



CV Handbook

cpl

Where to start - simple ways to update your CV

In Cpl, we receive hundreds of CVs every day. We know what works, what doesn't and what will get you noticed by employers for the right reasons.

Spend time on your CV and always edit it with the specific job you're applying for in mind. Here are some quick tips to get you started.

Write it all down

When creating or updating a CV, first write down any jobs, skills, volunteering, interests, courses and awards you can think of. List everything – from hobbies to work achievements and travel.

The simple process of listing your achievements, big and small, will help you remember details from previous roles, for example training new staff, recruiting team members, organising schedules, handling cash and so on.

By going through this process you'll likely jog your memory and remember details that will make your CV more impactful.

Get inspired by your LinkedIn

Your LinkedIn profile can be a handy place to find specific dates of employment and education. The 'Skills & Endorsements' section can also be really useful.

Emphasise achievements

Your CV should emphasise results and achievements rather than daily tasks.

For example, successful projects you worked on, awards you have won or any impactful problems that you solved. Use specific examples that showcase your technical knowledge, stats and figures that clearly back your achievements up and strong action verbs to really get your point across.

For example, "I trained and managed a team of five" is much stronger than simply stating I have good leadership skills.

Update your education section

Continuous learning is becoming more and more important so don't forget to update your education section with any relevant courses you've completed during your career.

For example:

- Online courses
- Night classes
- Internal training programmes
- Certifications

This clearly shows your commitment to continuous learning and a passion for the work you do.

4 Simple things to keep in mind when updating your CV

1. Tailor your CV to suit the job you're applying for
2. Be consistent in your style of layout
3. Always list results, not just responsibilities
4. Pay attention to spellings & grammar

What to put on your CV

Quality not quantity is a cliché, but it is a relevant and worthwhile motto to keep in mind when prepping a CV.

The below points will help you draft a good CV but you should always use the job description of the role you are applying for as your main source of what to include and leave out.

Basic information

A CV should clearly state your name and contact information at the top of the page. List your first name and surname, phone number and email.

Your email should be work appropriate - 76% of CVs are discarded for an unprofessional email address. If you're in doubt over suitability create a new work specific email. Email addresses can be set up for free across all major providers - Gmail, Outlook etc. If your name is taken add an initial or hyphen.

Avoid

Extra personal details. A CV should be as short as possible so keep to the point and avoid unnecessary extras such as:

- **A photo**
- **Marital status**
- **Date of birth**
- **Gender or nationality**

Personal bio

This is your chance to brand yourself the way you want. Your personal statement should be concise, 2 or 3 sentences and customised for each role. A personal bio is particularly valuable if you're switching careers or have taken a career break.

Aim for the length of a Twitter bio - which is 160 characters. Twitter allows a small number of characters to ensure all bios are punchy and to the point, which is exactly what you want your CV to be.

Use keywords that will attract the readers' attention and avoid using large bragging words such as wonderful, or world's best. For example, if the job ad specifies the role requires experience in Excel, and you're an expert in this program, highlight it in your bio.

Avoid

The purpose of a personal statement or bio is to engage the reader. It is important to consider each job you're applying for and what the job requirements are.

Applicants can fall into the trap of sending one CV to all employers and not adapting their bio to the specific positions they are applying to.

The job market is currently competitive and it's more important than ever before to be specific and stand out.

Education

Start with University degrees or other forms of education that should be included on a CV. State where you studied and the degree or course title. If the course is applicable to the job, flesh out relevant modules. Online courses, night classes, and everything in between show employers what skills you have and prove you are passionate about the area you work in.

Avoid

There's no need to include dates or grades in this section.

Work experience

List work experience chronologically. Your two most recent jobs should be more detailed than your other jobs.

Employers want to know what you achieved. Include keywords, focus on results and use strong words such as managed and controlled. This will help your CV stand out.

Employers want to know what you achieved.

Avoid

A big mistake people make in their CV is talking about their duties and responsibilities in work. Don't say what the job entailed, instead focus on results as recommended above. If you have a long employment history, list the roles that are most applicable and omit more junior or irrelevant jobs.

