

CV WRITING TIPS FOR POSITIONS IN THE FINANCIAL SECTOR (BUSINESS, CONSULTING, FINANCE, ENERGY, AND BANKING)

PURPOSE

A CV describes who you are, where you have been, and where you are headed. When composed thoughtfully and with attention to detail, it becomes an effective marketing tool that presents you in the best possible light to potential employers. The skills and qualities you include in your CV should demonstrate that you are an appropriate candidate for a position and help you secure an interview.

The following guide provides information designed to help you construct an effective CV for the private sector, including business, consulting, finance, energy, and banking positions. The style, format and content suggestions are based on feedback from employers in those fields. At the end of the guide is a sample CV that illustrates the tips in each category.

FORMAT

Page Size

Use only A4 letter size.

Length

Keep your CV to one page unless you are applying to a senior level position, or you have 5+ years of full-time experience in the field to which you are applying. When you apply to a specific job you may have to modify your CV to meet the employer's requirements.

Margins

Margins should be between .5" – 1" around the entire document. Be sure to maintain enough white space so that the CV doesn't look crowded, while including sufficient detail about your skills and achievements.

Line Spacing

Spacing between lines should be consistent throughout the document and look balanced.

Font

Use a simple font such as Times New Roman, and keep it consistent throughout the CV. Text should be between 10 and 12-point type, with the exception of your name, which might be slightly larger, and your contact information, which might be slightly smaller than the rest of the document. Keep things simple; don't overdo bold or italic type and avoid using excessive indentations (bullets within bullets). All text should be left justified.

Page Header

This is where your name and contact information go and it is important that it is clear and easy to read. A common format for the header is as follows: Name centered at the top of the page; on the line below, also centered, put a local mailing address, followed by email and phone, each separated by a simple bullet or symbol. The whole header should be in bold, followed by a single line that extends between the two side margins.

Section Headers

Left justify and bold each section heading. Use capital letters and do not underline. The three most common section headings are **EDUCATION**, **EXPERIENCE**, and **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**, in that order. If you are applying for a specific job, you may have to tailor your section headers.

Employer/School Names

Use consistent formatting within each section. For employers, put the name of the employer in bold, followed by your title in bold and italicized on the next line.

Locations

Locations should be listed to the right of employer/school names.

Dates

Dates should be listed to the left of employer/school names. Use a consistent format within each section. For education, dates should be the degree or certificate month and year of completion (ex. May 2011). For experience, dates should be the time you spent in the position listed, generally only month and year (ex. May 2005 – June 2008).

Bullets

Use basic round bullet points. Left align. Use consistent spacing. Limit bullets to no more than five per category/position. Be consistent throughout document.

Punctuation

Be consistent throughout the document. Bullet points do not need periods at the end unless they include multiple sentences.

CONTENT

Education

- List in reverse chronological order. Where you received a degree, include the month and year of completion.
- List your concentration.
- List relevant coursework. Not every employer is familiar with SIPA curriculum. It can help to include one or two lines of relevant coursework. Include advanced level classes or courses that equip you with key skills that are not evident in the rest of your CV.
- Unless you are applying for a competitive program, it is not always necessary to include your GPA. We recommend including a GPA of 3.7 or above.

Experience

- A CV should not sound like a job description. Avoid phrases such as “responsible for,” or “duties included.”
- Use action verbs and target appropriate key-words so that hiring managers don’t have to guess about your experience and qualifications.
- Provide brief descriptions of previous employers that are lesser known. This usually consists of a one-sentence description in italics underneath the company’s name.
- Use bullet points (limit of 5) to make your CV easier to read. Prioritize your experience by listing most relevant accomplishments or skills first.
- Bullets should be written in the SAR format:
 - Address the **Situation**
 - Identify the **Action(s)** you took
 - Show the **Results** that were achieved (How did your efforts add value to the organization?)
- Show **quantifiable** results of your work. Don’t generalize; be specific. See examples below:
 - Think Money* – Controlled a \$7.9 million annual operating budget
 - Think Time* – Spearheaded costs-reduction initiatives that reduced overtime by 36%

