

ADVICE FOR WRITING YOUR COVERING LETTER

INTRODUCTION

Your covering letter must be typed. Firstly, present yourself briefly, and specify which position you are applying for. Indicate how you heard about the job. If your application is unsolicited, explain what motivated you to apply.

1st PARAGRAPH

Explain what interests you about the job and the prospect of working in the company. Display a good knowledge and appreciation of the company's activities (you can consult professional journals, or the website, if they have one...). You should also indicate your short and long-term professional objectives.

2nd PARAGRAPH

Complete your C.V. by highlighting the personal qualities and skills that you would bring to the company. If you are responding to an advert that specifies the qualities required, take these qualities and use them as the basis of your presentation. Here, you can refer to your C.V. ("Curriculum vitae" in British English, "Resumé" in American English), explaining exactly how your education or training would be of benefit to the company. This is also an opportunity to draw attention away from any lack of experience in the profession, or to justify a break between jobs.

CONCLUSION

Anticipate the next step of the recruitment process, by implicitly requesting an interview. If need be, indicate the times you are available. Finish your letter with a conventional polite phrase. In British English, if your letter begins with *Dear Mr. Smith*, finish by writing *Yours sincerely*. If it starts with a simple *Dear Sir*, finish with *Yours faithfully*. In American English, finish with *Sincerely yours* or *Sincerely*.

And don't forget to sign it...

HOW TO WRITE YOUR C.V.

The C.V. ("Curriculum vitae" in British English, "Résumé" in American English) is a crucial element in any job search. It can help you obtain an interview, and its content will partly determine how the interview goes with your potential future employer.

The recruiter might receive several hundreds of applications for the same position, so it is essential that your C.V. attracts his attention, and helps him gain a favourable impression of you quickly. It is important that you take your time when writing your C.V. While there is no such thing as the ideal C.V., there are, however, rules to observe and errors to avoid that, if followed successfully, could swing the balance in your favour.

First of all, you must target the kind of job you are going to apply for. Whichever kind of job or sector you target, your C.V. should be tailored for the sector and for the required qualities. It is your job to present your profile accordingly, and to make sure it meets the needs of the recruiter.

The general presentation of the document is important. It must, of course, be typed. When typing, use a clear and classic font, such as Arial or Times, and a size of either 10 or 12. Avoid using too many fonts, especially over-elaborate ones. Once you have finished writing, you must use the spell-check. Be careful to use a good quality of paper (no low quality or coloured paper), and a good quality of printer (laser if possible).

Your C.V. should be clear, well-spaced and well-structured. The person reading it should be able to work out your profile and pick out anything of particular interest in just a few seconds. You should avoid overloading your C.V. with superfluous information, and only include information that could be of interest to your eventual future employer. Don't hesitate to ask people around you to read it and to offer comments and suggestions which would help refine certain points.

Your C.V. should be either 1 or 2 pages long. If it is too long, there is a chance that the reader will be discouraged, and could skip essential information. He could equally conclude that you lack a sense of organisation and clarity. On the other hand, if it is too short, the employer could think that you have nothing to offer the company, and that you have not carefully considered the position you are applying for.



This CV is not complete: you have only half the information. The other half is on sheet B. Work with a partner who has sheet B and complete the CV by asking questions. Your partner will also ask you questions. Follow these two rules:

1. Speak only in English
2. Don't show your CV to your partner until you have finished

CURRICULUM VITAE

Name: Jonathan R Porter

Address: _____

Telephone: Home: (032) 123 4567
Office: (____) _____

Date of birth: 15th June 1965

Nationality: _____

Family: Married, two children

Education: 4 "A" Levels: English, French and German 1973;
Computer Studies 1978
BA (Com) University of _____ 19____

Work Experience: 1986-19____
A _____ S _____ Manager
J. B _____ C _____ Ltd
_____ Road

1990-present
Purchasing Manager
Well & Goode Ltd
45 London Rd
Rugby RG2 3QY

Other qualifications: _____ in _____

Languages: French (good)
German (basic)

CV/Resume

Published May 1997
To be revised in Spring 1999

The writers of this careers information booklet are staff from member services of the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS). It is published by the Careers Services Trust and printed and distributed by the Higher Education Careers Services Unit (CSU). Full editorial control is exercised by AGCAS.

