

Writing Effective CVs & Covering Letters



This guide explains how to go about developing a professional and effective CV and Covering Letter. Whilst there is no one set CV format that you should follow we have provided an example of good practice as well as links to some additional example CVs that we feel are appropriate.

Your CV should be unique, reflecting your particular strengths whilst being clearly focused on the role you are applying for.

Key points to consider

- ▶ Target your CV. Initially this can be to the career you are considering but should then be to the specific placement / job role and organisation you are applying to.
- ▶ To do this you need to know what skills, experience and knowledge will be relevant. Research your chosen career and look at employer websites and any details of placement opportunities / job roles provided (e.g. job description / person specification) which will spell out what the employer is looking for.
- ▶ Think about what you've done in the past, whether through your degree, work experience, or in your free time, that can enable you to demonstrate the competencies that the employer is seeking.
- ▶ Make sure you describe your experiences in a way that provides evidence of these competencies. Concentrate on describing these aspects of your experience, even if it means leaving out, or saying little about, other things.
- ▶ Use short punchy sentences, avoid writing in the first person and start sentences with verbs or "active words" – e.g. managed, supervised, initiated, co-ordinated etc. (see our leaflet on **Effective Writing** for additional advice on writing for CVs, also available on Surrey Pathfinder www.surrey.ac.uk/pathfinder)
- ▶ If you are considering different types of job you will need different versions of your CV.
- ▶ Use space appropriately - expand on the most important information such as your current studies or directly relevant experience and summarise less important information such as pre-university qualifications.

- ▶ Academic posts - you should include more information about your degree content, research and project work and any publications arising from your work. A longer CV is acceptable.
- ▶ Right to work - if you are a citizen from a non EEA country but **do** have the right to work in the UK we would recommend you add this information to your CV.

Presentation

An employer may receive many applications. Well-known employers with vacancies in popular types of work sometimes receive thousands. It is your task to make sure that your content is both interesting and easy to read.

- ▶ Head the CV with your name, there is no need to use the title Curriculum Vitae.
- ▶ A 2 page CV is acceptable to most employers - more than that may put them off.
- ▶ Some employers (e.g. Investment Banks) may require a one page CV.
- ▶ Choose a suitable font. This text is Arial. Other good fonts are Verdana, -very legible on screen, or Calibri.
- ▶ Ideally main text should be font size 11 or 12. Use larger font sizes and bold for headings and it is generally advisable to avoid underlining.
- ▶ Each section of your CV should present information in reverse chronological order e.g. most recent events / qualifications first.
- ▶ Try to use the space on the page sensibly. Avoid large blocks of text which can be difficult to read. Bullet points can be a helpful way to present key information.
- ▶ As you often have to email your CV, keep formatting simple. Saving your CV as a pdf can ensure that the formatting is retained.
- ▶ When printing use good quality, A4 paper.
- ▶ Most UK employers will **not** want you to include a photograph within your CV.
- ▶ **Check spelling, grammar and punctuationand check again!**



Did you know?

You can access our leaflet series and further resources on Surrey Pathfinder:
surrey.ac.uk/pathfinder

What to Include

A typical CV may include the following sections. This list is not exhaustive and when you look at CV examples you will find other variations on this theme.

Personal Details

- ▶ Head the CV with your name.
- ▶ Address.
- ▶ Telephone (landline or mobile - ensure your voicemail message is professional).
- ▶ Email (ensure your email address looks professional).
- ▶ Nationality is optional.
- ▶ Do **not** include marital status, health, date of birth or age.

Personal Profile

This section is optional and can be hard to write well! It provides a very **brief summary** (three to five lines) of your key capabilities and experience – the idea is to catch the employer's attention and encourage them to read further. It is critical that the strengths you highlight in your profile are evidenced in what follows.

For further help drafting this type of statement see our leaflet *Writing a Personal Profile for your CV* which is available on the Careers Resources section of Surrey Pathfinder.

Education

- ▶ Name of University attended and dates.
- ▶ Degree subject, grades achieved to date and classification expected (or attained).
- ▶ Describe your degree but be selective and make it relevant to the selector.
- ▶ Some employers (e.g. Law Firms) may like to see a detailed breakdown of all modules studied along with specific grades achieved. For other applications it may be better to provide a more selective list of modules that are of relevance to the role.
- ▶ Placement applicants may choose to include reference to any relevant modules that they will have completed prior to the start of their placement.
- ▶ Consider whether details of relevant projects and /or your dissertation may be of interest to the recruiter.
- ▶ In addition you may wish to emphasise skills gained through your course of study e.g. research skills, report writing, problem solving, team work, project management etc.
- ▶ Include brief details of secondary education – provide A level Grades (or equivalent). Summarise earlier qualifications – e.g. *10 GCSEs (grades A-C)*.
- ▶ If your pre-university education was outside the UK just present a summary of the qualifications you have taken with grades achieved – do not try to translate your qualifications into UK UCAS points /A level grades – many employers will be familiar with international qualifications.
- ▶ If an employer asks for further details of your international qualifications you can get further assistance from **naric** - www.naric.org.uk - there is a charge for their service.

