



## DETAILED INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE CV

### What is the purpose of a CV?

A curriculum vitae, or CV, is a short summary of your education, work experience and other professional activities and achievements. Its purpose is to provide relevant information about you in a concise format. As **the CV is often the first of your job-hunting documents the recruiter reads**, you should draw it up so that it highlights your skills, motivation and interests without the recruiter needing to read your cover letter.

Writing a good CV requires that you put in the groundwork. Start by considering your skills, strengths, values and motivation. Make notes, draw mind maps or create tables – do what works for you. Being aware of your skills and strengths makes it easier to draw up a CV. You can find assignments that help you identify your skills and strengths on the page [Tools for planning your career and future \(studies.helsinki.fi\)](https://studies.helsinki.fi).

Please note! An academic CV, or the curriculum vitae of a researcher, differs from the non-academic CV described in this document, for example, in that an academic CV must list all of the candidate's academic merits, teaching experience and publications. For instructions on how to draw up an academic CV, please see [the website of the Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity TENK \(tenk.fi\)](https://tenk.fi).

### What is the difference between a CV and a cover letter? Or between a CV and a meta-CV?

A CV is a more general summary of your background, whereas a cover letter is tailored to a specific job. To be sure, you should always edit your CV to suit the prospective position, for example, by highlighting your most relevant work experience and skills.

Compiling a 'meta-CV' means documenting your skills, experiences and thoughts for your own use. You need not show your meta-CV to others. The idea is that you make notes related to your studies as they progress, and record information on your work experience.

A meta-CV is a more extensive document than the CV used to apply for a job. However, you can document your work experience or other achievements in a format you can use for job hunting, too. When editing versions of your CV to be sent to employers, you can select work experience and other content relevant to the prospective job. Do not send your meta-CV as such to anyone, unless you wish to request feedback from a trusted individual or to use it in your studies, for example, as part of portfolio work.

- This document provides comprehensive instructions on crafting your CV. For tips on crafting your **cover letter**, see the page [Tips for Job Search \(studies.helsinki.fi\)](https://studies.helsinki.fi).
- For tips on compiling your **meta-CV**, see the assignment 'Create a meta-CV and document your journey to becoming an expert' on the page [Tools for planning your career and future \(studies.helsinki.fi\)](https://studies.helsinki.fi), under the section 'What are my skills and strengths?'.



## How are CVs processed during recruitment?

CVs are often reviewed at the beginning of the recruitment process to see whether the candidates have a suitable educational background, appropriate work experience and the necessary skills. This information should be readily apparent from your CV. If the recruiter cannot find what they are looking for in your CV, it is possible they will not read your cover letter. This is why it is crucial that your CV is clear and easily readable and contains all essential information.

CVs are often drawn up using a specific basic format (see instructions on content and structure below). This helps the reader because the same information can usually be found in the same place. If your CV differs considerably from the basic format, the risk is that the reader cannot find the information they are looking for in your document.

### What do recruiters look for in a CV?

When a recruiter is looking for suitable candidates for a specific position, they usually have certain key criteria in mind. These may include a suitable educational background, a sufficient amount of work experience, and skills in certain duties, tasks or areas, such as the ability to use certain software.

This is what recruiters look for in your CV. If they find it, your CV is likely to end up in the stack of candidates to be considered; otherwise, your application will be dismissed.

### Gaps in a CV

At the initial stage of the recruitment process, recruiters looking for certain information in your CV do not necessarily notice other or missing information. Although gaps during your studies or career, for example, are not necessarily the first thing they pay attention to, prepare to be asked about them if you are invited to a job interview.

Also note that recruiters do not have time to clarify or interpret inconsistencies in the content of your CV, or to make sense of unfamiliar abbreviations or terms. Write your CV as clearly and understandably as possible: do not leave its interpretation to the reader.

### What is the best format for sending a CV?

As a rule, you should send your CV to employers in PDF format. This is the most secure file format for sharing a CV because the reader cannot edit the file. Furthermore, a PDF file is displayed to the reader exactly as you intended. A good basic practice for naming the file containing your CV is to use the format: 'CV First name Last name'.

