

CV Writing Tips for Graduates

by Kim Isaacs

You've spent three years or more building your knowledge and even earned a good degree. So why aren't employers clamouring for your services? The problem you and other new graduates face is that hiring managers are more interested in what you can do for them than what you did in university. So use your CV to convince employers that your academic success is transferable to the workplace.

What's Your Goal?

It's important for recent grads to provide a targeted objective statement. The objective can be stated in a formal objective section or referenced in a qualifications summary. Whichever approach you choose, avoid flowery or generalised objectives that are too commonly used by new graduates. For example:

Bad: Seeking a challenging position with a progressive company that will offer opportunity for growth and advancement.

Good: Honours graduate of ABC University's speech communication programme seeking a position in training and development. Offer hands-on experience in classroom teaching, corporate training and communication research.

If you have more than one possible career objective, develop variations of your CV, each one targeted to a different goal.

Emphasise Academic Credentials

If your related work history is minimal, place your education before work experience. List academic honours such as distinctions and other awards.

Consider adding a list of related courses in your education section so hiring managers can see that you have a strong academic foundation.

Highlight Educational Experiences

When reviewing your CV, hiring managers want to understand what type of worker you would be if they hired you. So describe educational experiences such as internships, projects and even volunteer activities as if they were paid work experiences.

If you lack work experience related to your goal, include your internships and projects in your experience section. Give examples of actual assignments, challenges you faced, your contribution, and the results and benefits to the employer.

When describing unrelated jobs, keep the descriptions to a minimum. For example, if you waited tables to help pay for college but your goal is software engineering, you don't need to provide a description of your day-to-day food service responsibilities. Just include your employer's name, location, job title and dates. You can briefly include any extra responsibilities you were given as a result of your performance or special recognition (such as Employee of the Month) to help demonstrate your strong work ethic.

Add Keywords

Your CV should be optimised for keywords to ensure you are found in an electronic applicant search. Keywords are buzzwords that an employer would use to find a match for a job opening. Job titles, educational credentials, certifications and skills are all possible keywords.

A great way to start considering the right keywords for your occupation is to review job advertisements for your ideal position. Look at the requirements, and if you see certain terms used frequently, they should probably be in your CV.

Pick the Format That Works for You

A traditional chronological CV format, which emphasises employment history, doesn't usually work for recent graduates. You will need to highlight your academic foundation, motivation to succeed in your field and the key skills that would help employers achieve their objectives. Many new graduates prefer to use a combination or functional resume to relay their key qualifications.