



WRITING A GREAT CV

THE NUMBER ONE PURPOSE OF A CV

The CV is a tool with one specific purpose: to win an interview. A CV is an advertisement, nothing more, nothing less.

A great CV doesn't just tell them what you have done but makes the same assertion that all good ads do: If you buy this product, you will get these specific, direct benefits. It presents you in the best light. It convinces the employer that you have what it takes to be successful in this new position or career.

It is so pleasing to the eye that the reader is enticed to pick it up and read it. It "whets the appetite," stimulates interest in meeting you and learning more about you. It inspires the prospective employer to pick up the phone and ask you to come in for an interview.

REASONS TO HAVE A CV

- To pass the employer's screening process (requisite educational level, number years' experience, etc.), to give basic facts which might favourably influence the employer
- To provide contact information: an up-to-date address and a telephone number (a telephone number which will always be answered during business hours).
- To establish you as a professional person with high standards and excellent writing skills, based on the fact that the CV is so well done (clear, well-organised, well-written, well-designed, of the highest professional grades of printing and paper). For persons in the art, advertising, marketing, or writing professions, the CV can serve as a sample of their skills.
- To have something to give to potential employers, your job-hunting contacts and professional references, to provide background information, to give out in "informational interviews" with the request for a critique (a concrete creative way to cultivate the support of this new person), to send a contact as an excuse for follow-up contact, and to keep in your briefcase to give to people you meet casually - as another form of "business card."
- To use as a covering piece or addendum to another form of job application, as part of a grant or contract proposal, as an accompaniment to graduate school or other application.
- To put in an employer's personnel files.
- To help you clarify your direction, qualifications, and strengths, boost your confidence, or to start the process of committing to a job or career change.

WHAT IT ISN'T

It is a mistake to think of your CV as a history of your past, as a personal statement or as some sort of self-expression. Sure, most of the content of any CV is focused on your job history. But write from the intention to create interest, to persuade the employer to call you. If you write with that goal, your final product will be very different than if you write to inform or catalogue your job history.

Most people write a CV because everyone knows that you have to have one to get a job. They write their CV grudgingly, to fulfil this obligation. Writing the CV is only slightly above filling out income tax forms in the hierarchy of worldly delights. If you realise that a great CV can be your ticket to getting exactly the job you want, you may be able to muster some genuine enthusiasm for creating a real masterpiece, rather than the feeble products most people turn out.



HOW TO KNOCK THEIR SOCKS OFF

Research shows that only one interview is granted for every 200 CV's received by the average employer. Research also tells us that your CV will be quickly scanned, rather than read. Ten to 20 seconds is all the time you have to persuade a prospective employer to read further. What this means is that the decision to interview a candidate is usually based on an overall first impression of the CV, a quick screening that so impresses the reader and convinces them of the candidate's qualifications that an interview results. As a result, the top half of the first page of your CV will either make you or break you. By the time they have read the first few lines, you have either caught their interest, or your CV has failed. That is why your CV is an advert. You hope it will have the same result as a well-written ad: to get the reader to respond.

To write an effective CV, you have to learn how to write powerful but subtle advertising copy. Not only that, but you must sell a product in which you have a large personal investment: you. What's worse, given the fact that most of us do not think in a marketing-oriented way naturally, you are probably not looking forward to selling anything, let alone yourself. But if you want to increase your job hunting effectiveness as much as possible, you would be wise to learn to write a spectacular CV.

You do not need to hard sell or make any claims that are not absolutely true. You do need to get over your modesty and unwillingness to toot your own horn. People more often buy the best advertised product than the best product. That is good news if you are willing to learn to create an excellent CV. With a little extra effort, you will usually get a better response from prospective employers than people with better credentials.

FOCUS ON THE EMPLOYER'S NEEDS, NOT YOURS

Imagine that you are the person doing the hiring. This person is not some anonymous paper pusher deep in the bowels of the personnel department. Usually, the person who makes the hiring decision is also the person who is responsible for the bottom line productivity of the project or group you hope to join. This is a person who cares deeply how well the job will be done. You need to write your CV to appeal directly to them.

