

Skills-based CVs

This tip-sheet offers some hints and tips for creating a skills-based CV. This format is particularly suitable if you are considering a significant career change or want to put more emphasis on a varied career history.

1. Essentials

- Your CV is a factual **marketing** document outlining your career history, education, and skills. An effective CV will contain accurate and honest information which shows that you meet the requirements of the role you are applying for.
- A skills-based CV will only work if it is closely tailored to the job specifications – which means that it will need to be **adapted each time** you apply.
- You should focus on the last **five years**. Skills and experience acquired before this time can be added but only if directly relevant to the role you are applying for.
- Aim to mirror what the prospective employer has said they are looking for. Keep the job advert, job description, and person specification close to hand. Try to use the same vocabulary.

2. Style & format

Looks matter

Your CV should be both professional to look at and easy to read. Through a quick scan of your CV (maximum 30 seconds), your potential employers must be able to extract key achievements.

Length

Your CV should be a **maximum of two pages** – no debates, no exceptions.

It's highly unlikely that, in cases where a skills-based format would be suitable, you would have a list of publications or talks. Instead, you might summarise this experience:

- Published 8 scientific papers in top-ranked journals
- Presented results at 12 international conferences

Bullet points and notes

To enable your CV to be easily scanned, use concise, punchy bullet points. Don't bother to say 'I' – put the verb first instead.

Never use full sentences anywhere on your CV.

Fonts

Be consistent with your formatting throughout your CV.

To aid easy reading, use a sans serif font such as Arial, keep it to pt 11 or above, stick to standard margins (1 inch/2.54 cm all around), use proper line breaks, and align all text to the left (never use centre or justified).

Bold fonts work well for headings and emphasising job titles, but capitals, italics, and underlining can clutter the page and are often best avoided.

3. Content

Personal details

Put your name in a large font and, underneath, your email address and a phone number (one of each).

There is no need to start with a heading of 'CV' or 'Curriculum Vitae'.

You can (but you don't have to) add your title at the top of your CV – either 'Dr' before or 'PhD' after your name is acceptable, but not both.

You can add the city you are currently based in. There is no need to add any other personal details, e.g., photo, date of birth, or marital status. If you are applying to other countries, please check local conventions.

You might choose to describe your right to work:

Nationality: Canadian (work visa required)

Nationality: Malaysian (work visa not required – UK permanent resident)

Personal statement

You could include two or three lines to explain why you are a good candidate, e.g., by highlighting key skills and experiences. These statements were very trendy for a while, but a lot of employers dislike them and simply don't read them.

A statement of key skills or achievements can, however, be useful if your most relevant experiences are spread throughout different sections of the CV. Similarly, you might set out your 'career goals' if you are making a significant career change.

Don't use adjectives to describe yourself in glowing terms. Support what you want to say with robust (preferably numerical) evidence:

Bad: 'highly experienced plant biologist'

Better: 'plant biologist with 8 years' experience'

If in doubt, leave the personal statement out.

Relevant skills

Use the job description to identify four or five skills-based subheadings, e.g., 'Communication', 'Leadership', 'Innovation and creativity', 'Customer focus', 'Project management', 'Administration and organisation'...

Under each subheading, provide a few specific, concise examples of your experience and achievements.

STAR is a useful tool to help ensure you include enough detail as evidence of your abilities:

Situation	Where were you, when, who with?
Task	What were you trying to achieve?
Action	What, specifically, did you do?
Results	What happened? Who benefited?

Begin each bullet point with a positive, active verb, e.g., led, coordinated, established, delivered.

Include **quantifiable data** where possible to support your evidence:

Led a team of 4 for a six-month project costing £40,000. Delivered the key project milestones 2 weeks ahead of schedule and 10% under budget.

Established an industrial collaboration resulting in a £400,000 grant and a successful patent application.

Ensure that all information is about you. Don't say 'we' or talk about your team in general terms.

Employment

Give a brief employment history in reverse chronological order (i.e. most recent first).

Provide the job title, the name of the organisation or institution and the dates you worked there for each position.

You do not need to elaborate any further as you will have highlighted the skills and experience you gained in these roles in the skills profile.

Qualifications

List your qualifications in reverse chronological order and be sure to specify the years (start and finish).

It is rarely necessary to include school qualifications.

Include your thesis title within this section if it's directly relevant. There is no need to give supervisors' names.

4. Optional headings

These optional headings can be included on the second page of your CV if they are relevant to the position you are applying for:

- **Professional development** – include any relevant courses, workshops, or development activity.
- **Awards, achievements and memberships** – list awards, accolades and professional memberships from the last 5 years (or relevant to the post).

- **Patents** – list them to demonstrate commercial awareness.
- **Interests** – don't just list some hobbies. This is another chance to show success, e.g., prizes, tournaments won, positions of responsibility...

5. Referees

If there is another space where referees' details are asked for, e.g., on an application form, you can omit this section entirely or write 'References available on request'.

Don't give the details of more referees than the employer has asked for. It doesn't show that you are esteemed; it shows that you don't follow instructions.

6. Breaks and disclosures

Minimise small breaks in your employment history by using whole years rather than months and years, e.g., 2009 – 2011.

If you have taken a career break or had time off lasting more than a few months, you can choose to:

1. Provide a brief, factual description:
 - Parental leave (6 months)
 - Sickness absence (1 year, now fully recovered)
 - Career break (12 months) – travelling in East Africa
2. Leave the break out. You do not have to volunteer this information, though you might get asked about any gaps later, e.g., at interview.

7. Checklist

- Does your CV correspond closely with the person's specification and show evidence that you meet the essential criteria?
- Is your CV the right length for the kind of application you're making?
- Is your CV formatted consistently, with no spelling or grammatical errors?
- Is the content recent and relevant?
- Have you included all appropriate sections?

Ask a friend to scan your CV in 30 seconds, then take it away from them. What stood out? What did they miss that you really want the employer to see?

If you have any further questions regarding your CV or any other aspects of your professional development, **contact us:**

pfdc-support@imperial.ac.uk

