**Top five CV pitfalls to avoid**

In today’s competitive jobs market, it’s more important than ever to make a good first impression.

This can often be your CV, so it needs to be putting across the right messages, with the right presentation, and no mistakes.

The most important thing is to take your time over your CV – make sure it’s the best it can be.

You might want to leave it for a couple of days and then come back to it with a fresh pair of eyes. Get it checked over by several people to see if they can spot anything you can’t. When you’ve been working on something for a long time it can be difficult to see ways in which it can be improved. But with CVs, it’s easy to make the mistake, but very difficult to correct the damage done….

Employers who receive a lot of CVs have to make quick judgements to create a shortlist for interviews. Read on for some of the most common reasons for not being shortlisted.

**1. Typing errors, and poor spelling and grammar**

Not all of us are perfect with spelling and grammar. But even if it’s not a strong point of yours, your CV isn’t the place to allow mistakes to slip through. It’s the first impression an employer gets of you, and a CV with these mistakes in it can make it seem like you haven’t put the time in, or you don’t think details are important.

A tidy, mistake-free CV creates the impression that you are professional, thorough and care how you come across. So the advice is – get it checked by someone whose English is good, even if yours is good too. Don’t rely on spell-checkers – they can miss lots of things, such as words that sound the same but are spelt differently. A stakeholder isn’t the same as a steak-holder but they would both pass the spell checker….

**2. Listing duties instead of achievements**

Putting in phrases like ‘responsible for ordering stock’ can make your CV read like a job description, when it should be selling your achievements as an individual. Try to re-phrase it describing exactly what you did, and what the positive outcome was. For example, ‘using specialist software, closely monitored sales trends and stock levels, and ordered stock appropriately. This reduced out of stock instances by 21% in 2011’.

To make your CV sound more dynamic, use active language instead of passive. An example is changing ‘involved in the promotion of the company at industry events…’ into ‘promoted the company at industry events…’ This has the effect of making you sound like a ‘doer’, rather than someone who was merely ‘involved’ in something that a lot of people did.

**3. Not tailoring your CV**

When you’re sending out speculative applications it can be tempting to go for quantity over quality, and send out the same CV to hundreds of employers. Unfortunately, employers can usually recognise a mass mailshot, as they can sound general and unfocussed.

In addition to this, you are missing the opportunity to sell your most relevant skills. Consider what the main skills are that the employer might be looking for and make sure you highlight your relevant experience. If you’ve got experience in both retail and care work, and you are sending your CV to a shop, make sure your retail experience is prominent in your CV

**4. Visually unappealing and difficult to read**

In an effort to include as much information in as possible, some candidates’ CVs can look cluttered, with long paragraphs of dense text and very little white space. This can make the CV very hard to read. Use bullet pointed lists and short sentences to make it easier for recruiters to scan for key points.

Trying to make your CV stand out is a good idea, but another pitfall is trying a little too hard, such as printing it on bright green paper or over a picture. If you’re going for a daring visual approach, make sure it is tasteful, and probably only use it for creative jobs. And don’t be tempted to mix up your fonts in an effort to create variety and interest – it can look messy and disorganised.

**5. Too long or too short**

Another delicate balancing act this one. The rule of thumb is that a CV should be no more than two pages long. But if you’ve got a lot of relevant experience at a high level, you might not want to cut out this important information to squeeze it into two pages. Likewise, if you’re just starting out in your career and you haven’t really got two pages of information, don’t try to pad it out with irrelevant info – one succinct page would be fine.

If you are going to have a detailed CV that goes back a long way into your work history, make sure the information is relevant to the job you’re applying for. Think carefully about whether that Saturday job you had 20 years ago is still relevant….

You can read more CV hints and tips in our section on CVs and covering letters. You can create a CV from scratch with our CV Builder, get advice on what to put in each section, and look at the different CV formats to find the right one for you.