

CVs, Cover Letters and Applications

Brunel+



Careers



Brunel
University
London

Professional
Development
Centre



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*For free professional help with your written applications book an appointment
with a Careers Consultant or Placement & Internship Adviser:*

www.brunel.ac.uk/pdc-appointments

Planning your application

Matching the job description

Tailor your application for each individual job by matching your skills, interests and experience to the selection criteria.

Study the job advertisement and employer's website to try to find out what's needed. Look at job profiles on the Prospects website: **www.prospects.ac.uk** for further hints.

Before starting to construct your CV, try a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis to highlight your main 'selling points' and identify any gaps or problems.

Standing out from the crowd

Sell yourself with evidence and examples to match the requirements of the job. Recruiters are keen to hear about the skills and experience you have, so do include things like retail and bar work as this shows key attributes such as team and time management skills.

Quantify your major achievements – did you raise a significant amount of money for a charity or society? Did you secure lots of hits on your society's Facebook page? Did you present to a sizeable audience? Show the scope and scale of the achievement.

Spelling, punctuation and grammar

Many employers have a 'three strikes and you're out rule' – i.e. if you make more than three errors then your application is rejected.

Use spellcheck. Ask your careers consultant, friend etc. to proofread written applications and if you are unsure about any grammatical or punctuation rules, double check.

Remember first impressions count. Demonstrate due care and attention and you stand a much better chance of getting an interview.

There are many online sources of help for written English. A good place to start is **www.bbc.co.uk/skillswise/english**.

Top Tip:

Don't just use spell checkers. Proofread your CV and cover letter yourself and ask another person to check it for errors.



CVs



Layout

The two page rule - your CV should be no longer than two pages. Decide if you need a one or two page CV: a single page is a must for the investment banking and creative industries, and is often better for speculative applications or where you have little experience. An academic CV is the only exception to the two page rule and can be longer.

Two popular CV layouts:

Reverse chronological order (the most commonly used)

Your most recent experience is listed first eg: your course at Brunel will be at the top of your Education section.

Skills based

Skills (Communication/Organisation, for example) are used as subject headings.

It may be suitable to use this layout if you lack related work experience but can demonstrate useful skills gained from university/personal external activities or other jobs.

Main section headings:

Personal details

Education

Work experience

Interests

These can be added to or adapted to suit your experience and the role for which you are applying.

Other headings you could use are:

Relevant experience / Industrial Placements/
Legal Profession Experience /Customer Service /
Voluntary Work (make the heading tell a story).
Additional work experience/part-time work.

Education and Awards (prizes,
scholarships, employer sponsorship)

Positions of responsibility (official roles
or leadership opportunities)

Achievements (if you have specific outcomes from
your interests or extra-curricular activities)

Skills: list 'hard' skills - languages, IT, social media,
driving licence and any others that may be appropriate.

What should I include/leave out?

Personal details

Address(es), email and phone number(s) (including a
mobile number if that is your main contact number).
Don't use an email address that sounds unprofessional
- create a new one or use your Brunel email.

Education

List your current or most recent course first. State the
subject studied and expected degree classification
(e.g. 2:1). If you're still studying, you may want to
include current modules which are relevant to the job.

Include all A-levels or relevant qualifications with results.
(International students see p15 for further help).

When listing your GCSEs, you can summarise the
number of subjects where you achieved A-C grades, but
should always include Maths and English with grades.

Top Tip:

You have about
30 seconds to
make a good
first impression -
make it count.

Top Tip:

What they see
is what they
get. Employers
generally know
nothing about
you and will base
decisions on what
you put (or don't
put) in your CV or
cover letter.





CVs *continued...*

Work experience

You can divide the Work Experience section into 'Relevant Work Experience' and 'Other Work Experience' to focus the recruiter on the information that is most appropriate for the job application.

Don't underestimate the importance of other part-time and temporary work – this is where you will have developed many useful skills.

Bullet point the tasks you undertook, using an active verb at the beginning that shows the skill you developed, e.g. "Organised a sales promotion event....".

Interests

This section can be brief but many employers like to see your extra-curricular activities. What you do in your spare time can give a recruiter valuable evidence about your skills and your ability to manage your time effectively. Playing sport to a reasonably high level shows discipline and tenacity, for example.

FAQs

Q: I'm too busy for all this; how can I cut corners?

A: Once you have a good CV, it's easy to customise it for different applications. Sending below-average CVs is a waste of time. Try to balance the quantity of CVs with quality. Most recruiters agree that it is better to send out fewer CVs of a better quality than a large quantity of substandard applications.

Q: Should I include a general profile or career aim on my CV?

A: It's not necessary unless you provide a list of specific and relevant skills at the beginning of your CV to encourage employers to look further. Discuss your career aim in your cover letter instead.

Q: My A-level grades aren't great. Can I leave them out?

A: No – employers make assumptions about why something is omitted. It's better to include them and put an explanation in your cover letter.

Q: Do I need to include details of referees on the CV or application?

A: Not on the CV – employers don't normally take up references until after the interview.

This may be a required field on the application form and then needs to be answered. Always ask referees' permission before listing them.

2 Further sources of help – including examples

Example CVs for a range of different areas of employment, eg Part-time work, Engineering, Marketing, Law, can be found on the Careers section of the PDC website: www.brunel.ac.uk/pdc.

For free professional help with your CV book an appointment with a Careers Consultant or Placement and Internship Adviser: www.brunel.ac.uk/pdc-appointments.



Cover letters



The purpose

Your cover letter personalises your CV by telling recruiters why their job interests you, why you are right for the role and what you can offer the organisation.

A well-written, targeted cover letter can be the deciding factor in whether you are shortlisted for an interview.