Work Experience / Employment

- ▶ You can list all work experience in one section or split into two sections covering *Relevant Experience* and *Other Work Experience*.
 - ▶ This is where you should include details of your *Professional Training Year* or any directly relevant placements you have undertaken.
 - ▶ Head up each entry by including name of employer, location, dates and job title.
 - ▶ Avoid irrelevant detail about the role – focus on selling the **relevant skills** gained from your experience using short sentences starting with action words
e.g. *Responsible for managing the day-to-day work of three part time staff ensuring adequate staff cover at all times.*
Regularly exceeded all targets in a high pressure environment.
Managed the demands of part time employment alongside full time study.
Frequently worked additional shifts at short notice in response to business need.
 - ▶ Try to ensure different job roles provide evidence of complementary skills that together demonstrate you have what the employer wants.
 - ▶ If you have undertaken a large number of similar jobs you may wish to group them together under a heading such as “*various retail / catering posts*” and then provide some comments about skills gained through these roles.
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Interests and Achievements / Positions of Responsibility / Extracurricular Activities

- ▶ This section may cover anything that is not work and study so could include other University activities such as course representative, involvement in clubs and societies or voluntary work. Select a title for this section that reflects what you have done.
- ▶ Be selective – better to explain three or four key activities that you have gained a lot from rather than listing 20 different sports which don't tell the employer very much about what you achieved.
- ▶ Put the emphasis on recent activities – if the focus is on things you did at school the employer will assume you have done little at University.
- ▶ As with the employment section focus on relevant skills evidenced through these activities.

Additional Skills

You may choose to include a section that briefly summarises tangible skills such as IT skills (make this relevant to the role), language skills and driving licence.

Referees

- ▶ If space is limited it is often possible to just state “references available on request”.
 - ▶ If references are included students and recent graduates should include one academic referee and a second referee who can provide an objective assessment of your character and capabilities. This could be an employer or someone in a position of responsibility.
 - ▶ Always ask permission and keep referees informed about the jobs you are applying for.
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The CV structure outlined above relates to a typical chronological CV. This can be the most straightforward style of CV however it is possible to produce a skills based CV using skills headings - this can also be very effective. See examples of both styles on the sites listed overleaf.



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surrey.ac.uk/pathfinder

Further sources of information including example CVs

Check our website for a range of additional CV examples that you may find useful:
www.surrey.ac.uk/careers/current/leaflets/

CV examples available include:

- ▶ One page CVs that can be welcomed by some investment banks
 - ▶ Simplified CVs appropriate for applications for part-time, term- time employment
 - ▶ CVs for a range of disciplines including Nursing, Health Professions and Law
 - ▶ Skills based CVs.
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Other sites that provide helpful examples of CVs and Covering Letters

- ▶ www.prospects.ac.uk/example_cvs.htm
 - ▶ <http://targetjobs.co.uk/careers-advice/job-hunting-tools-downloads>
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PhD Students and Early Career Researchers

A separate leaflet is available providing more tailored advice concerning CVs for **Postgraduate & Early Career Researchers** and is available to download from here:
www.surrey.ac.uk/employability-and-careers/researchers/researcher-resources

Applying for Jobs Abroad

- ▶ CV and Resume styles vary from country to country, as do guidelines for suitable covering letters. The advice in this leaflet is geared towards CVs and Covering letters for the UK job market.
- ▶ The University of Surrey subscribes to an excellent resource called *Going Global* which will provide you with bespoke advice on CV writing for many countries across the world.
- ▶ To access GoinGlobal go to: www.surrey.ac.uk/goingglobal and follow the relevant link to GoinGlobal.
- ▶ It is important that the first time you access **GoinGlobal** you do so whilst within the University of Surrey Network allowing you to create your own GoinGlobal account and make full use of this invaluable resources for anyone seeking work outside the UK.

There is no single set format for a CV and we would encourage you to develop a CV to reflect key information that will be of most interest to the selector.

Please find overleaf an example CV that puts into practice the advice given above. Please use as a guideline only and don't feel you have to follow this model precisely.

The final page of this leaflet provides a useful structure for a **Covering Letter** which you will generally be required to send with your CV.



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[**surrey.ac.uk/pathfinder**](https://surrey.ac.uk/pathfinder)

Sonia Wu

25 Gannon Rise, Guildford. GU2 3JU
mobile: 07877 711222 email: sw01234@surrey.ac.uk

A highly numerate Tourism Management student with proven leadership, customer service and time-management capabilities gained through varied employment undertaken alongside study.

Ambitious and highly organised, my current role as treasurer of a thriving student society has reinforced my commitment to a finance career in the tourism sector.

