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Creating a CV

Until your interview, you are only as good as your paperwork and perhaps telephone manner. This makes your CV and covering letter crucial. They are essential tools in most job searches. Like any marketing document, a CV should help you sell yourself.

What should your CV include?

PREPARATION:

Think about your skills, competencies, qualifications and experience. What are your unique selling points and strengths? Think in terms of what you have achieved. If you are replying to a specific job advertisement, review what key words and tasks were used in the advertisement. Which of these words applies to you? Use these words in your CV.

HELPFUL HINTS:

Remember that you want your CV to be read and responded to. Include enough information to stimulate interest, but not so much that you bore the reader. If you provide small digestible pieces of information you stand a better chance of having your CV read. Three pages maximum is preferred, but keeping it to one page is even better! Every word must contribute to the overall message – so keep it brief and ensure that the content is relevant to the job you are applying for.

Ensure that your CV is well structured and well laid out; this gives the impression that you think logically and makes it easier to review. Remember – a CV that is hard to read is often put aside and forgotten. When writing the CV, remember that self-opinion is best avoided. Aim to include factual information or objective evidence and remember to focus on the benefits of your achievements. Pay close attention to reply instructions in advertisements (e.g. spelling of a contact's name).

Always have someone else on hand to check your spelling and grammar. Nothing can ruin your chances of getting a job faster than easily preventable mistakes. Avoid coloured paper or fancy fonts, if you plan to fax or email your CV, you'll get a much better result with clean fonts and a simple layout.

THE FIRST PAGE:

This should contain your personal details, your home address and contact details located right at the top, followed by a brief summary of educational credentials and qualifications. An overview statement should be included covering your strengths in the relevant area, skills and experience, and the type of position sought.

PAGES TWO/THREE:

Here you should highlight your employment history. Present this in reverse chronological order, (i.e. last job first). If you have only worked for one company, break it down with an entry for each position or project dealt with. For each position held, briefly describe responsibilities and work undertaken. Do include achievements, not just regular tasks, if possible, quantify them in sales, financial or production terms.

Each professional position that you've had must include at least one statement of accomplishment. For your current and recent positions, you may have to have several bulleted items under the job that list your most significant experiences.

List your hobbies and interests in no more than three lines. Any voluntary or charity work or external posts you hold are worth including. Always include any languages, courses or training you may have done, or any professional memberships.

It is recommended that two referees be given – including the referees' official titles, addresses and telephone numbers.

THE COVERING LETTER:

CV's are seldom used alone, they should always be introduced by letter or a telephone call.

The letter can really let your personality come through. Remember, recruitment consultants and employers read hundreds of CVs. An interesting introductory letter can make yours stand out.

Your letter can be used to pick up points which modesty or space prevented you from including in your CV (i.e. to highlight your key strengths relevant to the job). An introduction letter can save you from having to rewrite the CV each time you want to target your application to a specific advertisement or sector.

Nevertheless, keep your CV up to date. Using an out of date CV looks sloppy at best and may exclude you from consideration.