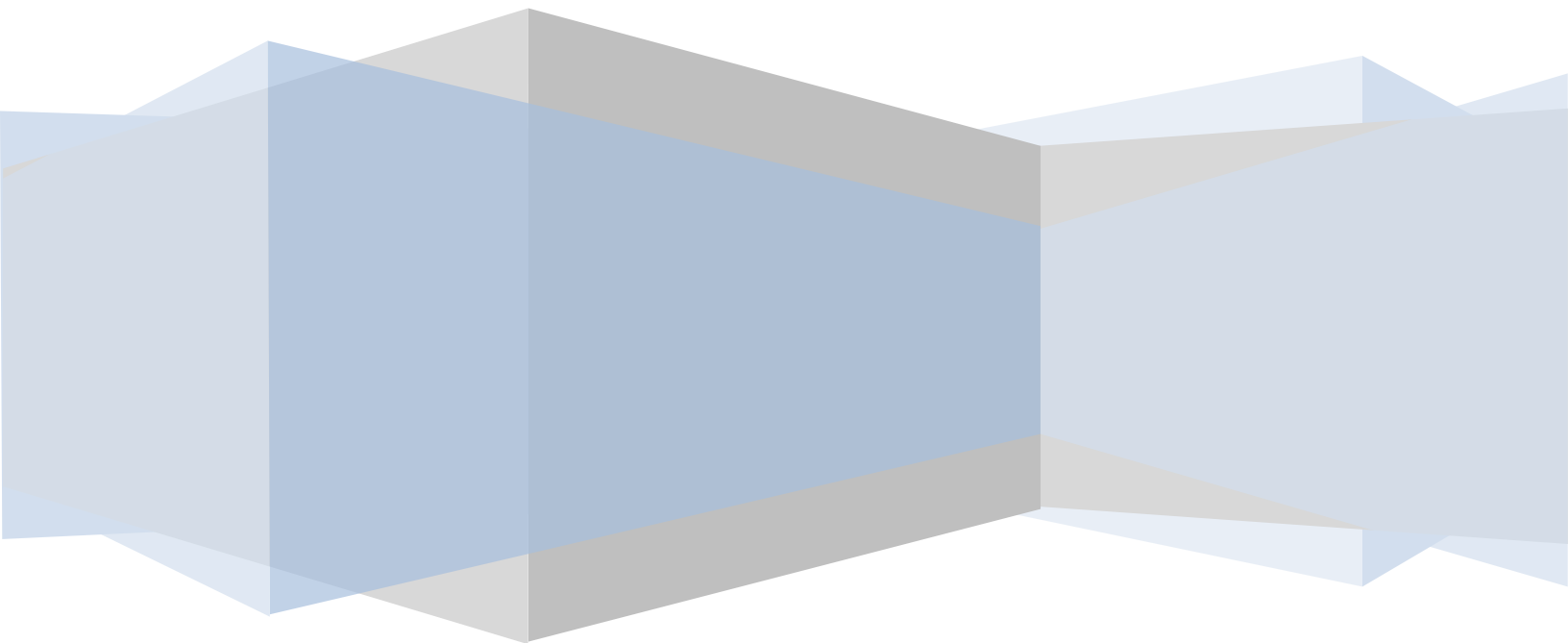


# Create a winning CV & Covering Letter

Turn your CV and covering letter into a persuasive  
marketing tool in 3 steps



# CV checklist: use this to review your own CV

## The basics

- Two sides of A4
- Correct spelling and grammar
- Name at the top (not Curriculum Vitae)
- Education in reverse chronological order
- No unexplained gaps
- GCSEs summarised not listed\*   
\* [number] GCSEs [grade] to [grade] including English [grade] and Maths [grade]
- Appropriate information in Personal Details (not date of birth, gender, marital status, health)

## Formatting and presentation

- All text neatly aligned according to set margins/tabs
- Bullet points used rather than paragraphs of text
- Font size 11 or 12 and one style
- One method of emphasis for headings (**Bold**, *Italics* or Underlining)
- Clear rather than crowded

## Use of language

- Appropriate use of headings\*   
\* Education, Employment History, Work Experience, Relevant Experience, Voluntary Experience, Awards, Achievements, Extra Curricular Activities, Positions of Responsibility, Interests, Professional membership, References

- Active not passive language\*   
\* Organised, Managed, Developed, Responsible for, Completed, Achieved, Communicated, Supported, Created, Provided, Implemented, Analysed, Resolved, Initiated, Presented, Committed to, Delivered, Succeeded in, Coordinated, Proficient in, Competent at, Confident with..  
**not** "My duties were to", "I was required to", "This allowed me to," "This involved me...."

