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CV writing

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The Chronological CV

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The Performance CV

This format should be used if you are searching for a new role in the same industry. It is same layout as the Chronological CV but job titles and company names are being strongly emphasised. The job description is listed with strong references to achievements that have been obtained in the role.

The Functional CV

This type of CV looks at the skills that have been obtained from work experience or whilst in Education. This CV suits graduates or college leavers as it concentrates on the skills that have been nurtured whilst in Education. It can also be used if you are changing career direction and want to emphasise the abilities and achievements that have not been used in your most recent job. This type of CV can also be used if you have a large number of jobs and want to describe the experience you have gained in total.

The Alternative CV

This is suitable for individuals in creative careers. i.e. designers, public relations. It tends to have more of a design feel to it with images, graphics and other visual mediums to highlight key points on the CV. It will often show the talents of the individual in the actual presentation of the CV.

Writing the CV

The CV consists of the following:

- A summary
- Education / Qualifications
- Career History
- Other Experience
- Interests

01

A Summary

The summary should consist of a brief objective, describing the type of role you are searching for and an overall impression of your suitability. The summary should also have your contact details, date of birth and nationality.

Education / Qualifications

List your qualifications with the most recent first. Place the grades obtained next to the qualification (for degrees or professional qualifications if you failed the course this must be noted). The other qualifications can be entered with the dates attended and the educational establishment named.

List any work related training courses which you attended, including company courses and any you attended on your own initiative.

Career History

Start with your most recent or last job and work backwards. For each position (treat internal promotion as a new job and record the dates separately) list your job title (e.g. Administrator, Secretary etc) and when you started and finished in each job. Give the name of the company and include a brief description of the service they provide (using the terms they would use to describe themselves). Set out your main responsibilities, achievements, duties, and skills from each role.

For example:

December 2000 - November 2004

XYZ Ltd. (The world leader in magnetic lettering.)

Title: Receptionist

Duties:

- Providing a comprehensive front-of-house reception, switchboard cover and computerised room booking service for meetings and corporate entertainment.
- The role involved meeting and greeting guests and liaising with individuals at all levels to ensure a seamless, efficient, friendly and courteous level of service.
- Booking refreshments and lunches.

01 Other Experience

List any computer skills you have, including the software and operating system used, e.g. Microsoft Windows XP Professional, Microsoft Office 97. If you have foreign language skills which may be relevant for any jobs which you are applying for, list them and indicate whether your skills are spoken, written, business or technical. Please also indicate your level of fluency: i.e. fluent, good business written.

Interests

This section is debatable to its relevance, however I believe that at interview if you and the interviewer share a similar hobby or interest then having something in common to talk about can be to your advantage. It also gives the employer a better understanding of the type of person you are outside of work.

Finally

The CV should be about 2 pages of A4, unless someone specifically asks for a more detailed CV. Ensure the CV is presentable and in a clear font (Arial) and either size 10 or 11. Make sure that if you are printing it that it is on good quality white paper (100 gram). Finally get someone you trust to proofread the CV for typographical errors, mis-spellings and poor grammar - don't rely on just a spellchecker!

02 Double check it

You have written your CV and are getting ready to send it off to your ideal vacancy... stop!!! Take a few moments and double check the following points.

Have you had it proof read?

Ask someone you trust to proof read the CV for typographical errors, misspellings and poor grammar - don't rely on just a spellchecker!

How long is the cv?

This format should be used if you are searching for a new role in the same industry. It is same layout as the Chronological CV but job titles and company names are being strongly emphasised. The job description is listed with strong references to achievements that have been obtained in the role.

Is your CV well organised?

Make sure that an employer can follow the CV and build up a picture of your skills and experience quickly and easily. Make sure you have tailored the CV to the job you are applying for. The key points they are searching for will be listed in the job description / advert so if you have this knowledge / experience put it in the CV!

Is the CV layout clearly?

Long paragraphs and long sentences can put off a recruiter so use bullet points and punchy sentences to get your message across.

You will need to send a cover letter when applying to a vacancy directly. Make sure this cover letter gives the reason why you are applying for the role, your suitability and that you ask for a response. Don't go into too much detail as that's the role of the CV, just whet their appetite! If you are posting the CV make sure it goes first class.

03 Be prepared

Well done! The CV has opened the door and now comes the 'Interview'. This makes some people weak at the knees at the thought of being put on the spot. The fear of interviews often comes down to the fact that you will say the wrong answer to a question. To prevent this and to succeed at interview will depend on the quality of your preparation.

Areas to concentrate on

- The job description
- The company
- Selling yourself
- Preparing interview questions
- The job description

The job description will highlight the key skills and experience the employer requires for the role. It is essential that you have read and understood all aspects of the job description. If you are unsure about any duties then speak to the Permanent Consultant at DCA Recruitment. Relate all key criteria with your own knowledge and experience so you can draw upon these factors at interview.

