

## Guidelines for preparing a CV – for young people leaving school and starting work – taking into account in particular, informal skills

### I Introduction

The European CV is a general model, with which applicants can apply for jobs with employers across Europe. The model is therefore designed in particular for the needs of those people who have completed training and have some work experience, as, when applying for a job, the preparation of a CV which includes qualifications and personal information represents a decisive stage in the process of looking for a job.

The European CV is adapted less to the needs of the special project target group, to the needs of young people making their first application on the work market in general, on the threshold between school and training. Owing to the increasing circulation of the European CV model and to the fact, that this model is intended for general use at a later point in time, it seems sensible to use this model as a basis in a European project. And from this basis to develop a special form with instructions, which matches the needs of young people which at the same time can be used as a model for later CVs. Simultaneously the model CV supports the orientation process for choosing a profession, as it is also necessary when preparing the CV, to consider one's strong points and to describe these clearly. This model is therefore, at the same time an instrument for "self assessment", for the self-analysis of interests, to decide what is of main importance and to assess an individual's strong and weak points.

### II General recommendations

Apart from the covering letter, the CV is the most important part of a written application. The CV only plays a subordinate role when looking for a vocational training position in the case of a direct placement, e.g. on the basis of a training period in the company. However, training positions are also often filled on the basis of a written application. A CV then becomes necessary in order to detail personal details, qualifications, experience and interests.

The CV is the door-opener for an interview, for an invitation to a trial training period. The CV must be used to arouse interest in the individual, and it must show that you have something to offer the potential training company and possibly the company, which will employ you. You must always remember: A positive portrayal is important. Exaggerations and false portrayals very soon become evident, just as when advertising products, and do not pay in the short-term. Honesty is the basis of every personal relationship, and training is a period of working together closely over a period of several years, in which mutual trust represents an elementary condition for success. Besides, if you exaggerate or even give false information you will make a fool of yourself sooner or later.

The CV and covering letter must always be coordinated. The CV must be short, the covering letter even shorter. Ultimately the CV provides the better space to briefly mention certain developments and decisions in your life. However, in each individual case it

must be decided, which statement appears in which of the two documents. In the end the decision should also depend on the relevance of your life experience to the position you are applying for. The closer the connection, the better it is to mention this point in the covering letter.

Normally you learn how to write a CV at school, so everyone should be capable of at least making a basic outline of his/her vital details. To this basic outline should be added a description of the interests and skills, and of informal qualifications acquired outside school, which are not documented by certificates and testimonials. This point is particularly important, but also difficult. It is therefore advisable, to ask for help. This can come from parents, teachers, friends, relatives. It is, however, important, that ultimately the applicant him-/herself makes the decision about what to put in the CV. It is his/her CV! And authenticity, i.e. the own presentation of the own character is of most importance. You should, however consider showing the CV to professionals, who often have a lot of experience of applications. Another possibility is to show it to someone with business/industry experience e.g. company owners. But frequently they do not have a lot of time, and not everybody knows someone who often deals with applications. This is the point where various institutions, who deal with training and the work market, can help. Professional help is offered, for example, by the mentors and training advisors of the Chambers and the career advisor at the job centre.

Important points are:

- Every detail is important. This applies to the contents and to the layout, i.e. the appearance of the CV. The CV should have a clear layout and be easy to read. Correct spelling and punctuation are an absolute must!
- Concentrate on the essentials. This statement does not contradict the first point. For: The CV must be precise and short. Nobody, who has to evaluate a large number of applications, has a lot of time.
- Therefore name your own skills and abilities briefly and provide written evidence. For this purpose it is absolutely essential to primarily list skills, qualifications and qualities, which are particularly valuable for the training post in question.

The model-CV is designed for processing on a PC, since it is difficult to prepare a visually attractive application without a PC. After all it can be assumed, that those, who do not have the necessary equipment available at home, do have the possibility of having access to a PC and printer in public institutions, in particular in the job centres.

### III The individual sections

#### 1. Personal details

When writing your name, first of all write the family name (surname), then all first names, beginning with the name you are called by.

Write the complete address in the order corresponding to the usual order for letters in the country, i.e. including the country code or the full name of the country in the last line.

Telephone, fax, E-Mail, provided these apply.

If you have your own, interesting webpage, which you created yourself, you can also list this.

## 2. Education

Start with the school you attended last and finish with the primary school. From the details about the main and favourite subjects, the person reading the CV can see the interests and professional aptitudes of the applicant. You should not insert any grades or marks here. These can be seen in the certificates enclosed.

In this section it is especially important to name exceptional activities and functions, always with the date or period of time. Whoever was class speaker had to train and prove their skills of communication. Whoever helped to organize a school event showed social and organisational involvement. Whoever took part in a school trip abroad has special experience in challenging situations. Here you can also list, in which special way you stand out from your fellow pupils, the special accomplishments during your school life, which are not usually assessed by marks.

