

A graphic of several interlocking puzzle pieces in various shades of blue, arranged in a cluster on the right side of the page. The pieces are semi-transparent, allowing the text to be seen through them.

CVs and covering letters

US

UNIVERSITY
OF SUSSEX

WRITING A CV

WHAT IS A CV?

'CV' is an abbreviation of curriculum vitae, a Latin term which can be translated as 'course of life'. Also known as a résumé, a CV is a document which sets out the skills, experience and knowledge you have which will enable you to perform well in a job, course, or other opportunity.

Your CV is usually one of your first chances to communicate with an employer. It should do several things:

- provide a clear timeline of your major activities in recent years
- show where you have built up the ability to do the job you are applying for
- demonstrate professionalism with its logical, appropriate layout and wording.

WHY DO I NEED A CV?

Whatever type of career you want to pursue, you will almost certainly need to write a CV and covering letter at some stage. For certain sectors, and especially with smaller organisations, application by CV and covering letter is the standard type of written application.

HOW DO I GET STARTED?

Your CV is a crucial opportunity to market yourself – to show the reader how you meet their requirements and get them interested in interviewing you. To give your CV the best chance of success, it is important to understand what the employer is looking for, before you start writing.

If you are applying to an advertised job vacancy or course, go through the person specification or entry requirements and identify where you have evidence of the skills, knowledge or experience needed.

If you are writing a speculative application, research the career area and find out what skills are in demand. You can use our sector guides to help you: ► [sussex.ac.uk/careers/researchingcareers](https://www.sussex.ac.uk/careers/researchingcareers)

WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF CV?

- **Chronological** – this is the most popular style of CV for new graduates. Education, work experience and other major activities are listed in date order. This is usually the best choice if most of your adult life has been spent in education, or if you have followed one career path.
- **Skills** – this type of CV centres on a list of the main skills you have to offer, with examples of when you have demonstrated them. This can be a good choice if you are changing career direction, or need to tell the employer about multiple technical skills.
- **Academic** – for academic careers, CVs tend to be much longer, with details of research carried out, and lists of publications, conferences attended, etc.
- **Alternative/creative** – for certain creative industries, it is important to demonstrate your creativity by taking a bold approach to designing the CV so that it shows off your talents.

WRITING A CV

WHAT DO I NEED TO INCLUDE?

There are few hard and fast rules about what to include on your CV, and in what order. However most people include the following sections.

Contact details

- Name: use the name you are usually known by in a work context.
- Postal address: increasing numbers of CVs leave this out, as employers will usually contact you by phone or email. If you include it, give your university address if applying for work locally. Use your home address if it is closer to the location of the opportunity – it can help to show a local connection.
- Phone: give one number, so you know which one employers will call or text you on. Use a mobile number, if possible.
- Email: it is fine to use your personal email account, and this has the advantage of not expiring when you leave Sussex. Ensure you have a professional-looking username, preferably a variant of your actual name.
- Social media: it is increasingly essential to have a positive social media profile for certain areas of work, so it is a good idea to include the details of your accounts, especially LinkedIn and Twitter.

Profile/introduction/summary

- Increasingly, CVs include a short introductory section, highlighting your key skills to encourage the reader to read the rest of the document.

- Avoid generic statements with no supporting evidence. Writing 'Successfully combining a full-time degree (average 2.1 to date) with part-time work and playing hockey every week' provides the evidence that you are working hard.

- Be brief but informative – for most undergraduates, a three- to four-line profile should be sufficient.

Education

- For many current students, your most significant achievements to date come from your education, so it makes sense to place this section towards the top.
- List your current or most recent course, and then work backwards to A-level and GCSE.
- You can summarise the number of your GCSEs and total grades obtained, but do mention if you have English and Maths.
- Give the start and finish dates, title of the course, and name of the institution, followed by the result if known.
- If you don't have A Levels or GCSEs, give the original name and grade of your pre-Sussex qualifications, with UCAS points if possible.
- For your most substantial qualifications, and any which are relevant to the job you are applying for, you can give more details, such as a selection of the modules studied; a brief description of your dissertation; transferable skills which you gained during the course.

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Work experience/career history

- This section should also be laid out in reverse chronological order.
- You can include any type of work, including part-time, temporary, and voluntary experience.
- It is a matter of choice how far back in time to go, and whether to include every work experience you have had – think about what is most relevant to what you are applying for, and how much space you have available.
- Lay out the information in a similar way to the education section – dates, job title, name of employer.
- It is usually better to use bullet points to describe your experience, rather than paragraphs.
- Highlight any achievements, with evidence to quantify them wherever possible, for example: 'increased membership by 20% within six weeks'.
- For experience that is not relevant to what you are applying for, focus on transferable skills. So if you have worked in retail, for example, you could write about building teamwork, communication and customer service skills.

Other activities/interests/extra-curricular activities

- Mention any structured activities, especially those in which you have an official role, for example: student societies which you help to run.

