

Brill

HOW TO  
WRITE A  
BRILLIANT

CV

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**brilliant**

# **how to write a brilliant CV**

**brilliant example**

One recent example of a CV we saw from a student read: 'I have excellent attention to detail!' Not only does this sentence undermine itself, it sends out warning signs – what other weaknesses does this candidate have?

## Energy/dynamism/drive/enthusiasm

A dynamic person would:

- Adopt a positive attitude to all tasks no matter how challenging or unpleasant
- Volunteer for extra responsibility
- Set demanding but achievable goals for themselves and others
- Respond constructively to criticisms, seeking to improve for the future
- Seek feedback from others on how to become more effective
- Persist in the face of obstacles
- Recover quickly from setbacks and not dwell unproductively on past failures
- Encourage and motivate other people.

## Initiative

Someone with excellent initiative would:

- Look for potential gains and opportunities in any situation
- Identify helpful contributions they could make without waiting to be told
- Seek to understand and anticipate the needs of others
- Have ideas for new and improved activities and make constructive suggestions
- Find solutions to problems rather than waiting for someone else to sort things out
- Take responsibility for their own learning in order to meet future challenges.

## Ability to handle pressure

Someone who is excellent at handling pressure would:

- Anticipate the conditions that could make a task or situation stressful
- Prepare adaptable plans to address demands
- Take a step back from immediate activities to identify wider goals and priorities
- Prioritise conflicting tasks according to their impact on business needs
- Put in place systems and procedures to ensure routine tasks do not take time and energy from more important activities
- Monitor and control their own emotions and stress levels so that they maintain equilibrium
- Respond constructively to the emotions of others under stress and calmly enable them to focus on what is important.

## Leadership

An excellent leader would:

- Seek information that would help them to understand the context for their actions
- Identify and communicate a clear vision for the team or organisation
- Seek input from followers and make decisions about a course of action
- Assess the abilities, motivations and working styles of their followers in order to appropriately allocate responsibilities
- Provide clear briefings to followers on their goals and tasks and check their understanding
- Monitor the performance and attitudes of followers and provide appropriate feedback and encouragement
- Take responsibility for the successes and failures of their team
- Treat everyone with impartiality, integrity and transparency.

## How do you rate against the list of important skills?

Here are a few questions that might help you think about these skills in relation to yourself. Use these questions to trigger ideas about your personal qualities.

- Do you tend to get details right more often than not, or do you find details irritating?
- Do you prefer working in a team of people, or on your own?
- Do you like to be a leader, or a team member?
- Are you punctual for work?
- Would you say you are outgoing, like meeting people and going to parties, or do you prefer your own company, or just a few trusted friends?
- Do you tend to be cheerful and positive, or do you easily get depressed?
- When people make a lot of demands on you, do you tend to remain calm, or do you find yourself losing your temper?

All of the above questions are commonly asked of candidates by employers because they are regarded as important qualities in successful employees. You may be thinking that to any or all of those questions your answer is ‘Sometimes yes, sometimes no’, or ‘It depends’, or ‘It is not as simple as that’. That is a perfectly reasonable response. The point is, if these are the qualities sought by employers, the more you can demonstrate them through deeds, the better.

## Exercising your skills

The following exercises should help you address these ‘personality requirements’ of employers more easily.

### Communication skills

List the people or group of people you commonly communicate with. Next to each person or group of people write down how you communicate. Is it face-to-face, in writing, or on the phone? What is your presentation style? Then write down how you know that what you’re communicating has been successful. Take a look at our example, then try to fill out the table yourself.



**exercise 1**

WHO	WHAT	SUCCESS?
Managing director	Face-to-face question	Body language, no additional clarification needed
Unit leader	Presentation of monthly reports	Performance appraisal requested to coach others

Teamwork and leadership

List examples of your ability to get on well with co-workers. Here are some to guide you:

- ‘The restructure motivated my new team, and we all took on extra duties to ensure that we accomplished our goals, which we actually exceeded every month.’
- ‘Five of us were assigned to investigate why our customer service ratings were down. We divided the tasks up into different product areas, and decided on weekly team meetings. We soon discovered that there were some common problems, and our recommendations when implemented proved very popular.’
- ‘I took on a departed colleague’s duties to ensure a smooth service before a replacement was recruited for our team.’
- ‘I was voted most popular team member twice last year.’

Remember, many jobs will be fairly clear whether they want a leader or a team member (or both). Looking like a leader when a team member is called for will have recruiters thinking this person will not take direction and will question decisions. Equally, if a leader is required, looking too much like ‘one of the boys’ might be interpreted as being a poor leader.

The following are some sample statements showing leadership:

- 'I reorganised the way payments were processed. This involved reassigning several staff, some job enlargement and the redundancy of three staff members.'
- 'Under my management, the group has shown record profits in the past eight quarters.'

Statements showing team membership are similar to those suggesting good relations with colleagues.

Try writing your own statements to show you are outgoing, like meeting people, going to parties, or that you prefer your own company or that of just a few trusted friends. Our examples follow:

- 'I enjoy public speaking.'
- 'I am the staff social representative.'
- 'I enjoy dealing with my customers.'
- 'I enjoyed my five years in sales.'

There are few jobs that would openly seek people who are not outgoing, but they do exist. Any job where contact with other employees or the public is not frequent would be a case in point. Such jobs include machine operators, back-room processing jobs or jobs where people are out 'on the road' alone like truck drivers, or people working from home. Inadvertent statements that may make you look a little anti-social would be:

- 'I have learned to be very self-reliant.'
- 'I worked in sole practice for 20 years.'
- 'I enjoy the challenge of myself against the elements on orienteering holidays.'

## Attention to detail

List work tasks or preferably results where your attention to detail has been demonstrated. For example:

- 'I have never had documents I have typed sent back to me with factual or grammatical errors in them.'
- 'During my time in this post, I reduced the amount of internal mail that was incorrectly addressed by more than 30 per cent.'

## Energy, enthusiasm and initiative

Try writing your own statements after reading these samples:

- ‘I identified more effective procedures in the Accounts department, leading to increased productivity and customer satisfaction. Mustering the talent of our Finance department, I solicited employee ideas and persuaded Management to award the best idea a £500 incentive. These ideas resulted in savings of over £500,000 to the company.’
- ‘I took on responsibility for reorganising client files to better improve storage and retrieval. Although this was an area in which I had limited experience, I contacted my colleagues in other parts of the company and by sharing ideas with them and working long hours I implemented a new system within two weeks (three weeks earlier than my manager had expected).’

## Pressure

Statements that show your calm temperament, or ability to handle pressure, might look like this:

- ‘My current role regularly involves having to produce briefing reports at extremely short notice. It is satisfying to get the job done against apparently impossible odds.’
- ‘A key skill is to calm down angry passengers whose flights have been delayed.’

If there was a time when a job had to be finished by a deadline and you worked overnight or over the weekend to complete it, then write down the details next to the relevant job on your life history.

Finally, reflect on the places you have worked, the times you have worked (such as nightshifts or overtime) and teams you have worked with. Are there any things that stand out as particularly good or bad?

## Where wouldn't you work?

Now is the time to make a list of things you will not put up with in the workplace. To do this, make three lists with the following headings: