



Push's Quick Guide to... Writing a CV

708,684

This is the amount of hours the average UK human is alive. You are asleep for a third of them, too. That means, if you live to 80.9 years (the average age), you will have under 500,000 waking hours of your life, from the day you are born. Your CV is being written from the day you are born.

What is a CV?

A CV stands for a Curriculum Vitae. This translates from Latin as a 'course of life'. It doesn't mean a course you study. It means a course you follow: like a race course. The word 'career' has numerous origins, but one we like is 'chariot': a very unstable vehicle that was a challenge to ride. It took skill, bravery and focus. That is a good way to think of a career journey: a chariot which you bravely ride along your course of life. You may stumble sometimes. You might even fall off. And it all takes practice to build up your skills as you drive it forward along your race course of life.

What is a CV made up of?

A standard CV is made up of 4 sections:

1 - Personal data: They might like to know your name, date of birth, address, contact number, email address etc...all they can contact you if they like the look of the other sections of your CV (some organisations might even ask for your driving license or passport details). Don't make any of this section up, and don't have an email address that is something ridiculous (it is often the first thing they see if you email in a CV).

2 - Proof: this is where you explain any qualifications and achievements you have that prove you know (or can do) certain things that would be relevant to the job role you are going for. This means showing your mix of knowledge and training (this can include a driving license, degrees, apprenticeships, diplomas, HNCs, HNDs, music or drama certificates).

3 - Experience: your time in a working environment where you proved you've put the education and training ingredients into practise...and managed to cope ok (work under pressure, adapt to situations, work with different people, communicate ideas, basic tech and literacy perhaps via phone/email/in person, problem solving, using initiative). The experience part is the bit most people find hardest to write as it isn't just listing a grade or the name of a qualification; it is crucial you mention stories of your experiences. Anyone can show they can pass an exam and get a grade, but stories build an image of you in an employer's mind, and therefore what you're curious about and genuinely interested in. Employers know that a lot of experience comes through your own initiative and energy to set those opportunities up, so you're giving them a clue as to the type of passions you have in life. The key to this section is to convince them that your experiences (and what soft skills you've learned whilst doing them) are really relevant

4 - References: employers like to know what other people think of you...'other' being previous people you have mixed any of the three ingredients with that are mentioned above: knowledge, training and experience. If you've spent time with other people developing any of those, that means they have observed you in action, seen how you learn and develop, seen your personality, attitude towards things, and your behaviour when put in certain situations. Your referee (not that type, they probably don't own a whistle and put red and yellow cards in their top pocket) could therefore be: a previous teacher or tutor, a previous employee including a boss or manager, or mentor, a person who has organised work experience or a placement for you. It could even be a customer or client you have worked with on a number of occasions. The main thing is to put down someone who knows you – and can express to an employer that you are a useful person people to have around, that can get things done, can learn things quickly and be willing to develop, can show passion and energy...and can be trusted.

The importance of a Cover Letter

You may have a great attitude, and a mix of the knowledge, training and experience, but unless it is relevant to the job position (or training scheme) you're applying to, don't put it in your CV. A cover letter is your opening pitch: it is 500 or so words (or at least no longer than a page of A4) written by you. It can also be a separate document also attached with your CV (make sure it is software an employer can open on their computer, like Microsoft Word) or you can make the body of your email your cover letter.

It needs to be personal, to the point and written in a style that makes your personality come off the page. Remember, a cover letter is often the first thing an employer will read – to build a picture of you as a professional useful human being. They often read this before they open your CV. Imagine you had a pile of 200 CVs on your desk, and you're busy with your job, too. You would want to read a Cover Letter which builds an instant picture of someone friendly and professional, who you can picture doing the job role. If an

employer likes the cover letter, they will want to open up your CV. A good cover letter is firm but friendly, and shows you are not wasting their time (or your time). It is never copied and pasted: it is built on research and shaped to be targeted specifically for that company. A good cover letter shows them you feel you would be a great match for the mix of knowledge, training and experience, and work attitude, that they are looking for.

Selling yourself

Selling is powerful. Think of any time you have realised you needed something, then seen a creative, emotional (or just plain catchy) advert that has affirmed not only that you need to buy that product or service, but that you need to buy it from that brand. Companies like Apple, Coca Cola and Adidas are all successful at building products people desire, because they apply three simple marketing rules very well:

- **Know your market**
- **Know what your market wants**
- **Know your product**

Following this order of rules, with good research and experimentation, allows them to work patiently toward a final product that is built on what people need. They make this need (and how they meet it) clear to consumers, via highlighting unique selling points (USPs). You, as a human being, are much more than a product, but you can apply these 3 successful marketing rules to sell yourself to employers...

