

HOW TO WRITE A SUCCESSFUL CV

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From vacation placements, to the preregistration year and beyond, you will need to have a well organised, up-to-date CV. It is best to prepare your CV early, so that the information is readily available to apply for jobs in response to advertisements, or to apply “on spec” to companies about possible employment opportunities.

The abbreviation “CV” stands for the Latin term “curriculum vitae” — course of life. It is also known as a résumé and is a document containing a summary of relevant experience and education. Its purpose is to obtain an interview for you by convincing the interviewer that your experience and skills would make you perfect for the job.

There are hundreds of books and millions of web pages giving advice on CV writing, much of it with conflicting information. Here are the general guidelines for writing a professional pharmacy related CV and the pitfalls to avoid.

Length

For summer vacation work limit the length of your CV to one side of A4 paper. This length, or a little longer, should also be adequate when applying for preregistration trainee positions. By the time you apply for your first job as a qualified pharmacist you should have enough experience and skills to fill two sides of A4.

Paper

Use white paper of high quality and ensure you use a matching envelope. Avoid any paper that is fancy, coloured or water-marked — it is just not professional.

Layout

Although it may be tempting to go for an unusual type face or layout this should be avoided. Remember that your CV may need to be faxed several times when received by your prospective employer. Your CV will lose its quality with each transmission so keep it simple and uncluttered. Stick to a professional, scientific font (Arial size 10 is a good choice) and do not use any shading or background markings to emphasise headings. Employers like “thinking space”, this is white space around the text to make notes on. So, as a general rule, leave about an inch of space around the text.

Structure

First, never write “CV” or “curriculum vitae” at the top of the page — the nature of the document is self-evident.

Personal details Start with your name, address, e-mail address and phone numbers (home, work, mobile). Once you have graduated you may include “MPharm” after your name, and “MRPharmS” after qualifying. If you have not told your current employer that you are leaving then do not give your work phone number. Generally, your date of birth should be included, although you can leave it off if you wish. It is up to you whether you wish to declare your marital status.

Employment This is the most important part of your CV. Most employers rate experience over academic performance. Even if you have not got much, or even any, relevant employment yet, list all of the jobs you have had. Working part-time in a bar or at a call centre shows that you have good interpersonal and communication

skills — an essential part of any pharmacist’s job. Employers are looking for someone who is hardworking, reliable and friendly; almost any job could be used to show you have these skills. If you have not got any work experience yet then now is the time to start. Have a look at doing some voluntary work (see www.do-it.org.uk). All kinds of relevant experiences can be gained from this, for just a few hours each week.

Present your employment in reverse chronological order. Make sure all the employment dates match up, and that there are no unexplainable gaps. Highlight your main responsibilities and achievements in your previous jobs, including facts and figures if possible. Do not go into too much detail; this can be discussed further at your interview.

Do remember to be positive; present yourself in a good light and emphasise your capabilities and achievements. State achievements with positive and active words, eg, “achieved”, “gained”, “managed”, “responsible for”. Make sure your strongest achievement is at the top of each employment.

It is this part of the CV which you will need to adapt to meet the specific job requirements. Study the job description carefully, research the company and give specific examples of your work that match each criterion on the job description.

Education As with employment, present this section in reverse chronological order. State your degree, its class and whether it was with honours. State all “A”-level subjects or Highers and grades obtained. GCSEs or SQAs and results can be included if they are relevant to the job.

A poor degree class is not the end of the world — enthusiasm and a glowing reference are valued more by most employers.

IT skills List all IT packages in which you are proficient, including specific pharmacy systems, eg, MS Word, MS Excel, MS PowerPoint, Smartscrip, Mediphase and Eclipse.

Membership of professional bodies Once qualified state that you are a member of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain and your date of registration.

Other information Mention details of any first aid qualifications, prizes or awards, relevant training courses or conferences you have been on and any published papers you have. If you have a clean driving licence state this fact as some jobs may require you to drive. It is also worth mentioning if you are fluent in any other languages.

Interests Do not make up any hobbies just to impress. It could get embarrassing if your interviewer is an expert in the area you claim to be interested in. This section does not need to be more than a few words long as it is the least important area of your CV. Most interviewers just use this information as a conversation topic to put you at ease at the start of the interview. Too many hobbies may work against you — suggesting that you may not have time to work late when needed. Avoid mentioning anything too obscure or controversial either. Also mention in this section any voluntary work or any university clubs or societies you were involved in, particularly if you were a member of a committee. These sorts of things appeal to employers as it demonstrates

organisational skills, responsibility and maturity.

References It is not necessary to include your referees on your CV if you do not wish to. It is acceptable to put “referees available on request”. Most employers require two referees. Once you start working, one of these should be your current employer but, until then, it is acceptable to use your university personal tutor or another lecturer. Make sure your referees are available if requested and they are aware that they are named as your referee so they are ready to say complimentary things about you.

Key points

*Check, recheck, then check again the spelling, punctuation and grammar. Do not rely on the computer spell check. Read it through several times and then get a friend to read it through for you. Even just one spelling mistake may imply you do not have the degree of accuracy required to do the job.

- Never lie. The truth will come out in the interview and you will risk losing the job.
- Be careful with acronyms. Always specify what you mean as many acronyms can have more than one meaning within the world of pharmacy.
- Do not use anything other than MSWord to write your CV. Your CV may need to be e-mailed and the chances are the recipient will not have the same software as you.
- Never use humour in your CV. A potential employer will just assume you are not serious about the job.
- Do not use icons or strange fonts or try to be a designer. Keep it simple.
- Keep a copy of each CV you use for different jobs for reference.

Application forms

Increasingly, many jobs require you to fill out an application form. Looking in *The Pharmaceutical Journal*, approximately 50 per cent of advertisements require a completed application form — most of these are within the NHS. Do not despair, the time taken to complete your CV is not wasted, much of the information can just be transferred. The most important section of the application form is the “supporting statement”. Ensure you exemplify how you meet the criteria set out in the job description.

Covering letter

You should always include a covering letter with your CV. Keep the letter brief and concise, never any longer than one side of A4. Use this to emphasise the skills and experience you have relevant to the particular job and employer, but do not just copy out parts of your CV. Make the cover letter look like a direct and personal response to the job advertisement. Always address it to a named person; if you do not know the particular person, phone the company and find out. Letters addressed to the “pharmacy manager” or “personnel manager” will either get lost within the company or go straight into the bin! Put the date on the letter, include your full contact details and sign each letter personally. ■