

# Writing a CV and Covering Letter

Today's graduate job market is very competitive and your CV is your prime marketing tool. It must highlight your skills and achievements in a clear and positive light which will persuade the employer to call you for an interview. Many applicants fail to make it to interview because of ineffective evidence of their skills and experience, poor presentation and careless spelling and grammar. Taking time and some simple advice can really make all the difference. Here we will show you how to write an impressive CV and how to avoid the pitfalls.

## Before you start

- Check that a CV is the correct method of applying to the organisation. Many employers now expect you to apply online via their website.
- Research what the employer is looking for. Look at the advert or information on the employer's website. What does it say about the job requirements? Are they looking for specific skills or competencies?
- Investigate the employer and the business sector – you can do this on the web in most cases.
- Target your skills and experience around what you have found out about the role. What do you want the employer to know about you?
- Write down some key experiences where you can demonstrate the skills required and think about how you might show evidence of your suitability.

By giving thought to these points you are thinking strategically about why the recruiter should give your application serious consideration

## Standard contents

All CVs need to contain some standard information, which normally includes:

- Personal details – name, address, telephone number and e-mail address
- Education and qualifications
- Employment history
- Interests, activities and achievements
- References

## Presentation

- Usually two sides of A4 or the equivalent in electronic format
- Avoid coloured or textured paper
- Clear – written in understandable and appropriate professional language
- Be consistent with font type and size. Line up text
- Make sure key information is not hidden by too much text; try breaking up with bullet points
- Use of headings or bold to draw attention to important points
- Spelling and grammar must be accurate

## Style and Format

There is not one correct style of CV to use. All CVs should be targeted to meet the requirements of an advertised vacancy or a particular employer.

The two most commonly used CV formats are:

- **Chronological:** the most common format outlining your experiences in reverse date order
- **Skills based:** this highlights and gives evidence of your relevant skills. It is particularly appropriate if you wish to demonstrate transferable skills

## Further Tips

- A personal profile is not essential but if included must be targeted for each application and must show evidence of your relevant skills
- In terms of qualifications do not give a disproportionate amount of space to say GCSE'S. Focus on the most relevant qualifications which are probably those you are currently or have recently studied
- Don't be modest about your work experience. It's easy to undervalue your vacation/casual jobs. You may not have held impressive positions but what interests an employer is what you gained from the experience in terms of skills and personal development. Also, don't forget to include voluntary experience

## Finally

- **Check and double check your spelling and grammar**
- **Make sure it is clear and easy to read. Most employers will spend less than 30 seconds scanning your CV**

## Other Resources available at CCD

AGCAS Booklet: *Applications, CVs and covering letters*

CCD Mini Guide to Writing CVs, Letters and Application Forms

CCD Leaflet: Writing Skills for Applications and CV.s

DVD: Your Job's On-line

## Websites

[www.nottingham.ac.uk/careers/students/applications](http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/careers/students/applications)

[www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk)

**If you are writing or revising your CV, or completing an application form for the first time, we expect you to use some of the above recommended materials PRIOR to arranging an appointment.**

**If you would like this information in larger print or Braille, please ask at reception or phone the information team on 0115 951 3680. This leaflet is also available on our website at [www.nottingham.ac.uk/careers](http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/careers)**

## An example of a chronological CV

Do not copy these examples word for word – YOUR CV has to reflect YOUR skills and how they relate to the job or role you are applying for

A personal profile is optional. If included, it must be targeted at the position applied for and include relevant strengths and skills. This would sit below your address

**Steven Brown**

**12 Green Drive  
Lenton  
Nottingham  
NG7 2XX  
Tel: 076.....**

Email: [s.b.brown@gmail.com](mailto:s.b.brown@gmail.com)

Date of birth - No longer necessary

### Education

2006-2009 **The University of Nottingham**  
**BSc Hons. Geography - 2:1 predicted**

Modules included: Interpreting Geographical Data, Economic and Urban Geography, Geography of Money and Finance, Environmental Change, Effects of Atmospheric Pollution. The course involved practical field trips in Wales and Majorca.

Final year dissertation analysed environmental issues in the development of a local business park.

