

CVs, Resumes, and LinkedIn

*A Guide to
Professional
English*

*Adrian
Wallwork*



Springer

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Adrian Wallwork

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A Guide to Professional English



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Adrian Wallwork
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INTRODUCTION

Who is this book for?

The book is intended for both native and non-native speakers of English. It focuses mainly on graduates and PhD students, and also young people who are already in employment and are looking for a new job. It is not intended for people who already hold managerial positions.

In the Contents page, subsections that are only relevant to:

- non-native speakers are marked with this symbol: *
- those looking for a job in academia or research are marked: §

How is this book organized?

The book is structured as a series of FAQs (frequently asked questions) with answers. The first three chapters outline:

- the quality of a good CV or resume
- how recruiters and HR people make their judgements
- whether using a template is a good idea
- how to write dates

Chapters 4–10 examine each part of a CV from your name and photo, to your personal interests and references. At the end of each of these chapters is a subsection saying in what ways, if any, a resume differs from a CV.

Chapters 11–14 regard how to write a reference letter, a cover letter, a bio, and a LinkedIn profile.

Every chapter ends with a summary.

Section 15.9 presents a possible template for a CV. Downloadable templates can be found at e4ac.com under 'CVs'.

Is this a book of guidelines or a book of rules?

Guidelines, not rules.

The book is based on interviews with recruiters and HR managers, and an analysis of hundreds of CVs from around 40 different countries.

The result is a series of guidelines on how I think a good CV and cover letter should look, they are not objective rules. Inevitably, you may not agree with all the suggestions, and are thus totally free to ignore them.

I have tried to be objective and to avoid all the possible pitfalls of writing from the perspective of a white British male. I thus hope that you will find nothing in this book that will offend you in any way. Please write to me if you feel there is anything that needs changing (adrian.wallwork@gmail.com).

Terminology used in this book

CV (also written *curriculum vitae*)

A reverse chronology listing your education, work experience, skills and interests. Generally two pages long, and typically used in all Anglo countries apart from the US and Canada.

Resume (also written *résumé*)

A brief summary of your achievements and skills, not necessarily in reverse chronological order, and generally not as comprehensive as a CV. Generally one page long, and typically used in the US and Canada.

Recruiter

Someone who works for an agency that finds potential candidates whose CVs and resumes are then submitted to the agency's clients.

Human resources (HR) manager

The person in an organization who deals with staff in general, and specifically recruitment and employment.

Hiring manager

The person responsible for deciding who to employ. This position may be held by the human resources manager, or vice versa.

For the sake of simplicity, although a CV and resume are not exactly the same (see 1.4), I will generally just use the term CV. And although a recruiter, HR manager and hiring manager do different jobs, I will often use these terms indiscriminately.

How dates are used in this book

CVs are full of dates of when you started and finished an activity. For the purposes of this book, I am imagining that we are now in 2030. So unless you are reading this book in 2030, most dates will appear to be in the future.

Examples used in this book

All the examples used in this book have been taken from real CVs, cover letters, reference letters etc. The only things that have been changed are personal details, dates and layout / font.

I use *he* or *she* at random to refer to the candidate who produced the CV or cover letter.

Other books in this series

There are currently five other books in this *Guides to Professional English* series.

Email and Commercial Correspondence

<http://www.springer.com/978-1-4939-0634-5/>

User Guides, Manuals, and Technical Writing

<http://www.springer.com/978-1-4939-0640-6/>

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<http://www.springer.com/978-1-4939-0631-4/>

Presentations, Demos, and Training Sessions

<http://www.springer.com/978-1-4939-0643-7/>

Telephone and Helpdesk Skills

<http://www.springer.com/978-1-4939-0637-6/>

All the above books are intended for people working in industry rather than academia. There is also a parallel series of books covering similar skills for those in academia:

English for Presentations at International Conferences

<http://www.springer.com/978-1-4419-6590-5/>

English for Writing Research Papers

<http://www.springer.com/978-1-4419-7921-6/>

English for Academic Correspondence and Socializing

<http://www.springer.com/978-1-4419-9400-4/>

English for Research: Usage, Style, and Grammar

<http://www.springer.com/978-1-4614-1592-3/>

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1 THE QUALITIES OF A GOOD CV AND RESUME

1.1 What is the purpose of a CV?

The aim of your CV or resume is to encourage a recruiter to contact you regarding a possible job.

