



The GraduateCoach
Essential Guide to

**COVER
LETTERS
& CVS**



In an increasingly competitive jobs market, it is essential to know how to make yourself stand out; not easy when the only materials you have are your CV and your cover letter. With GraduateCoach's essential guide, writing an eye-catching CV and a perfect cover letter is well within your reach. Following our tips will give you the edge that you need to get ahead.





The GraduateCoach
Essential Guide to Cover Letters and CVs

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ABOUT US

Graduate Coach has been set up to help students and recent graduates acquire the skills they need to get their dream job.

Having interviewed over 3,000 students and graduates over the last three years, we have a lot of very recent knowledge about how unprepared students are for the rigors of the job market.

There are only 35,000 'proper' graduate calibre jobs available in any given year. And so as every parent and student knows, competition for jobs is therefore ferocious with any advertised position receiving well over 100 applicants. We do not believe that any of this is going to change in the near future. Indeed, if anything it will get worse as student numbers increase further and the current recession causes companies to cut their recruiting.

Our unique approach will teach students and graduates how they can acquire skills such as interviewing, presentation abilities and CV construction. We will also be offering advice and help on a more fundamental level by getting students to really think through what type of person they are and therefore what type of job they would be best suited for.



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Chapter One

INTRO

WHY ARE CVS AND COVER LETTERS SO ESSENTIAL?

“ I think luck is the sense to recognize an opportunity and the ability to take advantage of it ... The man who can smile at his breaks and grab his chances gets on.” (Samuel Goldwyn)

When an advert for a well-paid job gets posted online, the employer will receive a multitude of CVs in no time. Rifling through them, the person overseeing the initial stages of the recruitment process starts to become more ruthless than Alan Sugar: one whiff of a bad CV and it's on the 'reject' pile. This happens countless times in countless offices across the country every day.

The average CV gets just 15 seconds to make an impression. Chances are, if you think you can do the job well enough to apply for it, you probably can. It is convincing the person in charge that is the hard part and that starts with getting noticed.

Ideally, you'd be able to ask each employer exactly what they wanted to see. Some believe the cover letter is more important than the CV, some don't. It is impossible to know in advance.

The CV shows your experience and qualifications; the cover letter demonstrates professionalism, your ability to write and your salesmanship skills. Both are equally important so it is vital not to favour one and neglect the other.

A job advert won't tell you how to sell yourself – but we will.

HOW TO APPROACH COVER LETTERS AND CV WRITING

THE FIRST STEPS TO WRITING YOUR CV AND COVER LETTER

“ Any human anywhere will blossom in a hundred unexpected talents and capacities simply by being given the opportunity to do so.” (Doris Lessing, Author)

What is a CV?

A summary of a person's education, professional history and job qualifications for a prospective employer.

Things to consider when applying for a job

Always remember that with a CV and cover letter you are introducing yourself and your abilities to the employer. You are saying, “I am just what you are looking for! Here's why ...”

Both the CV and the cover letter need to show confidence and enthusiasm. If you think that you really are the best person for the job, this will come across. So convince yourself that you are.

You're the best!

You might find it hard at first to write about your best qualities, abilities and skills, but throwing modesty to the wind is essential. You've been to university and that's a major achievement in life. And when you start thinking about it, you've also done a whole lot more ...



WHAT TO EXPECT FROM EMPLOYERS

BACKGROUND ON THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS

Finding the right person for the job is a long and expensive process for companies. If they use a recruitment agency, they will have to pay 10%-33% of your annual salary for the agency's services – usually over £1000.

Imagine that you are offered a salary of £20,000 per annum. As soon as you are hired, your employer will have to pay the recruitment agency £2,000 or more, with the possibility that you may not like the job and leave after three months. How can they avoid this? By hand-picking candidates that come across as reliable, trustworthy and able to fit well with the attitude of the company.

Nearly half of all newly-graduated employees will leave their jobs within five years.

This is another factor in why employers are so picky about who they employ. It's no small matter to invest in and train a graduate and the prospect of them only staying for the short-term is one that many companies are wary of. You need to be able to convince the employer that you are willing to commit yourself to a position. If you can't, they will choose someone who can.

UK employers spend £1.4bn per year on recruitment advertising.

If the company does the recruiting themselves, it's just as expensive and much more time-consuming. A job description needs to be thought about and written in a way that ensures the right people apply. The advert also has to be displayed in the right places and paid for.

A 2009 survey conducted by the Association of Graduate Recruiters found that an average of 48 university graduates compete for each graduate job on the market.

As soon as a job advertisement is placed, CVs start flooding in. Time and people need to be allocated to look through them. But these people are few in number and short on time. It is really important that you grab their attention and get to the point quickly.



SUMMARY

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM EMPLOYERS

- Employers look for candidates who come across as reliable, trustworthy and able to fit in well with the attitude of the company.
- They will be investing their trust in you. Are you good enough to give them confidence in this?
- When your CV and cover letter are being read, you don't get second chances – and you don't get much time. Grab their attention and stand out.

We'll show you how to do all these things



STAGES OF GRADUATE RECRUITMENT

STAGES OF RECRUITMENT

With so many applications, so little time and so much at stake, employers often use a range of methods to find the right candidate.

- CV AND COVER LETTER ENTRY
- APPLICATION FORM COMPLETION
- TELEPHONE INTERVIEW
- 1ST INTERVIEW
- 2ND INTERVIEW AND PRESENTATION
- PSYCHOMETRIC TESTING
- FINAL INTERVIEW
- SELECTION

Chapter Two

CVs



HOW TO AVOID TYPICAL CV PITFALLS

There are so many CVs that get rejected out of hand just because they don't look or sound quite right. Knowing how to write a good CV is a crucial step towards getting your dream job. Your CV is the deciding factor in whether you get the chance to show your stuff in the interview process. You can't change it once you've applied, but prospective employers will keep referring back to it, looking for different things.

Employers are past masters at rejecting CVs for a wide range of seemingly minor anomalies. Don't give them an opportunity to eliminate yours.

So how do you keep it from being thrown out? These CV tips dispel the myths ...

MYTH

If my CV is accepted, I've basically got the job.

TRUTH

Getting your CV accepted is only the first stage of the process. Look again at the recruitment process outline. This is what your employer will have in front of them, on paper or in their mind, when they consider you. The CV stage and the first interview are far from the end of the process. Without getting past one stage, you will not get to the next.

MYTH

The appearance of my CV isn't important.

