Top 10 tips for producing a better CV

Think of your CV as your shop window - it must effectively display your experience, skills and qualities in a very short period of time. The following tips will help you produce a CV that does just that.

1. Keep it short and clear

Before you start, choose the right structure for your CV. The most important information, such as your key skills and recent experience, needs to be near the top, where it can be seen straightaway. Sections you usually need to include are your Profile, Achievements, Experience, Special Skills (languages / computers), Education, Training, and (if you wish) Interests. Your CV should normally be two pages in length (unless you have a very long career or you are a contractor or the recruiter asks for a longer CV). If you haven't caught the recruiter's interest by page two then they probably won't read any further pages anyway.

2. Make it look good

Clear, attractive presentation is also important if your CV is to stand out. Ensure that it's uncluttered, with key points easy to spot. Use bullet points and keep the sentences relatively short. Plenty of 'white space' around the borders and between each section keeps the document easier on the eye.

3. Most recent first

Put your employment history in date order, starting with the most recent first. Avoid leaving any gaps, so if you've had time out for some reason, do mention this. Don't go into detail about positions you held over 10 years ago. Include details of holiday or temporary work only if it's relevant to the job you're applying for.

4. Include many facts

List your job duties beneath each position. List your achievements, responsibilities and results. Talk about results - what difference did your presence make? Use numbers for achievements wherever possible, e.g. "Boosted sales by 20% in first year". And always write in a slightly formal manner and never use the word "I" - e.g. "Supervised the team" rather than "I supervised the team". Use the past tense for previous jobs and the present tense for your current job.

5. Not too many lists

Include specific skills, such as languages, administrative or computing skills, in a separate section in your CV. Don't relist them for every job you've used them in. This is particularly so for IT work - lists of tools and packages make dull reading and won't make you stand out from other people with the same abilities.

6. Breath some life into it

Remember the employer wants a sense of the kind of person you are, as well as what you can do. Are you punctual, conscientious, or motivated? Do you rise to a challenge? With each point you write, ask yourself "What does this say about me?"

7. Be accurate

Always check for errors. Run a spelling and grammar check and ask someone else to read it for you. Read it aloud to the dog. The employer isn't going to believe you're a good communicator if your CV is full of mistakes.

8. Adapt it

You don't have to use the same CV every time. You can have two or three versions, each for a different kind of job. Or you can tailor your CV to suit the job you're applying for. It isn't a case of one size fits all.

9. Send a covering letter

Unless the advert tells you not to, always send a covering letter. This should highlight the two or three areas of experience from your CV that are most relevant to the advertised job. Never send your CV out on its own.

10. Be truthful

Although you obviously want to present yourself well, don't go too far and embellish the truth. It can easily backfire on you.