## Cast a critical eye over your CV

What does your CV look like?

- paragraphs of text about what you've learnt/developed/gained from your time at Uni?
- everything you've done since school?
- every single achievement, award and certificate?

This is fine for your records **but not for the employer.**

Be honest with yourself; would it be immediately clear to someone who doesn't know you what you want to do and the difference you can make? Page 4 of this guide will help you to translate your experiences, skills and qualities into benefits so the employer can see the difference you could make.

This guide will also help you to tailor your CV. In today's tough graduate labour market you **can't send the same CV to every employer.**

You need to:

- Create a master CV with everything you've achieved so far
- Update this each time you get a new job, join a new society, gain a new experience
- Change it each time you use it to apply for a job/make a speculative approach

### Why do you need to this?

Although most graduate employers are looking for a similar set of skills they will each use different language to describe those skills and will initially scan your CV for an average of 20 seconds for key words that identify the skills/experiences/qualities they are looking for.



**20 seconds  
To impress**

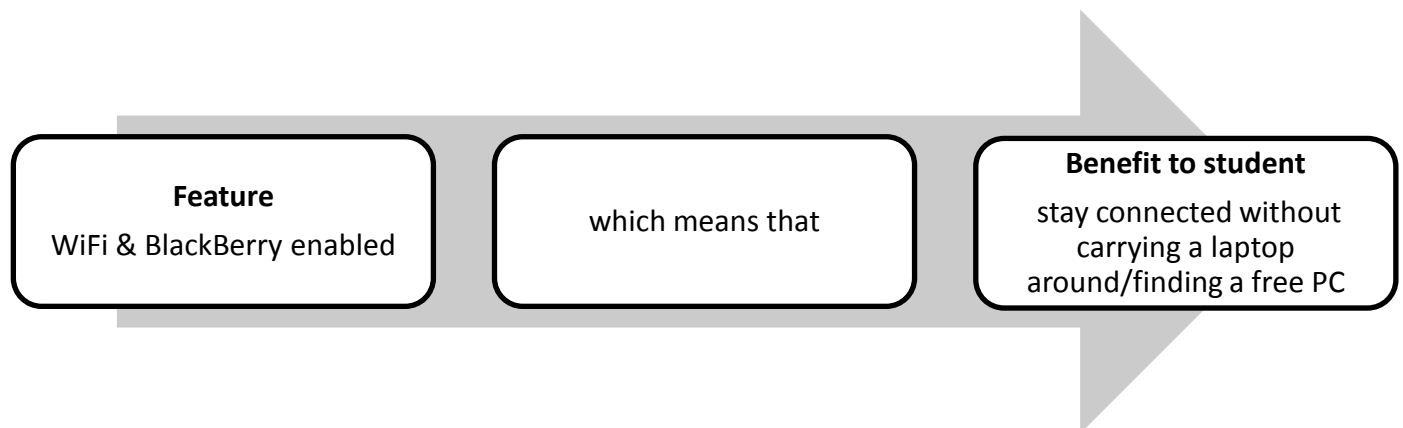
**Do the 20 second test on your CV; do key skills, competencies and experiences leap out encouraging the employer to read more?**

