

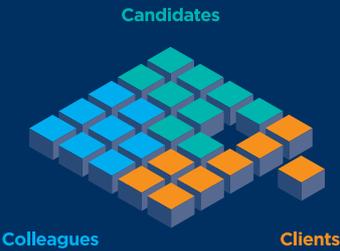
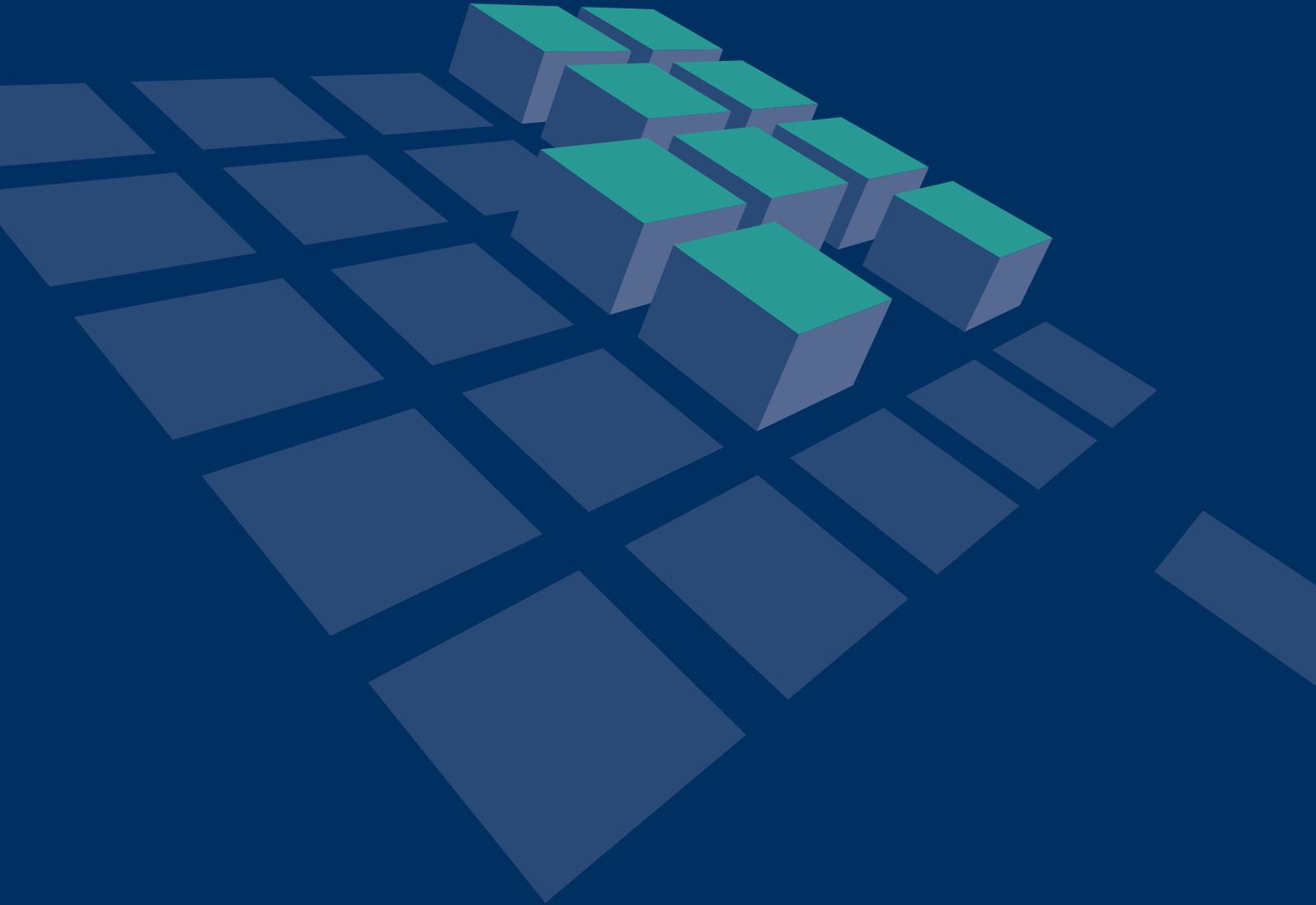
The CV in the digital age

A guide for the early career-stage candidate.



