

# How to Read a CV



Human capital is the most important asset to any employer, so short-listing and assessing the calibre of 300 CVs to identify the 10 best can be a daunting prospect.

*"In the war for talent, organisations will need to identify the skills and experience of the best candidates quickly and effectively."*

Jo Causon, Director of Marketing and Corporate Affairs for the Chartered Management Institute



## Reading a CV

The first step is to match your candidates against your Job Specification. Beyond that, here are some things to look for:

- 1) Skills:** Seek out CVs that describe how the candidate measured their performance using the relevant skill. Furthermore, has the candidate correctly described the skills needed for the role?
- 2) Achievements:** Candidates that describe how they added value to a job through, for example, saving money or increasing sales outperform other candidates that list job duties.
- 3) Transferable Skills:** Career changers that describe relevant, transferable skills.
- 4) External Validation:** Winning awards or being selected to chair working group meetings rarely happen to underperforming individuals.
- 5) Promotion:** Steady and consistent promotions are a good indicator that the individual can sustain the enhanced job responsibilities and that the person has been highly regarded.
- 6) Unsubstantiated Superlatives:** Beware Directors who claim to be "commercially astute" yet do not list one commercial achievement.
- 7) Length of Service:** Advantage or Disadvantage?  
**Long Service:** Some consider many years of service a benefit, others consider the candidate institutionalised.  
**Short Stints:** Look for signs in the CV. The candidate could be a job-hopper or could be going through rapid fast-paced promotions - or it may be normal for the sector (say telesales or contracting).
- 8) Photographs:** Ignore photographs/videos when recruiting in the UK as they allow for the potential to discriminate on the basis of age, sex, race etc.

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## Warning Signs:

- 1) **Gaps:** Ensure gaps in employment are accounted for.
- 2) **Duties:** A list of these does not say how the person performed in the role, just what they were meant to be doing.
- 3) **Spelling:** Mistakes on such an important document should prompt fears.
- 4) **Promotions:** job-seeking within 3 months of promotion may be indicative of over promotion.
- 5) **Salary fluctuations:** If a salary is £10k higher or lower than former roles – ensure you understand and accept the reason for this.
- 6) **Lies:** With so many CVs containing exaggerations, look for evidence to overcome this concern.
- 7) **Contact details:** A work direct line in a CV often indicates the person is happy to take personal calls during work time. Unprofessional email addresses also often draw unwelcome assumptions.

## Return on Investment

You should think about this in particular for your trainee hires. The costs to a business rise considerably for Trainee Schemes, so individual graduates should sell to you far more than a list of their modules. Look for descriptions of projects/dissertations. How they interpreted their project findings/results can help you understand how they tick, which is vital if you are to invest substantial sums of money in them. The grade alone is not enough.

## Correlation of Job Advertisement and CV Cliché's

The CVs you receive will mostly mirror the job advertisements you place, so favour absolute requirements and limit the clichés in your advertisements that request a good team player or excellent communication skills as applicants are likely to feed these generic terms back to you in their CV, without evidence of the skills use, leaving you with a batch of CVs impossible to shortlist. Many CVs simply claim the applicant to be a great organiser who is hard-working with excellent communication skills and able to work in a team – but when pressed for specifics these applicants often cannot recall a good example using the said skill to make a noticeable difference for the business.

## Searching CV Tips

To expand your CV search, look at positions below the one you are looking to fill – a candidate might be ripe for promotion. Additionally, look for competitor names or company names that are synonymous with like-minded employees.

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