CV Writing

A workshop pack for trainers looking to deliver an introductory training session on how to write an effective CV

Introduction

The following document contains useful resources for anyone who is looking to run a workshop introducing an individual or group of learners to the basics of writing a CV. The information presented here is intended to fill a two-hour session for a small to medium size group but can be scaled up or down as required.

This pack includes:

- A slide-by-slide breakdown of information that intends to introduce learners to the basics of CV writing, as well as tips for workshop leaders on how present said information.

- An accompanying slide show presentation that can be presented as-is, or adapted to suit the specific needs of your learners.

- A CV comparison exercise which emphasises the differences between a well-written and a poorly-written CV.

About this pack

This resource pack has been adapted from a CV writing workshop that was conducted at the PONToon Festival as part of the PONToon project.

The original workshop was developed by University of Portsmouth Careers Advisor Paul Barnes.

About PONToon

PONToon (Partnership Opportunities using New Technologies fostering sOcial and ecOnomic inclusioN) is an Interreg 5A France (Channel) England project co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund and comprised of 11 partners from across the South of England and northern France.

PONToon is a research project that aims to support the economic inclusion of disadvantaged groups (initially targeting socially and economically disadvantaged women aged 18-35) by creating a suite of digital tools, plus supporting materials, that can be used by trainers to provide support with various aspects involved in finding meaningful employment.

The project has a total budget of €5.8 million euros (approximately €1.5 million total budget to the lead partner University of Portsmouth; 69% grant funded by the European Regional Development Fund, 31% partner contribution).

For more information about PONToon, visit **pontoonproject.eu**

Tips for Trainers

Try to relate everything you say back to the ultimate goal of your workshop, in this case: getting an interview for a job via writing an effective CV. If you have not made it clear to your learners why they must do a particular thing, the information you are presenting will be less likely to sink in and you may risk frustrating them. This is further explained in the brief summary of Knowles' Andragogy below.

You should also try to be wary of the language you are using during your session, and try to conduct your speech in plain English where possible. Some words may be daunting or off-putting for prospective job seekers, especially those without much experience applying for new jobs.

Knowles' Andragogy (Knowles, 1990)

Andragogy dictates that the point at which an individual achieves a self-concept of essential self-direction is the point at which they psychologically become adult. A very critical thing happens when this occurs; the individual develops a deep psychological need to be perceived by others as being self-directing. Thus, when they find themself in a situation in which they are not allowed to be self-directing, they experience tension between the situation and their self-concept. Their reaction is bound to be tainted with resentment and resistance.

Principles of Andragogy

The need to know	Adult learners need to know why they need to learn something before undertaking to learn it.
Learner self-concept	Adults need to be responsible for their own decisions, and be treated as capable of self-direction.
The role of learner experience	Adult learners have a variety of experiences in life, which represent the richest resource for learning. These experiences are however imbued with bias and presupposition.
Readiness to learn	Adults are ready to learn those things they need to know in order to cope effectively with life situations.
Orientation to learning	Adults are motivated to learn to the extent that they perceive that it will help them perform tasks they confront in their life situations.

Slide 1: Key learning points

- The Curriculum vitae (CV) - a quick summary of what it is

- CV writing - the key tricks that everyone needs to know

- Examples - what do you think?

- Next steps

This first slide is all about introducing your learners to the key themes you will be covering during the workshop. At this stage it's best to give just a short summary of each.

You can also use this time to introduce yourself and learn about your participants' previous experiences with job seeking and CV writing - that way you may be able to tailor some of the information you present to them as you go.

Slide 2: What is a CV?

- A CV is a document sent to a potential employer that highlights a candidate's key experience and qualities in the hope of being selected for the next stage of a selection process

- CVs should be no more than a short summary of your professional history, as most employers won't want to read through the life story of every candidate

- Your aim at this stage is simply to pique an employer's interest.

The first slide is all about making sure your learners are aware of what a CV is, and why it is necessary. Whilst most of the points on this slide are self-explanatory, you should try to emphasise to your learners that CVs must be brief and concise.

Slide 3: Breaking it down – contents

- Important info – Name, address, email, phone number

- **A short bio - about 3-4 lines (think newspaper sub header)**

- **Events (employment history) listed with the most recent first**

- **References (available upon request)**

This slide is a simple checklist of everything that your learners should be including in their CVs. It may be worth explaining that although there is no official way to write a CV, there is certain information that must be included in order for it to be of any use to a prospective employer. Go through the items on the list with your learners and give a brief explanation of each:

Important info – including name, address and contact details allows employers to contact you about your CV.

A short bio – a couple of short sentences that highlight your key attributes. This will be further explained later in this presentation

Events – a list of your previous employment and education history, listed from the most recent item at the top to oldest at the bottom. Each item should include the dates of your employment, a short description of your role, and a bullet-pointed list of key skills or particular responsibilities that you demonstrated.

