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JOB SEARCH

Your Résumé or CV

The word Curriculum Vitae literally translated from the Latin means 'The way your life has run'. The words Curriculum Vitae are usually abbreviated to CV or C.V. In North America the term used is Résumé (from the French meaning 'summary'). Your Résumé/CV is a very important document; with it rest your hopes for the next step up the career ladder, a better position, more money, new challenges, etc. Your Résumé/CV therefore has to represent the best you have to offer – it will either open the door for you, or it won't.

A well written Résumé/CV is effectively your pass to enter the job race. At the Résumé/CV stage of selection the recruiter is looking for reasons to REJECT an applicant. They are likely to receive scores, if not hundreds, of applications for the position on offer. In this preliminary stage of selection their maxim is 'when in doubt throw it out'.

The good news (for you) is that most people do not know how to write a Résumé/CV and only spend a short time preparing one. Of course your Résumé/CV can continue to work in your favour even after it has obtained an interview for you.

It can also help you at an interview by carefully focusing the interviewer's mind on your good points and on your achievements. Once you have left the interview it will continue to work in your favour as the interviewer will probably reread it before making a decision, either on who should be invited to the second interview stage or who the job should be offered to.

When it comes to salary negotiations a good Résumé/CV can also help. If your CV conveys your full worth you are likely to get a higher salary offer than you might have done with a poorer CV.

The life of corporate and graduate recruiters is dull enough already without everyone's Résumé/CV looking identical. So, whilst you will see a lot of very good advice on how to write a great Résumé/CV it is important to make yours unique and special. Advice and guidelines on Résumé/CV writing are just that – very useful indeed, but NOT prescriptive.

There are no Ten Commandments of golden rules about this but following the advice will greatly improve your chances of being offered an interview, and ultimately securing the job offer.

The message that you must take on board is 'Prepare your Résumé/CV in a professional manner' It is quite probably the most important document you will ever write.

Résumé/CV Design

First impressions count. If your Résumé/CV does not attract the reader's attention in the first 20 seconds of reading then your chances of obtaining an interview are greatly reduced. An employer may have a hundred or more Résumé/CV's to look through and probably only a couple of hours in which to make their selection. So put your work experience at the start of your Résumé/CV, not personal or educational details; unless you have only just left education.

What an employer really wants to know is why they should invite you for an interview. For this reason a short summary of your capabilities and/or a list of your major achievements can often be a good idea. This should make an employer want to invite you for an interview - but please be careful that you do not oversell yourself.

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Résumé/CV Layout

The visual layout of your Résumé/CV is very important. Even though the wording you use may be correct, if people cannot find the information they want quickly they will move on to someone else's. You should use plenty of 'white' space in your CV and appropriate headings and section breaks.

Always use a word-processor/DTP package. Never use a typewriter as you will look old fashioned and out of date. Use good quality A4 paper, preferably 100 gram for both your Résumé/CV and covering letter.

It is usually best to try and keep your Résumé/CV to two pages of A4, unless someone specifically asks you for a longer Résumé/CV. If you cannot keep your Résumé/CV to this length then you probably have not understood an employer's requirements. Employers do not want to know your whole life history - just enough to decide whether they should interview you or not.

If your Résumé/CV is not well organized then the reader will find it hard to follow and will not be able to build up a picture of you quickly. Remember the reader will not spend very long looking at your Résumé/CV - so if they cannot find what they want they will not bother to read any further.

Résumé/CV Written Words

Long paragraphs and sentences make it difficult to read your Résumé/CV quickly. Try to keep your sentences short and punchy and use bullet points to break up the text under section headings.

A lot of people do not include enough details about their previous jobs and experience and an employer therefore does not have enough information. This will almost certainly lead to them rejecting your application. Remember, in this preliminary stage of selection their maxim is 'when in doubt throw it out'.

You need to shout about your achievements. Your Résumé/CV is your sales document to an employer. If it does not tell an employer why they should employ you then it has failed. An employer will only want to employ you if they can see a benefit in it for themselves. So do tell them the benefits of employing you.

In general being too young or too old can be a real problem and a barrier to future advancement, or even to getting a job in the first place. There are a number of ways round this problem - but this depends very much on your individual circumstances and the industry/job you are applying for.

It is essential that the entire document contains no spelling mistakes. Your Résumé/CV should be carefully checked for such errors before you send it out to employers. Tiny errors in your Résumé/CV can detract from an otherwise good Résumé/CV and make you look lazy or careless - not the sort of qualities you want to portray to an employer. As you will probably be 'blind' to these errors you should get someone else to check your Résumé/CV for grammar and spelling errors.

What to Include in Your Résumé/CV

You should gather together all of the information required below. You may not use all of this information in your Résumé/CV but it will provide you with useful reference material when it comes to preparing for interviews.

