

Project Management

CV Advice

arras PEOPLE

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INTRODUCTION

Arras People has been running its Project Management Careers Clinics for over six years now 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 (<http://www.arraspeople.co.uk/assets/ckeditor/ckfinder/userfiles/files/Careers/ArrasPeople CV Template2011.pdf>)

Before we start working through the structure some general pointers & thoughts on CVs:

1, 2, 3 or beyond

CV length varies from a one page profile to most stating that they should be two pages max. If its reading like *War and Peace* with 4+ pages – forget it, no one's 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, three 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; so lying on your CV makes things 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 is when 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. Briefly checking out the company online brought 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 work history.

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. Microsoft Word has a nasty habit of changing these frequently. With that in mind, the majority of Word formats allow you to change to Language settings under the Tools menu. Switch to English (U.K.) to avoid spelling headaches.

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 a potential employer, but also where you fit into the market

CV POINTERS

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

Social Media and Professional Profiling

Studies reveal that applicants are not taking advantage of social media, putting them well behind employers that use them exclusively as screening tools. You shouldn't miss out on tools for self-promotion like Twitter and Facebook.

Keep your accounts professional and they'll work in your favour. Social media horror stories in recruitment are out there only because candidates used these sites in such a way that frightened recruiters away. This keeps with a 'shop window' mentality - if it's nicely presented, the reader will read on. By the same token, privatise any accounts you don't want employers to see. Learn how to use these tools to interact with like-minded professionals, sharing ideas, thoughts, skills and practices for the betterment of the profession. When recruiters and employers check your CV against these accounts, your display of solid professional activity can do wonders for prospects.

Tools such as LinkedIn can allow for a solid professional profile that is easy to find. A strong profile on LI is one in which you can easily share with potential job hunters about your career history, share a profile picture, add PowerPoint slides and even join professional groups.

The CV as a Shop Window

If you are like me, when I open a Word document

CV POINTERS

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. As colleagues will attest, I'm not alone: first impressions really do count and if you do not grab our attention 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.

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. While handy details if someone wants to call you, they don't grab the reader's attention. Put these to the back and use the space provided to show the reader what you are capable of.

A final thought on your 'shop window' involves appropriateness. Just because something is eye-

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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. 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 (or end). You must of course have your name displayed prominently at the top 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

THE TOP

(Especially the one of you on holiday last year. Yes, we really have received informal snaps on CVs before!).

The Objective

The "Objective" or "Purpose" statement is often a missed part of the CV. We think it's crucial and works very well for people who use it. 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 the role fits perfectly with your current situation & goals).

THE TOP

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 aspirations

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 TOP

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"

With 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: 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 while being 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, what you do AND - most importantly - what you can do for the hirer/reader? It's important that the top of the CV is

THE TOP

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.

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, as 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 the 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.

When people are inconsistent in their CV (their current role is Feb 2004 to Present but the previous role is 2003 – Jan 2004, for instance), alarm bells start ringing. You can picture them asking "Is that December 2003 or January 2003? Why isn't the candidate being clear and consistent?" Already you might find yourself at a disadvantage because the reader is unsure about you.

Gaps

Explain any gaps in the dates. It's not something

to hide from - like in work history details, there exists chances for growth and achievement, another step in showing who you are. 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 - don't just list the company name. For example;

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

This allows the reader of the CV to be informed immediately about the type of organisation it is and give your experience and skills that follow it 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 CVs where this is not very clear. Don't let the reader have any cause for concern or suspicion, list your job title exactly

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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, Bullet Points & Achievements

Introduce the role you performed by concentrating on what constituted the majority of the tasks you performed – 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

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. In addition to listing the details, CV experts say that of equal importance in the effectiveness of your CV is the information that pertains to your achievements. If you make a powerful achievement statement, you'll form a basis of conversation in a competency-based interview as you relate your experience to the requirements.

