CV GUIDELINES

Purpose

- A CV is a marketing tool
- It will create the first impression of you, so make sure it is a good one!
- Recruiters use CVs to select suitable candidates

What makes a good CV

- A good CV makes an impact with good content and layout
- It looks professional and is easy to read and navigate
- It is targeted towards a specific purpose (advertised position)
- It reflects your ability to do the job/fulfil the requirements drawing evidence from your academics, work and extra-mural activities

Getting started

- Brainstorm your activities and achievements in all areas of your life
- Think about what you learnt and what skills you gained from these activities
- Organise what you have under headings that best fit your experience
- Do not initially limit your page length in case you leave important things out
- After gathering everything, edit and decide what is suitable to include

Layout & formatting

- Be careful of using templates. They may not be suitable for what you have done
- There are some standard categories of information in a CV, but one size does not fit all! (See our sample CV for suggested content headings)
- The order in which you categorise information might change as your career evolves
- Organize key information clearly and succinctly for easy reading
- Create clear, logical sections
- Avoid wasting space on information or designs that do not serve to market you
- List information in reverse chronological order, i.e. most recent to least recent qualifications and experience
- Keep formatting styles (e.g., font style and sizes, bolding, spacing and heading conventions) consistent throughout your CV
- Use a professional font style and size (e.g. 11 point font minimum) and never use ALL CAPS throughout your CV (it is fine for headings though)
- Avoid using bold formatting excessively
- Group and/or align similar information (e.g., date information)
- Use acronyms to save space. First write the name of the institution or company in full followed by the acronym. Thereafter only use the acronym in instances where the name recurs

Length

- CVs should be no longer than 2 pages unless otherwise requested by a recruiter
- Check spacing, size of headings and margins if it is just over two pages and adjust accordingly
- Referee details can be written in one line with commas, which also saves space e.g. Prof Joe Black, Head of Economics Department, University of Cape Town, etc.

Language

- Use professional, appropriate and relevant language. Do not use clichés or jargon
- Avoid the repetitive use of the personal pronoun ("I")
- Avoid full sentences or paragraphs to list and give evidence for what you have to offer
- Use verbs ('action' words) in short phrases to describe achievements, experience and skills e.g. presented, researched, analysed etc.
- Spell things out to avoid ambiguity or assumptions. If it's unclear or not present in your CV, they will assume you don't have it. Do the work for them.
- Use spell check (UK, US), but realise that spell check will not pick up ambiguities

Attachments

- It is not necessary to attach certificates and personal documentation unless requested

CV reviews

- Ask competent friends and family to check for mistakes
- Make an appointment with a careers adviser AFTER you have used our guidelines to review your CV and to discuss how you can target it to a specific application
- Book a CV Consultation via the Careers Service online portal MyCareer
- Make sure that your application is accompanied with a targeted cover letter (see our cover letter handout)