Education and Qualifications

University of Surrey	2016 – 2019
BSc International Tourism Management	Expected 2:1(year two results 67%)
<i>Modules studied include:</i>	
<i>Introductory Accountancy, Business Finance, Project Management, Entrepreneurship, International Events Management, Hospitality Events Management, Tourism Innovation</i>	

Skills gained:

- Quantitative and qualitative analysis of complex, varied information
- Strengthened presentation skills, delivering to large groups of students and academics
- Group projects and team-building days have developed effective teamwork skills
- *Selected for Surrey STARS programme for high achieving students*

Dean Close School, Cheltenham

A levels: Geography (A), English Literature (A), French (B)	2016
AS level: Mathematics (B)	2015
GCSE: Ten subjects, grades A*/A including English and Mathematics	2014

Employment

University of Surrey	<i>Oct 2017 - Present</i>
Team Leader, Student Life Mentor	

- Leading a team of residential mentors enabling students to settle into University Life
- Utilising a tactful yet assertive approach when mediating disputes between residents
- Other tasks include creating shift rotas and chairing weekly meetings
- Demonstrating strong multi-tasking capability by managing the demands of a challenging job alongside studies and active involvement in student societies.

The Armoury Public House, Guildford	<i>Oct 2016 – May 2017</i>
Waitress	

- Worked under pressure in a fast paced environment whilst remaining professional and delivering excellent customer service
- Regularly worked additional shifts at short notice to meet the needs of my employer
- Developed a Facebook page to promote the pub to the student population which generated in excess of 500 likes leading to a significant increase in clientele.

Next, Cheltenham
Sales Adviser

Feb 2015 – July 2016

- Built rapport with customers of all ages providing appropriate advice on fashion trends
- Regularly exceeded all individual sales targets
- Provided training for new staff and covered for the branch manager in her absence.

Interests and Positions of Responsibility

Treasurer of the University Latin American and Ballroom Dancing Society

- Elected to a position of trust, controlling the finances for a society with 200 members
- Responsible for creating financial risk assessments for planned events
- Canvassed over 50 major businesses for external funding and agreed sponsorship from a national hotel chain after delivering a 20 minute pitch at their London offices.

Course Representative, BSc International Tourism Management

- Regularly met with students to identify issues of concern
- Attended formal meetings with academic staff and successfully negotiated significant changes to coursework deadlines.

Sport

- Member of the University Hockey Club
- Responsible for co-ordinating regular training sessions and helped promote the club at Freshers' Fair.
- Represented Gloucestershire in the U19 Hockey Team

School Activities

- Senior Prefect
- Duke of Edinburgh Bronze Award

Additional Skills

IT

Fully competent MS office including advanced Excel skills

Languages

Fluent English and Mandarin.

Basic Spanish.

References

Personal Tutor

Dr Katy Amid
School of Hospitality and
Tourism Management
University of Surrey

k.amid@surrey.ac.uk

Previous Employer

Mr Kevin Francis
The Armoury Public House
Castle Street
Guildford

k.francis@hattershero.co.uk

Cover Letters

Key Points to Consider

- ▶ Keep the letter clear, concise, to the point, ideally one side of A4.
- ▶ Proof read to avoid spelling or grammatical errors.
- ▶ Send the covering letter as an attachment and write a brief explanatory email.
- ▶ If you mail a hard copy you should include your address, the employer's address and the date at the top of your letter.

Further information

- ▶ <https://www.prospects.ac.uk/careers-advice/cvs-and-cover-letters>
- ▶ <https://targetjobs.co.uk/careers-advice/job-hunting-tools-downloads>



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Suggested Template for a Covering Letter to send with a CV

Dear *Named Person*

(try to find out their name but if you can't address it to: *Dear Sir or Madam*)

Application for

(write placement / job title and reference number, if applicable)

Paragraph 1: **The Opening**

Introduce yourself briefly; refer to where you saw the advert, or if it is a speculative letter say why you are writing, including what kind of job/placement you are enquiring about.

Paragraph 2: **Why this placement/ job / career?**

Give reasons for your interest in the placement / job role and the career sector for which you are applying, show that you have done your research and choose elements of the post that genuinely excite you. If appropriate outline what you hope to achieve during the placement. Indicate any specialist areas in which you have an interest (if applicable).

Paragraph 3 **Why them?**

Give the reasons you are applying to this particular company/organisation. This is your chance to target your application and demonstrate that you have done your background research. Avoid vague generalisations about their “excellent reputation” or “first class training”.

Paragraphs 4: **Why You?**

It is **vital** to show what you can do for them. Give reasons why they should consider you. Write about the highlights in terms of your experience, skills and knowledge, which match the employer's criteria in the advert. With speculative letters you will need to work out what strengths will be important. Don't just repeat what is already in your CV, but emphasise your key selling points for the job.

Paragraph 5: **Any other relevant points? (if applicable)**

You can use this to explain any special information about yourself that you need to convey. This could be to do with a disability (if you wish to disclose) or gaps in your CV. Try to present these in a positive way and consider explaining how you have overcome any challenges and learnt extra skills as a result.

Final Paragraph: **The Ending**

Conclude positively, thank the employer for considering you and say that you look forward to hearing from them. You could also indicate your availability for interviews or starting work.

Yours sincerely (Use *Yours sincerely* if writing to a named individual. Use *Yours faithfully* if starting the letter with 'Dear Sir or Madam').

Sign it here



**Employability & Careers
Centre** T: 01483 689001/2
E: careers@surrey.ac.uk
W: surrey.ac.uk/careers

Find out more:
surrey.ac.uk/pathfinder

