Applying for roles in the UK – Support for partners of staff relocating to the University of Edinburgh

CVs and Cover Letters

The following information contains free, open-access tools and resources designed to help partners of relocating staff to establish their career in Edinburgh.

What is a CV?

A CV (Curriculum Vitae) is a document that outlines your work experience, education/qualifications, skills, and achievements. It is typically not longer than two standard pages ('A4' is the standard paper size in the UK). A CV is normally longer and formatted differently than a resume.

There are many examples and templates that you can find for free online with a quick google search. You can create your own, using Microsoft Word or Google Docs CV templates as well. Below are some helpful tips and advice for finding the right one for you.

Is a CV the same as a Resume? Sometimes. In the UK and in academic settings the term CV is used for this type of document. Some other countries use 'Resume' to describe the same thing. For example, in North America, a CV is often called a Resume. Academic CVs often have different terminology and formatting than professional resumes (see below).

What to think about before you start writing your CV?

Many companies are now using AI software tools (often called an Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS)) to pre-sort applications before the hiring manager sees them. This means that it's very important to make sure that you use the right keywords to describe your skills and abilities so they match the job description. Here's how it works:

1. **Keyword Matching** – The AI scans CVs for specific words and phrases that match the job description, such as required skills, experience, or qualifications. If your CV doesn't include these keywords, it might get rejected.

2. **Filtering Out Unqualified Candidates** – The AI looks for a match. If the job requires a certain degree, number of years of experience, or specific certifications.

3. **Checking for Formatting Issues** – Some AI systems struggle with CVs that have unusual layouts or too many graphics. If a CV is not formatted in a way the AI understands, it might be ignored.

The key thing to remember is to use clear, simple formatting and include precisely those words that are used in the Job Description to describe your skills and experience for the job. This will improve your chances of being seen by a human recruiter.

Please note that, while the University of Edinburgh does not currently use AI pre-sorting tools for job applications, hiring managers do expect to see that you have read the job description. They see this in how you describe how your skills and experience match the job.

How do I know what I'm good at?

Understanding your skills and abilities is important for creating an effective CV and cover letter. Here are some tools that may help you to think about what you can do.

Reflect on your past experiences. Think about your previous jobs, volunteer work, or academic projects to identify skills you have developed. Consider both technical abilities and skills like communication or teamwork.

The University's Careers Service is designed for University of Edinburgh students. However, there are some valuable tools that you may find useful too. The Careers Service Toolkits have support for 'understanding yourself' (skills, values and strengths) and how to build experience. If you're curious, please take a look around their website for any other support that might be applicable to you. Please note that you may need to be a staff member to access some of these pages, so you may need support from your partner (Edinburgh staff member) to read them.

Self-Assessment Tools. Use online self-assessment tools to identify your strengths, weaknesses, and areas for development. These tools can help you understand your personality traits, work preferences, and transferable skills. The National Careers Service offers a [free skills assessment tool](#) that you may find useful.

Do some research. Search online for any jobs that you are interested in, carefully reading through the job descriptions, and taking note of what skills and qualifications employers are seeking and how they are described. This will help you think about your own skills and how to talk about them as you tailor your CV and cover letter to highlight your most relevant experience.

Network. Connect with professionals in your desired field to gain insights into the skills that are in demand. Networking can also provide opportunities for mentorship and feedback on your application materials. LinkedIn.com is a popular platform for this as well as for searching for jobs. You can also keep an eye out for career fairs in your area.

Ready to create your CV?

Now that you have thought about your skills and experience, you can start writing. Remember, a CV should be factual; describe your past jobs through the skills, experience and achievements you have. Below is a quick outline and additional support for how to format a typical CV. If you look online, you will find many types of CVs, but **not all** will be appropriate for the UK job market.

The [UK National Careers Advice Service](#) is a great resource for information on where to find jobs, how to write a CV and cover letter, interview tips, and explaining gaps in employment, and more. They also have a free service where you can speak to an adviser.
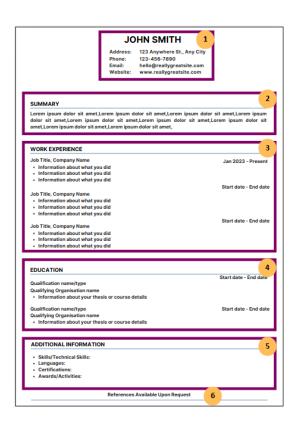
Formatting your CV

First choose the right font and style. There are many free templates to choose from, but not all are easy to read. Create one of your own or choose one that:

- Uses a clear, easy-to-read font like Arial, Calibri, or Times New Roman in size 11 or 12
- Keeps the same style throughout for a clean, professional look
- Uses clear headings and bullet points to make the layout easy to follow

When writing, be clear and to the point. Only include the key skills and activities and avoid writing long explanations. Ask someone else to read over your CV to check for spelling, grammar, and advice on anything you might have missed.

