



## S U N D A Y

### Thinking about you

We will start the week by thinking about why we write CVs and trying to establish what you want to say in your own.

From our experience, very few people relish the prospect of writing their CV. Some see it as a boring chore, while others approach it with a real sense of dread. However, writing your CV gives you the chance to take stock and put down in black and white all your achievements. It should be seen as an opportunity rather than a tiresome necessity.

After all, the first impression that a prospective employer will get of you will come from your CV. Before the interview, before the aptitude tests, he or she will read your CV and make an instant judgement – ‘Do I want this person working for me or not?’.

If they open a dog-eared photocopy, littered with spelling mistakes and basic errors, they are unlikely to hurry to pick up the nearest phone. If, however, the CV is nicely presented and clearly written in a logical order, then they just might.

#### *Rules, rules, rules*

This is an ideal time to pause and say something about the approach this book takes.

We are not going to lay down a set of arbitrary rules that must be obeyed at all times when writing CVs. Too many people try and turn CV-writing into some kind of pseudo-science. They want to create formulas and laws, where simple common sense is all that is needed.



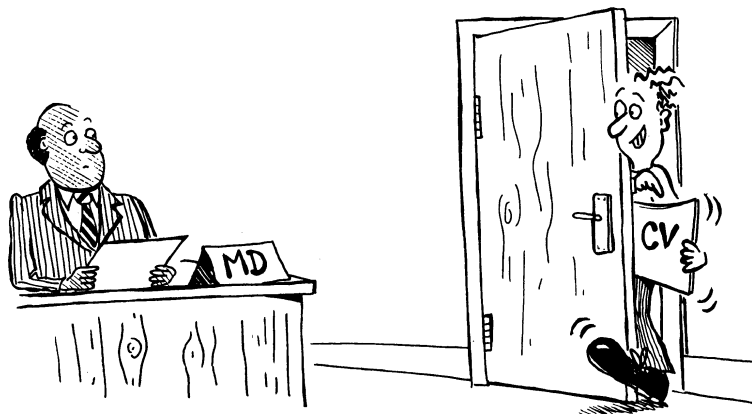
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Pick up three books on CVs and as likely as not each will advise you differently on tiny details – like whether to write a date as 3.4.98 or 3 April 1998. No wonder people sitting down to write CVs often don't know where to start!

This book is not going to insult your, or your employer's intelligence by getting pedantic about these minor details. Rather we are going to help you make the most of the important information that you are going to include – information about yourself.

### Some early thoughts

We have already said that CVs are the way to make that all-important 'good first impression'. They are the proverbial foot in the door that will help determine whether you actually get inside. You may not think that two sides of paper can affect your whole career – but they can!





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So we know why we are writing our CV, but it is worth asking ourselves why the recipient will want to read it.

Although many companies now rely on assessment centres and psychometric testing, the vast majority still require you to send in the humble CV.

### *Companies ask for CVs because:*

- Writing a CV gives you a chance to present yourself in your own way.
- It is a good indicator of how much pride you will take in your work.
- It removes the need to draw up time-consuming application forms.
- Employers can keep a CV on file and use it when further vacancies arise.

Now we have established why we are writing the CV, and why our prospective employer will want to receive it. It is now time to see how we can best make our CV work for us.

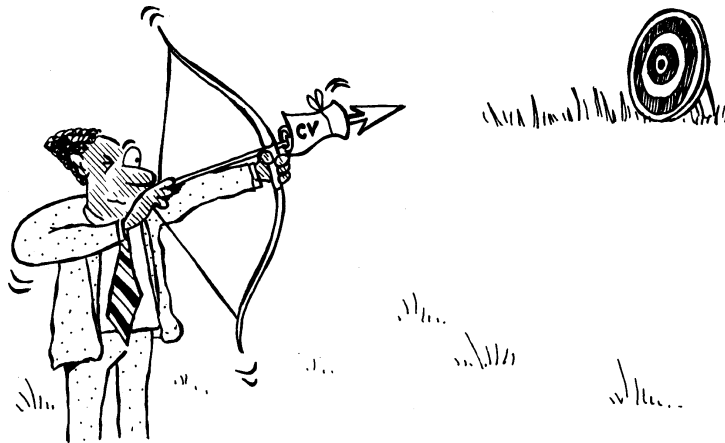
What are we really trying to achieve when we write our CV?

