

Creating an effective CV

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CV guide

How can this guide help me?

A Curriculum Vitae (CV) is your personal sales brochure. There is no set format to constructing the 'perfect' CV and even 'experts' can disagree on how one should be constructed.

That said, this guide can help you to explore how to get started with a CV and offers you tips for creating an effective document which guarantees to sell yourself. It uses extracts from actual CVs written by doctors, so highlights both effective and poor examples. It offers you questions to think about and additional resources to help you in your CV writing skills.

OK, how do I get started?

One of the **worst things** you can do in starting a CV or application is to 'just start writing'. Some effective thinking and preparatory work beforehand is worth the time invested in helping you to create an effective document later on. For example, it is likely to take several drafts and involve gaining constructive feedback from experienced colleagues as part of the process. Don't worry about feeling overwhelmed on how to begin – often this can be an important part of getting you to take action instead of procrastinating.

Do's and don'ts with your CV

| DO | DON'T |
|---|---|
| Use when required as part of the selection process, and as a part of your own portfolio development | If the application process asks for an application form to be submitted, don't send a CV in its place |
| Highlight the career path you are pursuing, the skills you have developed both in and out of your working environment that are RELEVANT and TAILORED to the job in question | Don't list every skill, every job or every experience you have ever had – this can not only make it difficult to read, but also can make it appear unfocussed and confusing to the reader |
| Keep a 'generic CV' to help you to adapt it for each job. This doesn't need to be in 'CV format;' you can choose programmes like Word/Excel etc to keep a record of your work and achievements, which can then be easily summarised for your CV | Don't send a 'generic CV' for every job you apply for, it will almost guarantee in failing to get you to interview |
| Try to keep your CV, in the case of CT/ST jobs, 2-3 pages maximum – it shouldn't take more than 2 minutes to scan read by someone short listing | Don't go overboard with details (it is suggested that the average time spent on reading a CV is 30 seconds) |
| It should provide topics for discussion at interview | Don't include complex detail – be clear, concise and to the point |
| It should aim to meet all of the essential criteria and at least some of the desirable ones | Don't lie on your CV – this can be a serious breach of probity under Good Medical Practice |
| It should explain any unusual terms or acronyms | It shouldn't use terminology inappropriately |

Sample CV template

This is a guide to the kinds of headings you may choose to use in your CV. You need to use your **OWN** judgement as to which you include/modify and which way you choose to order your information

Personal details

Here you can include things like your full name, address, telephone number and email. Only use one landline, one mobile number and one email address. Some people centre this information so it offers the reader a clear start to the CV. Other people prefer to list things in a more traditional way one after the other. Either way, make sure the information is clear and easy to read.

Career Plans

Some people like to offer an opening paragraph of their career intentions, specific skills or interests etc. This is a personal preference. Some short-listers like this kind of format, others hate it – get advice locally as to what tends to be preferred in the particular department or training programme.

Personal/ additional information

This may include for example, GMC number and registration status. You do not have to provide your gender, date of birth, marital status or nationality as this can act as an inadvertent discriminator. However, you may still wish to include this kind of information.

Professional Qualifications

It is good practice to list qualification in reverse chronological order. You should include things like your medical qualifications and any prizes, awards or distinctions you may have achieved. Additional examples could be: membership exams and specialty specific qualifications. Remember to include the institution/awarding body and dates (it is not actually a requirement to include date as this can identify your age, but it is usual practice to include dates of qualifications).

Education

Not everybody chooses to highlight their school qualifications but there are no hard or fast rules on whether you should/not. If including, school grades can be grouped, e.g. 3 A levels grades A-C rather than all listed). This may also include any prizes, scholarships or particular educational achievements prior to entering medical school, particularly if they have RELEVANCE in some way to the job/training programme applying for

Work history

Some people also refer to this as 'professional experience,' 'work experience,' etc. Remember to include job title, location and dates of employment. It can also be useful to offer key achievements in the role in a couple of sentences or bullet points.

CPD/additional courses and training

This can simply be a list of relevant events with dates and details of each achievement. Examples could be ALS, ATLS, ALERT courses etc, membership exams, specialty specific training or courses, or generic teaching opportunities such as being a first aider. Remember to think about the RELEVANCE

to the application. Other non-clinical courses may be better presented under a separate heading in some cases.

Research

This can be offered as a list of main publications and/or case presentations either under the same or separate headings. It can also highlight your specific involvement, particularly when you have been part of a project involving other people, where you can state YOUR role and involvement. Remember to include dates and location carried out – if something has been submitted to a professional journal, indicate the status. If it was a case presentation or piece of research presented locally, state who it was presented to.

Audit

Indicate dates and your involvement, e.g. carried out structured review of ...; literature review, under the supervision of (consultant name) It can also be useful to indicate the outcome/results of the audit.