Organising your CV and what to write

1 Contact information and a personal summary are usually placed at the top of the page; how you order the rest is up to you. See the example below of a common way to order the items on your cv: **Contact Information:** At the top of your CV, add your full name, address, mobile number, and email address. This is so that the hiring manager can contact you if they are interested in inviting you to an interview.

Personal Photo. You may see some CV examples online with a personal photo on it. In the UK, this is not normal practice, so we encourage you **not** to add your photo. Many companies in the UK actively discourage this to enable fair and unbiased selection practices.

2   **Profile/Personal Summary:** Write a brief summary that highlights your career goals and what skills you offer to employers. When you are applying for a job, make sure to highlight the skills and experience asked for in the job description.

3   **Work Experience:** List your work history in reverse chronological order, with your most recent jobs listed first.

For each job you list, briefly explain what your responsibilities were and what skills achievements you gained, particularly highlighting those relevant to the role. Start by adding your job title and company name, for example: 'Communications Assistant, University of Edinburgh'. Then underneath, describe what you did in that role.

Date: You will need to list the month and year you started work and ended work in that job, for example: January 2023 to April 2025. Examples also in CV image above.

In most cases, your CV should be no more than two pages long. If you have had many jobs in the past, only list the most recent and relevant ones.

What if I have career breaks or gaps in my work history?

That's ok. There are many reasons why people have taken time out of work. The UK National Careers Advice Service has helpful advice for talking about this in your CV and in interviews. The main thing is to be honest and list any skills you gained during your time out of employment, and be prepared to answer questions about it in an interview. You may even be able to highlight alternative experiences that strengthen your application!

4   **Education:** Here you list any qualifications you have. Include the name of the institution where you gained the qualification and the date you started and finished (month and year). If you wish, you can briefly describe the programme or any relevant projects you worked on, for example, your thesis topic.

5 **Skills:** This section is becoming more important as employers are seeking to match people with the right skills for their jobs. Here you can highlight relevant skills, languages spoken (other than English), people skills (for example, good communication skills, conflict management, etc.), technical and IT skills and certifications. These are usually listed in bullet points.

Interests: Many people also include a section listing a few of their interests. For example, reading, hiking, knitting, watching sports matches, and so forth. This is optional. You may wish to consider whether you have space to add this, or if it will take you over the recommended two pages.

6 **References:** It's common to state at the bottom of your CV that 'References are available upon request'. If you are invited to interview and being considered for the job, the hiring manager will request your referee details from you. You will need to have these ready. To do so, make sure that you have asked your referees if they are willing to provide a reference for you.

What is a reference and a referee?

A work reference is someone who can confirm your employment with them, also called a 'referee'. A referee is someone from your current or previous employer who had oversight over your work, e.g. supervisor, mentor, tutor, or other senior colleague.

Specialist/Academic/Research jobs:

As with many specialisms, each discipline will have its own expectations around what is normal to include in a CV. Academic CVs will normally be longer than other professional CVs and include more information about research, publications, grants or awards, etc., but expectations will vary by field of study.

For the best advice, speak to someone in the same field and ask about specialism norms and expectations.

Look at a few CVs of people who are in the next career stage to yours. Look at how they format their CVs, and how they articulate their achievements and research. This will also give you a sense of what you will need to do to progress in your career. To do this, you can look at personal academic websites or academic networking sites, such as academia.edu.

Draw on mentors and colleagues to proof-read your materials.

Top job search websites and resources

There are many job search websites that will help you find advertisements for jobs. You can look for job vacancies from particular company websites, as well as job boards. The following are some commonly used job boards, many with career advice and other helpful free tools:

- LinkedIn is a professional networking site where you can connect with employers and find job opportunities.
- Indeed has job vacancies and career tools.
- Totaljobs has job vacancies and career tools.
- CV-Library has job vacancies and career tools.

