



# Writing a CV and covering letter

**Your CV is your primary personal marketing tool. In a competitive market it is essential that you create a winning impression at the earliest opportunity so your CV needs to impress.**

Your CV needs to persuade an employer that you have the potential they are looking for and convince them that they should offer you an interview. As such, you need to clearly demonstrate that you have the key attributes they require. Presentation is also crucial; you can only make a first impression once.

You should allow as much time as possible to prepare a CV as it is time consuming and try to tailor it to each specific opportunity you wish to apply for.

## Before your start

It is tempting to rush straight into writing a CV but a couple of quick tasks before you begin may save you time in the long run and help tailor your CV appropriately to a particular opportunity.

- Check that a CV is the correct method of applying to the organisation. Many employers now expect you to apply online via their website and will not accept a CV
- Investigate the employer and the business sector. You should try to demonstrate your understanding of both of these throughout the application process. This is known as commercial awareness – find out more at [nottingham.ac.uk/careers/researchemployers](https://nottingham.ac.uk/careers/researchemployers)
- Research what the employer is looking for. Look at the advert or information on the employer's website. What does it say about the job requirements? Are they looking for specific skills or competencies?
- Think carefully about your own attributes, achievements, and experiences. You may not be able to fit all of these onto your CV so it is essential to decide what you most want to communicate based on what the employer is looking for

## Presentation

At first glance your CV needs to look impressive. It should appear neat and stylish and demonstrate that you have taken care to ensure excellent presentation.

- Always check spelling and grammar
- As a guide, a two-page CV is the accepted norm. However, some industries prefer shorter one-page CVs that are very concise, whereas an academic CV tends to be longer and can include more information
- Avoid a very text heavy appearance – be concise and use short bullet points, try not to use lengthy paragraphs
- Be consistent with formatting – emphasise headings by using a larger text size and/or bold. Choose font styles carefully, they should be easy to read. Align text neatly
- Use creativity with caution – it may be appropriate to introduce colour, graphics, or images when applying for certain roles and this can really help to get your CV noticed, but do ensure that any such additions are fitting and are carefully selected
- Try to draw attention to the most relevant items on your CV by locating them on the first page, by doing this an employer should be able to quickly see that you are a strong candidate and have the necessary attributes

## CV sections

Your CV should be unique, just like you. It should display your most relevant achievements and experience. It should be tailored for each opportunity you wish to apply for and clearly demonstrate why you are the ideal candidate. You should decide what information a prospective employer would be most interested in and then use appropriate sections to achieve this. Below are some suggestions of sections you may wish to include:

### Contact details

Make sure these are fully up to date.

- Use a professional sounding email address, do not use an email address that is based on humorous nicknames or contains explicit language
- Remember that your University email address will not be available after you graduate
- Consider including links to your LinkedIn profile, personal blog, or professional Twitter page. Ensure that links to online content are appropriate for viewing by a prospective employer

### Personal statement and career objective

This is optional, but if you do decide to have one it should be a short summary of your key attributes and may include a career goal or aim. It should clearly identify why you are the ideal candidate for the job.

- Two sentences is a good length to aim for; try to avoid lengthy paragraphs
- Avoid sounding cliché by using too many buzzwords
- Think of this as your very own strapline: it should be unique, memorable, and sell product 'you'!

### Education and qualifications

Start with the most recent or most relevant educational experience. As well as listing dates, institutions, awarding bodies, and overall grade, you could also consider including the following:

- the titles of relevant modules studied
- the title of your dissertation or a significant piece of work
- details of any key academic or transferable skills gained
- details of any work placements or industry experience included in the course
- details of any competitive scholarships or academic awards

### You may also want to include additional qualifications – these could go in a separate section:

- language qualifications
- medical or first aid qualifications
- driving licence information

### Employment history and work experience

It is important to stress any work experience that is directly relevant first. You could consider splitting your employment history into two sections and using subtitles: 'relevant work experience' and 'additional work experience'.

As well as listing dates, employers and locations, you could also consider including the following:

- main responsibilities
- key achievements

Where appropriate, you may also want to mention:

- membership of a professional body
- sector or industry events that you have attended
- details of any awards or recommendations you have received
- occasions when you have been an ambassador or represented a company or organisation

If you have had a lot of general part-time work experience and are short of space on your CV, you could consider grouping these jobs together and simply listing the key skills you feel you have gained.

