

Give the Employer What They Want! Effective CVs and Application Forms

**Midlands Graduate School
22nd May 2015**

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This Session Aims to...

- Enable you to consider what skills you can offer to an employer – and what skills employers want from PhDs
- Assist you to understand the implications of job descriptions
- Explain conventions and approaches for CVs, cover letters and application forms

Give the employer what they want.....



- EMPRESS Project at U of Leeds
- 47 employers (SME ➡ multinational), 4 research groups
- Explored researchers' perceptions of employers and vice versa
- This is gold dust – you can use to tailor your applications
- So – let's get our heads around this!

Your mission.....

1. **Take the pack of cards and sort into categories you think they belong to**



2. **Choose 2 categories and consider matches/mismatches**

- For instance, compare skills researcher's think employers want with skills employers say they want.....

EMPRESS – employer perceptions

“Even though many employers had no experience of employing a researcher, many were amenable to the idea. However, they had concerns about the researcher’s ability to make the transition to the workplace. Would it be successful and at what cost to the company? Would they be stuck in their HE research ways – and more stuck the longer they had been in HE?”

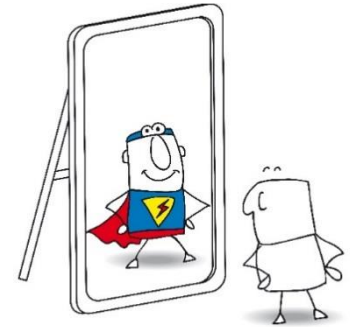
EMPRESS – researcher perceptions

“From another perspective, some of the comments from researchers suggest a lack of awareness of the similarities between modern businesses and universities, where both refer to ‘resources’, ‘outputs’, ‘deliverables’, ‘bottom lines’ and how everything should be ‘measurable’.”

“Researchers need to be able to learn and use a different language when presenting themselves outside academia. Researchers at any stage can often be lacking in these necessary translation skills.”

Matching yourself with the job

- Consider the skills employers say they want
- Gather evidence of how you have demonstrated the skill
- Consider the job description (JD)
- Formulate your application around the evidence the employer needs



Job Description Activity

- Read through the JD in pairs, underlining/circling skills and qualities the employer is looking for. Also consider themes, values/ethos. (7 minutes)
- Select 2 items each that you feel fit with your strengths/interests (3 minutes)
- Talk to your partner about one activity/experience that you could use to demonstrate this item (5 mins)
- Be prepared to contribute to short discussion on your ideas/thoughts.

Remember:

1. The employer is most interested in your potential to do a job for them – they may have limited understanding/interest in precise area of your research.
2. The employer will judge you by evidence that you have developed “transferrable skills”.
3. Avoid academic language and reflect back the language that is used in job description.
4. The employer is not interested in all you have done, just a sample of those things they outline as important to them.



Key Ingredients of a compelling CV

- Outside of academia: 2 pages max, sometimes one page
- Spells out where you have used the skills the job description asks for
- *Any points you make about what you have done must be relevant to the job you are applying for.*
- Clear layout

Non-academic CV – what's different?

- Two pages max (*One* page for financial positions, or if employer requests)
- **Typical sections: Education, work experience, additional skills and interests**
- In all sections, focus on skills relevant for job (usually as per job description or similar)
- **Make it easy to read at speed**

Layout

- Name as heading, contact details immediately underneath, usually centred
- Typical sections: Education, Work Experience, Additional Skills and Interests
- Be consistent – **bold** is ok for headings, so are *italics*, use the same for each one
- Also with order of place, activity, date
- Sans serif (e.g. Calibri, Arial) fonts are clearer and quicker to read than serif fonts (e.g. Times New Roman)
- Anything smaller than 11 point is too small

Write a winning CV

Do 😊

- **Format appropriately**
- **Be consistent**
- **Be selective**
- **Focus on accomplishments**
- **Use professional language**
- **Check spelling & grammar**

Don't 😞

- **Mention things the employer will have no interest in**
- **Include a photo** * In the UK
- **Use personal pronouns**
- **Use negative words**
- **Include explanations**
- **Lie or exaggerate**

Avoid unnecessary words...