Our Commitment to Candidates

We invest in building non-transactional partnerships with our candidates outside the search process. Our focus on a constructive candidate experience means that you can trust our advice throughout your executive career.





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Welcome to this guide to creating a CV that'll make the most of your skills, talent and experience. In Part II: Beyond the CV, we've also included advice on how to make your online identity work for you, and enhance your prospects of future career success.

FIRST THINGS FIRST

The idea behind a CV is pretty simple. It's an introduction sent by a job-seeker to a potential employer that provides a summary of the candidate's capabilities, history, and suitability for employment.

Your CV – whether it is uploaded on LinkedIn or not – is frequently the first detailed information an executive recruiter or potential employer will receive about you, and the basis of their initial impression. And, as we know, first impressions count!

As retained executive recruiters, we see thousands of CVs each year in our search for exceptional people. They vary in length, format, and – unfortunately – readability. That experience is the basis of this booklet. We think you'll find it useful.

STARTING OUT?

If you're not an executive yet, your CV will be subject to a different set of standards than later in your career. For mid- and low-level candidates (or even senior applicants in technical fields), the resume has to do a lot of work. Because you're up against a lot of competition.

Consider a typical low-level corporate job search: If 1,000 people see an online job post, 200 people are expected to begin the application process, and 100 actually apply.

Of these 100 applicants, 75 are dismissed by Applicant Tracking Systems, the dreaded ATS. (There's more about these later.) Someone in HR then consults the remaining 25 resumes and selects 4-8 as long-list candidates, who are brought in for an interview. 1-4 finalists are then brought in for a second interview. One of them gets the job.



WHO ARE YOU AND WHAT DO YOU WANT?

Always presume you're an unknown. So, start with the twin basics of any CV. The reader wants to know what you can do and what you're looking for.

In 1482, Leonardo Da Vinci got it right. He wrote a letter to the regent of Milan introducing himself as an artificer of war technologies (ie who he was). Then he tackled the 'what I'm looking to do' bit: "I have kinds of mortars," Leonardo wrote, "most convenient and easy to carry; and with these I can fling small stones almost resembling a storm."

He got the job, and with it, a long-time patron. 12 years later, the regent, then Duke of Milan, commissioned The Last Supper. Nice work, if you apply yourself properly.

Look at what the CV has to do: first it has to crack the ATS keyword criteria. Then it has to weather the more subjective, varied, and hard-to-define human measures.

More than 90% of the applicants are dismissed on the basis of their CV alone. Structure, content, tone – in this environment every part of your CV is important.

WHAT ARE APPLICANT TRACKING SYSTEMS? AND HOW TO SURVIVE THEM

With the average corporate job listing attracting 250 applicants (many draw thousands), companies have become increasingly reliant on ATS software, which runs keyword searches to automatically separate weak CVs from strong ones.

The problem is that this added efficiency comes at a cost: 75% of ATS-sifted CVs are never read by a person, and many qualified applicants are automatically dismissed from consideration because their CV's language or formatting did not match the software's keywords or capabilities.

One way to circumvent this is by subtly customising your CV for each application. (This is a principle you can apply to every CV, in fact.)

Your goal here should be to translate your experience and qualifications into the kinds of language used in the job posting.

For example, if you work in additive manufacturing and are responding to a job posting that asks candidates to have, among other things, "significant AM Exposure," it might be tactically wise to make sure that kind of wording appears in your resume (Be sure, however, not to lie in order to manipulate the ATS system.)

Another thing to consider is formatting. ATS systems have trouble coping with elaborate visual elements (for instance triangular bullet points), and many simply cannot read PDFs or even common serif typefaces like Times New Roman and Cambria. See our layout section for more information about ATS-friendly formatting.

ONE CV? OR MORE?

Before we kick off, one question. How many CVs should you have? Well, flexibility is key.

Don't be afraid of tailoring your CV to the position you're after. It shouldn't be set in stone, nor should the length for that matter. Of course, the differences will be a matter of degree, not an entirely different you.

But the more you can communicate yourself as the round peg suitable for the round hole, the better your chances of being considered.