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Personal Details

Your full name, address, home telephone number, date of birth, marital status (put only single or married down on your Résumé/CV, if you are divorced then put single, if you are separated you are still married - never list any sort of failure on a Résumé/CV) and nationality (you may want to include this if you are applying for jobs abroad or if your name does not sound "native"). Do you have a full driving licence? Is it clean?

Education / Qualifications

List your qualifications and education history, for example:

- BSc (Hons) 2.1 Hons in Physics at Bristol University, 1982 - 1985.
- A Levels: Physics [B], Biology [B], Maths [C] at Great Barr School, 1980 - 1982.
- O Levels: Maths [B], English Language [C], History [C], Geography [C], French [C], Chemistry [C], Biology [C] at Farnham School, 1971 - 1980.

If you have a degree you probably will not need to list all your O & A Levels; just listing the number is probably sufficient.

Professional Qualifications

List your professional qualifications, membership of professional associations and professional ID numbers. If you recently completed a college or university degree or HND or Diploma, etc, then you may want to list the courses you studied if the subject you studied was relevant to your target job.

Training Courses

List any work related training courses which you attended, including company courses and any you attended on your own initiative. If you obtained a qualification on any course please list it. You only need to list the important courses you attended; no one really cares if you went on a time management course as everyone gets sent on these courses!

Work Experience

If you have been working for a number of years you probably do not need to include any part-time jobs, vacation jobs, voluntary work or unpaid work experience. Charity work could be included in your interests. However you might want to include these jobs if they covered a period of unemployment, or a time when you were not working for any other reason, or you feel that some of the experience you gained will be useful in your next job. You should normally concentrate on your two most recent jobs (unless you were only there for a short time), because employers are usually most interested in these.

Start with your most recent or last job and work backwards. For each position (treat internal promotion as a new job and record the dates separately) list your job title (e.g. Manager, Supervisor, etc), the job title of the person you reported to (e.g. Director, Manager, etc) and when you started and finished in each job. Give the name of the company and include a brief description of the service they provide (using the terms they would use to describe themselves). Set out your main responsibilities, achievements, duties, and skills that could be transferred to another employer. Be specific and positive about your skills, e.g. 'good written skills' may be a better description of your abilities rather than 'good communication skills'.

Include your level of responsibility if any, e.g. 'responsibility for departmental budget of \$250K and managed 10 staff'. In particular list any achievements you had in each position, including increases in sales/productivity and cost savings made. Quantify your achievements if possible. 'Increased sales by \$100K' is more interesting and positive than just saying 'Increased sales'. You should try to include some achievements such as meeting deadlines, budgets, etc, and any information that may be relevant to your next job.

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Major Achievements to Date

When you are listing your achievements in this section, only list 3 to 6 of your most important work achievements; your other achievements can be described under the work experience section. You should only list achievements that are relevant to your next job and indicate how you achieved them.

This section is very important as an employer will only invite you for an interview if they can see a benefit in doing so. Your achievements may sell you to an employer and make them choose you for an interview rather than someone else. For this reason it is vital that you think carefully about your achievements.

Other Relevant Experience

List any computing skills you have, including the operating system, software and applications that you are familiar with e.g. IBM compatible PC, Microsoft Windows, Microsoft Office, Autodesk AutoCAD, etc.

If you have foreign language skills that may be relevant for any jobs which you are applying for, please list them and indicate whether your skills are spoken, written, business or technical. Please also indicate your level of fluency: fluent, good working knowledge, etc. You should only list these skills if they are relevant to the jobs you are applying for as no one really wants to hear about a French language course you did at school a long time ago. If relevant to your next job please include your typing or shorthand speeds.

Interests & Hobbies

How you choose to spend your disposable income and free time tells a potential employer a great deal about you, your values, motivation and in some cases even your intelligence. For example, supposing a candidate had listed her interests as:

1. Playing Bridge at regional competition level
2. Solving Crossword puzzles
3. Learning new computer software applications

The reviewer is likely to conclude that she is: intellectually strong, good at problem solving and interested in new technology. In this way list your interests, hobbies and any sports you play. List any positions of responsibility you hold or have held in any club or organization, and say what your responsibilities and achievements were. Remember, read it from the selector's viewpoint – what are you telling them about you?

References

You do not normally need to list referees on a CV, but it is a good idea to think about whom you could ask now. For some professions however it is normal to list referees; these include the teaching and health service (NHS) professions - your referees in these professions are often asked to provide you with a reference before you are even asked to an interview.

Summary

List your major skills, strengths, personal qualities and achievements. Be specific, for example: good team player, excellent written skills, versatile, able to motivate others, etc. If you are lacking in ideas, look at your staff appraisals or at your references.

