PRIMESOURCING

CV Writing Guide

Introduction – What's The Purpose?

The word Curriculum Vitae literally translated means the story of your life. The words Curriculum Vitae are usually abbreviated to CV or C.V. In the USA it is more usual for the term Resume to be used and this is sometimes used in the UK although CV is more widely accepted. The possessive form of Curriculum Vitae / CV should be written as Curriculum Vitae's or C.V.'s or CVs. It is not usual and will be considered incorrect to write the abbreviated form in lower case.

In describing your achievements, your career to date and your capabilities always remember that the job of the CV is to attract interest in you and to convince the reader to meet with you at interview (or offer you the job without the need for an interview – although that is rare). As such it is essentially a sales document and should be designed to showcase what you have to offer to an Employer. It has little other purpose and although often referred to in the interview its work is largely done just by getting you there.

Companies often receive hundreds of CV's for the jobs they advertise and Recruitment Agencies receive thousands of CV's every week for the many different roles they are trying to fill. Faced with such an abundance of choice your CV needs to do its job quickly and concisely since it may only receive the most cursory glance on its way to the "must interview" basket or, sadly, the rubbish bin, of both the physical and electronic variety. It has been assessed that the Hiring Manager and/or the Recruitment Consultant will make their mind up regarding your suitability within the first two minutes of reviewing your CV. Harsh but often true – there simply isn't enough time to peruse them all and it is for you to ensure that the skills, experience and aptitude that they are looking for are clear for all to see virtually at first glance.

Structure:

Begin with your name!

Obviously you will start off with your name at the top of the first page, clearly displayed. There is no need to add Male or Female beneath it (unless, like John Wayne, your name is Marion! (he changed his name pretty quickly)). If you have access to Microsoft Word (and if you are applying for a role in IT then you should have) you should add a Header with your name at the top and a Footer with contact details and a unique document number as well as page numbers (1 of 4, 2 of 4 etc.) so that if the CV is printed by the interested party – a good sign in itself - and the pages become separated then it will be easy to re-assemble them. You are not obliged to put your Date of Birth on a CV nowadays and this is a healthy sign given that age should not be relevant to an Employer. Nor do you need to add your ethnicity or religion.

Put your address and contact details clearly below the name – add all 'phones as well as e-mail. This will be in the footer as well but should be nice and clear early on. By all means add here if you are married and any children but you are not compelled to. Here you can add whether you

have any spoken and written languages other than English and, if the role requires travel then highlight such languages again in the summary described below.

Below the name you should put a short summary of the skills you have that match the position on offer. This can be as little as a paragraph and is designed to convince the reader that the CV is worth persevering with. So if the job is to run a small Helpdesk team then this summary should outline where you have had both Helpdesk and supervisory experience and detailed and lengthy that experience is. You can also mention here where you have had any relevant training but don't overdo it – this is merely the "Executive Summary" that attracts the reader to venture further. Study the job on offer and ensure that you display all the relevant skills that you have within this summary. If you are scratching your head after the first sentence then perhaps this isn't the right role for you! Try to imagine yourself as the potential hirer – would you want to read more about this candidate? If you are ticking the right boxes here then you should be in with a very good chance of that interview.

Describe the experience, job by job.

Continue with your work experience with the most recent job first. Be as precise as you can about dates of employment. Always put in the month/year that you started and the month/year that you left. If your career has been very long then you can be less precise about the months after (about) ten years ago when 1988 – 1995 will suffice but don't be vague about recent years – it will suggest gaps and that will worry the reader. If there have been genuine gaps whilst you went on that round-the-world tour then say so – don't try to mask it. If there were periods when you were between jobs then say so – honesty is the best policy – at interview you can say that you took pains to ensure that you accepted the right role rather than jump at anything and that meant an extended period searching for the right job – that strategy wouldn't be held against you.

Having put the Employer and the dates, state the Job Title (if there were several because of promotions then state them all, breaking the experience down into "chapters" together with the dates which you served in each role) then relate the key aspects of the role, the technology used and, perhaps most importantly, the key achievements. Think back – was there a particularly difficult project that you played a part in bringing in on time and to budget? Was there a difficult customer who you helped and they commended you for your flexibility? Potential employers want to read about how you made a positive difference in your job – not simply trawl through the routine tasks that you undertook day after day. Don't end up looking as if you re-built the Company from scratch – there's one thing accentuating the positive and quite another engaging in the most overblown hyperbole! List the key technologies that you were personally involved in – not every platform and software that the Company used. List the technologies that you used in the order of your personal competence in them – don't forget to flag up any new and emerging technologies and methodologies that you may have gained some exposure to – such skills will be rare and even if your ability in them is currently limited it may be vary attractive to the reader. You don't really need to put down reasons for leaving but if you feel compelled to, never criticise a former employer – it will be received very negatively.

