



CVs and Covering Letters for Non-academic Roles

Guidance for PhD students on producing CVs and covering letter for non-academic roles.

What should you include?

In a non-academic applications the emphasis is on the skills and experiences you have that are relevant to the position you are applying for. The key is to be selective in what you include, focusing on your more relevant and up-to-date experiences in education, work and leisure.

Communicating what you can offer

“Some doctoral researchers report that they have sometimes experienced negative stereotypes of their skills and attributes ...”

The impact of doctoral careers, CFE Research 2014

While negative stereotypes are not typically shared by employers who have direct experience of employing doctoral graduates, it is clear that not all employers will immediately recognize the value of a research degree or the skills you will have developed.

You need to ensure that use your CV to communicate the benefits of your experience clearly and effectively, and that you relate this to the requirements of the role you are applying for and the contribution you will be able to make.

Sections on your CV

Most of the sections below are commonly found in CVs but they do not need to be presented in the order given below. You should think about what will have the most positive impact on the person reading the CV and order your CV accordingly.

Personal details:

- It is usual to have your personal details at the top of your CV. There is no need to include Curriculum Vitae as a heading. Your heading is simply your name.
- Provide your name and contact details, including postal address, telephone number and e-mail address.
- Other personal information, such as health, gender and marital status, is not necessary in a UK CV unless it is a requirement for the job.

Education:

- Use reverse chronological order, starting with your PhD and then other higher education qualifications.
- You don't need to include school education unless the employer specifically asks for it. Even then, you only need to mention Highers / A Levels or equivalent.

When describing your research, you may wish to include:

- The subject of your research and / or
- The research methods you used, e.g. technical skills, qualitative or quantitative methodology and / or
- The skills and attributes that enabled you to successfully undertake a PhD





However, before you enter the complete title of your PhD thesis and a description of the subject area, ask yourself if the employer you are sending the CV to will understand the subject or be interested in that detail. If not, it may be more relevant to describe the approach you took towards your research or the skills you used. See [the webpage 'identifying your skills'](#) for help with this.

Work Experience:

- Consider the most effective way of organising and presenting this experience. While you can simply list your experience in reverse chronological order, it may have more impact if you are able to choose section headings to suit each application, e.g. relevant experience, project management experience, teaching or training experience.
- Focus on outcomes and achievements, not just responsibilities, when describing your experience.
- Where your experience is not related to the role being applied for, ensure that you highlight the relevant skills gained.

Interests / Positions of responsibility:

- This section can often help to demonstrate an interest in the career area being applied for and / or to demonstrate that you can offer some of the skills the employer is looking for.
- All sorts of active pursuits will make a good impression, including sports, volunteering, travel, clubs and societies and evening classes.
- Give some detail on each activity, demonstrating the skills you gained, or any special achievements.

Skills:

- Consider a skills section with sub-headings for the key skills that the employer is looking for.
- Providing examples of how you have developed and utilised the skills looked for in different contexts can help you to make a positive impact.
- This approach is particularly effective where your education and work experience are not directly relevant to the role being applied and it is your personal skills which will allow you to stand out.
- Where you have relevant experience, a skills section may still be used to highlight technical skills of relevant to the position e.g. lab skills / techniques, IT skills - such as software you are familiar with, and language ability.

Personal Profile / Career Objective:

This is an optional section for your CV which can be used to give the employer an immediate positive impression of you and a clear indication of what you are looking for.

- Keep your profile clear, concise, positive, confident and specifically focussed for the role you are applying.
- Use active vocabulary to describe both you and your achievements.





- Keep your profile short - ideally just a few lines in length
- Place it at the start of your CV immediately following your contact details if included.

Publications:

- This section is usually only necessary for academic posts.
- In a non-academic CV, rather than adding a traditional publication list, it may be more appropriate to provide an overview showing the number and type of publications and where published (e.g. top-rated journal in your field).
- Your publications can also be used to demonstrate relevant skills, e.g. ability to write for a specialist audience, personal impact, effective communication.

References:

- Referees details should be positioned at the bottom of the second page.
- Give full contact details (postal address, telephone number and e-mail address) as well as the referees relationship to you, e.g. PhD supervisor, PhD external examiner, employer.
- Make sure you choose a referee who knows enough about you to comment positively; give them a copy of your non-academic CV if necessary
- It is acceptable to say 'References are available on request' if you have not been specifically asked for referees details.

The covering or supporting letter

Your CV should be accompanied by a **cover letter** outlining your motivation and aptitude for the job. Key points to cover include:

- Why you are interested in this particular position and how it fits in with your career plans. You should pay particular attention to showing that this is a positive and logical career choice post-PhD
- Why you are interested in this particular company - they want to know that you are genuinely interested in working for them and are knowledgeable about the company and the market in which they operate. You should research the employer and industry thoroughly to ensure you can demonstrate this convincingly.
- What you have to offer in terms of experience, qualifications and skills. Use good examples to back this up from all parts of your life including your PhD, any work experience and extra-curricular activities.

You don't need to repeat your CV, but you should draw attention to key points to encourage the employer to read it. It is essential to prepare an individual cover letter for each application ensuring you highlight your most relevant experience.