References – References are comments from previous employers, managers or tutors that are intended to give an account of you as an employee. Instead of including a pre-written statement from your old boss, it is usually more commonplace to simply write 'references available upon request' at the bottom of your CV.

Slide 4: Breaking it down - Style

- **No more than 2 A4 pages in length (size 11 font)**

- **Clear sections - not too much text**

- **Avoid writing informally - for example, not: ''I did some good work experience...)**

- **Always adapt to the role in question!**

- **Use 'key' words - (remember Applicant Tracking Systems or ATS)**

- **No mistakes! Check, check and check again!**

This slide explains some of the most important elements of that style that should be followed when writing a CV. Whilst, as mentioned above, there are no rules for how a CV must look, there is a generally accepted style that employers will be familiar with, which allows them to pinpoint specific bits of information quickly.

No more than 2 A4 pages – as explained above, for most jobs anything more than an absolute maximum of two pages is too much. Employers simply do not have the time to sift through essays for each prospective employee.

Clear sections – it's important to make sure that any CV is divided into clear sections with appropriate line breaks and subheadings. The point of this is to aid readability and make things as easy as possible for the employer.

Avoid writing informally - writing informally on a CV is never a good idea as it can seem unprofessional. Instead, limit your sentences to the facts, try to avoid being overly descriptive and let the employer come to their own conclusions.

For example, instead of writing: "I had a great time working at Joe Bloggs ltd last year and learned loads of cool things about print design", it is better to write: "During my time working at Joe Bloggs ltd, I learned about the different aspects of print design".

Always adapt to the role in question – This point might seem counterproductive for some of your learners as it means taking more time writing and less time sending out CVs, but even if your learners are applying for broadly similar jobs, try to emphasise the importance of taking a few minutes to adapt a CV to match the job description. This doesn't mean re-writing a new CV from scratch each time, just tweaking a sentence or two here and there to better align it to the role in question. For example, if a learner is applying for a marketing role at a tech company, it would make sense for them to tweak their bio to emphasise any previous experience/ interests that relate to technology.

Suggest that your learners create a 'base' CV that can be tweaked to fit a variety of different job roles.

Use 'key' words – The main reason for using keywords is in order to get past applicant tracking systems (ATS). ATS are software applications that enable the electronic handling of recruitment and hiring needs, meaning that CVs will be scoured by a bot for specific keywords before they are passed on to a human. Using the right keywords in a CV means it is more likely to pass this initial phase.

A good way for your learners to ensure they are using the right keywords is to check the wording in the job description of the role they are applying for. This can make the process of writing CVs slightly more time consuming – especially if you are applying for multiple jobs, but it makes more sense to adapt your CV for five different roles and have it accepted for all 5, than to send the exact same CV to 50 different roles and have it accepted by none.

Triple check for errors – This point is fairly self-explanatory. If an employer comes across errors in a CV, it would immediately call into question the professionalism of the candidate – so why give them the opportunity? Read your CV multiple times, run it through spell checks (Google Chrome's Grammarly extension is very good for this) and where possible, run it past friends and family.

Slide 5: CV evaluation exercise

- **Now that you know a bit more about the different components of a conventional CV, take a look at the two CVs provided. The first CV follows all the rules we've already discussed, the second could do with a bit of work.**

- **Go through each CV and highlight the parts where each gets it right / wrong.**

For this exercise, give your participants access to the two CV examples included in this pack, either electronically or by giving them paper copies.

The point of the exercise is to cement the information that you have already presented, so there is nothing trying to catch participants out and it should be fairly straightforward. Allow for about 20 minutes to give everyone a chance to have a proper look, either in pairs or individually, then allocate another 10 minutes or so to talk through the pros and cons of the CVs.

Strong CV Example

- Clearly structured
- Name, address and contact details visible at the top
- Bio is written concisely, and not too long.
- Written in a formal style
- Events ordered correctly, with all relevant information displayed clearly
- A good length - shorter than two pages of A4

Weak CV Example

- No obvious structure, so it's hard to locate specific information
- No contact details or address
- The bio is far too long and contains unnecessary information
- It's written very informally, with lots of text that would be of no interest to an employer
- There are a number of typos/spelling mistakes

Slide 6: Preparing the components

- **A simple list of your skills & qualifications**

- **A breakdown of your prior experience and achievements**

- **The job description/ person specification of the role you are applying for**

In this part of the workshop, you can get your learners to begin working on their very own CVs.

Depending on how much time you wish to allocate to the workshop, you can just give your participants a brief overview of how to go about writing a CV or begin to actually piece everything together so that participants will be able to leave the workshop with a pretty solid basis for their CVs.

