

# Writing a CV

Whatever you choose to do after university, you will need to make a written application. This means getting to grips with forms, CVs and letters. For tips on application forms please see our leaflet: [Completing Application Forms](#).

It is a sad truth that many applicants fail to make it to interview because of avoidable mistakes and careless presentation of their CVs and application forms. Today's graduate job market is very competitive and you really have to work hard to sell yourself to employers. Taking time and following some simple advice can really make all the difference. Here we will show you how to avoid the pitfalls and show your talents in the best light.

## Creating an effective CV

CV stands for Curriculum Vitae – roughly translated as your life story. However, it doesn't literally mean all of your life. It is advisable to go only as far back as your secondary school.

## Top tips before you start

Before you rush into updating your CV it's worth doing a bit of groundwork.

- First, check that a CV is the correct method of applying to the organisation – many employers prefer you to use one of their own forms.
- Next, research what the employer is looking for. Look at the advert or information on the employer's website – what does it say about the job requirements? If there is no information from the employer, use the resources at the Centre for Career Development to find a typical job description.
- Investigate the employer and the business sector – you can do this on the

web in most cases. Think laterally – you may have been a consumer of the employer's products and services. What can you learn about the business?

- Relate your research to what you have to offer and why you want to work there.
- Brainstorm your skills and experience against what you've found out about the role. Think about what you want the recruiter to know about you.
- Jot down some key experiences where you can demonstrate the skills required and think about how you might give evidence of your suitability.

By giving thought to these points you are thinking strategically about why the recruiter should give your application serious consideration.

## Standard contents

All CVs need to contain some standard information, which normally includes:

- Personal details – name, address, date of birth, telephone and e-mail address
- Education and qualifications
- Employment history
- Interests and Activities
- References.

## Presentation

- One page is often too short, four too long
- Avoid coloured or textured paper
- Create a good, logical structure
- Key information easy to find and not tucked away
- No long passages of text, try breaking up with bullet points
- Use of headings or bold to draw attention to important points
- Text lined up or in columns
- Well spaced
- Consistency of font type
- Language is appropriate and professional
- Spelling and grammar are accurate

There is no ideal style of CV to use. On the following pages we have illustrated two common styles for you to consider, with some commentary about why they may or may not be effective.

**Example 1** is a conventional CV format

**Example 2** is a skills based CV format

## Example 1

### The Traditionally presented CV

#### Anthony Smith

**Home address:** 4 My Mothers Road, Middle Town, M12 34N

**Term address:** Flat 1, Inner City Road, University Town, U89 76V

**Telephone:** 00 00 123456

**Email:** [A.Smith@hotmail.com](mailto:A.Smith@hotmail.com)

**Date of Birth:** 01/05/1985

#### EDUCATION

2002-2005

##### **The University of Anytown**

BSc (Hons) Biological Sciences (2:1)

- Specialised in Animal Science. Main modules included Biochemistry, Endocrinology, Cardiorespiratory Physiology, Lactation and Indigestion, Biotechnology and Reproductive Physiology.
- Final year project: Determining the precise time of ovulation in a pig in order to enhance the efficiency of artificial insemination

1996-2002

##### **Middle Town 6<sup>th</sup> Form College**

A Levels: Biology (B), Chemistry (C), English (C)

GCSEs: 8 GCSE's A-C

#### WORK EXPERIENCE

Summer 2014

##### **Catering Assistant at R.Owdside Ltd**

- Prepared food and served customers as part of a team of six
- Gained experience of dealing with members of the public
- Worked quickly and reliably under pressure

Summer 2003

##### **Lab Technician with Labs R Us**

- Carrying out routine tasks accurately to produce reliable and precise data
- Following strict methodology to carry out analyses
- Recording and interpreting results and presenting to supervisor

## POSITIONS OF RESPONSIBILITY

- Captain of badminton team at University. Organised fixtures, practices and social events.
- Involved in first year Buddy schemes which entailed being responsible for a small group of first years, ensuring they settled in.
- Course representative for final year students. Involved representing interests and problems of students to staff in meetings

## ACTIVITIES/INTERESTS

- Sport: I have been a committed member of the badminton team throughout university
- I enjoy aerobics and cross country skiing
- Travel: I enjoy experiencing new cultures and have travelled to various parts of Europe and America.
- Other: Italian films, Modern Literature, watching football.

