



## CVs, Cover Letters & Interviews

After learning about New Zealand work culture and working on your job search strategy, you will need to work on your CV and prepare cover letters and interview answers. This section will give you some tips on what employers are looking for when they are going through applications and interviewing candidates.

### Writing or updating your Curriculum Vitae (CV)

- Your CV tells people who you are. It needs to demonstrate how you'll add value to an organisation, what you do well and what problems you've helped solve in the past.
- You have **6 seconds** for someone to give your CV a quick look over – **then you have 60 seconds** if they're interested in reading further.
- It should be as powerful and as short as possible.
- Tailor your CV to the jobs you're applying for so employers can see you've got the right skills and experience for the role. You can include transferable skills from your volunteer, community work or work in your home country.
- Include your personal statement – a small paragraph at the top of your CV summarizing your skills and strengths.
- Include examples of your achievements, including how your work contributed to successful outcomes.
- Keep it short because employers are busy and are mainly looking for relevant work experience - two to three pages at most!
- Choose referees who can speak well of your achievements and your working style. In NZ references are almost *always* checked, so select referees carefully. The reference checks will hugely influence the organisation's decision on who they hire.
- Write about your work experience. This is often more valued than qualifications.
- Overqualified? Don't dumb it down – address why you are right for the role in your cover letter.

- You have one CV you keep adding to. As you gain more experience you add additional good examples of where you have used skills required for roles that have demonstrated achievement and benefit.
- Put your personality in it! Businesses are wanting people who all work together in an unstructured way. They want to find people who will fit into their team – show your personality through your interests and achievements.
- Use whatever format you want as long as it is neat, clear and consistent to demonstrate your communication skills. There are a range of templates available online that you can use, i.e. Microsoft templates.
- When you edit the document make sure you thoroughly check the copy and format before saving and sending.
- It may be worth having your CV professionally edited – there are a lot of online services who will do this for a small fee. Typos and grammatical mistakes in your CV will not get you through to the next round.
- How do you talk about yourself when you're talking to friends or colleagues? Have a CV that reflects who you really are.

## CV Tips – what *not* to do

### Don't...

- Include a photo. This is not done in New Zealand. You will however have a photo on your LinkedIn Profile, which they will probably look up if they are considering you for the next round.
- Personal details outside of contact details i.e. date of birth, gender. Just your name and contact details (email, LinkedIn URL and phone number).
- Random sections that don't quickly tell someone what you are capable of i.e. "skills" that is just a list of soft skills
- Put in unevidenced claims
- Visa – if the job advertisement asks for details about visas then put it in your cover letter
- Have a strange file name for your CV. When saving your CV please put your name i.e. CV John Smith **NOT** CV JohnS, **NOT** CV John, **NOT** Resume 2019 or some other random file name.
- Have lots of different font sizes. Use only 1 font for copy – you can increase the font for headings. The most common style used is Calibri – Size 11 Font.

## Here are three questions to ask yourself when you are preparing your CV.

- When someone scans my CV quickly will they think, "This CV looks interesting?"
- When they read my CV fully, will they think "This person has the skills we need?"
- When they choose CVs to shortlist will they think "This person is worth meeting"

## CV Structure

### Main Headings

1. Name and Contact details (include LinkedIn if you have a profile, email address and phone number)
2. Personal Statement: – Career Objective, Personal Statement
3. Education & Qualifications – Tertiary only (include school results if you are a school leaver)
4. Skills Section: Technical + soft skills (employability skills)
5. Employment History: Include: Position, Employer, time in role, summary of role, any achievements. Have your most recent at the top
6. Community and Voluntary Work
7. Sports and Hobbies
8. Referees
9. Any other relevant additional information – Industry Tickets, Professional Memberships

### Talking about your experience in your CV

Whether you're new to the workforce or have decades of experience under your belt, writing your CV and updating it to reflect your level of experience is a skill that needs frequent consideration.

While there are many advisable CV writing tips that will help you get ahead (listing your most recent experience first is just one of them), there is no one-size-fits-all approach for your entire career.

Learn what to include or exclude in your CV depending on how much experience you have.

#### 2 Years' experience

With two years' in the workforce, it's likely you're considered a junior in most fields of work. If you've only had one or two jobs in that time, "consider including high school achievements, society or club participation, or certificate training to demonstrate you are an enthusiastic and driven member of the community".

#### 5 years' experience

Five years' of experience is a significant period of time to master a set of skills, providing you've either remained in the same field of work during that time or developed a robust set of transferable skills. Similar to junior professionals, you may only have worked in a couple of roles, so you could bulk up your CV by including volunteer experience to help round out your general work experience and to demonstrate you have gained and developed the skills required for the job you're applying for.

