# Looking for work – CVs and Application Forms

## About this factsheet

This factsheet is part of a series of factsheets on employment issues. This factsheet is a guide for anyone who is thinking about starting a job search or for anyone who is currently in the process of looking for a job. At the end you will find the full list, and details of where to find them.

## For further information

RNIB Helpline can refer you to an employment specialist for further advice and guidance relating to your employment situation. RNIB Helpline can also help you by providing information and advice on a range of topics, such as eye health, the latest products, leisure opportunities, benefits advice and emotional support.

Call the Helpline team on **0303 123 9999** or email **helpline@rnib.org.uk**.

## Your CV

### 1.1 What is a CV?

A Curriculum Vitae (CV) outlines your personal details and your relevant skills, experience and qualifications. It is a record of your qualifications and skills, so make sure it is up to date whenever you apply for a job. It is used to help you “sell yourself” to a prospective employer by highlighting your strengths and achievements. The aim of a CV is to get you an interview.

### 1.2 Why write a CV?

Writing and then updating a CV is a useful technique during a job search as it helps you keep track of your skills and experience in one document. Employers choose who they want to interview from what is contained on your CV, so it is really important that it is easy to understand and shows off your strengths. Spelling mistakes, poor grammar and missing information on a CV look unprofessional and if it is incomplete, employers may simply throw it in the bin.

### 1.3 CV basics

There is no right or wrong way to set out a CV, but there are some standard sections that they should contain. These are:

* personal and contact information
* education and qualifications
* work history
* skills relevant to the job
* interests.

When you are describing your interests, highlight aspects that show off the skills and competencies that the employer is looking for. The sort of things that are good to include are:

* any examples of working in a team
* relevant voluntary work or work experience
* positions of responsibility
* any activity that shows off using initiative.

Keep your CV to a maximum of two sides of A4 paper. Employers receive a lot of CVs, so it is unlikely that they will read each one from start to finish. In fact, most will make a judgment about a CV after a few seconds, so keep it as short as possible.

### 1.4 Types of CV and when to use them

The most common types of CV are:

**Skills-based**

This is also sometimes called a 'targeted' or 'functional' CV. It is often appropriate when there have been long gaps in employment as it highlights skills rather than gaps. This type of CV:

* highlights your skills and abilities related to the specific role you are applying for
* emphasises the transferable skills and experience you have gained, avoiding any reliance on work in date order
* is appropriate when changing careers, when skills are more impressive than employment history
* is appropriate if you have had a range of unconnected jobs.

Different jobs need different sets of skills. You should create your CV so that it closely relates to the job you are applying for.

You do not have to re-write it completely every time you apply for a different job, but you may want to re-draft or re-order some of your interests and skills so the most relevant information is nearer the beginning of the document.

**Chronological**

A chronological CV lists your details, under appropriate headings, in reverse chronological order. Chronological CVs work best when you have had continuous employment with no gaps. This type of CV:

* is a traditional format where work experience is organised in reverse date order
* is useful when staying in a similar field, or if your last employer’s name may be advantageous
* shows career development, and might highlight progress in a certain area.

### 1.5 General tips

* Limit you CV to a maximum of two sides of A4 – keep it concise!
* Keep it clear and specific – simple language works best.
* Use positive and active language.
* Highlight your selling points clearly.

### 1.6 Personal profiles

Personal profiles introduce you as an applicant. You should be able to outline your key strengths, achievements and goals in one paragraph. The following examples offer an outline of the different styles you can use:

* A college leaver with excellent computer skills. My college course work and work placements have enabled me to gain good research and presentation skills and an ability to communicate with the general public. I also see myself as an enthusiastic and reliable team player who is willing and able to develop new skills quickly.
* A reliable and conscientious employee with good customer service skills and a proven record of achieving targets and goals, looking to move to a more front line management role.
* I regard myself as a cheerful and friendly person, who is reliable and trustworthy. I am keen to learn new skills and use my considerable abilities within a garage/car business environment.
* I am currently looking for work in the computer industry. I am very familiar with most aspects of computing and have used computers for many years. I am always confident in learning anything new.

### 1.7 Skills and achievements

This section of your CV allows you to sell yourself through listing your main skills and experience. You can use the following outline of skills to help you judge your abilities:

**Skills with individuals**

Communicate well using the telephone, Persuade or sell to individuals, Deal with customers, Manage and supervise individuals, Delegate work to others

**Skills with groups**

Communicate to small groups, Lead seminars, Perform or entertain people, Persuade a group, Facilitate a group, Take part in group debates, Brief a team, Chair meetings

**Commercial skills**

Manage or run a business, Spot potential markets, Develop a new business, Design a marketing campaign, Look after customers well, Develop new sales initiatives, Promote or sell by telephone

**Skills with information**

Research, Gather information by interviewing people, Check information for errors/proof read, Analyse information, Organise or classify data, Retrieve information, Write reports

**Physical skills**

Manual dexterity, Ability/strength/speed, Craft/sewing/weaving, Painting/finishing/restoring, Washing/cleaning or preparing, Setting up or assembling, Growing/tending

### 1.8 Buzz Words

There are some words that stand out on a CV, which are often called buzz words. The following work areas and associated words may help when putting together your CV:

**Coping with routine**

Conscientious, Consistent, Controlled, Coped, Dealt with, Efficient, Managed, Performed.

**Working with others**

Advised, Co-operated, Counselled, Facilitated, Guided, Managed, Negotiated, Participated, Presented, Supervised, Assisted, Supported.

