

# CREATING A CV WITH IMPACT

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A CV is a symbolic document, influencing how you feel about yourself and sell yourself in the market. It will also affect both how prospective employers view you, how likely they are to invite you in for interview and the questions that you will be asked.

It pays dividends spending some time to get it right but there is no “perfect” CV – it needs to be fit for purpose and importantly tailored to the opportunities you are going for. Always be prepared to receive feedback but remember, it is your CV and you are the one who will need to be able to speak to it at interview.

So what is it for?

- A marketing document
- To get an interview
- To showcase your skills and achievements
- To remind yourself what you have done

It isn't

- A complete historical record
- The only thing you will need to do
- A one size fits all document

You need to put your best foot forward as everyone else in the job market will be. Strike the balance between being positive about your achievements and over egging them. You will have to speak to them at interview and are likely to fail if you can't evidence what you have said on the CV.

CVs follow a few different formats – see CV Example 1 for a financial services project manager CV. This is probably the most common type of CV. Here is what you should have in each section:-

## CONTACT DETAILS

Have your name at the top as you like to be known – wouldn't bother with middle name. Don't say “CV” as it is obvious it is a CV. If you there is any doubt about gender you may want to put Mr / Mrs /Ms. If you are known by a name that it not your given name, put one or other in brackets e.g. Bal (Baldeesh) or Baldeesh (Bal).

Have a professional email i.e. not beermonster@yahoo.co.uk or partygirl@hotmail.com. You may want to set up a mail specifically for your job search as websites and recruitment consultants will continue to contact you even when you have found a role – your call.

Mobile a must with home phone as an optional backup.

Address – not vital and a judgement will potentially be made about travelling time or relocation. If you have a Brighton address and are applying for jobs in Canary Wharf it may raise questions. You may also want to keep it off CVs that you post openly online.

## PROFILE

One of the most important bits of the CV. Recruiters sifting a stack of CVs will spend 1-2 minutes reading through. If you start with your most recent role they will assume that you are looking for something similar, which may not be the job on offer. A profile gives you the opportunity to showcase the skills that sell you into the role. The “objective” at the end can be open or specific, but the more specific the better. Sometimes it is better to have two or more CVs selling you into different roles rather than a one size fits all but be careful about version management and posting online. An example may be Business Analyst/Project Manager, where there are overlapping skills but clear areas of difference too.

Rules of thumb:-

**First bullet point:** You in a nutshell – “Skilled x with over x years experience in a range of organisations in the technology and financial services sectors”.

**Last bullet point:** Your objective. “Looking to deepen his experience in a project management role in a major financial services firm” or “Looking to transfer his financial management experience into medium size organisations in the not for profit sector”.

**Middle bullet points:** The key skills that you want to get across. You can cut these in many ways – some suggestions are overleaf. Points to note:

- Write in the active voice. “Responsible for responding to customers via phone. Queries were logged, actions taken and the results recorded” is the passive voice and can feel that you are avoiding responsibility for your actions. “Fielded incoming customer phone queries, investigated them to their root cause and instigated corrective action with the internal technology teams” is in the active voice and sounds much more appealing.
- Avoid clichés like the plague. “Works well independently or as part of a team” is like saying “Works well facing the wall or the window” and is on lots of CVs. If you are going to speak about something like teamwork, which is on everybody’s CV, reflect how you ACTUALLY demonstrate that skill. “Within a team, organises the workload fairly between team members, cross trains to learn all roles and is capable of flexing responsibilities and time to deal with workload”.
- Write the whole thing in the third person rather than first, perhaps apart from the interests at the end. Why? “I am good at learning and following the process and have a keen eye for detail” can sound like your opinion whereas “Able to pick up and follow processes quickly with a keen eye for detail” sounds more authoritative, as though someone else is commenting on you.
- In these five bullet points, you should be summing up your career and not listing achievements - you can do that in another section or in the body. So don’t say “Managed a three year project to deliver a desktop upgrade to 700 users in London, New York and Hong Kong” – something like “Strong track record of successful project delivery with budgets up to £500K to up to 700 users in multiple global locations.”
- In general on a CV you should quantify what you have done as much as possible. So “Manages teams” could become “Manages and develops technical and sales teams of up to 15, including all aspects of line and performance management.” In this profile section, pick

the biggest example and qualify with “up to” – manages budgets up to £20K, teams of up to 20, delivers project to up to 500 users etc.

At the end of the profile section the recruiter should have a picture of you and your skills in their head and will probably skim read the rest of the CV looking for evidence.

## SKILLS, KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDE

### KEY SKILLS

There are lots of ways of cutting skills but one way is to think of them in categories:-

- People – building relationships, teamwork, managing, leading, influencing, selling, caring
- Data – research, numbers, finances, logic, programming, analysis, problem solving
- Ideas – create, write, illustrate, brainstorm, invent, play, publish
- Things – make, repair, service, operate, craft

Most people have skills that will span the categories though probable with a preference for one or two.

A skill is transferable when you have learnt it in one role or organisation but could use it again in other. So for example, if you can programme in a particular language, say Java, and it is used throughout the industry, then that is a transferable skill. If you can programme in a language that is only used within your company, then the transferable skill is programming and not that language.