You should usually send your CV by email as a separate attachment, just as you send your cover letter. When sending job applications by email, ensure the email address shown to the recipient is appropriate and professional. Use a clear subject line, such as 'Application for the position of planning officer'. Write a short cover note itemising the documents you are sending, and add your contact details to the message.

If you do not send your application by email, but complete a form on the employer's website or in another recruitment system, first check how many attachments you can add to your application. If you can add two attachments or more, you can add both your CV and your cover letter. If only one



attachment is allowed, you should usually add your CV. In this case, the content corresponding to the cover letter can usually be written in a text field.

You should enter all information requested in an online form even if you have added your CV as an attachment. This takes time and effort, but is important: if applications are processed using artificial intelligence, failure to complete all the information means that your application will not progress.

## Length and layout of a CV

### Length of a CV

There are differing opinions and practices regarding the length of a CV. Some employers state in job ads that candidates' CVs should be no more than one page in length, in which case you should meet their request. If the employer has not limited the length of the CV, the recommended maximum length is two pages.

The widely used templates for visual CVs often enable you to display a great deal of information on a single page. In this case, one page may be enough. However, as the most important thing is to communicate your skills, experience and motivation with sufficient accuracy, a second page may be necessary. You can also edit visual templates to fit your content on several pages.

### Visual appearance of a CV

With the development of digital solutions and social media, all communications are becoming increasingly visual. Although the content of a CV always outweighs its appearance, a carefully completed layout can display your professionalism and show the recruiter that you have made an effort.

You should bear in mind that recruiters handle vast numbers of documents sent by candidates. It is only human that their attention is drawn to documents that are interesting in terms of not only content, but also visual appearance.

### **The key principles for the layout of a CV are:**

- Clarity and readability as well as a structure that enables rapid processing
- Headings that help the reader find relevant information and highlight key points
- A balance between text and white space: Do not clutter the page.

You can find various visual CV templates through Google or, for example, at [www.canva.com](http://www.canva.com), [cvapp.fi](http://cvapp.fi) and [www.overleaf.com](http://www.overleaf.com). Please always check whether you must pay to use the templates. Some can be used for free, whereas others are subject to a one-off or monthly fee. You can also use the free CV templates available in MS Office Word. Alternatively, you can use ideas from other sources to create your own CV from scratch, for example, in PowerPoint.

If you use visual elements in your CV, it does not take much effort to use them in your cover letter as well, thus creating an elegant and matching pair.

## Recommended content

### General

A CV is a concise professional description of you. Its purpose is to present your skills, experience, interests and motivation for the prospective job.



The content should be in reverse chronological order, which means you start with your most recent experience and achievements and work backwards. This principle applies to all content in your CV, whether relating to work experience, education, elected positions, projects or other activities.

Below is a recommendation on the headings and content of CVs. Please note that the structure and content mentioned in the example are not the only correct ones. You can, of course, highlight information relevant to the position in question, and edit headings or other information. However, **the recommendation is to take the following matters into account:**

- **Date:** This indicates to the reader that they are reading an up-to-date version of your CV.
- **Your contact details:** Ensure that your required contact details are up to date and can be found easily in your CV. Your name, phone number and email address suffice, but you could also add a link to your LinkedIn profile. If your CV lacks room for everything you deem of interest to the recruiter, you can mention separately that further information can be found in your LinkedIn profile. You can also add a link to your website, blog, video CV or other online material that the reader may find interesting. You can add such links to the other sections of your CV as well: for example, your blog may serve as a work sample, or your Instagram profile may demonstrate your entrepreneurship.
- **Profile text:** It is important that your CV begins with a concise summary of you and your skills, strengths and goals, and that this summary is relevant for the prospective job. If you are applying for, say, a teaching position, you can emphasise matters related to teaching, whereas your focus should be on other qualifications if applying for an administrative job. A well-written profile text provides key information about you in approximately four or five sentences, acting as a lens through which the reader can interpret the rest of your CV. Choose your words carefully! See the example structure for a profile text on page 6 of this document.
- **Education:** List your degrees and education chronologically, mentioning your most recent degree first. If you have not yet finished your studies, mention your target degree (e.g., Bachelor of Science or Master of Arts). You can provide slightly more information about your studies or degree if you consider it crucial for the prospective job or wish to highlight a specific aspect of your studies. For example, mention some courses or study modules you have completed, describe the work and study methods you have used in your studies (such as project-based or group work) or refer to the topics of your theses or final projects.
- **Work experience:** You can list your work experience chronologically (the most recent experience first) or by using descriptive headings (such as 'Teaching experience', 'Relevant work experience' or 'Other work experience'). It is crucial to highlight the skills you have acquired through work. Simply listing duties is not enough. For tips on how to identify and describe your skills and strengths, see the assignments on the page [Tools for planning your career and future \(studies.helsinki.fi\)](#) under the section 'What are my skills and strengths?'. The STAR model on page 7 of this document helps you put your skills into words.
- **Language skills:** Language skills should be listed by skill level, for example: native language – excellent or very good – good – basic or satisfactory – elementary.



Alternatively, you can use the European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR levels A1–C2). It may be useful to describe your oral and written skills separately. You should also mention elementary language skills or very limited language studies to indicate your willingness to learn new things. If you have used a language in a work setting, you can mention it in this section or in the description of the position in question.

- **IT skills, other skills:** Reflect on the general and field-specific software and IT systems you have used in studies, hobbies or jobs, and consider which are worth mentioning when applying for a specific position. Here you can also mention other useful technical skills, such as those related to research methods, image processing or social media.
- **Elected positions, volunteer activities:** Because what you do in your valuable free time says a lot about you, you should mention elected positions and volunteer activities in your CV. Clearly highlight the diverse skills you have developed in this area: What have you had the opportunity to do? What were your responsibilities? What skills and strengths did you develop?
- **Hobbies:** You need not mention hobbies in your CV, but they may tell the reader something essential about you and your strengths. If you mention a hobby, also state what skills and strengths it has developed.
- **Referees:** You should mention one to three referees and their contact details in your CV. For the sake of clarity, you should indicate your connection to each referee (e.g., a former supervisor or colleague, a friend from a student organisation, a teacher, or a thesis supervisor). Make sure in advance that the persons in question are willing to act as your referees, especially if it has been a while since you last asked them to do so. It is also good that your referees know you are looking for a job, as they are part of your network and may be able to inform you about open positions.
- **Photo:** In Finland, it is up to you to choose whether to include your photo in your CV. If you decide to do so, please ensure the photo is appropriate and fit for purpose. If applying for a job abroad, find out about relevant practices in the target country: adding a photo to a CV is not recommended in all countries.

### The law prohibits discrimination

When writing your CV, try to put yourself in the recruiter's position: what does the recruiter want to know about you? Also consider what skills you wish to highlight, and which of your strengths you think the recruiter should know. However, remember that you decide which information to give.

You are not obliged to provide information on your family situation or health, for example. In accordance with Finnish law, employers can process the personal data of an employee or a job-seeker only if the data are directly necessary for the employment relationship.

Discrimination based on factors such as age, gender or nationality is prohibited in Finland. The Non-Discrimination Act (1325/2014) stipulates that, when advertising an open position, an employer may not unlawfully require that applicants have specific personal characteristics or qualities. This means that you do not have to include, say, your date or place of birth in your CV.



The same is true of your photo. However, bear in mind that your photo says something about your personality. It also helps you stand out from other candidates and makes it easier for the recruiter to remember you. These days, including your photo in your CV is so common that if you choose not to include it, you may stand out negatively in certain situations.

More information:

- [Act on the Protection of Privacy in Working Life \(759/2004\) – Finlex.fi](#)
- [Non-discrimination Act \(1325/2014\) – Finlex.fi](#)

### Structure of a profile text

When a recruiter reads your CV, it is essential that they understand your professional context, your abilities, and your plans for the future. This is where a concise profile text can be helpful. Especially if you are making the transition from education to employment or are switching fields, it is important to help the recruiter understand what you are doing and why.

