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## 7 Steps to Writing a Winning and Professional CV

In the last article I wrote on 'Selling Yourself Short: De-Valuing your CV', I looked at the problems mature age workers, seem to have with selling their collective skills, knowledge and experience in their CV. This is particularly prevalent when trying to move from one job type or career band to another, where the individual is unable to clearly demonstrate the relevance of past skills and knowledge to the new/different context.

The CV is often the only important piece of information about you that a prospective employer gets to see.

So today I thought I would write a more prescriptive article on how to put the CV together using 7 quite simple steps to a successful CV.

As I said last time you need to confidently sell yourself, your skills and experience in your CV and you need to link your past experience, skills and knowledge to new and different contexts so that an employer can actually see the skills & knowledge transference – you must spell it out for them and leave nothing to chance (or interpretation).

Remember, an employer is looking for someone who can do the job and do it well. You must be able to demonstrate this – unfortunately, to really do this well, it often means you need to customise your CV (as well as your cover letter) for every job you apply for.

One technique to do this is as follows:

### **STEP 1 – Think about the Format**

Design a format that makes your CV easy to read (i.e. clear font/size/colour) with headings that stand out and lots of dot points.

Make sure you include your name and contact details front and centre on the first page with a summary in the header/footer of each page of the document.

The formatting of the CV tells the reader quite a bit about your computer skills and abilities so, depending on the job, you need to keep this firmly in mind and, if you're not confident then outsource it.

### **STEP 2 – Introductory Statement**

Make a defining statement that tells the reader who you are, what you're good at and/or passionate about and what you aspire to – preferably in relation to the job on the table (and this may change with every application you submit).

If you are linking previously acquired skills/knowledge to a new career or job opportunity then do so here for example if you were previously in sales and want to move to HRM then say something like:

*In my previous sales positions, I undertook a range of HR responsibilities including managing performance..... etc. and, this experience together with my recent study (i.e. completing the Diploma of HRM) have even more aware of the critical importance of employees to successful organisations.....*

### **STEP 3 – Education & Training**

Summarise your formal education and training (or technical skills). If you hold any post school qualifications then list them. There is no hard and fast rule for how you present your qualifications but, it is usually from the highest to the lowest, however, if you want to highlight a qualification for this job then start with that.

If you have no post-school qualifications then cut the heading out and list instead (or as well) all the training and/or technical skills you have. For example you might *list Advanced skills in Microsoft Office – Word, Excel, Power point; WordPress* and so on. If you are applying for a job where a software tool will be used i.e. a CMS or finance package then it's helpful to list those you've had experience with. Use a new line (dot point) for each new skill/tool.

Computer, email, web design and social media skills are all important skills to list – not just as I've done here but also list the tools and/or platforms you use and your skill rating (i.e. competent/ advanced).

It's important that you come up with some technical skills (even if you have impressive qualifications) as these give you some credibility that you can actually do something of immediate value without help. So cast your mind back to that short course you did years ago and list it here – if you are really struggling here then, if you hold a driver's license you can add it here.

Do not put your year 12 details here (only school leavers need to consider this).

### **STEP 4 – Key Skills Summary**

Now this is where you can really start to sell yourself and also demonstrate how you can successfully translate skills from previous contexts to new jobs/careers. This is the section that most people struggle with.

In this important section you need to list all the things you are good at (and that relate to the job) for example you might be:

- Highly motivated
- An experienced people person
- Excellent multi-tasker

Depending on the job and level, I would expect to see a targeted summary of skills over half to one page in total.

I suggest you begin by brainstorming all the things you do well in both a work and social context. If you can only generate a half page or less then enlist help from people who know you. Once you get this right it can be tinkered with as required.

So, begin by pulling together about an A4 page of dot point skill description. From this list gather together a small grouping of 5 – 6 key skills that you think describe you. These core skill sets will form the basis of all your job applications. Then, go back to the job

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advert/description and pull out the key points i.e. what you think the job is asking for. Once you have these listed, go back to your 'big' list of skills and put together a list that best matches the job you are applying for.

For example you might have a number of job specific skills such as:

- ✓ *Professional writing skills, able to write policies and procedures*
- ✓ *Good general knowledge of HR regulations, codes and legislation*
- ✓ *Highly experienced sales executive achieving all financial team and individual targets year on year*
- ✓ *Skilled user of complex CMS including designing of email templates and implementing campaigns*

If the job is HR related then you might select the first two dot points, whereas if it is in sales then you'd leave these out as they are irrelevant to the job and just go with the sales-related skill sets.

It is critical that you take the time to get this section right and, that you address it again for every job you apply for. Your skill-sets need to subtly mirror those required for the job. This is where you sell your transferable skills!

### **STEP 5 Career History**

This section is often neglected in the CV or, it is overdone with way too much detail. Your career history needs to be chronological with no obvious gaps commencing with the most recent position first.

For each job/position list:

Job Title

Dates position was held i.e. Jan 2014 – ongoing

Company Name

*Then include a summary paragraph (3 – 4 lines only) highlighting the key parts or notable points of the role and/or the company.*

List a dot point summary of the key responsibilities of the role i.e.:

- Motivating and engaging team members to work effectively and efficiently
- Consistently achieve set KPI's

If the position and the new job warrant it you may want to list 'Key achievements'. Here you can highlight any awards or citations won while in the role or any 'special' or unusual achievements, or if you want to brag about something then put it here.

Repeat this formula for each of the previous jobs you've held.

### **STEP 6 – Personal Statement**

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This is optional and gives a potential employer a bit of an insight into you as a person. It often depends on the job and here you might want to say something about your personal interests and/or passions i.e.

- Play the violin
- Amateur marathon runner
- Sing in Church Choir

Alternatively, you might like to list the various groups or charities you're involved with but, don't overdo it.

Make sure that what you highlight is not contentious nor adds any concerns to the employer. For example you probably wouldn't list 'hang gliding' as this may be viewed as high risk and a potential liability. Nor would you list membership of a political party for example.

### **STEP 7 - Referees**

The final point to make here is about your referees. I can't believe the number of CV's I see with a whole list of referees and contact details listed!

You should never supply referee details with an initial CV /job application. Instead a sentence that notes that referees will be supplied upon request is all that is required here.

NB it is poor protocol to pass out your referees to all and sundry in job applications. Your referee's time is valuable and their contact details should be privileged. Treat them like the gems they are. Normal job protocol says that you only give out contact details for referees only after you have notified them of the company name and contact person and the job title. That way you are preparing your referee for a call and providing them with the pertinent details of same.

It's just good business manners.

So there you have it. The 'trick' if you like in writing a winning CV is really taking the time to do it well, to read the job advert and respond directly to it. Of course this means you need to tweak or perhaps quite substantially re-write some sections of your CV for each new job you find but, if you follow my advice you'll find you won't have to do it for long.

Your attention to the details of selling your skill-sets as they relate to each specific job that comes along will pay off and you'll find yourself in a new job in no time!

Helen Sabell