Keywords

Studies suggest that recruiters look at a CV for an average of 6 seconds. During this time they are looking for keywords based on the job spec.

Many will also use a CTRL+F search for keywords. Keep this in mind when you write your CV and make sure the relevant keywords are included.

If you're unsure of what keywords to use, read the job description. Jot down the necessary requirements and skills - how many of these are on your CV? Incorporate these into your CV if they apply to you, if most of them don't then maybe it's not the right role to apply for.

Avoid

Avoid using words that are specific to certain companies. Instead stick to the words used in the job ad.

Systems & awards

Use the job spec. as a guide to what kind of systems are worth including. Then list each system and tool you are proficient with, by its industry-recognised name.

If you've won any relevant awards you should include these too. Use columned bullet points to make this section sharp and concise.

Avoid

Don't just say 'photo-editing software' or 'Photoshop'; say 'Photo-editing software like Photoshop...' etc. This can be helpful for recruiters or hiring managers searching for certain keywords.

Soft skills

Good soft skills (also referred to as people skills) enable teams to work well together and show an employer that you're likely to be a good cultural fit.

These skills don't need their own section, instead use examples within your Work Experience to illustrate your various soft skills. For example:

Teamwork – worked as part of a team of 5 to complete a social media campaign which increased traffic by 5%.

Avoid

Never list a selection of soft skills with no examples to back them up. This will look insincere and could turn an employer off your application.

Soft skills to consider mentioning:

- Adaptable
- Assertive
- Attentive
- Communication
- Confident
- Crisis Management
- Problem Solving
- Decision Making
- Emotional Intelligence
- Enthusiastic
- Flexible
- Good Attitude
- Honest
- Innovative
- Leadership
- Listening
- Motivated
- Organised
- Patient
- Punctual
- Reliable
- Resilient
- Research skills
- Respectful
- Team player
- Works well under pressure

Recruiters look at a CV for an average of 6 seconds.



CV format & design

To impress a recruiter or hiring manager you need to make your CV as readable as possible.

Design an attractive CV by keeping the layout consistent and simple. Use a regular font, bullet points, headings and bold text to make important points stand out.

Standard layout is as follows: name & contact details, CV bio / personal statement, work experience, education, skills, systems & awards (if applicable).

How to use headings & titles

Make sections such as Education or Work Experience easy to find by using formatted headings. Headings can be created in Word or a Google doc - Heading 1 or Heading 2 are good options.

Make your CV even more readable by using titles under each Heading. For example, under the Work Experience heading list each job in bold followed by a short description underneath.

Listing work experience and education

Education and work experience should always be listed in chronological order.

Put your current job at the top and work your way down through previous jobs in order of year. Education history should follow the same format. Consistency is key on a CV so make sure you use the same format for listing all jobs and educational experience.

If you are a recent graduate, your CV should start with your education. Conversely, if you are a more experienced candidate, start with professional experience and work from your most recent role backwards.

Format for sending - Word Doc. or PDF?

Always read the job description to see if the hiring manager specifies a certain format, then save your CV in this file type with your name in the title so it's professional and easy to find.

The most common formats to send a CV in are Word document and portable document format (PDF).

Generally hiring managers and recruiters prefer a Word document CV. There are 4 reasons why a Word doc is preferred:

1. Most universally used format
2. Allows ATS scanning software (used by many large companies and recruiters) to easily find keywords and criteria matches
3. Easily opened, even if the receiver doesn't have Word
4. Recruiters can alter to remove contact details when sending to prospective employers

A drawback of using a Word doc. is that CV formatting can change depending on what system the hiring manager opens it with.

Font size & style

CV font should be easily read and not too big or too small. Pick a font that is simple, professional and looks good online and in print. Fail safe font styles include:

- Calibri (Body)
- Arial
- Verdana

Picking a small font size to fit more information on a CV is tempting, but to keep your CV legible choose a font between 10 and 12.