TRUTH

Your CV is your written representative.

The format of the CV can, and should, differ depending on the job you're going for. If you aspire to be a graphic designer for example, then exciting images, layout and typefaces will be appreciated. For a banking role – and for most other positions, they will not.

For all jobs, your CV needs to be clean, clear and concise. It must also be grammatically correct. Many students fail to fully eradicate errors from their CVs. The mistake tends to be fatal, with most employers automatically deleting these applications without a second thought. If a folded, coffee-stained CV lands on someone's desk, it will almost certainly be thrown straight into the bin.

Some employers believe that CVs should be accompanied by a picture of the applicant. This is a controversial point. A picture may make you stand out, but you run the risk of being judged or discriminated against due to the way that you look.

MYTH

You should try to get some humour in there.

TRUTH

Never try to be funny in a CV.

There is possible room for humour in your cover letter, but in your CV it will be seen as frivolous. You can never know what kind of sense of humour your employer will have. Even if you are lucky and amuse one person, the next to be handed your CV may not be so amused.

MYTH

Your CV should contain every job you've done up to this point.

TRUTH

Employers only want to know what is relevant to the job you are applying for. They don't want to hear your life story. The paper round that you did when you were twelve isn't relevant when you apply for a job as an accountant. It might be of interest, however, if you are going for a sales job within the newspaper industry.

MYTH

Everyone lies on their CV.

TRUTH

Lies are an absolute no-go.

Employers study hundreds of CVs every year and can easily spot anomalies. If you fabricate a skill or experience on your CV, you will almost definitely be caught out. Your CV will probably be rejected, but even if you make it to the interview stage, you'll be grilled closely on that detail. If you can't answer, your lie will be shown up.

The trick is to highlight – and really focus in on – the skills and experience that you have and that are relevant to the role you are applying for.

MYTH

My CV should be as long as possible.

TRUTH

Your CV should be two pages long at the most. If it is any longer than that, the employer will lose interest. Everything about your CV tells the employer what you will be like as an employee. Being concise and to the point is a major skill in any profession.

Good tip

Bar work is always a tricky one. If you are going for a role that involves client interaction and customer service, it can be relevant. If you choose to include bar or waiting work, always streamline your description by picking out the skills you used. Examples might include customer service skills or coping well under pressure.

MYTH

Every piece of data about me should be included – how else will they know these things?

TRUTH

Some things they won't want to know.

Avoid mentioning birthdays, school prizes, subject marks, political or religious stances, names of children or reasons for leaving your previous jobs. If they want to know, they will ask you in the interview.

Think of your CV as a film – every scene needs to be relevant to the story or people get bored and switch off.

MYTH

My CV will be given full attention and interest by everyone that reads it.

TRUTH

The average time a CV spends in the employer's hands, before getting the go-ahead or the go-away is 15 seconds. The number of CVs submitted for every position is overwhelming and nobody will be wasting too much time pouring over your application initially. Be succinct and snappy. Your CV gets you noticed but you have to be noticeable. Be creative and exciting, but only if the company fits that profile, too.



SUMMARY

HOW TO AVOID TYPICAL CV PITFALLS

- Don't get too confident if your CV is accepted. You've still got to get through the rest of the process. (But well done anyway!)
- Keep your CV under two pages.
- Be relevant.
- The appearance is just as important as the contents.
- Don't put anything on your CV that you won't be able to do once in the job.
- Keep it formal and informative. No gags, even ironic ones.
- Avoid personal information that is irrelevant.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF CV LAYOUTS

There are three commonly used CV layouts.

- **CHRONOLOGICAL**
- **FUNCTIONAL OR SKILL-BASED**
- **COMBINATION**

Each CV layout uses the same information, but it's important to choose the one that works in the most effective way for you.

CHRONOLOGICAL CV

A chronological CV is, in many ways, the best. It is a style that most employers are used to. It is easily comprehensible and is a good way of listing your skills and conveying them in an organised manner to the person reading it.

Begin with details of your most recent education, from degrees or other qualifications, back to GCSEs.

Then set out your employment history, with the most recent job first. Describe the responsibilities and skills you have gained in each position.

As a graduate, you may not have an enormously lengthy or relevant employment history. In this case, a skill-based CV may work better for you.

Experience isn't necessarily what employers want, particularly from a graduate. They want potential.

FUNCTIONAL OR SKILL-BASED CV

This is a good format to use if you feel that your previous employment does not reflect the skills you possess and that are required in the job you are applying for.

This style can focus on key skills you will have gained through other things as well as work – university, gap years, societies and clubs.

List them first. Then briefly touch on your relevant employment history, work experience and any additional information you deem relevant to the job.

Remember that each employer is only scan-reading every CV. They will not spend time looking for hidden skills and speculating what you will have done in a job. Make sure they know.

COMBINATION OF THE ABOVE

A mixture of the two above CV styles. Your skills should be listed under work experience and employment, but you have room to mention your additional assets.

Firstly, list your relevant experience in employment and work placements chronologically from the most recent. Then do the same with your educational achievements.

Secondly, write a skills profile. This could include a summary of university experiences, gap years, societies and clubs. Be sure to explain what you believe you have gained from these.

It's a case of getting the key information across but shifting it around so that the best can be seen first.



SUMMARY

DIFFERENT TYPES OF CV LAYOUTS

- Chronological CVs – listing all your achievements, education and employment history in a chronological order. What most employers are used to seeing.
- Functional or skill-based CVs – entering skills gained while at school, university, travelling (and so on) before employment. Good for graduates with little or no employment history.
- Combination CVs – a combination of the two, giving you the opportunity to list skills gained in places other than work and also to name-drop anywhere you may have had work experience.



WHAT EMPLOYERS WANT TO SEE IN YOUR CV

Following our guidelines will save you time and effort trawling across the internet piecing together your own clues.

Your CV should include:

- PERSONAL DETAILS
- CAREER OBJECTIVES OR PERSONAL PROFILE
- EDUCATION AND QUALIFICATIONS
- EMPLOYMENT HISTORY
- ACHIEVEMENTS
- INTERESTS
- ADDITIONAL INFORMATION
- REFEREES

Don't include any negative details within your CV. Think of it as a glossy brochure selling a product. Remember you are the product.

PERSONAL DETAILS

Your name should go right at the top of your CV. You are the star of the document.