- Put the most recent or current activities towards the top of this section, although you can be more flexible than in the previous two sections.
- Specify your level of involvement e.g. 'I have played football regularly since early childhood and am Vice-Captain of the 1st XI at University'.

Skills

- Avoid lists of skills without explanation, e.g. 'team work'. Either produce a skills CV, or use bullet points in your Education, Work Experience and Other Activities sections to show where you have gained most of your skills.
- Most people include skills such as IT and languages. Be informative but brief, e.g. 'Excel – can create pivot tables and design charts', and/or 'Spanish – intermediate written and spoken'.
- Only include your driving licence (if you have one) if the job is likely to require you to drive.

Referees

- Traditionally, CVs included full details of referees, but this is less common now. Of course, you should include them if the job advert asks you to do so.
- For most purposes, you can write 'Details of referees are available on request'.
- If you are asked for referees, it is usual to give two: one from your current or most recent course, and one from a current or recent employer if possible.

WRITING A CV

WHAT TO LEAVE OUT

- In the UK, it is not customary to include a photograph.
- It is unnecessary to include your date of birth, place of birth, marital status, or any other personal details which are irrelevant to your ability to do the job.
- Your nationality is also not usually needed, but if you are from outside the EEA and have permission to work in the UK, you may want to include this.

WHAT WRITING STYLE SHOULD I USE?

Above all, your CV should have correct spelling and grammar. For every vacancy, several good applicants don't get an interview because their CVs contain poor spelling or grammar. Always check your CV and covering letter before you send them, and ideally get someone else to read them.

Aim for simple, straightforward writing. Once you have written your first draft, ask yourself if the content can be expressed more simply or concisely. Try reading your documents aloud, to catch overlong sentences, and divide them up or shorten them if necessary. If you use bullet points, you don't have to write in full sentences.

Use active, not passive language. Write, for example, 'I strengthened my practical problem-solving skills', rather than 'problem-solving skills were developed'. And say what you did – 'I answered queries from a wide range of people', rather than 'I had to answer queries from a wide range of people'.

HOW SHOULD I FORMAT IT?

- Your CV should not be longer than two pages (except for academic CVs). A one-page CV can work well when applying for part-time jobs.
- It is best to use conventional fonts, such as Arial, Calibri or Helvetica.
- Use black ink – CVs are often photocopied, and other colours can look unappealingly grey.
- Use bold, underlining and other emphasis sparingly and consistently, e.g. for section headings.
- Don't cram in more text than can comfortably fit – leave standard margins at the top, bottom and sides of each page. Leave at least a line between sections.

WRITING A CV

Figure 1
Example of a chronological
CV – for a graduate job

Emphasise the skills and interests most relevant to the job

List qualifications and experience in reverse chronological order

You can list modules most relevant to your career plans

Mention skills you have gained in addition to the content of your course

Yasmin Qureshi

121B Lewes Road, Brighton BN1 6JP

Tel: 07761 542339

Email: yasminq@coolmail.com

Second-year undergraduate in Neuroscience at the University of Sussex. Writing and editing skills gained from volunteering and blogging, combined with a passion for communicating life science issues to a diverse readership. Seeking editorial role in scientific publishing.

EDUCATION

2014 – 2017

**BSc Neuroscience
(University of Sussex)**

Key modules include:

- Molecular biology
- Computing for life science
- Developmental biology
- Biological chemistry

I am developing a wide range of transferable skills including quantitative and qualitative analysis, project management, team work and delivering effective presentations.

I will be completing an extended dissertation in my final year on the biological bases of bipolar disorder.

2012 – 2014

**A Levels: Biology A*, Chemistry A, Maths C
(Guildford College)**

2010 – 2012

**GCSEs: 12 subjects at grades A* to C
(Guildford County School)**

WRITING A CV

[continued]

Focus on skills you have built and successful achievements for experience unrelated to your career plans

Give brief information about your interests

Be as specific as possible with your skills

WORK EXPERIENCE

2015 – present

Team Member, LoCost Supermarket, Brighton

- Providing excellent customer service in an often hectic environment
- Enhanced team morale and effectiveness by suggesting introduction of brief training segments to team meetings, an idea which was adopted by the Store Manager

Summer 2015

Volunteer, Headway Surrey, Guildford

- Edited the Headway Surrey supporter newsletter: included copywriting, sourcing copy from other contributors, copy-editing and layout
- Supported the rehabilitation and recovery of people with brain injury by facilitating individual and group activities for clients with a range of brain injuries
- Flexibly adapted my contribution to help and support a small, close-knit team

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Sport and fitness

- Hockey: keen player since secondary school – currently playing in the Sussex 1st XI

Science

- **Blogging:** regular posts reflecting on my academic progress since my first year – adventureswithneuroscience.blogspot.com
- Active member of Sussex Life Sciences Society

SKILLS

- **IT:** Proficient user of Excel (charts, pivot tables) and Word; growing command of PowerPoint; some familiarity with SPSS
- **Languages:** intermediate spoken and written French

Details of referees are available on request

“A Careers and
Employability Consultant
helped me to prepare my
CV and tailor it to each
field I was applying for.”