PART I

Writing your CV





1. FONTS & FORMATTING

DID YOU KNOW?

60% of CVs are dismissed because they are cluttered or poorly formatted.

PLAIN AND SIMPLE, PLEASE

Right, let's deal with style. Things like the font and formatting do matter, as we'll explain. Get it wrong and you could be rejected straight away.

The people reading your CV are scanning it for key elements. In the early stages of a search, HR and executive search professionals spend only a few seconds per resume. Essentially, they glance at job titles, company names, dates, and education. If they don't find these easily, or are distracted by atypical elements, the CV winds up at the bottom of the pile.

With that in mind, our general guidelines are as follows.

KEEP IT SIMPLE

Employers care about content. Flamboyant formatting, prose, or fonts often come off as more ostentatious than clever.

A traditionally-formatted CV remains more likely – in our field – to secure an interview than a video posted on YouTube (though of course, if the position is not traditional and is explicitly looking for creativity, you might tailor your response, and even the medium, appropriately. When a major ad agency was looking for candidates, they asked for a personal video pitch on, you guessed it, YouTube.)

Use a single-spaced, 12-point font. The font should be simple and easy to read.

“If you're in the first years of your career, use a sans-serif font – Calibri or Lucida Sans – because many Applicant Tracking Systems cannot read serif fonts and will automatically discard a CV in Times New Roman and Cambria.”

If you're in the first years of your career, use a sans-serif font – Calibri or Lucida Sans – because many Applicant Tracking Systems cannot read serif fonts and will automatically discard a CV in Times New Roman and Cambria.

When e-mailing or uploading your CV, it is best to use a Word document because recruiters often convert CVs into their own formats. Vitaly, ATS systems can't scan PDFs, which means – you guessed it – automatic rejection.

Make sure your bullet points are round, not triangular or square. Some ATS software gets hung up on complex symbols.

Do not include a picture (or worse still, a selfie). Many employers will disregard CVs with pictures.

Be minimal with typographical emphasis, i.e. bold, italic, underline, and full word CAPS.

With our recommended formatting, recruiters can quickly find each company you've worked for. Not just because companies are in bold, but because nothing else is.

Edit, edit, and edit again. Throw out all unnecessary words. All of them. Every single one.



2. THE HEADING

The heading should appear at the top of every page and include the following: your name, address, and contact information. Each page after the first should begin with an abridged heading that includes your name, e-mail address, and page number.

We recommend providing only one phone number and one email. When you list multiple numbers, a recruiter may feel that you'll be hard to track down.

There are several acceptable methods for formatting a CV heading, but we prefer this one:

“ Depending on your industry, you may also provide links to your LinkedIn, Twitter, or website URL. ”



DID YOU KNOW?

59% of recruiters will reject CVs on the basis of spelling or grammatical errors.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

When it comes to your email provider, it's a good idea to have a Gmail or a personal email provider. Hotmail and AOL have behind-the-times associations.

Make sure your email address is recognisably yours.

Susan Fletcher should not have “S_67_F@candidate.com” as her email address.

Depending on your industry, you may also provide links to your LinkedIn, Twitter, or website URL.



3. EXECUTIVE PROFILE

Located at the top of your CV, the executive profile is an opportunity for you to summarise your current career standing and relevant skills. This section has a number of acceptable names, including Career Profile, CV Profile, Key Competencies, and Expertise.

A typical executive profile has two parts: a short sentence or paragraph followed by a list of core skills.

Here is an abridged example:

SUSAN FLETCHER
74 Resume Road, A City, Postcode
sfletcher67@gmail.com 00000 000 000 (mobile)

EXECUTIVE PROFILE

Experienced marketing executive with major communications, account sales strategy, business development, and civic partnership expertise.

Core Skills:

- Development of strategic, business development, branding, and marketing plans
- Adept project manager able to handle complex information
- Process oriented with ability to prioritise and streamline tasks
- Proven ability to establish trusted relationships with colleagues at all levels of the organisation

The executive profile should provide an at-a-glance view of your current professional expertise with an emphasis on areas in which you excel or have deep experience.



When customising or updating your executive profile for specific job opportunities, always remember to highlight skills that are relevant to the role.

