

CV Booster Guide

50 ways to make your CV stronger: right now.

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This guide gives you 50 specific, actionable improvements to make to your CV, grouped by section. Work through it with your CV open alongside. The more tips you apply, the stronger your CV becomes.

How to use this guide:

- Open your CV alongside this document.
- Work through each section and apply every tip that's relevant to you.
- Don't try to do everything at once; 10 improvements today beats 50 'planned' improvements never.
- Download the CareerGuide CV Template Pack for your sector at careerguide.network if you haven't already.

01 The Basics

Before you touch the content — get the foundations right.

01 Save and send as a PDF, not a Word doc

Word docs can look completely different on someone else's computer. A PDF looks identical everywhere. File → Save As → PDF.

02 Name your file professionally

Your CV should be named FirstnameLastname_CV.pdf, not 'cv final FINAL v3.pdf'. Employers notice.

03 Use a professional email address

firstname.lastname@gmail.com is correct. Nicknames, numbers and old school emails are not. Create a new one if needed.

04 Keep it concise

For most school leavers, college students and early-career applicants, one page is ideal. Two pages can be appropriate if you have substantial relevant experience, qualifications or achievements. Prioritise quality over length.

05 Use a clean, readable font

Calibri, Arial or Helvetica at 10.5–11pt for body text. Nothing smaller than 10pt. Nothing decorative or hard to read.

06 Leave white space

A CV that's crammed full is harder to read than one with breathing room. Margins of at least 1.5cm on all sides.

07 No photo

UK CVs do not include a photo unless specifically requested. Remove it if you have one.

08 Consistent formatting throughout

If your section headers are bold size 12, every section header should be bold size 12. Inconsistency looks careless.

09 Proofread. Then proofread again.

Read it backwards to catch spelling errors. Then get one other person to read it. A typo can seriously weaken an otherwise strong application, particularly in sectors where attention to detail is important. Proofread carefully and ask someone else to review it.

10 Check your contact details are correct

Check your phone number, email and LinkedIn URL are all accurate. This sounds obvious — it catches more people than you'd think.

02 Personal Statement

This is the first thing they read. Make it count.

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| 11 | Keep it to 3–4 sentences maximum
The personal statement is a hook, not an essay. If it runs to a paragraph, cut it. |
| 12 | State who you are, what you've done and what you want
Cover those three things in order: who you are; relevant experience or study; what you're looking for. That's the formula. |
| 13 | Be specific about the type of role you're after
"Looking for an engineering apprenticeship in the civil sector" is stronger than "looking for an opportunity to develop my skills." |
| 14 | Remove every cliché immediately
Delete 'hardworking', 'team player', 'passionate', 'enthusiastic' and 'driven' unless you immediately follow each with a specific example. Without evidence, they mean nothing. |
| 15 | Tailor it for every application
Your personal statement should change every time you apply. Even changing one sentence to reference the specific company or role makes a significant difference. |
| 16 | Don't start with 'I':
"Motivated Year 13 student..." reads better than "I am a motivated Year 13 student..."; a small change that improves the opening. |
| 17 | Make your sector interest obvious
If you're applying for IT roles, your personal statement should mention technology or digital skills. If it could belong to any application, rewrite it. |

03 Education

Show your academic record clearly — employers use it as a baseline filter.

18	<p>List your most recent qualification first Reverse chronological order: current or most recent at the top, oldest at the bottom.</p>
19	<p>Include relevant qualifications clearly Make sure English and Maths are easy to find. Include GCSEs, BTECs, A Levels or equivalent qualifications that are relevant to the role or requested by the employer.</p>
20	<p>Highlight your strongest grades If you got an 8 or 9 in a subject relevant to the role, make it easy to find. Don't bury it in a long list.</p>
21	<p>Include predicted grades if you haven't sat exams yet Add '(predicted)' next to grades you haven't received: Employers expect this for current students.</p>
22	<p>Name specific A Level or BTEC subjects Don't just write 'A Levels — 3 subjects'. Name them. Employers in technical sectors will look for specific subjects like Maths, Physics or Computer Science.</p>
23	<p>Add relevant coursework or projects if space allows If you completed a dissertation, extended project or major coursework piece relevant to the role, mention it briefly.</p>
24	<p>Include any online certifications Google, freeCodeCamp, Coursera, Microsoft Learn; any completed certification is worth listing under Education or Skills, especially in tech and digital roles.</p>

04 Work Experience

This is where most CVs either win or lose. Get this section right.