Write your CV from the point of view of the person who will receive it and examine it, i.e. a recruiter in an agency, an HR person in a company or research institute, a professor or fellow researcher in a research team.

This means you should:

- use a format that will be familiar to the reader (i.e. a standard template, which you can modify where appropriate) rather than a format that you have designed totally by yourself. A standard format is easier to navigate for the reader – he / she knows exactly where to look in order to find what he / she is interested in
- only include details that are relevant to the job you are looking for
- clearly highlight your skills and qualifications
- be honest, accurate and as objective as possible

A CV is thus not an opportunity for you to:

- write every single detail of your career history, education history and personal history
- experiment with your design skills

For an ironic perspective on writing CVs, see the Polish poet Wisława Szymborska-Włodek's poem 'Writing a Curriculum Vitae' – just type in her name and the title of her poem into your search engine.

1.2 How many pages should a CV be?

Two.

There seems to be a general consensus that two pages is the maximum. Your ability to be concise and to only highlight your most relevant skills and qualifications is revealed through your CV. If your CV is more than two pages, the HR person may think 'this person is unable to express themselves clearly and concisely; this is not the kind of person I want working in my company'.

However, if you are looking for certain high-level or high-profile jobs in academia, it may be appropriate to use more pages so that you have space to describe the projects you have been involved in. If you have a lot of publications (see 8.10), put them in a separate document or just have a link to your website where the professor (or whoever is dealing with your application) can download them if he / she wishes.

1.3 What is the typical order of information in a CV?

The most common order is outlined below. The numbers in brackets refer to the chapters of the book where these are dealt with individually.

1. name (4)
2. personal details (4)
3. objective / personal statement / executive summary (6)
4. education (7)
5. work experience (8)
6. skills (9)
7. personal interests (10)
8. publications (8.9, 8.10)
9. references (11)

There are of course variations in this order. Some people put point 3 before point 2. If you are an academic you may put your publications (point 8) into a separate document. If you are not an academic and have work experience, then you will probably put your work experience before your education. The skills section may be divided into subsections (e.g. technical, language). Not everyone mentions their personal interests though I would argue that these are essential. Not everyone puts references.

If you are not applying for a job in academia, then your publications will be of little or no interest to the recruiter.

Not all templates will include all the nine points above. For instance, at the time of writing, the Europass (2.10) has no specific section for personal interests.

1.4 What is the difference between a resume and a CV?

The word *résumé* is French and means 'summary'. It is a concise overview, generally just on one page, of your objectives and main achievements.

It covers the same areas (points 1–8 in the previous subsection) as a CV, but presents them in a different way. A CV is more like a technical description of a product (i.e. the candidate), whereas a resume is more like a sales brochure – though a good CV will also try to sell the candidate.

For an example of a CV and a resume, see 15.9 and 15.10.

1.5 What are companies really looking for? And research institutes?

There is no real difference in the requirements in industry and in research, though in research your academic qualifications are likely to have more weight.

Both companies and institutes clearly want to see evidence on your CV that you are qualified in terms of both education and work experience for the position that they have open. But they also want evidence that you:

- have a strong work ethic and that you work to deadlines (even under stress)
- can work in a team and are easy to get along with
- are both proactive and flexible
- have the technical, emotional and analytical skills for problem solving
- can give effective presentations
- have good communication skills
- can write reports and other kinds of documents
- are enthusiastic and passionate about what you do
- are professional, reliable, well mannered and appropriately dressed
- would fit in well with the company / institute – both in terms of the environment and the core values

You need to inject each section of your CV with evidence that you have the above attributes. The following chapters will tell you how.

Here is an extract from an email from an HR manager to a recruiting agency:

The candidate should have:

- Excellent communication skills
- Analytical thinking – be able to build patterns from raw data
- Be able to write succinct reports in English to tight deadlines
- Be a go getter, self motivator, who can work fairly independently

If you were applying for the post indicated in the email above, your CV would need to demonstrate that you have such qualities.

For example, by writing that you have had 12 research papers accepted at international conferences you are indicating that: 1) you can write technical documents; 2) you have experience in presenting your work; 3) your English is probably of a high standard.

You should not state directly, either in your CV or cover letter, that 'I have good communication skills' as such skills are subjective and difficult for the recruiter to evaluate. Instead the recruiter should be able to understand that you have these skills from the evidence that you provide in your education, work experience and personal interest sections (see 9.7).