Ask yourself: What would make someone the perfect candidate? What does the employer really want? What special abilities would this person have? What would set a truly exceptional candidate apart from a merely good one?

If you are seeking a job in a field you know well, you probably already know what would make someone a superior candidate. If you are not sure, you can gather hints from the help-wanted ad you are answering, from asking other people who work in the same company or the same field. You could even call the prospective employer and ask them what they want. Don't make wild guesses unless you have to. It is very important to do this step well. If you are not addressing their real needs, they will not respond to your CV.

PLAN FIRST

Focus your writing efforts. Get clear what the employer is looking for and what you have to offer before you begin your CV. Write your answers to the above mentioned question, "What would make someone the perfect candidate?" on notebook paper, one answer per page. Prioritise the sheets of paper, based on which qualities or abilities you think would be most important to the person doing the hiring. Then, starting with the top priority page, fill the rest of that page, or as much of it as you can, with brainstorming about why you are the person who best fulfils the employer's needs. Write down everything you have ever done that demonstrates that you fit perfectly with what is wanted and needed by the prospective employer.

The whole idea is to loosen up your thinking enough so that you will be able to see some new connections between what you have done and what the employer is looking for. You need not confine yourself to work-related accomplishments. Use your entire life as the palette to paint with. If Sunday school or your former gang are the only places you have had a chance to demonstrate your special gift for teaching and leadership, fine. The point is to cover all possible ways of thinking about and communicating what you do well. What are the talents you bring to the market place? What do you have to offer the prospective employer?

If you are making a career change or are a young person and new to the job market, you are going to have to be especially creative in getting across what makes you stand out. These brainstorming pages will be the raw material from which you craft your CV. One important part of the planning process is to decide which CV format fits your needs best. Don't automatically assume that a traditional format will work best for you. More about that later.



A GREAT CV HAS TWO SECTIONS

In the first, you make assertions about your abilities, qualities and achievements. You write powerful, but honest, advertising copy that makes the reader immediately perk up and realise that you are someone special.

The second section, the evidence section, is where you back up your assertions with evidence that you actually did what you said you did. This is where you list and describe the jobs you have held, your education, etc. This is all the stuff you are obliged to include.

Most CVs are just the evidence section, with no assertions. If you have trouble getting to sleep, just read a few CVs each night before going to bed. Nothing puts people to sleep better than the average CV.

The juice is in the assertions section. When a prospective employer finishes reading your CV, you want them to immediately reach for the phone to invite you in to interview. The CV's you have written in the past have probably been a gallant effort to inform the reader. You don't want them informed. You want them interested and excited.

In fact, it is best to only hint at some things. Leave the reader wanting more. Leave them with a bit of mystery. That way, they have even more reason to reach for the phone. The assertions section usually has two or three sections. In all of them, your job is to communicate, assert and declare that you are the best possible candidate for the job and that you are hotter than a picnic on Mercury.

You start by naming your intended job. This may be in a separate Objective section, or may be folded into the second section, the Summary. If you are making a change to a new field, or are a young person not fully established in a career, start with a separate Objective section.

THE OBJECTIVE

Ideally, your CV should be pointed toward conveying why you are the perfect candidate for one specific job or job title. Good advertising is directed toward a very specific target audience.

When a car company is trying to sell their inexpensive compact to an older audience, they show grandpa and grandma stuffing the car with happy, shiny grandchildren and talk about how safe and economical the car is. When they advertise the exact same car to the youth market, they show it going around corners on two wheels, with plenty of drums and power chords thundering in the background. You want to focus your CV just as specifically.

Targeting your CV requires that you be absolutely clear about your career direction - or at least that you appear to be clear. If you aren't clear where you are going, you wind up wherever the winds of chance blow you. You would be wise to use this time of change to design your future career so you have a clear target that will meet your goals and be personally fulfilling. Even if you are a little vague about what you are looking for, you cannot let your uncertainty show. With a non-existent, vague or overly broad objective, the first statement you make to a prospective employer says you are not sure this is the job for you.