### Skills profile

A skills profile lists the key skills needed for a particular role and gives examples from across your experience that demonstrates you have these. It can be a useful tool if you have no direct experience but do have lots of transferable skills.

- Look carefully at the job description and decide what you feel the main three to five key skills required are
- Use these key skills as subheadings
- Under each subheading give brief examples of how you have demonstrated this skill

### Additional achievements

You may decide to include further detail of any other significant achievements. Remember to also consider the relevance of these and suggest how your success can be transferred to another context.

### Positions of responsibility

If you include significant positions of responsibility, remember to consider the relevance of these and suggest how your experience can be used in another context.

### References

- If you are giving named referees, remember to include their full contact details and indicate what their relationship to you is
- It is perfectly acceptable to write 'references available on request'. This can be a good way to save space

## The language of CVs

### How you use language is important.

You can dramatically strengthen your statements by using simple language techniques effectively.

### Make verbs work for you

Use active verbs rather than passive verbs. For example:

- I **organised** a programme of speakers
- I **motivated** the team
- I **analysed** research data

Combine action verbs to further emphasise your achievements. For example:

- I **researched** alternative options and **negotiated** a better deal
- I **managed** the project and **delegated** responsibilities to team members
- I **designed** and **implemented** a new system

Use the list of action verbs provided to ensure that you demonstrate a range of experience and abilities.

### Avoid weak verbs

For example:

- I tried to...
- I hoped to...
- I attempted to...

### Add detail to your examples

Explain your contribution clearly by adding appropriate details. This will help to quantify the level of your actions and emphasise your achievements. For example:

- I increased sales by 25%
- I organised a charity ball for 150 guests and 12 VIPs
- I resolved customer enquiries efficiently by responding to all enquiries within **24 hours**
- I achieved consistently positive feedback from customers; 85% ranked the service they received as excellent.

### Cut the padding

Try not to use overly long sentences or lengthy paragraphs. It is important to be concise in order to quickly impress. Unlike writing an essay when putting your CV together it isn't essential to use joining words such as: 'however', 'furthermore', and 'nevertheless'. And, it is also useful to limit your use of stock phrases such as: 'as a result of this...', 'in response to this...', 'in order to...'

## The covering letter

### Your CV should always be accompanied by a covering letter.

The letter is a professional introduction that specifically relates your attributes, achievements and experience to a particular opportunity. The letter should not exceed one side of A4. As with your CV, it is essential to pay attention to the details.

- Where possible, address your letter to a named person
- Draw the reader's attention to the highlights of your CV and explain their relevance to the role
- Ensure you convey real enthusiasm for the position on offer
- Demonstrate your interest in and knowledge of the company

### A typical letter should include:

- A short introductory statement that explains the purpose of the letter and details how you found out about the opportunity
- A short series of concise paragraphs that prove you are an ideal candidate and meet, or even exceed, the requirements of the position by highlighting your skills and experience. To help structure your information use the following approach: make the point, provide evidence, and explain why it is relevant to the opportunity
- A paragraph that demonstrates that you have researched the company and explains why you want to work for them
- A closing statement that ends the letter positively and demonstrates your willingness to attend an interview or meet the employer to discuss the opportunity further

### International students

Read our leaflet Covering Letters: UK Conventions which will guide you through the content and style of UK covering letters using examples based on real life applications.  
[nottingham.ac.uk/careers/coveringletter](http://nottingham.ac.uk/careers/coveringletter)

## Action verbs for CVs

### A

Accelerated  
Achieved  
Administrated  
Advised  
Allocated  
Analysed  
Appraised  
Arranged  
Assessed  
Assisted  
Attained

### B

Broadened  
Budgeted

### C

Checked  
Coached  
Communicated  
Competent  
Completed  
Comprehensive  
Conducted  
Considerable  
Consistently  
Consolidated  
Controlled  
Converted  
Coordinated  
Created

### D

Delegated  
Delivered  
Demonstrated  
Designed  
Developed  
Devised  
Directed

### E

Ensured  
Established  
Evaluated  
Expanded

### F

Facilitated

### G

Generated

### H

Helped

### I

Identified  
Implemented  
Improved

Increased  
Influenced  
Initiated  
Innovated  
Instructed  
Interviewed  
Introduced  
Investigated