The company

Finding company information is not always as easy as it seems. Fortunately most companies have websites, but these can be quite hit and miss with smaller firms. At DCA Recruitment we will be able to provide more information on the company, especially if we have placed candidates in the company before. When looking at the company information makes sure that this is an industry you feel is doing well. Look at their accomplishments and their objectives for the future. How many employees do they have? Do they have plans for expansion? You can often tell how professional the company is by its website.

03 Selling yourself

Try looking at yourself objectively. Look at your strengths, weaknesses, your potential and achievements. Your strengths lie in your skills, usually outlined in the CV. Think about examples and achievements that provide evidence that you have used or developed certain skills. Relate these skills to the job description and don't waffle as the interviewer may lose interest.

Weaknesses should be shown as areas where training can improve the skills of the individual. For example you may have no experience on a company's in house database, and why should you if you have never worked for the company before. Simple training can turn a weakness into a strength.

Your potential lies in the opportunities the company has to offer and this should be explored during the interview. You must feel confident to ask why this role has arisen. Will this role develop in time or are there opportunities for progression? Some roles are exactly what they say they are i.e. Receptionist and will not change very much over time, so be careful about asking these questions if they do not apply to the type of role you are being interviewed for.

Preparing interview questions

Interviews are two way and you must make sure you are making the right decision if you are offered the job. By asking questions either throughout the interview or at the end you must be satisfied that you have enough information. I always advise candidates to take a notepad with questions already written down.

This not only shows to the interviewer that you have prepared for the interview but it prompts you to ask the questions rather than running for the door! Also have a look at the section 'The interview', so that you can prepare some answers to likely interview questions that may come up.

04 First impressions

Projecting a professional image comes down to your dress and how you conduct yourself at interview. Professional dress code should always be applied and your confidence will be boosted if you look the part.

Research shows...

In the first few minutes employer's impressions are based on:

- Body language (70%)
- Tone of voice (20%)
- What you say (10%)

From the moment you walk through the door you will be assessed. The receptionist will sometimes be asked by the employer for their observations, so always be aware.

Once you meet the interviewer with a smile and a firm handshake do break the ice (if the interviewer does not do it first) with some small talk, just to break the ice such as commenting favorably on the premises.

Try not to talk too much if you are following them to the interview room, apart from pleasantries if they are holding doors open for you. It is always awkward to talk to someone's back and likewise they can walk into desks if they are looking behind them to talk to you!

Once in the room wait to be seated and make sure you are comfortable. When introduced to the interviewers pay particular attention to remembering their names. If they introduce themselves by their first name then do not address them as Mr or Mrs.

Try and relax into the interview and you will be able to answer the questions with confidence.

05 The interview

I can assume that once you are in the 'hot seat' you are all prepared and ready for those interview questions. You know how important body language is and speaking clearly and confidently is a must. So what sort of questions could be asked? Have a look at these...

What kind of experience do you have to benefit this particular job?

The answer to this question lies in understanding the role when it is first described to you and taking the trouble to ask lots of questions about tasks involved. This opens the door for you to respond with suitable skills and experience showing you could accept the role with confidence.

What interests you most about this job?

Answering this question properly requires that you fully understand the job description, and if you ask plenty of questions then you should be able to respond with some specific explanations that show your enthusiasm.

Can you work well under pressure?

This is a closed question and can be a sign of an untrained interviewer. Use the opportunity to give a comprehensive but brief answer focusing on several clear-cut examples showing your ability to cope under pressure.

What is your greatest strength?

If you've done your homework before the interview, you would have several strengths to choose from. The obvious choice would be the strength which best suits the demands of the job.

Why should I hire you?

Be careful not to answer with a broad description. Keep it brief and to the point. Each point should be a direct link between your skills and experience and the demands of the role.

Do you have any questions?

This is when you can breathe a sigh of relief, it usually means that the interview is coming to an end and if there's something you haven't yet had a chance to impress upon the interviewer, this is your chance.

05 Informative answers

Do you consider yourself a natural leader?

The ideal answer to this is 'yes', but in reality not all of us possess the confidence required to lead. You can substitute 'natural' with 'competent' or 'conscientious', focusing more on leading by example with good organisational and interpersonal skills. Most professional jobs require an element of leadership that you should be taking the trouble to cultivate, whether it comes naturally or not.

Tell me about yourself

This can be a frustratingly open question. Aim to keep it professionally-orientated, specific to the characteristics that the interviewer may want to hear. A few personal attributes can also be mentioned, perhaps even with humour, this is a useful way of lightening atmosphere of the interview and increasing your confidence. Although your objective is to show you've got the perfect profile to fulfill the role, the interviewer will be pleased to discover that you have an agreeable personality. You may also want to ask in which particular aspects of your background the interviewer is particularly interested.