Agencies: You can also try using a recruitment agency to help you get short-term or long-term employment. Many employers prefer to hire through agencies because they will pre-sift applicants that match the job criteria and also may directly contact suitable candidates they already have engaged with.

If you're interested in exploring opportunities at the University, we encourage you to take a look at our jobs site, where we regularly post a wide range of roles.

What is a Cover Letter?

A cover letter is a key part of a job application and can make a big difference for getting an interview. The goal of writing a cover letter is to introduce yourself and encourage the employer to read your CV and consider you for the position.

Before you start writing

Do your research first. Think about the job that you are applying for and get an understanding of what the company is about and what they are looking for. Read the job description carefully and think about the skills and experience you have that matches what the employer wants. Find out about the company or organisation and what they do, their objectives and values. To learn more about what they do, you can look at their website, recent news articles, talk to people you know who work there.

Formatting your Cover Letter

Your cover letter should be in a formal letter format and be easy to read. The UKpostbox has a simple and helpful guide to formatting a formal letter that you may find useful. You can also find many cover letter templates online, which will help get you started as well.

A couple of key notes to start:

- Use a simple clear font that matches your CV, e.g. Ariel, Calibri, or Times New Roman
- A standard font size of 11 or 12
- Be consistent in formatting

Organising your Cover letter

1 The top of your letter should have the:

- Date
- Your full name, address, email address and phone number,
- The company contact name, company name and address.

Make sure you have the right contact details for the company, including postcode. If you are unable to find a contact name for the job, that's ok. Just list the company and address here.

2 This section is where you introduce yourself and describe how you would be a good fit for the job and the company. This section should be addressed to the hiring manager, and should include an introduction paragraph, a body paragraph (where you give details), and a conclusion.

Start by addressing the letter to someone: If you can, it is important to address a person by their title ('Dr', 'Mr', 'Mrs', 'Mx') and preferred name. If you were unable to find a contact name, start the letter with: 'Dear hiring manager' or 'Dear hiring team'.

Introduction: Your first paragraph should let the employer know that you are interested in the job by showing that you have researched the company. First make sure you note the specific job that you are applying for and briefly highlight why you want the job. Here you want to grab the hiring team's attention. Think about why you are motivated and interested in the role and the company.

Body: Next is where you go into detail and give specific examples and evidence from your CV that shows what you've done that describes how you would be an excellent fit for the job. This should be between one and three short paragraphs.

Conclusion: This is the end of your letter. Use this space to thank them for considering your application and encourage them to look at your CV. Let them know that you are looking forward to hearing from them. For example you can write:

"Thank you for taking the time to look at my application. You can find more details about my experience in my CV. I look forward to hearing from you soon."

3   **Signature:** Formal letters often end with 'Yours sincerely', 'Yours faithfully', or simply 'Sincerely'. If you have an electronic signature, feel free to paste it below this. Otherwise, simply type your name.

Don't forget that you are writing the cover letter to tell the hiring team all about how you match the role and the organisation. Make sure that match is really clear for the reader.

Demonstrating that you have done your research on the company and describing how you understand what the organisation is about and how would do well in the role shows your enthusiasm for the job.

Quick tips for writing cover letters:

- Do your research into the company and the role so you can tailor your letter.
- Write a fresh cover letter for each job you apply for, and make sure it is tailored to the company and role - Show that you've done your research into the company and the role. It takes time, but makes a big difference.
- Make sure the company name and recruiter's details are correct.
- Start with a strong introduction that shows your enthusiasm and encourages the reader to keep going.

- Keep it short and focused. Aim for one page with clear, direct language.

- Use the same font and size as your CV to keep things consistent and easy to read.

- Make sure the company name and recruiter's details are correct.

- Use a professional tone and try to match the language and keywords from the job description.

- Focus on the skills and experience that are most relevant to the job. Use real examples to support your points. The STAR method (Situation, Task, Action, Result) can help.

- Avoid repeating your CV. Use the letter to add context and highlight key points.

- Explain how you can contribute to the company and help meet their goals.

- Use a simple structure: an introduction, one or two short paragraphs for the main content, and a confident closing.

- Let your personality come through. Being genuine can help you stand out.

- End with a clear call to action, like saying you would welcome the chance to talk more in an interview.

- Proofread carefully for spelling and grammar and have someone else look at it before sending.

- Save a copy of your letter, so you can remember what you said when you interview!