

Ellie Rich-Poole

Career Development Coach

CV Guide

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CV Guide:

How to write a CV that will get you interviews

Having worked in recruitment for over 20 years I have seen a lot of CVs. The good, the bad and the mind-numbing. There isn't a 'right and wrong' way to write a CV, but I have pulled together these tips, which share some of the better elements I have seen, to give you some suggestions to write the best version of your CV which will stand you a greater chance of getting interviews.

This format is particularly relevant if applying for permanent roles in organisations at professional, leadership or executive level.

1. Structure your CV for maximum impact

I would suggest structuring your CV with the following sections, which in my opinion gives maximum impact for the reader:

- Name
- Personal statement
- Career history
- Qualifications
- Other information
- Location and contact details

Here are my key pointers for each section:

Name

It sounds obvious, but I have heard interesting views from clients on how it comes across when someone uses their title such as Dr (in a non-medical setting) or chooses to list all their qualification letters after their name. You know your industry best, so make an informed decision.

My view for the corporate / commercial world would be to keep it simple and don't appear too "try hard". I know of clients who have rejected candidates at screening stage for putting Dr at the top of their CV (they had a PhD) because they said they wouldn't fit the culture of their organisation if they refer to themselves in that way.

If you are working in a professional services role in the Academic world however, it may be more common to see people using their full titles, and would be respected.

So, I would be going with:

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at the top of mine, rather than:

Ms Eleanor Mary Rich-Poole, BSc Hons (Dunelm), PG Dip (Oxon), PG Dip, PCC.

Your education and qualifications will be included later in the CV

Personal statement

People's views on these vary enormously and some people don't like them or use them. My view is that they are a positive element of your CV because you can briefly summarise your USPs (unique selling points) and your key strengths. It is a good way to set yourself apart. It should answer the question 'who are you and what do you do?' Your elevator pitch works well here, followed by some bullet points of your key specialisms.



TIP: Describe yourself as you would speak in real life.

Imagine you are at a networking event and someone asks what you do – this would be similar. Don't talk about yourself in the third person. Read what you have written out loud and if it makes you cringe, edit it.

Career history

This is the main body of the CV and arguably the most important part. I recommend calling it Career history not Work experience which I sometimes see, which reminds me of doing it at school when I was about 14.



TIP: Start from scratch.

Don't continually edit your existing CV, because it will become like a patchwork quilt with bits bolted on at various times, usually at different levels of quality. Instead, start again from scratch. (Have an old version handy to remind you of dates and information.)

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So how to write it?

First, get the skeleton set up:

1. List the organisations you have worked for chronologically with the most recent at the top, giving start and end dates for each.
2. Give a brief overview of what the organisation does as a strapline underneath.

e.g. One of the world's leading consumer goods companies, making and selling around 400 brands in more than 190 countries.

3. Under each organisation list the roles you have held, with dates, most recent at the top.
4. Give a brief synopsis of the scope of each role as a strapline underneath including reporting line, client group, team size, budget, employee numbers, locations etc.

e.g. Reporting to the CEO, I led the HR function globally with a team of 120 and was accountable for the whole people agenda. As a member of the Executive Leadership Team I partnered the Director population and was a member of the Remuneration Committee.

Then fill in your best achievements for each role:

I repeat **achievements**. Not responsibilities. It should not read like a job description.

These should fill the majority of space on your CV. Achievements should be written in bullet points, in the past tense. List them under the role you achieved them in.

They should be output focused and clearly highlight the benefit to the organisation of what you did, supported by metrics.

e.g. Instead of writing:

- *Successfully designed and launched new company performance management process*

Lead with the benefit to the organisation:

- *Contributed to an increase in sales of 17% by the design and launch of a new company performance management process, ensuring individual goals were linked to business targets.*

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TIP: Know your numbers.

I know of blue-chip clients who have rejected candidates at application stage if their CV lacks metrics. They look at the process focused statements and say “so what?” ... “what value did they add?”. You may be adding value but if you aren’t taking time to review or measure your contribution in terms of its output it is hard to articulate this on your CV or at interview. Check each achievement you have written and see if it answers the “so what?” question: does it clearly articulate the value you have added?



TIP: Distill to your best bits.

It is better to have five excellent achievements per role, than ten, which includes some weaker ones. This way you can give enough space to each to give a strong example. This also helps you prepare for an interview and steer the interviewer to the things you want to talk about. If you were on a project which wasn’t completed for whatever reason, I would leave it off the CV.



