

How to complete your CV – School Leaver

Personal statement

Always start with your personal statement. This should be *tailored to the role* in question. To put it simply, every time you apply for a new job, you will need to write a new personal statement, which should be *tweaked to match* the job description.

In terms of structure, consciously try and answer the following questions: Who are you? What do you have to offer? What are you aiming for in your career?

Also, try and quantify and give examples, where possible, and be specific. Generic personal statements can prompt a CV to fall at the first hurdle

Of course, there are many different types of personal statement, ranging from university applications through to job applications, with each requiring a different approach and warranting different inclusions. However, all of them share one common function: to make the reader want to read on and represent why you're worth their consideration.

What is a personal statement?

A personal statement is generally the first thing included on your CV, and is a brief personal summary given to prospective employers to help you stand apart from the competition.

Why do I need a personal statement?

Your personal statement is your chance to sell yourself to the employer, and help you put across the specific skills that make you perfect for the position.

Quite simply, it is one of the most important parts of your CV, and a well written personal statement can mean the difference between standing out from the crowd and your application being rejected.

How long should a personal statement be?

Ideally, your personal statement should be no more than around 150 words (or four or five lines of your CV). Any more than this and you run the risk of rambling and taking up valuable space.

Remember: it is a summary. It is not a cover letter. So keep it concise, pertinent and to the point. Essentially, the shorter the better.

What should it say?

Successful personal statements often consciously try and answer the following questions: who you are, what you can offer, and what you're aiming for in your career.

Try bullet-point answers to these when drafting to help make sure you've ticked all the boxes. If you're struggling for inspiration, use the job description to help you identify the specific skills the employer is looking for.

For example, if it highlights that the perfect candidate will have excellent business analysis skills, make sure you reflect this somewhere in your statement. E.g. 'Working experience of strategic business analysis with an investigative and methodical approach to problem-solving.'

What tense should it be written in?

Your personal statement can be written in either the first or third person. Just make sure you maintain consistency throughout.

So avoid statements such as: *'I am a recent business economics graduate. Excellent analytical and organisational skills. I am driven and self-motivated individual that always gives 100% in everything I do. Proven track record of success'*, at all costs.

How long should I spend writing my personal statement?

A personal statement should always be tailored to the role in question, which means a new one should be written with each and every CV you send off.

This may seem time consuming, however, the longer you spend on an application, the more the recruiter will begin to take notice. Generic introductions will not endear you to anyone, and are a waste of valuable space. Sending off five well-written and tailored CVs has much more value than sending out fifty generic ones.

Example

Personal statement

A recent business economics graduate with a 2:1 honours degree from the University of X, looking to secure a Graduate Commercial Analyst position or similar to utilise my current analytical skills and knowledge and also help me to further develop these skills in a practical and fast-paced environment.

My eventual career goal is to assume responsibility for the analysis and implementation of all commercial data and actively contribute to the overall success of any business I work for.

Do

1. **Get straight to the point** – A good personal statement is not just informative, it's also succinct and concise. So try keeping it between 100 and 200 words for maximum impact.
2. **Make sure you answer the key questions** – Who are you? What can you bring to the role? And what is your career goal? Structure your statement using these as a guideline and that way you'll ensure you maintain your focus throughout.
3. **Add value** –When answering the above questions, always attempt to be specific. Quantifying achievements such as 'Increased revenue' by adding, for example, 'by x amount', is much more impactful than merely hinting at your success, adding value to your statement and helping to enhance your credibility.
4. **Avoid clichés** – Just as with the rest of your CV, the more personal you can make it, the better. It's difficult to stand out from the crowd when you fall back on the overused attributes that hiring managers will probably see scores of times a day (we're looking at you, 'A great team player').
5. **Use the job description** – A key part of writing your personal statement is being able to put across to employers what skills you currently possess that would make you perfect for the role. Struggling to think of the right ones? Surprisingly, most of them have already been given to you in the job description. Utilise it properly and you instantly become a more appealing candidate.

6. **Other things to do:** Use some of the following words or phrases – successfully, developed, proven, track-record, experienced, delivering results.

Don't

1. **Be too generic** – It might take a little more time to tailor your statement to each position, but your CV will be much more effective as a result, making it time well spent in the long-run.
2. **Focus on yourself** – It can be tempting to focus on the attributes you have, and where you want to go in your career. However, the best personal statements also explain to the hiring manager what skills you would bring to the company and what you can offer them that no other candidate can.
3. **Confuse it with your cover letter** – Your personal statement is meant as a brief introduction, so keep it that way. Small representations of your success (e.g. a Financial Analyst with eight years' experience) are necessary, but keep examples brief. Use your cover letter and employment history to elaborate on your achievements and your personal statement to grab their attention. Don't get confused between the two.
4. **Think of it as a list** – 'I am experienced. I am qualified. I am a good communicator. I just choose to write every sentence like this...' Don't feel confined to list everything you have ever done or every attribute you have and, similarly, don't feel restricted to start every sentence with 'I'. The recruiter knows who the CV is about.
5. **Forget to read it out loud** – Read it. Read it again. Get your friends and family to read it. And, most importantly, read it out loud and make sure it flows. Not only do you want it to impress the employer in terms of your achievements, you also want it to be well-written. Making sure it flows is a vital part of the process.

Other things not to do: Confuse tenses, forget to spell check, make it too personal, speak in colloquialisms, use the phrase YOLO.

Skills

Instead of concentrating on a minimal work history, the most effective CVs written by school leavers often give precedence to their skills.

Just as with your personal statement, try giving examples that are applicable to the role in question. For example, IT skills (naming specific programs), problem solving, public speaking and interpersonal skills, not to mention a friendly and welcoming demeanour, are all desirable qualities to have.

Education

Education should be included from GCSE level on. State the number and general grades you received (Maths and English at the very least). If you're awaiting any results, you may state mock/expected results where possible, although this is not essential.

Write in reverse-chronological order, with the most recent events coming at the top.

In direct terms, particular course modules you've undertaken may be relevant to a role or scheme you're applying for and can be used to demonstrate your wider knowledge of the subject.

Hobbies & Interests

A Hobbies and Interests section is optional. However, if you lack any notable work experience, they can be a great way of getting your personality across.

Feel like you don't really have a hobby? Don't panic. It's never too late. Setting up a blog, for example, can be a perfect way to show what you can offer. For practically any career you look into, from the obvious such as fashion and retail (fashion blogs) through to something as surprising as carpentry and construction (documenting a DIY or restoration project, for example) may be enough to help get your personality across.

Just be wary of anything too generic, such as socialising with friends or going to the cinema (unless, of course, you're applying for a role at your local cinema). If they're particularly individual, or actually back up your motives for applying for this role, then they should be included.

Ask yourself: Will they help you get the job? Finally, make sure you're happy to expand upon them during your interview if called upon.

Employment history

If you do have some relevant work experience, even if it was only for a brief period, this can be a great help.

If you have no employment history to speak of, you may wish to leave this section out. Alternatively, use this gap as your opportunity to be pro-active. Try volunteering with a local charity for a few weeks or at a locally run business. They will be grateful for the help, and you will have something extra to add to your CV.

References

Unless asked directly in the job posting, making them available on request is fine.

However, always make sure that you do have credible references. Close family friends, teachers, or career councillors are all good options, and are usually more than happy to help.