

Getting your Curriculum Vitae right: Tools and Techniques to Chisel Your Academic and Research roles

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Abstract:

“There is a great power in words, if you don’t hitch too many of them together”, opined Josh Billings. A Curriculum Vitae is probably the most important document one writes in professional life. It is a marketing tool that opens the door to exiting new job opportunities. It ends the frustration of knowing one is capable of doing the job but doesn’t know how to land one. It is the essence of a persons’ educational and professional journey; the sum and substance of the credentials that will act as a launching pad for one’s career. A curriculum vitae is like an advertisement of the candidate to the potential employer. It is a document detailing the educational background, research and publishing experience, job experience and every important information that might be of relevance to the recruiter. It is a document that traces the academic and professional journey of the applicant. A CV is like a self-portrait that highlights the relative strengths, skill-sets and richness of experience and gives an overview of the candidate’s personality and works as a selling statement and has to stand out from the a pool of applications. The present paper attempts to focus on how to prepare a CV and the dos and don’ts that should be adhered to in order to write a CV that propels the candidature forward.

Keywords: Curriculum Vitae, experience, employee, employer, job opportunities

Introduction

“The simpler you say it, the more eloquent it is”, said August Wilson, renowned America playwright. This quote holds true whether one has to apply for a summer job or a permanent position in a business organization, or for a post of a research fellow in academia. A Curriculum Vitae or Resume is an intrinsic part of the application package. If the CV is well-made and effective, it will convince the recruiter to take an informed but positive decision about the suitability of the candidate for that particular post by assessing the relevance of the skills, traits, experience, educational qualifications and specialised training that the candidate possesses. The aim of a recruiter or hiring manager is to find a candidate who can further the cause of the organization. The aim of a good CV is to secure a call for an interview. For every post advertised, scores of applications are received. For a person to stand out in a crowd, the CV must make a strong initial impression. The CV must be visually appealing, well formatted, error free, skilfully organized and written in a highly literate fashion. There is no “one size fits all” formula; every CV must be it’s own unique statement and it must be regularly updated to accurately reflect the most recent and relevant experience and accomplishment desired by the recruiter. Every CV must be tailor-made and the approach must vary for every new post. It is the candidate’s ‘personal sales brochure’ that also determines the course of the interview. The paper will highlight the insights and tips that can get a CV that works – whether one is a fresher looking for a job, experiencing redundancy or returning from a career break.

Getting started: Charting the course of the CV

Before you get started, bear in mind that a recruiter spends as little as a minute looking at each CV to shortlist candidates for an interview. Just a quick glance enables them to get an idea whether further indulgence is required or not. So, your aim should possess that bait in your CV to get the employer hooked so that CV makes it past the first brief reading that it might get. Your profile should be impressive enough to convince the recruiter that you are the perfect fit. The necessity of preparing a CV might crop up if you are job hunting in the same / different industry. Whatever be the circumstance you must be ready with a copy of your updated CV grouping well your accomplishments and experience. It is extremely important to know what skills and experience is to be highlighted and what aspects need to lie low, depending on the job applied for.

The key components of an effective CV is that it should provide relevant information for the job of interest and, that, the information is presented clearly and concisely in an error free and organized way. Ensure to include critical information at a strategic position. Do not unnecessarily highlight or detail irrelevant material. Set the right tone and context in alignment with the post advertised. Nothing can dent your impression more than grammatical and spelling mistakes, so pay especial emphasis to produce an error-free document. There is no set format that is mandated but the priority should be skill-based i.e., the key skill set needed for the post must be rejigged from your data base to make it THE important CV to be picked. Your skills should largely conform to the standard conventions of your specific discipline. To set the ball rolling, make a list of all your background information and list it in an organized way into different categories. Be objective and analyse your professional and educational achievements from the employer' point of view and shun the I approach. When assembling your professional details, simultaneously try to pen down your role and responsibilities- which in turn will bring to the forefront your skill set; whether it was advertising, marketing or a leadership role. Also include your regular assignments and duties alongside any special trainings and workshops. In compiling information move beyond paid assignments to include any voluntary work, internships or work-study positions. For fresh recruits or recruits with very little experience the focus should be on educational accomplishments and community outreach initiatives and this must remain your primary focus area. Be accurate with data, degrees, dates, grade point averages, honours and be mindful to mention any research work that you might have indulged in at the under-graduate level. Make a mention of your affiliations to professional bodies, libraries, grants received, publications, mentoring and relevant professional certifications. In this information gathering process, remember that employers jump at soft skills and transferable skills and give great preference to such candidates because they can be potential assets in work settings. Problem solving, critical reasoning, data analysis, decision making, team management, empathy, leadership, efficient communication are high selling skill sets sought by recruiters.

Casting the first impression: Appearance and visual appeal of your curriculum vitae:

Organization and format are of utmost importance because the birds-eye view of your CV is

what tempts the employer to explore more. Be consistent in the organizational layout so that the recruiter does not have to struggle to locate the information he / she seeks. Follow a format – let your CV be either chronologically or functionally based. If it is skill based, ensure to group or categorize your accomplishments in the right sections for the ease of the recruiter. If a chronological CV is being adhered to make sure to follow the reverse chronological order listing from the most to the least recent- mentioning all relevant activities and achievement in each category. If the functional format is being followed, organize your teaching / research / service / administrative experience and information in clearly indicated functional areas. For a fresher with little or no professional experience chronological format fits well and for people with greater professional experience, a functional format is more suited. At times, the post applied for also helps to determine what type of a CV will work better in the given situation. Gapping and parallelism are newer techniques that you might like to experiment with while drafting your CV. Gapping implies the use of incomplete sentences that provide complete information in a crisp concise manner without bothering to follow syntax and sentence completion rules. This helps reduce word-count by eliminating unnecessary words for example you might write “*As Marketing intern (2020 Jan to 2021 Jan) prepared reports, conducted field work, indulged in Data Analysis, co-ordinated launch event.*” Description such as this will give the potential employer a quick idea of what you have done. Parallelism refers to consistency of structure in the use of phrases / verbs / sentences throughout your CV. This prevents the recruiter from getting confused and helps simplify and clarify what you intend to convey. The ultimate aim of both parallelism and gapping to enhance conciseness of the document and ensures ease of readability.

