

Improving your CV

We are often told that it is good practice to keep a CV up to date in order to take advantage of opportunities that may arise. These could be promotion possibilities, changes of role or simply membership of a local voluntary or social organisation committee.

A good CV is far more than a list of facts set out in a clear order. It may be accompanied by a personal statement and both should always be tailored to suit the situation. As a leader you will often make judgements based on CVs sent to you by applicants, but how do your own efforts appear to others?

The instrument shared here was devised to support colleagues at a FE Women's Leadership Network conference. It proved helpful to delegates and may be useful to those who would welcome the opportunity to take a long hard look at how your CV appears to others.

Test it with a critical friend

The questionnaire on the final page is designed for use with a trusted colleague who can act as a critical friend. The exercise takes about an hour and should be carried out in a single session if possible.

In order to use the questionnaire:

1. Print out your most recent CV or personal statement.
2. Make a copy of the questionnaire.
3. Take time to read your CV or statement critically, answering each question by evaluation assisted by the prompting questions listed below.
4. Score yourself against each question, giving points from 1 to 5, with 5 highest. Try to avoid awarding yourself a neutral 3 wherever possible.
5. Write your scores in column 2.
6. Either make notes on why you decided on each score, or be prepared to defend your decision.
7. Fold the paper over so that your scores are hidden.
8. Ask your colleague to read your CV or statement and evaluate it against the questions, also using the notes listed below.
9. Ask him/her to place their scores in column 1 of the question sheet, not reading what you have put in column 2.
10. Open up the sheet and, taking each question in turn, compare scores and notes.
11. Use any differences in your perceptions as a means of investigating ways in which your CV could be improved.
12. Both of you should be able to justify why you have scored as you have and to use the outcomes of the resulting discussion to improve the CV or statement.

There are many ways in which this exercise can be adapted, but probably the best sign of its effectiveness – apart from supporting you to success in your next venture – is when your colleague asks you to repay the compliment.

Evaluating your CV or statement

The notes relating to each question are designed as prompts to assist in scoring.

1. **What first impression do you give?**
 - Look at your CV or personal statement through another's eyes. Is it easy to read through and navigate around?
 - Can the reader find out what they want to know at a glance?

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- Is there sufficient white space?
 - Is the layout attractive, using modern typeface and easy on the eye?
 - Is it too long? If more than three pages it may well be discarded unfinished.
2. **Is your CV or personal statement fit for purpose?**
- Is it relevant and appropriate for the post for which you are applying?
 - Are the language and assumptions suitable for your readers? A one size fits all approach to CVs is not advisable. You may be able to omit some facts, depending on the job description and criteria. For many posts, recruitment agency consultants and/or lay governors will be reading your CV and may well not understand specialist educational jargon or issues. Never make assumptions that your readers know as much as you about your job.
3. **Have you thought objectively about all aspects of your personal experience so that the reader sees them as positive?**
- Some examples:
- In FE, starting your career in a vocational role and reaching management status brings with it advantages and a depth of understanding of learners and their motivation that those who have come through a more traditional academic route may not have.
 - Having made a career change or studied as a mature student whilst working and/or bringing up a family is a real plus when applying for senior roles. It implies commitment, stamina and ability to overcome challenges.
- Nowadays, governors are often receptive to candidates who are that bit older and experienced. Use this to your advantage!
 - If you are young and energetic, help readers to see how your enthusiasm and vigour may benefit the organisation.
4. **Are there gaps in your CV that might lead the reader to wonder what you were up to?**
- Give clear reasons for gaps where you can. Examples include pauses for child rearing or other care responsibilities – evidence of a full and varied life indicates your ability to organise and empathise with colleagues and learners.
5. **Can the reader discern your values – things you feel strongly about?**
- Most interviewers want to know what matters to you. Have you managed to reflect or project this in your CV or personal statement?
6. **Does your CV or personal statement reflect your personality?**
- Consider that you will be working with others and they may appreciate a glimpse of your personality. If they don't like what they read, then you wouldn't want to work with them anyway
7. **Have you made sure that your CV reflects your abilities, skills and experience better than an application form?**
- For example, is there an opportunity to mention research, publications or experience in other sectors where relevant to the post?

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8. Does your CV intrigue?

- Have you planted a few ideas that will lead to interesting questions in interview, allowing you to share some qualities or experiences that will separate you from other candidates?

9. Have you sold yourself sufficiently?

- Think of someone who has been successful recently in job applications and whom you regard

as honest but assertive. Now consider your own CV – would s/he have produced it?

- Make sure that you have not undersold yourself.

Evaluating your CV or statement: grid

See the notes above to help you think about each question in the grid on the final page.

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Evaluating your CV or statement

	second score	first score	note
1. What is your first impression?			
2. Is it fit for purpose?			
3. Are all aspects of personal experience interpreted positively?			
4. Any unexplained gaps?			
5. Are values evident?			
6. Is your personality reflected?			
7. Does this do a better job than an application form would?			
8. Does this CV or statement intrigue the reader?			
9. Have you sold yourself sufficiently?			

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Thanks to Christine Tyler, Colleges Specialist for the Association of School and College Leaders and Thalia Marriott, coordinator of the Women's Leadership Network for producing this guide.

The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) is the professional association and trade union for secondary school and college leaders. ASCL has nearly 15,000 members including secondary heads, deputy and assistant heads, business managers, college principals, vice principals and others with whole school/college responsibility.

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