



JOB APPLICATIONS (CV's, Cover letters & Electronic Applications)

A. GENERAL PURPOSE OF A CV

Think of your CV as a marketing tool and the product is YOU.

Your CV can:

- win you an interview
- structure the interview
- remind an interviewer about you after you have gone
- provide evidence of your written communication skills

The principle underlying an effective CV is always: "How can I best let this employer know what I can do for them?"

B. GENERAL PRINCIPLES FOR ALL APPLICATIONS

Employers can be swamped with applications for a job. They look for reasons NOT to interview you. To avoid elimination in the first round your CV must stand out from the crowd.

When preparing your CV try to adopt the employer's point of view and imagine the ideal candidate. When looking at a CV an employer is asking "What does this person have/do/know that will benefit our organisation? Make sure you answer that question.

There is no right way to write your CV - There are a variety ways to make it work well for you, and different employers have different preferences.

C. KEY POINTS

First Impressions

- **Make your most important information easy to find!** An employer spends just 20-40 seconds scanning a CV. Choose information that is relevant to the position & organisation
- Your CV should be concise - between two and four pages
- Ensure the format is neat, tidy and consistent throughout. Keep to the same layout pattern throughout
- Organise your information into separate groups or categories, each with its own suitable heading
- Use colour, graphics and images with discretion. Most CVs will be photocopied, so it is hard to go wrong with black type on white A4 paper

Language

- Be sure to use clear, correct language, without spelling or grammatical mistakes and in a consistent style. Get someone to proof-read it for you
- As much as possible, avoid using the first person pronouns "I" and "we"
- Avoid using abbreviations - write names and titles in full. Avoid use of jargon that may not be understood by everyone
- Use strong, action-orientated words to describe your achievements & whenever possible, quantify that achievement

Content

- Unlike application forms which prescribe the information you need to give, CVs give you control of the content. Think about what information is relevant and shows you in the best, positive light

D. POSSIBLE HEADINGS FOR YOUR CV

You should provide information on the following – Name, contact details, education, work experience, skills, referees. How you present it is up to you.

Personal Information

- Personal Details
- Contact details

These are only suggestions!

Introductory Information

- Profile
- Personal Statement
- Career Objective
- Highlights
- Strengths
- Areas of Skills & Knowledge
- Relevant Skills and Experience

You must include something from these sections

Educational Information

- Education
- Tertiary Qualification
- Special Projects
- Thesis Topic
- Awards & Achievements
- School Activities

Use only what is relevant to you

Employment Information

- Employment History
- Work Experience
- Community Involvement
- Voluntary Work

General Skills

- IT Skills
- Language Skills
- Overseas Experience
- Other Relevant Information

Interests

- Hobbies
- Interests
- Leisure Activities

Referees

- Referee contact details

E. WHAT PARTS SHOULD MY CV HAVE?

Here are some suggestions for sections or groups of information that you could include. Think about where you place the most important and relevant information to give your CV a central focus.

Personal Details		
Name	Y	<u>Full name</u> that you are known by, no need to include all your name(s). Preferred name if appropriate.
Address	Y	<u>Address</u> for correspondence.
Telephone numbers	Y	Include a mobile if you are happy to be contacted in this way.
Email addresses	?	Only if you use it regularly. Only give one address.
Date of birth	?	Optional.
Age	?	Optional.
Nationality/Residency status	?	Optional. If you do not need a work permit or have a work permit already it might be good to say so.
Gender	N	Don't Need
Marital Status	N	Don't Need
Health/fitness	N	Don't Need
Ethnicity	N	Don't Need
Introductory Information		
Personal Statement Career Goal	A good idea	All these headings are optional. Research has shown that <u>CVs with this sort of information tend to be well received</u> . Avoid clichés, don't just copy nice sounding phrases from other CVs. Make it personal to you and make sure you <u>outline what you have to offer</u> that may help you to stand out from other applications.
Strengths/Highlights		
Education		
University	Y	Include <u>dates</u> as well as when you are expecting to complete. Provide <u>content details of relevant courses</u> or papers. Specify any <u>major subject(s)</u> You can list papers chronologically or cluster them under sub-headings by subject area. You can also refer the reader to an attached academic transcript for more details. Add <u>grades</u> if it is a selling point. Add <u>academic awards and other distinctions/achievements</u> Add <u>research</u> undertaken with results if possible. Include brief descriptions of <u>special projects</u> , field work courses or workshops relevant to the position
Schools & colleges	Y	<u>Secondary level onwards, with dates</u> . No need to include full address e.g. Glendowie College, Auckland is sufficient. <u>List relevant awards and achievements</u>
Academic qualifications	Y	List all <u>pre-university examinations</u> passed (e.g. Bursary). Detailing earlier qualifications (e.g. School Cert) is optional.
Vocational/professional qualifications	Y	Include with dates and awarding bodies.
Failed examinations or papers	N	Don't include.

