

What do employers and admissions tutors want?

The reader wants to know what differentiates you from others. Study, work and spare time activities will have developed your skills and given you the opportunity to demonstrate personal qualities such as tact, enthusiasm or teamwork.

You need to emphasise three main areas:

- your academic performance
- your activities and interests
- your work experience, paid or unpaid

Before making applications, take a few minutes to:

STEP 1: Assess what you have done

Jot down some basic information. You will need a record of your education, work experience and other activities. Don't forget to include conferences attended, course projects, time spent abroad, positions of responsibility and voluntary work.

Next to each of these, write down 'from' and 'to' dates, and brief details about what you did – job tasks, courses taken, prizes won and so on.

Keep this information safe. You will need it for almost every application you make.

STEP 2: Assess what this means

Using the information from STEP 1, write down **significant events** and **achievements**. Divide your experience under headings, such as academic life, work experience, travel, leisure and voluntary activities.

Take each activity and make a note of what **insights** you gained and what **skills** and **qualities** you developed. Focus on exactly what **you** were involved in and what **your** unique contribution was. These notes will make it easier to fill in application forms, write your CV and prepare for interviews by providing **evidence** of your suitability.

For Example

	Activity	Task	Skill Quality
Education	MA Geography		
	Fieldwork project	Study of glaciers in Iceland	Adaptable
	Seminars	Presented papers to group	Persuasive
	Dissertation	Interpreting data	Numerate
Work Experience	Waitress		
	Serving customers	Working under pressure	Team work
	Ordering stock	Deciding what to buy	Organisation
	Training new staff	Running induction sessions	Presentation
Interests/ Activities	Squash		
	Competition	Represented Uni.	Motivation
	Club Treasurer	Kept accounts	Responsibility
	Social events	Went to lots of events	Mixing/ Communication

STEP 3: Research the course or job

The reader will also expect you to show that you have thoroughly researched the course or job.

- Read any information sent to you and consult the website.
- Call for more information, particularly if a named contact is given for 'informal discussion' about the opportunity. Think of questions you want to ask before you call.
- Make use of the Career Contacts on the Careers Service website for informal advice.
- Keep an eye on relevant journals and news websites for up to date information.

STEP 4: Make the link

Use the research you have done to match the skills and qualities required with the evidence of your suitability for the job. The aim is to produce an application that balances the needs of the job or course with your skills and experience.

Golden Rules for Effective Applications:

Do:

- spend time thinking about the skills, knowledge and achievements you have accumulated up until now
- research the course or employer as thoroughly as possible
- provide **evidence** of the skills and qualities required
- keep a copy of applications sent with a note of **who** it was sent to and **when**

Don't:

- send out the same, general information for every application - you **must** target your applications carefully

The Career Planning Programme Worksheet 'Recording Experience' can also help you to analyse the skills you've gained from your studies, work experience and other activities.

http://www.careers.ed.ac.uk/CPP/What_I_Want/DevelopmentRecord.doc

Universities receive lots of CVs. However, many people don't take time to make sure that their CV presents them effectively.

A 'general purpose' CV sent out 'en masse' is unlikely to be successful. You need to tailor your CV for each application you send. Your application package must present you as an ideal match to the opportunity for which you are applying.

Writing your CV is not as difficult as it might first appear. With a little preparation and thought, and some basic word processing skills, most people can produce a CV that presents them efficiently and effectively.

Here are some guidelines to get you started:

The basics of writing a CV

- Your CV is your first chance to make a good impression - 'you at a glance'. Make sure yours looks professional and has no spelling or grammatical mistakes.
- Your CV will usually include personal details, education and work experience. It will also say something about your skills and interests and give the names of people who will give you a reference.
- Academic CVs are often longer than the 'UK standard' of 2 pages. This is because they include publications and conferences attended, often as an appendix.
- You will usually present your education, work experience and other activities in reverse chronological order – the most recent (and usually the most relevant) first.
- YOU decide on the best way to present your information. Your CV needs to be relevant, easy to read, and make you stand out from the crowd!

