



The graduate's guide to **CVs** & **interviews**



CVs

At **Give A Grad A Go** we read a lot of CVs, so we know a thing or two about what makes a **great graduate CV**.

We've put together this handy guide, full of **insider tips** and need-to-know CV "do's" and "don'ts" to give you the best possible chance of getting your CV noticed, and landing that all-important job.

We hope you find this guide a useful tool in your job hunt – and good luck building your CV! If you need any further help with your CV or would like us to review it, please feel free to send it to grad@giveagradago.com

– we're always here to help!

Structure

Don't underestimate the importance of a well structured CV! You need to make sure it's clean, concise and is easy to read.

General dos & don'ts

Add dates to **all** of your education and experience.

A graduate CV should be between 1 and 2 sides of A4 – no longer.

Keep the layout and fonts **easy to read**, with plenty of white space. Use bullet points and short sentences.

Save your CV under a **sensible file name**, 'First name, Last name - CV' not 'final final cv' or 'asdfghjk'.

Details

Your **details** should be clear and at the top of your CV. Use 'First Name Last Name - CV' as your headline. Add your phone number, address, LinkedIn and a sensible email address (e.g. **not** sexyhunk91@hotmail.com).

Personal statement

Always include a **personal statement** – just a couple of sentences at the top of your CV selling yourself as a potential employee. Try to make this unique for each application. Keep it **short, sharp** and **persuasive**; the aim is to make an employer want to read the rest of your CV.

Education

Put your **education** in chronological order with the most recent first. Include the grades for **all** of your A-Levels; whether they're good or bad, employers will want to know them and leaving them off looks suspicious! For GCSEs don't waste space listing all your grades. Instead, lay them out like so: 4 As, 4 Bs, 1 Cs **or** 10 All A* – B

Work experience

If you have several examples of **work experience**, put your most relevant and applicable experience for the application at the top under a subheading 'Relevant experience'. If you want to add experience which isn't directly relevant to the role you're applying for, place it under the sub-heading 'Other experience'. If you don't have any relevant experience, don't worry – list the experience you do have chronologically, concentrating on what you accomplished in your time there, rather than listing every aspect of the job.

Interests

Only include **interests** if they're relevant and professional. General interests include sports, musical instruments, books, travelling, or you can get specific to your chosen career. Creative CV's may benefit if you have photography or painting as an interest.

References

The best **reference** practice is to simply say 'References available on request'. Make sure you do have some references in mind or prepared for this.

Content

Now you've structured your CV properly, you need to make sure that the content you're including is going to persuade an employer to invite you to interview.

Keep clichés out of your personal profile - Try to make your personal profile as unique and as non-generic as possible. Avoid phrases like 'I'm a fantastic team-player' or 'I'm a great communicator' unless they're followed up by qualifying facts, e.g. 'As a confident communicator, I loved my role as social secretary of the badminton society.' Your profile should clearly outline your career objectives – including what skills you are keen to use, as well as identify the areas of industry you're keen to work in, making sure this matches the sector of the job you're applying to.

Talk about your accomplishments - Employers want to hear about your successes, rather than your duties – they want to hire high achieving, rather than obedient. They want to meet people that are going to add value to their business. For instance, if an employer is looking for a

Marketing Assistant, 'responsible for social media marketing' isn't exactly going to light their fire. On the other hand, 'Grew the company B2B Twitter following by 2,500 in three weeks, generating three new leads' will get their attention. If you were awarded any extra responsibilities, hit specific targets, or helped to implement a new strategy, be sure to highlight these.

Explain all gaps - Try and keep gaps in your CV to a minimum. Any that are longer than a month post graduating, should ideally be accounted for. Whether you've been travelling, had family issues or an illness, write a sentence or two on your CV just to explain what you were doing. If you've been searching for a job for a long period, make sure you fill in the gap using any volunteering activities, part-time work, or training you've been doing during that time.

Target your CV - Your CV shouldn't be a static document; it must be carefully tailored for each and every single application you make. Take a look at the specifications you're being asked for and highlight the experience on your CV, indicating how it meets the requirements. If the job you're applying for is in the tech sector and your CV says you want to work in pharmaceuticals then it is very unlikely to get into the 'yes' pile.

Triple check your spelling and grammar - A CV with spelling and grammar mistakes is a real pet peeve of employers (and us!), so triple check your work. Yes, everyone can slip up – employers included – but spelling and grammar mishaps on your CV show you either a) lack written communication skills, or b) don't have a great attention to detail – neither of which is going to hold much appeal to a potential employer!

Awards, achievements & interests

- These are the areas where you can really stand out and give your CV a bit of personality. Imagine that there's another candidate out there with exactly the same education and work experience as you – what's going to make you stand out? Where have you excelled over your peers? (not just at school or university) What do you do in your spare time to keep busy? Travels, books, music etc, it all helps to paint a more individual picture. Just make sure you keep it professional.

