

HOW TO WRITE A SUCCESSFUL CV

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From vacation placements, to the preregistration year and beyond, you will need to have a well organised, up-to-date CV. It is best to prepare your CV early, so that the information is readily available to apply for jobs in response to advertisements, or to apply "on spec" to companies about possible employment opportunities.

The abbreviation "CV" stands for the Latin term "curriculum vitae" — course of life. It is also known as a résumé and is a document containing a summary of relevant experience and education. Its purpose is to obtain an interview for you by convincing the interviewer that your experience and skills would make you perfect for the job.

There are hundreds of books and millions of web pages giving advice on CV writing, much of it with conflicting information. Here are the general guidelines for writing a professional pharmacy related CV and the pitfalls to avoid.

Length

For summer vacation work limit the length of your CV to one side of A4 paper. This length, or a little longer, should also be adequate when applying for preregistration trainee positions. By the time you apply for your first job as a qualified pharmacist you should have enough experience and skills to fill two sides of A4.

Paper

Use white paper of high quality and ensure you use a matching envelope. Avoid any paper that is fancy, coloured or water-marked — it is just not professional.

Layout

Although it may be tempting to go for an unusual type face or layout this should be avoided. Remember that your CV may need to be faxed several times when received by your prospective employer. Your CV will lose its quality with each transmission so keep it simple and uncluttered. Stick to a professional, scientific font (Arial size 10 is a good choice) and do not use any shading or background markings to emphasise headings. Employers like "thinking space", this is white space around the text to make notes on. So, as a general rule, leave about an inch of space around the text.

Structure

First, never write "CV" or "curriculum vitae" at the top of the page — the nature of the document is self-evident.

Personal details Start with your name, address, e-mail address and phone numbers (home, work, mobile). Once you have graduated you may include "MPharm" after your name, and "MRPharmS" after qualifying. If you have not told your current employer that you are leaving then do not give your work phone number. Generally, your date of birth should be included, although you can leave it off if you wish. It is up to you whether you wish to declare your marital status.

Employment This is the most important part of your CV. Most employers rate experience over academic performance. Even if you have not got much, or even any, relevant employment yet, list all of the jobs you have had. Working part-time in a bar or at a call centre shows that you have good interpersonal and communication

skills — an essential part of any pharmacist's job. Employers are looking for someone who is hardworking, reliable and friendly; almost any job could be used to show you have these skills. If you have not got any work experience yet then now is the time to start. Have a look at doing some voluntary work (see www.do-it.org.uk). All kinds of relevant experiences can be gained from this, for just a few hours each week.

Present your employment in reverse chronological order. Make sure all the employment dates match up, and that there are no unexplainable gaps. Highlight your main responsibilities and achievements in your previous jobs, including facts and figures if possible. Do not go into too much detail; this can be discussed further at your interview.

Do remember to be positive; present yourself in a good light and emphasise your capabilities and achievements. State achievements with positive and active words, eg, "achieved", "gained", "managed", "responsible for". Make sure your strongest achievement is at the top of each employment.

It is this part of the CV which you will need to adapt to meet the specific job requirements. Study the job description carefully, research the company and give specific examples of your work that match each criterion on the job description.

Education As with employment, present this section in reverse chronological order. State your degree, its class and whether it was with honours. State all "A"-level subjects or Highers and grades obtained. GCSEs or SQAs and results can be included if they are relevant to the job.