Presentations/publications

State whether they were done locally or nationally with dates and who the audience was where relevant. In some cases, they may be subsumed into the research/audit sections of your CV to avoid repetition.

Practical skills

Some people choose to highlight specific skills, competencies or abilities. Include details that are RELEVANT to the application and quantify where relevant.

Teaching experience

If you have an interest or achievements to highlight in this area, describe relevant experiences using dates/locations and any further qualifying/quantifying information, e.g. led 8 teaching sessions to train nursing staff in (name of procedure)

Voluntary work/experience

Again, think about RELEVANCY and VALUE added to your overall application. As before, give dates and achievements

General interests

This could also be listed as ‘interests,’ ‘hobbies’ ‘additional information.’ Be specific and honest about any interests. Choose which ones add the most VALUE to your application rather than just putting things down for the sake of it.

Additional information

This could be things like additional qualifications or specific information that doesn’t naturally fit under any other heading. Think about the REASON for describing the information. On the one hand it can offer a positive achievement that makes YOU unique. On the other, it could just read like irrelevant information.

References

Include names, addresses, telephone numbers and email of at least 2 people who know you and their relationship to you. One should be your current Education Supervisor/person with responsibility for your education. It is polite to have contacted your referees in advance to make sure they are willing to give you a supportive reference!

How do I begin structuring my CV?

Consider the following example of personal details ...

Curriculum Vitae

Name: Jon Bloggs
Address: 33 Somewhere street
 Anywhere town
 Anywhere city
 ANY WH1

Sex: Male
Marital Status: divorced
Children: 2, ages 3 and 7
Date of Birth: 09/09/1985
Age: 26
GMC number: 999 999 999
BMA membership: xxx xxx xxx
Email: jonthesexbomb@internetprovider.com
Nationality: British
Hep B Immunisation: 1997 immune
Telephone (work): (+44) 0123 456 789
Telephone (home): (+44) 0987 654 321
Telephone (mobile): (+44) 0777 777 777

Before reading on, how many points can you highlight that would improve the beginning of this CV?

| | |
|---|---|
| ❖ | ❖ |
| ❖ | ❖ |
| ❖ | ❖ |
| ❖ | ❖ |
| ❖ | ❖ |
| ❖ | ❖ |
| ❖ | ❖ |
| ❖ | ❖ |

Hopefully you picked up on:

1. It's a long list overall – using **18** valuable lines - not an effective use of space?
2. It looks cluttered and the information is difficult to read overall
3. The information isn't ordered well
4. Much of it is irrelevant and can be omitted or used elsewhere in the CV
5. Because everything is in **BOLD** it makes it difficult to read
6. Is a colon actually needed for each point?
7. Using the word 'curriculum vitae' in a large font serves little purpose?
8. There is no need to state marital status unless you want to
9. There is no need to state how many, and ages of children unless you wish to

10. There is no need to put 3 different numbers for contact purposes – this could be confusing to an HR assistant trying to get in touch – one main contact number should suffice
11. There is no need to indicate immunisation status
12. There is no need to state nationality (this would usually be asked for in terms of equality and diversity information in an application form)
13. The use of an obscure email address doesn't really project an air of professionalism

❖ Any other points we have not identified?

Now look at this as an alternative:

Jon Bloggs

Address 33, Somewhere Street, Anywhere Town, Anywhere City, ANY WH1

Tel (+44) 0123 456 789 (landline); (+44) 0777 777 777 (mobile)

Email jon@internetprovider.com

This might not be perfect, and it's not saying that this is the only personal information you should ever write, but it:

- Provides essential information
- Uses minimum space
- Mixes bold and ordinary text to make each piece of information clear

What you need to ask yourself is:

- **What do I WANT them to know?**
- **WHY do I want them to know this?**
- **What information do THEY want to know?**

Use of Funny fonts

Many people try to make their CV appear attractive by using a variety of fonts. In one CV reviewed recently, someone had used 10 different fonts on the first page! However, this can often make a CV or word processed application **appear** unfocussed and difficult to read . It could also imply you are not very good at making decisions because you can't make up your mind which style to use – essential qualities for a doctor!

Use of language

In many CVs, people state the tasks or jobs they have performed in previous roles. However, the way you present this information can be the difference between getting short listed or not.

Information needs to be **SPECIFIC** using both **qualitative** and **quantitative** information where relevant. It needs to tell something to the reader about what you actually did, what your achievements and skills were or what you learnt from each experience. Consider the following examples:

- ❖ I attended clinics
- ❖ I recently had the opportunity to receive SHO training in internal medicine & general surgery
- ❖ Cooperated with my team members and colleagues in occasional emergencies and unforeseen circumstances
- ❖ Assisted in operating theatres for elective and emergency lists
- ❖ I recently took part in a conference at Anywhere Town...
- ❖ I collected data for the research and did most of the write up

What’s wrong with such examples?