- I have demonstrated my communication ability by working with undergraduate students on the 'Introduction to Ancient Philosophy' module, during which I was consistently thanked for giving useful feedback, which was reflected in the good marks from students in my seminar groups
- Can you summarise in less than 41 words?

Avoid unnecessary words...

- 15 words...
- Effective communication skills demonstrated whilst seminar tutor, through positive comments and members gaining high marks.
- 10 – 13 words...
- **C**ommunication (skills): **P**ositive comments and high marks from members of seminars (**I** led)

CV Profiles

- Not essential
- Directly under contact details at start of CV
- Should interest someone such that they keep reading
- Can work well if you are drawing various threads together, or want to draw immediate attention to something further on in the CV, e.g.: ‘Two years’ relevant work experience, with skills further developed through challenging voluntary work, combine with proven academic ability at doctorate level.’
- Avoid vacuous generalisations

Could you offer...?

- Working independently, with ability to plan and achieve own objectives
- **High-level research and analysis skills**
- Spoken communication: Teaching, explaining/promoting/defending your ideas
- **Written communication: Publication, thesis**
- Etc etc

CVs – examples and information

- <https://www.vitae.ac.uk/researchers-professional-development/personal-effectiveness/professional-and-career-development/creating-an-effective-cv-quick-tips>
- <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/scs/applications/cv/>
- http://www.prospects.ac.uk/cvs_and_cover_letters.htm

Link between CVs & Cover Letters

- CV by definition a summary
- CV gives key information and highlights relevant aspects, in very distilled form
- Cover letter can give more details of any particularly important elements. It complements and expands on the CV
- Cover letter can explain why you are suited to/keen about that company and position

Cover Letters

- Maximum one page
- Formal layout – your address top right, their address underneath to left, date, Dear (with name wherever possible), yours sincerely (if name known) or yours faithfully (if name not known)
- Short introduction in text of e-mail, with attached documents, if sending electronically
- All that said, employers can and do give different instructions – so read the rubric!

Application Forms

Differences from a CV

- The layout is defined – you have to fit what you have done into what they have asked
- May have to include everything (e.g. every qualification) even if you feel it's not relevant
- There are likely to be longer questions
- Some organisations will accept a CV as well; many will refuse to.

Similarities to a CV

- Promote why you are suitable for the job
- **Ensure accuracy of information**
- Ensure accuracy of layout, spelling
- **Will only get you as far as the interview**

Additional information section

- ‘Please give additional information to support your application.’
- Performs much the same function as the cover letter on a CV-based application, though it may be possible to be longer and more detailed
- Say something about each point in the job description

Competency Questions

- Usually ask for a specific example
- Ensure that your own personal contribution is clear
- Use the CARE Framework

The CARE Framework

- **Context:** A sentence or two to set the scene, e.g. where you were and in what capacity
- **Action:** What did you do? (The bulk of your answer)
- **Result:** What was solved/ improved/ developed/initiated/agreed/etc?
- **Evaluation:** What did you learn which you could apply again?

‘Tell me about a time when you used your initiative to solve a problem.’

Context	During the first year of my PhD, my supervisor gained a role outside of the academic context so I needed to find another supervisor. There was no immediately obvious replacement.
Action	Since I had met various academics in related fields at conferences and during my research, I had a list of people I was able to contact to ask for advice. I arranged to meet with an academic suggested to me as a result of making these enquiries...
Result	... and she agreed to be my supervisor. We quickly established an effective working relationship and I am on track to complete my thesis by June 2015.
Evaluation	This has given me an important insight into the value of establishing and maintaining professional relationships, which I look forward to utilising in the aspects of liaison required of this role.

Thanks for Participating!

Any final questions?