



Write a Winning CV

Contents

Write a Winning CV.....	1
Foreword	1
The Most Important Point First – The Purpose of your CV	1
CV Templates and CV Style	1
Competition with Other CVs	1
Top 25 Hints and Tips for CV's including 'Do's and Don'ts'	2
Writing a CV for the Digital Age	5
Get your CV 'zinging' for the digital age!	5
The importance of keyword density in Your CV	6

Foreword

The following is a true story! When I first started in the staffing business I decided to read some books that would enable me to help my candidate base. In the local bookshop was a book that was six centimetres thick on how to write the perfect CV! Goodness knows why anyone would read it, let alone have the focus to read it and put their advice into practise. The point I am making is this – you will read 100 different articles on the subject and get 100 different answers as CVs are objective – what one person likes another hates. However follow the simple instructions below and you will not give anyone any reasons to filter you out on the basis of your CV.

The Most Important Point First – The Purpose of your CV

Remember your CV is your sales tool. Your CV is your marketing collateral. Your CV is the key to a door – the door of the interview and your future career! Don't give a potential employer reasons to screen you out! Keep it unfussy, keep it logical and straightforward, keep it clean, keep it punchy, keep it easy to read and flow, don't use jargon and don't give a potential employer any reason to make negative assumptions about you, or to not take you seriously. I know that you will want your CV to stand out but believe it or not when it comes to CVs – be conservative, stick to standard formats and unless you are in the design industry, keep it simple.

CV Templates and CV Style

Google up CV templates (or even try your word processor for templates – on the [Microsoft Office Templates Website](#) there's tons) and you'll find a wide range of straightforward and simple templates to follow. Save yourself time by using a 'classic' CV template – unless you are applying for roles where you need to demonstrate your design flair or eccentricity – don't be 'wacky'. Let other people be the ground breakers in CV design and let you be the one who gets the interviews and gets the jobs!

Competition with Other CVs

The responses to adverts placed by recruitment consultancies on job boards can be as high as 30-60 responses. An advert posted on all of the major job boards with an open brief and a large salary can often generate in excess of 500 responses. Quite simply the greater the salary, the larger the response the majority of which are



unqualified for the role. So how do you demonstrate that you do have the right qualities and experience for the role?

Top 25 Hints and Tips for CV's including 'Do's and Don'ts'

1. **HOW LONG:** Try and keep to two pages (three pages as an absolute maximum). If you feel it will support your case for a specific application attach a separate document as an appendix, separate attachment of case studies or detail specifics in the cover letter.
2. **MY PET HATE:** Putting 'Curriculum Vitae' at the top of the CV. Most spell it incorrectly and unless the application requires you to speak Latin then why bother just put C.V. or ideally nothing – it's obvious what the document is! NB the translation means 'Course of Life' (which I had to find in Wiki!)
3. **FULL NAME:** Is not necessary at this stage – 'Fred Smith' rather than 'Frederick George St. John Smith' will suffice
4. **GRAPHICS AND PHOTOGRAPHS:** Personally, I quite like photos – most hate them! It is a reason for people to make assumptions about you so common advice would be to not bother unless it is relevant to the application. Use a subtle graphic or watermark if you choose to use an illustration so BUT keep it simple and appropriate, less is more!
5. **CONTACT INFORMATION AT THE TOP (WITHIN THE HEADER):** Put your name and contact details at the top of the CV or within the 'header' (however some recruitment software is unable to read headers). Make sure that you have all of your contact information (address is not imperative and location is sufficient)
6. **SOCIAL NETWORKS:** It is best practise and quite common now to include links to your social networks. Before posting your CV make sure that you give them a refresh – make sure the dates on your LinkedIn profile tally with your CV (really important) and it is imperative that you give them a good edit to make sure that there are none of you eating kebab from the gutter! Whilst in surveys employers deny looking for their chosen applicants on social networks – be warned they do... The famous example was the retraction of a job offer for a high flying city lawyer who boasted on his Facebook status that he did nothing at his existing employer but shop on the Internet, pick up a six figure salary and regularly partake in recreational pharmaceuticals (including photographic evidence). He sued the firm that retracted the offer. He lost.
7. **PERSONAL PROFILES:** The world is split on this one - some people love them, some don't even read them! Why not detail a short paragraph detailing your key skills and traits, core values and beliefs. I personally like them as it gives me a short, sharp 'flavour' of the person.
8. **CAREER OBJECTIVE:** Do not use specific job titles unless you are tailoring your CV to each and every role. i.e. "Graduate Aerospace Engineer seeks career role within a growing aeronautical organisation" could mean that you are discounted from the ideal graduate engineer role with an F1 team that you'd be ideal for! Use generic career objectives if placing your CV on a CV job board or with a recruitment consultancy.
9. **LIST OF SKILLS:** All recruitment companies and many employers now use CV parsing software that 'auto reads' your details and populates the database fields. The very latest software matches CV's to job specifications in an automated process and provides a shortlist and a percentage match to the specification using a combination of keyword matching, artificial intelligence and an algorithm that predicts suitability. Trust me it is unbelievably quick AND accurate. Detailing core skills is therefore a must in this digital age. See our separate article - [writing a CV for the Digital age](#)