In the second section of the CV once again information about social and organisational skills is required. This is where to list out-of-school activities. Any special activities connected directly with school, should be described under school education. School education is not just gaining knowledge, but also includes what is described by the terms upbringing, formation and character development. These are points like for example, team spirit, involvement with the class and school community, supporting younger pupils and general social commitment.

This is why school projects also play an important role. In this case too, apart from the professional topics, the so-called key qualifications, such as skill at solving problems, independence, creativity and staying-power for example, are practised.

If you attended more than one school, please copy the table for each school. It is easier to follow if a separate section is completed for each school attended.

## 3. Work experience and (holiday) jobs

A period of work experience in a firm is often the first and most important contact with training. These periods of work experience are usually part of the school education. Any additional periods of work experience based on your own initiative generally increase your chances of getting the training post you want.

Jobs usually also help to get acquainted with the world of work. They can show which requirements are demanded. They show that performance and payment in return are the basic principles of our economy, and therefore of working life. For this reason, young people with "work experience" are generally more interesting for training companies and have the chance to stand out from the masses. It is important to describe jobs and training periods shortly and precisely, so that it is possible to get an idea, what you did there and what experience you gained.

Also applicable here: If you have completed more than one work placement and/or job,

copy this section as many times as required.

#### 4. Vocational training periods which were started and completed (or not)

This section will not be relevant for most of the young people on the threshold of leaving school and starting training, and must/can therefore not be completed.

For those, though, who already started vocational training and want or have to re-orientate themselves, this section is important. On the one hand, a CV must not contain any inexplicable gaps, and on the other hand a reorientation does not necessarily have to be a fault. It is, however, important to explain the reasons for the reorientation. Leaving school or a training post prematurely can also represent a chance, if you learn from the negative experience. Coping with crises can be associated with the development of stress resistance and frustration tolerance, if the crisis results in a change in behaviour or an orientation towards training better suited to one's own abilities and interests.

Successfully completing training is never the end of learning. A second period of vocational training can be meaningful for many different reasons. It is always possible to use the first experience as a base, even when the second training is in a completely different field. Here, too, it makes sense to explain the reasons for deciding on switching to another area/subject.

Not only can you learn from mistakes, you must! Those that are able to admit their mistakes and do not try to hide behind excuses or place the responsibility on others will progress and improve in life.

#### 5. Personal abilities and skills.

This point is nowadays becoming more and more important. Depending in which profession you wish to train, the knowledge acquired at school can play a more or less important role, and can be a criteria for rejection if it does not exist. Knowledge is reflected in the school certificates, but personality, the willingness to commit oneself, key qualifications such as reliability, punctuality, team-spirit, honesty, flexibility, the ability to work under stress, staying-power, the ability to accept criticism, self-discipline, initiative, communication skills, power of decision and self-confidence are also decisive criteria, which can decide on a training post especially in a company. In this case the description is not always easy. The vital question, which each person has to ask them self, is what am I good at?, apart from an average performance in mathematics.

The question also plays a decisive role when choosing a profession, because interests and abilities are generally closely connected with each other, and should therefore form the basis for choosing a profession for training. This is why the preparation of a CV is closely connected with the choice of profession. The CV can give help with the orientation towards a profession, or at the latest when preparing the CV, the questions concerning skills and interests, out-of-school activities and informal qualifications, i.e. those not documented with a grade or a mark, should be dealt with again.

## 5.1. Language skills

The ability to communicate is a vital skill in almost all professional activities nowadays. With Europe growing closer together and the globalisation of the economy, which also affects the skilled crafts and companies in many areas, foreign language skills are becoming more vital. This does not mean that everyone is expected to speak, write and understand English, for example, perfectly. But to be able to and wanting to understand a business partner with a little patience, or being able to make one's own ideas understood, is a skill, which is gaining more and more importance. English is the language used most commonly, but skills in other specific languages can be a particular advantage in the work market. The language skills of the employees can be of critical importance for the development strategies of a company. This is why the description of your language skills in the CV is very important.

It is, however, not easy to assess yourself. What does having "good" command of a language mean? The assessment is divided into the three areas, reading, writing, speaking, because a person frequently has a different level of command in each area, and because for a profession, e.g. speaking and reading are more important than writing. The level required or attained differs from school to school, but for practical reasons it seems sensible to quote the marks of the last class in foreign languages. Which class this was can be seen from the information about the school attended. The final mark/grade is shown on the certificates enclosed with the application. But everybody knows, which marks the teacher gave in the three areas, or how he/she can be rated in comparison to classmates. Experience shows that, precisely in the case of foreign languages, one tends to underrate one's own abilities. This should be taken into account, and at the same time it should be pointed out that during an interview a change to one of the generally common foreign languages is possible without warning.