This booklet was written mainly for undergraduate students and graduates who have access to the material referred to in the text. Other readers may need to consult other agencies (eg careers services or local job library) to obtain some of this material.

Although every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this booklet is accurate and is as up-to-date as possible, readers should check with the appropriate organisation for the latest information. AGCAS can accept no responsibility for ensuring that the accuracy is absolute.

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ISBN: 1 84016 004 7

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MAKING A START

When it comes to managing the recruitment process, the employer's situation is probably more difficult now than it has ever been. There are more students and graduates competing for, in many cases, fewer jobs - so the business of selecting the right candidates has become an increasingly refined art. How do you decide which ten people to appoint from 400 applicants, most of whom have the desired academic qualifications?

This situation also makes the candidate's task all the harder. If you are going to have any chance of getting the interview, and success in securing the job you want, your applications must 'hit the target' with employers more than ever before.

This booklet and its companion, *Going for Interviews*, will help you to make the most of your applications in a job market where it sometimes isn't just degree results that count. In an ideal world you would be reading this during the first, or at least the second year of your course, giving you time to plan ahead. Then you would have time to make the most of opportunities to gain work experience and an awareness of the skills for which you will need to show evidence in CVs and application forms later.

But we don't live in an ideal world, and many of you will be in your final year with urgent deadlines looming for submitting applications, wondering about how to complete them successfully.

Whether you are planning ahead or perhaps in a last-minute panic, you need to make a start somewhere. Before we look at what prospective employers want, let's consider your own needs for a moment.

'What Am I Really Looking For?'

Despite the need to be aware of what graduate recruiters want, you should only apply for a job once you have given thought to which

fulfilment: matching your skills, interests and personal motivation. The idea of working, say, in 'the media', advertising, marketing, publishing or even in an apparently unusual and challenging field such as forensic psychology may seem glamorous, well-paid and/or very interesting, but are any of them right for you?

Do you fully understand where your skills and abilities lie? What really interests you in life - working as part of a team dealing with the public in a busy setting, or working in more of a 'backroom' role? Is money the most important thing to you? Are you prepared to work anywhere you are sent, or would you prefer to work in your home town? Do you love working with figures, or would you rather use your verbal communication skills? None of these is mutually exclusive - you can mix any combination of ingredients you like - but the point is to **understand your own needs and abilities**, and then to identify the job(s) or career(s) that will meet those needs. Your applications and interviews will be all the better for it, not to mention your life generally.

Advice, Guidance and Information

If you are unsure about which careers do interest you, it's never too early to visit the Careers Service at your institution. There is a wealth of information and guidance material available to help you match your knowledge, skills, interests and preferences to the right job.

One good place to start is with a computer-based system you should find in your Careers Service, *PROSPECT* (HE). This acts as a kind of ideas-generator by matching your personal profile against a databank of over 400 occupations, then suggesting which of these match your interests, motivations, degree subject, etc. Detailed occupational profiles are also held by the Careers Service in printed form for you to consult.

apart from the need to make the right career decision for your own future, be in no doubt that your decisions and the reasons for them will be tested by employers at the application / interview stage. You will need well-considered answers to questions such as:

- 'Why do you want this job?'
- 'What do you think you can offer our organisation?'
- 'What attracts you to a career in...?'
- 'Why do you think you are suited to this type of work?'
- 'In what ways are your skills/experience/personal qualities relevant to us?'
- 'Why our organisation in particular?'
- 'What are your long-term career aims?'

If you have done your research and **self-profile** properly (see page 5), you should have no trouble with your answers, because you will be fully aware of your reasons for applying. However, if you are unsure about your real motivation for the job, have failed to understand what is involved, or are less than enthusiastic, this will come across from the very first stage of the application process.

If you take the time and trouble to assess yourself, your skills and your motivation before you make any applications, you will make better career choices, save a lot of wasted time and effort - and be more successful with your applications.

"What Are Employers Looking For?"

Each employer should make it clear what is wanted through the job description given in their advertisement, company brochure or detailed 'person specification' sent out to candidates. For your application to be most effective, you need to **analyse** job descriptions and find ways of matching your profile to them.