#### 10 to 15 years' experience

When you've had ten to 15 years of work experience, it's likely you feel confident in your skillset and abilities, and, have a lot to show for your service to your industry. This is when summarizing multiple roles, companies and responsibilities into a concise CV can become a challenge. Aim to keep your CV

to two pages, and, leave out any early roles in your career that may have no relevance to the job you're hoping to land now. You may decide to only summarise your last three roles and simply list previous employers, highlighting key achievements to demonstrate the development of your knowledge and skillset.

### 20 to 30 years plus experience

Senior professionals with more than 30 years or more of experience are more likely to have a four-page long CV. Four pages for senior professionals is a reasonable amount to really communicate their wealth and knowledge. However, ensure to only highlight key achievements under each role to make it easier for recruiters and employers to digest. You may also want to highlight programmes or groups you have been involved in such as mentoring to a junior colleague or advice to a charity board. These types of experience help demonstrate application of your skillset within the wider community.

Regardless of which stage of your career you're in, it is important to remember that it's not how long you've been in the workforce but what skills you can bring to the role. Make this clear in your CV and you'll be better positioned to secure your next great role

## Cover Letters

A cover letter may be the first contact you have with a prospective employer, so it is important to make a good impression. If your cover letter makes a poor impression, your CV may not be read.

It is important to include the right information about you and match this to the job requirements.

### Tips for creating a cover letter

A cover letter is usually one page long. It is important to read the job advertisement carefully as the employer may request you to address multiple criteria as part of your application. The cover letter is the place to do this.

You need to link the information in the cover letter back to the job requirements and there should be evidence of it in your CV.

Show you're enthusiastic about the role by giving examples in the cover letter of how your skills and experience match the tasks and requirements listed in the job advertisement. And tell the employer why you'd like to work in their company.

### Cover letter structure

#### Your contact details

- Full name
- Email address
- Address
- Phone number
- LinkedIn

<b>Date</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full date (eg. 18 March, 2020)</li> </ul>
<b>Salutation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dear (insert hiring managers name).</li> <li>• If the hiring manager's name is unknown, write 'To whom it may concern')</li> </ul>
<b>Role you are applying for</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Insert a heading: 'Re. Assistant Marketing Manager Role' for example</li> <li>• Then include a sentence stating you are applying for the above job and where you saw it advertised/heard about it</li> </ul>
<b>What you will bring to the role</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Highlight how well you match the requirements for the job;</li> <li>• Outline any further points in your favour relating to the job</li> </ul>
<b>Why you want to work in this position for the organisation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be enthusiastic and show that you have thought about the job and why you would like to work for them;</li> <li>• Make positive comments about the organisation, e.g. their reputation, performance and product</li> </ul>
<b>Finishing off</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If you are applying for a vacancy, thank them for considering your application;</li> <li>• If you are writing to ask for an opportunity, state your intentions to follow up with a telephone call (optional)</li> </ul>
<b>Signing off</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be professional with your farewell, not too formal or too familiar;</li> <li>• A fairly neutral sign off is 'Kind regards'; or more formal is 'Yours sincerely'</li> <li>• Sign off with your full name</li> </ul>

## Sample Cover Letter Layout

<Your name here>  
 <Your contact number>  
 <Your email address>  
 <LinkedIn>  
 <Your address>

27 February 2020

Dear <insert hiring manager's name>./ To whom it may concern

Re: <insert role title>

I am writing to apply for the position of <insert role title> at <Company name>, which was advertised online on SEEK. <Talk about your key skills and experience that would make you the best fit for the role>. <For example: Top notch sales skills are a must in the fast-paced world of retail and I pride myself as a very effective salesperson>

I have enclosed my CV to support my application. It shows that I would bring important skills to the position, including:

<Experience. Include a sentence on your relevant experience. <For example: I have six years' experience working on the shop floor in two highly competitive industries>

<Skills. Here you want to highlight some of your core skills that talk to the key selection criteria for the role.

<Performance. Promote a key achievement or result you're proud of that relates to the role. <For example: In my time at my current place of employment I have signed on 85 new clients and exceeded sales targets by 20% in consecutive years.>

<Talk about why you would like to work for the company and why you'd be a good fit. <For example: <Company name> has been of interest to me since embarking on its mega store approach to retail. This is ideal for 21<sup>st</sup> century sales of flooring products. I was also impressed with the profile of your Managing Director Rod Smythe, which I read in the Retail journal late last year.>

I would enjoy having the opportunity to talk with you more about this position, and how I could use my skills to benefit your organisation.

Thank you for considering my application. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

<Your name>

## Interviews

An interview is your chance to present your skills, experience, personal qualities and other strengths that relate to the position you are applying for. It is also an opportunity for you to show your personality and learn more about whether the organisation is a good fit for you.

Remember that an interview is a two-way street. It is as much about the employer assessing your suitability to the position as it is finding out whether this role is right for you.

