



Institute of
Employability
Professionals

Institute of Employability Professionals - Candidate's Guide

**The IEP's comprehensive guide to finding
your next opportunity.**



*This guide is adapted from materials in the
IEP Knowledge Bank.*

CV Starter Guide

- A CV exists to get a person an interview with an employer.
 - It must show why that individual should get a job.
 - It needs to match the employer's requirements.

Layout

- CVs should be around two pages long.
- Have a clear and easy to read template that you can reuse.
- Be consistent with the font, Arial, Calibri Gill Sans, and Helvetica are all easy to read.
- Use bolds, underlines and italics sparingly.
- Font points 11 and 12 are usually suitable.

What should go in?

Most CVs include:

- Name, email, mobile, address
- Personal Profile
- Skills
- Employment history
- Education and training
- Interests

There is no need to add your marital status, gender, date of birth, or nationality.

Personal Profile

A personal profile should be around 3-4 sentences long. It needs to show that

the person understands the job description and can do the job. It should show that you have read the advertisement, understand what the employer is looking for, and that you have the experience needed to do the job.

Skills

These are your skills that match up to the job that is advertised. You should avoid writing lists but instead say WHY you have these skills by giving some examples of how they have been demonstrated.

Examples:

- First-rate IT Skills: proficient user of Microsoft Word, Excel, Outlook, and PowerPoint.
- Excellent sales skills, achieved over £1.5m in sales for previous company, never missed a target and helped sales team achieve over 15% of target within the financial year.
- If they are advertising for people with good IT skills, experience, or anything specific, you need to add it. If the advert doesn't say much about the skills research the job profile on:
<http://www.nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk>.
- Make sure you include any cards and licences.
- You can include DBS checks here too – many employers are interested if someone has one already.

Employment History

This part shows that you have the necessary experience to do the job. Put the most current job (including voluntary work and placements) first and work backwards. There is no need to describe more than 5 previous jobs or 10

years work experience in detail unless requested. You can use bullet points to describe longer-term previous job roles.

Look at the job advertisement and see what sort of experience they are looking for and add what you have done in your previous job that will match that experience. Keep it relevant. Look at our list of verbs below as they create a strong impression of achievement, ability, activity & clearly communicate your contribution to the job.

Education

Put it in the way that suits you best. Go with their highest qualification first. Include any Maths and English Qualifications. Be sparing with ESOL, it can over-stress that English is not a first language.

If you did not complete education or you do not want to add in your education, you don't need to. Instead the next section will be more useful for you as you will be able to add other relevant skills which in some cases are more important than formal education.

Additional Skills & Training

Many people have learnt relevant skills on the job. They might also have attended workshops or short courses that are directly related or show transferable skills, for example health and safety courses. If relevant, add it to the CV.

Interests

Many people get worried about what to put as "interests". Don't be concerned as this isn't as important as you may think. Some employers see

interests as proof of a good work/life balance. But overall this will not get you a job or interview. If you wish to add them, add appropriate interests to your CV. Include interests that are an evidence of creativity, personality, and enthusiasm. The example could be volunteering or taking part in charity sports events.

References

Usually put “Available on request” and don’t list the names and contact details. Be ready to supply the references and make sure you have contacted the people who have agreed to give a reference before you give their details to a potential employer. That way the referee is happy to get a call, because they are expecting it.

Great Verbs to use on a CV

Use the “ed” ending of a verb rather than the “ing” because it personalises it to you and shows that it has happened.

Achieved	Calculated	Cooked	Doubled
Administered	Captured	Coordinated	Earned
Advised	Cared	Created	Edited
Analysed	Checked	Delivered	Eliminated
Approved	Collected	Demonstrated	Encouraged
Arranged	Combined	Designed	Engineered
Assessed	Completed	Developed	Ensured
Assisted	Conceived	Devised	Established
Attained	Conducted	Diagnosed	Estimated
Bought	Consolidated	Directed	Expanded
Budgeted	Consulted	Distributed	Facilitated
Built	Controlled	Documented	Forecast

Formulated	Launched	Performed	Sold
Founded	Lead	Planned	Solved
Generated	Liased	Prepared	Standardised
Guided	Machined	Presented	Started
Identified	Maintained	Processed	Strengthened
Implemented	Managed	Promoted	Supervised
Improved	Marketed	Redesigned	Supported
Increased	Modernised	Reduced	Taught
Initiated	Monitored	Reorganised	Tested
Inspired	Motivated	Represented	Trained
Installed	Navigated	Researched	Translated
Instigated	Negotiated	Resolved	Used
Instructed	Obtained	Reviewed	Verified
Interpreted	Operated	Revised	Washed
Introduced	Organised	Scheduled	Won

Adjectives – prove it!

