



CV & Interview Preparation Guide



CV TEMPLATE

Personal Details

- Name**
- Address** (Street name, town name, county, post code)
- Mobile Number**
- Email**
- Date of Birth**

Personal Profile

- Relevant skills and attributes.
- What experience you have acquired which will contribute to a new opportunity.

Education

- Dates attended.
- University / College name (spell it out - no abbreviations).
- Qualification / Degree name (spell it out - no abbreviations).
- List of relevant modules completed.
- Projects: If they support your job objective.

Career History (List in reverse chronological order)

- Employers' Name**
- Start Date – End Date**
- Job Title**

- Main responsibilities x 3-6 bullet points.
- Each statement should only be a single sentence.
- Key skills and experience gained.

Information to be included for each job listed.

Key Achievements

- List in reverse chronological order.
- Focus on relevant achievements to your job objective - academic or otherwise.

Skills

- Examples include:
- IT skills – list programmes you are proficient in.
 - Driving Licence – particularly relevant in a sales role.

Hobbies & Interests

- If the job you are applying for is a team-based role then highlight team activities you take part in.

References

- Reference Name**
- Reference Title**
- Address**
- Phone**
- Email**

Information to be included for each reference listed.

OR
Available on Request



CV PREPARATION

Creating a CV & Cover Letter

Cover Letter

- Always remember to tailor your cover letter. This is just as important as your CV. Outline in a brief paragraph the role you are applying to (or if on spec, then explain why you're applying to that company).
- Always include your contact details in the cover letter - if applying internationally, remember the area code for your mobile / telephone.
- Always include a (brief) outline of your skills and main experience.



Selling Document

Unless you've been headhunted, your CV is going to be your primary selling tool.

A well presented CV can secure you an interview by catching the eye of an employer, can encourage the interviewers to see your experience as a valuable asset, help you focus on the key points that you need to expand upon in interview and remind the interviewer about you once the interview is over.

Always remember the following points:

Presentation & Formatting

- Always type your CV on good quality paper. Print it in black ink on white paper.
- Use the same stationery for your cover letter.
- Unless specifically requested, do NOT include a photo.
- Use common face type and lay your CV out neatly.
- Use bullet points, be concise and to the point and avoid lengthy essays.
- Always ensure that contact details are on both your cover letter and CV.



Spelling & Grammar

- Always check for typos and grammatical errors. If an employer notices these, it could indicate that you are careless and disorganised.

No Gaps & Correct Dates

- Always ensure that there are no gaps on your CV. If you have been travelling, explain that in your CV. Employers need explanations for gaps whether you have been doing courses, travelling or taken personal time.
- Always ensure that you haven't duplicated dates or overlapped on dates.

Interests & Hobbies

- Hobbies and interests should be nearly the last item on your CV. Employers like to see a well rounded individual.
- Don't fall back on old reliables such as "reading" or "cinema". Nor should you put "clubbing". And never lie to make yourself seem more interesting.

Know Your CV Inside Out

- Be prepared to discuss every point on your CV however small and to expand upon it in interview. Don't assume just because a point seems a little irrelevant to you, it may be of interest to the interviewer and they could question you on it.

Structure

- Your personal details should come first and should include your contact details.
- A brief personal profile should be next which should include your education and qualifications. List your professional memberships. This may be expanded into a short paragraph highlighting your key skills.
- The main body of the CV should include your career history which should be presented in reverse chronological order with your most recent employer first.
- Extra Achievements - if you have been nominated or you have won an award, do put it in. Clearly make sure it's relevant but mention of awards and achievements shows employers that you are ambitious and self-driven.
- Lastly put references - you do not actually have to include the text of the reference, merely the referee's name, their professional title and a contact number. If you are uncomfortable doing this, simply state at the bottom of your CV "references available on request".

Remember:

**ALWAYS ask for permission
from your referee!**



Tailored CV vs Generalist CV

- A single generalist CV is unlikely to be sufficient. Just as you are an individual, so too is the organisation that you are applying to and you need to think about your audience.
- If you are applying for a specific job, ensure that the skills required match up to your skills and highlight them in your CV. Eg. If it is experience within forensic accounting, make sure that you highlight any experience you may have gained in past roles or any involvement in liquidations / receiverships.
- If you're applying to a specific organisation, do your research first and find out what type of employee they are looking for or if they are expanding or creating a new niche market. You can then highlight any relevant experience or qualifications in your CV.

