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How to Write a Winning CV

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How To Write A Winning CV

Harness the selling power of words & design

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If you're looking for either permanent or contract work, the **main weapon in your job seeking armoury is your CV**. It's your first point of **contact** with potential employers and is the deciding factor as to whether you get an interview or not.

When it boils down to it, your CV is an **advert** to sell your **professional services**. And like all advertising, there are certain things that work and certain things that don't.

So let's look at the basic rules of thumb that make up a winning CV.

Brevity

Employers are busy people. They don't have time to read through CVs. It's a chore. So make it **easy** for them and keep your CV short and to the point. Two or three pages are plenty. Leave your potential employer wanting more. **Intrigue** them. That way, they're more likely to call you in for an interview.

Target It!

Tailor your CV for each job you apply for. Read the job specification and demonstrate how your skills and experience fit the bill. This will usually be a question of **emphasising** the aspects of your career that match the job you are after.

It can be advantageous to add a brief opening paragraph to your CV to attract the employer's attention. It's a good way of introducing yourself. The secret, though, is to personalise it: research the firm you're applying to, find some element about them that you can make a favourable comment on.

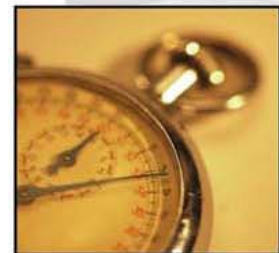
Skills First

Kick off with a bullet point **list of your skills**. Tell the prospective employer what you can do up front and, so long as it matches their needs, they're more likely to read on. You should also list the **software** you are skilled with here.

Career History

We now come to the meat of the CV - your **career history**. Begin with your present employment and work your way back. To keep the CV short, it's best to highlight only the jobs and projects you were involved in that are most relevant to the post you're currently applying for.

And rather than give a long chronology of work experience, try and group the jobs and projects you've been involved in according to **types** - technical user manuals, online help, proposals, websites, training and so on. That way, the employer can **scan** and latch on to the elements he or she is interested in.



For each project or job, make clear what your **involvement** was (e.g. writing, editing, research, designing, proof reading). And don't forget to include the **software** you used on each project or job, accompanied by your level of **proficiency** in each one. If you built a website using Dreamweaver, tell them whether you know the product inside out, or whether you're a Jack (or Jill) of HTML editors, but master of none... (The latter, by the way, wouldn't necessarily go against you; all depends on the post you're applying for).



Be Direct

When you're listing your professional skills and career highlights, don't use bland catch phrases or vague clichés. They are a yawn factor; they bore the reader. And, besides, they will be on most other people's CVs and won't mark you out as unique.

Get wise - be direct and tell your prospective employer how it really is.

For example, instead of saying you have "good communications skills", give a **real life** example, by saying something like: "When I was setting up new computer networks for Hackney Borough Council, I developed an ability to communicate effectively with people of all ages, cultures and backgrounds."

It's short, sweet, and brings **life** to what you've written about yourself.

Education

List your **education history** in reverse chronological order. Unless you're a recent graduate, you don't need to go overboard on this. Most employers are more interested in your **work experience** and what you can do now, rather than what degrees you've got.

Presentation

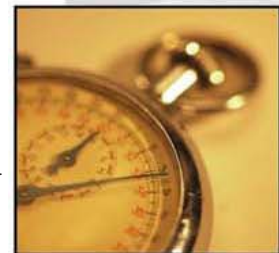
However well written your CV is, if the presentation is poor, you'll lose your reader within 30 seconds and won't get an interview.

To keep your prospective employer interested and reading to the last page, you need to make sure your CV is **well organised**. You need to lay it out in a **consistent** and **logical** manner. Plan the running order and use lots of **headings** and **white space** (space between paragraphs).

You also need to keep your **sentences and paragraphs short** - as there is nothing more off putting and tiring on the eyes (and brain) than a wall of text.

The **Typeface** (or font) you use is also important. Don't get carried away with fancy fonts.

Keep it simple.



A good rule of thumb is to use **Verdana** 10pt for **body text** and **Arial** (size of your choice) for **headings**. Yes, a lot of people use **Times Roman**. But these days, your CV is mostly sent via **e-mail attachment** and could well be read on a monitor screen (rather than be printed out and read). **Times Roman** looks great on paper, but ragged on a monitor. Whereas **Verdana** and **Arial** look more professional on a monitor - and they look okay on paper too. So use **Verdana** and **Arial** and you're covered both ways.

You can also do what I've done here and **highlight keywords and phrases in bold**. It adds liveliness - but it's optional and down to your own personal taste. **Italics** are fine too, but don't look good when read on a monitor screen.

Spelling & Grammar

What can I say? Check, check and check again. And don't just rely on your computer spell-checker. Go to your bookshelf and dust off your **dictionary, grammar primer, and thesaurus**.

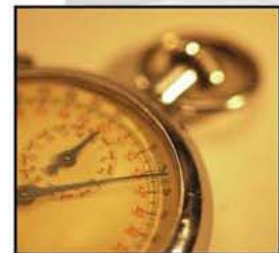
Employer's Shoes

Finally, put yourself in your prospective employer's shoes. They're busy, invariably overworked, and really don't want to read another CV...

...so does your CV stand out? Is it easy to read and well-designed? Does the layout look lively? Does it invite you to read it?

If not, it's back to the drawing board...

See the "Power Words" article for words that can be used to sell yourself in your CV ...



Plain Words – The Big Picture

Technical Writing & Course Development

Planning, writing and producing Help systems, HTML, on-line material, traditional manuals. Designing and writing bespoke courses for your products and services, whether tutor-led, CBT or e-learning. Presenting 'train the trainer' or end user courses.



Specialist Search & Selection

Helping you to recruit permanent or contract documentation staff:

- Technical Authors & Editors
- Trainers
- Localisation Specialists
- Information Managers
- Documentation Managers
- Copy Writers
- Project Managers
- Project Coordinators
- Instructional Designers
- Bid & Proposal Writers
- Web Content Developers
- Knowledge Managers

Writing Skills Training Courses

- Structuring & Writing Reports
- Designing & Writing Help Systems
- Writing Winning Bids & Proposals
- Writing Effective Letters & Emails
- Designing & Writing Technical Documents
- Indexing On-line & Printed Material
- Estimating & Planning Technical Documents
- Writing for the Web



Bids Consultancy & Training

Bidworker, a division of Plain Words, is dedicated to providing bids consultancy and training. Writing, editing and formatting of bids and proposals. 'How to Write Winning Bids and Proposals' training course. Plain Words own **bid**worker™ software to automate much of the process of compiling proposals.

"Excellent service, highly skilled authors. All deadlines have been met!"
Giovanni Calamida, European Patent Office

Catalogues

Plain Words **catalogue**worker™ enables you to create high quality printed or online catalogues in minutes. This is a simple and speedy way to create large catalogues that would otherwise need to be built, fully typeset and formatted. It also caters for multi-currency, multi-languages and different discount schemes.



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