Job Descriptions

At the heart of the job description is the employer's need to find out if you have the skills and personal qualities needed to do the job, and if you will **fit in with the culture of their organisation**: the image it has of itself, its staff and its customers. Don't forget that every kind of organisation has 'customers'

- those for whom it provides products or services, whether commercially or otherwise.

Some will demand **specific skills** and knowledge in, say, engineering, biological science, languages, statistics, information technology or something relevant to professions such as law or medicine. Other jobs may be open to those from any degree discipline, but it can still be a question of 'what else have you done?'. In both cases, employers often want evidence of more general, **transferable skills** that will make you effective in a variety of work roles.

Specific Skills

You may have gained specific skills through your academic course or through other training and experience at work or in your private life, perhaps through hobbies and other interests.

Go through your course handbook or materials and remind yourself which skills each course unit was designed to teach you. Make a list of these and rate your skill or experience level next to each one: this could either be a 'basic/intermediate/advanced' type of assessment, or one relating to the length of time you have been using or practising the skills in question. Do the same with skills you have gained elsewhere.

One example of a specific skill now required across a range of jobs is the ability to use Information Technology/Computers: word processing, spreadsheets, databases, desktop publishing and so on. Other examples include skills in speaking other languages, perhaps certain business skills such as book-keeping, or even the basic skill of driving a car.

Personal Transferable Skills

There are various terms used: **core skills**, **interpersonal skills**, **transferable skills**, **key skills**, **self-reliance skills** or a combination of any of these. The point is that they are seen as abilities or competencies which are central to almost everything you will be expected to do in a work environment. They are transferable between jobs of different types.

The range of transferable or key skills wanted by employers does vary, and though there is no truly definitive list, Chapters 5 & 6 of this booklet do show the range of skills mentioned

frequently in...

subject. Good examples of what key skills are valued by employers can of course be found in recruitment advertisements in the national press, or vacancy bulletins and publications such as **PROSPECTS FINALIST**...

'good interpersonal skills, sound commercial sense...'

(Trainee Accountants, for Arthur Andersen)

'excellent communication and influencing skills...'

(Sales & Production Management Trainees, for Glynwed International)

'commercially astute analytical thinker... ideally fluent in German/French... good interpersonal skills... creative flair...'

(Chemistry or Bioscience Commercial Management Trainees, for Zeneca)

'initiative, self-motivation, determination, judgement, flexibility & adaptability... excellent problem-solving, planning and organisational abilities... first class communication skills...'

(Science, Engineering, Computing and Business Trainees, for Amersham Health Science Group)

'commercial awareness, strong interpersonal skills... ability to articulate ideas effectively, proven numeracy...'

(Market Research Trainees, for Taylor Nelson AGB plc)

'resourceful, flexible...ability to interact confidently and effectively as team players in a multi-cultural environment...'

(Graduate Engineers, for Halliburton)

'flexible, motivated, committed to teamwork... excellent social skills, good organisation & planning... and relevant work experience in an industrial environment...'

(Graduate trainees from various disciplines, for Rover Group)

'considerable personal effectiveness... self-aware, resourceful, resilient, innovative... readily adapt to change...'

(Civil Engineering/Built Environment sector, for Mouchel Group).

Can pick up more... above by reading the 'Appointments' sections in national newspapers or professional journals for the areas of work that interest you.

Gathering Evidence

You could, of course, write all sorts of things on your CV or application form, claiming to have 'highly-advanced computer skills' or 'excellent communication skills'. But employers will need evidence of how and where you gained those skills and abilities.

The Self-profile

Before attempting an application form or a CV, you should therefore create a **self-profile**, analysing every aspect of your life and experience in terms of the specific and general skills you feel you possess.

This process is made easier if you think about the **key events** in your life:

- specific achievements
- current / past responsibilities
- notable coursework projects
- work experience
- voluntary work
- extra-curricular activities (clubs, societies, interests)
- notable travel experiences.

Consider each event or activity in terms of the skills you used or gained, and list them. What exactly did you have to do? Communicate ideas? Work in a team? Lead or organise a group? Plan and manage a project? Deal with the public? Work with a wide range of people? Develop a strategy? Learn a new language? Design and create something?

Once you have 'brainstormed' your thoughts onto paper, you can develop and organise them into a clear profile of your skills and achievements. You will then have a valuable tool with which to answer questions on application forms and in interviews, as well as an aid to constructing your CV.