Attach all information

- If you have said that you are attaching references, then ensure that you attach them or copies of your qualifications if requested by the advert / company. This shows attention to detail and won't have the interviewer scrambling for information which hasn't been attached.

Correct Recipient

- Always make sure that you address your CV cover letter to the correct person. Find out the name of the HR Manager or the relevant person. This gives them the impression that you've taken the time to find out who they are.





INTERVIEW PREPARATION

Your CV has secured you an interview. Now success in the interview is all up to you. Preparation is the key for a successful interview.

Research Company's History

- This is one of the easiest things to do and yet one of the most overlooked. It is very important to research the company's history and be able to talk about the company at interview. It also helps you prepare stock answers as you can tailor some of your experience to what the company needs and discuss it at interview.
- Most companies have a website – go on it, familiarise yourself with the company history, culture, organisation chart if it is on it, events that they attend, awards they have won. This shows a clear interest in the interviewers' organisation and will stand you in good stead. If you don't get enough information from the website, look up the company through newspapers, any specialist publications etc.
- Find out if you know of anyone who is working there or has worked there in the past. They can prove a valuable source of insider information and can give you the edge. They can also give you details of what the company culture is like.

Research the Role

- It is incredibly important that you understand the role that you are applying for. If you turn up for an interview and have little understanding of the role you are interviewing for, it will not go down well. Nor will you be considered for any other role within that company. Go through the job specification thoroughly before you attend the interview. If going through a recruitment agency, the consultant should brief you fully on the role before your interview.
- Find out if anyone you know either works in the company and can give you a heads up on any aspects of the role you may not have considered or talk to people who are working in similar jobs in other companies. They may be able to give you pointers that will prove invaluable during the interview.





Research Interviewers

- Find out at the very least who the people are who will be interviewing you. It is more of a courtesy matter but at least you will be sure of their job functions and what their connection to the actual job you are applying for is – it may be that the HR manager or the line manager is interviewing you, or it could be the Finance Director. You need to know who it is as this will be beneficial in helping you prepare sample answers. If you are going through a recruitment consultancy, they will be able to fully brief you on the people, their job titles and their interviewing manner.

Prepare Sample Questions

- Practicing sample interview questions will give you an advantage in that you will become more familiar with your own skills and experience. Hearing questions that you are familiar with will also boost your confidence levels during the interview. You will come across as confident and articulate.
- Prepare sample answers and quantifiable information.
- Go through past achievements and qualifications. This will at least enable the interviewer to measure your past successes against their needs. Most interviews are competency based which means that employers are looking for quantifiable information.



Find Out Exact Location

- Nothing screams unorganised like not knowing where you are going. If you are unsure, phone the company beforehand and get precise directions. There are plenty of anecdotes about people turning up to other locations of the company when the interview is in head office across town. Even do a practice run beforehand particularly if you are depending on public transport.

Bring Documentation

- Even though they already have your CV, ensure that you bring another copy of all documentation, particularly if there is more than one interviewer.



COMPETENCY BASED INTERVIEWS

There are several types of interviews from aptitude and psychometric testing to panel interviews but the one that is becoming increasingly common is the **Competency Based Interview**.

It may sound intimidating but the reality is that this type of interview will get the best out of you as a candidate and allow you to present yourself in the best possible light.

The basic premise of a Competency Based Interview is that a candidate's past performance is the best indicator of their future performance. All of the questions will be directly linked to a particular function of the position for which you have applied.

Interviewers will ask for examples of things you have actually done that demonstrate the key characteristics their organisation needs from the particular role.

There are a number of categories of competency based questions and if you prepare your answers carefully, you will be in a terrific position to sell yourself in the interviews. While some are particularly geared towards senior level management roles, the basic principles will remain the same.