- Beneath your name should be your address, so that your employer can get hold of you through the post.
- One contact telephone number (mobile is best).
- Your email address. If your email is something like *damnthesebeatsaresofresh@yahoo.com* or *sexy.babe@gmail.com*, you need an alternative one.
- If you have a driver's licence, let them know. It is a prerequisite for some roles and is looked upon as an advantage for many other positions.
- Do not include your birth date or age.

Example of personal details

Peter Jones

*15 Newbridge Road, London, N1 6JP
07703 613511
peter.jones@hotmail.com*

Full UK driving licence.

CAREER OBJECTIVES AND PERSONAL PROFILES

Including one of these beneath your personal details is an absolute must. It should grab the reader's attention and focus it immediately on a subject of your choice. This is your first chance to really sell yourself and can often mean the difference between further consideration and a binned CV.

Career objective

A career objective is good because employers will see that you have focus, ambition and drive. Only use one sentence to describe this – make sure it says something about you, as well as your career.

DO IT NOW!

First, imagine where you would ideally like to be in five to ten years' time. Below are some questions you might want to ask yourself.

- What are you doing on a day-to-day basis?
- What is your role?
- What aspects of your job are you still doing and what has changed?
- Are you working within a small team or a massive blue chip company?
- What is the thinking behind your ambition and how does it correspond to the skills you already have?

Use the following notes section to compose a pithy, short statement.

Examples of a career objective

To enter into the Public Relations sector utilising my advanced networking abilities and people skills to their full potential.

After numerous years of retail experience, both in an Assistant and Junior Manager capacity, I am now looking to challenge myself and develop my sales knowledge by joining a more corporate environment.

NOTES

PERSONAL PROFILE

A personal profile is better if you are not sure about your career goals or if you don't have much experience within the role you're applying for. This way you can concentrate on the personality traits that would be useful in this role. Use two sentences or less and write in the third person. Pick out your best qualities. Introduce yourself with them. Try to make them relevant to the role that you are applying for.

Look at the job description and try to get a handle on the type of personality specifications that would be advantageous for that role. Then note down what personality traits you possess and try and tailor them to the role you are applying for in this instance. For a position as a receptionist, for example, having a friendly, polite and professional disposition would be very advantageous. After doing this, construct your two sentences with the attributes that appear in both columns.

Don't be average! Remember, one of your main aims is to stand out so try not to use clichéd descriptions of yourself or the things you've done in a job.

Example of a personal profile

Highly motivated graduate with accomplished, creative capabilities and a meticulous and organised attitude to work. Advanced skills in most design programmes and the artistic skills to create 'stand out' designs for websites, newspapers and magazines.

DO IT NOW!

Write down what personality traits you possess. If you are stuck, ask a friend or someone you have worked with previously.



NOTES

EDUCATION AND QUALIFICATIONS

It's best if you put these two together so that future employers can see where you have gained your qualifications and verify them if they need to.

If you have yet to graduate, include your predicted grade. If your university doesn't predict grades, just include the qualification you will achieve – BA (Hons) History, for example.

Depending on the CV layout you have chosen, this section will occupy different places. Chances are, you've been in education for the best part of 15 years, so education will have played more of a part in your life than your career will have. If this is the case, we recommend putting it at the top, underneath your career objective/personal profile.

As with the employment history, go in reverse order and include more details for your university years than you would for your college or school years. You'll need dates, names, qualifications and skills gained during your degree – see our example on page 39.

Don't include any bad grades.

When it comes to how you lay out this section, it is completely up to you and will be best if you tailor it to your own needs. On page 39 is a general layout.

DO IT NOW!

Jot down all your education history, dates, names and qualifications.

NOTES

Example education section

Education

2004 – 2007 University of Leeds, BA (Hons) English Literature (2.1)

Modules studied:

19th Century plays, Literature of the Second World War, American Literature of the 20th Century.

Skills developed:

Working to strict deadlines, time management skills, conducting presentations and public speaking, advanced Microsoft Word skills.

2002 – 2004 Hillard Community College

A Levels:

English Literature (A), History (B), Sociology (B)

EMPLOYMENT HISTORY

One of the most difficult things about constructing a CV is how to remember the details of duties you have undertaken in a certain position and choosing which ones are relevant. It's a really good idea to get this out of the way so you can come back to it with a different perspective after reading the rest of this book.

DO IT NOW!

The easiest way to begin is by jotting down everything.

Cast your mind back to your most recent jobs and write down your title and main duties. Describe what you would do on a daily basis from the moment you walked in the door to the moment you finished work.

Top tip

If you have a copy of your old job specification you can use this as a basis for your employment history.

NOTES

DO IT NOW!

Now do the same for your tasks on a weekly and a monthly basis. This gets all the menial jobs down as well as the bigger duties, all of which are important at this stage. You can whittle them down and make them look professional later.



NOTES

An example of what you might have by now

Rebecca's daily, weekly and monthly duties:

***Branch Administrator
Abbott Recruitment
May 2007 – September 2007***

Daily tasks

- 1. Checking and replying to branch group emails*
- 2. Organising post*
- 3. Greeting clients and customers*
- 4. Answering telephone calls*
- 5. Working a busy switchboard*
- 6. Copywriting job adverts*
- 7. Reference requesting*
- 8. Organising the reception area*
- 9. Answering reference requests from other companies*
- 10. Group diary management*

Weekly Tasks

- 1. Ordering newspapers and water for the week*
- 2. Checking stock and ordering more when needed*
- 3. Organising payroll, ringing around candidates for timesheets*

Monthly Tasks

- 1. Re-ordering stationary stock*

Now remember more!

Repeat this process for all your relevant previous jobs, with daily, weekly and monthly duties. Also include any relevant experience, like voluntary jobs, unpaid work experience, etc.

You only need to put the month and the year when writing the dates that you have worked.

Technical Lingo

Although employers of graduates will understand that you perhaps haven't developed many office-style terms yet, being able to describe your experience in an official light will be a great advantage.

If a previous role involved loads of photocopying, filing and faxing, use 'administrative ad hoc duties' or 'general office duties'.

ACHIEVEMENTS

You may not have achieved much yet in your career, but employers will definitely want to know about anything notable you might have done during your life thus far. Again, make sure you are supplying relevant information. Include achievements only if they really add something to your CV or tell the employer something clear about your personality. They can go in the appropriate section. For example, if you were school captain, this can go in your education section.

You could also have an 'Other Achievements and Awards' listing after your Employment History. This may be easier for employers to refer to, but the risk here is inclusion of awards that are irrelevant use up space and make you seem conceited.