2004-2006 **Joseph Wright School, Liverpool**

A-levels: Geography (A) English (A) Biology (B)  
AS Level Business Studies (B)  
GCSEs: 10 A\*-B

Try and put your most relevant experience on the front page

### Relevant Experience

Spring 2008 **Wildlife Trust, Nottingham – Volunteer**

- Delivered fun educational activities in a local primary school
- Compiled and produced a marketing leaflet to promote future events

Summer 2007 **Newtown City Council Environmental Department - Administration Assistant**

Try and start each bullet point with a strong verb

- Worked in a team of six to provide administrative support to environmental consultants
- Compiled impact assessment documents using Microsoft Word
- Analysed environmental data using the internal database
- Responded to customer enquiries both on the telephone and in person

Summer 2006 **Corfu Dolphin Research Programme – Volunteer**

- Assessed and monitored the dolphin population in Corfu, Greece

## Other Experience

### 2006-2007 **Right Look Clothing, Nottingham – Sales Consultant**

- Displayed clothing to encourage sales
- Worked towards targets
- Served customers and supervised the changing rooms

2004-2006 Various casual jobs including catering assistant, warehouse work and builder's labourer

Group together temporary positions to save space

## Positions of Responsibility

- Final year course representative. This entailed liaison between staff and students.
- Treasurer of Geography Society during second year

## Achievements

- Right Look Clothing's Employee of the Month – for exceeding my individual sales target by 25%
- Duke of Edinburgh Silver Award. This included community service at a local hospice and a three day expedition in the Peak District

## Additional Skills

- Driving: full, clean, licence
- IT: competent user of Microsoft Windows, Outlook and Excel
- Languages: conversational French and Italian

## Interests

- Sport: play football in a local league
- Environment: subscriber to the Environment Post and a Member of the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers
- Music: bass guitar in a local band

## References

Dr T Khan  
School of Geography  
University of Nottingham  
University Park  
Nottingham  
NG7 2RD  
Tel: 0115 .....  
Email: t.khan@ .....

Mrs Bird  
Right Look Clothing  
Robin Hood Centre  
Nottingham  
NG92 1PZ  
Tel: 0115 951 ....  
m.bird@.....

One of your references should be from an academic at your university

## An example of a skills based CV

**JENNY LI**  
**31 Robin Hood Rise**  
**Sherwood**  
**Nottingham**  
**NG7 T66**  
**Tel: 07.....**  
**E-mail....**

Only list modules which might be of relevance to the position you are applying for.

### EDUCATION

**2007-2010**      **The University of Nottingham**  
**BA Finance Accounting and Management**  
Year 1 grade 69%  
Modules have included: Computers in Business, Entrepreneurship in Business, Financial Accounting, People and Organisations, Microeconomics for Business, Introductory Econometrics.

**2000-2007**      **West Park School, Birmingham**  
A-Level Business Studies (A) Mathematics (A) French (B)  
AS Level Psychology (B)  
GCSEs: 10 A\* - B

Consider which skills the employer is seeking and give evidence of these on your CV. Which other skills can you offer?

### SKILLS PROFILE

#### Effective Communication

- Strong customer service skills developed in sales and waitressing roles
- Presentation skills and confidence gained through production of school play in the sixth form

#### Team Working and Leadership

- Duke of Edinburgh (silver) – Leader for team expedition. Motivated team members during difficult weather conditions
- Captain of school netball team

#### Time Management

- Involvement in drama, netball, part-time work and my study has taught me the importance of organisation and prioritising commitments

### IT

- IT: Competent in the use all Microsoft packages

Other skills you could include in this section include: problem solving, innovation, influencing, creativity.....

## WORK EXPERIENCE

Aug 2008-present      **Notts County Football Club - Waitress**

- Customer service skills gained from serving refreshments in the hospitality boxes on match days

July-December 2006      **Sainsbury's – Check-out Operator**

- Operated the tills and dealt with customer enquiries
- Handled cash and card transactions

Use any casual jobs or voluntary experience you have had to give evidence of skills the employer might seek.

## ACHIEVEMENTS

- Captain of school netball club during sixth form. Team won local league in 2006
- Duke of Edinburgh Silver Award. This involved planning and leading a three day expedition in the Peak District with a group of ten students and weekly voluntary work with an after school club running drama activities for 4-11 year olds
- Member of school drama club. Producer of 'Annie' 2006. This involved organising the rehearsal schedule, negotiating employer sponsorship for the programme, co-ordinating ticket sales and overseeing the budget of £1250

## INTERESTS

- Sport: play netball in a local league in Nottingham
- Music: attend live concerts. Learning to play the keyboard
- Theatre: regularly see performances at the Nottingham Playhouse

## REFERENCES

Dr. J. Sutton  
South Building  
Jubilee Campus  
University of Nottingham Business School  
Nottingham  
NG10 1 YY  
Tel : 0115....  
j.sutton@nottingham.....