10. **EDUCATION/QUALIFICATIONS/PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS:** Detail your highest level of education first. Then detail other formal qualifications, other education, Professional Memberships/Affiliations in the order you deem most necessary to your sector. Name your University and your classification if 2.2 or above (if you don't all employers will assume you failed or got a third class degree!) If you are a recent graduate detail your core subjects and dissertation title – perhaps hyperlink to your academic record. Unless you are a recent graduate do not waste valuable CV space going into the depths of detailing the individual grades of your O-Levels/.GCSE's/CSE's, etc – detailing your passes in the core Maths, English subjects will suffice. For example: 'Achieved '9 GCE 'O-Levels' at Grade C and above including English and Maths'. NB We have known some employers to pay more attention to your 'A-Level' grades than your degree! If they're good – detail them! Do not under any circumstances tell an untruth about your education or memberships – they are incredibly easy to verify which is a standard step in any requirement process nowadays.
11. **OTHER INFORMATION:** Don't detail your marital status unless you are married, happily single or feel it wholly appropriate to the application NB It is actually illegal for an employer to discriminate on the basis of marital status but 'Divorced' never looks great so don't bother detailing it. Detail your driving status if it's a requirement of the role, particularly if you have a full clean driving license. Detail your eligibility to work in the EU for any employer or your visa/passport status if from outside of the EU. Do not put your passport number on your CV for reasons detailed later. Due to age legislation people are now choosing to not put their age and date of birth on their CV – you don't have to and don't feel that you have to. (In fact it is likely to be illegal to put your date of birth on your CV in coming years)
12. **NATIONAL INSURANCE NUMBERS and PASSPORT:** I know that you're probably trying to demonstrate your eligibility to work or your openness and honesty but DO NOT EVER, ever, ever, ever put your National Insurance number on your CV. Together with your name, address, date of birth and employment information you are leaving yourself open to significant identity fraud.
13. **DETAIL YOUR CAREER IN REVERSE CHRONOLOGY ORDER:** Do the first job first and work backwards. Your most recent experience, the last 5 years, is perceived as most important and is given the highest 'weight' in deciding whether to invite you, or not, for interview.
14. **USE SHORT PARAGRAPHS AND BULLET POINTS:** Be succinct – do not waffle or pontificate and definitely don't try to make your sales job more exotic by preposterous waffle, i.e. 'initiating strategic partnerships and management process initiatives aimed at restructuring procurement decisions in the favour of my organisation'! Remember this is your sales tool – use it to sell yourself – think careful about the words that you use. Read it aloud, can anyone who doesn't know your industry understand what you did, what you sold? People don't like reading more than three sentence paragraphs so use short paragraphs and bullet points. The average recruiter will skim read CVs looking for applicable points and experience. Decision makers want to read facts – how have you increased sales, decreased costs, improved systems, increased customer satisfaction, built a database, increased investment, drove down supplier rates, etc. Particularly use facts that you can back up at interview with evidence – case studies, testimonials, league tables, P60's, etc. (many employers will expect to see evidence of your claims at interview stage and it is imperative that you know your own facts and figures at interview)
15. **KEYWORDS:** By thinking of the kind of keywords that recruiters and hirers will use to find your details before writing your CV you will have a dramatically more successful experience. Detail your skills, client accounts, different terms for your role, etc. For greater explanation and some neat tricks [see writing a CV for the Digital age](#)
16. **JARGON:** Do not use jargon or abbreviations. Even abbreviations such as KPI's, EBITDA and EMEA, whilst widely used in business are not understood by everyone.