## How to turn your dull record of achievement to a persuasive marketing tool

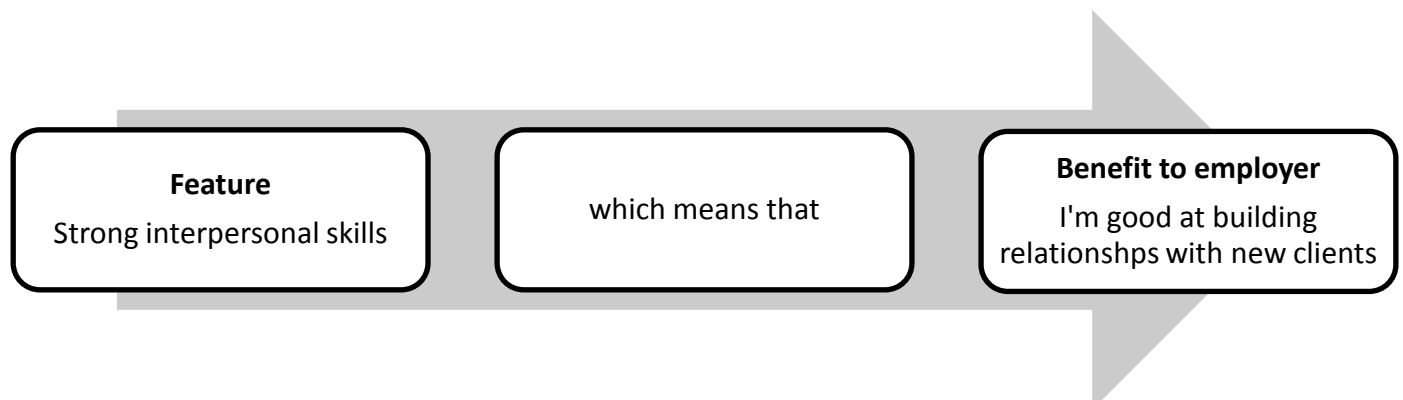
A CV is not a personal record of achievement; **it's a persuasive marketing tool to get you to interview.** Think of it like this; the employer is your client and you are persuading your client to offer you a contract for your services; your CV needs to demonstrate the difference you can make and the value you can add to that employer. This means that you have to **turn features into benefits.**

Imagine that you were selling a mobile phone to a student who is your client. You would have a list of features. On their own, they are unlikely to provide enough incentive for that student to buy the phone as the features are likely to exist in other models and brands. You have to translate those features into benefits so your client understands the difference buying that phone will mean to them:

Example: selling a phone to a student



Applied to writing a CV for an employer



## How to tailor your CV



### Step 1 – analyse the employer’s requirements

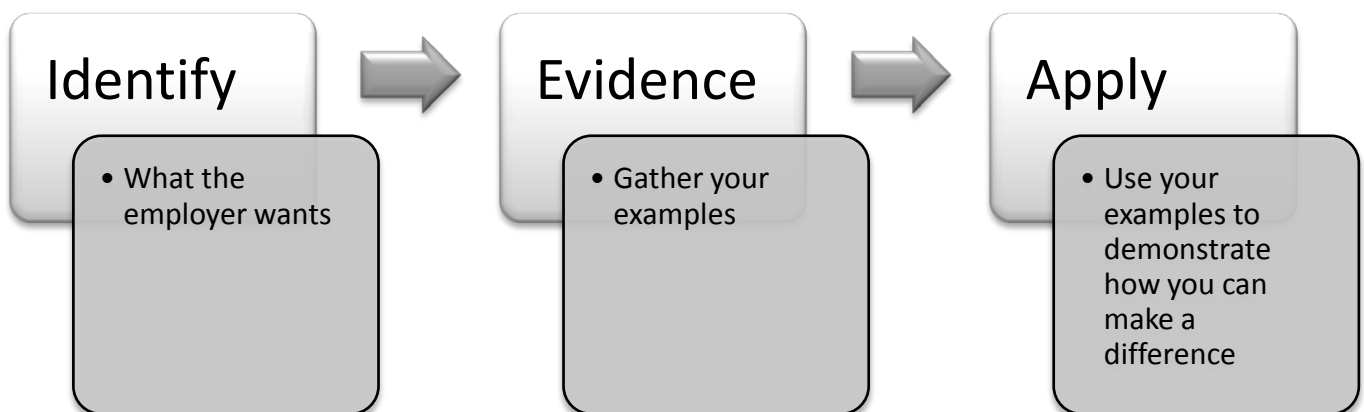
Recruiters will help you to understand what they’re looking for using various means. Some will advertise a vacancy using a full **job description and person specification** where they will list essential and desirable skills/qualities/experience and qualifications. Others will list **competencies and skills** on their website or in a graduate brochure. Some will expect you to use their website to **get a picture of what type of person they recruit** or even to contact them and find out.

If you are approaching an employer to find out if they have a position or to persuade them to create an opportunity you won’t have a job advert to work from. Using occupational profiles on career websites and analysing job descriptions on industry specific sites can help you to understand what employers look for in that sector.

