

Creating the CV That Works

A CV or resume is fundamentally a personal marketing tool – a tool designed to get you an introduction to your chosen organisation. The reader should be foremost in your mind when constructing the document – convincing the reader that your experience, attributes and ability to achieve will make a strong contribution to their organisation.

There is no right or wrong CV style – there are however, certain key aspects which all resumes should contain. What it must have is impact! This means the words you use should be action-oriented particularly when you describe your achievements and your skill set – created, improved, built, led, negotiated, developed. Avoid ending these words with “...ing” - “I developed ...” has more impact than “I was involved in developing”.

Critical to any document is structure. Although you may take hours preparing your CV, readers of CV's (whether that be recruitment consultants or employers) may take less than a minute to scan what you have prepared to determine whether you will be selected for interview (hopefully they will read it in more detail before the interview). Therefore, to ensure your CV is easy for the reader to scan so they pick up key words, etc, we suggest:

- Set yourself a target as to how long your resume will be and stick to it. In any event, it should be no more than five pages. There are also disadvantages in being too brief – one page may not emphasise your capabilities sufficiently.
- It must be uncluttered, leaving a good amount of “white space” in the document.
- The reader will want to get to the important bits first, - your work history. Therefore, ensure this is early in your resume (if not first). Perhaps the only section you would put in before your career history is a summary of your key skills and achievements (tailored to the role in question) and a sentence defining your career objective (again tailored). This summary should be a maximum of one page.
- Put your personal details and other information such as qualifications, personal development, etc. at the end of the resume.
- Use a bullet point format (such as this) than a narrative format – it has greater impact plus it ensures wording remains succinct.

When it comes to detailing your career history, the first rule is it must be in reverse chronological order – your last employment first, as this will be most relevant to the role you are seeking. The structure of this part of the resume is again important to ensure readability and for key words to stand out. The recommended structure is:

- Indicate last organisation and overall period of employment (it is recommended to include months and years rather than years only)
- A brief summary of the organisation detailing key metrics such as type of business, revenue, locations, employee numbers, etc.
- Detail each role commencing with title and dates in each role. Include a brief statement of responsibilities but put more emphasis on what was actually achieved – quantify those achievements where possible (\$, %, etc.).
- For junior roles earlier in your career, detail only the company, time employed and job titles.
- Detail your reasons for leaving each organisation such as seeking greater career challenge, etc. If you were retrenched from an organisation, put the retrenchment into a broader context to emphasise that you were one of a number of people who were retrenched at that time and the reasons for the retrenchment.

Where you have had long breaks between jobs such as extended overseas holidays, study, etc put these in the work history part of your resume. This will ensure the prospective employer knows you were well occupied during this period (as opposed to being in gaol, perhaps).

In relation to the remaining sections, this should be confined to no more than one page and include:

- Tertiary qualifications, including name of qualification (and majors), institution, year of graduation. Put these in order of importance or relevance. Include your secondary school if you believe the “old school tie” will be a benefit.
- Professional memberships (full description, not abbreviations).
- Professional skills and training – detail relevant courses you have attended including the institution (particularly if they are well known, eg. INSEAD) and when attended. Courses taken in the early part of your career may be less relevant.
- Personal interests: without getting trite, detail “interesting” interests, particularly those that will get you noticed for the right reasons. However, be careful about those more quirky interests – Bob Hawke probably did not put in his resume the fact that he held the record for beer drinking at Oxford University!
- Contact details, particularly mobile and personal email address.
- Referees are a limited resource – they tend to be busy, senior people and therefore should only be contacted when you are the preferred candidate for a role. Therefore avoid putting their details in your original resume, as this information may be misused. If you believe there is a specific benefit in including the names of your referees (such as inferring you have a strong relationship with your former employers

if that could be in doubt), don't put their contact details and emphasise the point that they are not to be contacted until you have authorised the contact.

Sending your resume in response to an advertisement or at someone's request (such as a recruitment consultant who has "tapped you on the shoulder") is now generally done via email. It is therefore important that your formatting does not unravel as soon as it is opened at the other end. If you aren't confident with your word processing skills, it is important to get some professional assistance. Always spell-check your final product.