Remember these key points:

- Explain how you have performed in a certain situation.
- Detail what you have learned from the situation.
- Give an overview of how you would cope in the future given a similar situation.
- Give examples of your experience to demonstrate your ability.

Categories of Competency Based Questions

Organisation Awareness

This is finding out how the potential employee (you) thinks and how you perceive your contribution to the company would be as a new member of their team. It is particularly relevant to senior level management. Samples of questions that would fall under this category are:

- Describe the structure of your current company and give an example of how you work within this culture to achieve your goals.
- Describe how you perceive the new company and how you would fit in.

These questions would help the employer in several ways (a) it gives them an accurate gauge of how they are perceived in the market and (b) how they're perceived as an employer. It also gives them a brief overview



of the way you are accustomed to working and it will help them figure out if you would fit in with their company culture. It will also allow you as the interviewee to give some valuable insights into how you would add value to their organisation.

Strategic Thinking

Again this is very much geared towards senior management and how you view decisions you would make both on a macro and a micro level. This shows what level of decision making you are capable of and what value you can add to the company.

Examples of questions falling under this category are:

- Describe the most challenging aspect of your current role and what you have done to adapt your performance.
- How did you go about assessing your own performance and your team's performance in that situation?

Innovation

This is particularly relevant at managerial level where the employers are looking for an individual who can make a positive profit making contribution.

- Describe something you have done that was new for your company that improved the performance of your team or the value of the work done.
- Have you done anything innovative (either produced surveys or written reports) that would be of direct interest to your target market or enhanced awareness of your company?

While it is geared towards managerial level, innovation is sought after across every role from managerial level to administration. For example, if you are responsible for ordering the stationery, take a look at suppliers for costing purposes.

If you are responsible for stock control, is there anything you would do to improve the process that would (a) increase business flow or (b) decrease monthly costs? Innovation is across the board and not just limited to managers. If you have done anything that added value to your firm, make sure that's in your CV and make sure you bring it up in interview.

Communication

This is relevant across all levels of roles. So many people use the terms "good communication skills" in their CV and when asked about their skills, are unable to give good solid examples of where they used those skills. Communication is vital, not only externally but internally within the company and potential employers want to see those communication skills in interview.

Samples of questions that would involve communication would be:

- Give an example of a difficult / sensitive situation that requires you to use excellent communication skills.
- How have you developed communication skills in others? (Particularly good for managerial roles).
- How do you keep your clients or your reporting line informed about difficult issues that directly affect the company's bottom line?



Client Focus / Client Relationship

This again covers all levels of staff as clients can be both internal and external. Samples of questions would include:

- Describe how you develop new client relationships or maintain existing ones.
- Describe how you keep your existing client base in the face of competition.
- Describe the process you use to keep in touch with your client's requirements.

Leadership Ability

This is very relevant for those seeking a managerial position – it will give the potential employer an insight into how you would lead a team, what your managerial style is like and how that style would blend in with their culture.

- Describe how you led a team.
- How did you motivate your team?
- How did you improve your team's individual performances?
- What do you think your team would say about you?

Teamwork

For those who are not necessarily looking at a managerial level position, team work is one category in which you have a chance to shine. Organisations are quickly coming to realise that a cultural fit is just as important as the ability to do the actual job so they are looking for people to fit in easily with their existing teams.

- Describe a situation in which you were a member of a team – what do you do to make a positive contribution?
- Describe a situation where there was conflict in a team and what did you do to resolve it?

Time Management

This category is not as often used as the others but you may still get questions on your ability to manage your workload in a timely and efficient manner especially for roles where time is of the essence, eg. project management. It also applies across all levels of roles particularly for roles that are in a support function. Samples of questions would include:

- Give a specific example of meeting deadlines.
- What could you have done differently if you could have?
- Has the experience affected the way you deal with deadlines now?

Benefits

The major benefits of Competency Based Interviews are that these questions will allow you, the candidate, to relate your answer to a real life experience rather than giving a generic textbook answer.

This will enable you to reveal the most relevant information in context to the current job opportunity and allows the interviewers to make much more effective hiring decisions.



If you have any questions on any aspect of CV or interview preparation, please contact any of our Brightwater consultants.

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