CVS AND COVERING LETTERS

Your job application, whether a CV and covering letter or an application form, is usually the first contact you will make with a prospective employer. It is vital, therefore, to create a good impression from the start. Bearing in mind that 30 seconds is reckoned to be the average time an employer will spend initially viewing an application, it must be **accurate, presentable and interesting** in order to get noticed.

Your primary objective is to convince a prospective employer that you have the skills, experience and enthusiasm to do the job in question.

Earlier in this booklet we explored ways of achieving this when completing application forms, but now we'll focus on the Curriculum Vitae.

Curriculum Vitae

A record of personal, educational and work details, your CV is a personal marketing tool which should be presented in a way that will show your skills, qualities and experience to their best advantage.

Unlike an employer application form (EAF), where you are restricted to giving information in a format controlled by the employer, a CV gives you the freedom to create your own personal record, presenting and highlighting your key strengths in a format that you control.

When Should You Use One?

- When the vacancy specifically asks for one.
- In reply to any job advertisement which simply asks for 'applications in writing...'
- When making speculative applications (ie approaching prospective employers without having seen a specific vacancy).

A CV can take many different forms, depending on the type of employer you are approaching. A few examples are listed here.

Types of CV

- Conventional
- Skills-based
- Academic
- Visual/Creative
- Electronic
- European

Although the contents of these will be similar, the structure and format of each will vary.

The first three types of CV are probably the most commonly used, but in an increasingly diverse job market you need to decide which is the most appropriate style for the job or industry in question.

In advertising and the media world, for example, recruiters can receive particularly **visual/creative CVs** from candidates keen to demonstrate originality of thought. One large advertising company received a running shoe from a candidate with their CV attached and a caption reading 'Now I have a foot in the door...'

However imaginative your ideas may be, at the end of the day it will be the content of your CV - the skills and experience you have to offer - that will determine whether your application proceeds beyond the selector's desk.

The **electronic CV** is a new concept which takes advantage of the Internet. It can be used in three different ways, with an interview being the primary goal:

- to respond to an Internet job advertisement
- to display on an Internet recruitment database
- to create your own web page(s).

Certain guidelines should be applied to an electronic CV to ensure that the pages are scannable and can be electronically retrieved. The information should be: clear, concise and

in a format that ingresses key points. Further details on electronic, or 'on-line', applications and CVs are given in Chapter 4. **Using the Internet.**

When applying for jobs in the rest of Europe, many of the same guidelines for CV writing will apply as for UK-based jobs. Generally speaking, one page of A4 should suffice, a passport-sized photograph may be required and you should remember to emphasise language skills. Keep the content as simple and concise as possible to avoid possible misunderstandings. Most Careers Services have details on **European CVs** (and for other countries), with guidelines on job applications for a particular country.

CVs for technical posts. CVs for engineering, technical, IT, architectural, design and all jobs which are closely course-related, must show more detailed information on coursework. Give precise information on equipment used and the systems and methods with which you are familiar.

also be interested to know details of your final year project or dissertation. If you think you can closely match the needs of a particular employer, you might want to consider using a skills-based CV, as shown on page 9.

Generally speaking, you have the freedom to create your CV in a way which reflects you as an individual. The end product should show an employer that you have the relevant skills, abilities and values appropriate to the job for which you are applying, and this should be done in a way which is considered the norm for that profession.

The examples which follow demonstrate three different styles of CV, using the same information to apply for different jobs.

Most Careers Advisers will warn you against copying any of the following CVs. However, the models used, together with the booklets and videos listed in the Chapter 7, should be helpful in your quest to design the perfect CV!

Conventional CV. This is probably the most widely-used and straightforward style of CV. It would be acceptable to most employers. If you are a mature student you will probably have more material to draw upon than a 20 - 25 year-old. This will be an opportunity for you to demonstrate a key skill required for many graduate level jobs - the ability to prioritise! Otherwise, the principles are the same, whether you are 21 or 41.