Interviews

Now that you've crafted the **perfect CV**, you'll be needing to prepare for any incoming interviews! With our definitive guide to succeeding in a graduate job interview, you'll be ready to attend and **ace any interview**. This guide features dos and don'ts, common interview questions decoded so you know what you're really being asked, and tips on answering tricky competency-based questions.

Preparation

- **Read up on the company** using their website, blog, and social media including LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Youtube if they have one.
- Have a solid grasp on the **sector** the company specialises/operates in, and who their clients are.
- Ensure you understand the **job specification** and where the role fits within the business.
- Check who their main **competitors** are and how they fare against them – what makes them unique?
- Find out **who is interviewing you**, and what their function is within the company.
- **Google them** to see if they have been in the news recently; if so, what for?
- Make sure your **digital footprint** is clean – your interviewer will look you up online prior to your interview, so Google yourself to ensure you have nothing out there on the internet you would not want your employer to see.

The night before

- Don't go out the night before; you won't perform well if you're tired or have a hangover!
- Prepare a clean, ironed, smart and appropriate outfit.
- Set an alarm (or two!) and give yourself plenty of time in the morning to relax and factor in transport delays.
- Make sure you have the following with you: the **time and location** of your interview (Google map or print), your **planned route** and how long it will take, as well as alternative routes just in case, and the **name of your interviewer** for when you get to reception.

During - Interview do's

- Arrive a few minutes early - if you are more than 10 minutes early, take a short walk or rest at a nearby café.
- Make sure you greet the interviewer by their name and remain polite at all times.
- Shake hands firmly, smile warmly, and make eye contact from the very start.
- Wait until you are offered a chair before taking a seat, sit upright and look alert and interested at all times.
- Try to keep calm - avoid crossing your arms or fidgeting. Remain interested and attentive.
- Be open and smile; it's important to show your charismatic side.

During - Interview don'ts

- Smoke before an interview.
- Make negative remarks about your present or past employers; you'll look difficult and unprofessional!
- Answer with 'yes' or 'no' - always offer an explanation.
- Lie about any of your accomplishments - you'll get found out in the end!

Wrapping up after the interview

- Thank the interviewer for their time and tell them you really enjoyed meeting them.
 - Close the interview with a strong question:
- “This is exactly the sort of opportunity I have been looking for; what is the next step?”

Getting feedback

- It is important to follow up and get feedback about how your interview went. If you are using **Give A Grad A Go**, make sure to call your consultant to let them know:
1. How you think the interview went and if you enjoyed it.
 2. What you now think about the company and if you could see yourself working there.

Classic interview questions

To help you to perform to the very best of your abilities, we've broken down some commonly asked questions to help you to decipher what the interviewer is **really** asking you, and how you should respond.

Q **Tell me about yourself**
The interviewer is really saying "I want to hear you talk."

A This is a 'loosener' which comes up in almost every interview, which means your response can stay the same throughout any interview (hurray!). Spend a maximum of four minutes describing your qualifications, career history and your range of skills – all the while emphasising skills / experience relevant to the job on offer. Write a rough script of what you want to say, and rehearse it so that it sounds natural.

Watch out! Avoid talking about your personal life e.g. "I'm engaged and getting married this September"; your interviewer wants you to describe your professional self. Don't just repeat what's on your CV – say something your interviewer doesn't already know about you.

Q **Why do you want this job?**
The interviewer is really saying "Do you know what this role involves? Have you done your research? Are you going to stick around?"

A Again, this is a question that will come up in virtually every interview. Make sure you've read the job description thoroughly, but don't just repeat it back to your interviewer parrot style. Cherry pick a few aspects of the job which genuinely appeal to you and say why.

Watch out! As a rule of thumb, avoid talking about the salary, holiday allowances and other benefits; it'll have your interviewer questioning whether you're actually interested in the role or just the perks that come with it! Likewise keep your answer specific and steer well clear of implying you need a job rather than want their job; even if it's not true, employers want to hear that you only have eyes for them.

Q Why do you want to work for this company?

The interviewer is really asking saying “Do you know what we do? Do your aims match with the company’s?”

A You need to have done your research for this question. Investigate what the company does, how they do it, and who they work with. Go beyond the basic facts – go through the company’s blogs, social media channels, videos etc, so that you can talk about the company’s culture, its recent successes and challenges, its ethos and mission. Show that you know it back to front.

Watch out! Don’t regurgitate what you’ve read on the company website – put your answer in your own words so it sounds natural and honest.

Q What are your salary expectations?

The interviewer is really asking “To what degree is money a ruling factor? Are you realistic about your value to a company?”

A Give a salary range in keeping with the salary advertised. For instance, if the position is advertised as £23k, mention £23k – £25k – this shows you’re ambitious, and will ensure you lay down the foundations for a future pay increase.

Q Which other companies or roles are you applying for?

The interviewer is trying to find out if you’re committed to their industry/sector, and whether you favour their company above your other options.

A This question tends to make candidates uncomfortable, but it doesn’t need to. Do say that you’re applying for several different roles – as a graduate, you should be doing just that. Say that you’ve only applied for their job and you’ll sound like you lack ambition, are recklessly putting all your eggs in one basket, or are covering up after being rejected from elsewhere! That said, always finish by saying that the company you’re interviewing for is your front runner, and give a reason why.