Work Experience		
Relevant work experience	Y	Include <u>position, employer name, dates and location</u> . Also whether it was <u>full/part time</u> or short term e.g. vacation or placement. Give relevant detail of your <u>responsibilities</u> . If you performed better than the minimum requirements, make sure you mention this – either here on in a separate <u>achievements</u> section. Consider using the <u>PAR formula</u> – problem, action result
Other work experience	Y	As above. Don't include work experience done pre age 16 unless it is really relevant.
Student jobs	Y	Don't miss these out! On the other hand, you don't need to include every job. Use them to demonstrate transferable skills such as interpersonal skills, teamwork and flexibility.
Voluntary or unpaid work	Y	As above.
Other possible headings		
IT Skills	Y	State packages, programs and platforms used, indicate your level of competency.
Language Skills	Y	List all plus your level of written/verbal comprehension. Be honest - if you only passed a School Cert Course and have not practised it since then, don't include it here!
Awards & Achievements	Y	List relevant ones or consider including them in either the education or work section if appropriate.
Driving Licence	?	Could be relevant.
Hobbies/Interests/Extra Curricular Activities	Y	Employers look for a balance of interests - active/quieter pursuits, things you do in groups/individually. Give some indication of your level of involvement
Positions of Responsibility	Y	Don't just give the job title, List your involvements in the same way as for a job.
References	?	Yes if space allows, if not “available on request” is acceptable. 2 or 3 referees is ideal and could come from your academic activities (professor, lecturer) or work (employer or someone in a position of responsibility). Personal or character referees can also be included, but the former 2 are preferable. Remember to ask permission first.
Written Testimonials	?	Written references can support an application but are not essential. Some employers do not regard them highly and most will seek a verbal reference should your application be successful.

F. DIFFERENT STYLES OF CV

There are many different formats a CV can take. The most conventional or commonly used is the chronological CV. Here activities such as education and work experience are listed in reverse date order – the most recent first; however, there are alternative ways of presenting the information. These are some examples:

Functional CV, Combination CV, Academic CV, Creative or industry specific CVs

If any of these may be applicable to you or you are asked to submit a CV with this style, ask one of our Careers Advisors for assistance/examples

G. ON-LINE ISSUES (FILE ATTACHMENTS, FILE SIZE & TYPE, AUTOMATED SCREENING & KEYWORDS)

In many cases you will be submitting your application on-line. Here are some points to bear in mind.

Attachments

Don't assume that formatted documents that are attached will arrive intact and be easily opened at the other end. This isn't always the case, due to viruses, incompatible ISP's (Internet Service Provider), computer platforms, or software programmes. In such a situation your application might simply be ignored or deleted.

Electronic CV content is also often entered manually into the company's resume database. Information is pasted into the pre-assigned fields in the database file.

The above factors may all result in the loss of formatting. It is therefore recommended that you create a text-based resume (see below) and paste it in the body of the e-mail or the pre-assigned field in the online application form – in addition to a more decorative, attached/uploaded version.

File size & type

Microsoft Word is the most commonly used programme and is the best version to send/upload your CV in if no other requirements have been stipulated.

Ensure the file size for uploaded CVs is relatively small so it won't take long to download and won't overload the recruiter's server. (100 K or less ideally) Usually the form will stipulate the maximum file size allowed – consult the Help/FAQ section for requirements.

When cutting and pasting your CV and/or cover letter in the body of an e-mail, ensure lines are no longer than 72 characters. Longer lines are wrapped and will lose your original formatting. You may want to set margins in your Word document and re-arrange text accordingly, before pasting.