Starting with basic information is OK, but it’s not enough. You need to gather information about the employer beyond the job advert. This means talking to people in the sector you want to work in, reading up on what is happening in that industry which will help you to decide what information you need to highlight on your CV in order to grab the employer’s attention. **Remember every graduate can access basic information about employers, insider information could help you to stand out.**

### Step 2 – Identify Evidence Apply

Think about examples which demonstrate that you have the skills/qualities/experiences they are looking for. Choose examples which **persuade** the recruiter that you can **add value** to their organisation. Examples could come from your Education, Training, Work Experience, Voluntary Experience, Extra Curricular Activities, Awards & Achievements and Interests



## Example

### Job Description

Trainee Theatre Administrator required for busy nationally acclaimed company, specialising in children's theatre. We seek someone with initiative, outstanding organisational abilities, energy and determination, resilience to cope under pressure, patience, good interpersonal skills, an excellent eye for detail, discretion and bags of enthusiasm. You will have strong written English and an interest in theatre.

Required key competencies	My evidence	Application to demonstrate benefits I can bring
<b>Initiative</b>	Guild Theatre Group stand at society's fair	Negotiated with local takeaway and obtained vouchers. Gave away vouchers on stand which attracted more people; increased membership by 20%
<b>Organisation</b>	Oxjam Music Event	Used on-line project management tool to make it easier to collaborate with team, bands, agents, venue manager – resulting in faster communication
<b>Resilience to cope under pressure</b>	Casual bar job at sports venue	Long queues at match intervals; maintained high standard of service despite time pressure
<b>Interpersonal skills, patience, discretion</b>	Healthcare assistant	Built good rapport with confused/distressed patients; exercised tact when carrying out duties which reduced their discomfort
<b>Eye for detail</b>	Set design for Uni theatre group	Thorough research into WW2 set; advice via forums on British Army paint colour which added authenticity to student production
<b>Strong written English</b>	Degree coursework	Excellent result for dissertation; feedback from tutor indicated my argument was very persuasive
<b>Interest in theatre</b>	Uni theatre group	Actively participated throughout degree
<b>Energy, determination, enthusiasm</b>	Use active/positive language	

## Step 3 – Decide on the order of content

This depends on the experience you have to offer and the sector to which you are applying. Some employers will value work experience more than academic ability. If you have relevant experience you could put this first. Others will include academic results in their requirements and want to see your Education first. The following pages contain two different job descriptions and the CVs written in response. The first CV ,below, is in response to the Trainee Administrator job used on page 6

### Joe Blogs

[jblogs@bt.com](mailto:jblogs@bt.com) | 09867428390 | 256 Park Avenue Birmingham B14 8EW

I am passionate about theatre and have pursued my interest through volunteering as a set designer during my degree. Having organised music events for a local arts venue and worked part time in customer facing roles I am determined to apply my organisational and interpersonal skills to become a successful theatre administrator

#### Skills

##### Organisation & Initiative

- Organised a charity music event with 5 bands on the bill attended by over 300 people
- Created new night for local bands after developing a facebook group which generated interest & demand

##### Ability to work under pressure

- Achieved recognition for customer service during busy bar shift at International sports event

##### Interpersonal

- Established a good rapport with patients often in distress making their stay in hospital more comfortable

##### Eye for Detail

- Designed set for WW2 play ensuring authenticity by paying close attention to detail to paint codes used by the British Army

#### Arts related experience

Oxjam Music Events Organiser: Oxfam

June 2010

- Participated in Oxjam Training days to develop event planning skills; used this opportunity to get advice from industry professionals
- Used Zoho Projects to create a web based project plan; utilised the project chat function to facilitate quicker discussions between committee members, bands and agents.
- Liaised with agents and promoters to book bands; strong communication skills used to manage problems with schedule clashes

Freelance Music event organiser July 2010 - Present

I organise local band and open mic nights at The MAC

- Produced publicity for events to a professional standard for using Adobe Illustrator
- Created an additional publicity campaign using social media including Twitter
- Paid close attention to detail when writing press releases and producing flyers for music event
- Developed a database using Access of local bands, promoters, agents

## Theatre Experience

Guild Theatre Group Sept 2007 – June 2010

- Enjoyed helping directors to realise their vision as a set designer
- Carried out front of house tasks including ushering, selling programmes and greeting audience members
- Suggested giving away vouchers for local takeaway which attracted new members to our stand at societies fair; membership increased by 20%

## Additional Experience

Casual bar staff Sept 2008 – Present

WM Hospitality & Events

- Excellent interpersonal skills used to maintain a high standard of service to customers waiting in long queues during sporting events
- Worked quickly under pressure to ensure that customers are served as soon as possible during match intervals

