

# Project Management

## CV Advice

*arras* PEOPLE

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*arras* PEOPLE

## INTRODUCTION

Arras People has been running its Project Management Careers Clinics since 2004 and talking to hundreds of candidates and clients for our project management recruitment services. We also run careers advice services to unemployed project management professionals through the JobCentre Plus. Over that time we've seen thousands of CVs – some good, some bad and to be honest only a marginal majority that are really excellent.

There's plenty of guidance on CV writing on the internet and there's no definitive answer to writing the perfect CV but there are definite pitfalls to avoid – and certainly big no-no's!

This guide has been specifically put together to assist project management professionals with the development of their own CV and to also give them an insiders guide to making successful applications for project management roles.

As you may have already discovered everyone will give you different advice on your CV! Arras People has put together some of its recommendations based on years of recruiting successful project management roles and guidelines from clients requesting what they like to see on candidates' CVs.

## INTRODUCTION

We've also added some new material to this second version of our CV Advice document which includes;

- Tell the Truth—Running Checks
- Social Media and Job Applications
- Making Applications with Your CV
- CV Errors
- Personal Details & Activities

## CV POINTERS

We have a CV template available, which you might find useful to download whilst reading through this document

> [Arras CV Template](#)

Before we start working through the CV structure a few general pointers and thoughts on the CV itself:

### **1, 2, 3 or beyond**

CV length advice varies from a one pager profile to most stating that they should be two pages max and if you find your CV reading like *War and Peace* with four or more pages – forget it, no one will be interested. Generally speaking we like to see candidates CVs no longer than three pages, as long as the CV hasn't become a waffling diatribe. If its two pages and it does everything you want it to do – great! If not, going to three pages is fine

### **Tell the Truth**

You will get found out eventually – if not at the first hurdle when being interviewed by a recruiter. More and more employers are using competency based interviews as the first hurdle which makes lying on your CV very difficult indeed. Lying in areas such as education, training courses attended, job titles and when you actually worked somewhere are much easier to find out about than you probably think.

## CV POINTERS

Here's a short article which highlighted the issue;

In a small sample of just 5 people who have applied for the position, 4 of them are not telling the whole truth, that's a whopping 80%! It took just five minutes of running a few checks on the internet to establish whether the people were who they say they were.

So, I bet you're really interested to hear about what people have been caught out lying about right?

The easy one, if you put that you've taken any of the OGC accredited courses like PRINCE2, MSP etc there is an online register that shows exactly when you did it and where. That accounted for the first of our candidates. The second, states that he's currently working for a company as a project support officer currently supporting a senior project manager. What he omitted to tell me was the company he currently works for is actually his own and its been dissolved for the last 12 months. It's easy to find out details about companies and directors either from Companies House directly or any of the credit checking facilities. The third, has been working for the same company for the last 5 years, a company I've never heard of. Briefing checking out the company online bought no clues and delving deeper it was easy to find out that actually it hasn't existed for the last two years. Finally, and this one is really the best of all. The fourth candidate is someone who has applied for a number of roles at Arras People over the last two years. The systems we use here enable us to keep previous versions of the CV used when applying for jobs, a bit like an archive. When I received the latest application I took a quick look at the previous versions, just to see if they were the same. Unfortunately some editing fairy must have been at work because the latest CV bore no relation to the previous versions, in fact he had invented an entire works history up.

## CV POINTERS

### Spell checker

An obvious one eh? Just make sure you also use the grammar checker to effective use too and avoid American spellings such as organization for organisation. MS Word has a nasty habit of changing these frequently. As a side note I think the most mis-spelt word in some of the CV's we've seen is "liaising". Do not rely solely on the spell checker make sure you read it through to ensure auto correct has not put the wrong word in.

### It's all about marketing and sales

Your CV is purely and simply a document that sells you, just like sales and marketing literature tells a potential customer about a product or service, its benefits, its features etc. Keep this in mind as you put together your CV as everything you write should be achieving this objective.

The starting point for the CV (or any report for that matter) is to ask yourself what you are trying to do.

Knowing who you are and what you are actually looking for is a vital first step. Performing self evaluation exercises such as Gap and the SWOT (Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, Threats) analysis' before creating your CV will give you a greater sense not only of what your skills are and what you have to offer, but also where you fit

## CV POINTERS

into the market and the type of roles you can realistically apply for.

Having established the objective, research is then essential to understand not only your target but more importantly yourself.

Remember, the purpose of a CV is not to get a job but rather to obtain an interview or meeting

***The most common mistake we see on a project management CV is the inability to clearly and concisely convey the competencies, skills and knowledge utilised by the individual in the successful delivery of the project, programme or portfolio.***

Maximising your potential through a carefully created CV does take some effort and may appear to some to be a semantic exercise. Competencies, skills, experience, knowledge, practical application, success stories, objective, education, qualifications, personal interests and the list goes on – are all core components of the selling tool you are going to utilise to find that perfect job.