17. **REASONS FOR LEAVING:** Many employers like to be able to see why you have taken logical career steps to this point. A one line reason will suffice – ‘Headhunted by previous manager to spearhead a new product’, type thing. However if it is not a pretty story don’t bother!
18. **CURRENT SALARY:** Again many employers like to see this progression; however it can work against you. For instance if you were in a £45K international sales development role and left to take a £30K UK based salary to breathe life back into your work life balance it may be perceived or assumed as a backwards step. Also firms tend to pay upto 10% more than you’re currently earning so it may go against you achieving the salary on offer. If it is continuous earnings progression then detail it. Don’t overstate your earnings as many employers require P60s as part of their referencing process and they will see your earnings YTD on your P45 anyhow.
19. **INTERESTS/HOBBIES:** Many books and CV advice sites say that this is superfluous information. However I use it extensively as an interviewer to start every interview with a discussion around the hobbies/interests to help put the candidate at ease. DO NOT solely detail ‘reading and socialising with friends!’. I would advise detailing one intellectual interest, one team sport/activity, perhaps another sport/activity and perhaps an art/creative interest. If you are interested in reading expand upon it, i.e. reading 1950’s crime fiction novels. Do not ever detail an interest that you are not knowledgeable about – it really, really can backfire! Also be careful with ‘I am a lifelong Wolverhampton Wanderers fan’ as again it could (and we all know very wrongly but it happens) be a reason why you’re not selected for interview.
20. **COMPANIES YOU’VE WORKED FOR:** I really like it in the employment sections when the CV details in one line exactly what the company does with perhaps a hyperlink to the company site. Particularly recruiters (when there is a fee involved) are looking for candidates from competitors or aligned companies and being able to see that quickly will help you to get shortlisted.
21. **REFERENCES:** You don’t have to detail them at this stage but you may choose to – your call. However please don’t waste valuable CV space putting ‘References: Available upon Request’
22. **LINKS TO PUBLICATIONS/COMPANY SITES:** Links to companies that you’ve worked for, projects that you’ve completed and publications will certainly do no harm
23. **PAPER:** 99% is online these days but if posting your CV, which together with a handwritten cover note is still quite regularly expected for the very most senior roles, invest in some decent weighted paper rather than the thin stuff that you ‘borrowed’ from the photocopier at work! Occasionally some candidates put a background to their electronic CV to give the appearance of paper but beware – many firewalls will not let it through, the file will be large and many recruitment software products will not accept it.
24. **EDITING:** It is imperative that you get someone to ‘proofread’ your CV. Spell checkers are exceptional but are not foolproof. Many a candidate has been declined on the basis of spelling or grammatical errors – YOU HAVE BEEN WARNED!
25. **GET SOMEONE ELSE TO DO IT:** Your CV is an amazingly important document – it will help further your career and reach your aspirations. However let’s also put things into perspective and don’t get ‘too hung up on it’ – it’s just the key to the interview door. It shouldn’t take any more than 6-8 hours to prepare MAXIMUM. Should you not have the desire or the inclination to write your own CV it’s relatively inexpensive to get someone to write one for you from £100 upwards. The top level services will interview you over the ‘phone and write your CV from scratch.



Writing a CV for the Digital Age

Believe it or not the software that many recruitment businesses use, including Aaron Wallis, is able to read your CV and populate the recruitment database with your details and skills with 96% accuracy (that's 4% greater than average human accuracy!) The software then applies keyword matching and artificial intelligence to match candidates to vacancies.

Many job boards and direct employers are also now adopting this software so it has never been more imperative to re-write your CV for the digital age ensuring that it is loaded with keywords and skills to enable you to be found!

The most simplistic way to explain this is let's say, for instance that a company is looking to hire a web developer with 'Dreamweaver' and 'PHP Programming' experience. They will simply place these terms into a search and 'voila' up comes candidates with both the requirements.

