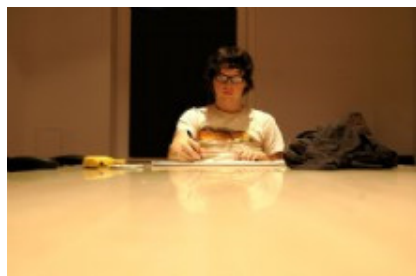


Stand out from the crowd: how to write that winning CV

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It's that time of year, you want a new job. But where to start?

Nowadays, there are plenty of packages and internet guides to help you write your CV. Some even provide templates. But if you work in the creative sector, writing a CV can be particularly challenging.

“You need to be someone who stands out,” says Julia Yates, head of creative careers, University of the Arts London. “Creative industry employers see more CVs and have less time, so yours needs to be different.”

Creative Careers has an annual CV competition, judged by the careers team and industry professionals. They focus on three key areas:

- Does it fit the job
- Strong content
- Striking visual design

Of course, the latter point is less important if your work is not directly creative. But, whatever your industry, the first point, ‘fit’ is crucial. Initially you might prepare a generic CV, one you can draw from. But when applying for specific jobs, study the employer and the position first. Then make sure your CV is tailored to the post. If you're going for arts management or admin., stress your organisational skills, if it's a creative post, highlight your flair and unique vision. And use the words that match your industry.

“Employers are looking for someone who fits them - a creative-cultural fit. So they can look at the person, their CV, and say, ‘yes, that would work’”, says Julia Yates.

Another crucial factor is keeping it short. Ideally one page, two at the most. If you're a visual artist, you can extend your CV by adding supporting images (on disc or via a website, whatever is appropriate in each case). But the ideal CV should be brief, with lots of white space. Then, the material which you do include stands out. Similarly, every word has to earn its place. If it's not relevant, not essential, leave it out. Be ruthless. If it's easier, write more to begin with then edit mercilessly. Your CV needs to be sharp, focused and reflect you.

So what categories do you need on a CV? Well, this will vary with the work you do, but certain headings are consistent across sectors.

Personal Details - the basics, name, address, key contact details.

Personal Profile - demonstrates your particular skills and expertise: 'An effective leader with excellent interpersonal skills and the drive to succeed.' This can be the most difficult section to write so leave it to last. Try identifying a few words that describe you and incorporate these, eg, strong communication skills, creative ability, and so on. This will give you a structure on which to hang the content. Artists may want to replace this section with an Artist Statement: a paragraph summing up your work, the medium you work in and your motivation.

Career Objective - a two-line section stating your aims. Optional - if short of space leave it out, or include as part of the Personal Profile

Key Skills or Achievements - optional, but valuable for stressing IT and language skills (Key Skills) or highlighting what you've done, eg, awards, targets met (Achievements).

Employment History (or Career History or Work Experience) - the phrase 'Work Experience' is suitable for those with a brief work history, eg, students.

The Employment History section should include the dates worked, the title of the position/role and the employer's name.

List all major employment but, unless you are just entering the job market with very little prior work experience, it's usually advisable to list years, not years and months. Too much information can make your CV look very cluttered.

If there are particular features of the post you wish to stress, eg, it was a summer intern post, you can put that in brackets after the job title or in the information below.

Under at least some of the jobs listed (usually the most recent, or the ones you wish to stress) you will want to include more information, usually in a list of bullet points. Be as positive and informative as accurately possible, eg, liaising with a wide variety of artists and performers, NOT: meeting different people.

Education (and/or Qualifications)

Again, keep it short. If you have a degree/postgraduate qualifications, you don't need to list all your A levels and GCSEs, but do give the number of each achieved, and for GCSEs, mention English and Mathematics in particular if you have them. With GCSEs, you should also say how many were grade C or above, eg

- 8 GCSEs (grades A-C) including English and Mathematics

You can also mention any A levels specifically, if they are relevant to the post, and your class of degree if it's a good one.

If you're a current student, you may wish to flag up relevant modules, projects or positions of responsibility, but do avoid listing every course you've undertaken since you started!

Training - if you've undertaken extensive in-house training courses this can be highlighted separately, otherwise include it under Education and Training.

Memberships/Registrations - optional. These could, if appropriate, be listed under Education and Qualifications

Interests - optional, should be very brief. Could be included under Personal Details

Personal Details - could include driving licence if you have one, or nationality and visa/work permit information, if applicable.

References - save space by putting "References available on request" unless specifically asked for.

There may be other aspects you need to include, Exhibitions or Commissions, for example, if you're a visual artist, or details of practical experience if you're a performer. You can also include voluntary work, if it's relevant, under its own section, or as part of employment, with reference to its voluntary nature. Don't have too many categories, however - focus on the essential ones. Under each category, highlight the information using bullet points and make each sentence stand out with energetic, positive words that fit your industry eg, designing, focusing, coordinating.

Remember

- Be confident, sell yourself, but be careful to only include information that is accurate and really represents you. Expect to be questioned on the information included and make sure you can back up what you say
- You can write your CV in the past or the present tense but the present tense gives an immediacy and freshness to your CV
- Put key information first within sections, ie, the most recent employment, the higher qualifications. Put Employment History before Education if you have a significant Career History. If you're a student/new graduate, or have recently retrained and are seeking a new career, put Education first
- Where relevant (and this is usually), stress your 'people' skills - most work includes some interaction you can draw on, such as with colleagues or clients. Your ability to communicate is essential and team skills are also highly rated in many jobs. Most people have more experience in this area than they realise, even if it's through charity or voluntary work, clubs or managing a family
- Most people choose to write a chronological CV, rather than a skills-based CV. If you choose the skills-based option, your work-related expertise (bullet points for each job) should be listed under the appropriate skill (eg, Commercial Expertise) in the Key Skills or Achievements section

So now you've prepared the perfect CV, maybe even one that's visually tailored to match your market or to demonstrate your skills. Is that it? Not according to Julia Yates. "Don't send a CV on its own," she says. "Present yourself. It's extremely tough getting yourself established in the creative industries. But you have a headstart, the advantage of your creative talent."

Presenting yourself can be as simple as talking to your chosen employer about why they should hire you. But you could go one step further and produce a marketing pack - starting with a logo and business card. A CV and covering letter is part of the package, supported by a portfolio if appropriate. You might even want to produce a branded website.

As you can see, a CV, like your new job, is just the beginning ...