Recruiters prefer a Word Document CV

Back to basics: CV design

Unless you have exceptional design skills, a simple CV design is best. Follow these guidelines for an easy to read and adaptable CV:

- Adopt a back to basics approach with minimal distractions
- Avoid using colour
- Never include a picture
- Make use of white space on your CV – don't overload with content
- Add definition with headers, bullet points, bold text
- If bullet points are lengthy, split into columns

Hiring managers and recruiters prefer simple CVs, so save yourself time and focus on the content of your CV rather than design.

[Download a simple CV Template here](#)

CV Format	
Name & Contact Details	1 Jane Smith _____ _____
CV Bio / Personal Statement	2 CV Bio / Personal Statement _____ _____
Work Experience	3 Work Experience _____ _____
Education	4 Education _____ _____
Skills	5 Skills _____ _____
Systems & Awards (if applicable)	6 Systems & Awards (if applicable) _____ _____

CV length - how to keep your CV short & relevant

The average CV should be 1 – 2 pages long and shouldn't include information that dates back more than 10 years.

With that said, if you're applying for a senior position which requires a lot of information and job history details don't be afraid to go over 2 pages.

Cut down on personal details

Your name, email, phone no. and current job title are the only personal details needed. These can all be listed on one line.

This:

Jo Smith | Marketing Assistant | Josmith@gmail.com | 086 123 4567

Not this:

Name: Jo Smith
Job Title: Marketing Assistant
Email: Josmith@gmail.com
Phone number: | 086 123 4567

If you list your date of birth, address, nationality or marital status delete them now. You'll be pleasantly surprised by how much space you can save by doing this. Any photos should also be removed.

Don't reference references

There is no need to include references or "references upon request" on a CV. References will be asked for if needed.

Focus on relevant information

Your CV should only include information from the previous 10 years.

Think about the job you are applying for. Is the part-time retail role you held as a teenager worth mentioning? Be strict and only include applicable jobs and skills for the role you're applying for.

Similarly, if your education isn't relevant – mention it but don't detail the modules you studied. With that said, be careful you don't omit transferable skills. Avoid this by carefully examining the job description and matching your CV content with the job spec as best you can.

Emphasise results

Avoid including unnecessary and lengthy details by emphasising results and achievements, rather than daily tasks.

A CV should highlight skills that make you attractive to interview. Keep things brief and let the hiring manager decide what needs to be fleshed out once you get called for interview.

Make formatting work for you

As we mentioned before the format of your CV is imperative. Simple formatting tricks that can help you cut down on length include:

- Removing unnecessary labels - there's no need to label your email address as, email: cpl@cpl.com
- Columns - If you are listing a lot of skills, use columns to split your list in two and free up space
- Margins - use a one or half inch margin, rather than the standard two

Emphasise results and achievements

Proofreading your CV

47% of employers state that typos or bad grammar are the most off-putting mistakes perspective employees can make on a CV.*

No matter what type of job you're applying for, always check your spelling, grammar and syntax. A clean, error-free CV makes your CV easier to read. Whereas simple spelling mistakes will highlight a lack of attention to detail.

How to avoid misspellings

Spell check is great for spotting most errors but isn't fool proof. For example, spell check won't notice correctly spelled misspellings such as manger instead of manager or collage instead of college; so, don't rely on it. Read your CV out loud to spot mistakes and always get a friend or someone you trust to read over it for you.

Common CV misspellings often spotted by our recruiters include job titles, employer name and company names.

Don't just use spell check - always ask a trusted friend to proof your CV.

How to avoid poor grammar

Bad grammar is off-putting for an employer. No matter how easy it is to write 'it's' when you mean 'its', employers will find it difficult not to assume that you don't know the difference.

Reread your CV numerous times and ask someone you trust to do the same. If you're still not sure you can use grammar checking applications such as Grammarly which is a free tool that will spot both spelling and grammar errors.

*info taken from poll of 480 people on Cpl's LinkedIn account.

What to include in a cover letter (if you're asked for one)

Some industries no longer request a cover letter, but many still do. For example, the public sector or marketing roles.

Write your cover letter in the body of the email, rather than attaching it as an email attachment – unless asked otherwise. A cover letter should be short (4 or 5 lines), align your experience to the key skills outlined in the job spec and why you are interested in the role.