INTERESTS

If – and only if – you have some spare room at the end of your CV, you should include your interests. While not essential, this will give the employers a chance to see another side of you and get an insight into what your character might be like.

Bear in mind that, more often than not, this won't have anything to do with whether you get the job. An employer will only be reading this section if they are already considering you for an interview.

Be honest about this. There's no use trying to predict what interests you might share with other people at the company.

DO IT NOW!

Jot down all your interests. Include things such as sports teams or clubs, university societies, language skills, volunteering, etc. Don't include anything that may reflect badly like President of the Pub Crawl Society. Don't include mundane interests such as 'going to the cinema'. Everyone writes things like this and you are looking for things that make you stand out.



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

If you feel that there's anything more you want to include which would be of interest, such as other languages you speak, create an 'Additional Information' section.

REFEREES

The truth is that including references takes up space on your CV.

The company are going to be more interested in their own opinion of you ahead of other people's. They'll already have formed that by the end of your CV. A simple 'references can be provided on request' will suffice.

Referees will need to be contacted at some point. Begin to think of who you have worked with in the past or who you've known for five years that is in a professional position. They can be a personal referee.

Contact the chosen individuals to ask if they would provide a reference for you should the occasion arise. Referees cannot, and will not, make any negative comments about you, so there's no need to be hesitant.



COMPILING A CV CHECKLIST

HAVE YOU:

- chosen the most appropriate CV layout for you?
- checked that you have an appropriate email address?
- written a career objective or personal profile?
- jotted down your educational achievements?
- made notes on your daily, weekly and monthly duties for all relevant experience, making sure you've included any voluntary jobs and unpaid work experience?
- remembered any additional achievements such as language skills or typing courses?
- contacted your referees to ask if they are happy to provide a reference for you?



TAILORING YOUR CV

MAKE IT PERSONAL

Now you have all the elements of a great CV but you need to put them together into one document and most importantly you need to target your CV to the job you are applying for.

With so much competition for each job or work placement, you really need to stand out from the crowd and make sure your CV ends up off the reject pile. The trick is to tailor each CV to the placement or company you're applying for. By tailoring your CV, you can turn it from an OK to an excellent CV.

Employers don't have the time to interpret the information in your CV and translate the job requirements laid out in the job advert. If you don't do this for them your CV could end up in the recycling pile.

It takes time for an employer to interpret the information in your CV and translate it into 'answers' to their specifications. They can't afford this time. We'll show you how to do it for them.

When writing essays, we were all taught to keep coming back to the question as a means of staying true to the point that is supposed to be argued. Do the same with your CV – use the job advert as the essay question and ensure that you don't drift too far from that defining concept. Keep looking at the words used to describe the ideal candidate and respond to them.

Print out the job description and keep it beside you when you write your CV. This will really help you stick to the requirements of the prospective employer.

EXAMPLES OF TAILORING YOUR CONTENT TO THE JOB DESCRIPTION

Example job description

'Candidate must be a self-starter with strong organisational skills and an ability to stay calm under pressure.'

Tailored response

In my time at PA Copy Direct, I was consistently working towards a deadline in a highly pressured environment. Articles needed to go out on time and the grammar needed to be accurate.

My sense of initiative and ability to self-start has allowed me to graduate from university with a strong portfolio of work already under my belt. As a way of getting practical experience, I wrote many feature articles for the university newspaper and student magazines.

Don't just relay your tasks and responsibilities in previous roles, detail the skills and achievements gleaned through these duties particularly those relating to the job you're applying for.

Example of job description

'PA needed for NHS Director. Ideal candidate must be super efficient and organised. Proficiency with Microsoft Word and Excel would be beneficial as would experience of working a busy switchboard.'

Tailored Response

Computer Skills

Due to the the nature of my degree (BA English Literature), I have used Microsoft Word on a daily basis for three years and I am now at an advanced level. I am also at an intermediate to higher level on both Excel and Microsoft Outlook, thanks to my previous role at Abbott Recruitment where I was solely responsible for answering the office emails.

Organisational Skills

My role as Receptionist and Branch Administrator with Abbott meant that I was required to be extremely organised. I oversaw all general administrative duties within the office, including diary management and travel arrangements for the seven recruitment consultants.

A solid green circle containing the word "NOTES" in white, uppercase, sans-serif font. This circle is positioned at the top left of the page, above the first line of the ruled area.



SUMMARY

TAILORING YOUR CV

- Include buzzwords from the job description in your Career Objective or Personal Profile. If the employer is searching for ‘highly organised and enterprising individuals’, you could describe yourself as enterprising and meticulous or a self-starter with strong organisational skills.
- Try to match the tone of your Objective or Profile to the tone of the company’s website. So for an advertising company with a flashy, bright website you could include a line about your aspiration to work in the fast-paced, exciting world of advertising, for example.
- Set out your educational background chronologically, but consider adding relevant extra-curricular achievements to it. Think whether you have any additional qualifications or details that might fit with the role’s requirements. For example, if you’re applying for a role in sales, consider recounting experiences that prove your talent for public speaking.

- When listing your experience, make sure that each requirement in the role description is met by (at least) one 'experience' you have had. This doesn't have to have been paid work. So if the company tend to go for 'determined, organised individuals', leave out the three months you spent as a cleaner and include the two weeks that you spent organising a music concert at school.
- Add an Interests section if – and only if – you suspect the company is keen on employees with personality and quirkiness. Beware though, many companies may say that they employ exciting, unique people with tons of attitude, but many of them are lying!
- Tailor your layout to the appearance of the company's website and the impression you get of the company. If the site is clean and simple, take that as your starting point. If it's snappy and individual, it's time to start thinking outside the box!



WHEN YOU'VE WRITTEN IT

By now you should have one of the most comprehensive CVs in the world thanks to GraduateCoach's CV tips! This could all be ruined however, if the employer has to go through a load of spelling and grammatical mistakes to get to the information.

Writing a good CV is one thing, but if you haven't reviewed it, you could still end up with mud in your face.

- Print it off and go over it in exacting detail. Reading it aloud often helps highlight areas of difficulty.
- Ask a couple of people to read the job advert and your CV and take note of their comments. Remember that any criticism offered is a useful way of ensuring you have the best CV.
- In terms of your layout, be creative but discreet. Try to stand out in a professional way. Don't change the colour of your text, but consider different fonts. Think about how to separate your different sections.
- Maybe add a border or put things into a column style.
- Whatever you do, remember: it has to be easily understood.