Personal Details

Head up the page with your name, address, email that you check regularly, and telephone number. A mobile is fine. If you are between addresses (home and semester time) you can give both, with dates.

If you are not from the EU you should make clear your right to work in the UK.

In the UK there is no need to state your date of birth on your CV.

Personal Profile

Some people include a profile that summarises what they have to offer. If you choose to include a profile (and it is by no means standard on a UK CV), make sure yours is punchy and relevant, and no more than 3 sentences long. It should grab the reader's attention and make them want to read more.

Education

Give full details of courses attended, with dates. Courses with the same title can vary greatly between universities, so you should give an informative, interesting and relevant description.

Your CV shouldn't just say what you learnt, but also how you learnt it. As well as subject knowledge, you also gain lots of useful skills on your course. Projects that involve applying your knowledge to real problems, research tasks, team assignments and making formal presentations can all be used to show that you possess a wide range of skills.

How far back should I go?

As you progress in your career you will reduce the information you include about the qualifications you gained at school-level. Once you are studying at postgraduate level, there may be no need to include these results at all. However, some applications still ask for detailed information. It may be obvious how much information is needed, but if you're unsure, ask a Careers Adviser.

Writing about your academic studies

Applying for postgraduate study

- Give the name of the university(s), dates you studied and the title of the course, with classification, if known.
- Highlight the main courses you studied, expanding on any directly relevant to your application. Give grades if this strengthens your application.
- Summarise your dissertation and/or other projects, and mention outcomes such as research findings.
- Include any prizes or scholarships.
- Give details of time spent studying abroad as part of your degree.
- Read the application instructions to check whether more information is required, for example detailed course grades.

Applying for an academic role

- Summarise your research to date, and attach an abstract if more detail is appropriate.
- Include the name of your supervisor and details of funding awarded. Include any additional prizes or scholarships.
- Include a list of conferences attended, publications, presentations and refereed papers (in reverse chronological order). You can allocate a section on your CV or attach details as an appendix.
- Include any other specialist skills, such as technical equipment training, or IT packages used.
- Use specialist CV resources, such as the UK Grad Programme website www.grad.ac.uk.

Work Experience

An upbeat, interesting work experience section will convince the reader that you will fit in and be productive early on. Even if you don't have much work experience, you need to demonstrate your suitability by emphasising the skills you have developed.

Work experience doesn't have to be paid. In some sectors it is common to work unpaid for periods of time. These experiences can be just as valuable as your paid work, sometimes more so.

It's up to you how you arrange this section. One way is to separate directly 'relevant' and 'other' work experience.

For example, if you are applying for a lecturing job, you could include a section called 'Teaching Experience', giving details of university and other teaching experience. You could follow this with a separate heading for 'Additional Work Experience', giving details of your other jobs. Allocate space according to relevance – give more information about your teaching experience and just mention other roles briefly.

Presenting work experience positively

Employers will be interested in what you learnt to do, what you experienced and what you achieved. For example:

	Including context	<i>'...a busy international office...'</i>
	quantifying	<i>'...assisting four solicitors...'</i>
and	giving outcomes	<i>'..resulted in faster customer enquiry response times'</i>

can help your experience stand out from the crowd.

So, a CV statement could be transformed from:

'Taught after-school mathematics to sixth formers'

to:

'Tutored a group of three sixth formers leading up to Advanced Higher Mathematics exams. Used examination board materials to improve technique through practice sessions. Student exam success resulted in further referrals from satisfied parents.'

Additional Information

Your CV should mention:

- IT skills – can you use Microsoft applications? Be specific, what else can you use? Can you use other 'industry' packages?
- languages spoken – do you have 'basic', 'working knowledge' or 'fluent' ability in a language?
- professional memberships. Do you have student membership of a professional body? Do you sit on any relevant committees?
- technical training, such as industry-specific health and safety training.

