Thinking about your first job?

Here are some **tips and tricks** on CV writing, cover letters, and job interviews!



What should I include on my CV?

Writing your first CV doesn't have to be hard. But it can be daunting! Don't worry - with some easy tips, you can create a great CV that shows off your skills and helps you get a job.

Think of your CV as your own personal marketing tool. It's the first thing an employer will see, and provides a quick snapshot of your skills, experiences and achievements. It should include:

Contact information: your name, phone number and email address.

Personal statement: this just needs to be a brief paragraph summarising who you are, and what you're looking for in a job.

Education: include any and all relevant qualifications you might have, from school, college, or anywhere else.

Relevant experience: this could be work experience, volunteering, or even relevant experiences you might of had through education or extra-curricular activities.

Skills: a well-rounded CV will include both hard and soft skills. Hard skills are things like digital skills. Whereas soft skills include things like communication, adaptability, and time management. Both are important!

Achievements: these might include awards you've received, or the positive outcome of a project you played an active role in. Top tip: Use the STAR method when describing achievements.

References: this can be tricky when you're applying for your first job - but not impossible! Get in touch with teachers, friends of the family, or even coaches and ask if they're happy to provide a character reference.

How to write a winning CV?

Struggling to get an interview?

Try out the following **tips**!

Keep it simple!

No more than two pages, and use a clear layout and font.

Tailor for each application.

Choose your most relevant skills, experience, and qualifications for the role you are applying for. You can use the job description for ideas!

Provide examples of your skills.

Don't just list your skills, demonstrate them with proven examples, either from work, education, or from your personal experiences.

Think carefully about your words.

If you managed a project, or updated a system, say so. Also, use words that are in the job description, especially any key skills they are looking for.

Have someone check it before you send.

This might seem obvious, but the last thing you want is a spelling error on your CV (especially if one of your skills is listed as 'attention to detail').

Save a copy as a PDF.

Sometimes when sending a word document, it may not always open. To avoid this from happening, and a potential employer from missing your CV, send a PDF version instead.

Avoid generic phrases.

Your CV needs to help you stand out, so try to minimise the number of words and phrases, such as 'hardworking'. Share examples that are unique to you, rather than copying other people.

Have a master copy.

As you gain more experience, skills, and qualifications, it can be hard to remember everything. But you also don’t want to include everything on every CV, so keep a master copy to take the most relevant bits from.

How to write a cover letter?

Not too sure what it is, or what to say?

Try out the following **tips**!

Don't repeat your CV.

A cover letter is its own thing, not just extending your CV (this can be boring to read). It's a chance for you to really explain why you are applying, and why you'll be a good fit.

Tailor for each application.

Like with your CV, you should tailor your cover letter each time. You can reuse certain phrases, maybe even paragraphs, but you must be directly speaking to the employer, and referencing the role.

Always send one.

Why pass on an opportunity to talk more about yourself, your skills, and your experience?

Have a clear structure.

Start with the position you are applying for, highlight relevant experience, qualifications, and skills that match the job description. Next, explain why you're a suitable candidate, and what attracts you to the role and the company, demonstrating your research. Finally, a summary, repeating the key points and a desire for an interview.

Include examples.

Similar to your CV, don't just mention skills or experience in passing - provide examples! This is your chance to go into a bit more detail, and really show off.

Showcase your unique selling points.

Be yourself and be proud of the skills and experience you have to offer, rather than trying to be something you're not.

Don't write too much.

Hiring managers will have to look through hundreds of CVs and cover letters, so focus on what is most important, and start strong.

How to succeed in interviews!

Struggling with your confidence?

Try out the following **tips**!

Use the STAR method.

STAR stands for Situation, Task, Action, and Result, and it will change how you do interviews forever! Make sure to check out our guide (page 13).

Always do your research.

Look at the website, the news, and social media to best understand who you are interviewing for.

Think before you speak.

You don't have to answer the question 0.001 seconds after it's been asked. Take a moment, breathe, take a sip of water, and think. Also, it's okay to ask for the question to be repeated.

Practice, practice, practice.

It might sound silly, but after you've prepared a few STAR method examples, just read them out loud. The more you do this, the more you will remember (especially if you get a bit nervous).

Be yourself.

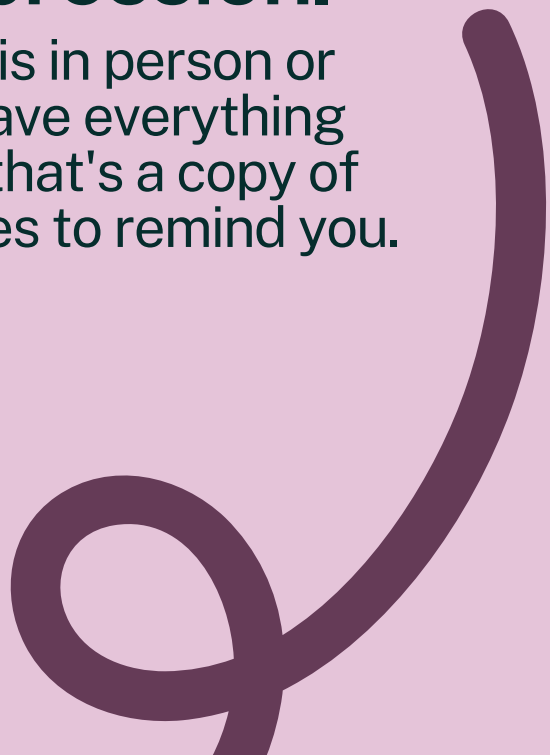
If you're a little on the quieter side, that's okay. Don't feel like you have to become a public speaker overnight. What's more important is to be confident in your answers.