CV CHECKLIST

HAVE YOU:

- interpreted the kind of candidate the company is looking for and matched it to your CV?
- included any buzzwords from the role description?
- made sure that each requirement in the role description is met by (at least) one 'experience' you have had?
- read your CV aloud to check that it reads well?
- shown it to a couple of people to check spelling mistakes?
- asked some people to read the job advert and your CV and taken notes of their comments?
- made the layout clear and professional?
- only written two pages?

Here are the some of the worst examples of real CVs and cover letters.

- The neurotic: a candidate submitted a password protected CV which could not be accessed.
- The evangelist: a candidate ended a cover letter with 'Jesus loves you'.
- The banker: a candidate put their bank details on their CV.
- The cyber-criminal: a candidate put that their life's ambition was to be a hacker.
- The punctual one: a candidate put "I'm good at timekeeping. I wake up at 6am on Monday, Wednesday and Friday" on their cover letter.
- The bone idle: a candidate sent across a generic template leaving gaps where there should have been information describing the job position they were applying for and the company they were applying to.
- The enigma: a CV was submitted with no name or contact details.
- The pervert: CVs with inappropriate email addresses such as 'caught****ing@school.com'.
- The narcissist: a cover letter from a candidate with one objective – "to please and attain supreme perfection".
- The adult film star: a CV was submitted including a photo more suitable for a glamour shoot.

SUMMARY

WHAT EMPLOYERS WANT TO SEE IN YOUR CV

- At the top – name, address, phone number, email, driving licence status.
- Include either a Career Objective or a Personal Profile.
- Chronologically list your education with qualifications and grades attained.
- For your degree, include a brief ‘Subjects Studied’ section.
- Chronologically list your Employment History:
 - make notes of your duties and responsibilities.
 - match them to the job description and detail what you have done that is relevant to it.
 - mirror the words used in the job specification.
- Include an Achievement section, if necessary.
- Interests and Additional Information – only add if you have space.
- Referees – simply note that your references are available on request.
- Check the spelling and grammar.
- Have someone else that you trust to be honest go over it.
- Be creative but simple with your layout.

Chapter Three

**COVER
LETTERS**

THE IMPORTANCE OF COVER LETTERS

If you don't write a cover letter, you might as well not even bother to send your CV in. Cover letters are part and parcel of applying for a job these days.

The cover letter is your introduction to an employer. It's also a chance to add another string to your bow and to show both your character and your professionalism.

HOW DO YOU STRUCTURE COVER LETTERS?

They are relatively easy to write once you have mastered the general rules. Some employers have stated that the cover letter is actually more important to them than the CV so it is well worth writing and spending some time over it.

THE LITTLE DETAILS

If you can find out the name of the person you are sending your CV to, that's a bonus. If not, start with 'Dear Sir/Madam' and sign off with 'Yours faithfully', not 'Yours sincerely'.

The majority of CVs and applications are sent via email these days so writing addresses and details at the top of a Word document is unnecessary. Only do this for letters you feel need to be really formal.

CONTENT

The first paragraph should explain why you are writing. It should mention the position you are applying for and where you have seen it advertised.

The middle two paragraphs should describe what skills you can bring to the role and why you would like to work for that company in particular. Researching the company is essential. Throw in some impressive statements about what you know about them and what you think about them.

Employers want to be assured that you're applying for their company, not just sending out a batch of CVs. The more personalised it is, the more likely you are to get a call back.

Employers will be aware that you are a graduate and therefore might not have the most extensive employment history. Don't be afraid of drawing on skills that you have gained while on a work experience placement or a voluntary position. It will only impress them that you've done such a thing. You can also talk about part-time jobs you've had or things that you have learnt about while in university.

The final paragraph should include the date that you are available to start and a final positive note such as "I very much hope you will consider me for this role".

Make them aware of any dates that you would not be available for an interview and mention that you would happily provide them with any further information.

OTHER POINTERS

- It should not exceed a page in length, so try not to waffle.
- Be careful not to repeat what you've already written in your CV.
- Remember you are selling yourself. This is also your chance to bring in some personality, which is much more difficult to do in your CV. Don't limit yourself to describing duties and responsibilities.
- Never include anything that will need an exclamation mark.
- A good rule to follow is to avoid all trace of self-appreciation. For example, saying "I believe I have the correct skills and abilities to fill this role efficiently and with creativity" rather than "I would be terrific in this role" will produce rather different results.
- Even if your CV isn't that impressive, a well put-together cover letter can make all the difference.

DO IT NOW!

Jot down some sentences that you can use to describe your skills. For example: “I am highly organised and methodical in every aspect of my working process”.



NOTES

EXAMPLES OF COVER LETTERS

Dear Mr Albert,

I am writing to apply for the position of Human Resources Junior Assistant which you have advertised on GraduateCoach.co.uk. As you can see from my CV, I spent a year after finishing my A-Levels and subsequent summers while at university, working as an assistant within the Human Resources department of a large HGV company. I feel that this experience in particular has equipped me to perform well in the position you have advertised.

Whilst working with this organisation, I gained significant experience in all aspects of the recruitment cycle, from writing copy for job adverts to screening applications and conducting telephone interviews, as well as coordinating induction sessions for new staff members within the company. I was also in charge of coordinating our organisation's advertising for graduate schemes and internship placements. This was done both on our website and at various internship and careers fairs. On the more social side, I was in charge of organising numerous staff parties and day outings.

I am highly organised and methodical in every aspect of my working process and work well under pressure. I believe my extensive experience in this environment would be of an immediate asset to your company.

I would relish the opportunity to further my existing experience within a more commercial environment and would be happy to go over my CV or any queries that you might have.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

*Yours sincerely,
Ivy Nicholls*

Dear Miss Swift,

I am writing with regard to the Teaching Assistant position at Nutfield Road Primary School that you have posted on the TES website. Attached is my CV and as you can see I have experience working with children of all ages. I believe I could bring many relevant skills to this role.

During my gap year between college and university, I travelled to Mexico with an organisation called Outreach International. Outreach is responsible for setting up links with various institutions in developing countries that would benefit from young volunteers' help. I volunteered in an orphanage where the children's ages ranged from one month to fifteen years old. I gained knowledge and experience of working with children with many problems, differences and enormous qualities.

I have since volunteered for many organisations and projects, especially those that let young people from inner city communities appreciate more rural areas. I was also an Educational Assistant for some time at Harewood House which is a charity-run stately home.

