

Media Article



Vocational Guidance Services

THE PERFECT CV

After deciding where next in your career, to get there you will need a perfect CV. Not to stress you or anything, but this is a rather important document. You need to ensure the CV remains in the centre of the recruiting managers' desk, rather than in the bin. If the CV ends up in the bin, so will your career – it is that important. Your CV is like your own personal advert, and if done well you can have employers flocking to your door.

There are at least 101 books on the market on how to put together your CV, but if you read them all by the time your CV is ready you'll be retirement age. So I'm here today with some hard and fast rules.

Length: it is not an urban myth that your CV should be no longer than 4 typed pages: it is an absolute must. In time conscious America, a one page resume is the norm, so you're lucky you get four! Make every word count, cut out all repetition of duties between positions and irrelevancies such as height, weight, religion, primary school and don't bother including the fact that you won the school cooking competition. I don't care if you are a senior manager with 20 years' experience – keep it to 4 pages.

Structure: Make sure the CV is professionally typed, formatted (please use spell check) and read at least three times by two different people before being sent out. Put your most recent work experience first, because hopefully (unless your career is going backwards) that will be your most impressive experience. Use bullet points, bolding, underlining and indentations to break down boring chunks of text and organise information. Never let a sentence run for more than 2 lines.

Content: Don't just list the responsibilities on your job description – ensure you mention achievements that show you've made a positive impact on the companies you have worked for. If you think that using lots of technical jargon and annocronims will impress the reader – you are wrong; it will probably just confuse them and make them think you are a 'know-it-all'. Don't forget to include skills that win points with employers – like languages and IT.

Contacts: We have CVs of managers on database earning half a million shillings a month, who have forgotten to include their own telephone or email contacts! This is like sending out invitations to a party but not telling us where to go. Two telephone, a mobile and email contacts are essential. If we want to contact you it most likely will be urgently, so also have a regularly updated CV on disk that you can email us TODAY.

References: It is no good listing relatives, rabbits and friends as references (to borrow a phrase from Winnie the pooh), we'll need three references from people more senior to you who you have worked with; please don't forget to include their telephone (preferably mobile) contacts! It is a total waste of your time, money and paper for you to send a whole wad of copied references and certificates. These will be binned and originals asked for only if/when you reach interview stage. When emailing never send scanned documents. Along the same lines, it is better not to bind CVs as this makes them harder to file and more likely to get lost.

'I am perfect' - try to totally avoid using the word 'I' in your CV, and do not start every sentence of your cover letter with 'I' either. Too much use of that word makes a candidate sound egotistical and self-centred.

Cover letters – Invest in some nice writing paper and a fountain pen if you want to hand write your cover letters (typed is fine, too). Learn how to write in straight lines across the page! Make sure you refer to how your particular skills and experience is spot on for the position in question. By the way, all cover letters written on torn out exercise book pages immediately end up in the bin.

Once your CV is all ready to go, don't just send it off and cross your fingers. Next week we'll discuss how to target your job hunt.

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