The way to demonstrate your clarity of direction or apparent clarity is to have the first major topic of your CV be your OBJECTIVE.

Examples. Suppose the owner of a small software company puts an ad in the paper seeking an experienced software sales person. A week later they have received 500 CVs. The applicants have a bewildering variety of backgrounds. The employer has no way of knowing whether any of them are really interested in selling software.

They remember all the jobs they applied for that they didn't really want. They know that many of the CVs they received are from people who are just using a shotgun approach, casting their seed to the winds. Then they come across a CV in the pile that starts with the following:

OBJECTIVE - a software sales position in an organisation seeking an extraordinary record of generating new accounts, exceeding sales targets and enthusiastic customer relations.

This wakes them up. They are immediately interested. This first sentence conveys some very important and powerful messages: "I want exactly the job you are offering. I am a superior candidate because I recognise the qualities that are most important to you, and I have them. I want to make a contribution to your company." This works well because the employer is smart enough to know that someone who wants to do exactly what they are



offering will be much more likely to succeed than someone who doesn't. And that person will probably be a lot more pleasant to work with as well.

Secondly, this candidate has done a good job of establishing why they are the perfect candidate in their first sentence. They have thought about what qualities would make a candidate stand out. They have started communicating that they are that person immediately. What's more, they are communicating from the point of view of making a contribution to the employer.

They are not writing from a self-centred point of view. Even when people are savvy enough to have an objective, they often make the mistake of saying something like, "a position where I can hone my skill as a scissors sharpener." or something similar. The employer is interested in hiring you for what you can do for them, not for fulfilling your private goals and agenda.

Here's how to write your objective. First of all, decide on a specific job title for your objective. Go back to your list of answers to the question "How can I demonstrate that I am the perfect candidate?" What are the two or three qualities, abilities or achievements that would make a candidate stand out as truly exceptional for that specific job?

The person in the above example recognised that the prospective employer, being a small, growing software company, would be very interested in candidates with an ability to generate new accounts. So they made that the very first point they got across in their CV.

Be sure the objective is to the point. Do not use fluffy phrases that are obvious or do not mean anything, such as: "allowing the ability to enhance potential and utilise experience in new challenges." An objective may be broad and still somewhat undefined in some cases, such as: "a mid-level management position in the hospitality or entertainment industry."

Remember, your CV will only get a few seconds attention, at best! You have to generate interest right away, in the first sentence they lay their eyes on. Having an objective statement that really sizzles is highly effective. And it's simple to do. One format is:

OBJECTIVE: A(n) xxx position in an organisation where yyy and zzz would be needed (or, in an organisation seeking yyy and zzz).

xxx is the name of the position you are applying for. yyy and zzz are the most compelling qualities, abilities or achievements that will really make you stand out above the crowd of applicants. Your previous research to find out what is most important to the employer will provide the information to fill in yyy and zzz.

If you are applying for several different positions, you should adapt your CV to each one. There is nothing wrong with having several different CVs, each with a different objective, each specifically crafted for a different type of position. You may even want to change some parts of your CV for each job you apply for. Have an objective that is perfectly matched with the job you are applying for. Remember, you are writing advertising copy, not your life story.

It is sometimes appropriate to include your Objective in your Summary section rather than have a separate Objective section. (Examples to follow.) The point of using an Objective is to create a specific psychological response in the mind of the reader.

If you are making a career change or have a limited work history, you want the employer to immediately focus on where you are going, rather than where you have been. If you are looking for another job in your present field, it is more important to stress your qualities, achievements and abilities first.

A few examples of separate Objective sections:

- Senior manager of marketing in an organisation where a strong track record of expanding market share and internet savvy is needed.
- Senior staff position with a bank that offers the opportunity to use my expertise in commercial real estate lending and strategic management.
- An entry-level position in the hospitality industry where a background in advertising and public relations would be needed.



- A position teaching English as a second language where a special ability to motivate and communicate effectively with students would be needed.
- Divemaster in an organisation where an extensive knowledge of sea life and a record of leaving customers feeling they have had a once-in-a-lifetime experience is needed.

