

Dos and Don'ts of a killer CV

Part 1 of a 2 part series: Graduates

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Most of us have a CV and therefore will know it's not an easy document to create. An interesting statistic is that an estimated 40% of all CVs are not entirely factual.

A significant number of people don't understand the purpose of a CV and therefore don't achieve the response they hope for. As a recruitment solutions business, operating for 25 years in the New Zealand market we have read a few CVs and the following are some pointers for graduates. We know there are many opinions on CV content so this is by no means an exhaustive list.

What is the purpose of a CV?

CVs are marketing tools designed to do one thing: make the phone ring. It is a "sales document" not only a record of your career.

Its time to forget the Tall Poppy Syndrome, you must stand out to get the interview. BUT, once you get it, you'd better be ready to back up your paper claims. With modern interview questions being behaviourally based most interviewers will be checking skills and competencies by asking questions that require examples. So for every claim you make in a CV you need to have a strong example of when you exhibited your proficiency.

So on with the Do's and Don'ts.

What to put in (or leave out) of a CV

Contact details

- Do – put your contact details at the top of the front page.
- Do – make it easy to get hold of you. If possible, provide both land and mobile numbers.
- Do – use a personal email address that is unlikely to change (i.e. don't use your university email address).
- Do – include an alternative address/phone number if you are in temporary term-time accommodation. (We don't want to lose you once you return 'home' so if appropriate, include your parent's address.)
- Do – think about what message your email address sends. (Sorry, but chickybabe@gmail.com does not send a particularly professional message.)

Your degree/qualifications and a brief description of what is studied.

- Don't assume the reader knows all about your qualification.
- For graduates: Do attach your Academic Transcript as an addendum – if your results are B average or above.

- Or – list your top marks/papers in the Education section of your CV.
- If you are a post graduate with published papers think about the advantages/disadvantages of listing publications. For academic CVs they are obviously required but they can be a turn-off for industry-based employers. Instead, include as a project, focusing on competencies gained.

Any awards or scholarships gained Research Projects

- Do – Include details about your final year group and individual projects. This may prove to be the bulk of your working experience to date so is really important.
- Do – Be specific about project objective, YOUR responsibilities and outcome (results/grades).

Holiday Employment

- Do – Put in your work experience, even if not relevant to your degree or ideal role. This demonstrates work ethic and commitment (and shows you didn't just lie on the beach during the summer). If you worked at Bunnings each holiday, put it in. It also shows that you will have work related references.

Extra curricular activities

- Do – be selective about what you include. Don't scream 'weird' or 'geek'. Having quirky pastimes is great, if you're a closet Dungeons & Dragons master, it may be best to keep it to yourself.
- Do – include activities that can be seen as relevant or advantageous to the future employer.
- As a Food Tech, demonstrating that you're interested in food through your hobbies is great (amateur winemaker/brewer, makes cupcakes for children's parties, gourmet cooking etc).
- Sporting activities: demonstrates that you are well rounded, fit and healthy, and have interests outside of work/study. If you've coached teams, include as demonstrates leadership potential.
- Cultural pastimes e.g. music
- Personal development e.g. Toastmasters.

Anything that is unique to you that makes you stand out from the crowd.

- E.g. Outward Bound, Duke of Edinburgh Award, Overseas exchange programmes.

Photo

The jury's out on this one, and in most cases I'd recommend leaving it off.

- Don't put a passport style photo (unsmiling headshot).



- Don't put a photo that includes friends or family, your pet, a national monument or other distraction.
- Don't put a touched up Body Shots style photo.
- If you feel you must – look natural and smile. People hire people they think they'll like. If your photo makes you look like a terrorist or convict your CV is guaranteed to be binned. Use your discretion!

A personal statement

- Don't waste space on a personal statement – the three of four lines at the top of the CV where you describe yourself as energetic, enthusiastic and committed. They add little value as everyone uses them and are difficult to quantify.

Career summary

- Do write a career summary – three or four lines outlining what you want to do as a career and why. This shows clarity regarding your goals.
- Customise this for each application:

- For example, "Career objectives: I am focused on building a successful career in sales and marketing for [organisation name]. I have deliberately looked for and found work experience in this area so I know that the fast paced, results-orientated environment will give me the challenge I thrive on. I am a strong relationship builder, resilient and motivated by success."

These are the basics of CV creation. In Part 2 we will focus on the things that will really get you noticed in the rapidly changing world of recruitment.

John Lawson is founder of Lawson Williams Consulting Group. He initially studied Biotechnology at Massey and is a professional member of NZIFST. He now enjoys leading a team of recruitment consultants, helping people like you develop satisfying careers.