*They allow you to tailor your message* The important thing about a CV is to show that you are both **right** for the job and **different** enough to be worth interviewing. This is something that people often don't realise when they are writing their CV.



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On the one hand you need to demonstrate in your CV that you understand what the company or organisation is looking for and that you match up closely with the criteria they have set. If you are too wide of the mark you won't stand a chance. You also need to show where you are different or better than the competition – that you have the edge.



People often go wrong by going overboard on showing how different they are. This can lead to zany CVs that simply don't get past the door. So drawing up a CV is about balance and about making sure that you aim your arrows good and true.

*CVs are universal* You are never too old or too young to write a CV. Many people leaving school find writing a CV very difficult, because they find it hard to identify what it is about them that is marketable. Many older people who write a CV find it difficult to see the wood for the trees. They have done so many things in their working life that it can seem very difficult to get everything down in just a page



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or so. People who have had an unconventional life or career can find CVs difficult, because on the surface CVs seem only to cater for people who have walked a straight path.

You will see how to overcome all these anxieties as you work through the week. Put simply, a CV is for *everyone*.

*CVs are infinitely adaptable* You decide what to say and how. You don't just fill in the boxes on someone else's form. In fact CVs are as adaptable as you and your own circumstances need them to be.

One very important point is that the CV is not just your chance to talk about what you have done at work. It's also your chance to present other skills and experiences you have picked up during your life. Indeed in some circumstances you can show, through your CV, that your life experiences are more relevant and valuable than your work experiences. All areas of your life and work can be brought to bear – but sparingly and tightly focused on the job you are applying for. So a CV allows you to select the appropriate parts and leave out the interesting but irrelevant bits.

*Where are you starting from?*

Of course, where you are starting from and what you are aiming for will have an impact on your CV. So you may be any one of the following – and more than one at different times:

- You may be a school leaver with the problem that you have very similar qualifications and education to other people. The challenge in this case is to look at ways of adding value and showing how you are different, and how



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your experiences inside and outside of school actually mark you apart from your peers. So in your CV you might stress the clubs you have been involved in, for instance.

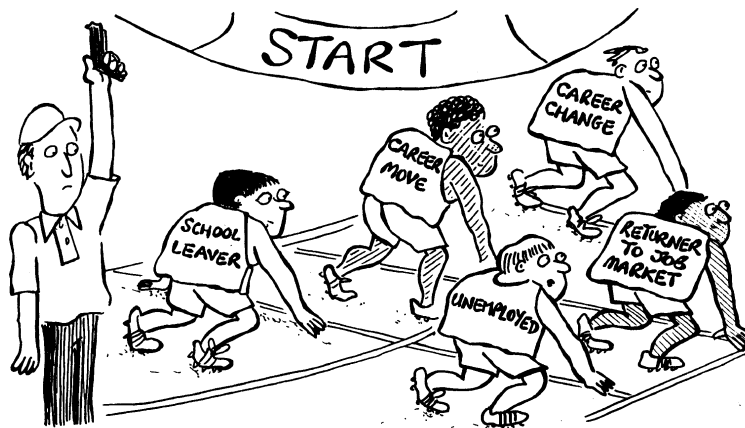
- You may be moving on from one job to another job in the field. In this case your CV is an opportunity for you to show that you have the capacity to move up a gear from where you are. So your CV may well be slanted towards presenting your experience and showing why you are capable of making the leap to the next level.
- You may be out of a job, having been made redundant. In this case your CV is your opportunity to get started again. This means you will be looking to show the ways in which your work experience is still valid in the workplace today and looking at any other attributes you have built up in your life that will help you get back into the job market. Take heart, there are routes back!
- You may have taken early retirement or be an older person. In this case you will probably have a whole host of life skills that you can draw on and experience that you will be able to present in your CV. It may also be an opportunity for you to show that you're still in touch with the job you are looking for, and to cash in on your most bankable asset – your experience.
- You may be a returner to the job market, having looked after or cared for relatives or brought up children. It's often tempting to think you are at a great disadvantage against all those people with a clear progression to show. However, your CV is an opportunity to stress all the valuable life skills that being a carer gives you, like budgeting, time management and negotiation with benefit agencies and



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schools. You may also have been involved in voluntary work, helping on the PTA or working in one of the care charities, for example.