### Prepare for interviews

An interview is also a chance for an employer to meet you in person, and for you to assess whether you would like to work there. So, it's important to spend time preparing for your interview.

1. Find out more about the organisation online – its products, service and key people
2. Re-read the job description to prepare for questions you may be asked (see below)
3. Make sure you have questions ready to ask them, and evidence of your achievements



## Interview Styles

There are different styles of interviews and the questions are a little different for each one.

**Behavioural:** competency based or situational interviewing

**Selection:** focus on your personality, goals, motivations and your reported strengths

**Combination:** Combination of both styles

**Regardless of the style of interview, being well prepared is critical!**

## Behavioural Interviews – STAR Methodology

**STAR** is a strategy to use in response to behavioural questions

Behavioural or situation questions focus on your past performance in a similar situation. This technique is used by employers to evaluate a candidate's experiences and behaviours. An example is:

“Tell me about a time when you had to assist an unhappy customer remotely to resolve a technical issue. How did you approach solving it? What was the outcome?”

<b>S</b>	=	<b>Situation</b>	(Give the context of your situation)
<b>T</b>	=	<b>Task</b>	(Explain the task you were required to complete)
<b>A</b>	=	<b>Action</b>	(Describe the specific actions you took to achieve the task)
<b>R</b>	=	<b>Result</b>	(Describe the result of your actions – “which meant that...”, which resulted in.....”, “the benefit was...”

Often you can predict the questions you will be asked. Let's take a look at the following details from a job advertisement.

### Knowledge, skills and experience

- Strong organisational skills and ability to multitask
- Able to work well under pressure and to tight deadlines
- Excellent interpersonal and communication skills

It is likely they will ask you to give situations or examples of times you have had to display those behaviours. For example, 'Tell me about a time you have had to multitask to get a project completed'; or 'Tell me about a time you had to meet a tight deadline'; or 'Tell me about a time you had to use your communication skills to deal with a difficult customer or colleague'. They will be expecting you to use STAR formula to answer the question; and will likely be evaluating you on it.

It's a good idea to have some examples of challenging situations you have been in in the past ready to go, that you can adapt to demonstrate different skills.

For example, you might have had to deliver an important project to a tight deadline in your previous role, which required good organizational skills, multi-tasking, communication and interpersonal skills,

ability to work under pressure, flexibility and a can-do attitude. If you have this example ready to go, you can use it to demonstrate any of those skills you might be asked about.

Make sure you have a few of these examples prepared.

Practice your interview by writing out possible questions you'll be asked and getting a friend to interview you.

Have a look online for common interview questions and practice some answers. The better prepared you are the more confident you will feel going into the interview. There are more online resources at the end of this document.

## **Attending Interviews**

Congratulate yourself when you're offered an interview. It's a real achievement to get through to interview stage and you should be really proud of yourself.

Now it's up to you to make a great impression and get that job.

- First impressions do count, so make sure you wear something that's smart, simple and looks professional. Make sure you dress appropriately for the role – if you can visit the business (or similar type of business) and see what others wear that helps – try to fit with their dress standards. If you wear a coat or jacket, take it off when you go into the interview. Track or sweatpants are not appropriate attire for an interview, whether it's for a job or an internship.
- Work out how you'll get to the interview and how long it'll take you to get there so you're not late. Plan to arrive around 5 minutes early. If you arrive earlier than that, stay in your car or wait outside until around 5 minutes before the interview time. Arriving late for an interview makes a terrible first impression that is hard to come back from. Don't be late!
- Take a few deep breaths before going in and try to clear your mind and think positive!
- Be friendly and confident when you meet the receptionist and tell him/her who you are there to see.
- Give a strong handshake and confident, friendly greeting when introduced to your interviewers.
- Be prepared for some smalltalk when you arrive – this is important, it gives the interviewers a chance to get to know you a little and form a relationship before starting the interview.
- Listen carefully and actively – make eye contact and make sure you understand the question before answering – if you are not sure what the question was, clarify before answering.
- Answer questions fully – interviewers will be evaluating your responses so you need to give as much information as possible. Give examples and evidence for your claims about skills you possess.
- Be confident when answering interview questions and speak clearly. Everyone is nervous during interviews but try to be as confident as you can.



- Be ready to give examples from your previous experience that demonstrates your knowledge and skills
- Strive to establish a connection – not overly impress them with unevidenced claims. Be confident yet yourself.
- Be aware of your body language. Don't sit on the edge of the chair – make yourself comfortable and make sure you're not facing away from people. Make sure you make eye contact with all the people in the room, not just the person asking the question/s.
- Be honest. If you haven't done something they ask about, or you can't think of an example for something they ask you, be honest. The best response is always honesty, but in a positive way. If they ask you if you can use a certain piece of software for example and you have never used it before, say 'I haven't used that before, but I've taught myself xyz software in the past and pick things up really quickly, so I would be happy to have a play around with it before I started – I'm sure I would be able to get proficient quickly.'
- They will ask you at the end whether you have any questions. You *must* ask at least a couple of questions. Not asking questions sends a message that you're not really interested. Go into the interview with some questions prepared. Some of the questions will be answered during the interview – you can tell them this: 'I did have questions around some of your current projects and the goals of the company, but you have answered these. However, I'd like to ask about...'
- At the end of the interview thank them for their time, tell them you enjoyed meeting them and learning more about the company, and that you are looking forward to hearing from them shortly. You might reiterate how excited you are for this opportunity 'because xyz'.