For example, if you are interested in a sales position, write “Accomplished sales professional with 5+ years’ experience in sales management.”

It is very important that you are consistent. So, the content of your executive profile should match what appears on your CV and the information available about you on the internet. This includes LinkedIn, for example.

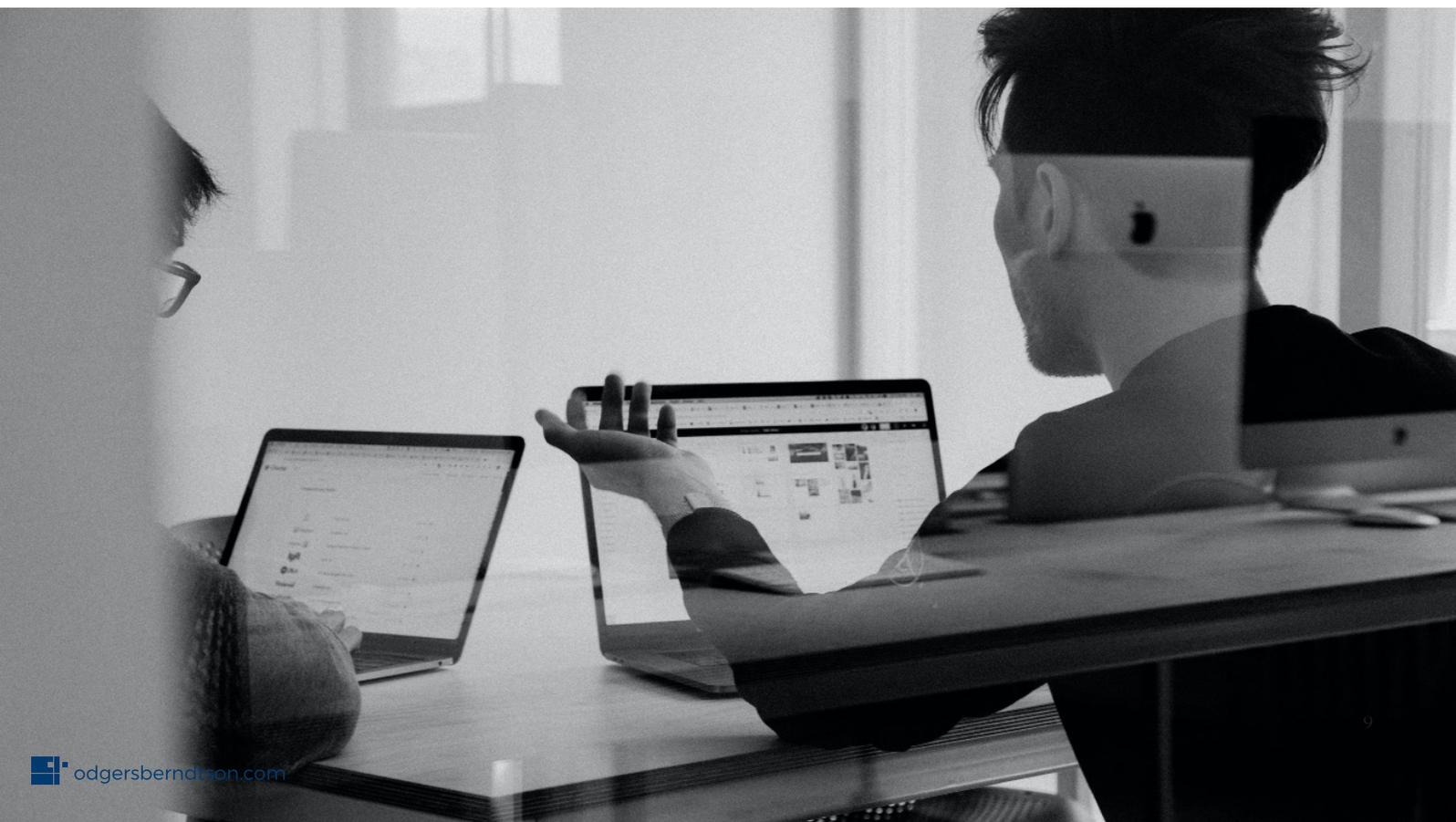
DID YOU KNOW?

