



Accessing A Training Contract In The Current Market

Information for People Hoping to Train
to Become a Solicitor



PRODUCING A CV

The purpose of a CV is to grab a prospective employer's attention, interest them, and motivate them to invite you to an interview. A good CV goes beyond just listing job responsibilities.

Ideally, it should include information on achievements you've had too. When drafting your CV, remember it is more than just an introduction to a potential employer. It will most probably also guide much of what is discussed at interview.

Provide the kind of information that your targeted reader is likely to be interested in. Illustrate types of work that you have worked on and provide named examples where possible.

Short, succinct bullet points are the best format for a CV. Do not write long wordy sentences and bulky paragraphs. Clarity is essential - the reader will not spend the time trying to decipher the point you are trying to make.

Make sure that your CV contains your full career and academic history and that any chronological gaps, including years spent abroad, travelling, sabbaticals etc, are explained. Identify career highlights, real successes you have had and also what you have enjoyed.

Give thought to the interests section of your CV. Leaving it blank is a wasted opportunity for you to sell yourself and to give the interviewer the chance to ask you about what you do outside of work to identify whether you will fit into the team/business. It is becoming increasingly important for law firms to recruit rounded individuals who are going to be client relationship partners of the future. It is important you illustrate all your potential in this regard within your CV.

If you have had achievements in work, include details and, where possible, quantify any benefits your achievements delivered and include details of these. Do not include statements that cannot be substantiated at interview. Avoid jargon and non-standard abbreviations. Do not use clichés and avoid the over-used claimed words found in so many CVs. Ensure your CV is carefully proof read, first by yourself and then by someone else who is skilled at proofreading. Do not send your CV anywhere with errors on it.

Things Not To Include In Your CV

- Salary Requirements
 - Leaving Cert / Junior Cert subjects and marks
- Political affiliations, membership of bodies not related to your career etc.
 - References
- Personal details such as age and marital status.

Power Words

The use of action words / power verbs, are very effective in presenting your skills and experience. Using these words at the start of each bullet point under the details of your employment will work towards enthusing the reader.

The words you use will depend upon your experience. For example, a candidate applying for a managerial position will want to make use of words such as "oversaw, developed, improved and reduced", whereas someone looking for a more creative role will want to use words such as "designed, compiled and created".

Power verbs to accentuate organisational skills:

Arranged	Categorised	Collected	Compiled
Corrected	Distributed	Filed	Incorporated
Logged	Maintained	Monitored	Observed
Ordered	Organised	Prepared	Recorded
Registered	Reserved	Responded	Reviewed
Scheduled	Screened	Supplied	Updated

Power verbs used to highlight achievements:

Achieved	Built	Created	Developed
Established	Expanded	Founded	Identified
Implemented	Increased	Initiated	Instigated
Launched	Led	Managed	Reduced
Solved	Streamlined	Supervised	Supported

Other power verbs:

Administered	Advised	Analysed	Approved
Completed	Conducted	Controlled	Coordinated
Defined	Delivered	Demonstrated	Designed
Instructed	Introduced	Maintained	Negotiated
Oversaw	Performed	Planned	Presented

Including a Profile / Summary Section

Profiles or summary sections are usually placed just under name and contact details and are often highlighted in various ways - such as with a text box. The profile / summary draws the reader in and encourages them to read further.

As covering letters become less relevant, the importance of a profile / summary section has grown.

For instance, recruiters generally pass on CVs, but not covering letters to employers. Within these circumstances, the profile / summary section can introduce the reader to the CV, in the same way that covering letters used to.

A good profile summarises what you have achieved and / or what you are looking for in the most succinct way possible. If it is running over several lines, it is too long. Avoid subjective descriptions too, such as 'excellent communication skills' and clichés such as 'capable of working on own or as part of a team'.

Common Mistakes in CV Writing

Spelling mistakes: Circa 50% of CVs contain spelling errors. This easy mistake will make you seem careless and could also distract the reader's attention from the content

Jargon: Using jargon and acronyms risks having your CV not understood.

Qualifications: A common mistake is to over detail subjects and marks gain right back.

Employment: There is no need to provide the address of employers. All you need is the company name, your job title and the dates you started and finished.

Hobbies: Everyone likes 'reading, listening to music, keeping fit and socialising with friends'. Try coming up with something that portrays you as more interesting...

CV CHECK LIST

Indicate with a '✓' or an 'x' how your CV rates against each of the questions below

<u>Mark</u>	
	<p data-bbox="352 349 515 383"><u>Appearance</u></p> <ul data-bbox="352 416 1262 719" style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="352 416 879 450">▪ Is your CV no more than two pages?<li data-bbox="352 483 1225 517">▪ Are the margins and top and bottom, all close to standard size?<li data-bbox="352 551 815 584">▪ Is the document neatly laid out?<li data-bbox="352 618 1062 651">▪ Is a standard style used throughout the document?<li data-bbox="352 685 1262 719">▪ Is the font size large enough – and is there sufficient white space? <p data-bbox="352 819 459 853"><u>Content</u></p> <ul data-bbox="352 887 1246 1290" style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="352 887 1206 920">▪ Is the CV format used appropriate, given your circumstances?<li data-bbox="352 954 1126 987">▪ Are details provided focused enough on achievements?<li data-bbox="352 1021 871 1055">▪ Are verbs used in the 'active' tense?<li data-bbox="352 1088 1054 1122">▪ Does content include achievements outside work?<li data-bbox="352 1155 1246 1223">▪ Have any 'gaps' that which might cause the reader concern been addressed?<li data-bbox="352 1256 1214 1290">▪ Have you avoided splitting up blocks of content across pages? <p data-bbox="352 1402 440 1435"><u>Clarity</u></p> <ul data-bbox="352 1469 1206 1895" style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="352 1469 1007 1503">▪ Are all spellings, grammar and syntax correct?<li data-bbox="352 1536 703 1570">▪ Is your CV jargon free?<li data-bbox="352 1603 919 1637">▪ Are words used all easy to understand?<li data-bbox="352 1671 951 1704">▪ Is the profile clearly and succinctly stated?<li data-bbox="352 1738 1206 1771">▪ Are contact details (address, telephone number) easy to see?<li data-bbox="352 1805 911 1839">▪ Is there a logical flow to the document?<li data-bbox="352 1872 1174 1906">▪ Has your CV been carefully proofread by at least 2 people?