Think Amounts – Managed a staff of 59 through five supervisors. Results included a 35% increase in daily productivity and a 69% increase in customer satisfaction

- Only include relevant experience. You don't always have to list all past employment. If positions held many years ago aren't relevant to your current career path, exclude or briefly summarize them at the end. If you are changing careers make your experience relevant by highlighting transferable skills.
- Emphasize what distinguishes your degree from an MBA. Skills such as foreign languages and international experience in the context of a global economy are what make a SIPA graduate stand out from the Business School graduate. Make sure these parts of your CV are noticeable.
- Use the position description as your guide. Make sure your CV speaks to that position. You may have to create different CVs for different positions.
- Avoid repeating yourself.
- Be careful about making grand claims such as meeting "record levels" at previous positions. Make sure you can support all claims with concrete evidence.

Additional Information

- Include professional associations or licenses, language fluency, computer skills, volunteer activities, personal interests, and travel.
- Only include information relevant to your target audience.
- The interests section can be a good conversation starter, but should be kept to one or two lines. Be specific; don't simply list "hiking," but give the name of the trail that you last hiked.
- For languages, include level of proficiency, such as *native, fluent, semi-fluent, conversant, advanced proficiency*.
- For skills, list those that would be of interest to the employer, and include your proficiency level. If a computer application is of particular interest to the employer, don't simply list it, but integrate it into your accomplishments, giving an example of how you have used it in the past.

LANGUAGE

Avoid using vague or generic language

Describe specifically what your role was and what you accomplished in your previous positions. Avoid using words such as *undertook, assisted or initiated*. Never use *helped*. Verbs such as *researched, analyzed or liaised* must be supported with specific and concrete examples. A complete list of action verbs is located in the OCS Professional Development Guide and on the OCS CV Writing - General Tips fact sheet.

Use industry specific keywords

Some employers will expect certain phrases to appear in a candidate's CV; however, you should make sure not to go overboard.

Use language that is appropriate for the type of position you're seeking

When you use technical jargon, make sure that the person reading your CV knows what you are talking about. If not, rephrase your experience in words that the employer will understand.

SELL YOURSELF

People talk about features vs. benefits

A CV is a personal sales and marketing tool that is designed to attract and impress employers. When marketing yourself, sell the strengths and benefits you bring to the table. Don't simply list your responsibilities, but give examples of your achievements. Your CV's job is to get you an interview.

Here are some examples of selling yourself:

Poor

Managed sales regions throughout the US with 82 sales associates.

Good

Independently planned and directed a team of 82 sales associates marketing sophisticated technology products throughout the northeastern US.

Poor

Met all company sales goals and profit objectives.

Good

Launched a series of customer-driven marketing programs to expand market penetration and increase key account base.

Closed 2008 at 182% of revenue goal and 143% of profit objective.

Poor

Managed all financial, accounting, budgeting, MIS and administrative functions.

Good

Served as Chief Financial Officer with full responsibility for the strategic planning, development and leadership of the entire corporate finance organization for this \$280 million consumer products manufacturer. Directed financial planning and analysis, accounting, tax, treasury, budgeting, MIS and administrative functions through a 12-person management team.

Poor

Updated computer technology.

Good

Launched the introduction of PC-based client server technology to expand MIS operations throughout the finance function. Resulted in a measurable improvement in data accuracy and

LAST STEPS:

Proofread

Go over your CV repeatedly for typographical and grammatical errors. Then ask three to five others to review it, paying attention to your terminology and tone. An imperfect document isn't acceptable. If you are not a native English speaker, have it reviewed by someone who is.

Get an insider's opinion

Have your CV reviewed by someone in the field you are entering, either by an acquaintance or during an informational interview. An insider will know how your CV will fare in a highly competitive market.

Submit

Send the final version of your CV to an employer. You may want to send the document as a PDF file to avoid any format changes that might occur during sending.

Citations: Barnet Sherman, SIPA MPA '82

"The Six Cardinal Rules of CV Writing" By Wendy S. Enelow

<http://www.careerjournal.com/jobhunting/CVs/20010104-enelow.html>

Columbia University/SIPA – Office of Career Services

www.sipa.columbia.edu/ocs