Watch out! Never admit that you’re applying to lots of different industries. Say that you’re applying for a few marketing roles, a couple of finance roles and some IT consultant positions and you’ll look like you don’t know what you want, which in turn will make your interviewer think you might not stick with their company for long.

Q **Where do you want to be in five years' time?**

The interviewer wants to know you're looking for a long-term position, but also have ambitions to progress.

A Start your answer by confirming that you definitely want to be in that sector/industry in five years' time, and would have expected to have hit your own personal career targets. This could include: successfully building a good name for yourself in your market, being amongst the highest-performing employees in the business, achieving 'X' number of promotions or anything else to demonstrate your desire to progress.

Watch out! Do your research to keep your aims realistic, otherwise your confidence will come across as arrogance.

Q **What do you dislike about your current/previous job?**

The interviewer is trying to find out whether the job on offer has responsibilities you will dislike, or which will make you unsuitable.

A Choose a fairly innocuous characteristic of your present / previous role, such as the size of the company, slow decision-making, or any other factor which you're unlikely to find in the role you're interviewing for. Relay your answer with the air of someone who takes problems and frustrations in your stride and as part of the job.

Watch out! Don't be too specific as you may draw attention to weaknesses, leaving you vulnerable. Equally don't pick out things which make you look a little difficult, e.g. "I hated the fact that I had to do so much admin".

Q **What has been your most significant achievement?**

The interviewer is asking "Are you a high achiever? What do you value?"

A Select an achievement that is work-related and fairly recent. Identify the achievement and the skills you used, leading your answer into quantifying the benefit. For example: "My greatest achievement has been bringing on 'X' client while working for 'Y' business. This generated 'Z' amount of revenue, which I was delighted about."

Watch out! Avoid referring to your degree as your greatest achievement – all graduates can talk about this. Choose something that's a little more unique.

Q What is your greatest weakness?

The interviewer is really asking about your self-perception and level of self-awareness.

A Use a genuine weakness such as lack of experience (not ability) in an area that is not vital for the job. Always end your answer by saying what you're doing to work on this weakness, e.g. If you were applying for a role where you **won't** be required to present, you might say that you feel your presentation skills aren't up to scratch but you've been practising presenting in your current role and have enjoyed seeing your skills improve.

Watch out! Don't say that you don't have any weaknesses; everyone does! Avoid clichés of weaknesses that are actually strengths, such as "I'm a perfectionist so I find it difficult to delegate," or "I find it really difficult to switch off from work"; your interviewer will have heard them a million times before.

Q Why should we hire you?

The interviewer wants to know "What are you good at? How are you going to add value to the company?"

A Concentrate on discussing three or four strengths, with explanations of how they could benefit the employer. Strengths to consider include technical proficiency, determination to succeed, an ability to learn quickly, or a knack for relating to other people. Whatever you say, make sure you give evidence of a time you've used each strength. For example, "I think one of my key strengths is my ability to lead, which is something I developed during my time as vice-president of my university's tennis society. I think this is something I could put to great use as a Trainee Manager."

Watch out! Avoid directly comparing yourself to other candidates, e.g. "I will work harder than any other candidate you'll meet." Realistically, you can't know this for sure, and announcing it with such confidence may come across as arrogant or deluded – neither of which will work in your favour!



STAR

S

Situation

Introduce the situation to the employer and set the context.

T

Task

Describe the task you had to complete, including expectations and challenges.

A

Action

Explain what you did, and how you achieved it.

R

Result

End with the results of your efforts; accomplishments, rewards, and impact.

Competency based questions

Graduate interviews will also feature competency based interview questions. These are questions that ask you to talk about a skill and a **time when you've used it.**

The **STAR** method gives a structure for answering these questions, and will stop you from going off on a tangent. We've modelled an answer on the next page to "Give me an example of a time when you have overcome a problem."

S**Situation****Outline the situation you were in.**

Example: During my time acting as Vice President of my university's badminton society, membership to the society began to dwindle, which meant that we would struggle to get the same amount of funding from the student union for the following year.

T**Task****Talk about the task at hand. What was required of you?**

Example: The challenge was to re-recruit some of our original members and attract new members to the society before the end of the academic year.

A**Action****What did you do? What actions did you take, and why?**

Example: I organised a society social, negotiating a 2 for 1 offer on drinks at a local bar. I then wrote a persuasive email encouraging people to come, and got friends to promote the event on social media. I spoke to each attendee individually about why they hadn't been at badminton sessions recently and what would convince them to attend again. It turned out that some of the members couldn't make the Thursday sessions and would prefer Wednesdays, while others felt that they didn't get to play enough games each session. I spoke to the sports hall and changed the sessions to Wednesday, negotiating three more courts for people to practice on. I also introduced a 'bring a friend' offer, halving the price for those who brought a new member.

R**Result****Summarise the results of your actions, quantifying if possible.**

Example: I increased the membership of the society from 20 to 60 over a period of two months.