Since Nutfield Road Primary School is an inner city school and most of my work with young people has also been based in similar environments, I believe I could bring knowledge, experience and creativity to the role you have advertised.

If you have any further queries, I would be happy to answer them. Many thanks for your time and I look forward to hearing from you.

*Yours sincerely,
Rebecca Stanfield*



SUMMARY

HOW TO WRITE GREAT COVER LETTERS

- Always keep it to a page in length, at the most.
- Find out the name of the person you're sending it to.
- Within the first paragraph tell them:
 - why you're writing.
 - the job you're applying for.
 - where you saw the advert.
- In the second and third paragraphs tell them:
 - what you can bring to the role specifically.
 - why you are applying to their particular company.
- Draw on previous experience but try not to repeat what you've already written in your CV.
- Bring some personality in, but not too much.
- Use the words 'I believe' or 'I consider myself' to avoid coming across as arrogant.
- Don't forget to get it spell checked.



NOTES



BUZZWORDS AND PHRASES FOR CVs AND COVER LETTERS

Have you noticed, when you come to write cover letters that your vocabulary can become a little repetitive? As an employer will be reading thousands of near-identical letters, it is important to radiate your creativity from the rest of the crowd.

The key is to be 'articulate'. There are many impressive ways of saying exactly what you mean.

Here are some which employers really like to hear

Achieved
Developed
Accomplished
Enabled
Handled
Executed
Displayed
Implemented
Structured
Researched
Established

Gained
Widened
Performed
Improved
Generated
Applied
Coordinated
Produced
Gathered
Advised

Words to use instead of 'Good'

Advanced
Strong
Accurate
Diplomatic
Decisive

Proficient
Consistent
Enthusiastic
Professional
Experienced

Words to use instead of 'worked'

Collaborated
Campaigned
Marketed
Controlled

Managed
Supervised
Initiated
Sold

Positive ways to describe yourself

Efficient
Honest
Meticulous
Self-aware
Confident
Reliable
Logical
Organised

Positive
Pro-active
Enthusiastic
Energetic
Articulate
Cooperative
Conscientious
Capable



THE DOS AND DON'TS OF CVS AND COVER LETTERS

So here we have a summary of GraduateCoach's all-important CV tips and cover letters: the dos and don'ts of writing CVs and cover letters.

CV DOS

- Keep it to two pages, at the most.
- Be creative with your layout and make it stand out.
- Match your phrasing and choice of skills with the job specification.
- Include a Career Objective or Personal Profile, but limit their length.
- Include any predicted grades.
- Include voluntary or unpaid work if it's relevant.
- Use the job description as a guide for staying focussed on what is necessary for this specific role.
- Only put the month and the year when writing employment dates.
- List achievements and the skills you gained within roles, not just your tasks and duties.

CV DON'TS

- Put anything negative.
- Give your employers a chance to whittle your CV down by missing out any technicalities or details.
- Use clichés.
- Lie about skills or experience.
- Repeat yourself.
- Include any bad grades.
- Don't leave time gaps.

COVER LETTER – DOS

- Find out the name of the person you're sending it to.
- Tell them within the first paragraph:
 - why you're writing.
 - the job you're applying for.
 - where you saw the advert.
- Tell them in the second and third paragraphs:
 - what you can bring to the role specifically.
 - why you are applying to their particular company.
- Bring some personality in, but not too much.
- Use the words 'I believe' or 'I consider myself' to avoid coming across as arrogant.

COVER LETTER DON'TS

- Repeat what you wrote in your CV.
- Write more than one page.
- Try humour.
- Write your address at the top if you're sending it by email.
- Forget to spell check and get a friend to proofread your CV.

REMEMBER

Employers **DO** want to see skills and potential more than anything else. But they **DON'T** want to struggle to find these.



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**ALSO
AVAILABLE
FROM
GRADUATE
COACH**





OTHER COACHING MANUALS, BY GRADUATE COACH IN THE 'ESSENTIAL SERIES'

Every coaching manual in the series splits each part of the job hunting process into easily managed chunks with easy to follow step-by-step instructions. They are filled with activities, checklists and contact forms that you'll find easy to manage.

These coaching manuals will give you the tools you need, to get the job of your dreams.

The following pages include some sample chapters for you to read





The GraduateCoach Essential Guide to INTERVIEWS

Arguably the most daunting of career-hunting tasks is the interview. GraduateCoach will arm you with the knowledge and techniques to help you sail through these frequently intimidating encounters without breaking a sweat. The guide is split into three parts; before your job interview, at your interview and after your interview. With chapters such as; essential interview techniques, the best answer format, common questions you might be asked and tips on answering difficult interview questions you'll have everything you need.

“ *This is probably the best book that I have ever read about how to behave during an interview. It covers everything from the preparation before an interview to what to do after an interview.*

It explains what is going on in an interviewer's mind, so it teaches you not just what to say but how to say it. The part I liked most was the tips about the questions most companies ask, because even though they are common, I was unsure about how to answer them.”





The GraduateCoach
Essential Guide to

INTERVIEWS



ESSENTIAL INTERVIEW TECHNIQUES

Did you know that some interviewers will give higher points to the candidates that ask for a question to be clarified?

These are the kind of insider tips that we as employers can let you in on. We will cover everything from the vital initial first impression to how to sell yourself without blowing your own trumpet too loudly.

Interviewers will always pose some tough questions. They will probe your weaknesses and question your abilities. Our job is to ensure that you walk into the room with the confidence to come through this test of character with flying colours.

Feeling nervous before an interview is human nature – even the most experienced of people get butterflies in these situations. What we aim to provide you with is a grounding of self-confidence that will impress your future employer and give you the opportunity to let your qualities shine to their full potential.



GETTING AN INTERVIEW

Dictionary definition: Interview – a meeting in which one or more people question, consult or evaluate another person.

Congratulations. CVs and applications are rejected by the bucket-load so getting over that first hurdle should be a boost in itself. You should process this fact and use it to build up your confidence. Being granted an interview shows that it has been accepted that, on paper, you are equipped to do the job. Now it is time to prove it in person.

You need to sell your personality and your skills and to do this you must market yourself as a package. Be prepared, well-presented, motivated and self-confident and you have the perfect opportunity to prove that you are a ‘must have’ for the job in question. If you can impress here, there’s no limit to what you can achieve.

