

## Careers and Enterprise

# CV and Cover Letters

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## Basic principles: nature and purpose of a CV

**Which of these statements do you agree with?**

- (a) A CV is a formally documented list of all my professional and educational skills and experience
- (b) A CV is a marketing document
- (c) A CV must follow a strict format
- (d) A CV is either good or it's not
- (e) The purpose of a CV is more to inform than to persuade

## Basic principles: nature and purpose of a CV

A **succinct** and **clear** summary  
of **your unique combination** of  
**knowledge, skills, experience** and **qualities**  
to **persuade that employer** that  
you are a **good fit**  
for **that role**  
with **that employer**

# CV quiz

1. What is the maximum acceptable length of a CV in the UK, for most purposes?
  - 2 pages (sectors like finance may prefer 1 page CVs)
2. What items should you include at the start of your CV?
  - Name, phone number, email address, link to LinkedIn profile, address
3. Is it best to use bullet points when describing your skills and experience?
  - Makes it easier to read but succinct summaries can be just as effective
4. Should a CV be written in first or third person?
  - Third person
5. What kind of verbs should be used when describing skills and experience?
  - Active
6. Should you include a photo in your CV?
  - Not for the UK, but common in many other countries
7. Should you include your age and nationality?
  - Not for UK, but may be required in other countries
8. Should you include a profile?
  - Not a requirement – if used - should be factual/substantiated, short and show your unique selling points (USP)

# The structure of a CV

**What you MUST include** (the essentials):

- Name and contact details
- Educational qualifications
- Professional qualifications
- Details of professional experience and achievements

# The structure of a CV

What you **MAY CHOOSE** to include:

- Personal profile
- Right to work in the UK
- Positions of responsibility
- Volunteering
- Additional skills and activities
- References (available on request)



# The structure of a CV

## What NOT to include:

- Photograph
- Title 'CV' or 'Curriculum Vitae'
- Age/Date of Birth/Ethnicity
- Marital status
- Last salary
- Reason for leaving your last job
- Grids or tables



# The form of a CV

## What to AVOID:

- Jargon, abbreviations, colloquial language (unless you know the employer will understand it)
- Narrative style - 'I started my work experience in the IP department...'
- Coloured paper/writing or *crazy fonts*
- 'Fun' email addresses
- Things that aren't true/exaggeration!





# The form of a CV

- Key information on page 1
- Most relevant = more prominent
- Logical structure with clear headings
- Reverse chronology (most recent first)
- Avoid repetition
- White space helps things stand out (but not too much)
- Consistent formatting
- Easy to read and visually uncluttered
- Triple check spelling and grammar!

# The form of a CV – writing a profile

- Like a film trailer
- At the start of your CV
- No more than 3 sentences
- The main things you want that employer to remember about you
- Further details can be incorporated in the body of the CV

Italian qualified lawyer currently undertaking an LLM in Commercial Law at Queen Mary University of London, with pro bono experience of advising tech start-up companies and entrepreneurs through Queen Mary Legal Advice Centre (qLegal).

Proven ability in customer relationship development and team-working in a high pressure environment within the retail and hospitality sectors.

Fluent in French, Italian and Spanish.

# How do you get your CV on the yes pile?

Understand what the employer is looking for (match your skills and experiences to the person specification/core competencies)

Recognising relevant experience you can draw on to evidence your skills

What to say (**and what to leave out**) – not a list

How to say it (**facts and figures; help the reader understand your competitive advantage – it's in the details - give specific examples!**)

## Drawing from experience

## Think about your skills

### Studies

Sports teams/societies

Work shadowing

Local community  
work



Legal work experience

Seminar/conferences  
attended

Volunteering

## Focus on what the **employer wants** from you

Scrutinise the job description and person specification

Underline the knowledge, skills, experience and qualities that the employer is looking for

Identify those things which are essential and those that are merely desirable

# Focus on what the employer wants from you

## Immerse yourself in that employer's world

### Online research:

Their whole website (not just the jobs/careers page)

Their Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram profiles and feeds

Legal press [www.thelawyer.com](http://www.thelawyer.com) [www.legalweek.com](http://www.legalweek.com)

Insider guides [www.chambersstudent.co.uk](http://www.chambersstudent.co.uk) [www.rollonfriday.com](http://www.rollonfriday.com)

General press e.g. FT, Times, Economist

### Personal insight:

Attend employer events and law fairs

Speak to people who work there: via professional contacts (via LinkedIn and the Queen Mary Network)

# Professional Support Assistant – job advert

## The role

Working closely with the Corporate Professional Support Lawyer to help implement the knowledge and practice development strategy. Duties to include:

- assist with KM content management
- liaise with business development, learning and training and other relevant departments
- some legal research

## About you

This role requires an excellent academic background, experience in working in a global professional services environment and ideally experience in knowledge management and understanding of corporate law. Familiarity with KM related technology platforms is highly desirable.