## SKILLS

- Driving: Full clean licence
- IT: Familiar with Word, Excel and Windows
- Languages: Basic French and Italian

## REFEREES

Dr E.C Lifenot  
Department of Academic Studies  
University of Anytown

Mrs Sue Pervisor  
R.Owdside Ltd  
Middletown

### Commentary

- The traditionally presented CV has a clear and logical order. Many people feel comfortable creating this format as it adheres to the key areas of information usually required in making a job application.
- It is important to avoid making this style of CV into a bare list or inventory of what you did and when. As our introductory notes say on the opening page of this leaflet, you need to give a strong impression of what you got from your experiences in terms of achievements, skills and knowledge acquired, and a sense of how far your involvement went.
- The main drawbacks of this style of CV are that it doesn't really allow you to target your experiences towards the kind of job you are trying to get. If you wish to do this, then you may want to consider either a skills based CV (see next example) or a targeted CV (see further examples on our website: [www.nottingham.ac.uk/careers](http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/careers). Select Applications and CV's.

## Example 2

### The Skills based CV

#### Anthony Smith

**Home address:** 4 My Mothers Road, Middle Town, M12 34N  
**Term address:** Flat 1, Inner City Road, University Town, U89 76V  
**Telephone:** 00 00 123456  
**Email:** A.Smith@hotmail.com  
**Date of Birth:** 01/05/1984

#### EDUCATION

- 2002-2005                      The University of Anytown  
BSc(Hons) Biological Sciences (2: 1)
- Specialised in Animal Science. Main modules included Biochemistry, Endocrinology, Cardiorespiratory Physiology, Lactation and Indigestion, Biotechnology and Reproductive Physiology.
  - Final year project: Determining the precise time of ovulation in a pig in order to enhance the efficiency of artificial insemination
- 1996-2002                      Middle Town 6<sup>th</sup> Form College  
A Levels: Biology (B), Chemistry (C), English (C)  
GCSEs: 8 GCSE's A-C

#### SKILLS PROFILE

##### Communication Skills

- Prepared and conducted 4 assessed 20 minute presentations to my tutor group as part of my course using PowerPoint
- Developed succinct Report Writing Skills through project assignments
- Learnt to speak efficiently in formal meetings through my course representative duties
- Experience of dealing effectively with a wide range of customers through working at R.Owdside and W.E. Employlots of students

##### Teamwork

- Developed team leading skills, including motivating team members, and encouraging good performance through my role as captain of University badminton team
- Learnt how to listen to the needs of others and provide support through my involvement in the first year Buddy Scheme
- Gained insight into how teams can develop strategies to deal with problems through participating as a team member in project assignments as part of my course

##### Personal Organisation and Time Management

- Learnt the importance of prioritising competing demands at busy times by setting myself achievable goals
- Learnt to delegate organisation of training rota to other members of the badminton team when I had academic deadlines to meet
- Adapted successfully to shift work at R.Owdside Ltd

## WORK EXPERIENCE

Summer 2004      Catering Assistant at R.Owdside Ltd  
Summer 2003      Lab Technician at Labs R Us  
Summer 2002      Sales Assistant with W.E. Employlots of Students

## POSITIONS OF RESPONSIBILITY

- Captain of badminton team at University. Organised fixtures, practices and social events.
- Involved in first year Buddy schemes which entailed being responsible for a small group of first years, ensuring they settled in.
- Course representative for final year students. Involved representing interests and problems of students to staff in meetings

## ACTIVITIES/INTERESTS

- Sport: I have been a committed member of the badminton team throughout university. I also do aerobics and cross country skiing
- Travel: I enjoy experiencing new cultures and have travelled to various parts of Europe and America.
- Other: Italian films, Modern Literature, watching football.

## SKILLS

- Driving: Full clean licence
- IT: Familiar with Microsoft Office
- Languages: Basic French and Italian

## REFEREES

Dr E.C LifeNot  
Department of Academic Studies  
University of Anytown

Mrs Sue Pervisor  
R.Owdside Ltd  
Middletown

### Commentary

This style of CV can be useful in the following circumstances:

- When the role you are applying for requires a particular set of skills, this style allows you to be specific in giving evidence that you possess these skills by writing a skills profile in this way.
- It can be good for helping you to move out of a particular functional background into a role requiring more general skills – e.g. if you are an engineer or scientist who wants to move into management.
- If you don't have much work experience, a skills profile can illustrate how you have developed skills through academic work, interests and other extra-curricular activities.

The common pitfalls of doing skills-based CV:

- DON'T COPY THIS EXAMPLE WORD FOR WORD – your CV has to reflect YOUR skills and how they relate to the job or role you are applying for
- Don't make a claim about possessing a skill if you can't back it up with concrete evidence of how, where and to what extent you can use it.

# Common CV Mistakes

## Anthony Smith

**Home address:** 4 My Mothers Road, Middle Town, M12 34N  
**Term address:** Flat 1,  
Inner City Road, University Town, U89 76V  
**Telephone:** 00 00 123456  
**Email:** [A.Smith@hotmail.com](mailto:A.Smith@hotmail.com)  
**Date of Birth:** 01/05/1984

1

**Profile** Anthony is a hardworking, outgoing person with solid communication and teamworking skills who is looking to embark in a career which will take advantage of the knowledge he has acquired over the last 3 years.