The format

Use a standard business layout with your address top right and the name and address of the recipient in the left margin below. Place the date below the recipient's address.

Insert the job reference number (if any) after the greeting and before the main text, which should consist of three to four paragraphs.

A cover letter should not be longer than one side.

The content

Introduction – State the purpose of the letter and make clear whether it's a speculative approach or response to an advertised vacancy. If the latter, give the job title and say where you saw it advertised (if appropriate). Include a one-line summary of relevant experience and academic achievement.

Why them? – Write about why you really want to work for the organisation and show a deeper interest than just, 'working for a big name'. Briefly indicate how you've researched the organisation (PDC, personal contact, job fair, LinkedIn, etc) and how your experience, skills or interests match you with the particular job and/or employer.

Why you? – Write about what you could bring to both the job and the company. Make sure to list any work experience you've done as well as the skills and learning outcomes gained.

Specific issues – Address any issues such as gaps in your CV, low exam grades which don't reflect your ability, or concerns the employer may have.

Conclusion – Include an enthusiastic phrase such as 'I look forward to hearing from you' or 'I am really excited by this role'. You can also include practical details, eg availability for interview or for work experience.

Close with 'Yours sincerely' if you used a named contact, eg 'Dear Mr. Smith', and 'Yours faithfully' if you had to use 'Dear Sir/Madam'.

Further sources of help about cover letters

Sample cover letters can be found on the Careers section of the PDC website: www.brunel.ac.uk/pdc.

For free professional help with your cover letter book an appointment with a Careers Consultant or Placement and Internship Adviser: www.brunel.ac.uk/pdc-appointments.

Top Tip:

Use a different cover letter to apply for each job – using the same one for multiple jobs is a waste of time.

Top Tip:

Always write to a named person with the correct title and job role. Phone or email the company if necessary to find the right one.





Application forms

Types of questions

Ensure that you read each question carefully and answer it accurately. If a question isn't applicable to you write 'Not applicable' to show that you have read the question and not just overlooked it.

How to answer competency questions: the STAR technique

Competency based questions are designed to measure the skills and experiences you have to offer against the competencies needed for the job.

"Give an example when you have worked in a team. What was your role and what did you learn from the experience?"

"Describe how your personal planning and organisation resulted in the successful achievement of a personal or group task."

These questions require specific examples as evidence. Try to ensure that examples draw on a broad range of experiences from part-time job, to sport to volunteering or being a member of a university society.

The **STAR** technique can be used to answer competency questions effectively:

Situation – the general background

Task – the specific task or project

Actions – the actions you took to complete the task that show the specific skill

Result – ideally a positive outcome and any lessons learned

Top Tip:

Book an appointment with a Careers Consultant in the PDC to get help with making a successful application.

Example of the STAR technique – Teamwork question

Situation – I was Social Secretary of a university society.

Task – I was a member of a team of four people organising the end of term party.

Actions – At the first planning meeting I volunteered to arrange the catering.

I suggested that we met once a week to discuss our progress.

I set up a WhatsApp group so we could stay in touch with each other.

When a fellow team member had problems finding the venue I offered to help.

Result – The team worked well together to organise a hugely successful event which 100 people attended.

Answering motivation questions

Why are you applying for this job? /

Why do you want to work for us?

Employers want in-depth and genuine reasons for applying and will expect you to have done detailed research on the role, the company and the business context in which it operates. This is known as being commercially-aware.

Demonstrate why the post is the next logical step in your career progression and mention specific examples of why the job and the organisation interest you.

Give examples of specific skills and experience you bring to the position and how they can benefit the company.



Application forms

continued...

Personal statements

Some jobs may require you to complete a personal statement explaining how you meet their selection criteria which is usually provided in a Person Specification, a list of the skills and qualities needed to do the job.

Ensure that you write about each of the selection criteria in turn, showing how you have proved that you have each skill. Keep to the same order as that of the Person Specification as it will then be easier for the employer to assess your statement.

Further sources of help

For free professional help with your cover letter, book an appointment with a Careers Consultant or Placement and Internship Adviser: **www.brunel.ac.uk/pdc-appointments**.

The Prospects website has useful advice about application forms: **www.prospects.ac.uk**.

International students

As UK employers won't necessarily be familiar with overseas qualifications you will need to show how your grades fit into a range (i.e. grade point average 3.33 out of 4.0 or a 'B' grade out of A-F).

Look on the UK NARIC (National Recognition Information Centre) website to relate your qualifications to the UK equivalent: **www.naric.org.uk**.

There are additional resources on the PDC website to help International students understand the UK recruitment process.

Declaring a disability

It depends on individual circumstances. Disclosure may explain gaps in education or employment or lack of experience which might otherwise count against you. Alternatively, you may feel that there is no relevance to your future performance at work.

If you decide to disclose a disability, make sure to focus on the positives - skills, experience, and strategies for achieving academic and personal successes given the circumstances. Consider applying to businesses in the Business Disability Forum who are especially committed to equal opportunity: **www.businessdisabilityforum.org.uk** or ask PDC staff about other possible resources.



More about the PDC

The PDC is your one stop shop for advice, guidance and support when looking for work and planning your career.

You can use our service from your first day at Brunel and for up to two years after you graduate.

Jobs: part-time, vacation, internships, placement and graduate opportunities.

Events: recruitment, employability skills, webinars and Careers Uncovered.

Advice and feedback: job search, CVs, applications, interviews and assessment centres.

Guidance: career options and postgraduate study.

Information online at www.brunel.ac.uk/pdc

TO BOOK AN APPOINTMENT with a Careers Consultant or Placement and Internship Adviser go to www.brunel.ac.uk/pdc-appointments