25	Start every bullet point with an action verb Managed, delivered, organised, supported, trained, created, increased, resolved. Never start a bullet with 'I' or 'My role was to'.
26	Quantify wherever you can "Served 50+ customers per shift" is stronger than "served customers". "Raised £300 for charity" is stronger than "helped with fundraising". Numbers add credibility.
27	Include every job (however small) Weekend work, babysitting, helping at a family business, or a Saturday market stall. If it required reliability and responsibility, it counts.
28	Include volunteering as experience Volunteering sits in this section, not as an afterthought. If you volunteered consistently, it deserves the same treatment as a paid role.
29	Focus on what YOU did, not the team Employers are hiring you, not your team. "I trained two new colleagues in till procedures" is stronger than "we worked together to onboard new staff."
30	Show progression within a role If you took on more responsibility over time, say so. "Promoted to shift cover lead after 6 months" signals growth and reliability.
31	Don't list duties — show impact "Responsible for stock control" is a duty. "Reduced stock discrepancies by checking deliveries against orders daily" is impact. Aim for the second type.
32	Address gaps if they're significant If you have a gap of more than a few months, add a brief note explaining it: caring for a family member, health, travel. Unexplained gaps raise questions.
33	Use the STAR framework to write bullet points Situation + Action + Result = a strong bullet: You don't need all three in every line, but the best bullets always include at least Action and Result.

05 Skills

Be specific. Vague skills are invisible to employers.

- 34 Never write "good with computers." This phrase says nothing.**
This phrase says nothing. List the specific tools, software and platforms you can actually use. 'Microsoft Excel (intermediate), Canva, Adobe Photoshop (basic)' is useful. 'Good with computers' is not.
- 35 State your level for each technical skill**
Basic, intermediate, advanced or confident. Without a level, employers can't tell whether you've opened the software twice or used it daily for a year.
- 36 Only include skills you can actually demonstrate**
If you're asked to use a skill in an interview or on day one, you need to be able to back it up. Don't pad with things you 'sort of' know.
- 37 Include language skills with level**
If you speak another language, include it and state your level: conversational, fluent or native. This is often highly valued, especially in London.
- 38 Add a driving licence if you have one**
Relevant for many roles, such as trades, logistics, sales, or support work. If you're currently learning, say 'currently learning to drive'.
- 39 Remove generic skills that everyone claims**
Communication skills, teamwork, and time management; these belong in your experience section with evidence, not as listed skills. A skill without a story is just a word.

06 Achievements & Interests

Show who you are beyond the classroom and the workplace.

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| 40 | Include Duke of Edinburgh, sports captaincy, or school council
These are taken seriously by employers; they demonstrate commitment, leadership and the ability to balance multiple responsibilities. |
| 41 | Be specific about interests: don't just list hobbies
"Football" tells an employer nothing. "Weekly football training for 3 years; developed teamwork, discipline and leadership as team captain" tells them a great deal. |
| 42 | Keep interests relevant or revealing
List 2–3 genuine interests that show either sector relevance or personal character. Remove anything you wouldn't be able to speak confidently about for 2 minutes in an interview. |
| 43 | Include any awards or competitions
School prizes, community awards, or competition placements. If you won or were shortlisted for something, include it; it's credible evidence of performance. |
| 44 | Add young enterprise, model UN, or similar programmes
These are well-regarded by employers and show initiative, teamwork and professional exposure beyond the standard curriculum. |

07 Formatting & Presentation

A well-formatted CV gets read. A poorly formatted one gets skimmed, or ignored.

45 Use clear section headers:

Every section should have a clearly visible header. Bold, slightly larger than body text, and consistent throughout.

46 Keep bullet points to one or two lines each:

If a bullet runs to three lines, split it or cut it. Long bullets lose impact and are harder to scan.

47 Don't use tables or text boxes in Word:

They often break when opened on different systems or sent through applicant tracking systems. Use plain formatting instead.

48 Left-align your text:

Body text should always be left-aligned. Justified text creates uneven spacing and is harder to read. Only centre your name and contact details.

49 Use consistent date formats:

Pick one format, such as September 2022–Present or Sep 2022–Present, and use it throughout. Don't mix formats.

50 Test how it looks when printed in black and white:

Some employers print CVs. If your formatting relies on colour to make sense, it needs to work without it too.

The best CV is the one you actually send.

Apply the improvements. Save as PDF. Send it.

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