- They are just vague statements
- They don’t tell the reader what they DID
- They don’t describe ACHIEVEMENTS
- They don’t show evidence of LEARNING or INSIGHT
- They don’t offer any qualifying information – how many, how often, when, where etc

See page 7 and 8 of this guide for alternative examples and tips on constructing effective statements

Use of bullet points – “to bullet point or not to bullet point? – that is the question!”

It can be a case of just ‘different strokes for different folks’ with bullet points. Ask 10 senior doctors whether they would prefer a bullet point list or not in CV or application and there would be a pretty 50/50 split. But the key to use of bullet points is:

- Use them when it will make info clear and concise, not just for the sake of it
- ❖ Watch the spacing of bullet points – make sure they are aligned, otherwise it will look messy
- ☹ Don’t use too many different styles of bullet points in your CV – in this case, variety definitely isn’t advised – it will just make your CV (and you) look unfocussed and not able to make a decision very well!
- ☺ Be careful about using obscure bullet points like these: , , , ,  - it might look good, but Shortlisters might just be put off by them!

What’s wrong here before reading on?

| Work experience | | | |
|--|--|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| *HOUSEMAN H. Officer Gen. Medicine | Anywhere Hosptial Anywhere NHS Trust | 12 th Nov TO 2011 | 19 th Nov 2011 |
| *Foundation Doctor PIU Department Surgery and Medicine | Anywhere university hospitals Anywhere Hospital | 1 st Nov 2011 | to 26 th Nov 2011 |

Hopefully you will have picked up on:

- Use of word ‘House man’ may not be viewed positively and is also outdated
- Format of dates with year under the date and month doesn’t look professional
- Use of acronym PIU in the last line (PIU not universally recognised – could be Paediatric intensive care unit, but this is often PICU, not PIU)
- Layout of information is cluttered and looks unprofessional
- Use of ‘TO’ and ‘to’
- Use of ‘H Officer’ – just looks like they tried to get all the info on one line
- Poorly ordered and spaced
- Spelt ‘Hospital’ incorrectly!
- Appeared to be in two jobs at the same time!

Using the ‘CAR’ method of writing evidence in your CV

Using the ‘CAR’ method can be a really helpful way of making sure your responses are **FOCUSSED** and **RELEVANT** and **EASY TO READ**

| | |
|----------------|---|
| CONTEXT | Put the situation in context: briefly describe the situation so that the example can be clearly understood by your assessors – avoid explaining too much detail |
| ACTION | State what ACTION you actually took – what was your contribution? Avoid ‘we’ if talking about a situation in a team context. The assessor needs to know what specific contribution/difference YOU made |
| RESULT | Describe the outcome – what were the positives/learning points/reflections on the situation? |

Useful questions to ask yourself when evidencing experience:

- ❖ Think about what your involvement was – what was your role?
- ❖ What did you actually do?
- ❖ What skills did you acquire or develop further?
- ❖ What difference did **YOU** make?
- ❖ What obstacles did you have to overcome if any?
- ❖ What feedback did you receive either positively or negatively?
- ❖ What did you **LEARN** as a result? (about the situation/topic and about yourself?)
- ❖ **HOW HAVE YOU APPLIED YOUR LEARNING AS A RESULT?**

Examples using the CAR method:

Protocols - Created a protocol for investigating the causes of scleritis in June 2006 – currently in use at Anywhere Hospital in Anywhere town

Presentation - Acute renal failure in patients with diabetes. Paper presented at national conference of (organisation) June 2011

Research - Constructed a questionnaire to measure the quality of life of patients with Scoliosis. This is now being used to develop a further pilot study in the department

Audit - Developed a literature review with two senior colleagues to compare the hospital’s policy on ulcerative colitis with current research. Policy modified as a result and presented at departmental meeting.

Audit - Major audit into renal failure. Responsibility for identifying patients, data collection and design of database to record data

Teaching - Led 8 teaching sessions to train medical students in (procedure)

Use of ‘passive’ and ‘active’ language

Sharpening up your attention to your choice of language is another way of fine tuning your CV.

Consider the following example about leadership potential in a CV:

Voluntary work

Event organiser, Any Medical Society, Anywhere medical school 2010-11

In this role I was required to delegate tasks to other team members for a charity event and I learnt a lot from this event in terms of team working

(This is PASSIVE: this statement doesn’t demonstrate team working skills – ‘I was required to’ could

mean 'I was told to' – doesn't tell us much about what they ACTUALLY learnt)

Now consider a rewrite of the same example:

Voluntary work

Event organiser, Any Medical Society, Anywhere medical school 2010-11

Led a team of 6 people as president of (society) to organise an annual charity event for Barnado's. My role included motivating and delegating tasks to the team and ensuring the event ran within budget. From an initial budget of £1,000, the event made a profit of £3,000 for the charity.