### L

Launched  
Led  
Liaised

### M

Maintained  
Managed  
Marketed  
Minimised  
Motivated

### N

Negotiated  
Networked

### O

Operated  
Organised

### P

Participated  
Performed  
Persuaded  
Pertinent  
Pinpointed  
Planned  
Prepared  
Presented  
Processed  
Produced  
Programmed  
Promoted  
Prompt  
Proposed  
Proved  
Provided

### Q

Qualified

### R

Recommended  
Recruited  
Reduced  
Reorganised  
Represented  
Researched  
Resolved

Resourceful  
Responded  
Responsible  
Reviewed  
Revised

### S

Selected to  
Simplified  
Spearheaded  
Strengthened  
Supervised

### T

Taught  
Tested  
Trained  
Transformed  
Translated

### U

Undertook

### V

Volunteered

### W

Won

### Further information

We can give you feedback on your CV or covering letter but we expect you to have followed the advice in this leaflet and the other resources below.

We offer a number of workshops in the autumn and spring terms on developing a CV and covering letter - book a place through our website at  
**[nottingham.ac.uk/careers/events](https://nottingham.ac.uk/careers/events)**

To book an appointment log on to My Career  
**[nottingham.ac.uk/careers/login](https://nottingham.ac.uk/careers/login)**

There are a range of resources on our website that you can use to develop your CV and covering letter including advice for international students  
**[nottingham.ac.uk/careers/applications](https://nottingham.ac.uk/careers/applications)**

Prospects website  
This site covers what to include in your CV and covering letters and examples  
**[www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk)**

## An example of a chronological CV

This style of CV is particularly useful when applying for a role related to your degree and/or where you have relevant work experience.

Adam Brown

07881 11222  
AdamJBrown@email.com  
12 Green Drive  
Lenton  
Nottingham  
NG7 2XX

A final year geography student with practical experience of environmental sampling and a sound knowledge of environmental issues seeking a graduate role in environmental consultancy

### Education

2014 – 2017

The University of Nottingham

BSc Hons. Geography – 2:1

My course focuses on the physical and human environment and provides an overview of geographical information science. It has enabled me to develop strong research skills and an ability to analyse information and interpret data.

#### Modules include:

- Earth and Environmental Dynamics (71%)
- Interpreting Geographical Data (68%)
- Economic Geography (67%)
- Environmental Change (67%)

2008 – 2014

Tunbridge Wells School, Kent

A levels: Geography (A) Mathematics (B) Physics (B)

GCSEs: 9 (5 As, 4 Bs) including English and Maths

### Relevant Experience

July – Sept 2015 Grencap Environmental Sampling, Kent

- Attended site visits with the Geotechnical Division to investigate, test and advise on geological, ground and structural conditions and risk factors
- Analysed data from soil and water samples and communicated findings to clients. Retested samples to check for discrepancies and liaised with different colleagues across the organisation to correctly interpret findings before reporting back to clients.
- Gained an awareness of testing, inspection and compliance to ensure that companies adhere to health and safety issues and environmental protection guidelines.
- Developed understanding of soil and rock classification and geophysical, hydrographic and topographic surveying techniques.
- Liaised with colleagues across the company to produce a report for senior managers outlining current working practices and ideas for improvement.

If you have done well in some relevant modules, but have a lower overall average, you could omit your predicted grade and just give the results for the key modules.

You can include a list of key modules relevant to the employer

There is no need to list all your GCSEs.

If your most recent experience is not the most relevant, you could divide your work experience into “Relevant Experience” and “Other Experience”.

Start with your most recent experience – this can be paid and unpaid – and list it in reverse chronological order.

Use action verbs to give impact.

### Adam Brown – CV continued

#### Other Experience

September 2014 – present                      The Bell, Nottingham                      Barman (part-time)

- Developed excellent customer service skills working regular shifts behind the bar of a busy pub restaurant

June and September 2015                      School of Geography                      Open Day Assistant

- Showed prospective students and their parents around the University and the School of Geography answering questions about the course and student life.

#### Activities

GeogSoc

- Led a team of 4 organising the Nottingham Geography Society Ball for 200 people; we raised £400 for charity.
- Coordinated a varied guest lecture series for members.
- Networked with professionals at events developing my confidence and gaining further insight into a range of careers.

Nottingham University Karate Club

- Assistant Coach for newer club members, demonstrating different movements and basic techniques.
- Arranged training sessions and regular practice, which requires dedication and commitment.
- Negotiated a £200 sponsorship deal with a local business to subsidise the cost of kit to allow more students to try out karate.

