

Preparing a CV

Curriculum vitae (CV) translates from the Latin as “course of life”. It is a record of an individual’s qualifications, skills and experience

Everyone, from preregistration trainees starting their career to senior executives, needs a CV. It is used when responding to a job advertisement (unless there is a specific application form) and also when applying “on spec” about possible job opportunities.

What’s it for?

The purpose of a CV is to get you an interview. It is a way of selling yourself to prospective employers. The CV has to make them employer that you are a suitable candidate for the job and that they would be foolish not to interview you.

CV structure

There are no rules on how to write a CV — although plenty of books have been written on the subject. There are, however, some general guidelines.

Some people prepare a CV divided into sections based on particular work-related skills, but the more usual type, certainly for someone at the start of their career, is a chronological CV. This type of CV should include:

- ▶ Personal details
- ▶ Employment experience
- ▶ Educational qualifications
- ▶ Any other relevant information.

Personal details — You should start with your name, address, and telephone number. If you do not want to be contacted at work (you might not have told your employer you are moving on) give an alternative telephone number, and an e-mail address, if you have one.

You do not have to include your date of birth or marital status, though a missing date of birth might look a bit peculiar.

Employment experience — This is the most vital bit of your CV. You need to give details of jobs you have held, with the corresponding dates. Start with the most recent and work backwards. Don’t worry if there is not much to say. At this stage in your career you are not expected to have gained vast experience. You could include relevant vacation jobs.

The essential thing is to highlight the key tasks, responsibilities and achievements in your previous jobs. If you are newly registered, summarise the work you did in your preregistration year.

It is unlikely that one CV will fit all jobs. You must carefully study the job advertisement (and any job description that is available) to analyse what the employer is really looking for. Then you can tweak your CV — without lying of course — to show that you have the required skills and experience.

Aim to use positive statements, eg, “I have experience in . . .”, “I developed. . .”, and “I was responsible for . . .”. Get this bit of your CV right, and you are well on the way to getting an interview.

Educational qualifications — Again, education details should be presented in reverse chronological order, ie, university first, followed by school. State your class of degree (there is no point hiding this). Also include the grades obtained in school public exams; as your career progresses, these will become less relevant, but for now they are important.

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Other information — Here you should include your professional qualifications (eg, MRPharmS) plus membership of any societies and organisations likely to be relevant to the job you are applying for, eg, UKCPA, Guild of Healthcare Pharmacists.

Mention any other relevant skills (eg, computer expertise) or evidence of professional development. You could include details of training courses and conferences you have attended.

Of course, if you received any awards or prizes while at university you should say so — it all helps to make you stand out from the next applicant. Publications and conference presentations can also be included.

Another thing that is worth mentioning is a clean driving licence if the job is likely to require you to drive (say for residential home visits or collection and delivery schemes).

Interests — Have a think about whether there is anything else, including voluntary work, which might help to push you forward. Perhaps you completed the Duke of Edinburgh award or ran the university hockey club. Or maybe you helped organise a BPSA conference. This type of thing demonstrates responsibility and, at this stage in your career, could give you the edge over another applicant with similar pharmacy work experience.

Traditionally, people mention hobbies on CVs and job application forms. It can be a useful talking point, especially in the early stage of an interview when interviewers will be trying to put you at your ease. But keep it short — and don't make up hobbies to impress. A friend of mine mentioned his great interest in wine making. He was then stymied when he was asked about this during his interview. He had not yet taken the kit out of its box.

There is a danger that too many hobbies might interfere with your work, eg, that you will not have time to work late when needed. So take care with what you

write, and avoid mentioning anything too controversial.

When should you prepare a CV?

It's a good idea to get your CV ready even if you are not immediately thinking of applying for a new job. When you see a job you want, you will then just need to tailor your CV to apply promptly, which might stand you in good stead.

Once the CV is written, remember to keep it up to date, for example by adding in new training courses that you have been on or new skills that you have developed.

Key practical points

- ▶ Lay your CV out neatly— it needs to be well presented and clear. Highlight your strong points relevant to the job you are applying for
- ▶ Be concise — it is often said that a CV should be no longer than two A4 pages
- ▶ Use white paper — this looks more professional. The document may well be copied to several people and coloured paper does not always photocopy well
- ▶ Keep it simple — a jazzy type-face is not going to impress
- ▶ Make sure you check your CV (and check it again) for spelling, grammar and punctuation. Don't rely on the computer spellchecker. It might be a good idea to get a friend to check it for you. Common errors are confusing practice and practise, principal and principle, and, all too often, incorrect use of the dreaded apostrophe! A CV with mistakes suggests that the applicant does not have the attention to detail required of a pharmacist
- ▶ Be careful with abbreviations — something that is obvious to you (eg, BPC, PCP) might mean something else entirely to another person

- ▶ Don't lie — of course, present yourself in the best light but the CV must be honest and factually correct

- ▶ Don't specify the salary you want (that's for discussion at a later stage)
- ▶ Remember to keep a copy of your CV
- ▶ If you are asked to send your application by e-mail, be sure to send it in a format that will be readable by any computer.

Referees

Most employers will take up references before making a formal offer. You do not have to include referees on your CV, but you should be ready for this and do remember to ask your referees if they will be willing to act for you. Employers usually ask for two referees.

Application forms

Increasingly these days, advertisers, particularly public bodies, ask applicants to fill in a job application form. This is seen as a way of ensuring consistent information from all applicants. In such cases, you won't need to send your CV as well, but having a CV to hand should help when filling in an application form.

Much the same principles apply to application forms as to drawing up a CV. If you have to fill in the form by hand (some are sent electronically and can be typed) be sure to write neatly — crossings out will increase the risk that your form will go straight into the bin.

It's a good idea to photocopy the form and have a dry run.

Covering letter

The CV (or application form) should not be sent alone. You also need a short (no more than one side) covering letter. Don't rehash your CV in this letter but explain why you are a suitable candidate for the job and emphasise how your skills and experience match those required. ✎