- You may decide you want to make a career change. In this case your CV is your opportunity to identify transferable skills that will allow you to move between one career and another.



So, it's important to be aware of all these points before you start working on your CV. All too often people simply plunge in without any preparation or clear idea of the context a CV operates in. What you have done so far today will help you see how your CV is grounded within the general world of selection and recruitment.

*Ask yourself:*

- What do I want from a CV?  
Be clear about the specific results you want it to achieve.



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### See the wood and the trees

The first step when drawing up your CV is to make sure you see both the wood and the trees, the detail and the big picture. This is probably the most difficult thing about putting a CV together. All of us have had experiences, all of us have lived lives. The hard part is to give an overall impression and at the same time to pick out the important bits that might get us that vital interview.



For many people the effort and discipline needed to pick out the key points makes them put their CV to the very bottom of their list of priorities. The best way to counter this is to have a more structured approach to take the pain out of it. The first step is to come up with the answers to some very simple questions. Try these for starters:



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- What three things you have done are you most proud of?
- What three things are you good at?
- What three things are you not so good at?
- What are three personal and professional landmarks in your life?

*When you have written the answers to these big questions, think about other things that are important to you, like:*

- What kind of job do you really want?
- What kind of things wouldn't you do (for instance, relocate)?
- What kind of work environment do you like best?
- Are you the kind of person who likes responsibility?
- Where and why were you most productive over the last five or ten years?
- If you are meeting a total stranger, how would you describe yourself to them?

You can go on and make other questions up. The aim of this is to start unblocking your thinking and start seeing yourself in a positive way. It should also help you to start sifting through what is important to you and some of your achievements. Unfortunately, a lot of people find answering some of these questions extremely hard.

### *Be realistic*

It's a characteristic of many people that they hate boasting. They're much happier telling other people what they are bad at than what they feel they are really good at.



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### *Go away and boast*

A consultant running a seminar on stress management told the twenty participants to go off in pairs and to tell each other what they did better than most (or all) other people. They had to honestly believe their claims and be able to demonstrate their validity through some sort of evidence.

After five minutes, six of the pairs came back. They said they simply couldn't do it. It was embarrassing and wrong to say good things about themselves. However, as the consultant pointed out, if the individuals didn't explain their strengths to other people, who else would? Who else knew more about them than they did themselves?

In other words, being honest about yourself is not the same as being boastful. If a succession of bosses and people reporting to you have told you you're a brilliant communicator, why not share this with the world?.. Suitably phrased, of course.

The best CVs have only the most crucial and relevant details selected. By asking yourself some straightforward questions like these, and giving honest answers, you can:

- Start the process of sifting out what is likely to be important
- Clarify the kind of things you are likely to want on your CV
- Get down on paper some ideas about yourself.



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In many ways this should have helped you break the ice and start the process of more structurally putting a CV together.

### And finally today

Finally, today is the day to start digging out all the bits and pieces you are likely to need as you go about drawing up your CV during the week. This will help you to feel fully prepared when you come to put pen to paper.

So, get together a pack or pile of all the documents you think might be relevant. These could include:

- Certificates from your formal education
- Proof of training courses you have been on
- Articles you have written
- Addresses and phone numbers of your potential referees
- Any testimonials written by people about you.

Basically you need to get together anything you think might help you, or jog your memory, or that you might refer to in your CV.

### Summary

Today you have:

- Clarified what CVs do and why they matter to you
- Thought about yourself and your main achievements
- Got together the bits and pieces to help draw up your CV.