Nottingham Advantage Award

- Participated in extracurricular workshops to develop employability skills, including interviews, networking, negotiation skills workshops, plus Intensive Skills Day delivered by PwC.

Running

- Developed endurance and determination completing the Great North Run and Tunbridge Wells Half Marathon last year.

#### Additional Skills and Qualifications

- IT: Proficient in use of Microsoft Office, SPSS and Mat Lab
- Languages: Intermediate Spanish speaker – mainly learnt during a gap year project in Guatemala and wider travelling in South America.
- Driving: full, clean licence
- Qualified First Aider

#### References

Available on request

Provide evidence and give details. How many? How much? How long? etc.

It is perfectly acceptable to put “References available on request” (unless specifically asked for); this can save space.

## An example of a skill-based CV

This style of CV may show your skills to best advantage when applying for roles for which you have no direct experience.

Adam Brown  
Flat 3, 6 St Paul's Road, Nottingham NG8 4PQ  
AdamJBrown@email.com Tel: 0115 333 4444 Mobile: 07881 11222

No need to have "Curriculum Vitae" at the top – your name should be the title

### Personal Profile

Final year geography student with excellent problem-solving and communication skills seeking a career in management consulting

A personal profile is optional. If included, it must be short and targeted at the position applied for; include relevant strengths and skills. It sits below your address.

### Education

2014 – 2017

The University of Nottingham  
BSc (Hons) Geography – predicted 2:1  
My course has enabled me to develop strong research skills and an ability to analyse information and interpret data.

Put your most relevant information first; this is likely to be your education.

2008 – 2014

Tunbridge Wells School, Kent  
A levels: Geography (A), Mathematics (B), Physics (B)  
GCSEs: 9 (5 As, 4 Bs) including English and Maths  
Key Skills

If you have taken non-UK qualifications give an indication of their level e.g. A level equivalent.

### Effective Communication

- Analysed data from soil and water samples and communicated findings to clients during three month placement at Greencap Environmental Sampling.
- Liaised with colleagues in several departments across the organisation at Greencap to write a report for senior managers on current working practices and ideas for improvement.
- Led groups of up to 30 prospective students and their parents around the School of Geography and the campus during University Open Days, effectively promoting the university courses and facilities.
- Acted as Assistant Coach for newer club members of University Karate Club, demonstrating different movements and basic techniques.

Pick 3-5 key skills for the sector you are applying for and provide evidence showing you have developed these skills.

### Problem-solving

- Carried out data analysis from site soil samples while working at Greencap. When discrepancies arose, I retested samples and worked with a colleague to correctly interpret findings before reporting back to clients.
- Arranged alternative entertainer to perform at the Geography Ball when the original act cancelled at short notice due to illness.
- Negotiated a £200 sponsorship deal with a local company to subsidise the cost of kit to allow more students to try out karate.

### Teamwork

- Worked effectively with 3 other students to carry out mapping and data collection and create a group presentation in the practical fieldwork element of my degree; we received 72% for our project report and presentation.
- Organised annual Geography Ball for 200 students, as part of a team of 4 people, while Social Secretary of Nottingham University Geography Society.
- Worked flexibly as part of a team of 4 in a busy pub restaurant covering different tasks where necessary due to staff absence.

### Work experience

The Bell, Nottingham, Sept 2014 – to date

Barman (Part-time)

Worked behind the bar in a busy pub restaurant.

Greencap Environmental Sampling, Kent, July – Sept 2015

Summer Intern

- Summer placement carrying out environmental sampling.
- Attended site visits to investigate, test and advise on geological, ground and structural conditions and risk factors.

University of Nottingham, School of Geography, June and Sept 2015

Open Day Assistant

- Showed prospective students and their parents around the University

### Additional Skills

- IT skills - Proficient in Microsoft Office, SPSS, Mat Lab
- Intermediate written and spoken Spanish
- Full, clean driving licence
- Qualified First Aider

### Achievements, Interests & Responsibilities

- Nottingham Advantage Award – participated in extracurricular workshops to develop employability skills
- Active member of Nottingham University Karate Club
- Enjoy running and have completed the Great North Run and Tunbridge Wells Half Marathon
- Enjoy films, reading, travelling and spent first year summer vacation inter-railing around Europe

### References

Dr. J. Sutton (Tutor)  
The University of Nottingham  
South Building  
Jubilee Campus  
Wollaton Road  
Nottingham  
NG8 1BB  
Tel: 0115....  
j.sutton@nottingham.....

