

North Connaught Youth Services

Rockwood Parade, Sligo

Tel: 071 91 44150 / 9147468 Fax: 071 91 45578

Email: yicsligo@eircom.net www.ncycs.ie

9.00 – 5.00 pm (Mon – Thurs) 9.00 – 4.30 pm (Friday)

WRITING A WINNING CV

Introduction

The main way to sell yourself on paper is a CV and there is no such thing as one perfect CV. You may produce a number of different CV's to fit different purposes. The chances of success or failure of your CV will depend entirely on how far it meets the criteria, background and bias of the person reading it.

When producing a CV, many students:

- Fail to identify what the employer is looking for
- Undersell and underestimate what they have to offer
- Fail to provide the right evidence to support the skills and competences

Steps that you can take to help you create the winning CV:

Step 1 – Identify the employer's needs

Read

You should read all the information available to you on the job and the Company. Look at any company literature or publicity material and refer to the company website. Look carefully at job adverts and job specifications. Read your current CV and consider whether it is right for the kind of positions that you are applying for. To help with this go to www.propsects.ac.uk click on 'Jobs and Work' and then 'Explore Types of Jobs' and look at the details of the jobs you are interested in. This will help you with the language that you will need to use in your CV.

Think

Think about the range of skills and competences that are required, the evidence that you will need to demonstrate these skills and how you can tailor your skills and experience to meet employer requirements. Think carefully about the layout, design, style and content and consider ways to get your CV to stand out from the crowd.

Act

Write a clear list of the skills, qualities and experiences that are essential for the position and create a skills portfolio to back them up. Start to prioritise these skills and consider whether you have any gaps that you must fill. Get feedback on your current CV and look at other examples to give you inspiration.

Step 2 – Know what you have to offer

Knowing what you have to offer and selling this on paper is crucial to creating a winning CV. Having considered the issues of what employers are looking for, you can now start to identify what you have to offer by reviewing your skills and qualities.

These can be categorised into 4 areas:

1. Specialist skills including company-specific or sector based technical knowledge, e.g. specialist languages, IT packages, etc.
2. General business skills. These would include skills in: problem solving; flexibility; numeracy; business acumen; commitment.
3. Self-reliance skills. These would include: self awareness and confidence; self promotion and marketing skills; networking; initiative and proactivity; willing to learn; action planning.
4. People skills. These would include: team-working; leadership; inter-personal skills; customer orientation; oral communication.

You should list the positive experiences and achievements in your life to date, covering your education, work experience and other interests. Do not forget that activities beyond school, University and work can be of interest to employers. This will boost your confidence and help you to create a broader range of positive images. Think about how to develop and evidence a balance of skills between people, self reliance, general and specialist skills that will make you employable.

Step 3 – Make the connection

Now that you have examined what employers are looking for and have identified your key skills, you now need to take a fresh look at yourself through the eyes of the employers.

You should ask yourself:

- What are the features that are really going to make me stand out?
- How am I going to be able to evidence the statements?
- What benefits am I offering to the employer? Why should they interview me?
- You now need to make the connection between what the employer is looking for and what you have to offer.

Here are some key transferable skills that you may wish to include in your CV.

Communication – ability to communicate orally, in writing and electronically.

Teamwork – being a constructive team member and contributing practically to the success of the team.

Leadership – being able to motivate and encourage others whilst taking the lead

Initiative – ability to see opportunities and achieve set goals.

Problem solving – thinking things through in a logical way in order to determine key issues. Creative thinking is also useful.

Flexibility/adaptability – ability to handle change and adapt to new situations.....cont'd

Self awareness – knowing your strengths and skills and having the confidence to put these across.

Commitment/motivation – having energy and enthusiasm to pursue and complete projects

Interpersonal skills – ability to relate well to others and establish good working relationships

Numeracy & IT – competence and understanding of numerical data, statistics and graphs and confidence in use of information technology.

Step 4 – Turning plans into action

You should now study examples of good CV's and start developing or adapting your own. Remember to keep the focus on who the CV is for and consider the best way of presenting the benefits of what you have to offer to employers.

Some general points about layout of the CV

Think carefully about how you enter the information and how easy it will be for the employer to pick out what they want quickly. The use of bullet points can help keep the information concise and guide the eye around the page.

- Keep to two sides of A4.
- Put your main selling points on the first page – these may be qualifications but could also be particularly relevant work experience or key skills.
- Give the highest priority to the best and most relevant examples of your ability to do the specific job. Be positive, direct and concise.
- Be selective – space is short and only give the information that counts.

Content

Select carefully the areas that allow you to market yourself most effectively.

Personal details – avoid unnecessary information and anything that could be seen as negative. This often goes at the beginning of a standard CV but there are no fixed rules.

Profiles/objectives – designed to provide the reader with concise information about what you are looking for or why you are suitable for this particular position. It gives the employer a quick snapshot of you at the beginning of the document. There are a number of different ones that you may decide to use including: a personal profile, career profile and career objective.

Education – give space to the most recent and highest level qualifications.

Employment/work experience – concentrate on showing relevant and transferable skills drawn from all your work experience. Try not to list what you have done in the jobs but concentrate on what you have learned, how you have developed and what you can offer as a result.

Interests/achievements – concentrate on activities that can again show transferable skills and be prepared to talk about them at interview. Remember to avoid creating lists. Language and other skills and interest in going to a particular country

Referees – you should name at least 2 referees, one should ideally be an employer and if you are still at University, or are a recent graduate, the other should be a tutor.

Personal profile is a brief businesslike description of you and your: personal qualities, skills, abilities and experience.

A career objective focuses on what you are looking for and can be used on its' own, or combined with a personal profile.

A career profile allows you to focus your attention on your career and work experience so far rather than looking too much at your personal characteristics.

The profile could include what you do/have done (degree or job); key strengths; background experience in....; what you are aiming for and how you would like to use your skills.

CV prompt list – use of language

The use of language can affect a CV considerably. Use positive/action words to create a favourable impression on the potential employer. Try to introduce as many of these words as possible.

Examples:

Accurate	Designed	Facilitated	Negotiated	Professional
Achieved	Developed	Flexible	Open-minded	Proficient
Active	Delivered	Focused	Organised	Profitable
Adaptable	Directed	Honest	Participated	Qualified
Administered	Dynamic	Imaginative	Positive	Resourceful
Ambitious	Efficient	Implemented	Persuaded	Responsive
Analysed	Energetic	Improved	Practical	Specialised
Assertive	Engineered	Influenced	Presented	Successful
Capable	Enterprising	Initiated	Proactive	Supervised
Confident	Enthusiastic	Knowledgeable	Processed	Supported
Communicated	Entrepreneurial	Listening	Productive	Trained
Competent	Established	Logical	Promoted	Versatile
Controlled	Evaluated	Managed		
Co-ordinated	Expanded	Monitored		
Co-operative	Experienced	Motivated		
Created				
Creative				

Final checklist before sending out the CV How does it look –

- Is it well presented and clearly laid out?
- Are you clear about your skills and competences and have you provided evidence?
- Is it on good quality paper without spelling or grammatical mistakes?
- Have you put in some unique or distinctive/strong selling points and do they stand out?
- Is it prioritised to bring the most relevant information to the front? Have you used action words to strengthen your skills?
- Does your covering letter complement your CV?