



# The jobseeker's guide



With tips on...

Preparing for job-hunting

Applying for a role

Succeeding in interviews

Career planning

# The jobseeker's guide

Considering your next career move or trying to get your first job? This guide gives you practical advice on all the questions you may have about job-hunting. From writing your CV to succeeding at interview, we'll give you the tips and tricks to make job-hunting a manageable process.

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# 1 Preparing for job-hunting

## Writing a standout CV

When applying for jobs, your CV is your ultimate selling tool. If you want to be selected for interview, this is your opportunity to showcase your skills and experience. It can be challenging to get through this first hurdle as employers hiring often receive hundreds of applications for each job advertisement. Have this in your mind when preparing your CV as you'll need to be both succinct and relevant to grab their attention.

### What to include on your CV

#### 1 Contact details

Put your contact details first so recruiters can easily find your email address or phone numbers.

#### 2 Personal statements

This should be a short statement or 'summary of experience' and include relevant information about your skills in relation to the job ad. It should be tailored to the role rather than a general statement, such as: 'I'm a results-driven professional with excellent communication skills.'

#### 3 Career history

Start with your most recent job, work experience or voluntary placement and work your way back. List your job title and the dates you were employed. All the dates should match up; this is something a recruiter will look for. If there are gaps, make sure you can explain them. Remember to write about more than just the duties or responsibilities you held in each role and include any key achievements along with figures and statistics if you can. This shows how you added value to the company and that you're results-focused.

#### 4 Qualifications, training and education

Next, list your education (school, college or university) and relevant training. Some roles will require specific qualifications, so highlight those on your CV.

## What can make the difference?

Each role is unique and therefore your CV will need to be adapted for each application. Research the organisation and what they're looking for. You can use the job description or advert to match your skills against the role. Take out any unnecessary information – this just takes up space and the recruiter reviewing your CV won't want to know about things that aren't relevant to their vacancy.

Don't worry if you haven't got any work experience yet as there are plenty of other ways to show you have the right skills and abilities:

- Did you have to organise school/college/university events, have to keep records or hold meetings? If so, these are perfect examples of being organised, working in a group, using your initiative and sticking to deadlines.
- Were you a volunteer for a charity? This proves that you're a committed individual.
- Did you coach sports at college? It shows you may have some relevant skills for an HR career.

## The basics

### Formatting

Highlight titles and main headings in bold. Use a standard font such as Arial or Times New Roman and don't be tempted to make the font size small to fit more on the page. It must be easy to read. Fancy borders and formatting can take the focus away from the important part – the content.

### Length and order

You have about ten seconds to grab the recruiter's attention, so make sure you put the important work experience first. If you have limited work experience, you can put your academic qualifications first.

No recruiter wants to read an eight-page CV, so make it short and sharp. Aim for two pages or less and include only what's really necessary to get you the job. Use simple, plain and positive English with clear and concise content.

## Spelling and grammar

Always thoroughly check your spelling and grammar and ask someone else to read your CV before you send it. Nothing looks more unprofessional than a CV with lots of errors.

## Need to edit down your CV?

Here are a few things you can remove because they're just not essential for your application:

- driving licence – unless the role specifies you need to drive
- photograph
- date of birth
- references – just state: 'References available on request.'

## Your social media presence

### LinkedIn profiles

If you haven't yet considered setting up a LinkedIn account, you could be missing out on another opportunity to promote your skills and experience. It's used in a very similar way to your CV – think of it as your electronic version which people can view online. It is also a great way to network with people who work in the type of industry or job you want.

You'll need to include:

- a professional photo
- a summary of yourself
- work experience – keep this more succinct than your full CV
- skills and expertise – you can select from a list of options; only include the ones you're really proficient in
- education and qualifications.

You can then connect to people you know on LinkedIn. If they are old work colleagues or managers, you could ask for a recommendation to confirm some of your skills.