Mrs Thompson (Internship Supervisor)  
Greencap Environmental Sampling  
Harper Road  
Ashford  
Kent  
ANI IAF  
Tel: 01.....  
e.thompson@ ...

Provide brief information about any work experience – company, dates, job role and key duties and responsibilities.

If you have space, you may wish to include additional skills, such as languages, IT skills and a driving licence.

Include full contact details for referees

## Example covering letter – Reply to an advertised vacancy

4 Green Drive  
Lenton  
Nottingham  
NG7 2EE  
s.brown@hotmail.com  
6 September 2016

Mr P Cottingham  
Pockitt & Jingle  
Main Street  
Fossington, Hants

Dear Mr Cottingham

Job Reference: 22401: Marketing Assistant

I am writing in response to your advertisement for a marketing assistant listed on the Careers and Employability Service website.

As you will see from my CV, I am in the final year of a biological science degree. I have developed excellent oral and written communication skills through my coursework and work experience in catering and retailing. In addition, I am able to work well with other people. My role as captain of the University badminton team required me to motivate and encourage other team members and, as part of the first year Buddy Scheme, I was able to build rapport with my group very quickly. The range of my extracurricular activities and my academic performance show that I have good time management skills. These also demonstrate my ability to work under pressure. My academic work requires a high degree of numerical ability and attention to detail. I enjoy research and have always found analytical work very satisfying. My ICT skills are well developed, and as a result of this, I see all these qualities as relevant to the role of marketing assistant.

Pockitt and Jingle offers me the opportunity to work in industrial rather than consumer product marketing where I can make use of my scientific knowledge in a commercial setting. From your website I see I would be involved in marketing projects at an early stage which is very appealing. In addition, I am attracted by the opportunity to deal with a wide variety of customers. I notice that you place great emphasis on training in the job description and this is important to me.

I look forward to the opportunity to discuss my experience with you at an interview.

Yours sincerely

Steven Brown

State why you are writing

State what you can offer the employer

State what the employer can offer you and show that you have researched the company

End 'Yours sincerely' because there is a named contact.

End 'Yours faithfully' if addressing the letter to 'Dear Sir/Madam'

## Example covering letter – speculative submission

4 Green Drive  
Lenton  
Nottingham  
NG7 2EE  
s.brown@hotmail.com  
6 September 2016

Farrar PR Ltd  
22 Regents Crescent  
London SW1B 2TP

Dear Sir/Madam

As a highly-motivated student, who has undertaken editorial work placements in different settings, please consider my application for an account-handling role with your company. Having gained editorial experience through the Students' Union magazine, Impact, while studying at The University of Nottingham and while at Crispin Publishing, I am now seeking a career in consumer PR.

State why you are writing

As highlighted in my CV, I have excellent communication skills. Extensive customer service jobs helped develop these skills coupled with my drama performance interests. Socially confident, I am capable of addressing a range of audiences. I have excellent negotiation and persuasion skills, which I have had to apply recently when persuading store managers to lend me props for 26 photo shoots. I possess a combination of creative ability with a very can-do approach. My peers regard me as a good team player who, being well organised, is comfortable with both event management and communication roles.

State what you can offer the employer

I note from your website that you are a full-service agency that specialises in PR for the retail industry. I am impressed by your extensive range of clients including top names such as Tesco, and have followed their recent campaigns in the media. Communication skills are my strength. My editorial experience has really developed my writing skills, and taught me the need to produce copy to tight deadlines. At Crispin Publishing I learnt how to compile and research information. The strong emphasis on written coursework throughout my studies has been important in developing my written communication skills. My secretarial course and employment also taught me how to use business English and my IT skills are well developed.

State what the employer can offer you and show that you have researched the company

I hope that my enthusiasm for PR is conveyed in this application. I consider that I have the necessary drive and personal qualities required to contribute to your success as an established PR agency.

Close positively

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours faithfully

Steven Brown

This publication is available in alternative formats.

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e: [alternativeformats@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:alternativeformats@nottingham.ac.uk)

For more information, please visit:  
[nottingham.ac.uk/careers](https://nottingham.ac.uk/careers)

**Careers and Employability Service**  
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