

CV TIPS

- **Know what messages you want to convey**

It's easy to see a CV as a simple, biographical account of your life where you just list your education, work experience and activities. Think again. You must, before you do anything else, decide what sort of message you want to convey in your CV.

You must decide which parts of your life are going to be the most interesting to the person who receives your CV. These will include not only what you have done – relevant work experience and course work – but also the skills you have acquired.

- **Allocate spaces in accordance with the importance of the information**

You must decide the relative importance of the facts of your life and give the most important ones more space. If a piece of work experience is critically relevant to your application, give it twice as much space as other, less important jobs.

- **Develop a format that meets your needs**

Most CVs follow a traditional format: personal details are followed by education, work experience, activities and interests, then referees. There's nothing wrong with this. But if you want to vary the order of sections, give them different titles or experiment with different styles of CVs, then as long as you are doing it for a purpose there's really no problem.

- **Avoid gaps**

Personnel people have sixth sense for spotting gaps in a CV. They will start making assumptions about what you must have been up to – a spell in prison perhaps, a holiday job in the stripogram business? These assumptions will naturally be detrimental to your chances.

- **A general purpose CV is heading for the bin**

A general purpose CV is usually not a good idea. Your CV should be targeted to specific jobs or specific organisations.

- **Fill the prime selling space with the hottest material**

There are areas of your CV that are more important than others. These are the areas of prime selling space. The eye is drawn naturally towards them. The most prestigious spot is on the front page, just above halfway down. Make sure that the information in this area is really important. Another good spot is at the top of the second page. Don't use the bottom of the page to attempt to catch someone's attention.

- **Make it look good**

Choose a quality A4 paper and take time to lay it out carefully. There are several simple measures you can take to ensure that your CV looks good. Firstly, avoid large paragraphs of unbroken text. Break it up with line spaces or bullet points. Choose a font style that's neat and a point size that's not too small. Highlight section headings or important text: boldening and larger point sizes are better than too much underlining or the overuse of capital letters.

- **Length is important**

There's no reason to make CVs longer than 2 pages. Many people, in fact, prefer one-page CVs. If you genuinely can't, maybe because you're a mature student with a lot of work experience, then make sure that you make it as short as you possibly can without leaving anything important out.

If you do opt for a two page CV or longer, make sure that the pages are filled. Don't end half way down a page. Either space the material out more generously or include more information.

- **Send it with a decent covering letter**

Never send a CV without a covering letter. It's no good producing an excellent CV and a hopeless covering letter, because the latter might give a very bad impression of you, before the reader has even turned the page.

- **And remember: there's no such thing as a CV expert**

The world is full of self-proclaimed CV experts. Go into any bookshop and stare in wonder at shelves groaning under the weight of helpful advice. However tempting it is, and however much time it saves, you would be crazy to follow exactly another person's model of the perfect CV. For a start, there is no orthodoxy in this field. What your careers adviser loves, the recipient of your CV may hate. If experts disagree, as they do, then there is not only no such thing as a CV expert, there is no such thing as a perfect CV.