

CV WRITING GUIDE

A practical guide to creating a clear, credible and compelling CV that helps you stand out for the right reasons.

ACCOUNTANCY & FINANCE • CUMBRIA & DUMFRIESSHIRE

A strong CV should be professional, relevant and make the right information easy to identify.

Start with the purpose

Your CV is often the first detailed impression a prospective employer has of you. Its job is simple: make it easy for the reader to understand what you do, the value you bring and why your experience is relevant to their vacancy.

Hiring managers rarely read every word on a first review. They scan. Strong CVs therefore make the most relevant information visible quickly, while still giving enough evidence to support it.

RECRUITMENT INSIGHT

Think relevance before detail. A strong CV is not a record of everything you have ever done; it is a carefully edited summary of what matters for the role in front of you.

1. Keep the layout clean

- Use one professional font throughout. Lato, Aptos, Arial or Calibri all work well.
- Use clear section headings, consistent spacing and concise bullet points.
- Avoid photographs, decorative borders, multiple colours, graphics and skill-rating charts unless they are genuinely relevant to your profession.
- Make your current or most recent job title, employer, professional qualifications and key experience easy to spot on page one.
- Use reverse chronological order: most recent experience first.

2. How long should a CV be?

For many candidates, two to three pages is a sensible guide rather than an absolute rule. A graduate may comfortably use two pages; an experienced finance professional may need three. Senior candidates can occasionally justify more, but every line should earn its place.

CV CHECK

If a bullet point does not help demonstrate your suitability, seniority, achievements or career story, ask whether it needs to be there.

3. The first-page 'hotspot'

The upper part of page one carries the most weight. Use it for your name, contact details, qualifications and a short professional profile. The reader should understand your level and core strengths within seconds.

Build a strong first page

Professional profile

Aim for a concise 3–5 line summary tailored to the role. First person without 'I' or a neutral professional style both work well; what matters most is clarity and authenticity. Avoid clichés such as 'hard-working team player' unless you back them up with something meaningful.

LESS EFFECTIVE

A hardworking, motivated individual with excellent communication skills who works well independently and as part of a team.

STRONGER

CIMA-qualified Management Accountant with manufacturing experience across month-end reporting, budgeting, forecasting and business partnering. Confident improving reporting processes and translating financial information for operational teams.

Career history

For each role, clearly show:

- Job title
- Employer
- Location if useful
- Start and finish dates (month and year)
- A brief line of context where the company, team or remit is not obvious
- Around 5–10 focused bullets covering responsibilities, scope and achievements

Turn responsibilities into evidence

Responsibilities tell the reader what you were expected to do. Achievements show the difference you made. Wherever possible, include scale, outcomes or measurable impact.

EXAMPLE

Instead of 'Responsible for reducing costs', try: 'Renegotiated key supplier and property contracts, delivering annualised savings of £126k.'

Useful action verbs

Delivered • Improved • Reduced • Implemented • Led • Developed • Streamlined • Negotiated • Introduced • Achieved

Tailor it to the opportunity

Read the job description properly

The advert and job description tell you what the employer values. Highlight the recurring requirements and make sure your CV gives clear evidence of the relevant experience you genuinely have.

- Match relevant terminology naturally - for example management accounts, consolidation, CVR reporting, audit, cashflow, business partnering or team leadership.
- Bring the most relevant responsibilities higher within each role rather than burying them at the bottom.
- Highlight sector knowledge where it matters, including reporting standards, legislation, commercial models and specialist systems.
- Never copy keywords into a CV where they do not accurately describe your experience.

Qualifications & education

If a professional qualification is important to the vacancy - ACA, ACCA, CIMA, CIPFA, AAT or equivalent - make it easy to find on page one. List education and professional qualifications with the most recent or relevant first.

- Include standout achievements such as first-time passes, institute awards or a first-class degree where relevant.
- Include recent, relevant training or CPD, but avoid filling space with old or routine courses.

Systems & digital skills

Finance employers increasingly look for systems confidence, data capability and evidence that you can improve processes. Give this its own short section if it strengthens your application.

- List relevant finance/ERP systems you have genuinely used: for example SAP, Sage, NetSuite, Dynamics, Xero or sector-specific platforms.
- For Excel, describe capability rather than simply writing 'advanced'. Examples might include XLOOKUP, SUMIFS, PivotTables, Power Query, Power Pivot, macros or financial modelling.
- Include reporting and data tools such as Power BI where relevant, together with how you have used them.

RECRUITMENT INSIGHT

If the employer uses a system you already know, make that obvious. Do not make the reader hunt for one of your strongest matches.

Career gaps & changes

Do not leave unexplained date gaps that may distract the reader. A simple, factual line such as 'Career break for travel', 'Relocation to Cumbria' or 'Parental leave' is usually enough. There is no need to over-explain personal circumstances.

Final checks before you send

Accuracy matters

- Be truthful and precise. Dates, qualifications, job titles and achievements should stand up to discussion and reference checks.
- Check spelling, grammar, punctuation and formatting - then check them again.
- Use consistent date formats, bullet styles, capitalisation and spacing.
- Save the final version as a PDF unless the recruiter or application system specifically requests Word.
- Use a professional filename, for example: Heidi_Wright_CV_2026.pdf rather than CVfinalFINAL2.pdf.

References

You do not need to include referee names and contact details on your CV. These can be provided later in the process when requested. You can simply omit a references section altogether, or add 'References available on request' if you prefer.

Keep your CV alive

Update your CV while achievements are fresh in your mind. Record projects, systems implementations, promotions, qualifications, team growth, efficiencies and measurable results as they happen. It is much easier than trying to reconstruct them when an opportunity suddenly appears.

FINAL CHECK

Ask yourself: Is my current level clear? Are my qualifications visible? Have I shown outcomes as well as duties? Is the most relevant experience easy to find? Does this version genuinely fit this vacancy?

CV support from Heidi Wright Recruitment

As part of our candidate service, Heidi Wright Recruitment provides practical, constructive CV feedback before presenting candidates to clients. The objective is to ensure your CV is clear, relevant and professionally positioned while remaining an accurate reflection of your individual experience and career.

READY FOR YOUR NEXT MOVE?

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