THE SUMMARY

The "Summary" or "Summary of Qualifications" consists of several concise statements that focus the reader's attention on the most important qualities, achievements and abilities you have to offer. Those qualities should be the most compelling demonstrations of why they should hire you instead of the other candidates. It gives you a brief opportunity to telegraph a few of your most sterling qualities. It is your one and only chance to attract and hold their attention, to get across what is most important, and to entice the employer to keep reading.

This is the spiciest part of the CV. This may be the only section fully read by the employer, so it should be very strong and convincing. The Summary is the one place to include professional characteristics (extremely energetic, a gift for solving complex problems in a fast-paced environment, a natural salesman, exceptional interpersonal skills, committed to excellence, etc.) which may be helpful in winning the interview. Gear every word in the Summary to your targeted goal.

How to write a Summary? Go back to your lists that answer the question, What would make someone the ideal candidate? Look for the qualities the employer will care about most. Then look at what you wrote about why you are the perfect person to fill their need. Pick the stuff that best demonstrates why they should hire you. Assemble it into your Summary section.

The most common ingredients of a well-written Summary are as follows. Of course, you would not use all these ingredients in one Summary. Use the ones that highlight you best.

- A short phrase describing your profession
- Followed by a statement of broad or specialized expertise
- Followed by two or three additional statements related to any of the following:
- breadth or depth of skills
- unique mix of skills
- range of environments in which you have experience
- a special or well-documented accomplishment
- a history of awards, promotions, or superior performance commendations
- One or more professional or appropriate personal characteristics
- A sentence describing professional objective or interest.

Notice that the examples below show how to include your objective in the Summary section. If you are making a career change, your Summary section should show how what you have done in the past prepares you to do what you seek to do in the future. If you are a young person new to the job market, your Summary will be based more on ability than experience.

A few examples of Summary sections:

- Highly motivated, creative and versatile real estate executive with seven years of experience in property acquisition, development and construction, as well as the management of large apartment complexes. Especially skilled at building effective, productive working relationships with clients and staff. Excellent management, negotiation and public relations skills. Seeking a challenging management position in the real estate field that offers extensive contact with the public.
- Over 10 years as an organisational catalyst/training design consultant with a track record of producing extraordinary results for more than 20 national and community based organisations. A commitment to human development and community service. Energetic self-starter with excellent analytical, organisational, and creative skills.
- Financial Management Executive with nearly ten years of experience in banking and international trade, finance, investments and economic policy. Innovative in structuring credit enhancement for corporate and municipal financing. Skilled negotiator with strong management, sales and marketing background. Areas of expertise include (a bulleted list would follow this paragraph.)



- Health Care Professional experienced in management, program development and policy making as well as in several developing countries. Expertise in emergency medical services. A talent for analysing problems, developing and simplifying procedures, and finding innovative solutions. Proven ability to motivate and work effectively with persons from other cultures and all walks of life. Skilled in working within a foreign environment with limited resources.
- Performing artist with a rich baritone voice and unusual range, specialising in classical, spiritual, gospel and rap music. Featured soloist for two nationally televised events. Accomplished pianist. Extensive performance experience includes television, concert tours and club acts. Available for commercial recording and live performances.

SKILLS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

In this final part of the assertions section of your CV, you go into more detail. You are still writing to sell yourself to the reader, not to inform them. Basically, you do exactly what you did in the previous section, except that you go into more detail.

In the summary, you focused on your most special highlights. Now you tell the rest of the best of your story. Let them know what results you produced, what happened as a result of your efforts, what you are especially gifted or experienced at doing. Flesh out the most important highlights in your summary.

You are still writing to do what every good advertisement does, communicating the following: if you buy this product, you will get these direct benefits. If it doesn't contribute to furthering this communication, don't bother to say it. Remember, not too much detail. Preserve a bit of mystery. Don't tell them everything.