You should rehearse the reasons for moving from previous jobs for the interview - acceptable reasons include that you were seeking a larger environment using new technologies with greater opportunity for advancement, not that you thought their career management was poor and their management style draconian! Use bullet points where possible to break up the text – very few people nowadays want to studiously read every document put in front of them – if the reader scans the document highlighted points will attract the eye.

Naturally the summary of your experience needs to be more detailed on recent jobs and be précised as the roles get more distant – there is little point giving chapter and verse about your Mainframe skills from the 'eighties – a few lines on your role and the key technologies used will suffice.

Add *relevant* training.

It is important to flag up training that you have received and qualifications gained but please don't simply list every training course that you have ever attended and every achievement gained – your swimming diploma attained in junior school will not count for much (yes, been seen on a CV before now!) and, like your experience – if the training relates to technology that is now out of date then it won't add much by including the courses you attended for it or the accreditations gained.

"Tell us about yourself"

By all means add a brief summary of your hobbies and interests. Keep it short – it merely provides the reader with a bit of background to you as a person and shows you as a rounded individual with healthy pursuits. Be careful not to fall into the trap of giving too much away here – the candidate who wrote "I love traveling and plan to travel the world next year" didn't get to interview – no employer wants to hear that you might just be "passing through". Hobbies should look like hobbies and not give an impression that work gets in the way of pursuing them. Sometimes your hobbies/interests will support your experience – you "enjoy developing Programs on your PC and learning different programming languages in your spare time" is okay and shows a real interest in technology but be careful not to be seen as too much of a "nerd". Please also avoid crass remarks – the guy applying for a job at BP who wrote "I always fill up at BP stations since you are the greenest fuel provider" was seen as a sycophantic little prig and didn't see the inside of a BP building!

So how long is long enough?

There is no set length for a CV. Two pages may well do the job but four is more common. Lay it out clearly – there is no point using an 8 point type face just to get it on two sides of A4 if what you are left with is something so cramped it offends the eye. Unless you are applying for a role with a media or marketing Company (and even then, be careful) use a common font (e.g. Arial, Times New Roman, Courier). When you have completed it try reading it through as if you are the Hiring Manager – would you want to interview this person – does he or she have the skills you need – and can I see that quickly. Is it an appealing document that is not cluttered and makes its point in short order? It is difficult to be dispassionate about something you have written with loving care and something that summarises a career that you are rightly proud of so ask a friend or partner to consider it – they may not be recruiters but they'll know what appeals to them about the document and tell you so. Also, of course, use your Recruitment Consultant to help you – their job is to get people to interview and to job offer – that's how they make their money – they won't be shy in telling you what needs to be adapted on yours.

Will a photograph of me help?

Only if you have one that is professionally taken and you looked at your best that day. One taken in a photo booth the morning after an all night party with you sporting baggy eyes and disheveled hair just won't add anything (except that you like a good night out!). If in doubt, leave it out – it is your skills they are interested in, not that you have the looks of a matinee idol (can cause jealousy in any event!).

What about References?

Please feel free to add them. If you have two former employers who will speak highly of you then list them with contact details. If you have only one (or none) then offer a character reference via good friends or a professional acquaintance (e.g. Bank Manager, Doctor). Please ensure that you forewarn the Referee that they might be contacted and, of course, ensure that they will provide a good account of you. Naturally it is best not to use your present employer if they don't know you are looking for another job and, if they do and they are prepared to act as a referee, be sure that their intentions are honorable – it has been known for an employer to give a poor reference on a current employee simply because they were desperate not to lose the person!

So I'm done then?

Just about but, with the wonders of modern technology, you can help yourself a little bit more yet – yes, use the spellchecker and grammar advisor. You'd be surprised how bad spelling offends the eye and, if the reader opens the document in MS Word, they won't want to see red and green underlining all over it!

Any final tips?

Try not to repeat words close together – it smacks of inarticulacy. Emphasis the good points and don't be afraid to use words that help do that – I am extremely adept at C++ will sound better than I am adept at C++. I achieve quality results doesn't sound that good at all until you add the word high (quality).

And remember:

It is your document and your career – by all means add in the footer that "this document is proprietary to Joe Bloggs and should not be adapted or re-presented in any way without the express permission of Joe Bloggs". Update it frequently – it'll be out of date within three months anyway in today's fast changing world….

Good Luck……

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