PATRICK CHONG

Home Address: 24 Glendarloch Wynd
Crieff
Perthshire
Date of Birth: 11th April 1975
Email: 9243759pc@wgl.ac.uk

Term Address: 65 Russell Road
Glasgow
G11 0PZ
Nationality: British

EDUCATION AND QUALIFICATIONS

1992 - 1997
University of
West Glasgow

MEng (Hons) Electronics & Electrical Engineering
(Expected 2:1)

Honours Subjects:
Optic Systems, Signals & Electromagnetic Waves, FibreSystems, Computer Architecture,
Image Processing & Pattern Recognition, Radiation, Communications
Non Technical Subjects: German, Marketing, Finance

5th Year Placement

As part of my degree I undertook a six month placement with the European Space Agency in The Netherlands

1987 - 1992
Crieff High School

Highers
Maths(A), Geography(A), Physics(B), Chemistry(B), English(C)
S/O Grades
As above including German and French - 6(1)s, 1 (2)

Conventional CV continued

WORK EXPERIENCE

July - Dec 1996
European Space
Research &
Technology Centre

Student Engineer

Based in Noordwijk, I worked as part of a multi-cultural team on a commercial test campaign for Passive Intermodulation Interference. Enabling me to further develop my technical skills in a professional environment, this work involved attending team meetings and liaising with various departments within the organisation.

July - Sept 1995
Shell Technology
Enterprise
Programme

Technical Assistant

Working in an insurance brokers I was responsible for developing a new computer system. This involved communicating with all levels of staff, meeting project timescales and documenting a training manual for company employees.

1991 - 1994
Waterstones

Bookstore Assistant

Invited to return each summer, this work involved dealing with a wide variety of queries from the general public and cashing up at the end of the day.

SKILLS AND INTERESTS

University Activities

Student Member of IEEAs Staff-Student Committee Class Representative (1995-1996) I was able to put forward students' views, on issues such as timetabling of tutorials, to staff at our committee meetings. As a volunteer tutor at new students orientations I found it rewarding introducing first year students to the University.

Computing

Basic understanding of 'C' Programming language, working knowledge of Microsoft Word for Windows, Excel Spreadsheets and the Internet.

Languages Sport

University level German, basic French.

Member of West Glasgow University Canoe Club.

Member of West Glasgow University Skiing Club I enjoy playing football regularly.

Travel

I have travelled extensively in South America and parts of Asia including India and Nepal.

REFEREES

Dr G Smithson
Senior Lecturer
Department of Electronics &
Electrical Engineering
University of West Glasgow
Glasgow
G11 9PQ

Mr S Falconer
Head of Radio Frequencies
Laboratory
ESTEC
PO Box 968
The Netherlands

Skills Based CV. This CV (page 9) shows an alternative way of detailing information in a CV, allowing you to demonstrate a close match between your experience and an employer's requirements. The 'personal profile' is optional and can be used to emphasise key qualities appropriate for a particular job. If you choose to use a personal profile, evidence of how and where you developed the skills or qualities mentioned must be provided elsewhere in your CV. In this CV, **Interests** and **Referees** would follow the format shown in the Conventional CV example.

EMMA BURTON

25, Vicarage Close
Rotherham
South Yorkshire
Tel: 01709 333333
(Home Address)

email: emb@arts.nbham.ac.uk
DOB: 12.01.75

23, Pershore Road
Edgebaston
Birmingham
Tel: 0121 444444
(Term Address)

PERSONAL PROFILE

Capable of achieving personal objectives as demonstrated by successful completion of my degree and my commitment to leisure pursuits. Excellent verbal and written communication skills and an ability to relate to a wide range of people. Ambitious and goal orientated, with a clear vision of future objectives. I am keen to find a challenging position within a progressive organisation.

SKILLS PROFILE

Communication

- Good communication skills gained from giving presentations at seminars, issuing clear and concise instructions to suppliers, chairing meetings and dealing with customers tactfully and diplomatically
- Advising and instructing customers at Aquasports and counselling teenagers at summer camp
- Working on team projects during my course has involved different roles which have developed negotiation and persuasion skills

Team Work

- Successful course work was dependent upon participation and motivation of syndicated project groups
- Experience of working within a team based culture involved planning, organisation, coordination and commitment

Problem Solving

- Development of strong analytic and diagnostic skills as part of degree course
- Running the office at Aquasports Ltd taught me to find solutions to customers problems in a calm and efficient manner