**Achievements**

Accomplished, Achieved, Co-ordinated, Created, Developed, Formulated, Revitalised, Recommended, Completed.

Problem-solving

Implemented, Improved, Instigated, Interpreted, Initiated, Inspired, Introduced, Investigated.

**Initiative**

Created, Designed, Developed, Devised, Directed, Established, Formulated, Innovated, Motivated, Negotiated, Organised, Originated.

### 1.9 Summary

Your CV has around 10-15 seconds to impress a potential employer. To recap:

* Limit you CV to a maximum of two sides of A4 – keep it concise!
* Keep it clear and specific – simple language works best.
* Use positive and active language.
* Highlight your selling points (skills and achievements) clearly.
* Make sure you have checked the spelling, punctuation and grammar.

## 2. Application forms

### 2.1 Requesting an application form in an alternative format

All employers are required under the Equality Act to make application forms accessible. This can be done by either making them available in an alternative format or by offering a reasonable adjustment to the recruitment process, for example allowing you to complete the form over the phone.

### 2.2 Before completing the form

* Make sure that you give yourself plenty of time to complete the form.
* Read it through to ensure that you are clear about the kind of information that the employer requires.
* Collect together all the information you can about the employer - brochures, website and local knowledge.
* Read through the job description and person specification to identify what they are looking for in terms of skills, experience and qualifications.

### 2.3 Completing the form

A good application form will give you a very good chance of getting an interview, so the most vital thing to have in mind when completing the application form is to make it as easy as possible for the person reading the form to shortlist you. The section you need to put most effort into is the personal statement, or sometimes this is replaced with competency-based questions.

**Personal statements**

Personal statements allow you the chance to demonstrate how well you can do the job. As with your CV you need to actively sell yourself, your skills and your achievements to an employer. If you do not demonstrate, with examples, how you meet the criteria for the job then you will not be offered an interview.

The most important thing to remember when writing a personal statement is that you should address all points on the person specification and the job description. Make sure you answer these points with specific examples from your previous jobs, work placements, leisure interests or education.

To make things more straightforward, you can mirror your personal statement to the person specification. For example, if the person specification has 12 bullet points split between the headings Education, Skills and Other, then your personal statement should have 12 bullet points split between three headings. By doing this you are making it easy for the recruiter to put a tick in the box that says you answered that point in the person specification.

**Competency-based questions**

This type of question is becoming increasingly common on application forms, especially in graduate recruitment. They usually begin with "Describe a time when you…" or "Give an example of…" and ask for examples of specific skills such as teamwork, leadership, persuasiveness and so on.

One way of answering these questions is to use the STAR approach, where you identify a situation, task, action and result. The situation and task are usually combined and form the introduction, the action you took should form the main body of your answer and the result should be your conclusion. For example:

* **Situation** - how, when, where, with whom?
* **Task** - what situation or task were you faced with?
* **Action** - what action(s) did you take?
* **Result** - what results did you achieve/conclusions did you reach?

As an example:

"Whilst volunteering at ABC Charity last summer I was given the task of producing a database of supporters. I gathered information from a number of departments and conducted an information audit on how the database needed to be used. I designed the database and entered the relevant information into the system. As a result of the database, fundraising revenue has risen by 15 per cent."

### 2.4 After completing the form

* Put together a short covering letter to send out with the application form. This letter enables you to set the scene for the employer and to reinforce your key strengths and reasons for applying for the job.
* Make sure you keep a copy of your completed form so that if you are called for interview, you can quickly go over what you said about yourself and prepare for the interview more effectively.
* Be prepared to contact the employer to check the progress of your application if the closing date passes and you hear nothing from them for several weeks.

## 3. Covering letters

### 3.1 When should I use a covering letter?

A covering letter should always be included when you are sending out a CV or an application form. It should generate interest and motivate the employer to want to know more about you. A covering letter is even more critical if your application is speculative.

### 3.2 Structure

Base your covering letter on the following outline structure:

**Paragraph one**

Introduce yourself, state what you are applying for and where you saw the vacancy.

**Paragraph two**

Outline why you are applying. What in particular has made you send your CV or application form for this particular job? Try to demonstrate how enthusiastic you are about the job. At this stage you can also demonstrate any research you have done.

**Paragraph three**

This should be a summary of the key points of your CV or application form. What are the two or three things that mean that you should get an interview?

**Paragraph four**

This paragraph is flexible, and it is your opportunity to explain any gaps in your career.

If you have been asked about a disability on the application form, this is a good place to disclose your disability or mention any adjustments you may need at an interview or test. Also, if your CV highlights that you have a disability (for example, you attended The Royal Blind College) this is your opportunity to explain your disability in more detail, in positive terms. For speculative CVs, there is no need to mention your disability until you are asked for interview, where you should be asked if any adjustments are required.

## Other factsheets in this series

We also produce the following factsheets, which you may find of use:

* Access to Work
* Staying in work
* Job seeking resources
* Self-employment
* Your rights in employment
* Looking for Work – Starting your Job Search
* Looking for Work – Interview Skills
* Looking for Work – Tests
* Looking for Work – Disclosing a Disability

All these factsheets can be found in electronic form at **www.rnib.org.uk/information-everyday-living/work-and-employment**

For print, braille, large print or audio, please contact our Helpline team on **0303 123 9999** or email **helpline@rnib.org.uk**

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