Healthcare assistant Sept 2007 – Aug 2008

University Hospital Birmingham

- Worked well as part of the healthcare team to ensure that patients received a good standard of care
- Used tact and diplomacy to ensure privacy of patients was maintained when carrying out my duties

## Education

BA Social Policy University of Birmingham 2007 – 2010

- Excellent written communication skills used to construct persuasive argument in dissertation which critically examined the success of community arts programmes in two regions

A Levels: English (A) Theatre Studies (A) French (B) St. Peters High School 2002 – 2007

GCSES: 10 Grade A-C including English (A) and Maths (C)

References available on request

## Example 2

Law firm – Training Contract for Trainee Solicitor

We'll pay your tuition fees and offer a maintenance grant for the LPC year (and law conversion for non-law students) before you join us for your Training Contract. To find out what we expect read on...

Academic qualifications

We welcome applications from any degree discipline. You will need a minimum of 3 Bs at A level (or their equivalent), excluding General Studies, and must have gained a minimum 2:1 in your undergraduate degree.

You'll need more than a good academic record; we're looking for additional skills & qualities gained from a variety of experiences:

- Work Experience - This need not be legal work experience, but some kind of business related experience may help your application. We are looking for people who are motivated by the prospect of working in a commercial environment
- Commerciality – We want people who appreciate that we are business advisors, not just legal advisors. We encourage you to improve your commercial awareness by taking an interest in current affairs, reading the trade press and researching topical issues which affect the legal sector and our clients
- Extracurricular activity – We want to know that you can create a balance between work and academics; a range of activities outside of work, such as music, sport and culture may help your application
- Teamworking – We are looking for people who can fit well into a team, and can adapt to a variety of situations.
- Analytical/creative thinking – We want people who can think clearly and identify the key aspects of a problem. You will need to show that you can explain complex issues in simple language and make sense of a complicated situation. We look for people who can see alternative ways of approaching and solving problems.

How would you Identify, Evidence and Apply?

<b>Identification of key competencies</b>	<b>My evidence</b>	<b>Application to demonstrate benefits I can bring</b>

See pages 10 and 11 for the example CV written in response to this job description

## Josephine Blogs

Flat 238  
Tenby Street  
Birmingham B1 8EL

0987264890  
JBlogs@txt.com

### Education

University of Birmingham – BA Political Science (2:1) 2007 – 2010

Awarded annual prize for outstanding undergraduate dissertation:

- Took a creative approach to analysing conflict in the Middle East by interviewing International students from the region
- Received excellent feedback from dissertation tutor who praised the clarity of my argument and success in bringing a new perspective to a complex issue

Hillfield High School & Sixth Form College 2002 – 2007

A Levels: History (A) Politics (A) Philosophy (B)

AS Levels: Psychology (B)

10 GCSEs grade A\* - B including English (A\*) and Maths (B)

### Work Experience

Shell Step Programme June – August 2008

*12 week summer placement in an SME during which I completed a Marketing project and greatly improved my commercial awareness*

- Analysed customer feedback, existing marketing materials, sales targets and competitors/market conditions using the trade press and business-business magazines to produce recommendations for a new strategy
- Presented findings in a presentation to Managing Director and persuaded him to adopt strategy
- Implemented customer awareness campaign using social media which generated 20% increase in traffic to company website
- Enjoyed the challenge of creating incentives for new customers; included discounts for recommending a friend to buy products
- Received excellent feedback from Managing Director who highlighted my success in achieving the project aims

Waitress – Sweet Success

Sept – May 2007

- Worked well as part of a team of 5 in a busy cafe to provide a high standard of service to customers
- Adapted to new work tasks in order to support staff needing help in the kitchen
- Took responsibility for training a new member of staff

### Positions of Responsibility

Student Representative for the Department of English

2009 – 2010

Raised students' concerns at staff/student committee meetings; created a forum to enable students to share concerns and ideas

Social Events Secretary for the English Society

2007 – 2009

Organised termly events for student members, including a charity ball which raised £750 for a local hospice

### Voluntary Work

Disability Support Worker – CSV

June 2007 – Sept 2008

*Four month residential placement supporting teenagers with disabilities*

- Completed training programme to learn how to support teenagers with special needs
- Developed my communication skills to enable me to create a good rapport with clients
- Enhanced my team work skills; a team effort was essential to providing 24 hour care and ensuring that clients were supported at all times

### Interests

I enjoy cycling and regularly participate in charity bike rides; recent rides include the London – Paris tour.