### KNOWLEDGE

You may want to highlight specific sector knowledge that will be a plus. “Knowledge of Sarbanes Oxley and its application to settlement processes” or “Understanding of health and safety legislation and its application to branch fit out projects.” Some specific knowledge is always a plus. You can do the catch all “Able to pick up new concepts, systems and knowledge rapidly.”

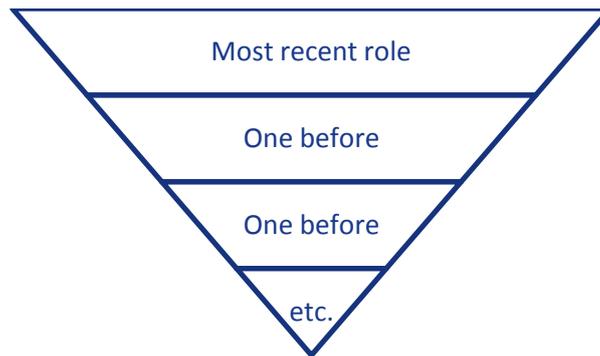
### ATTITUDE

It is said that you can train for knowledge and skills but it is difficult to train for attitude. However, it is quite difficult on a CV to convey attitude without resorting to language that sounds cheesy or a cliché – “Enthusiastic” or “Self starter” are two that spring to mind and “hard worker”. It is better to give examples that demonstrate the attitude: “Contacted over 300 clients and verified their data to comply to Know Your Customer regulation to a challenging 4 week timescale.”

### CAREER HISTORY

Reverse chronological with your most recent role at the top. Show progression where you can by splitting time at particular organisations up as you were promoted.

In general the content should be an inverse pyramid e.g. says most on the most recent role.



Beyond 10 years you can just list organisations, job titles and dates, be very brief or even summarise – “Progressed through a series of customer facing branch roles, through team leader to branch manager”.

Don’t leave gaps – it is a normal part of working life nowadays (perhaps not 20 years ago) for people to have career breaks, go travelling, or try things out but not pursue them as a career. Leaving gaps can look suspicious and you are likely to get asked about them.

### EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Beyond a couple of years in a career, you are likely to be able to sell yourself more strongly based on what you have achieved in work rather than your academic qualifications, although there are always exceptions. Only go as far back and include what is relevant – decide at what point GCSE in RE is no longer a plus to your career in investment banking. Include professional training courses and continuous professional development (CPD – commonly referred to) as well as membership of professional bodies. The more up to date the better – that 1985 refresher in COBOL may not be a massive plus.

People who are fresh out of university may start their CV with their education, but beyond the first role this should be moved to the end.

### INTERESTS

Interests are a double edged sword – it can give people you are going to work with a flavour of your personality and show that you are an interesting human being. It can also turn people off – some people may find “travelling across the world to ride on as many rollercoaster rides as possible before I die” quirky and interesting, others will find it nerdy. Things like “reading books and going to the cinema” may attract a question at interview so if you haven’t read a book in two years or seen a film in six months, or are able to talk about a favourite author or director, probably leave it off.

For people who are on their first job, or very early on in their careers, their interests, including e.g. voluntary work, can be a very valuable proxy for a work track record and in this case it is worth spending a bit of time on.

### LENGTH AND EXCEPTIONS

A standard UK CV is two pages long, and don’t go above that unless there is a real reason – it indicates that you have difficulty communicating concisely.

Exceptions may be:-

- Front office CVs are sometimes only a page long and have less detail

- Some MBA CVs are a page, as are standard US resumes
- Interim, contract or IT development CVs tend to be longer as they will go into equal detail on all projects – there is less of a sense of experience becoming “old” – but often this is a master CV and it will be edited down just to show relevant projects for particular roles.
- Academic CVs are longer and have published papers in a specific format.
- Very experienced professionals may get away with 3 or 4 pages detailing their career history, as they are less likely to be part of a volume sifting and will be getting roles via their network or search firms.

## APPEARANCE

Avoid the “Frankenstein CV” – it looked good once but has been added to in a piecemeal basis with copy and paste from job specs and other people’s CVs, contains 4 fonts and looks like a dog’s breakfast.

It is best to start with a clean template, paste your experience into it (Paste Special as plain text to lose the old formatting) and then go through and edit the language and the length to ensure that it reads as a coherent document.

Bullet points help the reader to skim through the information quickly – two line bullet points work well.

Many “looks” of CV work, but try to ensure that there is enough whitespace to make it look as though it won’t be difficult to read. Cramming too much information onto two pages using 8 point Ariel narrow will make the recruiter’s heart sink as soon as they open it. In general go for a single font all the way through – Arial and Times New Roman are perennial favourites, and normally there is a “new” Windows font on every version e.g. Tahoma on XP or Calibri on Windows 7 that may give it a fresh and up to date look. Don’t use a font that isn’t going to be on most operating systems. Emphasise using bold or a slightly higher font size as in the example.