COVERING LETTERS

A covering letter is traditionally the first document that a hiring employer looks at and it is critical to the impression you create. Understand that this is a sales document and an opportunity to personalise your application and express your enthusiasm for the job.

The covering letter should be brief and certainly contained on a single sheet of paper. It should identify who you are and record that you want to apply for the position. It should have a strong final paragraph, summing up what you can do for the company.

Never mention salary in a covering letter unless you have been specifically asked to. Your figure may be too high or too low and provide a reason to screen you out. Where you are asked to state salary, either current or expected, approach the matter carefully and seek to keep the matter as vague as possible.

Recruitment firms and employers increasingly want applications submitted to them electronically.

This allows them to circulate your details electronically among the various people involved in short listing. Submit your application electronically unless there is an instruction to post it.

General Guidelines On Writing a Covering Letter

- Ideally use the same font and style that you used on your CV to give a consistent, professional look.
- Address the letter to a specific person. If an advert does not give a name, ring the company and ask them who to send the letter to.
- Your letter should expand on your CV and complement any profile / heading statement you have used across the top.
- Use relevant achievements in your work history and refer to one or two briefly and colourfully in your letter.
- Tailor your letter carefully to the key words of the advertisement. Provide key examples of your achievements that relate to the key criteria.
- Incorporate terminology the employer has used in an ad, in a written job description, or in a conversation, into your letter.
- Pay attention to details. Type the letter and use spell check but also have it carefully proofread.
- Resist using standardised covering letters. Each letter should be individualised. The reader should know that you did not send this letter to another employer.
- Divide text into short paragraphs. Lengthy paragraphs are overwhelming to read.
- Don't forget to match the company's needs to what you have to offer. A useful tactic is to include some of the terms used in their advert in your covering letter.

Important Disclaimer – Please Note

The Law Society does not give any guarantees, undertakings or warranties concerning the accuracy, completeness or up-to-date nature of information within this document. The Law Society also does not take responsibility for any dependence or reliance placed on the use of career support information provided and cannot accept liability for any loss or damage incurred as a result.

Recommended layout of a covering letter in response to an advertised job

Your name
Your address line 1
Your address line 2
Your address line 3
Your Telephone numbers - including mobile
Your email address

Name of person you are writing to
Company name
Address 1
Address2

Date

Their Reference / Job Title

Dear [name of person]

Opening paragraph: State why you are writing, identify the position for which you would like to be considered, and indicate how you heard of the position. If you are sending a letter of interest which is not in response to a specific job opening, simply indicate the type of work you are seeking.

Middle paragraph(s): Your goal here is to show how you can be useful to this particular organisation. Describe what strengths you have to offer this employer by showing the relationship between your skills and experience and the vacancy. You can also describe your previous achievements and how they relate to the vacancy and identify three reasons why you should be called for interview. Refer the reader to your enclosed CV for additional information.

You can divide this information into a couple of smaller paragraphs - rather than have one large dense paragraph that people will not be inclined to read.

Closing paragraph: End your letter by clarifying what will happen next and how they can most easily reach you.

Yours sincerely,

Space for your signature
Type your name beneath your signature

Enclosed: CV

COMPLETING APPLICATION FORMS

Always read instructions carefully and review what information is needed. Take a photocopy or two of the blank form and use a copy first for practice. Follow all instructions carefully. For example, don't use blue ink when it says complete in black.

Some questions require brief, factual answers. Others need a narrative response. The "other information" section is often the section that interviewers read most carefully. Mention your strengths, experience and achievements and state why this job interests you or why you want to work for this organisation.

When you have completed the Application Form check it very carefully. Proofread it, and get someone else to proofread it for you. Do not cram it into a small envelope. Post it in an A4 sized envelope if appropriate. Retain a copy of your completed form. This will be useful for your interview preparation.

General Guidelines on Completing Application Forms

- Keep in mind the particular requirements of the job you are applying for.
- Place information in the correct boxes.
- Keep answers short and to the point.
- Complete a fresh application form rather than cross out or use correction fluid.
- Do not just leave blanks. Write N/A (not applicable) beside any questions which do not apply to you.
- Keep your form neat and check all answers carefully before sending it.
- Use black pen unless you have been instructed otherwise.
- Try not to cram too much information into a small space.
- Answer all questions truthfully.
- Check all spelling and keep your handwriting consistent and legible.
- If the form instructs you not to send a CV with it, then don't.
- If there are gaps in your career details (time out for study, family care, travel, etc), give an account of them on your form.
- Check that your answers on the application form mirror information on any other career papers that you may have to give to the organisation.
- If you are asked for referees, make sure you ask them before providing names, and discuss with your referees what you would like them to say about you.

Contacting an Employer to Get an Application Form

When you phone for an application form, leave your details in a friendly and upbeat manner. Take the opportunity to ask the name of the person who will be receiving the completed form - so you can personalise your covering letter.

If asked to write to the organisation for an application form and further details, give details of the job title and the name and date of where the ad appeared. Do not write a lengthy letter. Keep it brief and to the point. Do not send a CV.

If you would be happier to receive 2 blank forms - then ask for that.