If you are sending your resume in hard-copy, have it professionally presented – this includes choosing high quality paper (understated, not flowery – you don't want to distract people) and properly bound. Again, if you are not in a position to do this yourself, a professional copy centre will assist.

Once you have prepared your resume, give it to friends or colleagues to gain their feedback on style, presentation and content. Ideally, if you have a relationship with someone in the recruitment industry, gain their feedback.

Finally, your resume must reflect reality – it should contain factual information, particularly on basic items such as job titles and employment dates. In describing your achievements, ensure you give due recognition to other colleagues.

Your resume is now ready to launch onto the market. There are a variety of ways in which you will do that, including responding to advertisement in print media or on the internet. Leaving aside public service applications (which generally require completing a detailed application form) you may wish to consider drafting a concise but impactful application letter. Here are some tips on covering letters:

- Keep them brief – no more than half a page.
- Use a bullet point format – it has more impact.
- Use the same or similar words to that used in the advertisement in describing your skills.
- Do not rehash your resume summary – it doesn't add value.

If you are emailing your resume in response to an advertisement, the covering letter should be in the body of the email, not as an additional attachment.

How to Impress at Interview

The interview is the cornerstone of the executive selection process. Over the years, additional selection methodologies have been included such as psychometric testing, assessment centres, presentations, even informal lunches or dinners. In the end, the interview is still seen as the core interaction for selection for many companies. Therefore it is critical to achieve the right impression throughout the entire selection process.

In the earlier part of our careers, interviews were always perceived as being daunting, intimidating, even scary. As a senior manager or executive, the interview is now more of a business meeting, as the participants focus on determining how a future business relationship could be built. That being the case, it is like any business meeting and preparation is the key!

The initial impressions we create in any business environment are crucial in how we build future relationships. Therefore these basics are as critical for the interview process as it is in any other business context. They include:

- Show courtesy – arrive on time and know who you will be meeting.
- Dress conservatively, yet professionally – the dark business suit is seen as the best combination.
- Engage the interviewer and build that initial rapport with positive greetings, good handshakes, and personality – people like to work with people they like (generally).
- Conduct a conversation, not a monologue – maintain eye contact, ask questions, listen, give properly detailed answers.
- Be aware of your body language – posture, energy, enthusiasm (the interviewer is looking to see how you will look in front of clients, suppliers, other senior executives).
- Be truthful, don't exaggerate, give other people credit where appropriate.
- Show confidence, be relaxed, talk clearly.

It is important to remember that during an interview the interviewer is looking for reasons to hire you. This can be contrasted to when they reviewed the resumes and they were looking to screen people out. Therefore try to avoid areas of “controversy”:

- Sex, religion and politics.
- Salary and other benefits (particularly at the first meeting).

Attending an interview is just like any other business meeting where you are pitching for business – it is all about selling your credentials to this prospective employer, ideally to the point where the “buyer” becomes very flexible about

the “price” they are willing to pay. To be successful in such a business pitch you need to:

- Plan:
 - Do your research about the company – understand their business issues and relevant history.
 - Ensure you are up-to-date with the latest management thinking in your area of expertise, whether that be functional, industry, product.
 - Identify what questions you will ask of them (remember you are interviewing them as much as they are interviewing you). Anything from why is the position available, to future business direction, to what is the company culture.
 - Refresh your memory on your resume, and key information about your current and recent employers.
- Practise:
 - Answering the generic questions you will likely be asked – anything from why you wish to leave your current company (put a positive spin on this – never deride past employers) to what sort of team player are you?
 - Answering the behavioural questions you will likely be asked – think of specific examples that demonstrate key competencies.
 - Your initial elevator-pitch which you can use at either the beginning or the end.
 - Be able to show clarity in your thinking by responding quickly and articulately to questions.
- Close:
 - Ask about the next steps in the selection process.
 - Look for “buying signals” from the interviewer.
 - If you are meeting with the recruitment consultant, gain their feedback on your interviewing style and their thoughts on how relevant your background is to the role in question. Ask them if they will be referring you as part of the shortlist.

Finally, once the interview is over and you are back at your desk, send a thank you note to the person who interviewed you. If the meeting you had was arranged by a recruitment consultant, contact them after the interview and give them feedback on how it went and what your views are about the opportunity. Always try to get feedback on your interview style so you can improve on it on the next occasion.

Good luck!