Your profile text must contain your key skills and experience relevant to the position. As part of your CV, its title may be 'Profile', 'Summary', 'About me', 'About' or 'In brief'. The main thing is that this text summarises the key points briefly and clearly.

The minimum length of a profile text is three to five sentences. It can be formatted as full sentences in a paragraph, or written as short bullet points. It is also important to add a specific professional goal at the end, such as: "My goal is to find a job in content production in the third sector."

### You can use the following as the structure of your profile text:

- I am an X professional/I am an X future professional/I am studying...
- My key interests are/In my studies, I have concentrated on...
- Through my work experience/hobbies/elected positions, I have gained experience in X and Y over a period of Z years...
- As a person I am/My approach to work is/I have received positive feedback on...
- My future goal is to/I am now looking for/The position you advertised would be... (Explain how the position would fit with your goals.)

### Education or work experience first?

If you graduated recently or have not yet acquired work experience in your field, you should list your education before your work experience in your CV, thus highlighting your degree.

In contrast, if you graduated several years ago and have work experience relevant to the prospective job, it may make sense to put your work experience first. The longer it has been since your studies, the more important your work experience is.

### Documenting your work experience – what and how?

Many people wonder how far back their CV should go in terms of work experience. As a rule of thumb, you should list only the last 10 years of work experience. However, you can list older work experience if it is relevant to the prospective job.

In general, Finnish employers value all kinds of work experience, even if it is irrelevant to your field. You can split your work experience under several headings, such as 'Relevant work experience'





and 'Other work experience' or describe it by field, such as 'Work experience in teaching' and 'Work experience in customer service'.

Headings enable you to highlight directly relevant work experience, listing other experience lower down. This way you can 'bypass' the requirement of reverse chronology and highlight older work experience instead.

It is worth making an effort to present your work experience clearly, as it is one of the key parts of your CV. It is not enough to list your work experience with job titles. You must describe your skills using concrete examples.

When identifying and documenting your work experience, the following questions can be helpful. Try to consider different areas of expertise as broadly as possible (e.g., concrete skills, general professional skills, and self-management skills):

- What did you do (verbs)? What were your responsibilities?
- What topics, phenomena and issues did you work with (the substance of your work)?
- What did your duties require of you (understanding, skills, characteristics, strengths)?
- What feedback did you receive from others (your supervisor, colleagues or clients)?

When compiling the final descriptions, you can use the STAR model outlined below.

#### [Using the STAR model to describe work experience on](#)

A good way to describe your skills is to connect them to your experiences. The STAR model helps you do this. The model allows you to justify your skills in a convincing manner to yourself and others. The idea is to use verbs rather than adjectives, describing your concrete actions in previous situations.

#### **The acronym stands for:**

- **S = Situation:** What was the situation? Where did you work?
- **T = Task:** What task were you required to carry out?
- **A = Action:** What action did you take? Did you take on additional duties, did you do something outside your job description, how did you get down to work, what was your role?
- **R = Result:** What did you achieve? What did you learn? What feedback did you receive? How did the employer or others benefit from your contribution?

Instead of describing yourself as "self-motivated, responsible and good with people", create a story using the STAR model, for example like this:

"As the project assistant of company X, I was in charge of the communications for project Y. I created a network of key stakeholders, compiled a regular newsletter and organised network meetings for them. In my work, I improved my interaction, communication and organisational skills and received praise for taking initiative and being responsible. When the project ended, I was asked to continue in another project by the same company."



## Ask for feedback on your CV

When you are actively looking for a job and wish to send your CV to an employer, you should first ask for feedback on it from a fellow student or someone else you trust. Another pair of eyes is helpful in spotting any typos, errors or omissions. You can also obtain feedback by visiting the [Career Services' Drop-in support for job search](#).

Checklist:

- Does your CV contain all key content in accordance with these instructions?
- Can the recruiter find key information at a glance?
- Does your CV include a profile text?
- Have you described your work experience sufficiently for the reader to understand your skills?
- Is the layout of your CV sleek, clear, professional and attractive?
- Have you checked the spelling?
- Have you followed the instructions on length and saved your CV in PDF format?