

The job application



It's about a job: The job application

The job application

He toka tu moana, ara he toa rongonui.
Your strength is like a rock that stands in raging waters.
Maori proverb.

Most employers ask job candidates to send in written applications, very often without speaking to them first. So if you submit a well-presented, eye-catching application – complete with a CV (or resumé) and covering letter – you stand a better chance of getting invited to a job interview.

Writing a stand-out CV

Think of your CV or resumé as a self-advertisement. It helps 'sell' you to a prospective employer.

Like any good advertisement, it needs to put its messages across clearly and simply. A good CV provides a snapshot of your skills, experience and personal qualities. It gets employers interested in you.

Employers use CVs as basic screening tools to come up with a shortlist of candidates to interview. In most instances, it's your CV that gets you through the employer's door. So even if putting one together seems like a mighty big job, it's worth the effort!

Basic tips of CV writing

- Keep your CV short and concise. Two typed pages is about the right length. Any longer and the employer probably won't read it all anyway.
- Choose the right style of CV, one that shows off your background to best advantage – the following pages give you some examples to follow.
- Be honest – but never modest. Talk yourself up!
- Keep your lists of skills handy. Refer back to them.
- Include all the important information: your personal contact details, work objective, education, work experience, community or volunteer experience, and any copies of written references and/or names of verbal referees (people who have agreed to speak about your skills and personal qualities to employers).
- Use action words – ask your Workwise employment consultant for a list of these.
- Write a draft CV first. Ask people in your support network or your employment consultant for feedback.
- Keep an electronic version of your CV handy so you can modify it quickly if required.
- Always keep your CV up to date. That way you can quickly apply for new job opportunities as they come up.

Choosing a CV format

ACCENTUATE THE POSITIVE: CHOOSING A CV FORMAT

CVs come in all different shapes and sizes. Choose a format that highlights your strengths, not your weaknesses. If, for example, your work experience is stronger than your educational background, put your work history before your qualifications.

You'll find many different CV formats on the internet, but in essence there are just two basic styles to choose from, each of which is outlined here.

Chronological CVs

A chronological CV outlines a person's work experience in date order.

It begins with their most recent job and works backwards.

Advantages

It's logical and easy for prospective employers to read and understand.

Disadvantages

Because it puts information in date order, it draws attention to gaps in a person's employment history. It also highlights behaviour patterns (such as a tendency to change jobs quickly, for example), which employers may not like. It doesn't give a person much opportunity to focus on skills they haven't yet used in a job, either. And if a person hasn't been in paid employment before, it won't do justice to their skills and personal qualities.

AN EXAMPLE OF A CHRONOLOGICAL CV

Anne Example

Outline your work experience, listing your previous job titles, the names of your formal employers and a short summary of your main responsibilities in each role.

personal information	
address (home)	36 Jon Doe Road, Frankton, Hamilton, New Zealand
phone (home)	07 123 5678
phone (mobile)	027 876 5432
e-mail	anne.example@gmail.com
employment history	
June 2003 - March 2006	Receptionist/Junior office assistant Coolers Ltd
responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Phone management Service reception General administration duties Accounts
achievements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> After 18 months my responsibilities increased and I was offered the role of junior office assistant on top of my receptionist duties. This gave me the opportunity to use my organisational skills to a greater extent and to advance my administration skills.
April 2007 - February 2009	Commercial cleaner All Star Cleaners
responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Office cleaning Window cleaning Gardening Supervising two staff members
achievements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I was promoted to a supervisory role within three months because of my strong commitment, work ethics and attention to detail.
education	
1997 - 2000	A* Form Certificate Newton High School
2002 - 2003	Certificate in Business Administration Unitech New Zealand
relevant courses attended	
2007 - September 2007	National Certificate in Cleaning and Caretaking
The completion of this course demonstrates that I am skilled in cleaning and caretaking in commercial and educational premises and that I use safe practices.	
personal skills and experience	
I am a motivated, hard working person. I am physically fit and have experience in commercial cleaning. I am very organised and these skills have been strengthened by volunteering at my local city library. I have strong work ethics and continually strive to improve. My experience as a receptionist also strengthened my communication and accuracy skills. I take a lot of pride in my work and enjoy the daily challenges that my change in career direction brings.	
referees	
Joanne Keys Hunters Community Library Community library manager 07 356 1234 joanne.keys@hunterslibrary.co.nz	Karen Fokke All Star Cleaners Senior supervisor 07 876 1235 k.fokke@allstarcleaners.com

List your personal details: your name, address, telephone numbers and email address if you have one.

Outline your education listing the schools, colleges and institutions you've attended alongside any qualifications and special awards or commendations you've gained. Include dates.

Give full contact details for your referees, or write 'references available on request'.

Choosing a CV format continued...

Functional CVs

A functional CV clusters a person's skills and personal attributes under group headings. It highlights a person's achievements, skills and characteristics. However it leaves out dates and more specific details about work experience.

Advantages

A style of CV especially suited to people who either have little or no experience in paid employment or have gaps in their employment history. It gives people plenty of scope to mention skills they have picked up working in the home or in voluntary organisations, for example.

Disadvantages

It may make employers suspicious about why the person has chosen to leave out information. It can also be difficult for an employer to understand the person's skill levels.

THE GOLDEN RULES OF CV WRITING

- Always check your referees.
- Never be untruthful.
- Never attach original certificates – send copies instead.

AN EXAMPLE OF A FUNCTIONAL CV

List your personal details: your name, address, telephone numbers and email address if you have one.

Outline your key skills and relevant personal attributes. Include one or two more detailed bullet points underneath, including information such as how long you have used these skills and how many jobs or projects you have used them in.

Give a brief description of your interests, hobbies or memberships, especially if they are relevant to the job you're applying for.

Outline any relevant education and training, with dates.

Give full contact details for your referees, or write 'references available on request'.

Joe Bloggs

12 Joop Street
Papakura, Auckland
09 243 1234
021 987 6543
joe.bloggs@gmail.com

Personal profile

I am a highly motivated and enthusiastic person. Employers and supervisors have praised my ability to work hard, provide excellent service and communicate effectively. I work well in a team environment and I am seeking a painting position that involves a degree of teamwork. I have my own work tools and transport.

Key skills

Able to work well under pressure

- In a number of painting jobs I have had strict deadlines to meet. I enjoy the challenge of deadlines.

Spray gun painting skills

- I have three years experience as an industrial spray painter, working on a number of commercial projects within Auckland.

Good communication and listening skills

- During previous painting jobs with Painting Direct, I have needed these skills to follow instructions and to ensure the job is completed correctly. I was often praised for my communication and listening skills.

Internal and external painting experience

- I have five years experience in the painting industry and have been involved in a number of private and commercial projects.

Excellent presentation skills

- As an industrial spray painter I have worked on a number of projects which have required excellent presentation skills. I have also fine-tuned my accuracy and eye for detail through my art work as I like to sculpture in my spare time and have done so for a number of years.

I also have good problem solving skills and a strong knowledge of safety rules and procedures.

Education and training

2005 Cambridge High School, Waikato, New Zealand
National Certificate in Building, Construction, and Allied Trades Skills (Level 1)

Interests

- Sculpture
- Home renovation

Referees

Mike Jones Senior Supervisor Painting Direct 09 345 2634 Mike.jones@pdirect.com	Jan West Manager TradeStaff 09 865 4567 jwest@tradesstaff.co.nz	Doug Smith Senior Foreman Sprayem Ltd 09 635 4765 Doug@sprayemltd.com
---	---	---

It's about a job: The job application

Writing a cover letter

Always attach a cover letter to your CV when sending it to employers, whether it's travelling by standard mail or email. It needs to put across your enthusiasm for the job and the organisation, as well as highlight one or two of your main achievements. It should also address any specific requirements noted in the job advertisement.

Tips for writing cover letters

- Keep it to no longer than one page in length. Use concise language and action words.
- Send an original (not a photocopied) type-written letter, unless an employer requests a handwritten letter or you are using email.
- Save the covering letter on a computer file, if possible, so you can modify it for other job applications.
- Check the letter carefully for spelling mistakes and grammatical errors. Ask a family member or friend to double-check it too. Always correct all the errors before sending it.

AN EXAMPLE OF A COVER LETTER

If you don't know the name of the person handling your CV, phone the organisation to find out. Only ever begin with Sir/Madam as a last resort.

Anne Example
36 Jan Doe Road
Frankton
Hamilton

18 May 2010

Mr John Smith
Master House Pet Technologies
Lane Avenue
Hamilton

Dear (or Kia Ora) Mr Smith

I am writing in response to the advertisement for an office cashier as published in the New Zealand Herald on May 18 2010. As I am a big fan of your company's products and I have experience as a cashier, I hope you will consider me for this vacancy.