## **Final social media tips**

Some employers will use social media to check people's profiles before offering them a job – there are no laws against doing this and so make sure that whatever they find will not put them off. You can help yourself by:

- Making your profile on sites such as Google+, Facebook and Instagram restricted to be visible to just your friends. All of these sites have pages that allow you to set your privacy settings.
- There should be no bad language and opinions expressed should not be offensive to others – if in doubt, don't post it (or delete it if it is too late).
- Be aware of any photographs you are in that might be visible to the public – think about whether they are photos you would mind a potential employer seeing.
- Remember that things on social media sites stay on there – there have been cases where people have lost their jobs over things they posted when they were much younger.

## 2 Applying for a role

### The application form

Organisations are increasingly asking jobseekers to apply using their own application form or online portal. The questions on these forms help them assess your suitability, which may not be immediately obvious from traditional applications. Here are some tips to help you.

#### **Meet the organisation's requirements**

Some roles require certain grades or knowledge of particular computer programmes; make sure you have these before applying. Companies can quickly reject applications because you don't meet their specific requirements. If you have extenuating circumstances, highlight them somewhere on the form.

#### **Do your research**

Find out about the business, what it can offer and what it's looking for. They will probably ask why you're applying and it's important that you've considered what you want to gain from working for them. You can read up on the skills needed to work there and include your experience of those in your application.

#### **Thinking about the language you use**

Just because you're submitting an application online doesn't mean you should be careless when completing it. Check your language and don't use 'text speak' when you complete an application. It's amazing how often this is done.

#### **Think quality not quantity**

A recruiter doesn't want to read pages and pages of answers. Keep your writing concise and clear, with the important information first.

#### **Check your qualifications are correct and complete**

Employers may ask for certain academic grades for the role. Take care to check your qualifications are correct and make sure you attach copies if required. Most recruiters will check your qualifications.

### **Ensure there are no gaps on your application**

If there are years missing from your application, such as the time between school and university, highlight these rather than leaving them blank. Recruiters want to see a full chronological history of your schooling through to university and your work experience. Be prepared to discuss reasons for any gaps in the interview.

### **Check the content and spelling**

Always check your spelling and grammar. Online application forms often don't have a spell-checker, so you should write your answers in a word processing programme (such as Microsoft Word), spell-check and then paste them into your job application.

### **Answer the questions asked, not those you wish had been asked**

Employers ask questions to discover whether you meet their requirements. However, it's surprising how many candidates don't answer the questions they're asked. If the question has two or three parts to it, answer each in turn to demonstrate you've read and understood them.

### **Check the form before you hit the button – you get only one chance**

Take one final look over your application before submitting it. You get only one chance, so make sure it's as good as can be!



# How to write a cover letter or email

Similar to application forms, a cover letter or email can market you and your skills. Just like your CV, you will need to amend each cover letter for each job application to make it suit that particular employer. Keep a 'draft' copy saved on your computer so you can adapt it each time you apply for a job.

## Who's recruiting?

Find out the name of the recruiter and address your cover letter or email to them. It makes your application more personal and shows you've used your initiative. If not available, use 'Dear Sir/Madam'.

## Keep it short

Don't write an essay about your skills and how much you want the job. Keep it short and to the point. An A4 page is fine or a few paragraphs on email.

## What to include

This is your chance to highlight your key skills, experience and/or qualifications that are relevant to that particular job. Explain why you want to work for the company and what you can bring to the role, expanding on any relevant projects that are not already on your CV.

## Clarify your availability

If you're going to be away or out of reach for some time, let the recruiter know. It's frustrating for busy recruiters when they can't get hold of candidates.

## Close with a positive

End the letter with a positive, expressing your willingness to discuss your application at interview. Perhaps highlight that you will call them to follow up in a few days and remember to include your contact details in case they want to reach you.

## Final checks

Lastly, review your spelling and grammar. If you're applying online and there is no chance of adding a covering email, you can make your covering letter the first page of your CV, so it's all in one document. Personalise the letter and title it 'Covering letter for x company'.

## 3 Succeeding in interviews

### Preparing for interviews

You've impressed them with your CV and covering letter, and now you've got that all-important interview.

#### Before the interview

##### Do your homework

Before the big day, visit the organisation's website and review the job description. Read up on the skills they're looking for and whether you meet those requirements. Then think about any examples you can talk about that demonstrate those skills or behaviours.

