



Australian Government  
Department of Agriculture,  
Water and the Environment

# Authoring a successful CV

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Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment

**Water Division**



## Key factors when creating your CV

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Tailor your CV to the job you are applying for. This includes adjustments to things like your:

- Career objective to match the role you are applying for
- Emphasising highly relevant skills in your key skill listing; and
- Focusing detail of your employment history so it emphasises duties or achievements highly relevant to the role you are applying for

## Remember

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- Your resume is a living document. It is not a static, historical document that once created is sent out for every job that you come across. Think about your audience and how the CV will be perceived. Put yourself in a potential employer's shoes and think about what they need to know and ensure it is addressed.
- Your CV is also a marketing document and it represents who you are. Sloppy content, poor presentation, poor editing, spelling mistakes and poor English leave a lasting impression.
- Setup the format of your CV so when an employer is scanning through for the initial short listing 'cull', your CV is prepared in a way that is conducive to being understood in a matter of seconds.
- Your CV needs to clearly convey your story. The story begins with an introduction (e.g. a career objective), an introductory chapter setting the scene (key skills/attributes), the main storyline (your employment history) and an ending (the overall physical impression of the document). If someone unrelated to you and your career can't understand that story within 30 seconds then you still have work to do!
- Employers want to see demonstrated career progression, a steady employment history and indications of loyalty/hard work. Don't leave unexplained 'gaps' in your story. These typically lead to misunderstandings or disqualifying you from contention altogether.

## Edit! Edit! Edit!

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In our experience we find that more than 25% of the CV's we receive contain multiple spelling, grammatical, formatting or other errors that escape attention during the proofreading process. Errors like these stand out like sore thumbs for an employer.

### **It is critical that you:**

- Use your spell check fastidiously, but avoid using the replace option blindly!
- Have more than one person with strong written English skills review your CV in fine detail
- Use plain English – your CV is not the place to impress with your extensive vocabulary.
- Flowery language can come across as pretentious or confusing.

### **English as a second language**

If English is your second language the proofreading stage is even more critical. Make sure you have a native English speaker review your CV carefully for grammar and spelling.

### **How long?**

Forget the one or two page CV rule of thumb. If you can keep the CV to two pages and it covers all necessary detail terrific, but don't let 1-2 pages dictate the format and content of your CV. The average CV we receive is 4-5 pages long so don't stress too much about the length, focus instead on encapsulating highly relevant detail.

## The overall structure and content

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### **Career objective**

Although not 100% essential, stating a career objective at the start of your CV allows you to focus the attention of your reader on where you are at now and describes who you are. It creates a motivational snapshot for the reader; it qualifies information about your career direction and directs the reader towards focusing on key relevant information in your CV.

The career objective should be a mix of generic, replicable information that can then be tailored for each specific role you apply for.

### **Personal details**

Naturally, your contact details are an essential part of your CV. However, we strongly recommend not including irrelevant personal information such as marital status, religion, the car you drive or your age.

The bare essentials include:

- Your full name (noting preferred first name in brackets)
- Contact details:
  - Home and postal addresses
  - Mobile phone number and other numbers
  - Email address(s)
- Citizenship/Visa status/Eligibility to work in Australia
- Government Security Clearance (if applicable)

Avoid autobiographical information about your personal life, family or other such information. Your CV is not the place for this.

## **Education/professional qualifications:**

List your education and professional qualifications in reverse chronological order detailing the educational institution, the location if unclear and the year completed. If the course is still being completed we recommend stating in this format:

Bachelor of Laws (ANU)

2009 – Current (5 units for completion – part-time)

Avoid including outdated or irrelevant education or awards such as your Year 10 Mathematics Competition awards or similar.

## **Additional Training**

If you are seeking to highlight additional training (e.g. skill specific training) you have completed, put a subsection under qualifications titled Training.

## **Skills summary/expertise**

Often considered an optional section of your CV, this is used to help focus your audience on what you want them to. In the days of 'key word searches' this section of your CV is becoming nearly mandatory.

The skills section should summarise core transferable skills relevant to the role you are seeking. This can include subsidiary sections breaking your skills down into, for example:

- Systems/IT skills
- Personal Characteristics/Values/Strengths
- Technical skills/Capabilities (within your area of expertise)
- Specialist Capabilities (e.g. Management)

## **Employment History**

This is the focus of your CV and the section employers most readily skip to first. It should be a detailed account of your most recent employment history (say up to 10 years maximum), with the bare basic details summarising your prior work history. We recommend keeping the information clear and succinct, and that you exclude irrelevant content such as old jobs from a different career (e.g. detailed accounts of your career in retail when you are an experienced, qualified accountant).