I am interested in this role because, as requested in the ad, I am energetic and motivated and have previous experience as an office cashier at a senior level. I have experience in cash handling, customer relations and other office duties and in my last job I established a new cashier system and improved the running of the office. I have strong organisational and communication skills, a good work ethic and I enjoy the challenges this line of work brings.

I have enclosed my CV, which gives full details of my work experience and skills. I would welcome the opportunity to attend an interview.

Thank you for your time. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours sincerely
Anne Example

Explain the reason for the letter, how you know about the person or the organisation and why you are writing to them.

Advise that your CV is attached and that you would welcome an opportunity to discuss your background and your work objectives at an interview.

Summarise your work objective in two to three sentences. Link it to the job you're applying for. Use action words to inject energy and enthusiasm. Highlight the key skills you can bring to the role and organisation, mentioning any special achievements that show you have a positive contribution to make.

Note: when writing to the person as a result of a referral from someone, say you will telephone in a few days' time, on a specific day, to follow up on your letter.



Completing employers' application forms

Job application forms

Why do employers sometimes ask candidates to fill in job application forms when they already have copies of their CVs? Well, sometimes employers find it easier to compare candidates if everyone completes the same forms. Either that, or they want to check your handwriting.

- **Download (or ask for) two copies of the application form.** Use the first copy to practise on in pencil. Or have some spare paper handy to draft answers on.
- **Download (or ask for) a copy of the job description** before filling in the forms. If you know what the role requires, you can make sure you include all the information that helps convince the employer you're the right person for the job. Complete the forms at home if you have the opportunity.
- **Read the entire form and all the instructions before you begin.**
- **If a question doesn't apply to you, write N/A,** the abbreviation for 'Not Applicable'.
- **Be honest,** but if you suspect some of your answers may be used as reasons not to interview you, always add something positive, such as 'I will explain this in detail in an interview'.
- **When explaining gaps in your employment history, be positive.** Think about all the constructive things you did and the skills you developed when you weren't working. Perhaps you focused on self-development, for example.
- **When outlining work experience, start with your most recent job first** unless the instructions tell you otherwise.
- **When asked for reasons why you left previous jobs, always give an upbeat answer.** Never badmouth former employers. Look for the positive in a negative. If you were bored in a job, for instance, write 'I left to move onto new challenges'.
- **In the education and training section,** start with information about study you've done that relates directly to the job you're applying for.
- **When asked in a health questionnaire if you can perform the job safely and competently answer 'yes'** unless you know for sure your health prevents you from doing all or part of the job. If you're unsure whether you can safely and competently do the entire job, write 'will discuss this at the interview'. Employers can only ask for job-related information.
- **If the form has an additional information section, use it to say why you believe you're the right person for the job.**
- **If the form asks you for your salary or wage expectations,** write '*open to negotiation*' unless you have a certain threshold below which you won't drop.
- **Once you've finished the form, read over it carefully and fix any mistakes as best you can.**
- **Attach your CV to the application.**

Questions employers can and can't ask

Under New Zealand law, employers have every right to ask applicants questions that relate to the requirements of the job. Let's say they want to hire someone to work weekends. Then they have a right to ask job applicants if there's anything that prevents them from working on Sundays. But they have no right to pry into an applicant's religious or ethical beliefs. Or let's say a men's clothing designer needs a male model. Then they can ask applicants about their gender.

Security and/or Police checks and immigration checks are now very common employment practices. Employers have every right to ask you to declare your criminal history and undergo a security or Police check. They may also ask you whether you are eligible to work in New Zealand and ask to see evidence of your citizenship (e.g. a passport) or your work permit.

But unless employers have a genuine reason, they:

- **can't** discriminate against applicants on the basis of gender, race, ethnicity, age, employment status, disability or health
- **can't** ask job applicants about their sexual orientation
- **can't** ask job applicants about their religious, ethical beliefs or political beliefs
- **can't** ask job applicants further questions about criminal convictions that are eligible to be concealed under the 'Clean Slate' Act – ask your Workwise employment consultant for further information on this if you are unsure.

Employers also **can't** ask job applicants about their marital status or family situation. However, if you feel you would like to volunteer this information during an interview to give a well-rounded picture of yourself, you can do so.