

Advice for Career Changers

Changing career is nothing unusual - it is now rare to have a single 'career' spanning a lifetime of work.

There are many reasons for changing career. You may:

- Want to change - because you are dissatisfied with your current job/career or have discovered a career direction you would prefer to take
- Need to change - because your previous career sector is shrinking or disappearing
- Have the opportunity to change - because new circumstances give you the freedom to move in a different direction

Maybe you chose a new career direction and embarked on your current or recent studies with that focus. Or you may have chosen your studies first and are now considering possible options. Our handout *What's next after graduation?* has some ideas for considering what you want from your next career move. A one to one appointment with a careers consultant at your college could also be very helpful. Once you have a sense of direction, you can concentrate your attention on how to get there.

Presenting your skills and experience in a CV

Employers are very used to seeing a range of different experiences on CVs and applications. Emphasise skills and knowledge that are relevant to the sector and the specific role that you are trying to move into, using terminology familiar in that sector. Our title *Demonstrating your skills and competencies* may also be useful.

Profile

Starting your CV with a brief profile allows you to point out straight away the unique combination of skills, knowledge and experience you would bring to your next job. That acts as a lens through which the reader sees the rest of the CV.

Education

If your current studies are the springboard for your change of direction, it usually makes sense to put the education section early in your CV, to give it prominence.

Put a little detail in about relevant modules studied, new skills gained and research project/dissertation topics, especially if there is a link with the field of work you want to move into.

Experience

On a CV you can organise your experience in whichever way best conveys the message you want to present, but it is usual to use reverse chronological order (most recent first) within any particular section.

If you have previous experience that is more relevant to the position you are applying for than something more recent, try subdividing your work experience, to focus attention on the most relevant.

You could have two separate sections: "Relevant Experience" and "Additional Experience". Or you can use even more specific section headings, such as "Research experience", "Teaching experience", "Charity experience" etc.

Choose your headings to best suit your purposes.

Do you have 'too much' experience?

If you have many years of experience it can be hard to condense your CV into two pages (some sectors even prefer one page CVs). You need to be ruthless and concentrate on the most relevant skills and experience for your new career.

If you've used the same skills in a number of jobs, be selective about which you will highlight within each role. There is no need to list similar skills many times.

If you've had a period of doing many, similar jobs (perhaps short term contracts or project based consultancy), you can group those experiences together under one more generic heading, such as "consultancy" or "retail positions". Then you can put a single time period spanning all of them and a few bullet points covering the relevant skills demonstrated within that range of positions.

Does your experience 'pigeonhole' you?

Sometimes your previous experience means employers only seem interested in recruiting you for similar roles. Concentrate on highlighting skills relevant to what you want to do. You could experiment with a 'skills based' CV: use the skills or competencies listed in the job description/person specification to structure the first section, giving evidence from your work experience and studies for each of the essential skills and competencies. Then further down include employment history: a brief overview of actual positions held.

Gaps in employment

It's a good idea to account for any extended gaps in your employment history, but no need to give lots of detail. One line indicating the reason is sufficient.

Short gaps (a few months or so) do not need explanation.

If a longer gap was due to ill-health consider how much information you want to give to a prospective employer at this stage.

You do not have to disclose health needs or disabilities but if you would like them to be taken into account (either in the selection process or in the workplace) you will need to inform your prospective employer at some stage. Ask for advice from the careers team at your university. Our handout *Disabled students* may also be helpful.

Age

In some countries, legislation exists to prevent discrimination on grounds of age, but prejudices can remain. For jobs in the UK you would not usually put your date of birth on your CV, but dates of education and experience usually give an indication. Think what concerns and biases employers might have; do they assume you're not willing to learn? That you'll be expensive or demanding due to increased experience? Address any possible issues by promoting your strengths.

What level job should you aim for?

This depends very much on your prior experience, how much of a change of direction you are making and the type of work you are aiming for.

Networking with people in the sector can help you to gain an understanding of an appropriate job level to aim for.

Look carefully at the person specification for jobs that interest you and be as objective as possible as to whether you can meet most of the specification requirements. Weigh up whether there is any specific experience or skills that you lack and if so, brainstorm how you could fill any gaps.

Sometimes you may need to initially take a step down in order to make the transition and build sector-specific skills/experience but your additional experience may mean you progress faster than someone just starting out.

This resource is available in alternative formats.

Please contact your careers service or email careersgroup@careers.lon.ac.uk