You need to prepare a CV in plain text format. Save it in "plain text" or "ASCII text" format. Re-open the document and then re-arrange the text. Helpful tips are:

- You don't have bold, italic or multiple fonts and sizes at your disposal, but you can use a combination of dashed lines, multiple returns and ALL CAPS to establish the same visual hierarchy that a print-based resume would have.
- Use asterisks in place of bullets. Certain special characters transmit unpredictably via e-mail and the Web, and the bullet, often used in resumes, is one of those characters.
- Use the Space Bar and not the Tab key for spacing as you may have done in your original resume.
- Allow the lines to wrap naturally at the end of a line — don't put a forced return (don't push the Return or Enter key) if it's not the end of the statement and don't indent the second line of a statement with either the Tab key or Space Bar).

- Use straight quotes in place of curly quotes Like bullet points and other special symbols, curly (smart) quotes do not transfer accurately (in fact, they may appear as little rectangles on the recipient's screen).

Automated screening & keywords

Because larger employers receive so many online applications, they often use software that helps them to shortlist candidates. The software scans resumes for keywords that it has been programmed to search for, relevant to that particular vacancy.

A keyword search might look for up to 60 keywords. It will locate all CVs that contain any of the keywords, count the number of keywords per resume, and rank the CVs accordingly.

The keywords that need to be included are educational and work specific areas and key competencies. Make a careful study of the job ad and job description for key words. Also study a range of related job ads for keywords found with relatively high frequency. Ensure that you use lingo particular to NZ. Include the key words in a summary section at the beginning of your CV, as well as in the cover letter.

The types of keywords scanned for are typically nouns instead of verbs or adjectives. Verbs are still important because the CV may still be printed out and viewed manually. Best is to use both – eg if you 'managed' – also include the word 'management' somewhere.

More sophisticated systems employ synonym-search capabilities to locate similar words as well as exact keywords. However, to be sure – instead of repeating a word, rather use a synonym – eg leadership vs management.

Types of key words to include are:

- Standard **NZ job titles** for your current and previous jobs
- Names of job, profession, and industry-specific **tools and techniques** (e.g. MRI images, etc.)
- **Software and hardware** unique to your profession (e.g. MS Project, SAP, etc.)
- Industry and professional **organisations**
- **Trade shows and conferences**
- **Classes of employers** who offer your services, "national specialty retailers," for example
- Other **jargon** (common "insider" terms that describe your work, typical products and/or services)

Other useful tips:

- Include both the **acronyms and the phrases** that explain each of them
- **Be inconsistent.** Include for example- "M.B.A," "MBA," "Master of Business Administration," "Masters in Bus. Admin," etc. so your resume will pop up in the results regardless of the exact term used by the recruiter in their search
- Add a **section near the top** of your resume named "skills" or, even, "keywords," where you concentrate as many of your key words as possible.
- Be sure to **include the word "resume"/CV.**
- **Keep a simple lay-out:** Use clear, large fonts (min 11 pts) and avoid including decorative features, unusual fonts, tables, italics and underlining, which may all interfere with the scanning software's ability to pick up the desired keywords. Generally recruiters say – the plainer – the better.

H. PREPARING AN EFFECTIVE COVER LETTER

Your CV and cover letter are two parts of the same document and should complement each other. While the CV largely contains factual information your cover letter is the targeted expression of your suitability for the role and the organisation.

Your covering letter enhances the contents of your CV by linking your skills, qualifications, experience and accomplishments to the organisation's needs. You will be able to do this only if you have researched the company from the job advertisement, from a job description if available, (try phoning the firm), and from information on the company (E.g. brochures, annual reports, news media).