### References

Dr. A. Williams

Senior Lecturer

University of Birmingham

Birmingham B15 2TT

[d.a.williams@bham21.com](mailto:d.a.williams@bham21.com)

Mr. D. Davidson

Managing Director

Sife Enterprises

Sheffield SH1 8EL

[sife3@ent.co.uk](mailto:sife3@ent.co.uk)

References tip: don't include personal details unless you have permission from your referees

## Covering letter/email

In the majority of cases you will need to send a **one page** covering letter or email with your CV. The covering letter is part of your application. Its purpose is to make the recruiter want to look at your CV and to quickly see your suitability for the post.

The emphasis should be on what you can **offer** rather than on what you want. A successful covering letter **highlights your strengths, relevant skills and experience in a concise manner**. Where a CV is more factual, your covering letter is the place to write about your motivations interest and enthusiasm for the position and company/organisation. By using positive language your letter can also get across the “positive attitude” that most graduate employers look for and help the employer to get a real sense of type of person you are. If you are missing anything from the selection criteria and have extenuating/mitigating circumstances you could include a brief paragraph at the end.

There is no standard format, but follow the general guidelines on page 13. In many cases you will be asked to send your CV as an email attachment. You can also add your covering letter as an attachment and indicate that you have done so in the main body of your email as follows

Dear....

Please find attached my CV and covering letter in response to.....

Yours sincerely,

Signature

Or you could write your covering letter in the main body of your email (excluding information about addresses) or write a condensed version of your letter.

Whatever method you choose, don't use informal language in your email.

Your address

Name of employer

Address

Date

Dear Mr/Mrs/Ms/Miss Surname or

Dear Sir/Madam (this won't work for a speculative approach; find a named person to write to)

This is your introduction to explain why are writing to them; is it speculative? If replying to specific advert mention the reference number and where you saw it.

Second paragraph: refer to your CV and draw out specific examples that identify what they are looking for. The advert will give clues. Talk positively about the skills you have and any experiences that are relevant to the reader. Use this as an opportunity to let them know about your strengths and qualities.

Third paragraph: **why** that employer. Show that you have done your research (website or brochure) but don' repeat their marketing back to them! What is it about them and the vacancy in particular? Show your enthusiasm and interest in them. If you have undertaken a placement there, explain how this experience confirmed your desire to build a career there.

To conclude, you can thank them for taking the time to read your letter; identify that you are available to discuss your suitability and your hope to hear from them soon.

Yours sincerely (if writing to a named person)

Yours faithfully (if Dear Sir or Madam)

## Resources



Face to face help

CV advisers offer a CV Clinic most days during term.

See [www.as.bham.ac.uk/cec](http://www.as.bham.ac.uk/cec) for details of availability and how to book

CV workshops throughout term time. See [www.as.bham.ac.uk/cec](http://www.as.bham.ac.uk/cec) for details



[www.as.bham.ac.uk/cec](http://www.as.bham.ac.uk/cec) (under how to apply for a job)

[www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk) (under careers advice)

<http://careers.guardian.co.uk>

[www.skill.org.uk](http://www.skill.org.uk) (for students with disabilities)

[www.vitae.ac.uk](http://www.vitae.ac.uk) (for academic CVs)

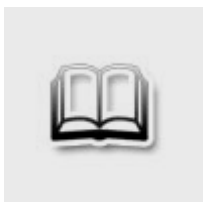
Sector specific information:

<http://targetjobs.co.uk>, [www.get.hobsons.co.uk](http://www.get.hobsons.co.uk),  
[www.insidecareers.co.uk](http://www.insidecareers.co.uk), [www.wikijob.co.uk](http://www.wikijob.co.uk), [www.creative-choices.co.uk](http://www.creative-choices.co.uk), [www.skillset.org](http://www.skillset.org), [www.realworldmagazine.com](http://www.realworldmagazine.com),  
[www.sscalliance.org](http://www.sscalliance.org)



Looking good on paper (available from our information room)

[www.careerplayer.com](http://www.careerplayer.com)



Available from our information room

Pitch yourself, Pearson 2<sup>nd</sup> edition

How to write a CV, Careers Group 2006