Sometimes the "Skills and Accomplishments" sections is a separate section. In a chronological CV, it becomes the first few phrases of the descriptions of the various jobs you have held. We will cover that in a few minutes, when we discuss the different types of CVs. When it is a separate section, it can have several possible titles, depending on your situation:

- SKILLS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS
- ACCOMPLISHMENTS
- SUMMARY OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS
- SELECTED ACCOMPLISHMENTS
- RECENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS
- AREAS OF ACCOMPLISHMENT AND EXPERIENCE
- AREAS OF EXPERTISE
- CAREER HIGHLIGHTS
- PROFESSIONAL HIGHLIGHTS
- ADDITIONAL SKILLS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

There are a number of different ways to structure "Skills and Accomplishments" sections. In all of these styles, put your skills and accomplishments in order of importance for the desired career goal. If you have many skills, the last skill paragraph might be called "Additional Skills."

BASIC CV FORMATS

There are three basic types of CVs: Chronological, Functional, and "combined" Chronological - Functional.

CHRONOLOGICAL

The chronological CV is the more traditional structure for a CV. The Experience section is the focus of the CV; each job (or the last several jobs) is described in some detail, and there is no major section of skills or accomplishments at the beginning of the CV. This structure is primarily used when you are staying in the same profession, in the same type of work, particularly in very conservative fields. It is also used in certain fields such as law and academia. It is recommended that the chronological CV always have an Objective or Summary, to focus the reader.

The advantages: May appeal to older, more traditional readers and be best in very conservative fields. Makes it



easier to understand what you did in what job. May help the name of the employer stand out more, if this is impressive. The disadvantage is that it is much more difficult to highlight what you do best. This format is rarely appropriate for someone making a career change.

FUNCTIONAL

The functional CV highlights your major skills and accomplishments from the very beginning. It helps the reader see clearly what you can do for them, rather than having to read through the job descriptions to find out. It helps target the CV into a new direction or field, by lifting up from all past jobs the key skills and qualifications to help prove you will be successful in this new direction or field. Actual company names and positions are in a subordinate position, with no description under each. There are many different types of formats for functional CVs. The functional CV is a must for career changers, but is very appropriate for generalists, for those with spotty or divergent careers, for those with a wide range of skills in their given profession, for students, for military officers, for homemakers returning to the job market, and for those who want to make slight shifts in their career direction.

Advantages: It will help you most in reaching for a new goal or direction. It is a very effective type of CV, and is highly recommended. The disadvantage is that it is hard for the employer to know exactly what you did in which job, which may be a problem for some conservative interviewers.

COMBINED

A combined CV includes elements of both the chronological and functional formats. It may be a shorter chronology of job descriptions preceded by a short "Skills and Accomplishments" section (or with a longer Summary including a skills list or a list of "qualifications"); or, it may be a standard functional CV with the accomplishments under headings of different jobs held.

There are obvious advantages to this combined approach: It maximises the advantages of both kinds of CVs, avoiding potential negative effects of either type. One disadvantage is that it tends to be a longer CV. Another is that it can be repetitious: Accomplishments and skills may have to be repeated in both the "functional" section and the "chronological" job descriptions.

THE EVIDENCE SECTION

HOW TO PRESENT YOUR WORK HISTORY, EDUCATION, ETC.

Most CV's are not much more than a collection of "evidence," various facts about your past. By evidence, we mean all the mandatory information you must include on your CV: work history with descriptions, dates, education, affiliations, list of software mastered, etc. If you put this toward the top of your CV, anyone reading it will feel like they are reading an income tax form. Let's face it, this stuff is boring no matter how extraordinary you are. All this evidence is best placed in the second half of the CV. Put the hot stuff in the beginning, and all this less exciting information afterward.

Divide the CV into a "hot" assertions section, and a more staid "evidence" section for the sake of communicating that a great CV is not information but advertising. A great CV is all one big assertions section. In other words, every single word, even the basic facts about your history, are crafted to have the desired effect, to get them to pick up the phone and call you. The decisions you make on what information to emphasise and what to de-emphasise should be based on considering every word of your CV to be an important part of the assertions section. The evidence includes some or all of the following:

EXPERIENCE

List jobs in reverse chronological order. Don't go into detail on the jobs early in your career; focus on the most recent and/or relevant jobs. (Summarise a number of the earliest jobs in one line or very short paragraph, or list only the bare facts with no position description.) Decide which is, overall, more impressive - your job titles or the names of the firms you worked for - then consistently begin with the more impressive of the two, perhaps using boldface type.