Key Points

- Each letter should be tailor-made. **Under no circumstances send a standard letter!**
- Avoid copying directly from models of covering letters that you think look good
- Try to send it to a person by name - rather than to the Human Resources Manager for example. Ensure that you include their correct title
- Remember to date your letter
- Always keep a copy of everything you send to a company when making a job application. This will be useful later, e.g. during your interview preparation

Layout

- Always word process your letter unless requested to do otherwise
- Keep your letter to one page
- Remember to sign it

Language

- Be sure to use clear, correct language, without spelling or grammatical mistakes. Get someone to proof-read it for you

Content

- Explain why you are writing. Name the specific position you are applying for with the vacancy number if it has one
- Highlight the specific aspects of your background that relate to the position i.e. the skills, qualifications, personal qualities, experience and achievements
- Write about your motivation i.e. why you want to work for this particular company and in this particular kind of role. Show your enthusiasm
- Demonstrate that you have done some research about the company
- Provide a confident ending with details so that they can easily contact you

Using job advertisements to write great cover letters

If you are responding to an advertisement it helps to analyse the ad before writing the covering letter.

1. Look at the employer's requirements and write down which are:

- Transferable skills
- Technical skills and knowledge
- Personal qualities

2. Decide which of these are: 'Essential' - must have these for the job, and which are 'Preferred' - ideal, but negotiable.

3. Brainstorm the skills you believe you have that match those required by the employer. Describe any additional skills that you believe could also be useful.

COVER LETTER OUTLINE

Alan Thompson
555 Jabberwocky Street
Kingsland
Auckland

Your name and
contact details

21 January 2004

Date

The Human Resources Manager
Sarah Jones
ASB Bank
Private Bag 99999
Auckland

Employer's job
title, name and
contact details

Dear Miss Jones

Mr, Ms, Mrs or
Miss (not first
name)

Re: Application for vacancy 2234

The opening paragraph needs to inform the reader as to the purpose of the letter. Show your enthusiasm for the position here.

Outline the relevant skills and experience which you have for the position – aim to establish as many links as possible between your background and the job description. Focus on what you have to offer the company in the way of qualifications, skills, knowledge and personal qualities and the ways these will benefit them.

State what you know about the organisation and why you want to work for them. You could mention: product range, services, innovations, market position, reputation, customers, clients etc. Try to show how you will fit into the organisation.

Conclude confidently: e.g. "I would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss my application further. I can be contacted by telephone on: ..."

Yours sincerely

(sign here)

Alan Thompson

Use 'Yours
faithfully'
only after
salutation
'Dear Sir' or
'Dear
Madam'

I. HOW TO APPROACH ON-LINE APPLICATION FORMS

- Ensure that your **Internet browser** supports the 'File Browse and Upload' function. If you have Internet Explorer 3 and Netscape Navigator 2, you may need to update your browser.
- **Explore the site** thoroughly for specific guidance. Look at the HELP and FAQ sections to which often explains crucial information related to completing the form effectively.
- Online application forms often contain specific interview type questions that would require you to **know the position and requirements well**.
Eg: "What do you feel are the top 5 things to be successful within this position?" (Telecom)
Eg: "Can you please provide examples of how you have assisted with developing a culture?"
- At times, the online job ad has an icon that leads to a more detailed job description. This may be easy to miss so look out for it. Download the application form first and complete it offline (see below)
- Try to **download** the application form. Websites differ in the degree of difficulty in downloading the form. Some sites allow you to download the application freely or to save it and re-access it later. Alternatively, the best way is to copy and paste it into a Word document. If there are sequential pages to the form, you will need to enter using dummy data to access the full form. However, sometimes if the dummy information is not in line with their requirements, you may not be allowed to enter the rest of the form. In any event, even after having downloaded the form, be aware that you may still not have succeeded in accessing all parts of the form. If it is not possible to copy and paste, print the form out instead.
- Before going online to complete your authentic application, open separate windows that contain: the pre-prepared form to paste from, your CV and cover letter, the job description and job ad for easy access and reference and to help you check that information has been correctly pasted.
- Be aware that when applying for a vacancy through a recruiter's website, you may be given an option to apply directly to the organisation (if the e-mail address is provided), or to apply through the recruiter. You may elect to apply directly to the organisation, instead of through the recruiter, especially if you judge their privacy policy to be to your disadvantage.
- When online to submit your application, be aware that some sites allow you to go back to the previous screen to amend information you had given and that information would have been saved and would be visible. Others allow you to go back but the information you had provided would no longer be visible
- Check which are mandatory fields and double check that you have completed these. If you haven't, some sites would prompt you immediately, whereas others only prompt after going back to the same page, sometimes with the information you had provided no longer be visible. Try to avoid this by ensuring you have entered the mandatory fields.
- Certain fields can accept only a maximum number of characters. A few resume banks limit the number of words you can have in a field. An easy way to be sure you don't exceed the limit is to type your answer in an MS Word document and use the Word Count function found in the Tools menu. Edit your text if necessary, and then copy and paste the text into the field on the Web site. Always double check that the section has been pasted in full before proceeding.