## REMOVE

- Date of birth or age – age discrimination legislation means that many recruiters will remove it anyway. Although there are laws about age discrimination, age will still be a factor, positive or negative, for some recruiters. If you are concerned about appearing “long in the tooth” then remove dates for education and summarise earlier experience.
- Eligibility to work – this can be stated in covering letter and all recruiters will need to independently verify your status by a passport, work visa or other means.
- Marital status and number of children.
- “Full clean driving licence” etc. if not relevant to the role.
- It isn’t common to have a photo on your CV in the UK so avoid this. For some roles e.g. customer facing roles in retail – they may ask for this but generally leave it off.
- Avoid anything that is gimmicky – coloured paper, borders, etc. – unless you are a graphic designer showing off your skills...

## PROOF READ, REVIEW AND CHECK

In Word, hit “F7” to do a spelling and grammar check and correct any errors or ignore (if valid but not recognised) so they aren’t underlined in red when sent. Print out the document and read through it again. If you find yourself using a lot of the same word, then hit SHIFT+F7 to invoke the thesaurus and come up with a different one.

Most CVs are sent electronically but it is worth having a stock of CVs laser printed on good quality paper. When you are going to interview, have a couple of copies of your CV with you in case the interviewer doesn’t have it with them.

## GET FEEDBACK

You will get different types and quality of feedback from different groups of people.

- A Career Coach or Recruitment Consultant can give you a view based on their experience e.g. language, quantification, what comes across well, what needs to be stronger and so on.
- Peers or managers that you work with or have worked with can give you a view on whether it is a fair representation of you. It can be difficult to be objective about your own achievements and easy to miss things that you are good at but find easy.
- Network contacts who have recruited for the type of role that you are going for can give excellent feedback. This can also be a good way of letting people know that you are looking for different types of jobs.

To conclude though, as we started, it is your CV and you need to own it. Don’t get yourself into an endless editing loop because you have 15 sets of conflicting feedback – get the CV out and adapt it to roles as you go.

## ADAPTING THE CV

Be prepared to tweak your CV for different roles. Check the wording of the ad or job spec, and make sure that your CV addresses any required skills or knowledge. Sometimes this is just a case of replacing a term in your CV with the one on the job spec to make it easy for the recruiter to see that you have it. In other cases it may be inserting experience that is relevant but you don’t include in your general CV. Also have a look at the covering note section to ensure you are communicating well.

## ACTIVE VERBS FOR USE ON CVS

Here is an analysis of 118 CVs of people largely in the financial services sector and the breakdown of action verbs that they used:-

Managed	340	Supervised	13	Calculated	6	Held	3
Performed	108	Reported	12	Administered	5	Reorganised	3
Developed	106	Completed	11	Engaged	5	Strengthened	3
Worked	93	Promoted	11	Planned	5	Maximised	3
Acted	87	Updated	10	Executed	5	Launched	3
Provided	84	Dealt	10	Handled	5	Migrated	3
Ensured	56	Instigated	9	Presented	5	Deployed	3
Led	50	Researched	9	Devised	5	Captured	3
Project managed	45	Compiled	9	Fulfilled	5	Converted	3

Implemented	41	Recruited	9	Generated	4	Conducted	3
Processed	39	Controlled	8	Arranged	4	Transferred	3
Delivered	37	Input	8	Seconded	4	Responded	3
Investigated	37	Programme mgd	8	Contacted	4	Translated	3
Created	35	Facilitated	8	Marketed	4	Carried	3
Supported	35	Initiated	7	Represented	4	Determined	3
Maintained	35	Tracked	7	Made	4	Chased	3
Fielded	34	Organised	7	Mentored	4	Received	3
Designed	33	Management	7	Allocated	4	Priced	3
Oversaw	33	Resolved	7	Raised	4	Prioritised	3
Built	31	Authored	7	Collected	4	Involved	3
Monitored	31	Liased	7	Redesigned	4	Verified	3
Contributed	29	Negotiated	7	Opened	4	Followed	2
Produced	28	Advised	7	Participated	4	Balanced	2
Prepared	28	Collated	7	Selected	4	Increased	2
Achieved	26	Defined	7	Headed	4	Influenced	2
Identified	25	Reduced	7	Invited	4	Chaired	2
Checked	23	Booked	6	Gained	4	Attended	2
Reconciled	22	Formulated	6	Informed	4	Directed	2
Analysed	20	Coded	6	Evaluated	4	Authorised	2
Assisted	20	Played	6	Transitioned	3	Formed	2
Undertook	20	Integrated	6	Tested	3	Instructed	2
Introduced	19	Elicited	6	Prospected	3	Matched	2
Reviewed	19	Wrote	6	Coached	3	Documented	2
Ran	18	Took	6	Gathered	3	Maximized	2
Set	18	Communicated	6	Pursued	3	Changed	2
Coordinated	17	Kept	6	Configured	3	Targeted	2
Trained	15	Drove	5	Drafted	3	Interviewed	2
Progressed	15	Obtained	5	Recommended	3	Guided	2
Established	14	Applied	5	Collaborated	3	Proposed	2
Improved	14	Utilised	5	Serviced	3	Helped	2