You may want to describe the firm in a phrase in parentheses if this will impress the reader. Put dates in italics at the end of the job, to de-emphasise them; don't include months, unless the job was held less than a year. Other headings: "Professional History," "Professional Experience"--not "Employment" or "Work History," both of which sound more lower-level.



EDUCATION

List education in reverse chronological order, degrees or diplomas first, followed by certificates and advanced training. Set degrees apart so they are easily seen. Put in boldface whatever will be most impressive. Don't include any details about high school except your major and distinctions or awards you have won.

Do include advanced training, but be selective with the information, summarising the information and including only what will be impressive for the reader.

AWARDS

If the only awards received were in school, put these under the Education section. Mention what the award was for if you can (or just "for outstanding accomplishment" or "outstanding performance"). This section is almost a must, if you have received awards. If you have received commendations or praise from some very senior source, you could call this section, "Awards and Commendations." In that case, go ahead and quote the source.

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

Include only those that are current, relevant and impressive. Include leadership roles if appropriate. This is a good section for communicating your status as a member of a minority targeted for special consideration by employers, or for showing your membership in an association that would enhance your appeal as a prospective employee. This section can be combined with "Civic / Community Leadership" as "Professional and Community Memberships."

CIVIC / COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

This is good to include if the leadership roles or accomplishments are related to the job target and can show skills acquired, for example, a loan officer hoping to become a financial investment counsellor who was Financial Manager of a community organisation charged with investing its funds. Any Board of Directors membership or "chairmanship" would be good to include. Be careful with political affiliations, as they could be a plus or minus with an employer or company.

PUBLICATIONS

Include only if published. Summarise if there are many.

COMMENTS FROM SUPERVISORS

Include only if very exceptional. Heavily edit for key phrases.

PERSONAL INTERESTS

Advantages: Personal interests can indicate a skill or area or knowledge that is related to the goal, such as photography for someone in public relations, or carpentry and wood-working for someone in construction management. This section can show well-roundedness, good physical health, or knowledge of a subject related to the goal. It can also create common ground or spark conversation in an interview.

Disadvantages: Personal interests are usually irrelevant to the job goal and purpose of the CV, and they may be meaningless or an interview turn-off ("TV and Reading," "Fund raising for the Hell's Angels").

You probably should not include a personal interests section. Your reason for including it is most likely that you want to tell them about you. But, as you know, this is an ad. If this section would powerfully move the employer to understand why you would be the best candidate, include it; otherwise, forget about it. May also be called "Interests and Hobbies," or just "Interests."



REFERENCES

You may put "References available upon request" at the end of your CV, if you wish. This is a standard close (centred at bottom in italics), but is not necessary: It is usually assumed. Do not include actual names of references. You can bring a separate sheet of references to the interview, to be given to the employer upon request.

A FEW GUIDELINES FOR A BETTER PRESENTATION

The CV is visually enticing, a work of art. Simple clean structure. Very easy to read. Symmetrical. Balanced. Uncrowded. As much white space between sections of writing as possible; sections of writing that are no longer than six lines, and shorter if possible.

There is uniformity and consistency in the use of italics, capital letters, bullets, boldface, and underlining. Absolute parallelism in design decisions. For example, if a period is at the end of one job's dates, a period should be at the end of all jobs' dates; if one degree is in boldface, all degrees should be in boldface.

As mentioned above, the CV's first impression is most important. It should be exceptionally visually appealing, to be inviting to the reader. Remember to think of the CV as an advertisement.

There are absolutely no errors. No typographical errors. No spelling errors. No grammar, syntax, or punctuation errors. No errors of fact.

All the basic, expected information is included. A CV must have the following key information: your name, address, phone number, and your email address at the top of the first page, a listing of jobs held, in reverse chronological order, educational degrees including the highest degree received, in reverse chronological order. Additional, targeted information will of course accompany this. Much of the information people commonly put on a CV can be omitted, but these basics are mandatory.