If you're asked to email your cover letter, follow the guidelines of regular business email and include:

- **The position you are applying for in the email subject line**
- **The recipient's name - don't use "to whom it may concern"**
- **Brief description of who you are**
- **Brief outline of your relevant experience and why you're worth interviewing**
- **Confident language**
- **Your phone number**
- **Your work availability**

- Any specifics requested in the job ad
- Your CV as an attachment
- Link to portfolio/examples of work, if applicable

In a Cpl social media poll that asked our followers if they're still asked for a cover letter 56% said Yes and 44% said No.

Tips for writing an effective cover letter

Most cover letters are too generic. Make your cover letter impactful by following these simple guidelines:

Use the person's name

If there is no name on the job listing, make a call and figure out who is the hiring manager or accepting CV applications. Alternatively, check the company LinkedIn and find the applicable addressee.

Base content off the job ad

The job ad will tell you exactly what the hiring manager is looking for, so use it to frame your cover letter. Pick out the most important aspects of the job ad and clearly point out that your experience and skills match those requirements.

Address any unusual CV details

If you've made a career change, recently moved country or if you've been out of work for a while now is the time to address it. The hiring manager could get suspicious and ignore you if you ignore details like these.

What can you bring to the company?

Rather than focusing on what you want or how you'd benefit from the job on offer, talk about what positive impact you'd make to the business.

Reading about how you could increase ROI or your innovative ideas is much more interesting than reading about how much you'd love to work in the company's nice office, or how convenient the new commute would be.

Always spell check

Show your attention to detail by ensuring your cover letter is well phrased and has no mistakes. If you're not a confident writer, ask someone who is to read it over for you.

References

There's no need to list your references on your CV or "Reference available upon request", but you should have references ready when applying for jobs.

Choose your references wisely and always ask before giving out contact details (a phone number and work email address) to a prospective employer.

Your most important reference is from your last employer. If you need more than one referee any of the following are acceptable:

- **Another previous employer or supervisor - the more recent the better**
- **Former clients**
- **Academic references - university professor or mentor, secondary school principal**
- **Volunteer group reference - if you volunteer a reputable member of the group can be an impressive reference**

Pick a reference who is familiar with your abilities and that you enjoyed working with. You want this person to sell your skills, personality and ability to work as part of a team.

Before sending references

Always contact your references before handing out their details.

Confirm they are happy to act as your reference and ideally meet with them in person to tell them about the prospective role. If you can't meet in person make a phone call.

A reference can make or break a job offer so don't let your references be an afterthought.

Your most important reference is from your last employer.

What to put on your CV If you have little, or no, experience

If you have no experience you'll need to show passion, an eagerness to learn and skills that show your potential. Think about why you want the job and why you'd be good at it.

Your priority is to show the relevant skills you can bring to the role you're applying for. Like any other CV maintain a clear, easy to read layout using bold titles and only include information relevant to the job post.

A relevant bio

If you don't have concrete work experience than focus on writing a strong bio. Be honest and use this is as your elevator pitch.

Don't try and hide your lack of experience, instead highlight the skills and passion you have that make you right for the job. For maximum impact keep your bio short and to the point.

Soft & technical skills

Rather than listing Work Experience first, use a Skills section to show transferable skills and your most attractive traits.

In this section list:

- Core soft skills & technical skills. Use examples from internships, voluntary work and extracurricular activities
- Soft skills to consider include: teamwork, innovation, creativity, self-motivation, decision making, problem solving

Education details

As well as listing where you have studied, include:

- Information on relevant modules you excelled in
- Information on clubs or committees you were involved in
- Thesis information – even if the topic isn't relevant, your thesis project can be used to demonstrate discipline, time management and the ability to start and complete a project

Volunteering experience

Volunteering shows you're caring and passionate.

If you have experience volunteering list your volunteer roles as you would a job - detailing the charity, the length of time you volunteered for, relevant tasks you undertook and the skills you developed.

Work experience

Even if you have very little, or no, relevant work experience you should still include a Work Experience section to show you're used to a working environment.

List previous jobs but don't go into as much detail as usual.

