



# CV Hints and Tips

## For Students and Graduates or Early Careers



*Your complete guide to writing a graduate CV that gets noticed,  
passes ATS filters, and gives employers a reason to call you.*

## What Is a CV?

A CV is your personal introduction to a potential employer. It summarises your education, skills, experience, and achievements, and its job is simple: to give the employer enough reason to invite you for an interview.

For students and graduates, a CV is almost always the first thing a recruiter sees. On average, a recruiter will scan it for around six seconds before deciding whether to read further. That means every section needs to work hard, and nothing should be on there without a reason.

**Good to know:** Your CV is not a record of everything you have ever done. It is a targeted document tailored to a specific role. Treat it like a marketing brochure for your skills and experience, and adapt it for every application.

## Format and Layout

- Maximum two sides of A4 with clear, informative content throughout.
- Use a single clean font throughout. Arial, Calibri, or Times New Roman are recommended at size 10 to 12.
- Use bullet points and clear section headings to make it easy to scan.
- No photo, no borders, and no graphics. These add nothing and can cause problems with ATS software.
- Save as a PDF unless the employer specifically asks for a Word document. Name your file professionally: FirstName-LastName-CV.pdf.
- Do not print double sided if submitting in person. Present it unfolded in a clean envelope or plastic folder.



**Good to know:** Many large employers use Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS) to automatically screen CVs before a human reads them. A clean, simple layout with no tables, columns, or text boxes gives your CV the best chance of being read correctly. See the ATS section below for more detail.

# What to Include: Section by Section

## Personal Details

- Use your first (given) name and your surname (family name) at the top, used as the document title. There is no need to title the document CV or Curriculum Vitae.
- Phone number and professional email address. Avoid informal email addresses.
- Location: your city or town is enough. You do not need to include your full address.
- If you have both a term-time and home address, include both with dates for each.
- LinkedIn profile URL if your profile is complete and up to date.
- There is no need to include your date of birth, photo, nationality, or marital status.

## Personal Statement

A personal statement sits at the top of your CV below your contact details. It should be three to five focused sentences covering who you are, what you bring, and what you are looking for.

Tailor it to every role. A personal statement that could belong to any applicant will not help you stand out from any of them.

**Example:** A final-year Marketing student at Nottingham Trent University, graduating this summer with a predicted 2:1. Two years of experience managing social media for the university netball team, including growing their following by **35%**. Looking to apply analytical and creative skills in a graduate marketing role with a data-led agency.

## Education

- List in reverse chronological order, starting with your most recent or current qualification.
- Include university name, degree title, grade achieved or predicted, and graduation dates.
- Include relevant modules, dissertation topic, or specific projects if directly relevant to the role.
- For A Levels, include grades and subjects. For GCSEs, a summary is sufficient once you have a degree, for example: nine GCSEs including Maths and English at grades equivalent A to C.
- There is no need to list every GCSE subject individually, and no need to include primary school.



## Work Experience

List all roles in reverse chronological order, including the job title, employer name, location, and dates. Then use bullet points to describe what you did and, more importantly, what you achieved.

Use action verbs to open each bullet point: led, developed, created, managed, delivered, increased, coordinated, organised. Avoid vague phrases like responsible for or involved in.

Use numbers where you can. Numbers make achievements specific and credible.

**Example:** Grew the team's social media following by 35% over six months by introducing a consistent content schedule and running joint campaigns with three other university societies.

Include placements, internships, volunteering, university society roles, and committee positions. If your experience is not directly related to the role, focus on the transferable skills it demonstrates. Customer service, teamwork, time management, and problem-solving are valued in every sector.

## Skills

Include both technical skills and transferable skills relevant to the role. Technical skills might include software packages, programming languages, or platforms. Only list skills you genuinely have. If it is on your CV, an employer may ask you to demonstrate it at interview.

## Interests and Achievements

Only include this section if it adds something meaningful. Interests that demonstrate relevant skills, initiative, or character are worth including. Generic entries such as socialising or watching films are not.