The winners are crafting these into a succinct document that catches the attention of the reader and encourages them to take the next step.

## CV POINTERS

### The CV as a Shop Window

If you are like me, when I open a word document I tend to view it at 100% or full page width (129%). This means that my first view is of the top half of your document. Only if I like what I see will I bother to read any further. This is something that many of my colleagues also do. First impressions really do count and if you do not grab our attention at the beginning we are unlikely to read very far.

I have started using the analogy of a shop window to help candidates make that important first impression. If you see a nicely presented and appropriate shop window then you are more likely to go into the shop – even if you did not intend to in the first place. Think of the top half page of your CV as a shop window. Only if you grab the attention of the reader will they be enticed to ‘enter’ the rest of your CV.

Continuing the theme you want to maximise your shop window. Would you store empty boxes in a shop window, or unwrapped supplies? In the same way is there anything in the top half of your CV that does not add significant value?

Filling your ‘shop window’ with contact details or education, is a common approach, and in my opinion wastes an opportunity to market yourself.

## CV POINTERS

These details are important if someone wishes to contact you or confirm your education but are unlikely to be the things that grab people’s attention. Put these to the back and use the space provided to show the reader what you are capable of.

The final message regarding your ‘shop window’ involves appropriateness. Just because something is eye catching does not mean it is necessarily good. Again going back to the high street think about how shops are able to present their brand through the shop front. The same applies to your CV. You want to create the impression of a professional who a future employer can have complete confidence in. This is perhaps not the place for exotic fonts and bright colours!

So read on to the next few pages where we look at the beginning of the CV and how you maximise your shop window

## THE CV

We're going to run through the CV very simply – the top, middle and bottom – or the beginning middle and end - your CV is telling the reader the story of your working career and education to date!

### The Top

#### Personal Details

The CV doesn't necessarily have to carry all your personal details here at the top; it works equally well at the bottom (At the end of the CV). You must of course have your name displayed prominently at the top of the CV and there is no need for the words "Curriculum Vitae – CV" it's pretty obvious what it is!! Make sure you use your full legal name. Some candidates may have long and pretty unpronounceable names but many people get around this by providing a shortened name in brackets for example.

A personal no-no of ours – no pictures please (Especially the one of you on holiday last year – yes! we really have received informal snaps on CV's before!).

#### The Objective

The "Objective" or "Purpose" statement is often a missed part of the CV and we think it's crucial and works very well for people who use it.

## THE TOP

The objective is "a statement of what you want to do for an employer", for example:

*"Objective: To obtain a challenging project co-ordination position within a public sector organisation which will allow me to continue developing my project management skills, with a long-term aim to progress to the role of Programme or Project Office Manager."*

Anything written in the objective must also be clearly backed up in the rest of your CV in the personal profile, achievements and then your work history.

So why do we encourage people to spend time writing their objectives? For a number of reasons; it makes your application stand out from the 100's of others the client may be reviewing, it shows the employer you've taken the time to think about your application and above all else it makes you the most ideal employee on paper (you're telling the employer that this role fits perfectly with your current situation and aspirations)

Here's a list of some of the do's and don'ts:

- Don't be too general - there wouldn't be much point in including an objective in the first place
- The objective should take into consideration your skills, abilities, aspirations, education and interests
- Write a new objective for each position you apply for - difficult when there's a limited advertised job specification but make the effort
- Remember to tell the employer in your objective exactly what it is that you can do for them
- Be realistic and sensible in your aspirational goals

## THE TOP

### The Personal Statement

You can still write a personal statement below your Objective but the statement should avoid the bland statements of “excellent team player” or “committed, motivated and proactive project manager”, these are considered to be vague statements that don’t really add anything to the CV – in fact there are probably hundreds of other people with exactly the same statement. The personal statement should also set the scene for the CV and ultimately whatever you put into the statement should be backed up by the rest of the content of the CV.

So what kind of things should you be putting into the statement? Look at the project management role descriptions out there and concentrate on the key capabilities and skills that are needed. For example; for a project co-ordinator role there is a lot of emphasis on planning, monitoring, control etc. It is these core skills that should be incorporated into the statement e.g.,

*A professionally trained (PRINCE2) project co-ordinator with experience of in-depth planning, reporting and project communications to provide a flexible, pragmatic and proactive project support service to programmes and projects*

## THE TOP

In this kind of statement, coupled with a highly targeted objective, you are stating all the attractive keywords i.e., project co-ordinator, PRINCE2, planning etc that the reader is looking for.