Nearly **50%** of recruiters will disregard CVs that contain non-standard fonts, margins, or colours.

EXECUTIVE PROFILE OR OBJECTIVE STATEMENT?

An objective statement resembles the executive profile in a number of ways: it’s a brief introduction located at the top of your resume. But instead of describing your current capabilities and key skills, the objective statement describes what you’re looking for in your next job.

This is your opportunity to articulate some clear-eyed career goals. Some might say that if you are at the beginning of your career, this approach limits the way people read your interests and capabilities, but it does make clear whether you and the role are a good fit. And it does make the recruiter’s job easier, which is always a good thing.





4. PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

This section, which can alternately be called Executive Experience, is the bulk of your CV.

FORMATTING

As we've emphasised earlier, it's imperative that your CV is rich in information, but can be quickly scanned.

We recommend the format below.

NOTE THE MINIMALIST LOOK

Simply bold the company, and italicise the company description. Everything else is plain text.

The sentences in the responsibilities and key accomplishments sections should begin with verbs, not personal pronouns.

List the positions you've held in reverse chronological order, newest to oldest.

For your current position, use the present tense to describe responsibilities. Use the past tense for all previous accomplishments in former positions.

For each position, state your title and responsibilities. At a junior level, you might not be able to include the number of employees you supervised or your sales numbers or budget. If you can do this, however, make sure you do include these.

The employment dates should be divided by an en-dash (–), not a hyphen (-) or an em-dash (—).

SUSAN FLETCHER
sfletcher67@gmail.com

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PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Company, location Started – Present
Job Title

Brief company description

Responsible for writing 1-5 sentences. Do not use pronouns. Do not state the obvious. Mention aspects of the job that were not obviously implied by the job title.

Key Accomplishments

- Wrote a CV worth looking at despite fierce competition
- Etc. etc. (as many times as you need)

Company, location Started – Present
Job Title **Etc**



THE COMPANY DESCRIPTION

We recommend including this because it allows readers to understand your career without pre-existing familiarity of the companies you've worked for. We want to know whether you were working for a regional retailer with \$3 million in sales or a \$6 billion global manufacturer of automotive products. Big difference.

DID YOU KNOW?

Half of recruiters will disregard a CV if it contains too many clichés. Avoid 'Highly motivated', 'good communicator', 'team player', you know the kind of thing.

RESPONSIBILITIES

This section is what it sounds like: a brief summation of the tasks associated with your position, especially those that can't be directly inferred from your job title. To save space, we recommend putting responsibilities in paragraph form, as in the career profile section.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

This is where you get specific about your successes.

Here are some things to keep in mind:

Whenever possible, quantify these achievements. Instead of writing "Grew online sales," write, "Grew online revenue from start-up to market leader with \$8 million in annual sales."

Avoid subjective self-assessment. Don't tell us you are "talented" or have "strong interpersonal skills". Those are idle boasts. Instead, be specific. If you have "received six medical device patents", we know you're talented. If you were "awarded the Chairman's Award in 2016", we know you're good with people.

LENGTH

Your CV should be as long as is necessary to concisely summarise your career.

A candidate with a six figure salary and 10 years of work experience will have a longer resume than a five figure employee who's still early in their career. Can the latter really come up with 4 or 5 pages' worth, without waffle and padding?

Always state the facts concisely, honestly and without embellishment. Always write your own CV. No one knows more about you than you. (Of course, do get it spell-checked by a literate friend or colleague who might notice the mistakes you don't.)

State all of your previous and current roles. A good recruiter will spend one to two hours interviewing you for his or her client, and if your CV is well-prepared, it will increase the depth and efficiency of those conversations.

Do not leave things out, and do not leave interpretations up for grabs. Here's why:

If you leave a job out of your CV because it doesn't seem relevant to your current career, a recruiter might simply assume you weren't working during that time period. In fact, don't leave any gaps. Explain the fact that you took, say, 18 months off to sail around the world.



SHORT TENURE

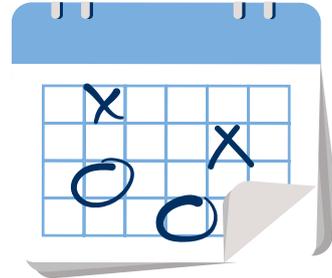
How do you talk about jobs held for brief periods?

