

career : now

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CV & COVER LETTER WRITING TIPS

A professional CV and cover letter will help employers understand the skills, experience and personality that you could bring to their business. Follow these top tips to make yours stand out from the crowd.

1. Put your full contact details at the top of the CV, including your name, address, home phone number, mobile number and email address.
2. Choose a professional looking font such as Calibri, Arial or Times New Roman and use font size 11 or 12.
3. Use a professional sounding email address. If you currently use an address that includes a nickname or slang words, set up a new one with your full name e.g. josh.jones@gmail.com
4. Keep things tidy and lined up and check your punctuation and spelling. Ask a friend or family member to look at it for you; attention to detail shows that you care about your future.
5. Try to keep your CV concise and easy to read - one or two sides of A4 is enough.
6. Include a cover letter with your CV as this allows you to expand on your skills and why you want the job.
7. Print your CV and cover letter on good quality paper and send in an A4 envelope, keeping them neat and presentable.

CV LAYOUT

After your contact details you should include the following headings:

PROFILE

This is a great place to introduce yourself and say a little bit about you. This section should be at least a paragraph long. When writing focus on the job you are applying for, highlighting your interest in this area. You could also mention any relevant work experience you have.

SKILLS AND STRENGTHS

You can use bullet-points in this section to list your skills and strengths but please tell the truth. For example:

- Keen and eager to learn
- Punctual
- Friendly and helpful
- Excellent computer skills.

EMPLOYMENT OR WORK EXPERIENCE

Start with your most recent job or work experience and work backwards. You should name the employer and the dates you worked for the company e.g. January 2015. You could also note your job role and a description of your duties and responsibilities.

EDUCATION AND QUALIFICATIONS

Start with your most recent qualifications and work backwards. Write the name of your school or college, the qualification and the subject. Some employers like to see what grades you achieved but if you prefer you can write a summary i.e. "I achieved seven GCSEs at grades 4-8 including maths and English."

OTHER INTERESTS

This section gives potential employers an idea of what you are like as a person, especially if you have not had much work experience. You can write about hobbies, clubs or activities that you are involved in. Participation in sports or other group activities show that you are a team player and have good self-discipline.

REFERENCES

You will need one or two people who can talk to an employer about you. This could be someone from a job or work experience, college tutor, or sports leader; but not friends or family. You should write their full name, job title, contact details and their relationship to you.

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INTERVIEW TIPS

So, having created a great CV and cover letter, you've now been invited to an interview! Here are some essential things to remember to let the employer see the best of you.

WAYS TO BE PREPARED

1. Research the company before you go to the interview; read the company website to get an idea of what they do and check out their social media such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn to find out about their latest campaigns and news.
2. Take a copy of the job advert and highlight the key areas of responsibility. Think of questions you could ask in the interview about the role and compare your CV and interests to the job. Some questions you could consider are: What is the start date? What are the working hours? What does a typical day look like? What career opportunities are available to me?
3. Practice your answers to common interview questions such as: Why do you want to work for us? What are your strengths and weaknesses? Where do you see yourself five years from now?
4. Take your CV with you and be familiar with what you have written. You may also like to take your certificates presented in a smart folder.
5. Allow plenty of time to get to your interview, so that you don't arrive late. It's normal to be a bit nervous. Plan ahead and do a 'dummy run' so you know how to get there and what travel arrangements are available to you. If you are delayed on the day of the interview, make sure you call the employer to apologise, explain why you are running late and give an estimated time of arrival.
6. Look smart; first impressions really do matter. Men can wear smart trousers, shirt and tie, and women a smart skirt or trousers, shirt or plain top. It is advisable not to wear jeans or trainers

THE DAY BEFORE YOUR INTERVIEW

There are five main reasons why people are unsuccessful at interview: Lack of preparation, nervousness, body language, attitude and appearance.

Don't let interview nerves get the better of you. Make sure you sleep well the night before the interview as it will help your concentration.

The interviewer wants you to do your best, so they won't be trying to catch you out. If you prepare well and do your research, it will make you feel more confident.

Use this checklist the day before to make sure you have everything you need:

- Interview clothes are clean and ready
- Travel plans arranged to get to the interview
- Paperwork; CV, copy of job advert, certificates, company information
- ID if you've been asked to bring it
- Notebook and pen

If you are unsuccessful this time, think about how you'll address this in the future.

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THE INTERVIEW

Remember that the interview is also an opportunity for YOU to find out if you like the employer and the company.

- Arrive early so you can be calm and prepared when you are called for your interview
- When you meet the interviewer say hello and smile, make eye contact and greet with a handshake
- Listen to any questions fully before you answer
- Remember the job advert and think about examples from your work experience or interests that are applicable to the role
- Do not interrupt the interviewer
- Be aware of your body language and try to maintain eye contact throughout
- Be confident, keeping your answers clear and concise; limit to about one minute where possible
- Always be positive and show enthusiasm. Talk about what you can do for the company and why you are interested in this opportunity. The interviewer will be looking for a good attitude and interest in working for the company
- Don't be afraid to ask the interviewer to explain something that you have not understood
- Avoid asking about the salary; the employer wants to make an investment in you, and many apprentices are offered permanent jobs once their training has finished
- At the end of the interview, ask any outstanding questions you may have. Thank the interviewer for their time and reiterate your interest in the role. You could ask about the next stage, i.e. if there will be a second interview or a work trial assessment.
- Review your interview experience by writing down key points and questions you have.

DON'T FORGET

- You are not out of the interview until you have left the premises so maintain your positive professional attitude
- Email the employer to thank them for their time; outline your continued interest in the job and add anything which supports why you are the perfect candidate.

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