Be warned, however, interviews are tough. They can be tense affairs and interviewers won’t go easy on you. Don’t expect friendly smiles and easy conversation, expect to be quizzed and cross-examined. Just remember the key phrases: preparation, practice, confidence and self-belief.

Stars from the world of sport have to have an enormous amount of self-belief. They don’t just say, “I hope I win this one,” they say, “I’m going to win!” Muhammad Ali pumped himself up by saying, “I am the greatest, I am the double greatest!” He believed in himself and by combining this belief with his natural ability, he fulfilled his own prophesy.



AVOIDING INTERVIEW PITFALLS

DISPELLING THE MYTHS ABOUT A TYPICAL INTERVIEW

We never really know what questions are lurking at job interviews. There are, however, plenty of pointers to keep in mind that will save you from tripping up almost immediately.

First impressions don't count

You may think that the shoes you are wearing won't affect whether you get the job or not, but you would be surprised how often they do. Making a good first impression is vital. You need to look and feel the part.

A trend for the rest of the interview can be established at the very beginning. If the interviewer takes an immediate dislike to you, it can be tough to get things back on track. Instead of having to redeem yourself after making a bad first impression, you have to ensure that you have given yourself the best possible start. Presenting yourself impeccably is a must.

You are there to make up the numbers

Interviewers have enough work to do. They would rather not interview people that they already know are unsuitable for the job from their CV. You are there because they want you there.

All interviewers ask the same questions

Never predict that what goes on in one interview will definitely occur in another. Different jobs require different information. The more you prepare, the better off you will be. You can try to predict what questions will be asked of you by referring to your CV and the job description.

Your interviewer will use trick questions to catch you out

Try not to think of your interview as something that is being done to you. The sole purpose of an interview is to establish whether you're right for the job and not to trick you.

You are inferior to your interviewer

There is no need to be submissive as the interviewer will not want to employ someone who thinks of themselves as 'unworthy.' Look at it as more of a meeting of two adults that are both looking for the same thing and seeing if they are right for one another.



SUMMARY

AVOIDING INTERVIEW PITFALLS

- Go into the interview with a positive attitude.
- First impressions do count whatever people say.
- You are there because they think you'll be able to do the job – not to make up numbers.
- Do prepare for certain questions but be aware that you'll have to be able to think on your feet.
- Think of yourself as an equal to your interviewer.
- Your interviewer is not trying to trick you.







The GraduateCoach Essential Guide to GREAT PRESENTATIONS

The chances are that in university you would have had to give the odd presentation in front of your class, maybe even as often as once a week, but there is a world of difference between talking in front of your peers and impressing at an interview. Which is why GraduateCoach has put together this coaching manual to help you. The manual is split into three sections; the Introduction, Writing a presentation and Giving your presentation.

“ This book starts with the most important idea that everyone needs to understand: even if you do not have a natural skill to speak in public, make presentations and lead people, this skill can be learned. And this is exactly what the book is for. It explains how to organise good presentations and gives tips on how to present well.”





GIVING GREAT PRESENTATIONS AT YOUR INTERVIEW

In 2001, a Constituency Selection Panel for the Conservative Party was interviewing candidates for a safe seat in the House of Commons. Eight candidates had been selected to present, seven of whom walked in, placed their notes on the lectern that had been provided and presented from behind it. When the eighth candidate entered with no notes at all, it came as a breath of fresh air as he ignored the lectern and conducted a flawless presentation from the edge of stage. He won the seat. His name was David Cameron.

Increasingly, particularly within the corporate and sales sectors, candidates are being asked to prepare a presentation as part of the selection process. Many people would rather run down the street naked than perform this activity. It is fair to say that some are naturally better at public speaking than others. However, it is a myth that these skills can't be taught.

ASSESSING YOUR SKILLS

Your personal assessment – ask yourself these questions before going any further. They will get you in the right mindset, prepare you for what you will need to do and, depending on how much you know already, how hard you will have to work.

WHERE ARE YOU NOW?

How many presentations have you done?

What did you learn from any previous experiences?

What have you particularly enjoyed about doing presentations?

Were there any aspects you didn't enjoy?

WHERE WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE?

- Would you like to be a presenting virtuoso?
- Do you want to be able to do a presentation without any stress or worry?
- Do you want people to automatically think of you as a good performer when they need a presentation?

HOW DO YOU GET THERE?

Wherever you are and where you'd like to be, we'll show you your route map to presentation success.

In today's tough job climate, an increasing number of candidates with similar qualifications and experience are going for the same role. Presentations during the application process are a popular way of sifting the diamonds from the rough. Ideas come and go but the skills necessary to present well are there for life and are an asset in so many jobs today.

It's impossible for us to predict what kind of presentation you'll be asked to prepare for your audience. Often you'll need to base it on the simple subject, "Why me for this job?" You may be asked to prepare a presentation about the company using all the information you can find out about it.

The point is that whatever the subject of your presentation, the rules remain the same.

In a good presentation, you are solving someone's problems, you are inspiring them to hire you and you are telling them something they didn't know before. Plus you need to do it in an interesting, concise and original way. Sounds difficult? We'll make it easy.







