

How to be invited to a job interview

About the author

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Improve your CV and Application

When it comes to applications you surely have received tons of advice from various people. And probably many among them have told you the most important thing you have to do is to have a great letter of motivation/ letter of purpose to get the attention you want. Forget about that.

Of course a good statement is much better than a bad one. However, against common belief, your letter is step 2 during your application process. And you surely won't make it to step 2 without having accomplished step one successfully.

People in HR get many motivation letters every day: good letters- and not so good ones, creative- and non creative ones, interesting- and not so interesting ones. So naturally, they do not have the time to go through all the letters they receive.

First, they will always check your CV to get an idea whether or not you meet the requested qualifications. Only if they think you do they *might* consider reading your letter.

Why is that? Your CV is the most important tool you have: it gives people an insight into your life. It shows both your business and personal growth, the career steps you have taken so far and it also allows a look into the future to the next possible career steps. Additionally, many people put in information regarding their family background or hobbies- all important facts for people in HR to decide whether they see you in their open position or not. So be smart and put all the energy you have into a great CV first.

Before you start you should always read carefully through the job announcement. Look at the job profile and ask yourself if you really want that job and why. Then look at the candidate profile and consider whether you meet the qualifications or not. Save you and the company you apply to time and do not send in your application form just for fun. In case they **require** 7 years of experience within the (bike) industry in a leading position, don't apply if you can only look back on 1-2 years in minor positions. Looking back on 4-5 years of experience is a different matter and definitely worth a shot.

It is a different matter also with formulations like "**ideally, preferably, desired, it is a plus**" and so on. Here, they are not too strict. i.e. even when you cannot win any points here, there is still a good chance of meeting up with the key qualifications.

Having decided you really want the job and it is a realistic next career step for you, what does a good CV look like?

1. Design

Choose a design that is an eye-catcher but simple at the same time. On the one hand you do not want to hand in just a boring looking white sheet of paper- on the other hand you should not use crazy colors or big icons that disturb the reader neither. You could use some unobtrusive frame (maybe in the company's color). If you decide to use icons, e.g. a bicycle, also keep it simple and put it there where it will not distract the reader, or worse, where it would make your words hard to read.

If you decide to go for a more classical style (without color, icons, etc.) try to make it look elegant. For instance use lines and play with size and type of your script. What you definitely not want to create is a monotonous list. Monotony tends to seem much harder to read through (although the words might be the same) and you will lose the reader's attention. Compare the beginnings of different CVs in a) and b) (see below) and decide for yourself. Keep in mind that the difference will be bigger the longer your CV gets.

Finally, make sure your CV is consistent- no matter what style you choose. Whenever you have developed a certain style, stick to it.

The perfect CV is a very individual and personal matter- what seems perfect to you can look weird to someone else. So try to find your own design which you personally support 100%. Confidence is important! That is also the reason I do not want to focus on design too much but rather on common mistakes applicants do. So create your own design and follow the advice given here.

2. Personal Information

Decide carefully which information you want to share. In most countries it is not an obligation to add a photo, in some countries it is even prohibited. So make sure you do not hurt the legal requirements of your area.

Be careful with information regarding your family. You can mention your children if you want to- but consider whether this information is helpful or not. In case you apply for a job as a Product Manager for Kids Bikes it might be a plus. For jobs that require a lot of traveling I personally would leave out that information.

Make sure you add your correct contact information, especially email and phone. You should always use your personal mobile number to make sure the call goes always through to yourself directly. Never use your company's email address! Make sure communication always takes place via your personal accounts- you don't want other people within your company to know about your ongoing applications.

Some people deny their age- probably because they are afraid they could be considered either too young or too old. You are who you are, so do not deny it. Furthermore you have put information about your educational background- from the year you graduated from school people can tell almost exactly how old you are anyway.