Languages

- Fluent German, basic French

Computing

- Good working knowledge of several word processing packages including Microsoft Word, Excel spreadsheets and the Internet

EDUCATION AND QUALIFICATIONS

1994-1997

University of
North Birmingham

BA (Hons) Combined Arts (2.2 expected)

1988-1994

Allinton Comprehensive

3 A'levels - English (B), History (C), German (C)
8 GCSE's

WORK EXPERIENCE

1995 - 1997

Aquasports Ltd, Rotherham

Shop assistant and acting shop manager during summer vacations

1992-1994

Camp America

Camp counsellor to 11-19 year-olds during summer vacations

Academic CV. This shows a typical CV used in **postgraduate applications**. Note that subjects studied are shown in greater detail than other forms of CV, with emphasis on any awards received. Also, details of projects undertaken and specialisms selected should be given. If applying for a PhD, emphasise your academic interest, membership of relevant societies etc. **Post Doctoral CVs** should offer additional pages giving a clear, concise summary of research expertise together with a list of publications and conference publications. **Applications for industry** should reflect a broader skills set and avoid over-technical jargon. You would need to develop your **Work Experience** section to show evidence of skills gained, and include sections on **Skills and Interests** and **Referees**, similar to those in the *conventional CV example*.

HARRY MURDOCH

Home Address:

The Holmes
Ashbourne Road
Buxton

Term Address:

Flat B
33 Coronation Street
Manchester

Tel:

0129 837 4980

Tel: 0161 332 9653

Date of Birth:

24th June 1975

Nationality: British

Email:

9243865@smu.ac.uk

EDUCATION AND QUALIFICATIONS

1994 - 1997
University of
South Manchester

BSc (Hons) Physics & Astrophysics
(Expected 1st Class)

Year 3
Final Year Group Project

As one of a team of 4 working on a 15 week project to design and make a microwave radio interferometer, I tackled the data analysis package. Regular team meetings enabled us to work together effectively and ensured we met the project deadline. We were awarded first prize for our group presentation to lecturers and classmates at the end of the exercise.

Honours Subjects

Advanced Mathematical Techniques in Physics, Stellar Dynamics, Galaxies & Observational Cosmology, Astronomical Data Analysis, Star formation & Plasma Astrophysics

Year 2

Physics 1, Physics 2, Physics 3, Astronomy & Astrophysics 2. Two afternoons each week were spent on practical work at Acre Road Observatory

Year 1

Physics Foundations, Physics, Physics Advances, Astronomy & Astrophysics. Two afternoons each week spent on laboratory work in the School of Physics

Awards

Class prizes for Physics 1, Physics 3, Astronomy & Astrophysics
Winner of Newton Medal in 1995 Faraday Prizewinner in 1996

A Levels

Physics (A), Mathematics (A), Geography (C) 10 GCSE's

1988 - 1993

Buxton High School

WORK EXPERIENCE

June - Sept '96
University of
South Manchester
School of Physics

I spent the summer working with the Solar & Stellar Research Group. I was involved in the preparation of a teaching package for students and spent some time presenting a number of planetarium shows for school children in the Manchester area.

Content of your CV

Regardless of the type of employer you approach with your CV, the information you present should contain the details below.

Personal Details

- Name, address, (home and term-time), telephone no., e-mail address (if relevant).
- Nationality - if you are an international student with right to residence or work in the UK, this should be stated.
- Gender (male/female) should be given, even if you think your first name makes it obvious. The reader may not be of the same ethnic origin or culture as you.
- Date of birth.

Education and Qualifications

The order in which you list these is optional. However, as a new graduate or Diplomate, it is usually your recently-acquired qualifications that will be of most interest to an employer, and many CVs are therefore presented in reverse-chronological order.

Give:

- dates and details of universities /colleges attended and degree details;
- school results and dates.

Work Experience/Employment History

These details should be listed in the same order as above, ie reverse-chronological, or chronological, and should include: dates of work experience, name of employer, and a description of what you gained from the work experience.

Use action verbs to describe how you did the job, eg 'This job involved **liaising** with customers... **organising** an event... **supervising** the office team...' etc..

Do include any voluntary and other seemingly less-relevant jobs, too. If you give it some thought, these will almost certainly have provided opportunities for developing skills and qualities in which the employer will be interested.