Some of the most up to date 'CV parsing and searching' software like we use here at Aaron Wallis uses an algorithm to determine how relevant your skills are to a job. Believe it or not it scans your experience, skills and length of time in each role and then predicts the likelihood of you succeeding in the role that we are searching to fill! It is not so simple for sales professionals unfortunately (or luckily for us as a specialist sales recruiter!). Firstly look at the term sales – some call it 'selling', others 'business development', others 'prospecting and closing', etc. Then look at sales job titles. To one Sales Manager a 'guy out on the road' is a 'Sales Representative' to another a 'Field Sales Executive' to another a 'Business Development Manager' and to another an 'Area Manager', etc. So therefore you have to hedge your bets' and include various keywords within your CV to be 'found' by recruiters and employers.

Get your CV 'zinging' for the digital age!

One of the predicaments that you uniquely have to face as a sales professional is that your sales approach, personality, Presence, rapport skills, solution providing ability, drive, passion, enthusiasm, creativity, determination, etc. can't be assessed by a recruitment software or job matching tool so you need to still use these kind of expressions to ensure the reader gets a flavour of the real you. However you can have the most powerful CV imaginable, full of powerful words and amazing adjectives but unless it contains the right keywords you simply won't be found.

It may sound strange but you need to look at your CV from the other side of the interview table. i.e. if you are in publishing or advertising sales the most common string that someone will use to find you will be 'media sales'. You should therefore include the word media, and ideally the exact string 'media sales', somewhere within your CV.

Some software determines the result based upon the keyword density (or amount of keywords) contained within a CV. Therefore subtly, and in context, drop appropriate keywords into your CV. For instance if you are in 'technical sales' place the words 'technical', 'sales' and 'technical sales' throughout your CV. However, remember it must be subtle and in context so that it isn't cluttered and preposterous – many employers still place a very high value on the correct use of grammar!

CV parsing software, used by many of the leading recruiters, extracts your personal details and address from your CV automatically and populates their recruitment database. Therefore to give it the best chance of success (and ultimately your best chance of success) place your name, address, Date of Birth, telephone numbers, etc at the top of your CV. Your postcode is imperative as the software determines the best placed candidates using 'postcode lookup' processes. A neat little cheat would be to use the postcode of your employers, university and references to trick less sophisticated software into bringing your CV up as a result.

Use a standard TrueType font. Firstly, it looks better as it is a regularly used font and secondly all TrueType fonts will be picked up by OCR (optical recognition) software. Never send a 'hard copy' of your CV in a font that is not TrueType (most are nowadays in standard Office products and can be identified by a TT next to the font). NB, you



can't go wrong with Times New Roman, Arial, Franklin and Tahoma (and courier/century schoolbook but they're looking somewhat dated now)

You must use common job titles as these are what recruiters/hirers commonly use to find you. You may have been 'Area Support & Development Manager' in your last role but more commonly that would be a 'Regional Manager'; a 'Business Enabling Consultant' would be a 'Sales Executive', etc.

Use synonyms of your job title within your CV, i.e. if you were a National Account Manager try and use the term NAM somewhere within your role description and responsibilities.

The importance of keyword density in Your CV

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It is common for an IT programmer or Web Developer to commence their CV with a table of skills (they've known of the importance of keywords within CVs for a long time!) Do the same as it gives you 'carte blanche' to list a whole set of keywords in context. For Instance:

Core Skills include:

Business Planning and Research
New Business Development
Sales Training
Sales Presentations
Event Management
Relationship Management
Sales and Marketing Management
Pre-Sales
Technical Selling and Solution Sales
Account Management including Managing Key Accounts
Public Speaking and Corporate Presentations
Bids, Tenders and Writing Winning Proposals
Communication and Public Relations

This also allows you to use the words 'manager', 'management' 'managing' and has high keyword density for core skills such as 'sales', 'marketing' account management', etc.

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Making a list of all of the sales training that you have received is another good way to get the keywords legitimately loaded into your CV (in context) and could also utilise key industry terminology

If you are familiar in the art of Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) then this approach will not be alien to you. For the rest of us it is a skill we need to acquire to ensure that our CV hits the 'top of the pile'.