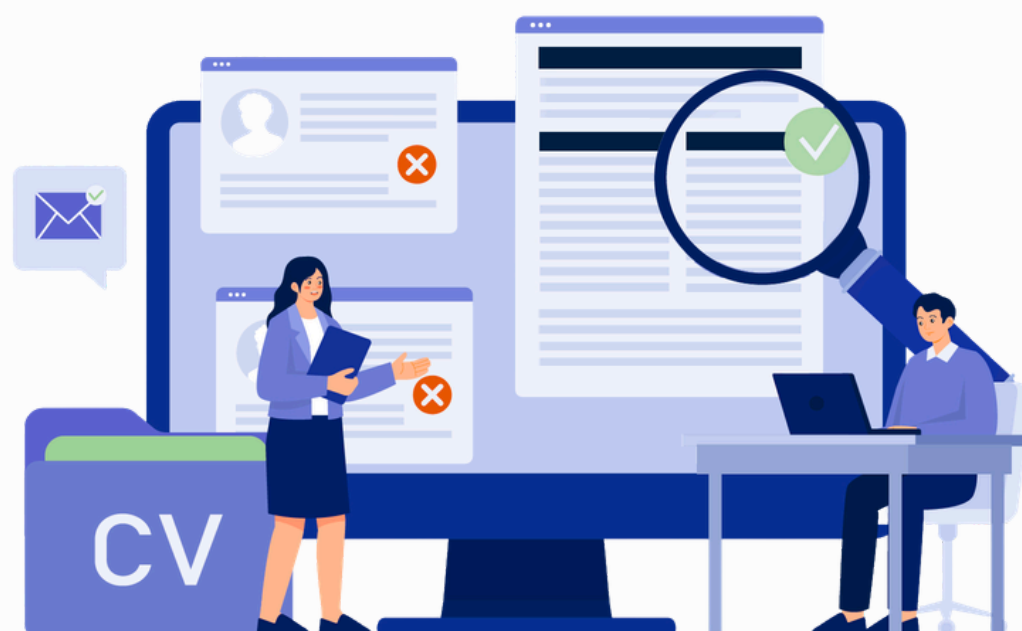
- Good examples: running a university society, writing a blog, volunteering, competing in sport at a high level, achieving an award or scholarship.
- If you cannot link an interest to the role or to a relevant skill, leave it out.

## References

You do not need to include references on your CV at this stage. References available on request is sufficient. Have one academic reference and one from a previous employer ready to provide when asked.

## What to Do and What to Avoid

Do	Avoid
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tailor your CV to every role you apply for</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using generic phrases like team player without evidence</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use specific numbers and outcomes to back up your claims</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Repeating the same content across multiple roles</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Start bullet points with strong action verbs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Including a photo, date of birth, or full address</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mirror language from the job description</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using tables, columns, or graphics that confuse ATS software</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep formatting clean, consistent, and easy to scan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Going over two pages</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proofread carefully and asking someone else to check it</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Submitting the same version to every employer</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include university projects, society roles, and volunteering</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leaving gaps of more than three months unexplained</li> </ul>



## Understanding ATS: How Your CV Gets Screened

Most large graduate employers use Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS) to screen applications automatically before a human ever reads them. The system scans your CV for keywords that match the job description. If your language does not reflect what the employer is asking for, your application may be filtered out regardless of how strong your experience is.

This is one of the most common reasons why well-qualified students and graduates do not hear back from applications. Understanding how ATS works gives you a straightforward advantage.

### How to Make Sure Your CV Gets Through

- Read the job description carefully and note the specific skills, qualifications, and phrases the employer uses. These are the terms the ATS is scanning for.
- Mirror that language in your personal statement, skills section, and work experience bullet points.
- Use standard section headings: Education, Work Experience, Skills. Unusual or creative headings may confuse the system.
- Avoid tables, text boxes, columns, and graphics in the main body of your CV. ATS software often cannot read these and may miss important information.
- Spell out acronyms at least once so the system recognises them.
- Save in the right format. Most ATS tools handle clean Word documents and simple PDFs well. Always check the application instructions.

## Using AI to Help Write Your CV

AI tools can be a useful starting point, particularly for students and graduates writing their first CV. But there is an important difference between using AI to help you and letting it write your CV for you.

### Where AI Can Help

- Getting started when you are unsure how to structure a section or phrase an achievement.
- Suggesting stronger action verbs or more impactful ways to describe your experience.
- Checking grammar, spelling, and sentence clarity before you submit.
- Helping you identify which of your experiences are most relevant to a specific role.

### Where AI Falls Short

- AI does not know your actual grades, projects, roles, or achievements. Vague input produces generic output.
- AI-generated CVs often read as polished but impersonal. Recruiters are increasingly good at spotting them.
- A CV that could belong to anyone will not stand out to anyone.

**Our advice:** Use AI to improve what you have written, not to replace the thinking. Before you submit, ask yourself: does every line on this CV accurately reflect something I have genuinely done?

## Before You Send: CV Checklist

### Graduate and Student CV Checklist

- ✔ Contact details are correct and your email address is professional
- ✔ Personal statement is tailored to this specific role and employer
- ✔ Education is listed in reverse chronological order with grades included
- ✔ Work experience uses action verbs and includes specific outcomes where possible
- ✔ Skills section reflects the language used in the job description
- ✔ No photo, date of birth, full address, or irrelevant personal information
- ✔ Formatting is clean and consistent with no tables or columns
- ✔ No longer than two pages
- ✔ Saved as a PDF with a professional file name
- ✔ Proofread for spelling and grammar errors
- ✔ A second person has read it and given feedback
- ✔ Tailored to this specific role, not submitted as a generic version

**Need help with your graduate  
job search?**



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