Mrs Thompson  
Notts County Football Club  
Trent Avenue  
Nottingham  
NG1 IAA  
Tel : 0115.....  
e.thompson@ ...

# The Covering Letter

Your CV should always be accompanied by a covering letter. You should use your covering letter to tailor your experience to the position or organisation to which you are applying. Never underestimate its importance and as with your CV pay attention to style, layout, grammar and spelling. If possible, you should send it to a named person. A covering letter should:

- Highlight particular points in your CV that give evidence of your suitability for the position
- Demonstrate your interest in and knowledge of the company
- Be no longer than one side of A4 or electronic equivalent

## Example Covering Letter 1 – Reply to an advertised vacancy

**4 Green Drive  
Lenton  
Nottingham  
NG7 2EE  
[S.brown@hotmail.com](mailto:S.brown@hotmail.com)**

6<sup>th</sup> September 2008

Mr P Cottingham  
Pockitt & Jingle  
Main Street  
Fossington, Hants

Dear Mr Cottingham

I am writing in response to your advertisement for a Marketing Assistant included in the University of Nottingham Vacancy list.

**State why you are writing**

**State what you can offer the employer**

As you will see from my CV, I am in the final year of a Biological Science degree. I have developed excellent oral and written communication skills through my course work and work experience in catering and retailing. In addition, I am able to work well with other people. My role as captain of the University badminton team required me to motivate and encourage other team members and, as part of the first year Buddy Scheme, I was able to build rapport with my group very quickly. The range of my extra curricular activities and my academic performance show I have good time management skills. These also demonstrate my ability to work under pressure. My academic work requires a high degree of numerical ability and attention to detail. I enjoy research and have always found analytical work very satisfying. My ICT skills are well developed as a result of this. I see all these qualities as relevant to the role of marketing assistant.

**State what the employer can offer you**

Pockitt and Jingle offers me the opportunity to work in industrial rather than consumer product marketing where I can make use of my scientific knowledge in a commercial setting. From your website I see I would be involved in marketing projects at an early stage which is very appealing. In addition I am attracted by the opportunity to deal with a wide variety of customers. I notice that you place great emphasis on training in the job description and this is important to me. For all these reasons, an industrial marketing career appears to suit my personality and skills and I am now fully committed to it.

**Close positively**

I look forward to the opportunity to discuss my experience with you at interview. My final exams fall in the two weeks of 9<sup>th</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> June.

Yours sincerely

**Steven Brown**

## Example Covering Letter 2 – Speculative Submission

4 Green Drive  
Lenton  
Nottingham  
NG7 2EE  
[S.brown@hotmail.com](mailto:S.brown@hotmail.com)

6<sup>th</sup> September 2008

Ms Eleanor Dashwood  
Farrar PR Ltd  
22 Regents Crescent  
London SW1B 2TP

Dear Ms Dashwood

**State why you are writing**

I would be pleased if you could consider this speculative application for an Account Handling role at Farrar PR. I note from your website that you welcome applications before Christmas for the September 2009 intake.

**State what you can offer the employer**

I am a confident and highly motivated final year History undergraduate at the University of Nottingham. I have gained editorial experience through Impact Magazine and the Athletic Union whilst at University. Having researched various media occupations, and undertaken work placements, I am now fully committed to pursuing a career in PR and have a particular interest in Consumer PR.

My verbal communication skills are equally good. Extensive customer service jobs helped develop these skills coupled with my Drama performance interests. Socially confident, I am capable of addressing any audience including the Press. I have excellent negotiation and persuasion skills which I have had to apply recently when persuading store managers to lend me props for 26 photo shoots. As can be seen in my role profile, I possess a combination of creative ability with a very can-do approach. My peers regard me as a good team player who, being well-organised, is comfortable with both event management and communication roles.

**State what you know about the employer/ what employer can offer you**

I note from your web site that you are a full service agency who specialise in PR for the Retail Industry. I am impressed by your extensive range of clients including the top names such as Tesco, and have followed their recent campaigns in the Media. Communication skills are my strength. My editorial experience has really developed my writing skills, and taught me the need to produce copy to tight deadlines. At Crispin Publishing I learnt how to compile and research information. The strong emphasis on written coursework throughout my studies has been important in developing my written communication skills. My secretarial course and employment also taught me how to use Business English and my IT skills are well developed. .

**Close positively**

I hope that my enthusiasm for PR is conveyed in this application. I consider that I have the necessary drive and personal qualities required to contribute to your success as an established PR agency.

I forward to hearing from you shortly regarding an interview.

Yours sincerely

**Steven Brown**