Make sure your employment history is in reverse chronological order! The most recent job comes first.

There are three key parts to a detailed account of your employer.

Summary of key details relating to the employer:

- Inclusive dates of when you worked there (include months)
- The employer name(s) (include names of subsidiary group if a large organisation)
- Job Title(s)
- Note if the role was contract or permanent if you have done a mix of both
- If you have worked in a variety of locations clearly indicate the city/country where the role was located

## **Summary – detailing important context:**

- Who was your employer/what do they do/what type of organisation are they?
- Relevant contextual detail – Size of organisation, no. employees, \$ turnover, international?
- Where did you fit in? What was your progression? Who did you report to? Who reported to you?
- Lead into job duties with a broad description of what you were responsible for

## **Job duties/responsibilities**

- Bullet pointed list emphasising the duties of highest responsibility/highest degree of difficulty by putting them first
- We recommend grouping lists of similar duties (e.g. separating management responsibilities, administrative responsibilities and technical duties)
- Be specific about what you did rather than what the team or the group did
- We recommend tailoring the job responsibilities to the role you are applying for
- Make sure there is sufficient detail to understand the context around the responsibility (one word duties are not self-evident)

## **Relevant key achievements**

- Tailor these to the opportunity you are applying for
- Align these underneath your job duties/to a specific role rather than being their own section in the body of the CV
- We recommend keeping to 1-2 achievements, and no more than three
- We recommend keeping to 2-3 sentences maximum – keep them short and punchy

## References

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- Include two work references of people who have directly supervised your work or who have a clear managerial perspective of your work
- Include the following detail:
  - Their full name
  - The organisation where you worked with them (noting if they have left that employer)
  - Their job title, noting the nature of your relationship with them (e.g. Director – Direct Manager)
  - Indicate how long you worked with/reported to them
- Do not include friends, family, former lecturers, or character referees – in the majority of cases these are not appropriate and will detract from your candidacy
- It is also best practice to make sure you have advised your referee that you have submitted an application along with their details.

## Things to avoid

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### Major don'ts

- Don't copy your job description blindly into your employment history
- Don't use excessive detail on job duties or list every single little thing you do in a job (e.g. 'I take the invoices from incoming mail, open the envelope and put them in Tray B for processing, and then I move them to.....') - stick to the key points
- Don't embellish the truth or lie – you are likely to be caught out • Don't use large blocks of text (more than ½ a page). Setup your CV in a way that allows the information to 'jump off the page' when an employer takes a 'snapshot' review. Use a combination of headings, subheadings, bullet points and prose to create easy to understand the content
- Don't use long lists of ungrouped bullet points (e.g. > ½ page). Wherever possible sort bullet lists into 'like' groups to create a better understanding of your role
- Don't use long lists of bullet-pointed achievements that are not linked to specific roles. These are unlikely to be read before the CV 'cull' decision is made

## Things to avoid

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### Minor don'ts

- Don't include a picture of yourself on your CV – it is not the place
- Don't include detailed personal information or stories about your personal life, family, tales of woe etc.
- Don't include exhaustive lists of skills and strengths or huge lists of all the training courses you may have ever attended – it comes across as you are trying too hard to impress or that you are making up for something.
- Don't use a third person narrative approach to writing your CV – it comes across as strange (e.g. Darrell is a highly experienced administrator with a knack for attention to detail)
- Don't include meeting deadlines or achieving KPI's as an achievement – these are meeting the requirements of your role not exceeding them
- Don't hide your Employment History way back in your CV – it should be close to the front

## Frequently asked questions

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### **1. How do I address very short term stays in permanent roles (e.g. 3 months)?**

If these are in the most recent years of your employment it is best to include them and state a clear reason for leaving.

### **2. Gaps in your employment history**

If you were on holiday/extended leave, you were studying or having a family/children, or you were working on a personal project (house, novel etc), put this in your CV noting clear dates so the gap is addressed.

### **3. Sudden career changes, unusual career transitions or moving to roles of significantly less responsibility**

Leaving these unaddressed leaves your fate to the subjective analysis of the reader. If you have moved jobs and when you put yourself in the shoes of the reader it seems a bit strange, clearly articulate why you have made such a move in your CV.

### **4. Incomplete qualifications (ones that won't be completed)**

It is a tight call whether or not to include unfinished qualifications in your CV. As a general rule it is best not to include these unless the experience gained with that study is highly relevant to the job you are applying for.

### **5. Including reference contact details if these may jeopardise your existing role**

If you are nervous about including these then we recommend leaving current employers off your CV, and instead including those from previous work or perhaps a manager that has moved on and is happy to act as your referee confidentially.



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