Remember, unfortunately a lot of readers of your CV may be unclear about what a project manager does or what a project co-ordinator does, and they are only relying on keyword searches to pick your CV out in an initial sift so your CV should include good keywords and also be written as simply as possible too.

So to recap, think about the top half of the CV and ask yourself does your CV actually tell the reader who you are and what you do? Make sure its state who you are, what you do AND more importantly what you can do for the hirer/reader. It’s important that the top of the CV is setting the right tone because generally people read CV’s in pretty much the same way; they scan the top to see if it feels like the right kind of applicant (based on the words you’ve chosen to introduce yourself), then look at the career history and down to the education details. When the reader feels satisfied it “feels” right, they then start back at the top and read much slower, taking in the finer details.

## THE TOP

### Key achievements

Key achievements or straight onto your work experience? It's often good practice to include 5 or 6 concise bullet points highlighting your key achievements to date – especially if there are areas which you think relate very well to the role you're applying for. Here is an example;

- Successful management of a xxxxxxxx programme/project for xxxxxxxx, providing xxxxxx service improvements
- Established a project office function providing xxxxxxxx with a best practice approach to programme and project management
- Development of xxxxxxxx
- Promoted to xxxxxx

Make sure you mention what you did, in terms of "I" not "we". It's a common mistake with project management CV's due to the nature of the role—it's very team based. Employers want to know what difference you made - they are hiring you not the team you worked with. So ensure you can tell the story around your experience – what you actually achieved.

When choosing your achievements, make sure they are quite recent. Successes and key achievements tend to lose their influence if the successes were years ago.

Key achievements are also a good space on your CV to pull out significant things you've done that closely match the role you are applying for. Be prepared to move the achievements up and down in the pecking order and know when to drop ones which are not particularly useful for certain positions.

### Education and Qualifications

We recommend that recent graduates include their Education and Qualifications pretty high up in their CV, after all this is where your recent time has been spent. List all your University, College and Secondary School education together making sure the dates are clear. Make sure you include grades or predicted grades. Also include details of any modules or dissertations too, especially if they are related to project management.

For other candidates it's down to your personal preferences, in our opinion your education and qualifications straight after the achievements/ statement works just as well as placing it near the end of the CV.

## THE MIDDLE

### Work History

So the practical experience or work history is ultimately the most important area of your CV and this is the area that requires the most sweating over and agonising about how to write about the job you perform in a clear, concise, easy for an outsider to understand and ultimately to sell you effectively.

Not only will the reader be looking to understand the who, where, what, when and how but also they way you write about your experience – the language you use and importantly what you don't say.

Here are some tips on putting together your work history:

#### Dates

Make sure the dates are clear, when you started and finished the role – make sure you include the Month and Year.

Be consistent in your use of dates; don't use Month-Year in one role and just Year in another

Double check that the dates all line up from the bottom of the CV (your early roles) through to the present day.

### Gaps

If you took time off to travel, put your career on hold to raise a family, enrolled in new training/ educational programmes full-time, or are simply between contracts or employment; make sure these dates are covered in the CV. Leaving dates out means gaps appear in your CV and where there are unexplained gaps there are reasons to doubt the accuracy of your CV and ultimately you.

Explain any gaps in the dates, for example if you completed your last role in March 2006 and went travelling for a year, the most recent entry in your works history would look like;

**March 2006 – Present** Travelled to Australia and xxxxxxxx

### Where You Worked

Introduce the company you have worked for instead of just listing the company name for example;

Hammersmith Hospitals Trust - National Programme for IT (NPfIT / CFH) (£400m operational budget 4 hospitals and 5600 staff)

## THE MIDDLE

This allows the reader of the CV to be informed immediately about the type of organisation it is, where you work within it (where the programmes and projects are) and gives your experience and skills that follow in the CV some context. When working for smaller, less known organisations it also saves the reader time in researching it too.

### Job Title

Make your job title very clear; it's remarkable how often we see CV's where this is not very clear. Don't let the reader have any cause for concern or suspicion, list your job title exactly as it was in the organisation you worked for, there will be plenty of opportunity when listing your skills and experience to really convey what this job title and job entailed.

### Introduction and Bullet Points

Introduce the role you performed by concentrating on what constituted the majority of the tasks you carried out – what was the main function of your role. By introducing the main function you can then provide, by a bullet pointed list, what the actual tasks were that enabled you to carry out the function successfully.

Think about the ordering of the bullet points, the ones which correspond closely with the advertised role should be at the top.

Ideally write in the tasks and the objectives you were set – add to that what you achieved against those objectives and the resulting benefits to the employer. This makes a very powerful achievement statement and will form the basis of conversation in a competency based interview as you relate your experience to the role's requirements.