Organize your personal data at the beginning of your CV; here you introduce yourself. You can either add your contact information here as well or you put it into the header or footer. Also think about writing a short text- just a couple of lines- where you present your most important skills and talents you think you have and why you would be of benefit for the hiring company. You can also give a short overview in terms of keywords, however this is rather recommendable for more experienced applicants as you must have something to show here. You could mention information such as:

10 years of experience in International Sales
7 years of experience in Marketing
5 years of experience as a Social Media Manager
3 years of experience in Brand Management

3. Career steps (Professional or Work Experience)

A modern CV usually uses a chronological order wherein your last (or current) position is mentioned first. Then you work your way down into your past. So naturally you start with your Professional Experience rather than your Educational Background. Also consider that your Educational Background becomes less important the more working experience you have. You don't believe that? Here is a practical example:

Imagine you have a university degree in chemistry, no working experience, and now you decide you want to be a store manager of a bicycle store. People will have their doubts you are the perfect candidate for that job (not because I consider chemistry as a wrong choice but for this position they would rather look for someone with a background in economics).

Now imagine someone gives you the chance to start as a sales person in their bike shop (maybe during your studies). Possibly they will see your potential and promote you one or 2 times until you have reached your goal. Some day you want to apply for the same position at a different shop that is better, bigger, offers more brands, etc. So naturally your main argument that you are the perfect candidate for that job is your professional experience in a similar position regardless your former background. That information goes to the very top of your qualifications!

Now imagine you would have mentioned your university degree first and your current position last- some readers won't even have arrived at that point.

Besides the correct order a more concrete job description of your former position(s) is essential. We still receive many CVs that mention just the job and company title. Compare a) and b) with c) (a) and b) are both good examples here regarding the information they share- just that a) offers the better design as you have learned above).

Probably you do not know any of those companies. That is because I have made them up- they don't really exist. Nevertheless you get a got insight into the shop's structure and the store manager's responsibilities in b) which you won't get in c). And that is exactly the point here: The reader won't know all the companies in the world so it is more than likely he/ she won't know yours. In order to decide whether you meet the

expectations they will need more information about your work. Therefore it is essential to always mention your 3-5 key responsibilities/ assignments/ achievements with each career step (see a) and b) and compare with c).

4. Educational Info

Follow the same steps as in the chapter before. Use a chronological order and try to specify possible uncertainties. Remember: Your work experience is more important than your educational background. In case you had only one job so far- or maybe right now you are looking for your first real job- try not to fill half a page with your studies and only one line with working experience. Think about internships you did or part time jobs during your studies. Try to give important details and add them to your Professional Experience rather than Education.

If you want you can add grades. It is the same here: the more work experience you have the less important are your academic records. In case you are extremely proud of certain achievements you can mention them. However, there is no use of adding your High School Grade when you have passed with a C or D.

5. Further Qualification

Here you should list everything else of interest that you can offer, e.g. internal or external training, exams you have passed, courses you have taken, prizes won, etc. Languages can be a powerful tool, especially when it comes to international companies and positions. In case you can offer profound knowledge of one or the other language you should mention it even when you do not have obtained a certain certificate. But be careful, you might be tested during the interview so just add skills and talents you really have. Giving false Information is not a good base for a business relationship.

6. Personal Interest/ Hobbies

Besides your professional and academic record you can always win some extra credit with your personal interests. Especially when you want to enter the bike market you should definitely add your interest here (I wonder why so many people don't do that). A good Product Manager is someone who has spent many hours on their bike, a good sales person is someone who knows all the important details about their product and so on. So show your reader you *personally* are deeply interested in the position. On the other hand you should not list all your 30 hobbies when only 5 are relevant for the open position.

7. Attachments

Add certificates or diploma you have. In case you are a creative person and/ or apply for a job that requires creativity (Design, photographer, product management, etc.) or you have created something else you consider worth mentioning you might want to add some files or samples of your work.

Some people also add a link to their Xing or LinkedIn Profile- but please do that only if a visit to your profile is worth it and maybe can offer some more details about you your CV cannot. Additionally, you might want to consider alternative formats such as a short video in which you present yourself and your talents.

8. Format

Many people still send in their CVs in word format and save it as “CV.doc”. First of all, please consider that there are many different versions. A word file with a certain layout that looks fine on your computer does not necessarily look great on other computers with older or newer versions. So do yourself a favor and send in your CV as pdf to avoid problems. Moreover, always name your file something like “name.surname.pdf”. The company you apply to might receive hundreds of applications from which at least 20 are named “CV.doc”, or “application.pdf” or something alike- so make sure you use your name and your application can be found among the many applicants.

9. Some more advice

Now that you have created your perfect CV you can start writing your letter of purpose. As in your CV, avoid monotony! We people in HR get many of those letters every day and they all somehow read the same. Do not just summarize your CV, try to explain why YOU are THE person the company wants to hire. Try to think of different ways most people would not go for. For instance I helped my friend with her letter some weeks ago. We used a somewhat provocative first sentence to start the letter which I will quote here:

“I hereby would like to advice you not to fill your vacant position as “*Name of the Position*” without having read my application.” We then build up her letter around every detail the company mentioned in the job description- they used 7 bullet points to describe the perfect candidate and so we addressed every one of them in one sentence each in order to explain why she is the perfect candidate. What can I say. They invited her to the first interview, then the second one, and finally they gave her the job. The explanation why they invited her was:” you really made an impression on us”.

So go out there, think about what you are good at, what is it you have all the other applicants don't have, and most importantly develop your own style that really suits you and that you are 100% confident with. Do not just copy smart advice.

Before I finish this article, one last, however, extremely important point. Never- never ever give a company the impression you are desperate. Always show you want THE job because of THE job, and not just any job. Practical example: A company has 2 job announcements. They look for a Sales Manager and a Marketing Assistant. You really need a job and both announcements suit you and you really love the company. So you think why not double my chances and apply for both. No! Never do that (at least not at the same company). With your perfect application you are either the perfect Sales Manager, or you are the perfect Marketing Assistant, or maybe you are neither. But definitely you are not both. The reader of your applications will feel your desperation

and won't hire you. You should always just apply for one job at the same company. In case they reject your application, you can address the responsible person and ask whether they see better chances for the other job and then send in your application.

Conclusion

I am very sure you will boost your chances and make it to the one or other job interview in the future when you follow my advice. In case you have learned nothing new and you feel angry now as you have wasted your time.. think about how much time you have wasted applying for jobs that do not really match your background, ideas, and expectations. When you see a job offer, the perfect candidate is usually described with 5-10 key skills or talents. Ask yourself how many of those you really match. 50% or less is definitely not enough to make it to the interview. Slightly more than 50% is worth a try. The Skills to create the perfect application will accompany you from now on.

a) Professional Experience

10.2014 – today

Global Sales Director EMEA

ABCDEF Bicycle Corp. Cape Town, South Africa

- Responsible for the Brand ABCD
- Member of the Board of Directors
- Sales Turn Over app. 50 Mio. Euro
- Employee Responsibility : 25

05.2010 – 09.2014

Sales Manager G-A-S

ABCDEF Bicycle Corp. Cape Town, South Africa

- Responsible for the Brand ABCD
- Sales Turn Over app. 10 Mio. Euro
- Employee Responsibility: 5
- Marketing Responsibility

b) Professional Experience

10.2014 – Today

Super Sport Store London

Store Manager
Responsible for 50 Employees
Super Store Area 6000m²
Budget Responsibility 10 Mio €
Marketing Activities

10.2010 – 09.2009

Super Sport Store Manchester

Store Manager
Responsible for 15 Employees
Budget Responsibility 7 Mio €

c) Professional Experience

10.2014 – Today

Store Manager Super Sport Store London

10.2010 – 09.2009

Store Manager Super Sport Store Manchester