## Choose your Referees

Employers usually ask you for at least two referees – people they can call to check your work experience and find out whether you will fit into their organisation.

Choose referees who are reliable and professional, and easy to contact. They should be able to talk about work you have done and how you do it. The best referee options are your manager or supervisor, but your coach, community leader or course tutor are good if you have limited work experience.

**Use credible referees.** Referees should be someone you've reported to. Ideally it should be your existing employer. Otherwise use people in respected positions who can say good things about you. That may be your principal if you've just left school, your university lecturer, your work mentor, or an intern supervisor. Whatever you do, don't use your friends.

**Naming Referees** You don't need to name your referees on your CV. Sometimes managers don't know that you are job hunting. **It is fine to say referees are available on request.** You can be selective when you release those references.

**Attach written references if you have them.** Recruiters generally don't expect these now, but good references will add value to your application.

**Forewarn your referee.** Brief your referee with details of the job you're applying for and how you hope you'll be portrayed. There is nothing worse for a referee than being contacted with no warning that they might be contacted or no context of the type of job you are applying for.

## After the interview

It's always nerve wracking after an interview waiting to hear back. A 'thank you' email is always a nice touch, best if sent later the same day you have the interview. Just a one liner thanking them for the opportunity and how much you enjoyed meeting them.

If you are not successful, feel free to ask for feedback on why you weren't successful. They may not give you feedback – don't push them if they don't, but it can be helpful to know how you can improve for future interviews.

Try to remain positive – you never know exactly what their reasons are, it may just be that you weren't quite the right 'fit' for the organization. That means it's probably not the right organization for *you* either. Don't take these rejections too personally – everyone has interviewed and missed out on jobs, it just means there is something better for you around the corner!

## Getting a job offer

Being offered a job exciting. Although it's natural to want to accept it straight away, take time to consider the offer because your reputation could be at stake if you back out later.

Before you accept the offer, ask to look over the employment agreement and make sure you understand it, or get advice on its fairness before signing it.

Think about whether the employment agreement covers important things such as flexible working hours and the opportunity to learn new skills. If you're not completely happy, it could be worth trying to negotiate on pay, leave or training before you sign the contract.

## Settling into Your New Job

You've got the job, congratulations! Now the actual work begins. Whether you have been hired on a permanent or fixed-term contract, there are a few things you'll need to know about and complete during your first day, your first week and your first month.

Remember, you are not expected to understand everything from the start – the first few weeks are a learning opportunity, so you can get to know your job and the business better.

### Your First Day

Your first day is always a little different and there are some processes your new employer will need you to complete. There could be meetings to attend some on-the-job training. These first weeks are all about induction/orientation into the business.

- Your first day is usually planned for you. In the first few days of a new job you will be told lots of information so it's a good idea to make notes.

- Depending on the job, be prepared to start working soon after you arrive at your new workplace.
- You should attend any health and safety sessions as this is required by law. You will need to sign a document confirming you understand all the health and safety processes.
- Your manager will usually introduce you to your team members and other people in the workplace.
- If you use a computer for work, you will get login details and training on how to use the company systems. Your new employer will need you to fill in a new employee form, provide bank account details for your pay and an IRD number for tax purposes, and complete a Kiwisaver (Savings scheme) form. You should bring all this information with you on your first day.

## Your First Week

- In the first couple of days there may be a morning tea to welcome you to the team. You may also need to be prepared for a cultural welcome such as Maori pōwhiri (this can occur if you have secured a job in a government organisation or the Not-For-Profit sectors) They may also ask you to say a few words, so practice something to say before you start work.
- An induction pack or background information like an annual report or business strategy may be given to you to read.
- Expect to attend meetings where you should take notes and ask questions
- Your workplace may have a social-get-together after work on a Thursday or Friday. Go along if you can as this is a good opportunity to informally meet your new team and create networks.
- At the end of the first week, book in a general chat with your manager to ask questions and get feedback. Your manager can give you any information you may need, and you may have some ideas you'd like to share with them.

## Your First Month

- By now you're probably very busy with work. If you haven't completed any background reading from your employer, you should make this a priority.
- You may have had many meetings with your manager, and if you're a permanent employee they could ask you to create a performance or goal setting plan for the next few months.