Skills and Interests

Use this space to highlight skills you have developed which are not mentioned elsewhere - eg computing skills (listing specific packages used), language skills, driving licence, etc. List some interests you are involved in regularly and are able to back up with examples.

Referees

If you don't have space to list the names and addresses of two referees (generally one academic, one work-related), then insert the phrase 'References can be supplied on request' at the bottom of your CV.

General CV Tips and Guidelines

- Your CV should be no more than two sides of A4 in length (perhaps three if you are a mature student).
- It should look businesslike - use good quality paper and a suitable type size to create a clear, easy-to-read document that will make a good impression.
- Keep it simple and concise - avoid long paragraphs of text and instead adopt short, sharp sentences or bullet points.
- Ensure there are no gaps in your CV. A selector will almost certainly check for unaccounted-for periods of time which may be viewed suspiciously.
- Allocate space on the CV according to the relevance of information to the employer - ie more space devoted to your university involvements or work experience, and less to school activities.
- Make your key selling points obvious by listing them in order of priority under headings and/or highlighting text in bold.
- Remember to check your spelling and punctuation - perhaps ask a friend/family member to proof read it for you before printing out your final draft.
- Finally, use the 'arm's length test': hold your CV out at arm's length and check your first impression. Is it cluttered? Is space wasted? Are your headings clear? Can the reader see at a glance where to go to find the information they are looking for?

The Covering Letter

When sending a CV or application form to an employer it should always be accompanied by a covering letter. As a letter will be the very first document to be read, it is initially as important as your CV. Its purpose is to ensure your application is seen by the relevant person and to draw their attention to key points in your CV, highlighting your suitability for the job.

An example of a covering letter is set out on page 13. It should ideally be word-processed or typed, and must give the impression of being especially for that organisation, not a mailshot to all similar companies listed in the Yellow Pages (even if it is!). Unless the employer specifically asks for it, or you are sure that your writing is both legible and a credit to you, do not handwrite covering letters.

In the case of speculative applications, your research on the organisation should have clearly identified a role that you can apply for and the most relevant person to receive your letter. You should also make it clear in the letter what you wish to achieve - a summer work placement, a work shadowing opportunity, a permanent post or whatever the case may be.

Your covering letter can also be used to outline any special circumstances that are not covered elsewhere. For example, if you have a disability you can show how you have overcome it or turned it to your advantage.

Covering Letters - Tips and Guidelines

- Use one side of A4 - three or four paragraphs of text.
- As with your CV, keep it clear, simple and concise.
- Address it to the appropriate person by name - if necessary telephone the organisation to establish who this might be.
- Draw out from your CV (using different wording) evidence to show your suitability in terms of your skills and experience.
- End on a positive note, stating that you are looking forward to hearing from the organisation.
- Finally, read over your letter. Have you got your main points across? Do you sound an interesting candidate? If you were an employer would you feel encouraged to explore your CV and take your application further?

Remember to keep copies of all the letters and CVs you have sent.

Covering Letter - Example

Ms F Barclay
Human Resources Manager
Screwloose Engineering
Appin Way
Frome
Somerset

12th May 1997

Dear Ms Barclay

Trainee Graduate Engineers

I am writing in response to your advertisement in the current issue of my university's career vacancy bulletin, and would like to be considered for one of the posts. This is my final year as a student at the University of West Glasgow, having studied for an MEng (Hons) degree in Electronics and Electrical Engineering.

As you will see from my CV, the course has given me a good grounding in this field, and I have developed a keen interest in radio communications and RF/Microwave engineering. I was also given the opportunity to apply some of the theory learned on my course during a six-month placement with the European Space Research and Technology Centre, based in the Netherlands. This exciting opportunity gave me first hand experience of working life in another cultural and work setting. I learned to adapt to new situations, communicate with a wide range of people, and was able to practise many of the skills which I believe are needed to work effectively in a professional environment.

From your corporate brochure it appears that working for Screwloose Engineering would offer a technically challenging career within a highly commercial organisation. I find this very appealing and feel that I have already developed some of the qualities and experience necessary to make an effective contribution to the company.

I would welcome the opportunity to discuss the post and my own background in more detail, and would be available for interview at any time from the beginning of June onwards.

Yours sincerely

Patrick Chong