



The physicist's guide to writing your CV

A series of booklets to help you in your career

The physicist's guide series

The physicist's guides are written to assist anyone with a background in physics regardless of what stage they are at in their career – this could be in education or employment.

These guides are unique because the writers have taken into account the skills and abilities that someone with a physics training or background has, so they are specific and relevant to physicists.

We hope that these booklets will be of assistance when you consider your career-development plan.

The IOP wishes you the best of luck in your career. If you require any further information or advice, e-mail **members.careers@iop.org**.

Other careers guides in this series can be found at **www.iop.org/careers**.

A CV is a personal marketing document with a focus. It should be written to convince an employer that you are the person whom they want to select for an interview.

**So how do you convince them of this?
How do you show off your unique selling points? How should it be laid out?
What should you include in it?**

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How is a CV laid out?

Your CV should reflect your personality and be suited to the job that you are applying for. A distinctive CV will catch the recruiter's eye, but there are a few conventions that you should follow:

- It should normally be two sides of A4 or similar, with an additional single-sided covering letter.
- It should be clear and easy to read, so use a sans serif font.
- Use bullet points and bold text to draw the reader's attention to key skills and achievements, and avoid large chunks of text.

What are employers looking for?

You need to be able to demonstrate your ability to detail your work experience, skills and academic achievements concisely and in relation to the specific job that you are applying for. Write in a positive and logical manner and don't use jargon or unusual abbreviations. Use the job advert as a checklist for the qualities that are required in an applicant. For clarity, use the same wording as in the advert and imagine someone sitting with the advert as they read your CV – ensure that you address all of their requirements.

“You need to be able to demonstrate your ability to detail your work experience, skills and academic achievements concisely and in relation to the specific job that you are applying for.”

How do you make your CV sound impressive?

Use action-oriented words to describe your skills and experiences because these suggest active participation and accomplishment. For example, words like “achieved”, “initiated”, “established”, “produced” and “decided” describe proactive involvement in events. But never lie – sooner or later you will be found out.

What if you don't have anything interesting to include apart from your degree?

This is unlikely, but if you really can't think of anything, make the most of what you did during your degree. Use action-oriented words to emphasise the skills acquired through your laboratory work, presentations, group projects and any competitions that you were involved in. These involve teamwork, negotiation, communication and analytical skills.

What do you do if you haven't any paid work experience?

Any experience is valuable regardless of whether it was paid or not. Think about what you have done during your vacation time, such as caring for a relative or child, or doing voluntary work. These involve working with others, effective communication, flexibility, initiative and commitment.

What should you do if you are not happy with your grades?

You can leave your grades off your CV if you wish. However, it is likely that the employer will ask what they were if you do. If there is a good reason for having lower grades than you had hoped for, you could explain this in your covering letter, but remain positive.

Finally...

- Get feedback about the content and appearance of your CV. Ask people whom you trust for their opinion and make use of a university careers adviser or the Institute of Physics careers service. Ask your referees for their thoughts – it is important that they are aware of what you are applying for and why, so that they can be prepared when an employer approaches them.
- Ensure that you identify skills and experiences that will be of interest to employers. Read *Getting the Most from a Physics Degree*, which is available from the Institute of Physics careers service (to request a copy, e-mail: members.careers@iop.org). This should help.
- Before submitting your CV, make sure that it has been thoroughly checked. There is no reason for a CV to contain spelling mistakes or errors, and this may result in rejection, so spend a bit of extra time proof-reading it.

The sample CV on the following pages should give you an idea of good layout and content. However, for ease of legibility, it has been spread across three pages.

Written by Dr Sara Shinton.

Jeff Morgan BSc (Hons), AMInstP

Personal details

- Your full postal address. (You don't need to use labels like "address" and "e-mail".) Make dates of occupancy clear if you are leaving at the end of term.
- Your telephone number. (If in shared accommodation, inform your housemates.)
- Your e-mail address. (If you are about to graduate, use a personal e-mail address, but make sure that it sounds professional.)
- Nationality. If you are not an EU citizen, state your right to work in UK.

Qualifications

2006 University of Croxton MSci (Hons) physics 2:1

Relevant modules include instrumental and physical optics; waves, optics and relativity; device physics.

Research project: Successfully characterised a prototype hybrid photon detector. Reported on threshold scans, leakage current measurements, live pixel fractions, dark count rates, ion feedback rates and quantum efficiency. The project thesis and presentation were awarded a first-class mark.

2002 Metherton College, Metherton

A-levels: physics A, mathematics B, chemistry A

2000 St Peter's School, Metherton

GCSEs: six grade A* (including physics, mathematics and English), two grade A, two grade B

Put your name in a header so that it appears on every page.

Headline your CV with your name in bold. This makes it easier to find and can summarise your education at a glance if you include any designatory letters.

If you are still studying or have fairly recently left university, your academic qualifications should be listed in reverse chronological order.

Focus on relevant modules and project work. Describe successes in your research work. If applying for a technical position, highlight scientific skills or techniques. If not, focus on transferable skills, such as teamwork and time management.

If space is limited, don't list all GCSEs but give A-level grades in full.

Employment

2004–2005: Freelance writer for students' union newsletter, *Polo*, University of Croxton.

Summary: Reported on the sports and cultural events organised by the students' union. Successfully established an interactive sports page on the students' union website.

Skills: Written communication, website development, networking, project management.

Summer 2004: Research assistant, University of Croxton

Summary: Worked independently in the Electron Microscopy Unit to improve the quantification of data from complex systems.

Skills: Computational modelling.

Summer 2003: Leisure assistant, Hellerdale Farm Country Park.

Summary: Assisted in various roles in this busy tourist attraction, including staffing admission gate, refreshment stands and children's rides.

Skills: Customer service, teamworking.

Use positive language to describe your contribution in previous jobs.

Balance descriptions of work experience/jobs to include both your responsibilities and how you carried them out.

Skills

Communication: Confidence and effective communication skills developed through:

- regular presentations during my degree to audiences of up to 80 people;
- writing academic and newspaper reports, which have been consistently praised;
- contact with customers during vacation employment.

Teamwork: Worked in groups during my degree and vacation jobs. Comfortable with adapting to the needs of the team, and enjoy generating new ideas and problem solving.

Computational: Familiar with a range of modelling software and programming languages: C++ , Fortran and Java.

Interests

Treasurer, PhysSoc 2003–2005. This role developed my organisational skills, confidence in working with others and financial management.

Volunteer, Science in Schools 2004–2005. This project trains undergraduates to support science teachers during lessons. I suggested and led a lesson on medical imaging with another volunteer, and designed visual aids that were highly effective at engaging a teenage audience.

References

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Use bullet points to break up long passages of text.

Keep a balance. You want to avoid suggesting that your hobbies and interests are more important to you than your work

Prepare your referees by telling them the key selling points of your application and sending them a copy of the relevant job adverts.

Get their title correct and include a full postal address and e-mail after confirming that they are happy to be contacted.

Find out more...

Visit the website at
www.iop.org/careers.



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