Don't just assert you are something; show what this means – take the adjective Trustworthy:

Trustworthy

“Handled money – on a till, bar staff, waiter”

“Responsible for other people's children”

“Responsible for another people's property”

A CV that begins “I am a hard worker; able to take instructions and work on

my own initiative. I am punctual and a great communicator" will not impress an employer as it is just your own opinion of yourself.

An employer wants to have examples and to know that you understand why these attributes are important.

Let's take a list of words:

Confident

Creative

Dedicated

Helpful

Punctual

Team worker

You could say:

With my NVQ level 2 in Childcare and recent experience at a Children's Centre I am a confident Childcare Worker. Dedicated to helping children fulfil their potential, I make sure I am there early each day to prepare creative sessions and work with the whole team to create a safe and secure environment where children can develop.

Are There Any Words You Should or Should Not Use on A CV?

A CV has one function - to get you an interview with an employer. It must show why a person should get that job, so to begin with the key words are those that make sure your CV matches an employer's requirements. That means each time a CV is sent it should be tailored.

What not to say:

Too many CVs contain strings of meaningless adjectives that cover as many bases as possible in their allotted two sides of A4. A CV that begins "I am a hard worker; able to take instructions and work on my own initiative. I am honest, punctual and a great communicator" does not impress.

You may well be honest, hardworking, punctual, and energetic or have a will to learn. But just ask yourself – is there anyone out there applying with a CV that says "I am lazy and a bad time keeper; curmudgeonly and antipathetic to work? The key message is **don't just make a list of adjectives**. An employer wants to have examples and to know that you understand why these attributes are important. Let's take a list of words that you might want to use and think about how we can best deploy them.

- **Confident**
- **Creative**

- **Dedicated**
- **Helpful**
- **Punctual**
- **Team worker**

You could say:

I am confident, creative, and dedicated. I am always punctual and helpful and can work on my own and in a team.

But far better to say:

With my NVQ level 2 in Childcare and recent experience at a Children's Centre I am a confident childcare worker. Dedicated to helping children fulfil their potential, I make sure I am there early each day to prepare creative sessions and work with the whole team to create a safe and secure environment where children can develop. I am responsible for supporting individual children at play time and mealtimes. Each day I write a short report for parents and post a picture to their phones so they can see what their child has been doing.

Use more verbs:

At the IEP, we love verbs. Particularly the simple past tense that usually ends in an ed. This tense shows that they did the task themselves. Here is part of a list with examples from just the first letter of the Alphabet.

- **Accomplished**
- **Achieved**
- **Administered**
- **Advised**
- **Analysed**

- **Approved**
- **Applied**
- **Arranged**
- **Assessed**
- **Assisted**
- **Attained**

We would use these to come up with a sentence that added value to the verb for example.

- Assisted the team to meet its sales targets.
- Achieved a certificate in Food Hygiene.
- Applied the company's Health and Safety rules and arranged for machines to be inspected.

Don't worry about first or third person

Formality is important in a CV, so make sure it is written in good clear prose, with correct spelling and punctuation. It does not really matter whether it is First or Third person, as long as you are consistent. The third person can be beneficial as it cuts out a lot of superfluous 'I am's'. However, sometimes it feels more personal, especially where there are human relationships involved, for example in care work and childcare, to write in the first person.

Cover Letters – An Introduction and Basic Structure

No idea where to start when it comes to writing the perfect cover letter? Worry not – the IEP has you covered with our basic structure to build the narrative and help you take your second step towards finding employment, after producing the perfect CV of course!

1. Remember the purposes of a cover letter

A cover letter has two key purposes, the first is to introduce you to a prospective employer, and the second, arguably more important purpose, is to display how you would be suitable for the specific role to which you're applying. Therefore, it is essential that each cover letter is adapted to the type of role, or if possible to match the job description, you are applying for as closely as possible.

Unless you have a very good reason, **keep your cover letter to one page.**

2. Start by introducing yourself

The first paragraph, following either the name of the hiring manager, or 'Dear Sir or Madam' should always address the purpose of the letter. In the introduction you would specify which role you'll be applying for, ideally the organisation, and finally what you're looking for as a candidate (similar to the 'profile' section in a CV).