Résumé/CV What to Leave Out

Remember, your Résumé/CV is your own personal sales brochure. You are not obliged to include every last detail about yourself. In fact, it is incumbent on you to omit negative information – after all the Résumé/CV should be kept brief and to the point!

Items that should be omitted as a matter of course include:

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1. Photographs - the only people who need to include these are models, actors, actresses and possibly air cabin crew.
2. Any sort of failure - exams, marriages, businesses, etc.
3. Any periods of detention.
4. Your reasons for leaving previous employment.
5. Any previously held junior positions that are irrelevant to your present career thrust.
6. Hobbies that may be dangerous – e.g. hang-gliding and parachuting.
7. Country of birth, if different from current country of residence.
8. Political affiliations.
9. Salary information - this can only be used to reject your application. If an advertisement specifically requests this information you can always include the information in your cover letter.
10. Fancy patterns/borders - these detract from your presentation
11. Title pages, binders and folders are usually unnecessary and can be off-putting (though if you are doing a special presentation, enclosing your Résumé/CV in a binder may look more impressive)
12. Do not include a list of publications if you are a scientist, unless they are asked for.
13. Leave out age (put in date of birth instead) and if you are over 35 years old place this, together with other personal information near the end, rather than the beginning of your Résumé/CV.
14. Weight, height, health, and any other personal information that is irrelevant to your application can be omitted, but if you believe these may be advantageous you can include them.
15. Do not use poor quality photocopies of your Résumé/CV - they make it look as though you are sending it off to lots of companies and that you may not be too bothered who you work for. .

Interview Preparation

Being aware of the different types of interview that you may encounter can be very helpful. Examples of different types of interview include:

Recruitment Agency interviews, Employer interviews and Personnel or Human Resources interviews.

How you approach these different types of interviews should be adjusted to meet the requirements of that interviewer. Failure to do so is likely to prevent you from progressing any further.

Recruitment Agency Interviews

These are designed to screen candidates ahead of putting only the best forward for consideration by the recruiting organization. Recruitment agencies are working primarily for your potential employer, not for you.

Recruitment agencies vary enormously from highly professional organizations that can be extremely helpful to you the job hunter. They can analyze your requirements in detail, giving you good advice on your strengths and weaknesses and how to present and conduct yourself to each interviewer. However, less scrupulous agencies may be more focused on placing people in jobs so that they earn their fee whilst paying little regard for the suitability of candidate to job.

Use your own judgment and try to establish relationships only with those agencies that give you confidence that they are genuinely interested in matching the requirements of the recruiting organization with your own.

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Employer Interviews

These are generally staged in order for the employer to assess whether or not you match their requirements. It is usual for a first interview to be used to screen out unsuitable candidates, whilst those that pass this interview will proceed to the second, and possibly third interviews.

Therefore, if attending a first interview, you should approach it as a challenge for being seen as a suitable candidate for the job. It is in subsequent interviews where you should really aim to sell yourself as the best candidate.

Personnel or Human Resources Interviews

Most large organizations now include a personnel or HR interview as part of their selection process. It is easy to underestimate this type of interview, as personnel staff typically will not ask detailed technical questions. They tend to stick to more personal areas and this can often give the impression of being friendly and supportive.

Despite the relative informality of a personnel interview, make sure that you remain focused throughout. HR specialists are often highly trained and very experienced at conducting interviews and will therefore be adept at gaining information from you. Consider their questions carefully and try to picture what point really lies behind each request. This will enable you to respond in a more direct and forthcoming manner, which should be well received by the interviewer.

Your Self-image

A career statement is a brief summary of your achievements and aspirations. Having written a killer Résumé, you should have a lot of information on which this is based. This information should make the next step straightforward; you are going to devise a career statement. This career statement, or summary, wants to be between 20 and 35 words long and should be written in the first person singular. For example:

"I am a very experienced purchasing manager and team leader with an impressive record of successful negotiations in the printing and packaging industry."

If you have written a professional CV, you may already have a version of this statement, written in the third person singular. As its' inclusion is recommended as one of the first items in a contemporary CV. Even if you already have a career statement, you may now wish to update it.

Your career statement should encapsulate your career aspirations and has three main benefits:

In wording the statement, you should become clear about which of your skills you wish to utilize and the job you are looking for.

When placed within your Résumé/CV it will broadcast your skills and achievements loudly, usually near the top of the CV, therefore preparing the reader to receive positive information about you.

Finally, in the context of the interview your career statement can be used as the cornerstone on which you base replies to questions. You may even have the opportunity to state it, at the beginning of a response to a question such as: "Tell me about yourself".

This tutorial is an excerpt from the GetAhead in Winning at Interviews course.

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