What are your biggest accomplishments?

Answers to this should be job-related. Modesty should again be applied, hinting that your best work is yet to come. A big accomplishment doesn't need to be overly impressive, but rather show your competency. Efficiently managing a small team of diverse people, or ably dealing with a shortage of resources is an accomplishment that can be meaningful, but claiming your bit part in a huge project sounds fanciful and isn't likely to leave a favorable impression. Don't be hesitant or vague when answering this question. Show that you have a clear idea of your achievements to date.

Where do you see yourself in five years time?

The obvious answer would be "part of the management team within your company". We all know this may not necessarily be true, but the interviewer needs to know that your intentions are to move up the career ladder within the organisation. Be careful not to sound overly ambitious, the interviewer may be your future boss. The safest option is to modestly express your desire to grow with the company.

05 Dealing with objections

How long would you stay at this company?

You should emphasise your desire to settle down with the right company, and that you feel this is it. Alternatively, throw the question back at them: "Would this company be able to offer me a long term future?"

How do you handle criticism of your work?

Firstly, try to portray an attitude that all criticism has a benefit, and provides a chance for improvement.

Do you make your opinions known when you disagree with someone?

If you have previously successfully dealt with a situation like this where the process and outcome was very satisfactory to both parties, then mention these examples. Aim to show that you're a mature individual with the confidence and intelligence to approach your supervisor in private to discuss your objections in a constructive, calm manner.

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05 Turning negatives into positives

What can you do for us that someone else cannot do?

If you have properly understood the details of the job then try to answer with a unique combination of your skills/experience which others are unlikely to have.

Describe a difficult problem you've had to deal with

Outline an example of your success in troubleshooting and organisation. It's always good to go into an interview armed with one of these. Clearly explain how you approached the problem, the result and how a difficult outcome was averted. This is a good opportunity to show that you have a positive attitude to all challenges, and that you were not discouraged or intimidated by the situation.

How do you handle tension?

The smart answer here is to explain how you avoid tension in the first place. Avoid a vague and simplistic answer like "Yes, I can handle tension". You might also want to mention what you do outside of work to reduce stress.

What are your pet hates on the job?

Be careful not to shoot yourself in the foot here. Keep this answer short and sweet, using words like 'challenge' rather than 'I hate'.

Do you prefer working with others or alone?

Answering this depends on the nature of the job you are going for, but team players are usually favoured, so it's best to show that you function well in both situations depending on the nature of the task.

What kind of people do you like to work with, or have difficulty working with?

Don't get into personal details here, just give a short, sweet and obvious answer that you prefer working with people who are motivated and have integrity and pride in their work.

05 Stress Busters

What kind of decisions are most difficult for you?

A good answer is to mention that you have difficulty making a decision where there is insufficient knowledge or information at hand, and that you try to avoid such instances by taking the trouble to remain informed. Try to imagine what sort of decisions would frequently be made in the new role, and steer clear of mentioning any of these as 'difficult'.

I'm not sure you're suitable for the job

Don't let this trick question throw you. If they felt this, they would be terminating the interview. What the interviewer is in fact doing is giving you an opportunity to sell yourself and seal any doubt. Remain calm and re-emphasise several points that lend support to your suitability. You could phrase the answer by saying: "I'm surprised to hear that, I would've thought that my experience in telesales would be very useful in developing the customer services portfolio, for instance..." Questions like these crop up towards the end of an interview and can make or break your case.

Wouldn't you feel better off in another firm?

This is a rather flattering question that can be a good sign that the interviewer has a high regard for you. What they're really asking is "Aren't you going to get bored here and move on?" You need to reassure them by throwing the flattery back at them, emphasising the appealing aspects of their company, showing that you know a lot about the company. Answers such as, "this company has good potential for growth", "I feel I can thrive best in an environment like this" or "I relish the challenge of turning the department around" are good examples.

*These interview questions have been taken from professionalcv.co.uk

06 Feedback

Once you have left the interview start thinking about all the positives and any negatives. It is good to talk to your consultant as soon as possible as these thoughts can be discussed and feedback passed on to the employer.

If you are made an offer then you need to be able to make a decision fairly quickly so that the contract can be sent out to you. We advise that you receive this in writing and you are happy with it before you hand in your notice.

You may find that when you hand in your notice that your current employer does not accept your resignation and offers you more money to stay. In this case you have to ask why you intended leaving in the first place! If it was for extra money then do accept it, but also think about the consequences.

If you are not offered the position then do not worry. Draw on this experience and look at all the positives from the interview. Keep on persevering and soon the right job will be yours.