



CV PREPARATION

Your CV is your primary selling tool and it is unique to you, your skills and your experience. A well-presented CV can secure you an interview by catching the eye of an employer. It can also help you focus on the key points that you need to expand upon during an interview and it will remind the interviewer about you once the interview is over.

Presentation & Formatting

The presentation and formatting of a CV is incredibly important.

- Always print your CV in black ink on good quality white paper.
- Do **NOT** include a photo unless specifically requested.
- Use a common typeface and lay your CV out neatly – all headings the same font and size.
- Use bullet points, be concise and avoid lengthy essays.
- Ensure that your contact details can be clearly found at the top of your CV.
- Your CV should not be longer than 2-3 pages. If you are at a very senior level, then 4-5 pages should be the maximum length.

Spelling & Grammar

Always check for typos and grammatical errors – these could indicate carelessness and lack of attention to detail on your part.

Never just rely on your computer's spell checker – you may be using the correct spelling of the word but it could be wrong in context, eg: "their" for "there" or "martial status" instead of "marital status".

It can be a good idea to ask someone who has a keen eye for grammar and spelling to look over your CV – common errors would include "Its" when it should be "It's". Always capitalise "I" when you are describing something that you are or do eg: "I am an IT professional".



Gaps & Incorrect Dates

Employers do not like to see unexplained time gaps or incorrect dates. These raise questions in their minds which if you are lucky, they may ask you to explain in interview but more often than not, they will dismiss the CV before short-listing for interview.

Always ensure that you have not duplicated or entered incorrect dates by writing a timeline check beside each job so that you are instantly aware of any gaps and can correct them

If you have been travelling, explain that in your CV, eg. 2001 – 2002 “Year spent travelling in Australia”. This shows that you have life experience and also explains the gap in your CV.

Structure

The most common question consultants are asked is about the structure of a CV and what should be included. We would always recommend the following:

Personal details / contact details. This should be first in any CV and clearly visible. Remember to keep all email addresses professional and leave any nicknames to a personal email address.

Academic achievements – Put this in reverse chronological order with your most recent qualifications first. Always make sure that these are kept up-to-date. List your professional memberships.

Career history – This will be in the main body of your CV and should be presented in reverse chronological order with your most recent employer first. List your day-to-day duties a good tip is to keep a portfolio of job specifications that you see advertised and match your duties up, using the same terminology where possible. *Just make sure that you understand all the terminology you are using in case you get asked about it in interview.*

Extra achievements – If you have been nominated for an award or you have won an award, mention it in your CV. However do ensure that it is relevant. *Any mention of awards or achievements show employers that you are ambitious and self-motivated.*

References – Do not actually include the reference itself, merely the referee’s name, their professional title, the company and a contact number. Make sure that you contact them beforehand for their permission. If you are uncomfortable doing this, simply state that “references are available upon request”.



Interests & Hobbies

Hobbies and interests should be nearly the last item on your CV. There is no real necessity to include them but employers do like to see a well-rounded individual and hobbies help create that perception.

INTERVIEW PREPARATION

There are many types of interviews, from the free flowing to the formal, but one that you are likely to come up against at some point is the competency-based interview.

They're designed to make the job application process as objective as possible, removing any conscious or subconscious bias by the interviewer by asking each candidate the same questions. Some people feel this type of interview is more stilted – there can be less opportunity to build rapport. However, they are very common, especially in large organisations and the public sector, so it's worth refining your technique.

The questions will be driven by a competency framework that's required for the job. For example, a marketing executive may require problem-solving skills, or a job in customer services may require conflict management skills.

The interview questions tend to start with a variation of, "Tell me about a time when..." This may sound simple but, in the heat of the interview, it's easy to give an unstructured answer, miss out key details, or let the story peter to a halt.

One way of avoiding this is by using the Star acronym to structure your response. Here are two examples of how to implement the technique:

A candidate for a marketing executive role might be asked: "Tell me about a time that you solved a problem to a tight timescale." Here's how you could structure your response:

- **Situation** – set the context for your story. For example, "We were due to be delivering a presentation to a group of 30 interested industry players on our new product and the guy due to deliver it, got stuck on a train from Dublin"
- **Task** – what was required of you. For example, "It was my responsibility to find an alternative so it didn't reflect badly on the company and we didn't waste the opportunity."



- **Activity** – what you actually did. For example, "I spoke to the event organisers to find out if they could change the running order. They agreed so we bought ourselves some time. I contacted another member of the team, who at a push could step in. She agreed to drop what she was doing and head to the event."

- **Result** – how well the situation played out. For example, "Our guy didn't make the meeting on time but we explained the problem to the delegates and the alternative presentation went well – a bit rough around the edges but it was warmly received. Our guy managed to get there for the last 15 minutes to answer questions. As a result we gained some good contacts, at least two of which we converted into paying clients."

There are a few things to note with this response: it's important to speak in specific rather than general terms and quantify your success. In this example, we mentioned 30 delegates, and quantified two contacts converted to clients. From a listener's perspective, this makes the story more interesting and they are more able to gauge your success. Undefined successes can make the answer less feel less convincing. Secondly, as there are likely to be many questions and interviewers have short attention spans, it's important to keep your answers concise: convey the maximum achievement in the minimum time. Finally, it's important to finish on a positive note so the overall impression is strong.

In a second example, a candidate for a customer services role is asked: "Describe a situation when you had to deliver excellent customer service following a complaint"

- **Situation**: "A customer rang up complaining that they'd waited more than two weeks for a reply from our sales team regarding a product query."

- **Task**: "I needed to address the client's immediate query and find out what went wrong in the normal process."

- **Activity**: "I apologised, got the details and passed them to our head salesperson, who contacted the client within the hour. I investigated why the query hadn't been answered. I discovered that it was a combination of a wrong mobile number and a generic email address that wasn't being checked. I let the client know and we offered a goodwill discount on her next order."

- **Result**: "The client not only continued to order from us but posted a positive customer service tweet."



Used at its best, the Star structure is invisible to the listener and it simply comes across as a well-articulated example. Create a bank of answers in this format in advance, so don't struggle to do it on the day and can make it appear as seamless as possible

ARCON'S TOP 10 INTERVIEW CHECKLIST

1. **Have you researched the company?**
2. **Have you read the job specification properly?**
3. **Have you gone over your CV with this research in mind to identify the most relevant points / experience?**
4. **Have you prepared yourself for potential questions based on the qualities desired outlined in the job spec?** e.g. if the job spec states that working to tight time frames is essential, have you prepared an example such as that outlined above using the STAR technique?
5. **Do you know exactly where the interview is taking place and have you allowed for enough time to get there?**
6. **Are you dressed professionally and appropriately?** Feel free to ask for advice on this from your Arcon Recruitment Consultant
7. **Are you mentally prepared?** Irrespective of the position on offer, employers will always want to see the below qualities demonstrated:
Enthusiasm - don't be afraid to show you want the job!
Positive attitude – don't forget to smile and maintain regular eye contact basic
Manners -. Please and thank you are always appreciated
Good Communication – one word answers are always a bad idea.
8. **Do you have a couple of intelligent questions prepared?** Steer away from asking about holidays and sick leave at this point!
9. **Do you have a copy of your CV to bring with you?** Although the interviewer has already viewed your CV it is useful to bring along a copy just in case. This demonstrates excellent preparation on your part!
10. **Do you know how to create a good “final impression”?** This is just as important as the often discussed “first impression”. Make sure you thank the interviewers for their time, firm handshake and state that you are looking forward to hearing from them in due course. It is often a good idea to follow up the following day with an email thanking them for taking the time to interview you and re-iterating your interest in the position.