## 5.2 Social and organizational abilities and skills

Everyone can do lots of things, has various qualities and in his/her life has learnt more than just what was taught at school, but is often not aware of this. At school contribution, hard work or laziness and behaviour are admittedly assessed, too, but many other components of a character remain hidden in the school certificates, even though they are highly significant, particularly in the working world, in a practical job. One of these is, for example, taking on responsibility. This is a virtue which is often practised in the family as a matter of fact. Or the ability of "keeping cool" under pressure. This does not mean being lethargic, but rather the ability, perhaps in certain fields, which are interesting, for example, not to let oneself get worked up, to be able to work and think in an organized manner, even when "pressure" is coming from different directions. Or optimism and the ability not to get too stressed as characteristics used to find a solution, even in "hopeless" situations. "There are no problems, there are only challenges" and "For every problem there is a solution" are attitudes, which are more likely to be developed outside school and which can have great significance in a working life and in training.

Again: It is important to analyse yourself and to compare the results with assessments from other people.

Under this point all special qualities and qualifications acquired out-of-school should be

listed. Which activities did you enjoy in the past?

What has remained apart from the enjoyment?

Can I do something, do I know something or I am something, which is not in the school certificates, and which I believe I could use in a profession?

Here there will often be a great deal of uncertainty, particularly concerning questions about commercial skills. "I can skateboard and our group built a ramp." What does that have to do with working life? On the one hand, commitment to a common goal, and on the other hand a practical activity. In the CV it could be described as "self-organized construction of a skateboard course with five friends". The important thing is the statement that if motivation for something exists, there is also a will to achieve something. Even this is not necessarily expressed in school marks/grades. For a potential training company it is important to know that fundamentally the will to achieve something exists, if the task is stimulating.

There are innumerable possibilities to become involved and to acquire the so-called informal skills. Therefore, it is only possible to give some tips here, which is also vitally important for the vocational orientation: Ask someone, perhaps two people, who have seen your CV and who know which achievements can be useful for a particular job. Doing nothing and waiting for something to happen is not one of them, but developing different ideas yourself about what you and your group of friends can do at the weekend is.

This is why it is ultimately only possible to give you general hints and tips to think about maybe becoming socially involved in the church, clubs, youth organizations, in sport and also about other regular activities besides taking part in a club or society.

### 5.3 Technical abilities and skills

At this point please don't just think of computers and computer games. We are a society characterized by technology and in many cases, we use technology so naturally, that we hardly realize it consciously. E-Mail, internet, SMS are taken for granted and important in working life too. But being able to deal confidently with application programs is also important. Any skill in technology and a technical understanding can also be important in professions, which are generally described as non-technical professions. Therefore it applies in this case as well: Think about it, take even seemingly obvious things into account (but certainly do not describe the use of a radio as technical orientation), and, if necessary ask whether programming a DVD-player or the method of dealing with electric motors and water pumps learnt as a volunteer member of the fire brigade would also count.

### 5.4 Artistic abilities and skills

The same applies: Do not relist the points, which are already under "school". School and "personal activities" should be separated. The involvement in a school theatre group is an additional involvement, but playing in an independent orchestra, taking drawing lessons at a class at evening school or participating in an independent film and video production normally require a little more personal initiative and are usually continued beyond the time at school.

## 5.5 Hobbies/Interests

All activities and interests not mentioned before should be listed here. It is often difficult to differentiate and should therefore be listed as thought best. Nothing can actually be “wrong”. The dividing lines between e.g. social and artistic involvement are often blurred. How do you classify the participation in the literary circle of the town library, which includes the organization of readings, writing short reviews/book assessments and looking after the library users?

As hobbies which have been pursued over a longer period of time and/or intensively and currently pursued, should also be listed. For this purpose all interesting areas should really be named, as although most people know their own hobbies, they have no idea how that relates to demands in the working world. Moreover, interests are still the main indicator for a good choice of a profession, because motivation is born from interest and this is associated with qualifications and skills.

## 6. Enclosures

The most important details must also be documented. This does not include the membership card for the sports club. The enclosures include:

- Primary and all secondary school-leaving certificates
- Certificates and/or references for training periods and (holiday) jobs
- Certificates and/or references for any completed vocational training
- If language courses (holiday language courses) were taken outside school, certificates or participation certificates are usually issued. These should also be documentary proof of activities and qualifications.
- Basically all certificates and certifications for qualifications mentioned in the CV should be included.

The enclosures should be arranged in the order they are mentioned in the CV. With the exception of school certificates, the enclosures are usually only checked at random, but precisely for this reason they must be easy to find.

Do not enclose any originals, only copies!