

CV Checklist

Note: all advice is given from the Dutch perspective. Other practices might be in use in different countries.

The CV has only one purpose: to be invited for an interview. Your CV should therefore immediately have the reader thinking: "We need to see this person!". Selectors, be they recruiters, managers or HR staff, receive many CVs. Therefore, not every reader has the luxury of reading your CV at length. Therefore, aim your CV at hasty readers (then it is all uphill from there if your entire CV is read anyway).

In general

- Keep your CV to two sides (A4) at most. Keep in mind that the first page is determinative. You can play with the order of your CV to take advantage of this.
- Make rows instead of long pieces of text. Rows are easier to process. Eye-tracking research has shown that text at the bottom and back of bulleted rows is read best. See example below. Use this cleverly!
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- Use keywords from the job texts. This works well for robot selection and for recognition by recruiters.
- Use job titles that are recognisable to the reader. A management assistant is the same as an executive secretary - choose the title that best suits the new position you are applying for, regardless of the official name your title had.

Step 1 – The first draft

Standard items on a CV are:

- Personal details
 - First and surname (all of your official names are unnecessary)
 - Address (just the city is enough)
 - Telephone number
 - Email address
 - Birthday and place of birth (+ nationality) (all of these are optional – they don't say anything about your professional capabilities!)
 - Driving licence (if relevant)
 - URL LinkedIn-profile (optional)
 - N.B. The words 'name', 'address', etc. (e.g. 'Name: John Smith') are unnecessary, leave those out (just 'John Smith' will suffice - every reader will then understand that that is your name).
- Education (name of the programme – institution – place of institution) (listed in reverse chronological order). For the most relevant programme(s), indicate:
 - Specialization

- Relevant courses, electives or minor
- Graduation/thesis topic
- Grades (usually only mentioned if >8, otherwise do not mention)
- Other relevant notes (f.i. if your thesis was nominated for/won an award)
- Work experience (and/or internships) (position title – name employer (and department) – place) (listed in reverse chronological order)
 - Indicate concisely and concretely what the tasks or activities were. A good way to do this can be by listing three tasks for every position, f.i. ‘coordinating team – creating synergies with other projects – contact with stakeholders’
 - List explicit results you achieved, not just what you are responsible for. F.i. for ‘creating synergies with other projects’ – ‘merged three projects which increased the reach of the projects while simultaneously lowering monetary and personnel investments’. Use numbers and percentages!
 - Write down the full name of the employer. Avoid using abbreviations and jargon. Include logo’s! The brain processes images 60.000 times faster than text.
 - Give context on the company – how many people work there, what is the revenue of the company, what is the (inter)national position in their specific market, etc.
 - Mention gaps in your CV concisely and positively, f.i. ‘travelling through Asia’, ‘career orientation’, ‘informal care’.
 - If your internship experience is relevant to the position you are applying for, you can also mention the internship under this heading. A separate section for internships draws extra attention to this experience, e.g., in the case of multiple internships
- Extracurricular activities (very important to distinguish yourself from others) (listed in reverse chronological order)
- Voluntary work (optional, can be merged with extracurricular activities) (listed in reverse chronological order)
- [Personal competencies](#) (e.g., dependable, problem-solving attitude, goal-oriented)
- Personal skills (e.g., public speaking, social media management, coaching)
- Language skills
 - Make sure to use ‘positive’ terminology, e.g., instead of saying ‘weak’ or ‘bad’, use a term such as ‘novice’.
 - Consider using a language table:

Language	Speech	Writing	Reading
English	Native	Native	Native
Dutch	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent
French	Advanced	Intermediate	Advanced

- Even better is expressing your language skills in practical terms, for example: ‘Daily fluent business English since 2020’

- Computer skills or competencies (only if relevant – f.i. everyone is proficient in Microsoft Office. SPSS or R skills should only be mentioned if they are relevant to the position) (can be merged with personal skills)
- Awards or other qualifications
- Hobbies and interests (gives you something nice to talk about in your interview as well)
 - NB sport is always inviting - vitality is important to many employers
- Further personalisation (personal profile, professional picture)
- References (should always be on request, not stated by name in your CV)

General tips about layout

- Most importantly: use a clear structure. Bells and whistles are nice, but not if they infringe on the clarity of the CV.
- If you want to share an URL in your CV (f.i. to your LinkedIn page, to a personal website, etc.), use a link or a shortened URL. Do not include the entire URL.
- Use colour in your CV to make it stand out. Be aware of what certain colours communicate and choose one that represents you but also fits the position. Some common colours and their attributes include:
 - o Red – power, passion, action. Beware of bright red, as it can evoke aggressiveness. Use deeper hues, e.g. burgundy or maroon.
 - o Blue – integrity, calmness, reliability, trust.
 - o Yellow – positivity, good energy, happiness, optimism.
 - o Orange – strength, productivity, tenacity.
 - o Green – calmness, the environment, development, growth.
 - o Purple – inspiration, royalty, dignity.
 - o Use deep, bold hues for crisp, clean CVs. Use soft, neutral hues for more elegance.
- Make sure you do not use a standardized CV. Use your CV to stand out from the crowd. You do this by providing the information the company is looking for. Have a close look at the requirements in the vacancy and try to meet these in your CV. For example, if your master thesis is relevant for the position you apply to, then describe the content of your thesis in more detail. If it is not relevant, then you only mention the title, and that is all.
- When writing or editing a CV, there are other presentation details that you should consider: the way you list certain skills, your choice of font, the overview and spelling. Be consistent with this throughout your CV.
- It is common to have a CV which is no longer than two pages. It is important that your resume is clear and easy to understand. Concentrate on the essentials.
- If your CV is more than one page, make sure the second page is easily identifiable as a match to the first one. Think of it like this – if a recruiter prints all the received CVs single sided, then trips and drops all CVs – will they still be able to piece your CV back together?
- Emphasize your contact information. A good place is at the top of the page, close to your name. Nothing is more annoying for a recruiter than having to search for a way to contact you. It might even get you disqualified as a candidate.