Jobs listed include a title, the name of the firm, the location of the firm, and the years. Jobs earlier in a career can be summarised, or omitted if prior to the highest degree, and extra part-time jobs can be omitted. If no educational degrees have been completed, it is still expected to include some mention of education (professional study or training, partial study toward a degree, etc.) acquired after high school.

It is targeted. A CV should be targeted to your goal, to the ideal next step in your career. First you should get clear what your job goal is, what the ideal position or positions would be. Then you should figure out what key skills, areas of expertise or body of experience the employer will be looking for in the candidate. Gear the CV structure and content around this target, proving these key qualifications. If you have no clear goal, take the skills (or knowledge) you most enjoy or would like to use or develop in your next career step and build the CV around those.

Strengths are highlighted / weaknesses de-emphasised. Focus on whatever is strongest and most impressive. Make careful and strategic choices as to how to organise, order, and convey your skills and background. Consider: whether to include the information at all, placement in overall structure of the CV, location on the page itself or within a section, ordering of information, more impressive ways of phrasing the information, use of design elements (such as boldface to highlight, italics to minimise, ample surrounding space to draw the eye to certain things).

It has focus. A CV needs an initial focus to help the reader understand immediately. Don't make the reader go through the whole CV to figure out what your profession is and what you can do. Think of the CV as an essay with a title and a summative opening sentence. An initial focus may be as simple as the name of your profession ("Commercial Real Estate Agent," "CV Writer") centered under the name and address; it may be in the form of an Objective; it may be in the form of a Summary Statement or, better, a Summary Statement beginning with a phrase identifying your profession.

Use power words. For every skill, accomplishment, or job described, use the most active impressive verb you can think of (which is also accurate). Begin the sentence with this verb, except when you must vary the sentence structure to avoid repetitious writing.

Show you are results-oriented. Wherever possible, prove that you have the desired qualifications through clear strong statement of accomplishments, rather than a statement of potentials, talents, or responsibilities. Indicate



results of work done, and quantify these accomplishment whenever appropriate. For example: "Initiated and directed complete automation of the Personnel Department, resulting in time-cost savings of over 25%." Additionally, preface skill and experience statements with the adjectives "proven" and "demonstrated" to create this results-orientation.

Writing is concise and to the point. Keep sentences as short and direct as possible. Eliminate any extraneous information and any repetitions. Don't use three examples when one will suffice. Say what you want to say in the most direct way possible, rather than trying to impress with bigger words or more complex sentences. For example: "co-ordinated eight city-wide fund-raising events, raising 250% more than expected goal" rather than "was involved in the co-ordination of six fund-raising dinners and two fund-raising walkathons which attracted participants throughout Auckland and were so extremely successful that they raised \$5,000 (well beyond the \$2,000 goal)."

Vary long sentences (if these are really necessary) with short punchy sentences. Use phrases rather than full sentences when phrases are possible, and start sentences with verbs, eliminating pronouns ("I", "he" or "she"). Vary words: Don't repeat a "power" verb or adjective in the same paragraph. Use commas to clarify meaning and make reading easier. Remain consistent in writing decisions such as use of abbreviations and capitalisation's.

Make it look great. Use a laser printer or an ink jet printer that produces high-quality results. A laser is best because the ink won't run if it gets wet. It should look typeset. Do not compromise. If you do, your CV will look pathetic next to ones that have a perfect appearance. Use a standard conservative typeface (font) in 11 or 12 point. Don't make them squint to read it. Use off-white, ivory or bright white 8 1/2 x 11-inch paper, in the highest quality affordable. Use absolutely clean paper without smudges, without staples and with a generous border. Don't have your CV look like you squeezed too much on the page.