Include a section for these or make sure they are included elsewhere on your CV.

Interests, activities, responsibilities and achievements

You could include sports, music, drama, societies and clubs, positions of responsibility, prizes and awards, travel, community projects, courses such as Insight Into Industry, charity involvement and much more.

Interests are not always relevant on an academic CV and you should use your judgement to decide how much information to include. Talk to a Careers Adviser if you are unsure about including this information.

You might also have heard of...

Skills-based CVs

A skills-based CV uses headings such as 'Teamwork', 'Communication' and so on, giving evidence to demonstrate you have these skills. This approach may be suitable if you have lots of experience in one career area, and want to change careers, or if you have had lots of short-term jobs and want to summarize the skills you have gained. You'll find examples of skills-based CVs on our website.

Computer packages

These can help you to write your CV. Some are free and some are quite expensive. The packages prompt you with questions about your education, work experience etc. and produce a CV based on your responses. This process can help you to structure your thoughts but won't usually help you to think about the most relevant information or the best way to present it. Be cautious about packages and make sure you have control of the end result, rather than the package dictating to you.

CV Checklist

Do:

- spend some time writing down all the key points that you want to include in your CV before you start writing the CV itself
- make judicious use of space, bullet points and bold text
- use past tense for past courses and jobs, and present tense for current courses and jobs
- watch out for large unexplained gaps in your CV. Employers may notice and be suspicious about large chunks of time unaccounted for

Don't:

- give the same amount of space to each job or course. If your standard grades take up as much space as your degree, you've probably got the balance wrong
- use patterns, borders or graphics. You might think it looks good, the employer might not agree
- give long lists of skills without evidence of how you acquired them

Ask at the Careers Service for more information on how to write your CV, or drop in for feedback on one that you've already written.

You will usually be asked to give details of two (occasionally three) referees on application forms, and many people include them on their CV. Referees are critical in the process of selection and for funding applications. It is usual to give the names of two referees with the following details:

- Job title
- Address
- Telephone number
- Email
- Their relationship to you (Director of Studies, personal tutor, manager).

If you are in your final year or have recently graduated, you should name your Director of Studies and/or one of your tutors. Academic jobs and postgraduate courses often ask for more than one academic referee. For vocational courses, you could choose to include a referee from work, especially if the job relates to the course.

Make sure the people you choose are happy to provide a reference, and discuss your plans with them. Giving them a copy of applications, CV and covering letters will help.

The covering letter may be the first point of contact you have with the university or department and is therefore of crucial importance. It must highlight your suitability and entice the reader to look closely at your application.

A covering letter sent with an application form may be shorter than one accompanying a CV, as it mainly confirms your interest in the opportunity and indicates any enclosures. Even if the instructions do not specifically ask for a covering letter, including one creates a good impression.

What to include

The covering letter should be typed (unless otherwise stated) on no more than one page of plain A4 paper. Lay it out neatly in the style of a business letter.

It should contain no more than 4 or 5 paragraphs and will:

- 1. Set the scene.** State what you are applying for and where you saw it advertised. Confirm that your CV or application form is attached.
- 2. Explain why you are interested** in the job and/or the organisation - carefully target your letter and demonstrate your knowledge of the course or department.
- 3. Explain why** your unique blend of knowledge, personal skills and experience make you a strong candidate.
- 4. Indicate what you hope to gain** from the course or job and where it fits into your career plans.
- 5. Conclude positively.** Tone is very important. Try not to use exactly the same expressions that appear in your CV.

Covering letter checklist

Do:

- address it to the most appropriate person
- ensure that your letter supports rather than repeats your CV
- show you have thought carefully about your 'fit' for the job or course you are applying to
- let the language used reflect your enthusiasm
- ask someone to read over it

Don't:

- address your letter to Sir / Madam if there is a named contact
- send the letter off without having it checked for spelling and grammatical errors
- underestimate the covering letter's potential to make an impact