TIP: Use Power Verbs

When you have written your achievements, revisit the verbs you use, and ensure they really sell you and your impact. E.g. rather than supported, helped, managed, think bolder and use words like – led, created, outperformed, initiated etc

[This blog](#) shares some more power verbs for inspiration.

Qualifications

Include relevant qualifications only. List your qualifications including institution and grade. You don’t need to include training courses, particularly internal ones, where no qualification or accreditation was gained.

Use your judgement on relevancy and recency e.g. If you have been working for 25 years there is no need to list your GCSE / O Level grades. If you are at the start of your career, and your education and qualifications are more recent, give more focus to them.

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Career Development Coach

Other information.

Things you may wish to include in this section are:

- Voluntary work
- Non-Executive Director or Trustee positions
- Interests
- Languages
- Publications

Some people are more comfortable sharing a bit of their non-work life than others. My view is that it is good to share some interests and personality, which can be a good talking point when you meet people at interview. If you are social secretary for the PTA or a trustee of a charity consider including it. Some people only like to mention "serious" Non-Exec Director roles and have no hobbies. This is your call.

Definitely list any languages you speak, or any super earlier career achievements like Olympic Medals, Oscars or similar.

Location

Even if you are flexible to relocate, travel or stay away, always include a home location rather than leaving it off. Some companies or recruitment consultancies use Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS) with a screen / parse feature and if you leave this blank you run the risk of being overlooked because the field will be empty and you won't come up in *any* searches.

You shouldn't include your full home address, but it is important to give an area for example Ealing, London, W13.

Contact details

Use a professional email address. Now is not the time to be dirtydave@gmail.com.

Include your mobile number.

Include the URL to your LinkedIn Profile (make sure this is looking super too – download my free LinkedIn Guide from the resources page of my website.)

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2. Style

So that is the structure and main content sorted. Now go back and read it again and sense check the following:



TIP: Write for your audience

Consider who is most likely to be reading your CV and what is important to them. Write it with them in mind. If you choose to tailor your CV for a specific role, ensure you select achievements that showcase what they are looking for. Align your language to that used in the advert.



TIP: Make it interesting

Even in the most sensible corporate settings interesting things happen. If you worked on a brand that had a memorable campaign or advert, if you went on TV, if you won an award – mention it. Interesting CVs lead to interesting conversations at interview and ultimately help build rapport and make you memorable. As long as you are professional it is OK to inject some life into it.



TIP: Make sure your CV represents YOU

It's important it sets you apart from someone else doing the same job. Although it is a professional document you can still get some of your personality and style across in it. Instead of using generic adjectives like hard working, accomplished, senior, experienced, think about how your colleagues would describe you and weave in some of these words. If you don't know how they would describe you – ask them.



TIP: Less is more

There is often a debate about whether size matters. I have seen CVs from one page long up to recently an eleven pager (gulp). My view is that when it comes to your CV you should keep it concise. Two to three pages would be my recommendation for an Executive or Leadership level professional with a few years' career experience under their belt. If you are earlier in your career two pages is enough. Keep sentences short and to the point. Don't waffle. Focus on your outputs i.e. the things you have personally delivered in the role that have positively impacted the business, rather than lots of context. The interviewer can probe for further information at interview if they need it.

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TIP: Beware of auto screening

At Executive level this is less of an issue than for higher volume roles, however, just be aware that some companies use automated screening tools. This could simply be to upload your CV to their Applicant Tracking System (ATS), or in some cases your CV may have to meet certain criteria to pass an initial screen. This is becoming more common now with the increasing sophistication of AI.

- o Ensure you use Word format with one clear font.
- o Avoid photos and graphics such as logos.
- o Avoid tables and columns.
- o Ensure you include relevant key words which you can match to the advert text if you are applying online.



TIP: Don'ts

Don't add a title saying 'Curriculum Vitae' / 'CV' / 'Resume' or a line saying 'References available on request'. Both are obvious and you can use those two lines for better things.

Don't use competency speak, buzz words, abbreviations, acronyms or internal company jargon. Make it as easy as possible for the reader. Simple language is often more impactful. Write words in full.



TIP: Get feedback

When you have drafted your CV, ask for feedback from someone who knows you in a professional setting. People often forget some of the best things they have delivered. Also ask someone to proof-read it for you and flag any typos or errors you have missed. If you don't have great attention to detail ask someone who does and make sure font styles and sizes are consistent and it is a professionally produced piece of work that does you justice.

Now go and nail that interview 😊

Ellie

ellie@ellierichpoole.com

For more support: I have a range of [free resources](#) available on my website including a LinkedIn Guide and my [blog](#) which can be filtered by topic

Please connect with me on [LinkedIn](#) and follow my [business page on LinkedIn](#)