

How to Market your Master's

You have committed an extra year to studying – how do you show prospective employers how much more valuable that makes you as a potential employee?

Master's courses vary just as much as undergraduate degrees, so you cannot assume employers will know what relevant additional skills you have gained unless you spell that out.

Common questions

How much detail about my master's degree shall I put in my CV?

As with all CVs, relevance is the key factor (see our *How to write a CV* title):

- start with a job description/person specification
- identify what skills the employer requires
- build a list of your evidence for each of those skills
- create a CV that uses that evidence to clearly demonstrate your relevance to the role

Consider whether certain modules in the master's are particularly relevant to the job you want to apply for. For example:

- Does the job require analysis of statistical data? If so, include units that developed your statistical skills (and name statistical software you are now familiar with).
- Does the job require skills such as research or project management? If so, include a couple of bullet points giving evidence of those skills.
- Is your final dissertation/project on a topic related to the area of work you are trying to get into? If so, include the title and the type and scope of the research involved.

What kind of jobs might I apply for, and at what level?

As with undergraduate degrees, many master's degrees are essentially transferable qualifications, enabling you to develop a range of skills that can be applied in many different job sectors. This means you may often be applying for the same level of jobs as you would with an undergraduate degree. The advantage your master's gives is that you can position yourself as a stronger candidate for those jobs, because of the enhanced skills you have developed.

However, there are some roles, often scientific or analytical, that specify the need for a master's qualification. Use your CV/ application to show you have the particular skills and/or knowledge required by the role – don't assume that it will be obvious to an employer, simply by stating the title of your master's. For example, for a scientific job highlight the specialist knowledge or relevant, specific lab techniques you have gained.

Similarly if you have an MA in Museum Studies and are applying to work in a museum, highlight the content from your master's that most directly relates to the role.

If your master's is not obviously vocational, or you are applying to a sector for which it has less direct relevance, concentrate on emphasising the transferable skills gained. For example, in an MA in English Literature, you are likely to develop skills relevant to a wide range of graduate jobs, such as:

- critical thinking
- written and oral communication
- analysis
- research expertise
- independent working.

Highlight the skills most relevant to each role/ employer that you apply to.

What about approaching employers speculatively, when there is no job description/person specification?

Speculative approaches can be highly effective in many sectors, especially if you tailor your CV and a covering letter to the organisation and to the role you hope they might offer you.

This means looking at related roles at similar organisations to get ideas of the requirements, researching the organisation you are approaching and thinking carefully about how your particular combination of skills and knowledge could be of use to them.

Imagine the role you think you could do there, consider what the job description/person specification would list as requirements and focus your CV and cover letter accordingly.

When should I be applying for jobs?

If you are aiming at graduate training schemes with the bigger employers you will need to submit applications early in the academic year (often September–November), so it is worth checking those deadlines as soon as you arrive on campus... or even before!

Even graduate schemes with no published deadlines close once the positions are filled, so applying early definitely pays off.

Smaller employers (and the majority of graduate jobs are with smaller employers), tend to have later deadlines and for individual graduate jobs you would apply in the early summer, not long before you will be available for work. When a specific job is advertised, the recruiter will usually want to fill it quickly.

However, unless stated otherwise, there would often be some flexibility about how soon you need to be available. It is probably best not to leave applications right to the end of your course... unless you want to take some time out.

How do I describe my previous work experience?

Many master's students have professional experience already. How you present it depends on whether you are trying to progress in a similar industry or similar role, or you want to use your master's to actively help you to change direction.

If you are looking to build on your existing career, simply emphasise skills and experience most relevant to the job you are applying for.

If you are using your master's to facilitate a new career direction, it can be most effective to give prominence to your recent study and how that prepares you for the direction that you now want to take. A short profile at the top of a CV can be particularly helpful in this situation - setting out

- the background and skills you bring from your previous work;
- the particular skills/knowledge your master's adds to that;
- the field in which you now want to apply that combination of experience, skills and knowledge.

It may also be worth dividing the experience section of your CV into 'relevant experience' and 'additional experience' (or similar headings), so that you can group the most relevant things (whether study, employment or volunteering) together and put them nearer the top.

See also: *Advice for career changers*.

This resource is available in alternative formats.

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