Take a look at the example below. There, you can see Susan Fletcher does several things right.

This is the second page of her resume. So she includes an abridged heading, complete with page number. Because she was employed for less than a year, she listed months. If she had simply written 2010 – 2011, it would have implied two years of employment, which was not the case. By stating the facts, Susan avoids incurring a recruiter's distrust.

Susan gives a reason for her departure from GoodSeed. By doing so she (a) minimises the negative implications of short tenure, and (b) makes us feel like she's telling us what we want to know.

A known blip on your CV is infinitely more favourable than an unknown one.



Susan does not provide key accomplishments. Why not? She wasn't at GoodSeed long enough to accomplish anything that compares favourably to her previous and future accomplishments.

This is an important lesson: rather than inventing an accomplishment (or dressing a daily task to look like one), leave it blank.

SUSAN FLETCHER

sfletcher67@gmail.com

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PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

GoodSeed Bread Co., Sacramento, CA November 2010–May 2011

Director of Marketing

The GoodSeed Bread Company, before being acquired by Peace Foods in March 2011, was the world's largest organic-only bread-product distributor with 200 employees and clients in 10 states.

Responsible for all branding, marketing, communications, and business development programmes. Departed when the company was restructured after acquisition.



MULTIPLE POSITIONS IN THE SAME COMPANY

We think there are two good ways of visually presenting this information. Which one you choose largely depends on whether you want to talk about each role individually, or your tenure at the company collectively – and this probably depends on how recently you held these roles.

If you're currently holding your second or more position in the same company, it's probably a good idea to talk about each position. After all, they represent your last few years of work experience and promotions.

In this case, you can present this information like the example below.

DID YOU KNOW?

Referrals account for at least

30% of external hires?

Always leave a job on good terms.

SUSAN FLETCHER

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Page 2

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Talent Acquisition Inc., New York, NY 2019–Present

Talent Acquisition Inc. is one of the world's largest and fastest growing executive search and organisational leadership firms with more than 250 Partners, and offices in 53 cities across 28 countries.

Partner, Head of CV Writing 2019–Present

Responsible for writing the CV book, editing the CV book, and keeping you on your toes.

Key Accomplishments

- Wrote
- Edited
- Did not put periods after in-example bullet points

Partner, Head of CV Writing 2014–2019

Responsible for conceiving of and researching a project involving CVs.

Key Accomplishments

- Invented Sally Fletcher, GoodSeed Baking Co, and other fictions



5. EDUCATION

Your education section should be formatted just like your professional experience section, again in reverse chronological order, but without a company description. See the following example:

SUSAN FLETCHER Page 2
sfletcher67@gmail.com

EDUCATION

Institution, location	Year of degree
Degree	
Awards, honours, club memberships, sports teams	
The closer your university years are to the present, the more relevant the information about them. The insurance executive with 35-years of industry experience doesn't need to say that she got a First Class Honours Degree, but someone five years out of university definitely should.	

If you did not graduate, or have not yet graduated, format your education section like this:

EDUCATION

Jobsearch University , The Web, NY	2019 (expected)
Bachelor of Arts	
History of the CV Major	
Psychology of CV Writing Minor	
20th Century College , Truant, AL	Attended 2016-2017
History Major	



6. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

This final section of a CV should include any awards or recognitions, professional memberships and certifications, and volunteer activities.

Can you speak multiple languages? Would they be relevant for the position you're applying to? Make sure you add that fact. As in 'Fluent in Spanish and French.'

In general, we don't advise listing hobbies. It's not particularly useful for an employer to know that you are an avid runner or swimmer. But if you've completed several competitive marathons, or better still, raised money that way, we'd recommend saying so.

Why? First off, it demonstrates a commitment to meeting personal objectives, which can translate into meeting professional ones.

Secondly, it shows a social conscience. And if you ran in a rabbit costume, you've definitely got an ice-breaker at the interview!