Shorter is usually better. Everyone freely gives advice on CV length. Most of these self-declared experts say a CV should always be one page. That makes no more sense than it does to say an ad or a poem should automatically be one page. Your CV can be 500 pages long if you can keep the reader's undivided attention and interest that long, and at the same time create a psychological excitement that leads prospective employers to pick up the phone and call you when they finish your weighty tome. Don't blindly follow rules! Do what works. Sometimes it is appropriate to have a three pager. But unless your life has been filled with a wide assortment of extraordinary achievements, make it shorter. One page is best if you can cram it all into one page. It could be said that, the larger your accomplishments, the easier to communicate them in few words. Look to others in your profession to see if there is an established agreement about CV length in your field. The only useful rule is to not write one more word than you need to get them to pick up the phone and call you. Don't bore them with the details. Leave them wanting more. Remember, this is an ad to market you, not your life history.

Length of consulting CVs. In a consulting CV, you are expected to shovel it as deep as you possibly can. If you are selling your own consulting services, make it sizzle, just like any other CV, but include a little more detail, such as a list of well-known clients, powerful quotes from former clients about how fantastic you are, etc. If you are seeking a job with a consulting firm that will be packaging you along with others as part of a proposal, get out your biggest shovel and go to town. Include everything except the name of your goldfish: A full list of publications, skills, assignments, other experience, and every bit of educational crapola that you can manage to make sound related to your work. The philosophy here is: more is better.

Watch your verb tense. Use either the first person ("I") or the third person ("he," "she") point of view, but use whichever you choose consistently. Verb tenses are based on accurate reporting: If the accomplishment is completed, it should be past tense. If the task is still underway, it should be present tense. If the skill has been used in the past and will continue to be used, use present tense ("conduct presentations on member recruitment to professional and trade associations"). A way of "smoothing out" transitions is to use the past continuous ("have conducted more than 20 presentations...").

Break it up. A good rule is to have no more than six lines of writing in any one writing "block" or paragraph (summary, skill section, accomplishment statement, job description, etc.). If any more than this is necessary, start a new section or a new paragraph.

Experience before education...usually. Experience sections should come first, before education, in most every case. This is because you have more qualifications developed from your experience than from your education. The exceptions would be 1) if you have just received or are completing a degree in a new professional field, if this new degree study proves stronger qualifications than does your work experience, 2) if you are a lawyer, with the peculiar professional tradition of listing your law degrees first, 3) if you are an undergraduate student, or 4) if you



have just completed a particularly impressive degree from a particularly impressive school, even if you are staying in the same field, for example, an MBA.

Telephone number that will be answered. Be sure the phone number on the CV will, without exception, be answered by a person or an answering machine Monday through Friday 8-5pm. You do not want to lose the prize interview merely because there was no answer to your phone, and the caller gave up. Include the area code of the telephone number. If you don't have an answering machine, get one. Include e-mail and fax numbers, if you have them.

A FEW MORE TIPS

Try not to include anything on the CV that could turn the employer off, anything that is controversial (political, etc.) or could be taken in a negative light.

Put the most important information on the first line of a writing "block" or paragraph. The first line is read the most.

Use bold caps for your name on page one. Put your name at the top of page two on a two-page CV. Put section headings, skill headings, titles or companies (if impressive), degrees, and school name (if impressive), in boldface.

Spell out numbers under and including ten; use the numerical form for numbers over and including 11 (as a general rule), unless they are the first words in a sentence. Spell out abbreviations unless they are unquestionably obvious.

If you are not sure what sort of job you are looking for, you will most likely wind up in something that turns out to be just a "job." In a "job" you exchange your life for money. It is possible to choose a career that will fit you so well that you do it because you like to go to work.

WHAT NOT TO PUT ON A CV

- The words "Curriculum Vitae" at the top of the CV
- Fluffy rambling "objective" statements
- Salary information
- Full addresses of former employers
- Reasons for leaving jobs
- A "Personal" section, or personal statistics (except in special cases)
- Names of supervisors
- References

ACCURACY/ HONESTY/STRETCHING THE TRUTH

Make sure that you can back up what you say. Keep the claims you make within the range of your own integrity. There is nothing wrong with pumping things up in your CV so you communicate who you are and what you can do at your very best. Did you ever see an ad that didn't pump up the features they hope will convince you to buy? In fact, you are being foolish if you seek to convey a careful, balanced portrayal of yourself. You want to knock their socks off!