The GraduateCoach Essential Guide to **WORK EXPERIENCE**

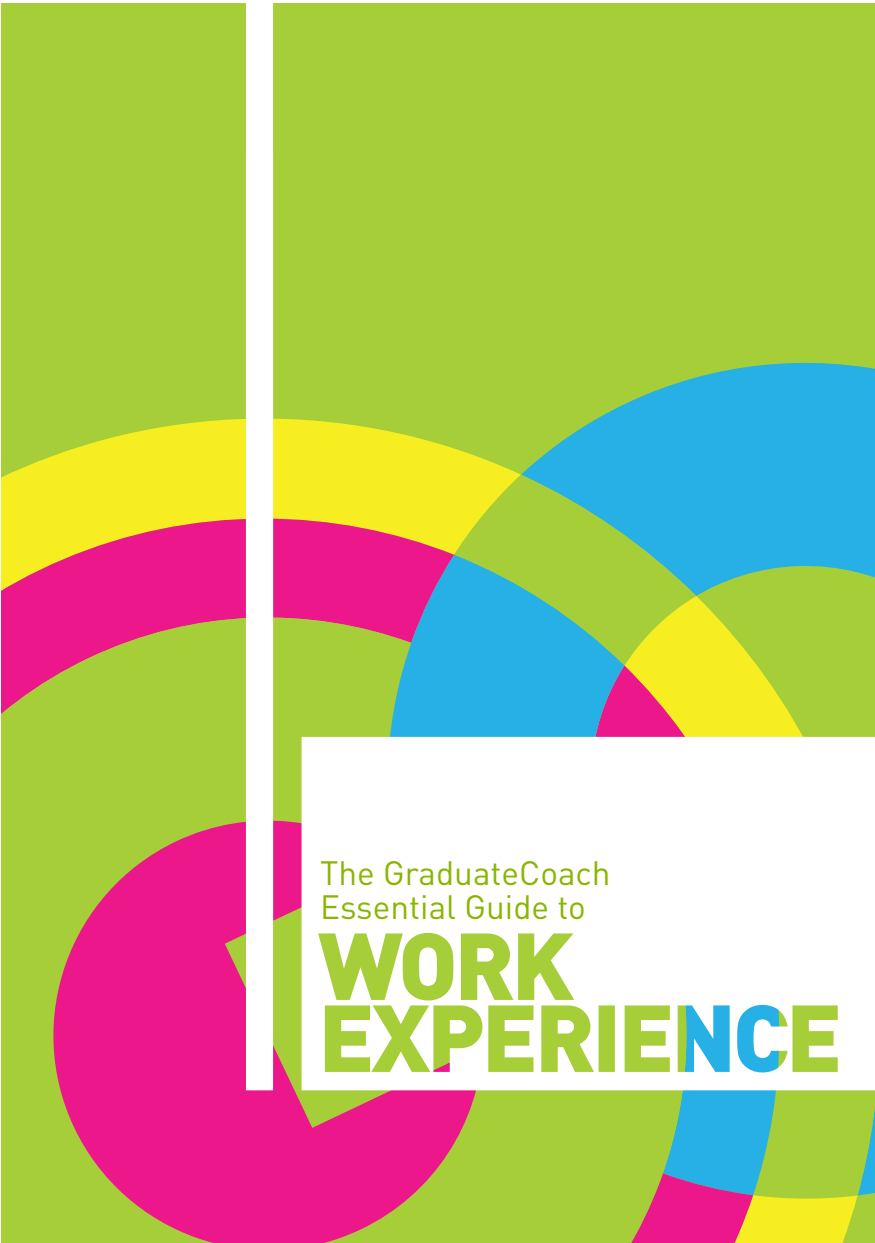
Work experience is a brilliant way to show employers that you have the initiative, ambition and determination that they are looking for. This guide will show you how and where to secure a work experience placement and how to ensure you get the most from it.

With sections covering; how and where to get a placement, using contacts for networking, CV and cover letter tips, the myths about work experience placements and after you've finished your placement and much more. It covers everything you need to know about work placements.

“ *The most practical guide about work experience you can buy.*

It explains where to find jobs, contains example, has a guide about 'myths' and 'truths' and gives basic ideas about everything that is necessary to get work experience. I consider it a complete guide to work experience. All you need to know, you will find in the book”





The GraduateCoach
Essential Guide to

WORK EXPERIENCE

WHY IS WORK EXPERIENCE SO ESSENTIAL?

“ *Experience: that most brutal of teachers. But you learn – my God do you learn.*” (C.S Lewis)

Work experience placements and internships are the best way to give yourself an edge in the jobs market. Whatever industry your experience is in, you'll gain important skills that will help you in any career. At the very least, you'll have something to talk about in interviews.

One in five people that complete a work placement are offered a job in the same company. But if you are thinking that you just need to turn up and make the tea to get ahead, you might want to think again.

Every employer is looking for talented, enthusiastic people to take on. Work experience is one of the best ways of discovering whether, after a bit of scrubbing and polishing, you will slot nicely into one of their swivel chairs. It is easy to work this situation to your advantage if you know how. You can show any employer that you are the perfect person for the job if you secure the right work experience and complete it in the right way.

This guide will show you how to do that.

As well as tips and exercises to help you find work experience and make the most of it, this guide contains success stories from candidates who have landed jobs through work experience placements. You'll get inside knowledge on how and where to get a placement and how to ensure that you emerge with your prospects enhanced at the end of it.



DO WORK PLACEMENTS REALLY HELP YOUR CAREER?

If you are new to the working world, you'll soon realise that many industries are like a closed book. Some – in fact most – of the companies that operate within these industries are nearly impossible to get into – unless you are related to the CEO. The rest are only accessible if you work for them for little or no money. These are your windows of opportunity. It can be a disheartening position to start from, but it's important to persevere as you need to start somewhere, at some time. Given the current economic climate, it is best to start as soon as possible. It may not pay, but you'll gain enough experience and know-how to make up for what you lack in money.

A few weeks' free experience gives you an essential advantage when it comes to applying for jobs. Your skills and knowledge, not to mention your confidence, will immediately place you above many other candidates, so you'll have a much better chance of earning a larger salary in the long run.

Three weeks of work experience will prepare you for a job more effectively than three years of university.

There really isn't a downside to putting a work placement on your CV. If it is in the same industry as the job you are applying for, it will show initiative, commitment to the profession and passion. Even if the placement is undertaken in a completely different industry, it's a demonstration of how quickly you can learn and how proactive you've been in sorting out your future.

If your placement turns out to be the worst two weeks of your life, this is a small amount of time to spend discovering the path you shouldn't take – especially if you compare it to the long, miserable years you could have spent proceeding up a blind alley.

The trick is to make the absolute most of any placement and complete tasks that will look good on your CV. This is precisely what GraduateCoach can help you do. Some of it is about luck (where you get a placement, when and what you end up doing), but hard work and effort can get you a very long way, too. Rather than waiting for chances to fall into your lap, you can create opportunities for yourself with our guidance.

Sometimes you'll need to just knuckle down and get the job done and it might be tough. But if there's one thought to sustain you, it'll be that in completing a few days' worth of work experience, you'll be taking one huge step closer to your dream career.



SUMMARY

WHY WORK EXPERIENCE?

- Remember, everyone with a job needs to start somewhere ... and you do need to start as soon as possible.
- Getting work experience to put on your CV shows that you have initiative, commitment to the profession and passion.
- No matter how disheartening it may seem, work experience is worth it.
- Try to remember that you'll get enough experience and know-how to make up for what you lack in money.
- Two weeks could rule out a profession that you could have spent long, miserable years in.
- Don't be discouraged by a miserable outlook or lack of contacts: luck and timing is a part of it, but with hard work you can create opportunities for yourself.
- Always remember to make the absolute most of any experience you do get. Pour yourself into it – it's not forever.



