Get your 1st tech job

A simple guide to effective CVs

Welcome

At Digital Native we review hundreds of applications from people just like you who are looking to secure their 1st tech job.

Although we get to see lots of fantastic applications, we also get to see a large number that are not shortlisted for the roles they've applied to. Many of these are not progressed due to the applicant making some simple, easily rectifiable mistakes.

This is not a definitive guide to what makes a good CV, our opinion is no more valid than yours but hopefully some of the simple advice in this guide may put you one step closer to gaining your dream job.

Finally, job seeking is tough and if you feel you're not getting anywhere there are services out there that can help.

Good luck!

Firstly, let's think what is the function of a CV?

Your CV has only **one** function and that is to answer questions that the person shortlisting has about your suitability for the role and to get you progressed to the next stage in the recruitment process.

What questions does my CV need to answer?

Typically, employers are looking for answers to the following questions:

- Why is this person applying for my role?
- What evidence is there that this person may be suitable for my role?
- Does the story this CV tells make sense?
- Does this person meet any essential criteria I have?

How do I know what the right answers are to these questions?

If you read the job description carefully the employer has already told you the answers they want to hear. They've told you:

- What the company does
- What you'd be doing in the role
- The technologies they use
- The skills they're looking for
- The essential criteria they have

A good CV will simply reflect this information and tell them that you're a **good** match for what they're looking for.

N.B. Please note, I used the term good match, not an exact match!

Great – I understand everything so far. How do I do this?

Firstly, there's no "right" way to write but you're looking to answer these questions in a simple easy to read format.

You should also consider using a covering letter as it may be easier to explain why you're a great candidate here, rather than in your CV.

Examples could include:

Personal Details – name, email address, mobile number, your location

This is so the employer can contact you and know where you're located which will answer the question "will this person be able to get to work?" If you are looking to relocate you need to make it clear that you're willing to do this and it is feasible and this is best done in a covering letter

Career Objective / Personal Statement – this is your introduction to who you are and what you're looking for. Examples:

Example 1
I am a motivated individual with a keen interest in computer science and maths and I am currently studying A Level computer science, Maths and Physics and my predicted grades are ABC. Although I have considered university, I have decided that I want to secure a Software Development apprenticeship as I feel this is the best option to me to start my career.

Example 2
Having graduated with a 2:1 in Engineering I had my 1st introduction to coding during my final year. From this I have undertaken a number of self-directed courses on Codecademy and Udemy and I have decided that coding is where my passion lies, and I want to secure a Software Development apprenticeship to further my career aspirations.

These two examples start to answer three of the questions that employers have when looking at your CV:

- Why is **this** person applying for my role?
- What evidence is there that **this** person may be suitable for my role?
- Does the story **this** CV tells make sense?

Skills

Remember – the employer will have told you the skills they're looking for in the job description so your task here is to simply provide **evidence** that you have these skills. **(The key word here is evidence!)**

Example 1
Job description: good working knowledge of Windows and computer architecture
Good statement:

- **Computer hardware and operating systems -** I have gained a good understanding of PC's, Laptops and operating systems through researching and building my own gaming PC, installing hardware upgrades on family and friends' machines, and resolving computer related issues.

Job description: You'll be a keen coder and be able to code basic solutions in either C#, JavaScript or Python
Good statement:

- **Coding -** Outside of my A Level computer science course I use Codecademy , w3schools and YouTube and I am proficient in JavaScript and Python and I am currently learning basic C#

Job description: Must have a passion for data and analysis.
Good statement:

- In my role in the finance department, I created a simple dashboard for our finance director and I am currently studying a course on Power BI in my spare time

Education

This is a factual list of the current qualifications you hold.

The main mistake that people make is not bothering to list all their qualifications. If the position has minimum academic requirements of 5 GCSEs at 4 – 9 (A – C) and the candidate has only bothered to list their A levels they run the risk of being rejected for not meeting the minimum requirements (or the employer may assume they're lazy)

Training courses

This is a really underutilised section and hardly any applicants put anything in here.

Employers are really interested in applicants that do learning in their own time, especially where what they're learning is related to the apprenticeship they're applying for.

The key thing here is you don't need to pay for any training courses as there's lots of fantastic free materials (some will require that you create an account) from:

- Google
- Microsoft
- Codecademy
- W3schools
- Ministry of Testing

Taking these free courses in your own time shows the employer that you are serious about a career in tech and you're willing to work hard to achieve this.

Work History

Again, this is a factual list of the previous jobs you held.

Although this is a factual list it's also an opportunity to tell the employer why you're are a good fit for their role.

Your previous jobs may not have been in tech, they could have been working in retail or hospitality but did you display any skills that you need in the apprenticeship? E.g., did you create a spreadsheet that enabled a manager to make a decision, did you solve a problem?

Hobbies and Interests

This is where you get to share a little bit about what you enjoying doing outside of work.

When writing this do think about the message you could be giving to someone and also have some reference to tech in here such as "I also enjoy keeping up to date with advances in cyber security."

Covering Letter

The cover letter is a great tool to:

- Reinforce the messages in your CV
- Explain things in more details

There are lots of good examples on the web so all I want to mention in the power of simple sentences and the impressions that they leave with employers.

Sentence: I have enjoyed learning to code in HTML and CSS and as I can see the role requires C# I have started a foundation level course on Codecademy to gain a basic understanding and I would love to become proficient in this through the apprenticeship.

What the employer thinks: Sounds keen and motivated, they must really want this job!

Sentence: I have a good understanding of statistics from my A Level Maths but as the role will require me to use Power BI I have taken a course in my own time on Microsoft Learn and would welcome the opportunity to develop my skills in the workplace.

What the employer thinks: Sounds keen and motivated, they must really want this job!

Sentence: Although I am currently located in Kent I would welcome the opportunity to relocate to Nottingham and I have researched that this is feasible on the advertised salary.

What the employer thinks: Sounds keen and organised!

Top Tips

1. Take the time to read each job description and amend your CV and covering letter to each application.

2. Remember the employer has told you what they want to see in your CV in their job description

3. The employer only gets to see the information you've provided and has to make their decision based on this information.

4. Many recruitment sites including the Find an Apprenticeship portal ask you to provide information through a website. If possible, don't write your responses straight in the browser, especially if you are viewing the site on a mobile phone. If you can, do this on a laptop or PC and copy the questions into a word processor and spell and grammar check your responses before cutting and pasting these into the relevant areas of your application.

Summary

Hopefully this guide will give you some hints on how you can improve your applications and enable you to give the best information you can to convince an employer that you're right for their role.

Good luck!