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Dressed to kill



Like a good book, a CV needs to grab attention, otherwise it won't get you a foot through the door. Getting your CV right is vital. It's your shop window and must be dressed appropriately.

Almost everybody, at some stage will have to go through a recruitment process in order to get a job. This may be an application to a new company, a promotion within your own company or a redefined role after a merger or acquisition. The recruitment process in the pharmaceutical industry has become increasingly complex over the last ten years.

The curriculum vitae (CV) is usually the initial tool that employers use in order to select a smaller number of candidates to go forward to the next stage of their recruitment process. No one makes an appointment based on a CV alone but a badly written one doesn't help a candidate's case. A poorly written CV can mean you may not be selected for the next stage of assessment.

Focus on achievements and what you've delivered to date rather than how you've spent your time

Achievements

For many people, putting together a CV is a tortuous business. One of the first things to remember when starting to write your CV is that it's just a way of presenting information that may otherwise have been written on an application form. The advantage of using a CV is that you have more flexibility in terms of emphasis and detail.

There are key things that should be covered. The CV should be focused on 'achievements' and what you have 'delivered' to date. Focus on what you have delivered for a company rather than how you have spent your time.

Avoid comments that go without saying. For example "I believe I would be an asset to your company" or "I have excellent communication skills." Try to show such skills and ability by giving precise examples of situations, what action you took and what the successful outcome was.

Do ensure that your CV is correctly 'pitched' for the roles you will be applying for. For an entry level role it is worth mentioning that you've captained your school cricket team or university rugby team but for a Medical Director role with a multi-billion dollar global pharma company, it isn't going to impress.

If you feel your current experience falls short of what a company may be looking for, try to show transferable skills or experiences. For example, you may have organised an event that raised a decent amount of money for charity or have experience of setting up or helping to set up a business outside of the pharma sector. Don't be afraid to let the reader know.

Make it look professional

Prepare your CV using industry standard software such as MS Word and ensure it's saved as a .doc file and not as rich text or a pdf or some other less accessible file format.

A CV should have a strong professional visual impact. Use bold headings, generous sized margins and 1 (or certainly no more than 2) clear standard fonts. There are plenty to choose from, such as Arial, Lucida Sans, Myriad, Tahoma, Times New Roman or Verdana. Two pages of size 8 font can be a struggle to read and ornate fonts are distracting.

Also, take care not to fall into the trap of making too much text bold and/or underlined, particularly the habit of embolding certain key words in sentences that you feel will make your application stand out.

Capital letters should be avoided unless the word in question is

- the first word of a sentence
- the first person singular pronoun, as a subject, 'I'
- a title (Mr, Mrs, Ms, Miss, Dr. ...)
- a proper noun such as a particular place or person

For example:

"I worked in the Anaesthetics Department with Dr John Smith at West Middlesex Hospital."

SMS language (also known as chatspeak, txtspk, txt talk or texting) should never be used anywhere other than on your phone.

Avoid the temptation to use a CV template. They are almost all unsuitable and restrict your ability to express yourself freely. They can also be problematic when opened by recipients using different software releases or PC configurations. Compose text in a table but without borders. Many professional documents are composed in this way. There's nothing more frustrating than opening a CV to find indent or tabs errors because the writer has tapped the space bar to align paragraphs!

Opinions vary on whether including a photograph of yourself is a good or bad idea - even if you do resemble Brad Pitt or Halle Berry! I believe CVs are better without them if only to avoid unnecessarily inflating the file size.

Be accurate. Check spelling and grammar. I have seen a significant number of CVs with errors in them. Errors of any type are careless and send a sign to a prospective employer that a candidate cannot be bothered. Don't miss out on an opportunity needlessly. Take care to check your CV thoroughly and if you send a CV electronically, check the document has been received. Occasionally, incompatibility between computers may turn your beautiful formatted layout into a page of hieroglyphics! A quick phone call to check the CV has been received OK can resolve this.