There is no shortage of research you can cull from the internet, especially from CV writing sites or other people's CVs, to get an 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.lewiscobb.co.uk/download.html>

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

- Supported the
- Liaised with (Check the spelling if you use this word – it's the most misspelt word on a CV)
- Established a
- Provided a
- Produced a
- Delivered a
- Identified a

THE MIDDLE

Remember that the CV is a multi-faceted 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 coordinators fall into the trap of describing successes that were really the project and team's successes because the coordinator spends a large majority of their time supporting others i.e.,

"Successful delivery of a XXXXX system for XXXXXX."

Instead, make sure that 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.

THE BOTTOM

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.

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. These add a human angle to the CV and inform the reader that you're not a robot and you actually do have a life as well. Don't fall into the activities trap, though: too often, a mechanical, lifeless CV is reflected by the activities section. If your hobbies and interests are not going to be a major topical piece (enjoys reading, trips to cinema, socialising, etc), make sure you give a little more detail (what books you like, what kind of films, where you've travelled recently, etc.)

Remove your date of birth from your CV. After the 1st October 2006, the Age Discrimination Regulations came into effect. To find out more about this regulation visit the Age Positive website at <http://www.agepositive.gov.uk/>

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

> Twitter link: [tp://http://bit.ly/taB5xY](http://bit.ly/taB5xY)

Errors and Applications

CV Errors You May Not Be Aware Of

We've mentioned some common CV mistakes throughout this document, but there are other errors that aren't so obvious as well. Consider:

- Does your CV actually tell the reader who you are and what do within the first half of the first page? In any piece of good writing, you have to grab your audience right away.
- Is your CV three pages or less? If it's too long and in a pile of over a hundred applications, it's going to get tossed aside and that's that. Rule to thumb: More than 3 = "buh bye, CV".
- Do you show in your CV what you are capable of doing? It can't just be about your work history; you'll need to have effectively displayed what that work history and acquired skills means to your future capabilities. Spell it out.
- Are you applying for a role that is no reflection of what you are? We've received CVs from bonafide Project Support Officers applying for a Project Manager job, and vice-versa. I tend to close the application as soon as I've opened it when this happens.
- Do you have a command throughout your CV on the project management lingo? This goes a long way, not just in terms of first-hand knowledge and the ability to talk the language, but also increases your shot at being picked up in CV searches and databases.

Using Your CV for a Job Application Form

Clients are requesting that candidates fill in job application forms more and more considering it requires more effort than merely submitting another CV via email. Your polished CV, however, can be a template for the questions the application asks of you.

When filling out any job application, it is crucial that you completely address each question according to the complete instructions. It's not about cut and paste from your CV: Instead, you are taking what the CV provides and adding detail to its relevance on the role you've applied for. Accuracy on a job application is just as crucial as it is for a CV: essential details, company names, dates, salary/benefits, notice period and job titles (among others) are a given.

In the profile section, you need to provide the clearest possible description of yourself. Make it concise and be sure to avoid oft-recycled phrases like "determined self-starter" with "excellent communication skills" that "possesses a can-do attitude." For example:
"An APM qualified Project Manager with extensive experience of delivering off-shoring projects within the public sector."

However, as with any CV, you will need to tailor your words to the job specification. Target

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keywords from the spec that can take a prominent place in your profile (provided the words are a truthful representation of your expertise and viability for the role).

Qualifications and education should be listed with your highest qualification first (a Ph. D before a Masters, a Masters before Bachelors, etc.). In the Additional Training & Skills space, include all training, skills and tools you've acquired/used/mastered, and look to use it in an order similar to the weight the job specification requests skills. There's no need to put Primavera as the first skill if it's clearly stated that MS Project is the most important skill for the role.

When it comes to listing job referees, this is one area where an application differs from your CV, which, as we stated, should not have them. But when it comes to job referees, there are three key rules to follow:

- Keep in touch with the people you list as referees, just to keep them familiar with you and what you have done in the past for them;
- Let all referees know you've listed their names for a potential role and to expect a call from the prospective employer regarding yourself;
- If you have not informed your present employer of your intentions to leave, indicate on the application you do not want these referees to be contacted. Otherwise, you may have inadvertently terminated yourself.

Wrapping It Up

When you've completed your 1st 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.

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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