

The FM Guru Guide to a Great CV

The CV is the most important tool available to you in looking for work or progressing your career. It should be looked at as your major piece of advertising material and you should constantly work on polishing, refining, adjusting and improving it.

Its purpose is to get you an interview. You will already have done everything you can to identify the right people to put your CV in front of, but once its there it is competing for their attention with hundreds, even thousands, of other applicants or concerns.

That means it has to grab their attention and quickly, simply ensure that you stand out from the competition. That gets you the chance to put your case in person.

It can also be the thing that kills your chances. A poorly prepared CV can give the completely wrong impression about you. Spelling, grammar and presentation must be perfect. Remember the potential employer is busy. Don't irritate them with oversized paper, bulky folders or fancy gimmicks.

Use the covering letter to emphasise the parts of your CV that match the job requirements. Also give broad package expectations here. Aim high. Look professional. Never criticise previous employers or try to make jokes.

There are hundreds of good books and no shortage of opinions on what makes a good CV. Here are my tips based on what I wanted to see during many years of recruiting for hundreds of jobs in the support services industry.

Basic guidelines for a generic CV:

- Keep it to 3 pages maximum. Nobody will wade through more than that. The trick is to show off your best bits but highlights not details.
- Keep everything simple & concise. Easy to navigate.
- Use a clear simple commonly used font like Ariel or Calibri.
- Use white paper, it copies better.
- Avoid jargon or abbreviations.
- Give years not months.
- It's a good idea to set up a footer with your name on. Papers can get separated and it would be awful to lose out because a sheet went astray.
- Write in the 3rd person so that you can say wonderful things about yourself without appearing big headed.

- Start off with a sharp paragraph about how fantastic you are. A bit like your covering letter. The trouble is that people often tear the covering letters off and just look at the CVs. So repeat it. Something like: “An experienced Facilities professional with over 20 years experience of property and support services. A first class communicator and manager with excellent technical skills he can also walk on water and make the blind see. Now looking for a challenging role with a progressive organisation”
- Use strong verbs and superlatives – You are a *first class* manager who *exceeded* targets not a manager who met targets
- Be positive but don't lie. Just like real adverts. Never try to blur dates to hide periods of unemployment. The most basic check will catch you out and then you've blown it.
- Put your contact details on the front page. You don't want them having to search for them
- Most recent & relevant experience should come next. Emphasise the bits that match the role you're applying for. Talk about achievements rather than responsibilities.
- Then slightly less detail on other relevant experience
- Other employment history for completeness of chronology but with minimum detail. Only go back 10 years unless it's particularly relevant to the job.
- End with personal info including languages, education and qualifications but keep it brief. Only the highest qualifications you have (Your MBA not your O levels)
- Check the spelling then check it again.
- Make sure the printed version is crisp, smart & free of coffee stains

Leave out:

- Photographs – You never look good photocopied.
- Salaries – They can always ask
- References – Wait till they ask
- Health details – Wait till they ask
- Disabilities – Wait till they ask
- Reasons for leaving your last job – Wait till they ask
- Poor examination results – Why bother

Having said all of that remember to give them everything they ask for in the advert. If they want five copies then send them five. Make sure you get it in on time.

Keep your generic CV up to date. If you tinker with it to match particular job requirements then don't forget and save that version. The amendments may not suit the next job.

Good luck

Martin Pickard