The first sentence of a cover letter would usually be: "*I am writing to you to apply for the role of [role] at [organisation]*".

3. What you're doing now

Your second paragraph usually addresses your most recent experience of employment, training or education. The next few sentences would explain the skills that this has taught you, and these usually relate to the ones specified in the job description. It's usually excellent practice to provide examples of practical tasks where you have utilised each skill in the job role.

The section would ideally include an example of a success story where you have achieved in a role, or an example of your contribution to your employer or education.

For example:

"Currently, I work as a [role] at [organisation]. My primary role is to [main features of role that align with the job description you're applying for], alongside [other key responsibilities]. The role requires me to be [key skill] whilst displaying an aptitude for [key skill]. During my time at [organisation], I managed to [give an example of something you succeeded in doing]."

If you're not in education, employment or training, you may want to talk about relevant experience that you may have for the role, or start with the skills section below instead.

4. Provide a skills breakdown

This is your opportunity to expand on the skills found in your CV, and follows up with lots of practical examples where you've applied these in your previous roles. These skills should usually differ strongly from the first section to ensure that you cover as much of the job description as possible, and show off your versatility.

This is also the time to mention how you would apply the skills that you've learned in their organisation.

For example:

“Professionally, I enjoy [a skill you enjoy doing], as displayed in my experiences at [a previous organisation], where I was expected to [one of your responsibilities there]. I expect as a [new role] to [something you hope to achieve in your new role]. Similarly, I hope to [something you would contribute to your new organisation].”

5. Get your personality across

A cover letter is meant to be a personal document, giving your employer and insight to you as a person, as well as an employee. Make sure that you include a paragraph about your values and your beliefs about the working environment, and what you bring to a workplace setting.

For example:

“Through my experiences, I believe that [value, preferably one in the new job description] is one of the most important values in a workplace. During my time at [organisation], I worked to [example of a scenario where you behaved according to the value].”

The example format above is intentionally vague as much of what you write will be personal, and it is difficult to set out a standard format for this. The key consideration is that you need to reflect the behaviours expected of the role that you are applying for. These may often be listed in the job description.

6. Conclude showing a want to learn

Your final paragraph should centre on what you hope to gain from the new role, and most importantly, what you want to learn. You also want to ensure that you thank them for their consideration, preferably as your last line, and reference your CV if relevant.

For example:

"I look forward to [doing or learning something] in a new environment and expect [organisation] will provide me with an exciting opportunity to [give an example of something you want to learn]."

Thank you for your consideration. Please find my CV attached.

Yours Faithfully,

[Name]."

When writing formally, remember to sign off your letter with 'Yours Sincerely' if you know the name of the person to whom the letter is addressed. If you are using 'Dear Sir or Madam' sign off with 'Yours Faithfully' instead. The phrase 'never sin with a sir' helps remember this rule. Kind Regards is also acceptable, though not preferred.

We hope that you've found this simple guide and format useful. To maximise your job search, cover letters should not appear to be generic. While the basic format in this guide can be useful to make a start, it is important that you personalise your cover letter according to job function.

Cover Letters: Pro-Tips

Use these quick and easy pro-tips to give your cover letter that final polish!

1. Personalise your letter

Make sure to be as human as possible. Find out the name of the hiring manager (do not use 'Dear Sir/Madam' if possible).

2. Make them feel special

Tell them why it's them you want to work for. What is it about their company that really interests and excites you? For example, you could reference a charity or community activity or where you heard them speak.

3. Tell them why you

What is it that you bring to the role and the organisation? Ideally, link these to the top three things on the job description. Always give examples, and you can even throw in a sneaky line from a great reference or testimonial.

4. Show passion

State why you want to work for them; use terms of 'love' not 'like' or other terms such as delighted, passionate, committed etc.

5. Show kindness

Let them know that you care about how the process can be difficult for them, and wish them the best of luck for finding the right person.

6. Don't miss out

Copy your cover letter into the body of the email as well as attaching so it cannot be missed.

Interview Preparation: Top 5

Interview Tips

If you're counting down the days till your next job interview, these helpful hints will help you get in the right mood so you can leave a lasting impression on the interviewers.

1. Do your research

Fail to plan, and you plan to fail. You are certain to be asked specific questions about the company, so make sure you've done your homework on things like their last year's profits and latest product launches. Also take a look at the latest developments in the industry so you can converse with confidence.