2

### Education

1996 – 2000 Middletown Comprehensive

GCSE Bio-Chem	A
GCSE Chemistry	A
GCSE Maths	B
GCSE English Lang	B
French	C
German	C
History	C

3

2000 – 2002 Middletown 6<sup>th</sup> Form College

A Levels: Biology (B) Chemistry (C) English (C)

2000 – 2005 The University of Anytown

Bsc (Hons) Biological Sciences (2:1)

### Work Experience

Summer 2004 Catering Assistant at R.Owdside Ltd

Summer 2003 Lab Technician with Labs R Us

4

**Interests:** Reading, Football, travelling, snowboarding

5

1. Watch the wobbly lines! Justify your text – you need to make your information easy to read.
2. Despite what many books on CV writing say, a profile is not compulsory and, as you can see here, if you get it wrong it can turn an employer off. Writing like this is the third person sounds like you are describing someone else. And what is this statement actually saying? Try writing a career objective: " I am studying for a degree in Electronic Engineering and am looking to pursue a career in electronic design"
3. This gives a disproportionate amount of space to GCSE's – not really the most

important set of qualifications at this stage are they? If you are pursuing a graduate level job – tell them about your degree first.

4. Don't be timid about your work experience. It's easy to undervalue your vacation jobs – but don't. You may not have held impressive positions, but most employers don't care about that. They want to see what you gained from the experience in terms of skills and personal development.
5. Interests? *What* about them? *Why* are you interested? *What* is the level of your involvement? *What* do you get out of your involvement?

## The Covering Letter

Both a CV and an application form require a covering letter - but the format will be different for each. An application form simply needs a short statement of the post applied for and possibly an indication of availability for interview, if this is not included on the form. View this letter as a mark of courtesy. A CV on the other hand requires a longer letter, which personalises your approach to an employer.

4 My Mothers Road  
Middle Town  
M12 34N

24 May 2005

Mr P Cottingham  
Pockitt & Jingle  
Main St  
Fossington  
Hants

Dear Mr Cottingham

I am writing in response to your advertisement for a marketing assistant included in the current vacancy list from Anytown University where I am in the final year of a biological science degree.

As you will see from my CV, I have developed excellent oral and written communication skills through my course work and work experience in catering and retailing. In addition I am able to work well with other people. My role as captain of the University badminton team required me to motivate and encourage other team members and, as part of the first year Buddy Scheme, I was able to build rapport with my group very quickly. The range of my extra curricular activities and my academic performance show I have good time management skills. These also demonstrate my ability to work under pressure. My academic work requires a high degree of numerical ability and attention to detail. I enjoy research and have always found analytical work very satisfying. My ICT skills are well developed as a result of this. I see all these qualities as relevant to the role of marketing assistant.

Pockitt and Jingle offers me the opportunity to work in industrial rather than consumer product marketing where I can make use of my scientific knowledge in a commercial setting. From your website I see I would be involved in marketing projects at an early stage which is very appealing. In addition I am attracted by the opportunity to deal with a wide variety of customers. I notice that you place great emphasis on training in the job description and this is important to me. For all these reasons, an industrial marketing career appears to suit my personality and skills and I am now fully committed to it.

I look forward to the opportunity to discuss my experience with you at interview. My final exams fall in the two weeks of 9th to 23rd June.

Yours sincerely

Emma Austen

Here is a synopsis of the main paragraphs:

- State what you are applying for and where you saw it advertised. Also indicate your present situation
- Draw attention to relevant aspects of your experience; both academic and work. Say what you learned and how it would be useful to the selector
- Sell yourself on the basis of your personal qualities, making sure that these match up with the requirements of the job
- Say something about the company/organisation - what attracts you to apply to them and what you know about them (subtle flattery, please)
- Close with some reference to availability for interview and the usual signing-off phrase.
- Make it clear, concise and interesting, keeping it informative and relevant. You can either handwrite or type your covering letter, according to your personal preference.

## Resources available in the Resource Area

### Reference Books

- How to complete an application form
- How to write a curriculum vitae
- Making wizard applications
- Preparing your own CV

### Other sources of help and information

- AGCAS Information Booklet: *Making Applications*
- Applying for Jobs File: CV's
- Workbook - *Curriculum Vitae and Application Forms* (this can be bought from the Reception for £2)
- DVD – Your Job's Online
- The Duty Careers Adviser is available each day in term time to give feedback on application forms, CVs and covering letters.

**For a variety of other CV examples please see our website: [www.nottingham.ac.uk/careers](http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/careers)  
Select Applications**