SUSAN FLETCHER
 Page 3
 sfletcher67@gmail.com

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- Member, The CV Enterprise forum Current
- Member, CV Experts United Current
- Member, Big City Sprinters Current

MEMBERSHIPS

- Member, the Headhunters' Caucus Current
- Member, the We'll-Find-You Association Current
- Member, New York Spinners (cycling team) Former

PUBLICATIONS

- "The CV in the Digital Age" (OB Journal) 2021
- "The Not-So-Great European Novel" (Knopf) 2019

It is also worth noting that in some cases it may be helpful to divide the additional information section into multiple parts, or change its name.

Do whatever best reflects your career history.



“No two humans are completely identical in terms of knowledge, skills, life experience and personality. Each of us will bring something different to every role we perform. A diverse multicultural, multi-ethnic workforce is not just best practice, it’s best for the business and best for employee engagement.”

HOW TO REFLECT DIVERSITY

Companies are actively seeking diversity at all levels, so if you are a minority or non-normative individual, it’s not a bad idea to reflect this on your CV.

We think the best way to incorporate these facts is in your CV’s additional information or education sections. Were you a member of a minority-oriented university group?

Mention it in your education section. Are you a member of the Asian Women’s Leadership Institute?

Put this in your additional information section. Did you publish an essay about your experiences as a minority university student? Be sure to describe it along with your other publications.





7. WHAT NOT TO INCLUDE ON YOUR CV

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Do not include marital status, age, weight, health conditions, or a photograph.

This sort of information was once expected. Now it's definitely 'TMI'.

REFERENCES

Do not provide references, unless they're specifically asked for. Do not include any version of "References Available on Request."

Employers assume that you can produce references. It's a waste of space and reader attention.

DID YOU KNOW?

70% of employers have rejected potential employees based on negative information they found online.

TESTIMONIALS

Also a no-no, unless of course Bill Gates called you the 'most talented coder he had ever met'.

SALARY

Do not include a salary, unless specifically asked to do so.

TELL THE TRUTH

A 2017 study found that 85% of employers had caught applicants fibbing on their resumes, almost a 20% increase from 2012.

Competition is fierce. The average corporate job post gets more than 250 responses and the widespread adoption of applicant tracking systems has pressured less competitive job seekers to stretch the truth to fit algorithms.

Almost all recruiters today run background checks, search for backdoor references, study your internet presence, and use behavioural interviewing techniques to make sure that what you've said about yourself is true. Most will drop a candidate from consideration if they discover that they have lied about their background. Remember, you are the headhunter's product, and if you are revealed to have created 'fake news', they look bad in their client's eyes.



PART II

Beyond the CV

TAKE CHARGE OF YOUR INTERNET EXISTENCE

It's time to take your online reputation seriously: the career-building potential of Social Media.

Would headhunters and potential employers be impressed by what they can see on your Social Media profiles? What do they look out for?

It's as much a virtual world as a physical one in executive search and reputation management. So, getting your CV right is just half of the job. You have to look just as good online too.

In today's digital world, recruiters will study your LinkedIn profile, public Facebook pictures, blog posts, newspaper articles, and, regrettably, police reports. Your CV and your online image should be consistent. Discrepancies will lead to awkward questions.

Start your personal brand health-check with an internet search. Get into the habit of Googling your name every six months. Take the trouble to conduct several separate searches with variations in the search terms. Potentially illuminating options include pairing your name with your job title, current employer, area of expertise, geographic location and sector in which you work.

If the Google results throw up something negative or embarrassing, you should address this problem straightaway.

LINKEDIN

Corporate HR and executive search professionals use LinkedIn all the time. If you're on LinkedIn, you're much more likely to be contacted. (And if a recruiter wants to connect, say yes.) LinkedIn connections can also function as references and affinity group-identifiers.

Make sure that the CVs you've created are matched by your LinkedIn profile.

LinkedIn also offers a great forum for sounding the part.

Perhaps you have the depth of knowledge about a key issue or trends in your sector to write an interesting thought leadership piece. Or if not a full-blown thought leadership viewpoint, maybe you can post some less-involved content that's still relevant and of value to your peers.

A major part of our role at Odgers Berndtson is being aware of exceptional talent and evaluating whether they could be potential assets to our clients now or in the future. When individuals are self-assured enough to share their insights, it could give them an edge in a competitive market.