<http://www.theguardian.com/careers/careers-blog/job-interview-checklist-how-to-prepare>

2. Practice your answers

Although there is no set format that every job interview will follow, there are some questions that you can almost guarantee will crop up. You should prepare answers to some of the most common interview questions about your personal strengths and weaknesses, as well as being able to explain why you would be the best person for the job.

3. Look the part

Appearances shouldn't matter, but the plain fact is that you are often judged before you've even uttered a word. Make sure your shoes are polished, your

clothes fit correctly and that your accessories are subtle. Dressing one level above the job you're applying for shows a desire to succeed.

4. Stay calm

Good preparation is the key to staying in control. Plan your route, allowing extra time for any unexpected delays and get everything you need to take with you ready the night before. Remember to speak clearly, smile and remember that your interviewers are just normal people, and they may be nervous too!

5. Ask questions

You should always have some questions for your interviewer to demonstrate your interest in the position. Prepare a minimum of five questions, some which will give you more information about the job and some which delve deeper into the culture and goals of the company.

Interview Preparation - The Decisive Factor

93% of employability is determined by preparation BUT only 1 in 10 candidates spend 2 hours or more preparing.

Preparation is proven to be the most decisive factor in interview success.

There are 5 key steps that will give you the winning edge:

- 5 Key Components of Interview Preparation

1. Get organised

- Organise everything two days before.
- Allow extra time for travel delays.
- Double check you will look the part.
- Arrive 15 minutes early to the interview.

2. First Impressions Count

- 85% of interviewers decide whether to hire someone in the first 3 minutes.
- Smile and greet your interviewer confidently.

3. Demonstrate your energy and enthusiasm

- Sit up. Try to relax and enjoy it. Let your enthusiasm show through.
- Make eye contact.
- 67% of hiring managers say that failure to make eye contact is the biggest mistake that applicants make.
- Don't cross your arms or fidget as that indicates nervousness.

4. Research the company and role

- 47% of interviewees who have little or no knowledge of the company are rejected.
- Prepare at least 5 questions. Make sure they are specific to the company and role.
- Asking about a recent industry change is a good way to show your interest in a company's market.

5. Demonstrate Attitude and Aptitude:

- Make sure you talk about your leadership and teamwork skills.
- A great way to structure your answers is the STAR technique.
- 89% of new hires fail for attitude not aptitude.

An example of STAR Answers:

SITUATION - Set the scene

TASK - Describe the challenge

ACTION - Explain what you did

RESULT - Quantify the results

What to do after the Interview

- Always follow up within 24 hours. It could make the difference.
- 75% of interviewers say receiving a follow up impacts their decision making.
- BUT only 39% of candidates follow up within 24 hours.

Typical Interview Questions

Although there is no set format that every job interview will follow, there are some questions that you can almost guarantee will crop up. Here's a list of the most common questions and a guide to the kind of answers your interviewer wants to hear:

1. Tell me about yourself

This is usually the opening question and, as first impressions are key, one of the most important. Keep your answer to under five minutes, beginning with an overview of your highest qualification then running through the jobs you've held so far in your career. You can follow the same structure of your CV, giving examples of achievements and the skills you've picked up along the way. Don't go into too much detail – your interviewer will probably take notes and ask for you to expand on any areas where they'd like more information. If you're interviewing for your first job since leaving education, focus on the areas of your studies you most enjoyed and how that has led to you wanting this role.

2. What are your strengths?

Pick the three biggest attributes that you think will get you the job and give examples of how you have used these strengths in a work situation. They could be tangible skills, such as proficiency in a computer language, or intangible skills such as good man-management. If you're not sure where to start, look at the job description. There is usually a section listing candidate requirements, which should give you an idea of what they are looking for.

3. What are your weaknesses?

The dreaded question, which is best handled by picking something that you have made positive steps to redress. For example, if your IT ability is not at the level it could be, state it as a weakness but tell the interviewer about training courses or time spent outside work hours you have used to improve your skills. Your initiative could be perceived as a strength. On no accounts say, "I don't have any weaknesses", your interviewer won't believe you, or "I tend to work too hard", which is avoiding the question.