##### Plan your travel and expect the unexpected

There's nothing worse than getting lost or missing trains before an interview. Of course, things can happen that are out of your control and it's important to inform your interviewer if you're going to be late. Leave early and you'll feel more prepared and composed on arrival.

#### At the interview

##### Don't panic

It's natural to feel nervous before an interview. But don't panic if things don't go according to plan. If a question throws you off track, ask for a moment to think about it and compose yourself. If you're really stressed, let your interviewer know; this will help them understand your situation and make you feel at ease. They don't want to catch you out – they just want to see if you have the right skills and motivation for the role.

##### Be yourself

Give an accurate picture of yourself in the interview. Friends and family may have advised you about what to say, but it's best to be yourself. This way, you reveal your personality and make yourself appear much more relaxed.

## **Watch your body language**

If, when under pressure, you tend to play with your hair, fiddle with a pen, bite your nails or anything else, try not to do so during the interview. Instead, look your interviewer in the eye, sit up straight and try not to slouch.

## **First impressions last**

First impressions count. Make sure you're wearing something appropriate for the interview that's not too uncomfortable. Your handshake is important, so look the interviewer in the eye and shake firmly.

## **Listen and answer the questions**

You may have prepared answers for some questions. However, don't answer a question with a response that doesn't relate to it. Listen carefully to the interviewer and make sure you answer appropriately, and don't be afraid to ask the interviewer to elaborate or repeat themselves if you're unsure.

## **Change your examples**

If an interviewer wants you to demonstrate your communication skills, teamworking talents and business ability, don't use the same example for every question. Try to think of various ways to highlight your skills, perhaps by talking about things you do outside work or university.

## **Come prepared with questions**

Ask questions about the role and the organisation – this will show that you are interested. For example:

- How many people are in the team I may be working in?
- What's the best thing about working here?
- When can I expect to hear your decision?

## **Look interested and leave on a positive**

Smile, nod and show you're interested in what your interviewer is saying. If you look bored or don't maintain eye contact, your interviewer may think you're not interested in the job. Even if, at the end of the interview, you decide the role isn't right for you, thank them for their time and remain enthusiastic. It's always best to be professional.

## Typical questions you may face

Interviewers will ask you many different questions. The key to answering them successfully is simple: be prepared. Look at the job description, advertisement and the organisation's website. What are they looking for from their people? Then consider your relevant skills and experience and how you can demonstrate them in the interview. A project or work experience role that didn't seem important at the time may be an excellent subject to discuss. Here are some questions your interviewer may ask.

### **Why have you applied for this role?**

Explain your motivation for the role, what you know about the company and why you think you're suitable for the position. Your answer should reinforce why you are a good fit for the job and convey your enthusiasm for the role. You can mention the good match between your skills and what the job requires – including what you will bring to the company; your interest in the organisation's area of business/products; and the job being an exciting challenge for you.

### **What attracted you to this organisation?**

Show you're interested in the organisation and that you've researched them. For example, do you know the locations they operate in? And who their competitors are? Knowing details like this is important when applying for HR roles. To make a difference, you really need to understand the organisation.

### **Tell me about a time you had to work under pressure**

Your interviewer is encouraging you to talk about a project or piece of work that you found quite stressful. How did you deal with the pressure? Did you give up and walk away? Or, did you find a solution and get the job done? They want to learn about your resilience when under stress and how you cope when things go wrong.

### **Tell me about a time you had to resolve a conflict in a team**

The interviewer wants to know if you can deal with issues within a team. So, describe briefly the structure of the team and your role within it. If there was conflict, did you deal with it or ignore it? What was the outcome?

### **Can you give me an example of when you've had to give feedback to someone?**

They're asking if you can show your coaching skills and ability to develop others. Do you shy away from giving feedback or are you good at tactfully giving positive and developmental responses? How did they take your comments and what was the result?

### **Tell me about yourself...**

Don't be tempted to give a short response – use this time to introduce yourself to the employer in the best possible light. Your response to this should be well rehearsed, confident and relevant. It's not necessary to reel off your life history – instead, focus on things that relate to the job you're going for.

### **What are your key skills/strengths?**

Focus on what you know they are looking for, even if it has only been a small part of what you have done to date. Take another look at the job advert and download the job description from the company website, work through it carefully and think about how your experience and skills meet their requirements.