What would you include in a CV checklist from this job description?

# Professional Support Assistant – CV checklist

## Essential:

- Excellent academic background and experience in global professional services environment

## Desirable:

- Experience in knowledge management
- Understanding of corporate law
- Familiarity with knowledge management-related technology platforms
- Some PQE (post qualification experience)

## Skills:

- Legal research
- Interpersonal skills (ideally through stakeholder management)
- Ability to adapt communication styles and team –working/managing up
- Well-organised and good time management



# Let's talk about cover letters...

- Length, format and formalities
- Structure
- How much information to include
- What information to include

## Suggested structure – 4 sections (may be more paragraphs)

- Who I am, why I'm writing OR something original to capture attention
- Why I really want THIS ROLE with YOU
- Why you should be interested in me – 3 top criteria rather than chronology
- What I want to happen next

# Making your cover letter work

## Tone and Feel of a Letter

- Clear & succinct/quickly reach YOUR reason for writing the letter! Refer to yourself as “I”
- Start by thinking of the employer’s perspective – what 3 criteria will they most value. Then provide your evidence.
- Avoid too much outright/overt effusion (emotional sentiment/gush) towards target institution
- Don’t be so modest that your qualities are in disguise!
- Don’t be so immodest that on paper potential employers are left with sense of too good to be true!
- Don’t assume you WILL be given the position! Therefore the use of the hypothetical modals would/could are appropriate
- Don’t be impatient or overly assertive.
- **Keep it brief- 1 page**

# Cover letter tone – which is more appropriate?

1

- I am writing to you, in the capacity of being an LLM student at Queen Mary, University of London. I have opted for modules that underpin my proposed research area of financial regulation and particularly the new “twin peak” regulatory levers that the government has introduced in light of the generally accepted failure of the FSA during the recession that started in 2008 .It is evident that your firm...

I am currently an LLM student at Queen Mary, University of London, specialising in the new regulation and supervisory bodies of the financial sector.



2.

**A** I have contributed significantly to my firm's recent success in the negotiations on behalf of the government and the pharmaceutical company. I have been involved at all stages and co-drafted the terms of the final settlement. I believe this experience and all-round knowledge of the entire process could allow me to bring some useful attributes to your firm.

**B** I have contributed hugely to my firm's recent success in the negotiations on behalf of the government and the pharmaceutical company. I have been involved at all stages and co-drafted the terms of the final settlement. I am certain that this experience and holistic oversight of the entire process will allow me to bring some useful attributes to your firm.

### 3.

- **A** I have, for many years, hugely admired **Legal Services Co**, and consider it the pinnacle of all of my lifetime's ambitions to be considered as part of your globally-esteemed staff. It would be an honour to work for you.
- **B** I am attracted to **Legal Services Co**, not only as it is a renowned leader in corporate law, but also for its reputation for innovation. The firm's investment in AI, flexible approach to pricing, and development of alternative career paths for staff, all suggest a forward-thinking mind-set. I am excited by the prospect of change in the way legal services are delivered, and so am keen to be a part of an organisation that demonstrates its commitment to improvement.

4.

- **A** I am hardworking, with excellent communication skills, which I have put to good use in the various internships I have undertaken in leading firms.
  
- **B** I believe I could make a valuable contribution to the firm, drawing on my previous experience. As an intern with Reed Gray LLP, I worked closely with an associate on a commercial property transaction. I particularly enjoyed the buzz of having to produce good quality work within tight deadlines, and received praise for the rapport I built with the client.

5.  
• A

I hope to have the opportunity to discuss this further with you at interview and, in any event, look forward to hearing from you.



- B To conclude, I believe there is a good match between what you are looking for, according to the job description, and the skills and experience I bring. Furthermore, my language capabilities could be an asset, given your international client base. Moreover, I am available to start at your earliest convenience.

I'm really looking forward to hearing from you by 30 June.



## Further resources

- PG Law Professional Development Guide: pages 21 – 35
- Resources on QMPlus
- QMUL careers website (Downloads/CV and applications)

[http://www.prospects.ac.uk/example\\_cvs.htm](http://www.prospects.ac.uk/example_cvs.htm) - Sample CVs (e.g. traditional, skills-based, academic)

<http://www.prospects.ac.uk/coverletters.htm> – Advice on and examples of cover letters

Book a 1-1 appointment by calling **0207 882 8533** (or emailing [careers@qmul.ac.uk](mailto:careers@qmul.ac.uk) if abroad/don't have a UK phone number)



Queen Mary  
University of London