Ask tailored questions.

At the end of most interviews, you should have the chance to ask some of your own questions (and make sure you do)! Plan at least two or three questions in advance, not to get caught out, and check out our 'top interview questions to ask' guide on page 11.

Make a good first impression.

Be on time, whether the interview is in person or virtually, dress accordingly, and have everything you need in front of you, whether that's a copy of your CV, cover letter, or some notes to remind you.



Common job interview questions!

A list of questions you might get asked...

... and how to answer them!

Why would you be a good fit for this role?

Have a list of bullet points prepared with relevant skills, qualifications, and experience. Plus don’t forget to demonstrate you’ve researched the role, the company, and its values.

What are your strengths?

Focus on a couple of strengths that really suit the role you are applying for. You can use the job description for inspiration if you're unsure.

What are your weaknesses?

Avoid saying something like 'I work too hard' or 'I'm too much of a perfectionist'. Instead, highlight a weakness (that is not essential to the role), but also how you are working on it.

How do you handle stress?

This is a perfect example to use the STAR method. Outline a situation in which you were stressed, and go through what you did to still achieve a goal i.e. asking for support or writing individual tasks down and prioritising.

What are your goals for the future?

You don't have to have it ALL figured out, but if there is an obvious progression from the role you are applying for, such as into a supervisor role, you can say this (and perhaps how you plan to get there).

Why are you leaving your current role?

Best to focus on your personal or career goals here and what you would like to achieve, such as 'I am looking to progress into a more senior role and develop my skills'.

Do you have any questions?

Always yes! Make sure to plan these in advance. You can ask questions about future training opportunities, or where the interviewer sees the company progressing in five years' time.

Top questions to ask in an interview

Never know what to say at the end of an interview?

Try out the following **tips**!

- **What is the most important quality you look for in a candidate?**
- What are the goals of the team and the company over the next year?
- **What are the biggest challenges in this role?**
- Do you see the role adapting/changing over time?
- **What would a typical career progression look like from this role?**
- How would you describe the culture here?
- **From your experience, what have you enjoyed most about working here?**
- What is the team's biggest achievement in the last year?

How to overcome interview nerves?

The initial excitement of being invited to interview is often quickly overpowered by feelings of anxiety and stress. Here are a few things you can try to calm those nerves!

Prepare thoroughly: planning ahead helps keep the interview nerves at bay. Keep notes on the job description handy, and make sure you've done plenty of research on the company. Plan your journey, or if virtual, test the video app in advance, to avoid any last minute technical issues.

Practice common questions: rehearse answers to common interview questions. Practice with a friend or family member, or use online resources for mock interview scenarios, including those for virtual interviews. The more you do this, the more comfortable you will feel during the real thing.

Stay positive: focus on your strengths and what you can bring to the role. Positive thinking can help reduce anxiety and improve your performance.

Don't rush: most often, interviews are 45 minutes to an hour, with lots of room for discussions. Take time to process the question, and even ask for it to be repeated to give you more time to think and plan your answer.

Accept nervousness: don't try and be overconfident to compensate for your nerves, or be someone you're not. Acknowledge your nerves, but don't let them control you; use them as energy to stay alert, engaged and in the moment.

Use positive affirmations: by simply saying "I am prepared," "I am confident," and "I can do this." can significantly boost your confidence.

The STAR Method

What is it?
How to use it?
An example to get you started.

What is it?

STAR stands for **Situation**, **Task**, **Action**, and **Result**, and is a useful method to help you answer job application or interview questions.

Each part of **STAR** will help you tell an effective story (without losing focus).

Situation - Set the scene.
Task - What you needed to do/achieve?
Action - What you did (and why)?
Result - Was it successful, and why? If not, what did you learn?

How to use it?

There are behavioural types of job application or interview questions, that often start with '**tell me about a time when...**' which STAR will help you answer.

Ahead of your interview, in particular, think of and write down as many STAR examples that you can that can be used for behavioural type questions.

Example

“Tell us about a time you faced a difficult time a work?”

Situation - We were short staffed on a particularly busy bank holiday.

Task - I was the supervisor on shift, and had to ensure that, despite fewer numbers, staff worked as a team, completed their tasks, and that customers were looked after.

Action - I reorganised the floorplan, delegating higher priority tasks, whilst I managed the door and new customers.

Result - With my direction and management, staff were able to do their jobs, and customers were left satisfied.

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Visit our **website** for more support

shawtrust.org.uk/what-we-do/

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