Whatever you put up on the platform plays a part in how you position yourself. Take care not to gratuitously offend, appear out of touch or make silly mistakes.

Moreover, don't simply cut and paste your entire CV. Cherry pick and emphasise achievements that underline your value proposition and mark you out as a strong candidate for the step up you want to take.

Be sure to weave in a few carefully chosen keywords relating to your job specification and industry sector. This will boost your visibility to recruiters hiring for a relevant executive position.

“ You have these free platforms you can use to establish yourself as someone who is a thought leader in your field - so use them! ”



When was the last time you did a spring clean of your Social Media profiles? Possibly within the past year, possibly never? Are you sure which are public and which are private? Are you using two-factor authentication to secure your account? If you are someone looking to build on your career success and network with like-minded industry figures, read on.

UPLOAD A PROFILE PICTURE

The absence of a headshot on a platform where the vast majority of members show their faces may damage your credibility and give the impression you are cold and uninterested in developing professional connections.

There's also the possibility of missing out on opportunities that spring from familiarity. When someone recognises you from an industry event or prior meeting, it may open doors. Your profile photo does not need to be professionally-taken, but it should be professional-looking.

TWITTER

Be careful what you tweet. With one angry, ill-considered tweet, you can lose your job. And the same goes for Facebook and Instagram. Quite simply, online there is no place to hide. If you wouldn't stand up and say it in front of a prospective employer, don't say it online.

ONLINE NETWORK BUILDING

Build your network of online contacts wisely and remain career-focused, connecting with people predominantly in your professional cohort. This has dual advantages.

Not only will recruiters find it easier to track you down, it will also help with how you are positioned and perceived.

Reply to message requests and connect with credible and relevant people to strengthen your network and enhance your online image. Interactions that begin online can quickly evolve – for instance, you might suggest moving the relationship on to a short meeting over a cup of coffee – with the potential to unlock new career opportunities.

You should also join and actively contribute to online groups covering your function or industry. The more closely related these are to your target job the better.

Actively taking control of your online image will make you more attractive in the eyes of recruiters and will enhance your prospects of future career success.

Good luck.

“It's important to remember that making your Social Media profiles work for you isn't just about filtering out embarrassing content from the past, it's an opportunity to control your own narrative.”





WORKING WITH HEADHUNTERS

We want to help. But remember we are busy working on current assignments, and our ability to meet potential candidates on a speculative basis is limited. (To provide some perspective, Odgers Berndtson can receive up to 50,000 CVs a year.)

Think about how you make your approach to headhunters a warm one. Existing contacts within search firms are valuable; even if a consultant does not operate in your sector, he or she will be able to direct you accordingly.

If you are not well connected in our industry, then think about those in your network who are. An introduction from someone senior who knows you can be a powerful means of opening the door and differentiating yourself.

We are delighted if you stay connected with us and keep us informed. As your roles or responsibilities change, please let us have a revised CV and contact details. If you secure a new role, let us know. Ensuring that we understand your objectives, the sorts of roles you seek, and your capacity to undertake them is vital intelligence for us and lies at the heart of our work.

Please help us to help you.

TALENTED PEOPLE ARE OUR LIFEBLOOD.

THAT'S WHY WE HAVE A CANDIDATE CHARTER.

“ Whether we approach you about a specific opportunity, or you contact us to share your biography and career ambitions, we want you to have a constructive experience of engaging with Odgers Berndtson. ”

We recognise that we have a commitment to you, as well as to our client, and we undertake that our dealings with you will be professional, courteous, rigorous and honest.

You can find the details of our Candidate Charter [here](#).





ABOUT ODGERS BERNDTSON

Rapid change, new challenges and societal shifts demand fresh thinking. We thrive on new ideas in our search for leaders who will flourish in a time of exceptional change and disruption.

For over 50 years, Odgers Berndtson has helped some of the world's biggest and best organisations find the senior talent to drive their agendas.

We deliver executive search, assessment and development to businesses and organisations varying in size, structure and maturity.

We do that across over 50 sectors, whether commercial, public or not-for-profit, and draw on the experience of more than 250 Partners and their teams in 35 countries.

Get in contact with your local Odgers Berndtson office [here](#).

We transform clients' performance and candidates' lives by building outstanding teams