How to address a career break or gap in a CV

As a result of COVID-19 career gaps are now more common. If you don't explain why there are gaps on your CV it can cause suspicion.

Be honest and focus on the positives. Address what happened, or why you chose to take a break, and talk about what you've done to develop your skills and improve yourself.

If you were made redundant or lost your job due to COVID-19: if this is the case don't worry. Employers understand that redundancy doesn't mean you were bad at your job. Discuss what you've done since being let go and avoid any negativity.

If you decided to travel: this shows you're adventurous, willing to take risks and could bring innovative new ideas to the table.

If you took a break to refocus: this demonstrates that you're committed to what you do and like to get things right. Make sure to outline what you did during this time and that you're excited to return to the working world.

If you had family issues: explain your situation and confirm you are ready to re-enter the workforce. Being a carer or choosing to focus on family is noble and shows you're a people person, caring and a hard worker. All enviable skills.

If you were let go from a job that lasted a few months or that's irrelevant to the job you're applying for, just leave it out of your CV, but if it was your last job always include it.

Include any of the above reasons chronologically amongst your work experience. This keeps your CV layout consistent and clearly fills gaps.

What to put on your CV if you're changing career

The easiest way to explain why you're changing career is to include it in your CV bio and in a cover letter, if the employer requests one.

Don't omit other information about your previous career, this is what will distinguish you from everyone else. Instead, frame your past experiences to demonstrate all your transferable soft and hard skills.

Research the industry you want to enter, look online, register for webinars, connect with people in the industry, then look at what you've done in the past - education, professional development and skills.

Determine what's considered useful for your new career and highlight this on your CV.



CV bio

Make it clear in your CV bio that you understand the job you're applying for isn't directly relevant to your past experiences, but that you are passionate about committing to something new. Explain why you're passionate about changing career and mention any transferrable skill you have.

CV layout & content

Your CV should show you're upskilling and are eager to change career – not just applying for any job you find. Like all CVs, use the job description to guide you and place your most relevant information towards the top of your CV.

A skills section is also valuable. Include a skills section straight after your bio. List your transferable skills and any relevant results achieved in the past.

Even if your work experience or education isn't valid, include these but keep them brief. Instead keep the focus on elements of your previous roles that are relevant to the job you're applying for.

For example, if you are switching to a caring profession focus on how you have worked with people or projects where you displayed organisation and communication skills.

Similarly, if you've recently done a course or an internship in the area you want to enter emphasise this.

Avoid industry specific words

Jargon can get confused within different industries and what makes perfect sense to you could be confusing to someone in the field you want to enter.

What to put on a cover letter if you're changing career

Your cover letter needs to explain why you're changing career and why you'd be a good fit for the role on offer. Like all cover letters, keep it brief and personalised. Explain why you want to change career and what led to this decision.

Make it clear that you have researched the industry, thought strongly about switching jobs and are passionate and committed to your new career.

Avoid talking about any previous career changes as this will make you appear indecisive and likely to change direction again - a costly risk for any hiring manager.

CV Checklist

What to include on your CV

- Full name, email address and phone number
- Current job title, 2/3 line bio, relevant work experience, education, skills/interests
- Results rather than responsibilities
- Figures to add impact – I trained a team of 10, I increased ROI by 10% etc.
- Keywords relevant to the job spec
- Powerful, rather than passive, verbs – I controlled, I enforced, I managed

Formatting

- Have you used bullet points?
- Have you used headings and bold for titles?
- Last/current job listed first, then work backwards
- Order most relevant section at top of page 1

Before submitting a CV

- Spell check and grammar check
- Proofread by at least 1 other person
- CV should be 1-2 pages

References

- Organise a reference from your last employer, and additional work references if applicable
- Other acceptable references: charities, former clients, university professor or mentor

Cover Letter (if requested)

- Job title in subject Line
- Use hiring manager's name
- Highlight what you will bring to the company
- Include any necessary links
- Attach CV



For more information please get in touch or visit our website.

**Cpl Resources plc.
83 Merrion Square South,
Dublin 2,
D02 R299**

**Ph: +353 1 614 6000
E: info@cpl.ie
w: www.cpl.com**