

Plain English Campaign: The plain English guide to CVs

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The plain English guide to CVs

This is only a basic guide. If you have any suggestions, corrections or improvements, please contact us. You can contact us at:

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The plain English guide to CVs

What is a CV?

CV stands for curriculum vitae, which is Latin for 'the course of one's life'. A CV is a brief description of your personal details, work history and education. You will usually be asked for one when you apply for a job.

This guide covers the following.

- Why CVs are important
- What to include in your CV
- Personal details
- Education and qualifications
- Work experience
- Further information
- Interests
- Referees
- What next?

Why CVs are important?

Most employers will ask you to send in your CV before they will give you an interview. So, it is important that you get all your details right and that your CV stands out.

Employers may receive 200 CVs for one job, but they might only interview 10 people. If you want to be one of the 10, your CV must stand out immediately – so sell yourself.

You may not have the best qualifications or employment history, but if your CV is well organised and well presented you are more likely to get that interview. Other people might have better qualifications, but if their CV is poorly presented the employer won't spend time reading it.

Remember, your CV represents you, so if it is badly organised an employer will assume you are badly organised too!

Keeping all of this in mind, let's show you how you can create your own CV.

Personal details

The first important information you need to provide is your personal details. These need to be correct and at the very top of the page.

You need to put your name, contact address, phone number (daytime and

evening), email address (if you have one) and age.

You must be honest about your personal details as an employer won't give you a job if you lie.

Here is an example of what to include.

Personal details

John Smith

Address: 20 Union Road
New Mills
High Peak
SK22 4QP

Phone: 01663 744409 (daytime) or 07999 663 554 (evening)

Email address: sample@plainenglish.co.uk

(Optional) **Age:** 28

Education and qualifications

Here you give details of your education and qualifications.

Your details need to be in reverse chronological order – starting with the most recent and going back through your history, possibly to secondary school.

Depending on your circumstances it may not be necessary to go back as far as secondary school. This may be because it was a long time ago or your achievements at school do not reflect well on your abilities now. You decide. Here is an example of what to include and how it should look.

Education and qualifications

2000 to present

Durham University, BA (Hons) English studies

1999 to 2000

Dove Holes College, Buxton, access course (MAFP)

Subjects included: English literature, psychology, sociology and history.

1987 to 1992

The Triardan School, New Mills, GCSEs

Maths (A); English language (C);
English literature (C).

Work experience

In this section you need to show all the jobs that you have had. This can even include jobs that you had at school (if they are relevant).

As with your education and qualifications, you need to fill in your information in reverse chronological order. You need to include the dates the job started and finished work, your job title, who you worked for, where you worked and a brief description of what you did there.

Here is an example of what to include.

Work experience

April 2001 to September 2001

Office assistant: Andrew's Solutions, New Mills

- I helped to write courses which are used on the Internet.
- I provided quick and efficient help in writing, letters, sending out important information, filing, faxing, finding valuable information on the internet and much more.

July 1994 to February 1998

Sales executive: The Plexia Group PLC, Chinley

- I was responsible for contacting and visiting existing, potential and past customers throughout England.
- I designed and wrote a new company leaflet. The company sent this out to all potential customers in the UK, helping to increase sales.
- I organised and co-ordinated transport, planning collections and deliveries for three vehicles.
- I was in charge of my own administration – letter writing, contracts, accounts, updating computer databases, answering the phone and much more.

January 1994 to April 1995

Bar person: The Dandy Cock, Debley

- I worked well under pressure and, at times,

- in an abusive atmosphere.
- I learnt to defuse difficult situations in a diplomatic way.
- I gained good communication skills and performed well within my team.

Tip: use short sentences to describe what you did and only include relevant and positive information. Don't include things like 'I made cups of tea all day'!

Further information

This is where you write down any other skills, qualifications or information that might help you get that job.

This section can include things such as:

- a clean driving licence (useful if you are applying to deliver parcels); or
- a black belt in karate (useful if you are applying to be a nightclub bouncer).

Remember, only include information which is relevant. Don't put things like 'I can drink a pint of lager in three seconds.'

Before you go on to fill in your other skills, write them all down on a piece of scrap paper and choose which ones you want to include. Here is an example of what you may include.

Further information

- I am fully competent in using Microsoft Office packages such as Word, Excel and PowerPoint.
- My typing is accurate and fast (70 words a minute).
- I am very confident, use my initiative and work well within a group.

Remember - keep your sentences short, positive and relevant. Use a different line for each statement.

Interest

Use this section to include interests that you enjoy when you are not working. This section usually gives the reader an idea of your personality. This can be good or bad – it all depends on what you write. Here is an example.

Interests

- Mountain biking and walking – I enjoy exploring and taking challenging routes.
- Reading – from current affairs to novels.
- Swimming – as relaxation.

Many people tend to bend the truth a little in this section. This is not always a good idea. Imagine if your boss is a keen walker and asks you to go on a 20-mile walk with him, because you said that you walk every weekend, when actually you don't even like walking from the car to the office!

If you haven't really got any other interests, try and think about what you do at the weekends. You may go to nightclubs or watch television all weekend. This is fine if you use the right words.

For example:

'I enjoy socialising at weekends and visiting local attractions.'

is better than saying:

'I go clubbing all weekend and I'm knackered by Monday.'

'I like to keep up to date with current affairs.'

is better than saying:

'I don't do anything apart from watch telly.'

Note: This is one of the few places it might not be a good idea to use plain English!

Now get a piece of scrap paper and write down everything that you enjoy doing or have an interest in. When you have written them down, try to put them into better words and pick out the positive points.

Remember – keep your sentences short, positive and relevant. Use a different line for each statement.

Referees

In this section you need to include the names and addresses of two people who will provide references for you.

This may not seem very important, but it is! Your prospective employer will probably contact one or both of these people and you have to be sure of a few things.

Things to do before you put down your referees.

- Choose two people who you know would give you a good reference.
- You need to have one personal and one professional referee. The professional referee would usually be from someone you have worked for. The personal one may be an academic one or somebody you have known for a long time.

- If you have not had a job or been in education, find two people you have known for a long time. Your referees must not be related to you.
- Make sure that you ask their permission before you include them.
- Check their details. They may have changed their address, phone number or name.

What next?

If you have followed this guide, you will have a basic CV. All you have to do now is go and get that job!

You can [click here to see an example of a finished CV](#). (It's taken from the examples we have used in this guide.) This may help if you are uncertain about how to lay out your own CV.

Remember that when you send off your CV you will need to include a covering letter. We have a guide to letter writing which may be helpful.