### **What are your weaknesses?**

Nobody is perfect and everyone can identify areas for improvement. However, when thinking about yours, make sure they are relevant to a professional context. Remember to acknowledge that improving on your 'weaknesses' is important to you and, where possible, show how you are working to develop them. For example, you might be someone who is shy, but you purposefully make an effort to talk to people as you recognise this is an issue.

### **Where do you see yourself in five years?**

Your interviewer might want to know how the job you are going for fits in with your long-term plans. It's okay if you haven't worked out the next 20 years in your head – very few people have. However, you should have a general idea about what your interests are, what kind of areas you would like to work in and even perhaps where you see yourself in the next few years. Tell the interviewer how the job and their organisation fits in with these ideas – perhaps they offer lots of training and development, which in time will help you progress.

## 4 Career planning

### Ten-step plan for job-hunting

Finding a job can take time – many people find it difficult to keep motivated. Finding work can feel like a job in itself, but your hard work will pay off. To keep on track, think about setting yourself a plan. Here are ten steps that will help.

- 1** You should begin by being clear on the type of role, or roles, you are looking for and the location you would like to work in. Don't be too narrow as you might not be leaving yourself with many options, and if you look too broadly you could become overwhelmed. It's important to give yourself enough time to spend on each application.
- 2** Think about where you could work – do you know which local and national companies offer the types of jobs you are interested in? You can research organisations online or ask friends, family or teachers/tutors for their thoughts. However, remember to stay realistic – you might have to start out doing something else before moving on to what you really want to do.
- 3** Make a list of ten organisations and start a spreadsheet to help you keep track. Find out if any of the ten organisations you have identified have any job opportunities that would be suitable for you. You can then choose the vacancies you want to apply for. If this is your first job, you are going to be looking for an entry-level role – without experience, you will be wasting your time if you apply for a managerial role.
- 4** There are a massive range of job titles in use so you may not understand what level the position is and what experience is required until you read the full job description. Look out for job titles that include words such as 'Assistant', 'Co-ordinator', or 'Administrator'.
- 5** Make sure you read a job advert properly; make a note of important information such as the company name, contact details and application deadline, as these will come in handy later on.

**6** Now you can start applying for the vacancies – start with the ones that have the nearest closing dates so you can get your application in on time. Keep copies of your application/CV/cover letter on file so you have something to refer to if called for an interview.

**7** Make sure your application is tailored to every role – some of the content (such as education) will be repeated, but read the job description carefully and make your application relevant. Don't forget to check every application for spelling and grammar. More information on applications can be found in the next section.

**8** Remember to keep adding to your list of organisations, as some may not have any vacancies that are right for you. Keep them on your list so you remember where you have applied and then research new ones you can add.

**9** Within a few weeks of the application deadline you should start to hear back from employers if you have made it through to the next stage. Some organisations don't have time to let unsuccessful applicants know, but you can follow up with them to ask whether the vacancy has been filled and if it is possible to get any feedback on your application.

**10** Be persistent and ask for feedback! If your search is not producing the results that you want, don't blame yourself. Talk to other people, ask them what they did when looking for work and grab yourself some free advice. If you do get any feedback from an employer, make a note of it and use it constructively to make changes to your future applications. That way you are more likely to get better results next time.

## Useful resources

### Job-hunting websites

<http://hr-jobs.peoplemanagement.co.uk/>  
[www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk)  
[www.milkround.co.uk](http://www.milkround.co.uk)  
[www.targetjobs.co.uk](http://www.targetjobs.co.uk)  
[www.graduatejobs.com](http://www.graduatejobs.com)  
[www.apprenticeships.org.uk](http://www.apprenticeships.org.uk)

### Qualifications and advice

[cipd.co.uk](http://cipd.co.uk)  
[cipd.co.uk/qualifications](http://cipd.co.uk/qualifications)  
[cipd.co.uk/qualifications/higher-apprenticeships](http://cipd.co.uk/qualifications/higher-apprenticeships)

For more information visit  
[cipd.co.uk/careers](http://cipd.co.uk/careers)



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