

Who am I and what is this session?

I'm Ben and am a 3rd year student on the BSc Physics course. Today I'll be giving you all a short talk on good practices when writing your CV, which might be quite relevant or useful for some of you, especially those in 2nd year and above. We're currently in application season, so a lot of companies are currently recruiting for graduate roles and some internships.

The aim of this session is to answer the following questions:

1. What is a CV?
2. Why do you need a CV?
3. How do you write a CV?
4. What are good practices when formatting the CV?
5. How do you make your CV stand out?
6. How do you tailor your CV?

And to answer any questions you guys might have about your CVs or applying for jobs. Now, I'm definitely not an expert on this stuff – I've had quite a lot of experience applying for jobs both last year and this year and have not (yet) been rejected at the CV stage – so hopefully I'm doing something right. I wanted to give this session since I feel like there's quite a lack of help when writing a CV and since it's such an important part of the application process, it might come in handy for some people.

So, during this presentation, I'll try and show some good examples of CVs and at the end if you did bring your own CV along then I can have a look through it for you or whatever you like. Let's crack on with answering this first question.

What is a CV?

For some of you, this might be the first time that you're learning about CVs and applying to jobs. This is fine, but it's always good to get a head start in these things. So, what is a CV?

- CV stands for curriculum vitae – this is Latin for 'course of life'.
- Essentially is a summary of your career, qualifications, skills, and education
- Generally, is a page or two with sections for each of these things above
- Tailored to whatever job you're applying for (will discuss this later)
- Might also see CVs called resumes in America

Why do you need a CV?

Okay, so we know this is quite an important document, but why do we need it?

- The CV is the first point of contact for a lot of jobs.
- You'll often have to fill out a long form when applying for a job, then you'll likely have to attach a copy of your CV
- It's the main way of selling yourself to an employer
- A good CV makes a good first impression (as well as a good cover letter)
- A great CV will set you apart from other candidates
- However, this is NOT the only thing that will get you the job – interviews and assessments

This is an important point – you don't want to focus all your time and energy into writing a CV. You should always write a cover letter if the employer gives you the opportunity, and you'll need to practice the other stages of assessment too – e.g., if you're going into banking then you'll need to

practice your technical questions (don't ask me what these are because I'm not an investment banker), or if you're going into software engineering then you'll need to brush up on data structures, interview programming (Leetcode is your friend here), etc.

How to write a CV?

Getting started is usually a big struggle. Start by making a comprehensive list of your previous careers, qualifications, education, etc. Make sure that you have the dates that you were in those positions for and any references if needed.

Then, you need to think about where you're going to apply to. Different job sectors have different etiquettes for CVs generally. For example, an academic CV is a bit different to a banking CV. You might list your publications or awards for the academic one, and your job experience for the banking one. You'll have to do a bit of research yourself with this – this talk is just going to be quite general.

The way I like to write a CV is to have my name and contact details nice and clearly at the top. Include your name, email (make sure it's a professional looking email, not spy.boy@hotmail.co.uk, but rather benwatkins01@hotmail.com), mobile number, and home address. You do NOT need to include your age, sex, or a picture of yourself – you can save the pictures for LinkedIn or other social media.

Then, I quite like to have a brief summary section, just introducing myself and why I'd be a good fit for the job. I tend to include my degree and university (physics at Warwick is quite a nice flex), my predicted grade, some relevant skills for the job, and things that I want to improve/develop when I start working in the role.

After the optional summary section, it's time to start writing your relevant experience down for the job. Now, for a lot of people, this is probably the hardest bit, especially when applying for internships. This section is very dependent on what job sector you're applying for – I know people that have 2 or more CVs; one for retail and one for software engineering, for example. You should list relevant experiences that you've had, and that you'll be able to talk about in an interview. For example, it's all well and good saying that you've done this virtual internship for data analysis with this massive company, but if you rushed through it just to say that you did it, you'll stumble at the interview phase. You need to relate this experience to the position you're applying for on your CV and then in the interview, you need to be able to talk about it.

A common problem people might face when applying is that they think that they don't have any experience at all. This is VERY rarely the case. Okay, you might not have had a part time job when you were at college, but you'll have definitely had some kind of experience that you'll be able to relate to the job. Maybe you did a project, or you led the sports team or something – you should definitely be able to relate that to an entry level job/internship.

When writing down your relevant experience, I like to write a heading saying the position, where it was, and what time period I was in that position for. Then, below it, I write the key responsibilities I had in that role. This is where you can relate your experience to the job description. For example – say you're applying for an accountancy role, and in the past, you've worked as a retail assistant. One of your responsibilities there might have been to operate the tills or count up the money after closing – it's these kinds of things that show the employer that you've had a bit of experience, and that you won't be completely new to everything in the new role.