Customization is the key: One-size fits all rule does not apply

When preparing a CV one must bear in mind that with every fresh application the CV needs a rejig – a customization to suit the requirement of the post. Length of the CV is never a determinant of call for an interview. So, while it is essential to document all relevant information do not make your CV, a biography i.e., don't be so hyperbolic in your expression that it puts off the employer. Typically for a fresher a couple of pages in the CV would suffice. For more experienced posts the length may however vary to incorporate richness of experience.

The writing style you follow is equally important. As stated earlier, keep the document error free because it might lead to outright rejection of your application. Check for grammar punctuations and spellings and scan your CV multiple times critically and objectively. Never place **I** before **you** i.e., let the employer find you useful for the organization instead of indulging in self-glorification. Liberally use action words like *analysed, administered, increased, led, managed, organized, oriented, supervised, trained* etc.

The final product: A CV that translates in a job offer

The CV is your first impression on the potential employer-even before you meet face to face; so make sure it is high in quality and content. Spend time to unclutter material so that the appearance and readability is enhanced. As a thumb rule keep an inch margin on all sides and leave sufficient spacing in between categories. If you are using upper case bold letters for the section headings, use a combination of uppercase / lowercase bold to highlight subsections. Font size must also be used to indicate degree of priority. Do not experiment with fancy fonts with serifs that make reading an effort; stick to Times New Roman or Arial. Purchase high quality paper to print. Ensure that the photo you include does not have weird background that gives an informal look. It leaves the impression of an amateur on the reader. Get your CV printed using high quality laser printer and print only on one side of the paper. If a hard copy is to be dispatched, avoid folding you CV and prefer sending in a 9x12 inch envelope.

What to include and what to omit -An occasion to sell not tell - Contents / Categories and Sections

Begin with the basics – instead of writing curriculum vitae on the centre of the page, use the header for personal information because the content would be self-explanatory and the title CV is redundant. Keep the font slightly larger and in bold for the name. Avoid prefixes like Mr., Ms., Dr, Jr, Sr and let there be white space on the header by avoiding clutter. This can be followed by your contact details and email id. Ensure you use your personal email id rather than the official one as it might interfere with your current employment.

Writing the objective gives a sense of direction to your CV and charts your career goals. It

should be placed at the top and stand out in the document. It should be concisely worded focusing on your short and long term goals. Do not be too general in the objective because it will tend to be vague and sway from the focus. Instead of listing the position applied for, talk about the specific skills you possess that would help to advance organizational goals. Tailor your objective for every new job you apply for so that it suits the tone of what is to follow for the potential employee.

Educational details are always listed in reverse chronological order as listed earlier. Do not stoop below class X details. Do not mention your GPA if it is abysmally low- try to compensate with any other accomplishment like majoring or excelling in a specific subject.

The listing of professional experience follows the same reverse order in chronology highlighting your most recent job first. If you are a fresher and just getting started in your career, list your non-professional positions that can help to showcase your skill sets and work ethics. Ensure to put in the dates correctly listing your position, title, name and location following a consistent format and organization. If there are too many things to exhibit, pick and choose the most relevant instead of over-whelming the reader. Don't tell but sell in a way that the recruiter feels you are the most qualified for the job. Mention any professional memberships and affiliations because it is indicative of your level of enthusiasm in the chosen field. Academic and non-academic honours and awards should be listed under separate headers. If the financial component is large, list it under grants. Leave off high school achievements unless you are yet to receive your graduation degree.

Prefer to include service awards, community recognition academic accomplishments, recognition for presentations etc. Publications, if any, must also be highlighted because it is a statement on your written communication skills. Do not mention under preparation or print cases as they tend to leave an impression of exaggeration rather than providing a realistic picture. Mentoring experience should also find a mention in your CV- especially if you are a fresher. It may also benefit you to include certifications that you might have earned and the level of formal training achieved in the area. When listing your interests and hobbies, there is no need to align it to work. Employers prefer well-rounded individuals. When mentioning professional references, avoid references of friends and relatives. Prefer giving names of people with whom you've worked directly and who can give the potential employer an insight into your work ethics and skills. Do ask these references well in advance if you may use their

names.

Summing Up

Never spell out your salary expectation or demands in your CV. Omit any comments on fringe benefits. Do not talk about preferences for off day, work schedules in your CV. The aim should be to construct a comprehensive self-portrait. The goal should be to get a call for an interview. So use your CV as a selling brochure and self-advertisement. Showcase your capabilities in a way that the employer can see what benefit you can bring for the organization. Be truthful and sincere in listing down your information. Keep a balance between self-glorification and excessive modesty. If you provide incorrect information your credibility as a professional will be at stake and dampen your career prospects. To succeed in today's job market, use your CV as an advertisement targeted to your potential employer. You need to remember that a dream job does not exist – you have to create it.

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