First things first, when it comes to writing a CV having access to everything you need to build it before you start will make the process a whole lot easier. This slide features a simple list of items that will be useful to your participants when they are creating their own CVs. Quickly talk through each item on the list, explaining why it would be useful.

List of skills & qualifications - fairly self-explanatory, these can be pretty much dragged & dropped into a CV as is.

Breakdown of prior experience - having a detailed rundown of all prior experience and achievements will make it easier for participants to tailor their CV to the role they are applying for. Instead of having to think about which element of their experience is relevant each time they are applying for a new job, with an exhaustive list they can simply 'cherry-pick' the parts that match the role.

Job description/person specification - it is highly recommended that your learners have a copy of the job description (and person specification, if available) to hand when writing a CV for that role. That way they will be able to respond much more efficiently to the needs of the employer. Highlighting and using keywords that have been used in the job description will earn huge marks with employers and will go that much further in catering to the aforementioned applicant tracking system.

Slide 7: CV writing exercise - skills and experience

- **List some of your key achievements and work experience**

- **Write down some of the work-related skills you used during these positions**

- **Use the following format:**

> **Work Placement at Joe Bloggs Ltd – 01/06/2019 – 30/06/2019**
>
> - **Using Adobe InDesign to layout client's print requests**
>
> - **Communicating with clients to ensure their needs are met**

The next thing you'll want to do is ask your group to begin writing down some of their past work experience and achievements.

Once your learners have a couple of examples of previous work or achievements, ask them to think about, and jot down, a few skills that they will have used during those activities. Hard skills such as knowledge of particular software or processes are most important, especially when it comes to ATS, but soft skills such as communicative ability and teamwork are important too.

At this stage, be wary that participants without much in the way of experience may begin to get discouraged or frustrated so do your best to reassure them that they will have most likely taken part in other activities which can be used to demonstrate skills. Ask them whether they were involved in any extra-curricular activities during school or college, volunteer work they may have undertaken, etc. that can be drawn from.

Once your learners have had enough time to jot down one or two examples of their previous experience, it may benefit them to go through some of what they have written, either individually or as a group.

Slide 8: CV writing exercise - bio

> - **A brief introduction to your key aptitudes, ideally around 4 lines.**
>
> - **No more than one or two short paragraphs**
>
> - **The style should be concise and to-the-point - think 'elevator pitch'**
>
> - **Tailored to whatever job you are applying for**
>
> - **Refer to example CV provided**

The bio is perhaps the most important part of the CV as it is the first thing an employer will read. If the bio doesn't do a good job of explaining who you are and what your skills are, or is too long-winded and difficult to read, then the chances of an employer bothering to read the rest of a CV decrease.

During this exercise, give your learners 10 minutes or so to write a short bio about themselves, ensuring that they follow the above guidelines. They can use the example given in the 'strong' CV provided to

them earlier as a template for how to write a good bio.

Depending on how much time you have and how large the group is, you may wish to review each of your learners' bios individually and, if necessary, offer any tips and advice that you can to help them improve it.

Slide 9: Key points from today

- **A CV is a short overview of your professional qualities, usually electronic, that you send to a recruiter to apply for a job**

- **It should be designed to persuade recruiters in a quick and positive way**

- **It should contain your key skills and achievements, always tailored to the role you are applying for**

Slide 10: Next steps

- **Take a moment to capture the main learning points to take away from today's session**

- **You've got a handle on the basics of your CV - now you just need to build on it:**

    - **Fill out the remaining info, refer back to the strong example CV & find others online**

    - **Find a few roles/ companies to apply to, and adapt a different CV to each**

    - **Send it out!**

11. Useful links

- **Example CVs for different career situations: https://www.cv-library.co.uk/career-advice/cv/best-cv-examples/**

- **Some good examples of simple covering letters: https://www.theguardian.com/careers/covering-letter-examples**

- **Some useful tips for how to write an application email: https://jobs.telegraph.co.uk/article/the-do-s-and-don-ts-of-emailing-your-cv-to-a-recruiter/**

These last three slides are all about setting your participants up so that they are well prepared to finish their CVs and begin applying for jobs. First you'll want to give a simple recap of what has been covered during the workshop, and allow your participants time to capture the key points of your session, going back to previous slides if necessary.

Over the course of the session, your participants will hopefully have begun to create the most important elements of their CVs - all they need to do now is build these elements into a single document, add in the remaining information, and format it. From there, this foundation can be used as a base from which they can tailor a different CV for each role they apply for.

The final slide provides some useful links for formulating different types of CVs, as well as writing covering letters and application emails.

If participants are happy to share their contact details with you, you can also offer to send them your presentation so that they can refer back to it.

Finally, if you're happy to do so, you may also want to give out contact details to the group so that they can come back to you with any concerns they have & potentially mentor them further.