(this is much more 'ACTIVE' – it tells the reader what they did (led) and in what capacity (president) – it tells us more about the actual number of people involved in the task and who the event was for, which can then be expanded on through use of specific examples in an interview situation

Spelling and Grammar

Ensure all your responses are grammatically correct and spell checked – language skills may be assessed in the person specification and silly mistakes in the past have resulted in people losing marks unnecessarily. Even if you have completed your CV initially in Word, it doesn't pick up all grammatical and spelling errors so make sure you proofread it before submission.

Use of plenty of ACTION verbs

Using plenty of 'action words' in your response can help demonstrate to your reader what you did and what you learnt from a situation. It is common practice that person specifications are looking for EVIDENCE of many of the above qualities, not just your clinical skills and knowledge. Consider some of the following words to help you:

| |
|--|
| <p>Cognitive Collected, assessed, analysed, ordered (e.g. ranked), selected, applied judgement, discriminated between variables, evaluated data/evidence, interpreted, problem solved, reasoned, formulated, memorised, recalled, audited, researched, deduced, reasoned, recorded, formulated</p> |
| <p>Self managing Achieved, organised, managed, negotiated, budgeted, achieved, developed, directed, marketed, evaluated, audited, researched, managed stress, coped with pressure, assertiveness, managed boundaries/limitations, self evaluation/audit, identified potential, improvised, adapted, dealt with, transferred knowledge, improvised, adjusted, adapted, applied, specialised</p> |
| <p>Organising skills Administered, built, controlled, coordinated, established, managed, implemented, improved, planned, set goals, decided, facilitated, motivated, led, contracted, initiated, delegated, identified, processed, Initiated, guided, led, monitored, supervised, developed, directed</p> |
| <p>Group skills Encouraged, monitored, cooperated, shared (e.g. responsibilities), assessed evaluated others, dealt with conflict/apathy/negativity, explained, persuaded, participated negotiated, influenced, empathised, mentored, coached, listened, reflected, clarified, trained, taught</p> |

A note about plagiarism

Never lie on a CV. A set number of applications are often audited randomly each year where you may be required to provide evidence to back up the examples you have used in your application. It is a serious breach of probity under Good Medical Practice if you are found to have plagiarised your application and you may be reported to the GMC.

Shortlisters nightmares

- Use of convoluted sentences
- Use of ‘big’ words in an effort to appear more experienced
- Not followed application instructions
- CV is boring to read
- Overuse of same verbs – get a thesaurus!
- Lack of creativity with language
- Poor grammar
- Spelling mistakes
- No insight
- No or little evidence demonstrated
- Limited range of examples
- CV not structured well
- Repetitive

Checklist for creating your OWN CV

| | |
|--|--|
| Does it meet the essential (and some of the desirable) criteria for the job? | |
| Do you like the overall way it looks? | |
| Is it an appropriate length for the job you are applying? | |
| Have you got the ordering of sections how you want them to be? | |
| Is it TAILORED to the job you are applying for? | |
| Have you used the ‘CAR’ method to cite your evidence where appropriate? | |
| Have you used plenty of ACTION words to describe your skills and experience? | |
| Is the language ‘passive’ or ‘active?’ | |
| Do all your points have RELEVANCE and ADD VALUE to your application? | |
| Have you described ACHIEVEMENTS rather than just ‘tasks’ completed? | |
| Is your CV presented consistently and appropriately in terms of font, margins, type setting, bullet points, formatting, italics, bold etc? | |
| Is terminology explained where necessary? | |
| Is it grammatically correct and spell checked? | |
| Have you used good quality paper? | |
| Have you got other people to look at it – what do they think? | |

Resources

Use the headings from Good Medical Practice to generate good examples from your own experience to help you. Copy of tomorrow's doctors/ Good Medical Practice:

http://www.gmc-uk.org/education/undergraduate/tomorrows_doctors.asp

- Brammar, L. (2008). Medical CV writing skills. BMJCareers 12 August
- Walker, K. (2005) Filed in the bin. BMJCareers 6 August
- Ariyesena, H; Tewari, N; Livesley, PJ. (2005) The search for the perfect CV. BMJCareers 15 October
- McErin, S. (2004). Writing the Medical CV. London: Edgkom
- Turya, E. (2004). Growing your CV. BMJCareers 5 June

There are also plenty of **non-medical** guides available from any good book shop where the principles of constructing effective CVs and applications still apply whatever the profession, e.g.

- Bright, J and Earl, J (2007). Brilliant CV. London: Prentice Hall
- Middleton, J. (2006). High impact CVs. Oxford: Infinite Ideas Ltd

Use your preferred word processing package to look at sample CV templates, e.g. resume and CV templates in Microsoft Word or via office online:

<http://office.microsoft.com>