Research on the web other CV writing sites or other people's CVs to get a better idea about the type of language to use to convey your tasks, activities, skills and experience clearly and professionally. Here are some examples;

- <http://www.alec.co.uk/how-to-write-a-resume/project-manager-resume-cv.htm>
- [http://www.ir35calc.co.uk/CV\\_Writing\\_Deconstructed\\_case\\_study\\_1.a\\_spx](http://www.ir35calc.co.uk/CV_Writing_Deconstructed_case_study_1.a_spx)

When writing about your main duties vary the language you use at the beginning of the sentence. Too many CV's don't use a mix of adjectives which can lead the reader of the CV to get bored and give up reading on. Some excellent adjectives to use include;

Supported the ....

Liaised with ..... (Check the spelling if you use this word – it's the most mis-spelt word on a CV)

Established a .....

## THE MIDDLE

Provided a ....  
 Produced a .....  
 Delivered a .....  
 Identified a .....

Remember that the CV is a multifaceted document, it not only lets the reader get a good understanding of what you have done and where you were educated etc but it's also an opportunity to really blow your own trumpet. This is something that many people feel uncomfortable with and as a result produce a lacklustre CV which doesn't do anyone any justice. Think about the role you have been performing and really start to think about what you have done that was successful. Was there a special project you were asked to undertake due to the trust and respect you had built up performing your day job? Was there a particularly hard task or new task you were asked to take on? How did you go about doing that? Think about the successes you have had in your role and make sure they figure prominently on your CV.

Remember to concentrate on yourself more than the team, for example, many project co-ordinators fall into the trap of describing successes that were really the project and team's successes because the co-ordinator spends a large majority of their time supporting others i.e.,

*"Successful delivery of a XXXXX system for XXXXXX."*

Make sure the successes you are describing are supported by your own individual contribution or effort i.e.,

*"Contributed to the successful delivery of a XXXXX system for XXXXXX by providing a robust quality assurance and benefits realisation process resulting in XXXXXXXX."*

Once you have nailed a consistent, interesting and flowing current work history ensure that the same style is applied to all your other jobs in your employment history.

Just a quick word on terminology, make sure you are not using too many acronyms – especially if these are very specific to the organisation or project you are working on. Many people will not have a clue what you're talking about and will be inclined to leave your CV at the bottom of the pile.

If you've decided to move personal details and education and training to the bottom of the CV, now's the time to complete all the other bits about you that haven't been covered.

## THE BOTTOM

### Education and Training

As the advice for graduates above, list all your University, College and Secondary School education together making sure the dates are clear. Make sure you include grades, especially for degrees.

People with extensive work experience will also have picked up internal and external training courses along the way – make sure you include details in this section but only if they are relevant to the job or career you have now. For training courses and accreditations like PRINCE2 – make sure it's clear which you have passed – Foundation or Practitioner or both. Also include your candidate number – which can be checked online by recruiters.

Include information about any memberships you have for organisations, specific IT skills (and IT training courses you've attended and passed) you think are relevant for your CV.

### Personal details

Personal details at the end of the CV – like driving licence are good to see but keep any other information to a minimum for example I'm not sure when the trend started for informing readers about marital status and family members but it's really not necessary in a CV.

Details like hobbies are good – especially if written in your personality style – it's a chance to put a human angle to the CV and inform the reader that you're not a robot and actually you do have a life as well. If your hobbies and interests are not going to be a major topical piece i.e., enjoys reading, trips to the cinema, socialising etc make sure you give a little more detail i.e., what books do you like reading, what kind of films, where have you travelled recently etc.

We recently got asked this question from a candidate; *"I usually find it necessary to include details about my own personal life – extracurricular activities like marital status, clubs, no. of children, hobbies – on my CV. I'm starting to wonder if it's still the right thing to do, and if so, where on the CV I should list it."*

This is personal choice however, stating marital status and children is not required and having seen this kind of information at the top of the CV before, sometimes with the ages of the children and what course they are pursuing, etc., is too much information!

## IN SUMMARY

Remove your date of birth from your CV, after the 1<sup>st</sup> October 2006, the Age Discrimination Regulations came into effect. To find out more about this regulation visit the BusinessLink website for more information at:

> [Age Legislation](#)

Don't include reference details at this point – "References available on request" is the norm for CV's – you don't want your referees being hounded by unscrupulous recruitment agencies looking for their next lead.

### **In Summary**

When you've completed your 1<sup>st</sup> draft use trusted friends and family members to take a look at your CV and give you an honest opinion. Ask them the questions – do you understand what I mean when I say this? Chances are if your friends and family don't understand something then the recruitment agency or potential employer won't either. Don't make the assumption that the hiring manager or HR contact will be fluent in the world of project management!

Go back and make changes – don't be tempted to put it to one side and say it'll do! Remember there is a lot of competition in the job market and it's the people who make the effort and go the extra mile who get the job they want.

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