make you a suitable candidate, the evidence you might present to prove it, and where to place it on the application to make the greatest impact. Give concrete examples to support your case. It is important to think positively. Concentrating on your strengths can help to counter any negative stereotypes and provide clear evidence of your suitability for the job.

You may prefer to select employers who have publicised equality and diversity statements covering existing policies and practices, or who openly target minority groups, or who are listed by civil rights organisations. For further information, see 'Handling discrimination', [www.prospects.ac.uk/links/discrimination](http://www.prospects.ac.uk/links/discrimination).

### **I'm a student with a disability. Should I disclose it to an employer and if so, when?**

The decision is yours to make, but generally it is considered wise to be upfront with employers and that your original covering letter is the best place to do this. If this worries you, you might try targeting employers with demonstrated commitment to being disability friendly. Check whether the company recruitment literature includes a policy statement on disability, whether its job advertising carries the Jobcentre Plus 'two ticks' symbol,



and whether it is a member of the Employers' Forum on Disability. However, limiting your application to these companies may restrict your employment opportunities.

### How should I deal with the fact that I have a criminal record?

If your convictions are not 'spent', or if the role you are considering is 'excepted' from the Rehabilitation of

Offenders Act 1974 (ROA), it would be advisable to be upfront. If you have concerns about this, it always pays to seek advice. Your university careers adviser will be able to give you information about disclosure of criminal records. More information is available at, [www.prospects.ac.uk/links/discrimination](http://www.prospects.ac.uk/links/discrimination).

## 8. Persuasive applications

Recruiters have to trawl through many applications, including some that seem indistinguishable and unremarkable. Help them to find what they want by using direct, positive and appropriate language in your application. Know your audience.

Sub-headings and bullet points are used in both CVs and personal statements and allow the reader to pick up the information with ease. If possible, reflect the employer's terms in the headings. Make the first word in a bullet point an active verb such as 'organised', or 'delivered'.

When writing in the first person on application forms, be positive and affirmative. Avoid saying: 'I feel that I am a good communicator', or: 'I believe in diversity and equal

opportunities.' Say rather: 'I am a good communicator', and: 'I am committed to diversity and equal opportunities.' Do not give the employer the chance to question the strength of these skills.

On application forms, use themed paragraphs. Do not intertwine separate criteria in the same paragraph. The recruiter may miss one of your points. Revise and edit your text so that it is clear, precise and convincing. That way, the employer is more likely to understand the message you want to put across.

The following words and phrases may be useful in job applications:

<b>Experience:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrated skills in...</li> <li>• Extensive academic/practical background in...</li> <li>• Experienced in all aspects of...</li> <li>• Knowledge of/experienced as/proficient in...</li> <li>• Provided technical assistance to...</li> </ul>	<b>Roles</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analysed/evaluated...</li> <li>• Established/created/designed...</li> <li>• Formulated...</li> <li>• Initiated...</li> <li>• Orchestrated...</li> <li>• Managed...</li> <li>• Presented...</li> </ul>	<b>Responsibilities</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In charge of...</li> <li>• Supervised/delegated...</li> <li>• Now involved in/coordinate...</li> <li>• Familiar with...</li> <li>• Employed to/handle...</li> <li>• Assigned to...</li> <li>• Project managed...</li> </ul>
<b>Success:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promoted to...</li> <li>• Succeeded in...</li> <li>• Proven track record in...</li> <li>• Experience involved/included...</li> <li>• Successful in/at...</li> <li>• Delivered...</li> </ul>	<b>Ability:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trained in...</li> <li>• Proficient in/competent at...</li> <li>• Initially employed to...</li> <li>• Expert at...</li> <li>• Working knowledge of...</li> <li>• Coordinated...</li> <li>• Organised...</li> </ul>	<b>Personal Attributes</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Committed to...</li> <li>• Confident</li> <li>• Enthusiastic user of...</li> <li>• Thorough...</li> <li>• Actively sought...</li> </ul>

## 9. Unsuccessful applications?

As a guideline, if you are receiving many offers to interview but no offers of employment, reflect on your interview technique. If you receive few or no offers to interview, reflect on your application style. Do not send out a wave of applications with a duplicated covering letter. Tailored applications show research and thoughtfulness. Employers like to see you have done your homework. That means writing to a named person, reassessing your CV for every application, and demonstrating you have made a serious effort.

**Underselling yourself** - Be positive about what you have to offer. If you are not confident about your potential, it will be difficult to convince others. Ask a careers adviser to check your application before you send it in order to assess its strength and where improvements can be made. See the sections on 'Selling your skills' and 'Persuasive applications'.

**Restricting your range of applications** - Over 40% of graduate vacancies are open to graduates within any discipline. Opportunities are not limited to jobs directly related to your studies. Explore graduate career paths in *What Do Graduates Do?* and the AGCAS Options Series, [www.prospects.ac.uk/links/options](http://www.prospects.ac.uk/links/options).

**Highly competitive areas** - Some areas of employment are highly competitive. These include broadcasting, advertising, publishing and journalism. Voluntary work or unpaid work shadowing is a good way to gain experience and make contacts. If this is not an option, you might consider related fields where you can hone these skills while you continue to apply for your dream job.

**Not looking widely enough** - Some graduates only consider the large company graduate training schemes that appear in the *Prospects Directory* rather than those of small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). With a downshift in the economy and increased job losses, there will be fewer graduate placements on offer and today's graduates should not restrict their opportunities. SMEs can provide wider experiences and more responsibility. Register with My Prospects on [www.prospects.ac.uk/](http://www.prospects.ac.uk/)

[links/myprospects](http://www.prospects.ac.uk/links/myprospects) for notification of ad-hoc vacancies that SMEs often post on the Prospects.ac.uk site.

**Managing potential difficulties** - As a candidate, you may have background constraints or issues that you consider to be a disadvantage. Always present this information positively. Demonstrate what you have learned and how you have overcome any difficulties. Describe coping strategies that you have developed. Employers often look for evidence of perseverance and problem solving, so you can use this as an example.

Some employers do use academic results as an initial selection tool. If you do not meet all the academic criteria, you might ask to be considered on other merits, to have your experience taken into account. You may want to say this in your covering letter. It is better to tackle the issue than to either deselect yourself or ignore the criteria.

**Poor interview technique** - If you are called to interview, you are in with a chance of the job. Everyone who is short-listed is considered capable of doing the job. The interview will check the competencies of candidates and show employers your motivation and ability to fit into their organisation. Spend time thinking through your motivation and how to express it. Interview questions are often predictable and a mock interview with a careers adviser could be a great way to prepare. Have a look at the AGCAS Special Interest booklet *Going for Interviews*, [www.prospects.ac.uk/links/interviews](http://www.prospects.ac.uk/links/interviews), for more information.

**Always seek feedback** - If you feel that you have put in a good application for a job and have not been short-listed, seek feedback. This is not always forthcoming, but in some sectors, such as public services, you will be able to find out exactly why your application failed. This may indicate something that you can easily improve, or provide useful tips for future applications. It is often difficult to hear constructive criticism, but remember not to react in a negative manner. Say thank you to whoever gives you feedback and remember that whatever you are told can be put to good use.

# 10. Contacts and resources

## Sources of help

Most university careers services run sessions to provide feedback on your CV, covering letter or application form. These are worth a visit and can generate new suggestions, strategies or a fresh pair of eyes. If you no longer have access to your service, the Prospects.ac.uk website has a section for graduates.

**AGCAS and Graduate Prospects products are available from higher education careers services and on [www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk)**

## AGCAS publications and products

AGCAS Special Interest booklets:

*Going for Interviews;*  
*Job Seeking Strategies;*  
*Your PhD... What Next?*

AGCAS Options Series

AGCAS Videos/DVDs:

*Looking Good on Paper;*  
*Your Job 's Online.*

## Graduate Prospects publications and products

*Prospects Directory*  
*Prospects Finalist*  
*Prospects Graduate*  
*Prospects Postgraduate Directory*  
*Prospects.ac.uk*  
*What Do Graduates Do?*

## Other publications

*Application Forms: The Selection Process*, Careers & Employability Service, University of Liverpool, 2006  
<http://dbweb.liv.ac.uk/cll/upload/ApplicationForms.pdf>

*How to Write a CV*, 5th edn., The Careers Group, University of London, 2007

*How to Write a Great CV*, Paul McGee, 2nd edn., How To Books, 2006

*Killer CVs and Hidden Approaches*, 3rd edn., Graham Perkins, Pearson Books, 2007

*Preparing the Perfect CV*, 4th edn., Rebecca Corfield, Kogan Page, 2006

*The Right Way to Write Your Own CV*, John Clarke, Right Way, repr. 2007

## Websites

Black and Asian Grad, [www.blackandasiangrad.ac.uk](http://www.blackandasiangrad.ac.uk)

Employers' Forum on Disability, [www.efd.org.uk](http://www.efd.org.uk)

ENIC-NARIC, [www.enic-naric.net](http://www.enic-naric.net)

Graduates in Ireland, [www.gradireland.com](http://www.gradireland.com)

Higher Education & Research Opportunities in the United Kingdom, [www.hero.ac.uk](http://www.hero.ac.uk)

The National Mentoring Consortium, [www.uel.ac.uk/nmc](http://www.uel.ac.uk/nmc)

Select Simulator, [www.selectsimulator.com](http://www.selectsimulator.com)

SKILL (National Bureau for Students with Disabilities), [www.skill.org.uk](http://www.skill.org.uk)

Stonewall (Lesbian, gay & bisexual civil rights group), [www.stonewall.org.uk/students](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/students)

UK Border Agency (UKBA), [www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/](http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/)

UK Grad Programme, [www.grad.ac.uk](http://www.grad.ac.uk)

Universities and Colleges Admissions service (UCAS), [www.ucas.com](http://www.ucas.com)

Windmills Interactive, [www.windmillsonline.co.uk/interactive](http://www.windmillsonline.co.uk/interactive)



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