FINAL YEAR STUDENT
(SCHOOL OF BUSINESS, MANAGEMENT
AND ECONOMICS)

WRITING A COVERING LETTER

WHAT IS A COVERING LETTER?

Like a CV, a covering letter should be a marketing document, targeted to a particular opportunity, which showcases why you are a good match. Unlike a CV, which it is not practical to rewrite for each job, a new letter should be written for each application. It should be presented as a formal letter and be no longer than one A4 page.

WHAT DO I NEED TO INCLUDE?

Introduction

Briefly state which opportunity you are applying for, with any reference number given in the advert, and confirm that you are also sending your CV (if applicable). You may also want to confirm your current status, e.g. 'I am currently a final year undergraduate in Geography at the University of Sussex'.

Motivation

Say what attracts you to this particular opportunity, at this particular organisation. It can be useful to say:

- what is distinctive about the organisation, compared with similar places, and why this appeals to you
- why you are looking forward to performing this role, or studying this subject
- how it fits in with your career plans and progress to date.

In the case of a job vacancy, focus more on what you hope to contribute, rather than what you expect to gain.

Skills

Without simply repeating your CV, show how your skills meet the requirements of the role. It is important to base this on the person specification in the job advert. Lead with the job requirements where you feel you have most to offer.

Unlike a chronological CV, you can bring experience from different parts of your life together, e.g. 'I have shown the ability to multi-task and organise my time while working as Events Secretary of the Mathematics Society, as well as by holding down a part-time job while studying for my degree'.

Conclusion

Briefly state another reason why you are interested in the role and that you look forward to hearing from them.

NEED MORE HELP?

We have example CVs and covering letters in the Careers and Employability Centre and online at:

- sussex.ac.uk/careers/cvs
- sussex.ac.uk/careers/coveringletters

We can review your CV and covering letter before you send them to employers. You can book an appointment with a Careers and Employability Consultant in CareerHub or send them to us via 'Ask a Question' for written feedback:

- careerhub.sussex.ac.uk

WRITING A COVERING LETTER

Figure 2

Example of a covering letter

1

If possible, write to a named individual, if not use 'Dear Sir/Madam'

2

Brief introductory paragraph

3

Say why you are interested in the employer

121B Lewes Road
Brighton BN1 6JP

Sandy McMahon
Editorial Director
Nature Publishing Group
The Macmillan Building
4 Crinan Street
London N1 9XW

20 October 2016

1

Dear Ms McMahon,

Publishing Assistant (Science), Ref: BMC/Ed/2016/22

2

I am writing in application to the above position, which I saw advertised on the University of Sussex CareerHub website. I have attached my CV as requested. As you will see, I am currently a final year undergraduate in Neuroscience at the University of Sussex.

3

I was drawn to this vacancy as it offers the perfect opportunity to combine my life sciences understanding from my undergraduate studies, with my interest in communicating scientific knowledge effectively. This role is the ideal starting point for a career in academic publishing. Having decided on this career path, I see Nature Publishing Group as an ideal employer. Not only is Nature itself regarded as the leading science periodical in English, but I am excited by the prospect of working specifically on scientific reports.

WRITING A COVERING LETTER

4

Summarise your skills and how you meet the person specification

5

Briefly close the letter

6

Use 'Yours faithfully' if you are not writing to a named individual

I have developed the skills needed to succeed in this role through a variety of activities:

4

- Throughout my degree studies, I have deliberately kept my interests broad. I took two elective subjects outside Neuroscience, and have explored interdisciplinary themes in science in my blog, adventureswithneuroscience.blogspot.com
- Gained experience in editing as a volunteer at Headway, where I successfully produced two editions of the supporter newsletter.
- While at Headway, I used Photoshop to prepare images for publication. From this time-pressured experience and using varied software on my course, I am confident of my ability to learn and use new applications quickly.
- Demonstrated effective interpersonal and communication skills across my employment, volunteering and studies. At LoCost Supermarket, I have been commended for my ability to gain the trust of even difficult customers

Speed of publishing and open access are, in my view, two of the most important principles in raising awareness of original research. It has been interesting to study for my degree during a time when these two issues have been the subject of lively discussion, and I have emerged determined to do what I can to support open access.

5

I look forward to hearing from you.

6

Yours sincerely,

Yasmin Qureshi

FIND OUT MORE

Careers and Employability Centre
The Library, University of Sussex
Falmer, Brighton BN1 9QL

01273 678429

careers@sussex.ac.uk

www.sussex.ac.uk/careers

CareerHub

careerhub.sussex.ac.uk



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The Careers and Employability Centre recognises the diversity of Sussex students and graduates and is committed to addressing their individual needs.

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