1. **Know your market: learn as much about the company, and their industry, as possible**
2. **Know what your market wants: what clues do they give to what makes a successful employee at their business?**
3. **Know your product: with all this info, shape your cover letter and CV to highlight the main things about you that could be USPs for their needs. Then pitch yourself to them.**

Know your market and know what they want.

You can get to know all this by exploring four things:

- **Job description:** whatever was advertised to you will hold major clues (some blindingly obvious, some less so) as to exactly what type of job this is, what you'll be expected to do each day, and what knowledge, training and experience you may need (or not yet need as they may want to teach you some of it on the job). This is the bit you've got zero excuses on, so get going Sherlock: piece together all the clues presented to you in their words. They may give you more than words – in the form of online links (read anything they send you, for clues). Once you know exactly what they want, you can go through all your knowledge, training and experience from your life, to pluck out the bits that match.
- **Personal specification:** this goes deeper than the job description: this is a breakdown of the behaviours, attitudes and personality traits they want for the job position. It is the employer drawing you a picture of their ideal candidate in close detail. The person specification may even list what things are essential and which things are desirable. Make sure you have the essential things, or you will be wasting yours (and their) time. If you are 1 thing short on the 'essentials' list, then you can always get in contact to ask them if there is wiggle room.
- **The internet:** find out everything you can about the company, maybe even the department for which you'd be working. Ask yourself: when did the company start? Who started it? Who is the current CEO or manager? What does the company stand for? Do they have an ethos or mantra which they live and grow by every day? How quickly do people seem to progress through the ranks? What type of people work there? Are they similar to you? Do they believe in the same things you believe in? What career rewards do they seem to offer? The world (wide web) is your oyster: if you really dream of working for them, follow their social media, search for them on Youtube and see what comes up. Google them each morning to see what's being said about them in the news (and who by). Also, companies always have a section of their website which says 'About' or 'Our Story'. Read it, know it, then read it again. If you make it to the interview stage, one of the most common questions is "*what do you know about our company, and also the specific job role we are offering?*"
- **Ask:** If you still can't find out everything you want from the job description and person specification, call them up or go in in person and ask someone your remaining questions. You won't look stupid (far from it) you will look like someone who cares enough about their application to do it well because they believe they are the right fit for the company. Obviously don't ask them anything that you really should have spotted in the job description and person specification, otherwise that can indeed be a disservice as they can think you're not someone who can't concentrate and find solutions to (solvable) problems – but some problems aren't solvable and if you genuinely think there's something you need an answer for, which will help you create the CV and cover letter, then ask, in person (an email will get lost in the bottom of next morning's inbox): it is your chance to impress them because in the age of emails, and of TikTok, Snapchat, Whatsapp and Instagram, people like taking time to create, edit and send the perfect thing in their own time. Modern teenagers are most hesitant on how to conduct themselves and their words, in live situation with someone...because they have to react in the moment. It is something social media lets you hide behind, and just by you calling them up or going in in person, it is your chance to make an impression, getting them knowing who you are...and getting them remembering you as someone who really cared about creating an effective cover letter and a targeted CV. It will also show them you've got great communication skills and initiative.

Know your product

There is a phrase that Icelandic people use a lot: 'Ad ganga med bok I maganum'. It translates to 'everyone gives birth to a book', or more literally "you carry a book in your stomach". Icelandic people are always voted near the top of the Global Happiness Survey, carried out each year by the United Nations. One in Ten Icelanders will publish a book in their lives. They love stories, and they love thinking of their life as a story: something exciting, that is yet to be written each day, and can be changed page by page by a person's individual passion, energy and initiative. Remember, a CV is a Curriculum Vitae, which is Latin for 'course of life' – and to take the Icelandic example, each day you're constructing a story and it is up to you, for each job, to choose which parts of your life journey are relevant to the job role.

