

The 15 most common CV writing mistakes - and how to avoid them

The same common CV mistakes crop up time and time again. Too many jobseekers miss out on their dream job because of a small number of easily avoided blunders.

1. Inclusion of photographs

People often include photos of themselves on their CV. Don't! Unless you are applying to be a model or wish to work as an actor/actress then including a photo with/on your CV is definitely not recommended - at least not within the UK.

2. Inappropriate heading

Your CV should be headed with your name - and just your name - boldly and clearly - before any other details - contact details, etc. They should no longer be headed 'Curriculum Vitae' or 'CV'. It's very old-fashioned.

3. Missing or inappropriate email addresses

Whilst having no email address at all on your CV is clearly a problem, it's not something I see very often. Far more common is the use of fun or jokey email addresses. Whilst these may be fine for corresponding with friends and family, employers will probably regard more 'serious' email addresses as simply more professional.

4. Superfluous personal details at the top of the CV

My clients often feel that it is compulsory to include details such as their marital status, nationality, number (and ages) of children/dependants, etc. Whilst, yes, it certainly used to be the norm to include this sort of information on a CV, it is now increasingly rare, given modern anti-discrimination legislation, to find these sorts of details on a CV. They simply aren't relevant.

5. Lack of clear section headings/separation of sections

It is vitally important for your CV to be easy for the reader to scan quickly and, to this end, clear section headings and separation of sections is essential. I often recommend the use of lines or other graphic devices in this respect, although there are other ways of achieving a clearer separation.

6. Writing in the first person

The words 'I' and 'me' are often used repeatedly in homemade CVs. CVs should be written exclusively in the third person. It might seem unnatural to write a document about yourself and yet never use either 'I' or 'me' but recruitment experts conclusively agree that this is the best way to do it. Don't give your reader I-strain!

7. Lack of proper Professional Profile

A Professional Profile is a brief statement at the very beginning of a CV which, in the space of a few short lines, conveys to the reader an overall impression of your key personal and professional characteristics. It's essentially an introduction and should give the reader an overview before they read on in further detail.

8. Inappropriate section order

It's extremely important to choose an appropriate order for the various sections of your CV. For example, the decision whether to put your Education & Qualifications before or after your Career History is critical. It all depends on what is your greater selling point.

9. No bullet pointing

In today's fast-paced world, recruiters no longer have the time to read large, solid blocks of prose. They need to extract the information they need - and they need to do it fast. Long paragraphs of prose are tiresome for a recruiter to read right through and, as a result, many simply won't bother.

And this is where bullet pointing comes in...

10. Reverse chronological order not used

It is a standard convention on CVs to use reverse chronological order, i.e. to present your most recent information first, followed by older - and consequently less relevant - information. And I would strongly suggest you make sure your CV conforms to this.

11. Excessive details of interests

You should aim to keep your interests section brief. As with every other aspect of your CV, do include what you feel will count in your favour - but be selective about it. Choose carefully. You may indeed have a passion for model railways - but do you really want the recruiter to know that?!

12. Date of Birth included

I often get asked whether or not you should include your date of birth (or age) on a CV. No, you shouldn't. Not since the introduction of The Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006.

13. Referees included

Details of referees generally shouldn't be included on your CV. They're a waste of valuable space! They clutter it up and, more importantly, you will find that your referees get pestered unnecessarily by time wasters. By the time they have handled their umpteenth enquiry of the day, they are a lot less likely to say nice things about you!

14. Spelling, Grammar & Typos

It is impossible to stress enough how important this issue is. Spelling and grammatical errors are amongst the most irritating errors a recruiter sees, amongst the most damaging errors you can make - and are also amongst the most easily avoided. The answer is to check, check and check again - and then have someone else check for good measure!

15. Length

This is one of the most common problems I see when people prepare their own CVs - they're quite simply too long. I have seen CVs over 30 pages long (true!) with photocopies of all their certificates on top of that. This is not an autobiography you're writing. It's a curriculum vitae. It's a lot shorter!