

# CVs and Cover Letters

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## What to Include?

Do I put in everything I've done? How do I know what's relevant? What if I miss something out? What about that long gap in my work history? How can I make my CV stand out? The CV is more often than not, the first bit of contact between you and a potential employer. The aim is obvious; present yourself as someone that should be employed.

Depending on how old you are and what work you're looking for, the rules on what to include vary. If you're young and you've only had a couple of jobs, then you probably don't want to be omitting anything. If you've been working for a couple of decades, then the last ten years or so should be enough.

Include your role, what you've achieved, and how the role will enable you to do well in another career. It is often beneficial to tailor your CV to the job that you're applying for; highlight the skills you have gained in one area and specifically state how it applies to the prospective job.

Be succinct. Employers may be looking through dozens of applications for a single job and they will not be reading everything in its entirety. The two page limit seems to be fairly ingrained, and is a standard that employers have come to expect. This does not mean that you should extend it to two pages or that you should leave out something incredibly important because it goes over. Use the space wisely; depending on the field of work you want to go into, a clear, concise writing style may be preferred.

The structure of your CV affects how it is read. There are many pre-existing templates to choose from, which you can adapt and gain inspiration from. If you are, or have been, a student then your university's career centre may even provide it own template or guidelines. If you are applying for academic work, then you may wish to use a different template to if you're applying for a job in retail, or an internship in an office.

Highlight the strengths that relate to the job; find the balance between writing about your education and academic achievements, and your practical experience and transferable skills. If you have friends, or old colleagues, or professors that have worked in the field you are trying to get into, talk to them. Ask to look at their CV or a template that they have used. Pay attention to the job description; make sure you show that you have all the desired qualities the employer is looking for.

## What's Safe to Leave Out?

Do not feel that you need to meet a word count. If you have nothing else to say, then don't say anything. Include all your strengths and skills and relevant experience, and no more. Do not include personal information, or hobbies that have no relevance to the role.

A gap in your CV can stand out. A good way of filling this in is with relevant skills you gained during this time. This is another great reason why, when you're unemployed, you should keep busy and pro-active. Many people take courses in this time, explore new careers, or even take the time to do something they've always dreamt of doing. One of the best solutions is to volunteer, at least part time, to show you have kept the working mentality.

The important thing is to be honest, but also to not go into too much detail. For most long-term gaps, a short sentence will suffice; such as caring for a sick relative, travelling, raising a family, or returning to education. A great idea is to take what you have learnt from these experiences and show how you have become a better equipped candidate for the role.

## Writing a Cover Letter

This is the part that you would change the most and adapt for the role you're applying for. The cover letter needs to show the employer why you are the best possible candidate for the job, and it also needs to keep their attention. Let's assume you have twenty applications to read through, and you only want three or

four candidates to interview. You want these few people to not only be the best qualified for the role, but to have something that stands out.

If you're bored by your own cover letter, delete it and start again. Be succinct and direct. Try to not write more than a page. You want this job; make them know you want it and that you're more than capable of doing it. A good cover letter will engage with the aims of the company and the requirements for the role. Tell the employer how suited you are for the position in no uncertain terms; you are the best candidate because x, y, and z. Confidence and a sense of personal drive in a cover letter will impress the person who decides whether or not you get an interview. You may be great in person, but you need to shine on paper first.