This is you: your own Icelandic 'bok'. It lives and develops deep within you. Get to really know your life: stop and self-reflect, and think about what true happiness means to you. Structure your 'bok'. Go through it page by page and find those parts that match what the company wants, what the job requires and what rewards it can offer you. Find the characters which your character is drawn to, which will help you're your spirit and sense of community and belonging: where are your work tribe, and how can you show yourself to them? Knowing yourself means knowing what you want from life (the right combination of inner and outer rewards). It means knowing what would make you keep waking up on the rainiest mornings and wanting to go to work. It is the type of job that makes you say **"I get to go to work today"** as opposed to "I have to go to work today".

No 2 people want the same things in life

It might be that you want variety in the job; that you want to work with new people each day; that you want respect; or power; or fame; or responsibility; or to help people; or to travel; or to be challenged; or to learn from an expert. Whatever you want from life, make a list, and make sure that list meets the job role being offered – by at least 75%. Want to know the most popular interview question? "Tell me about yourself". They don't mean everything, they mean *"tell me what you want from life, how this role fits into it, and how we could be a good match for you"*

Speculative applications

75% of jobs are not advertised. Most UK businesses are small-to-medium sized employers (SMEs). Some are so small, but growing successfully, that they might not even officially be advertising a job. That doesn't mean they won't listen to you – if you can create an opportunity that benefits them. A lot of small companies or independent businesses in your area, might not realise they need someone like you, until you go in and explain to them how you could help their business grow. Travel to see them, introduce yourself and sell your skills, personality and ideas on how you could help them. So: speculate on 3-5 businesses in your area where you can see yourself developing your job skills, with people you might click with. Then act on that speculation: sell yourself.

PUSH's top 10 rules to CV writing:

Rule 1: You don't need a "funny" opening to your cover letter. And you don't want to open with a boring cliché.

- *"SEX! Now I've got your attention"*
- *"I would love to work for you"*
- *"Hello. If you don't accept me, I'm going to get you"*

Rule 2: Don't write something that 1,000s of other people would also write.

- *"I enjoy socialising with friends"*
- *"Good working in a team or as an individual..."*
- *"I enjoy going to the cinema and long walks on the beach"*
- *"I'm good at drama and everyone says so"*
- *"I have always been a creative person"*

Rule 3: You haven't wanted to be an architect since you were a foetus, so don't say it. Tell them a story of how your passion was awoken, at some point in your life, for that type of career or job.

- *"Ever since I was a child..."*

Rule 4: Get a person (someone who knows you really well) to read your cover letter and CV, imagining they are the employer. Beforehand, tell this person the job you are going for. Send them the job description and person specification if possible, too. Get reflections and feedback from them, about whether you are a match for what they need, and that your cover letter and CV accurately reflects you.

Rule 5: Watch for poor formatting. It makes your words hard to read. Remember the 'bok': a good narrative needs good flow and structure, so it engages people.

Rule 6: Be hesitant about applying to a role if the employer lists certain skills, qualifications or experiences as *essential* - if you don't have them. Sometimes, if you do lack do required traits then you might be able to show them how (a) you can learn them quickly (b) you are desirable in other, perhaps better, ways.

Rule 7: Watch for poor spelling and grammar. If you are dyslexic, as well as highlighting this as one of your qualities (show how it makes you unique) get someone who isn't dyslexic to read your cover letter and CV over a few times. Reading it out-loud to you, too, to ensure you feel happy with the narrative and flow of the words.

Rule 8: Make sure your CV isn't too long (make it 2-3 pages in length). #qualitynotquantity

Rule 9: Social media can be very beneficial for professional networking (think: LinkedIn) but it can also be a major turnoff. If you post something, is it forever? For example, have you posted any discriminatory remarks on social media platforms or forums? We'd truly hope not – as every single person should be treated equally, with dignity and respect – but if you feel there are any comments that could be deemed in such a way, do check – and reflect on your attitude and behaviour going forwards (employers value these things so much). Check your privacy settings: can the employer find any pictures or words you've said online, from the past, which might be a real turnoff to their ethics, values and the professional behaviour they expect from their employees?

Rule 10: Failure is fine to mention (in your experiences section), so long as you clearly highlight what you learned from it, and how you got better from it (what was the end result of the learning process). How did it make you stronger, in attitude and skills...

“Experience is the name we give our mistakes” –Oscar Wilde.
“Success is failure after failure without losing enthusiasm” – Winston Churchill
“See rejection as an opportunity to get better” – Shailene Woodley

Nothing is a failure, so long as you can say what you've learnt...and how it made you better.



Your Life is a Story you Write



Embrace your Uniqueness



Stephen's guide on how to handle failure