A note about the personal profile

Though it is not obligatory, a personal profile in your CV is becoming more usual and is a great way to present a recruiter with the essence of who you are. However, a personal profile can be difficult to write (how do you summarise yourself in 1-3 sentences?). Some tips:

- If you do not know where to start, ask others (friends, family, previous employers) how they would describe you.
- A lot of people have a personal profile on LinkedIn. Search for and read some of these for inspiration.
- Use a catchy opening line. Make sure the personal profile is no longer than four lines (not to be confused with sentences).
- State your current title, f.i. 'Junior Developer' or 'Engaged Master Student'.
- Talk about yourself concisely and enthusiastically. However, please never state that you are enthusiastic – the proof of this should be in the text. Also, you (and every other candidate) are obviously enthusiastic, otherwise you would not apply.
- Provide a unique story that paints a clear picture of you. Identify what you are good at (hard and soft skills). Share what you have already achieved: facts and figures.
- Describe clearly what kind of job you are looking for. Focus on your purpose – what drives you? Why do you get out of bed in the morning? What makes you so excited about this position?
- Share your professional ambitions and goals in the short and long term.
- Match the profile to the vacancy you are applying for (i.e., change the profile for every position you apply to).
- Alternatively, you can use some key words as a personal profile. F.i. 'Pioneer, innovator, decisive, combines task and people orientation in a balanced way' or 'Analytical, eager to learn, independent, hard worker, perfectionist'.

Step 2 – Specification

Make sure your CV matches the position you are applying for. Some general tips to do this:

- Adjust the CV according to the position and organization to which you are applying. Make the CV relevant or you may not attract the attention of recruiters and employers.
- Use short sentences. Avoid clichés. Concentrate on the relevant aspects of your training and work experience.
- Always remember that if you have doubts about whether to include certain information in your CV or not, take the reader's perspective and consider whether this information is of any relevance to this specific reader/company/position.
- Read the job description carefully and think about the skills and characteristics that are required. Make sure they are easily identifiable in your CV.
- Your CV (along with your motivation letter) is a chance for the recruiter to get to know you. Make the image they get of you as clear as possible. A professional picture will help, as well as information about your hobbies and interests. Additionally, you can create your best picture by concretely stating your strong competences and successes. Are you in a leadership position? How many people are you

in charge of? What have you achieved in previous positions (not just what were your responsibilities, but what was the result)? Can you deal with stress? Do you have examples to prove it? This proof of who you are as a person and as an employee should shine through in your explanations of previous experiences, but can also be mentioned in your personal profile. By substantiating your claims, you create a powerful image of you as a person, an employee, and a future colleague.

Step 3 – Kill your darlings

- Short, shorter, shortest. Less is more. How relevant is that one committee you did in secondary school? How relevant are the specific names of all your fraternity/sorority clubs and groups? Unless information has an added relevance to the position you are applying to, do not mention it. Delete everything in your CV that does not help you get the job. Be informative and telling, but short and clear.
- Important things first. All important information should be as high up in your CV as possible. Reading in the Western world happens from left to right, top to bottom. Usually, only your name, personal profile and most recent working experience is read well. Everything you want the recruiter to read should be there. This also means that, if you already have very relevant working experience, you can choose to place this above your educational experience. By mentioning special qualities (e.g., cum laude, professional athlete, loads of volunteering, etc.) which are placed lower in the text in your personal profile, you can subtly draw attention to all highlights in your CV.
- Don't be overly honest. Of course, you can never lie on your CV, but being too honest can also damage your chances. Did you fail your thesis on the first try? Are you divorced? It's not relevant to the position, so why would you draw attention to it? Anything in your CV that does not add anything to the message you are trying to convey ('I am the perfect candidate'), should be left out. Honesty is the best policy, but just because something is true does not mean it necessarily needs mentioning.

Step 4 – Sending out your CV

- Be sure to have someone else read your CV before you send it out. After spending so much time with it, it can be hard to see any grammatical or spelling errors.
- Send your CV in PDF format, to make sure your layout stays intact.
- Name your CV 'CV your name'. You might only have one CV, but a recruiter will receive dozens.
- Consider how your CV is opened, and therefore what a reader sees first. Your CV arrives digitally, on a phone or computer screen, where only the top half will be visible. So that top half should awaken interest, and invite further reading!