4. Why should we hire you? or What can you do for us that other candidates can't?

What makes you special and where do your major strengths lie? You should be able to find out what they are looking for from the job description. "I have a unique combination of strong technical skills and the ability to build long-term customer relationships" is a good opening sentence, which can then lead onto a more specific example of something you have done so far in your career. State your biggest achievement and the benefit it made to the business, then finish with "Given the opportunity, I could bring this success to your company."

5. What are your goals? or Where do you see yourself in five years' time?

It's best to talk about both short-term and long-term goals. Talk about the kind of job you'd eventually like to do and the various steps you will need to get there, relating this in some way back to the position you're interviewing for. Show the employer you have ambition, and that you have the determination to make the most of every job to get to where you want to be.

6. Why do you want to work here?

The interviewer is listening for an answer that indicates you've given this some

thought. If you've prepared for the interview properly, you should have a good inside knowledge of the company's values, mission statement, development plans and products. Use this information to describe how your goals and ambition matches their company ethos and how you would relish the opportunity to work for them. Never utter the phrase "I just need a job."

7. What are three positive things your last boss would say about you?

This is a great time to brag about yourself through someone else's words. Try to include one thing that shows your ability to do the job, one thing that shows your commitment to the work, and one thing that shows you are a good person to have in a team. For example, "My boss has told me that I am the best designer he has ever had. He knows he can always rely on me, and he likes my sense of humour."

8. What salary are you seeking?

You can prepare for this by knowing the value of someone with your skills. Try not to give any specific numbers in the heat of the moment – it could put you in a poor position when negotiating later. Your interviewer will understand if you don't want to discuss this until you are offered the job. If they have provided a guideline salary with the job description, you could mention this and say it's around the same area you're looking for.

9. If you were an animal, which one would you want to be?

Interviewers use this type of psychological question to see if you can think quickly. If you answer, 'a bunny', you will make a soft, passive impression. If you answer, 'a lion', you will be aggressive. What type of personality will it take to get the job done?

You should always have some questions for your interviewer to demonstrate your interest in the position. Prepare a minimum of five questions, some which will give you more information about the job, and some which delve deeper into the culture and goals of the company.

Questions for Your Interviewer

1. Why has the position become available?
2. What are the main objectives and responsibilities of the position?
3. How does the company expect these objectives to be met?
4. What are the measures used to judge how successful I am in the role?
5. What obstacles are commonly encountered in reaching these objectives?
6. What is the desired period for reaching the objectives?
7. What can I expect from you in terms of development and support?
8. What aspirations do you have for me at the company?
9. Where will the job fit into the team structure?
10. What is the main thing the organisation expects from its employees?
11. How do you build good relationships within teams?
12. What is the turnover of staff like throughout the company?
13. Are there any plans for expansion?
14. How would you describe the company culture and management style?

What You Wish You'd Known before Your Job Interview

Common Non-Verbal mistakes made at a job interview:

In a survey of 2000 bosses 33% claimed that they know within the first 90 seconds of an interview whether they will hire someone.

The average length of an interview is approximately 40 minutes.

Statistics show that when meeting new people the negative impact is:

21% - Playing with **hair** or **touching face**

47% - Having little or **no knowledge** of the company is the most common mistake job seekers make during interviews

67% - Failure to make **eye contact**

38% - Lack of **smile**

33% - Bad **posture**

21% - **Crossing arms** over their chest

9% - Using too many **hand gestures**

26% - Handshake that is too weak

33% - **Fidgeting** too much

7% - From what we say

38% - The quality of our voice **grammar** and overall **confidence**

55% - The way we **dress, act, and walk** through the door

Clothes

Bright colours are a turnoff!

70% Employers claim they don't want applicants to be fashionable or trendy
65% of bosses said clothes could be the deciding factor between two similar candidates

Top 10 Most Common Mistakes Made at a Job Interview

- 10 - Over-Explaining why you lost your last job
- 9 - Conveying that you're not over it
- 8 - Lacking humour, warmth, or personality
- 7 - Not showing enough interest or enthusiasm
- 6 - Inadequate research about a potential employer
- 5 - Concentrating too much on what you want
- 4 - Trying to be all things to all people
- 3 - "Winging" the interview
- 2 - Failing to set yourself apart from other candidates
- 1 - Failing to ask for the job

Most common tips about interviewing

- Learn about the organisation
- Have a specific job in mind
- Review your qualifications for the job
- Be ready to briefly describe your experience

Questions most likely to be asked

Tell me about your experience at...

Why do you want to work for us?

What do you know about our company?

Why did you leave your last job?

Tell me about yourself.