After your relevant experience section, I like to write a work experience section. This section is for any roles you've had that are less relevant to your new role you're applying for. I would say that this

is completely optional, especially if you've really filled out the relevant experience section – I just used it to fill the rest of my CV out. Try and relate any work experience you've had to the new role, but don't worry too much about it. This is a good opportunity to show other skills you've developed, like leading a team or using your communication skills and so on.

Then, there's the education section. This is a really important section but I do feel that some people overcomplicate it or make it too long. Essentially, all you need here is your university, your sixth form or college, and your secondary school. You do NOT need to list all your grades out, especially for your GCSEs. Sometimes you might want to list out your A level grades, but I'd only do this if you need to pad your CV out. The way I like to do it is as follows:

Finally, it's really nice to add a section for your skills or qualifications. This is where you can list some of the software that you're comfortable using – classic one is Microsoft Office – and any other skills you've picked up from your degree, college or work experience. Also, listing any extra languages you're fluent or competent in is a really nice way to set yourself apart from other potential candidates.

Don't lie about anything on the CV – especially not in the education section since this can get you in some serious trouble.

Good practices when formatting the CV

- Stick to one page – two at the very most
- Keep to the same font (use a professional font, not *Comic Sans*) and format
- CHECK YOUR SPELLING AND GRAMMAR – I know people that have sent their CV off to loads of jobs without proof reading it and
- Make sure it's neat, tidy and easy to read
- Make sure that you're not abusing the margins too much – although this can be a good way to squeeze in a bit extra space
- List everything in reverse chronological order – start with the most recent experience and work backwards.

I think this is a really important part of writing a CV. If you have a really uneven or mismatched CV then it makes you seem less organised and shows a lack of attention to detail. But, if you make a nicely formatted and clear CV then employers will definitely see the amount of effort put in, and this can only reflect well on you.

The general rule is to stick to one side of a4 for this document. If you've got absolutely loads of qualifications or experience then by all means go for two sides, but you should always be able to condense it down to one page.

When applying for the job, I'd recommend exporting the CV as a .pdf file, just so it can't be modified or anything – plus it's easier to read since it'll open in a pdf viewer.

One final note about margins – you can mess around with these to give yourself some more room, however, I wouldn't recommend going below 1cm on top and bottom, and 1.5cm on the sides.

How to make your CV stand out

This is quite tricky to do, but under the right circumstances, it can definitely pay off. Let's look at an example of a really interesting CV I found:

What job/company do you reckon they were applying for? They applied for a job at Spotify obviously, and they put this on Twitter – it went viral and Spotify gave them their dream job. If you can take the opportunity to make your CV look something like this then it can be a really nice way to stand out from the other candidates.

Another thing I saw that I really liked was the use of sliders to indicate how well you know something. I saw this software engineering CV where this guy knew lots of different programming languages, so he listed them all off and put a slider below each one to indicate how competent/confident he was in using them. It's little touches like that that can make a good difference.

How to tailor your CV

Tailoring your CV is another very important step of the application process. For example, one of my mates applied to several jobs with the exact same CV and then got rejected by a few because their CV was just too 'general'.

You need to 'tailor' the CV to the job you're applying to. First things first, you should read the job description really carefully. If, after reading it, this means you need to move or swap some of your work experiences around, or if you need to change the key responsibilities listed then you definitely should. For me, tailoring my CV means changing the short summary paragraph at the beginning and changing some of the keywords throughout the CV to match those in the job description.

Also, consider changing the skills in your skills section to suit those required for the job you're applying for, and to match well with the core values of the company – this means doing a bit of extra research to find out what kind of people the company employs.

This process may seem tedious, but what I recommend is to make a sort of general template for your CV and then edit it accordingly for each job you apply to and keep a folder of your different CVs so you can go back to them.

Summary

1. Make a list (either in Word or on a piece of paper) of all your work experience, qualifications, projects, skills, everything that could be useful for your CV
2. Think about what job sector you're going to apply to
3. Have a look at some of their job descriptions and requirements
4. Add your name and details
5. List out your skills and education
6. Then start to write out your relevant experiences and the key responsibilities you had in those roles
7. Format your CV to make it look presentable and neat
8. Tailor your CV to each job you're applying for
9. Proof read your CV by yourself, ideally out loud, then get someone else to proof read it.
10. Send that application off :D

Cheers for listening. I'll hang around now to look at your CVs and to answer any questions you might have.

I've written the word 'CV' 53 times in this document