

# CV template for school-leavers and graduate jobseekers

Writing a CV for your first job can be tricky - read our handy guide to help kickstart your job applications

**Andrew Fennell**

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Writing a CV for the first time is a challenging task, which can leave many graduates and school-leavers feeling stuck, staring at a blank page and wondering where to begin.

If you've never written a CV before, it's difficult to know what details you are supposed to include, how to structure it and how to deal with a lack of work experience.

However, if you understand the purpose of a CV and know what employers and recruiters are looking for, then you can simplify the writing process and create an effective CV regardless of your experience level.

The ultimate goal of your CV is to win job interviews. You can achieve that by quickly demonstrating your value to potential employers. Essentially you need to create a CV that shows an employer you have the skills, experience and knowledge their organisation needs.

## **Before you start**

Most candidates will start by writing down all the skills they think are valuable and then build their CV around them. This approach, however, is flawed. Unless you do some market research first, you won't know which of your skills are in demand.

Before you start, search for the jobs you are interested in online and make a list of the requirements that appear most frequently.

Now that you know exactly what your target employers are looking for, you can pinpoint areas of your experience where you've demonstrated those skills and highlight them throughout your CV. It's simply a case of finding out what employers are looking for and giving it to them.

## **Structure**

The most important thing to remember is that recruiters read scores of résumés every

day. So they appreciate it when you make it easy for them to read and pick out the information they need.

Clearly divide sections with bold headings, use a simple font, break up text with bullet points and keep it short and sharp. Avoid using long paragraphs and stick to two pages or fewer. After including name and contact details, ideally your CV should be split into the following sections from top to bottom:

## **Personal statement**

This is an opening statement at the top of your CV that summarises all you have to offer an employer in a few lines. It's the first thing a recruiter will see, so you need to make sure it shows that you have the skills and knowledge they are looking for.

Include your most impressive academic achievements along with relevant skills, experience and qualities. You don't have to rely solely on career-based experience - you can also draw on experience gained in work placements, school or university projects and extracurricular activities.

Try to include as many hard skills as possible such as writing, languages, software ability and industry knowledge. Soft skills like organisation, attention to detail and leadership should be used moderately if they are essential to the roles you are applying to. Avoid using cliches such as hard working, goal oriented and dynamic, as they don't tell the reader anything about you and waste valuable space.

## **Work experience**

This is an area that a lot of first-time CV writers struggle with because they often have little or no professional experience. Strictly speaking you should list your employment in chronological order from most recent to oldest - however school-leavers and graduates can use a bit of creativity if they want to get shortlisted for roles that will kickstart their careers.

For example, if a law graduate is applying for trainee solicitor roles while also working part-time as a waiter, it wouldn't be ideal to list the waiter role at the top of the work experience section - it's not relevant. Instead it would be better to list legal work experience such as university work placements, voluntary work or freelance projects. Be selective when choosing the first roles you list to make sure recruiters can instantly see that you have relevant experience.

Roles should be structured with a heading of the company name, role title and duration dates - followed by a sentence that summarises the role and how it fits into the company's overall strategy. Then you should list your responsibilities in a way that shows how each one provides value to the organisation. Finish with some impressive achievements to highlight any outstanding results you've produced for yourself and the employer. If possible, include some tangible achievements that you can quantify, such as sales figures, cost savings or awards.

## Education and qualifications

When your experience is limited, it helps to expand on your education to showcase more of your knowledge. Start with your most recent educational achievements and include the establishments you attended and duration dates with qualifications and grades achieved. If you have a degree then it's great to include any projects, studies or papers worked on - especially if they are relevant to the jobs you are applying for.

For A-levels and GCSEs, it's fine to simply list your subjects and grades unless you carried out any exceptional work that might be worth including to impress a potential employer. It's good to list any extracurricular activities such as prefect duties or Duke of Edinburgh awards. Vocational qualifications such as fitness coaching, commercial driving and social care should also be highlighted in this section. Remember to reiterate your most impressive education and qualification stats in your profile to ensure they don't get missed by recruiters.

## Interests

These are not always essential on a CV but in the case of an unexperienced candidate, they can help to give recruiters more insight into your capabilities. Avoid mentioning common pastimes such as cinema and socialising with friends, because they won't make you stand out from anyone else. Focus on interesting, productive and active hobbies such as sports, travelling, writing or crafts, as these will enable you to demonstrate desirable traits such as proactivity, organisation and social skills.

Download this free template for help writing your first CV.

*Andrew Fennell is a recruiter and founder of CV writing service StandOut CV.*

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