Be succinct

Traditional medical CVs used for gaining appointments within the NHS are far too wordy for the pharma industry. Keep information to 3-4 pages of A4 paper, not 20-30 pages listing every procedure you've undertaken! Recruiters receive many CVs every day and don't have time to eke out the facts from a plethora of irrelevant detail.

An important tip is to avoid the first person singular. Your CV is a business document and the first person is not appropriate. This is the most common area for feedback on CVs. Using 'I' all the way through your CV, particularly at the start of sentences, can make you appear self-centered. Instead of writing "I have experience of A and B," simply write in an abbreviated, almost bullet point style saying 'Experienced in A and B.' A CV is not the place to demonstrate your prowess in the English language by writing a lot of flowery prose.

A CV is not the place to let everyone know you're feelings about the future of the pharma industry or what you believe is important in life, the universe etc. Keep such things for debate with colleagues once you've got the job!

OK., so now we know what to bear in mind when drafting a CV but how do you set it out? Well, there's no definitive order for setting out information on a CV but most HR professionals will agree it should go something like this.



CV Dont's

Don't include any form of failure on your CV (e.g. failed business ventures, exams etc).

Don't embellish your CV with borders, clip art, patterns, photos, coloured or extravagant fonts.

Don't personalise your CV with political or moral comment.

Don't give superfluous personal detail (e.g. age, height, weight, health conditions etc).

Don't forget to spellcheck your CV and ask someone else to read it through to double check for typos and correct grammar.

• Personal Details

- Your full name
- Nationality
- Postal address and personal email address
- Home telephone number, mobile number
- Driving licence details (e.g. current, clean)
- GMC registration number
- GMC status (e.g. full, limited)

• Profile

Start with a brief paragraph that crystallises your strong points for the interviewer and summarises your strengths, successes and why you want the role you're applying for. This will frame the reader's impression of you as it will be the first thing they read and probably the last after they have read your whole CV. If it summarises you succinctly, you stand an excellent chance of being remembered.

• Education

Give educational details with dates and qualifications from secondary education onwards and with the most recent qualifications first. Place emphasis on your degree/ diploma/ professional qualifications, with an indication of subjects studied, areas of speciality and brief details of relevant projects or dissertations.

• Employment

List jobs, full-time, part-time and voluntary with the most recent job first. If you've held a variety of positions, give most detail for the last five years, as they are likely to be most relevant to the position you are now applying for. If your work experience is extensive, select relevant experience and mention other jobs briefly. Give dates in full, including months, to avoid ambiguity.

Give information on what you've achieved. Quantify your successes and give some background on how you achieved them (e.g. the number of staff you managed, the amount of money an initiative saved). Indicate skills and knowledge gained in all positions.

If you have worked in a small company or out of the sector, then two lines on the company describing its size, market, product etc, can provide a good idea of the environment and role you worked in.

• Other Skills and Experience

- Language ability (include fluency level)
- Computer skills
- Positions of responsibility with information about any official or unofficial organisational roles that you've undertaken.
- Activities & interests with details of any hobbies and interests that are genuine and regularly pursued. They can help provide common ground for discussion and help you gain rapport with the interviewer. But remember you may be asked about them at the interview, so make sure they are genuine!

You can also show a little character in how you tell the reader about yourself in this section. On a recent candidate's CV, rather than stating hobbies as 'DIY, gardening, cooking and entertaining', the writer commented "House always seems to be undergoing some sort of transformation both inside and out. A hands on gardener and DIYer and what better way to show off the fruits of hard labour than by entertaining friends as I love to cook."

• Published Papers

Include these as a separate document not as part of your CV.

• References

These are optional on CVs but you may want to include them as an additional page that can be submitted on request. One referee should be your current employer or tutor. Another could be a former employer or a family friend. Always ask permission to use referees names and contact details and keep them informed of progress with your job search.

If at first you don't succeed...

If, despite sending in what you believe to be a model CV, you aren't successful in proceeding further, a polite request for feedback on your CV will often result in you receiving constructive criticism.

You can then put this to good use when making future applications to secure a new job.