



Step 4: Seven Things which will wreck your CV

1 Writing it back to front

Most CVs are written back to front- the wrong kind of information is at the beginning and the best stuff hidden away on page 3. Think about the main things you want to communicate (this will usually be about skills, achievements, know-how, attitude) and make sure all these key messages appear on page 1. Better still, make sure they appear in the first two-thirds of page 1, as by that point the average recruiter has already decided whether or not to give you the green light.

2 Hoping your CV explains itself

If you want to do something different and don't just want a repeat of your last job, you need to sell that idea on paper – just as if you were in the room providing some comments before you hand the document over. A change of direction usually means a short profile explaining what you have done, what you have to offer, and where you want to go next.

3 Underselling everything

CVs and application forms are, at heart, fairly uninteresting documents, and get little detailed attention unless something highly positive (or negative) stands out. As you edit your CV, ask the question “so what?” against every phrase, and always try to express what you have achieved in measurable terms – just doing this will often make your CV stand out from the crowd.

4 Failing to match the job and organisation

If your CV works in general, meaning it captures who you are and what you're looking for, you don't need to do a massive edit every time you

apply for a role. But do adjust the order you present information, and change the language to fit the hiring organisation. Write a short, punchy cover letter pointing to 4 or 5 things you have done which are an exact match to the role – this gets your CV read with more attention.

5 Striking the wrong note

Things to avoid: attempts at humour, putting yourself down, being ironic about past experiences or trying to be slightly wacky. This material usually reads very badly. Don't make negative comments about anything, and don't make your CV a series of apologies for odd choices and a 'chequered' past. Tell it as it is – it's one career, one history, with you at the centre of it.

6 Get the right kind of feedback

Asking for feedback can be a precarious process because recruitment consultants, in particular, have strong views on CV layout. The best question is to ask “what does my CV say to you?”. If you recognise and like the answer, your CV works.

7 Misunderstanding what your CV is for

Your CV isn't there to get you the job. All it does is get you through the door. Therefore it needs to focus on the key information required to demonstrate that you match an employer's requirements better than the average. When you're face to face with an employer, reinforce the fact that you can do the job, show that you will fit in, and whatever you do, don't talk yourself out of the process by saying all the wrong things.

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