- Also remember that when there is a list of options as answers – there is often the possibility that you can select multiple options by holding down the ‘Control’ key. This is not always explained and it is sometimes taken for granted that applicants will know this.

J. REGISTERING YOUR PROFILE ONLINE

What is a profile and how is it created? A profile is a summary of you, providing recruiters/employers with a database of applicants that can be a potential pool to draw from when vacancies arise. The profile is usually created as part of a ‘registration process’ when applying for vacancies online.

You should have the opportunity to browse vacancies before registering to see if the site is a good fit. If not – sign in with dummy information first. We recommend you be selective about sites where you post your information. Here are some things to take into account:

Privacy issues

- Ensure you are able to access you profile later to edit it in the event you want to apply for different types of jobs
- Ensure you are able to delete your profile when you have found a job – you don’t want your new employer to discover you are still looking for work!
- Some sites require you to provide an e-mail address in order to inform you of future vacancies. Most sites would ask your consent to be sent mail – check carefully what you consent to – as consent may be ticked by default. We recommend you create a new e-mail address for the purpose of receiving job related e-mails.
- This website gives good guidelines on ‘staying cyber-safe’ and what to look out for when evaluating sites. Here is an excerpt:
 - ❖ Read Privacy Policies. Note what personal information they will collect, how it may be handled, and whether or not they reserve the right to sell it.
 - ❖ Avoid sites that offer to "blast" your resume. Such wide distribution may offer little, if any, control on where a copy of your resume could end up.
 - ❖ Limit or modify the personal and/or contact information you put on your resume. Remove all standard "contact information" -- name, address, phone numbers
 - ❖ Don't let your resume just sit there. If you don't get any response to your resume within 45 days of posting, remove it from that location and post it elsewhere.

<http://www.rileyguide.com/eresume.html>

Multiple applications

Remember that your suitability for all vacancies is assessed against your set profile, which prevents you from being able to tailor your application to each individual vacancy. Thus you need to update your profile regularly to maintain and/or increase your eligibility for new jobs.

Remember though, that recruiters can do a search based on your name/log-in details to find all of the positions you have applied for in the past. Be sure to carefully asses your suitability for a job and don’t just send applications off ‘en masse’ or else you run the risk of being blacklisted as a ‘job spammer’ by recruiters – in which case your applications may be automatically screened out in the future.

If you are applying for positions in the same general field but want to tailor your application specifically to match the requirements of each job – you are encouraged to have only one CV you submit each time, but use the cover letter to distinguish each individual application. If you are following multiple career paths, you may need more than one CV (be sure to create a different file name or else the new one will simply replace the previous one). In this case the respective CV’s should not completely omit anything that is included in the other CV – but may reflect a different emphasis. The cover letter may then be used to explain the reason for the two different CV’s.

K. SOME USEFUL CV AND COVER LETTER RESOURCES:

Books

- Stenberg, Paula- 'Write your own CV- a New Zealand Guide'
- Kennedy, Joyce- 'Cover letters for dummies'
- Pitcher, Doug- 'Successful strategies for answering job ads and writing effective cover letters'
- Thompson, Mary Anne- 'The global resume guide'
- Criscito, Pat- 'Resumes in cyberspace'

Websites

- JobStar Central- <http://jobstar.org/tools/resume/cletters.htm>
- CareerLab- www.careerlab.com/letters
- www.Jobs4Grads.co.nz - has useful templates to begin writing your CV
- <http://www.studentpress.org/acpjobs/resumetips.html>
- <http://www.susanireland.com/eresumework.htm#4>
- <http://www.job-hunt.org/>
- <http://resume-writing.candocareer.com/online-resume.htm>
- <http://www.rileyguide.com/eresume.html>

Careers & Employment Office offer a range of services including:

- How to write a CV workshop – including tips for applying online
- CV checking service – a Careers Advisor will give you feedback on your CV