

# CV IS YOUR FOOT IN THE DOOR

**When you've got your eye on that dream education job that will take your career where you want it to go, getting your foot in the door requires a great CV. ALAN JERMAINE of KEA Education has seen every mistake it's possible for an applicant to make, so he's the right person to help you avoid a CV that goes straight to the round filing cabinet.**

It doesn't matter whether you are going for a basic teaching position or a principalship: your first aim should be to make such a good impression that you will be asked for an interview. In the words of the sage, "The CV gets you the interview and the interview gets you the job." The documentation you provide creates your first impression.

Experience tends to show that educators care more about their current school than their own career and this is demonstrated by the uninspiring curriculum vitae that are so often presented. The saying, "It is better to be prepared and not have an opportunity than to have an opportunity and not be prepared" is applicable here. School holidays should be used to ensure that documentation is right up to date so you are ready for any opportunity. Give yourself the luxury of quality time to do a quality job.

## COVER LETTER

A cover letter focusing on the position is considered standard good practice. This should be a concise document ranging from one to 1.5 pages long that does not include material from your CV. It should focus on the school and position, and it should leave the reader in no doubt that you are thoroughly enthusiastic about the job you're applying for.

A cover letter should inform the reader that you have done your homework on the school. It should communicate the strengths and abilities that you can bring to the school. It should be honed to perfection by good editing and reflection: go for concise rather than wordy.

Ensure your cover letter is completely error-free and guard against every sentence starting with "I". If the letter doesn't resonate with the reader, then you have lost your first chance to excite. The cover letter is also your one chance to identify something that you don't have experience in – such as PYP – that a school might be seeking and then show your enthusiasm for learning. It's better to have this aspect in your cover letter rather than your CV.

## CURRICULUM VITAE

Before you look at your CV, you should start by thinking about the school and the role you are applying for. The school must excite you so you can excite your potential employer. You should make

sure that you really are a “good fit” for the school and your intended role. The school’s own website, as well as ERO reports, can be helpful here.

Boards are very impressed with a well-presented CV in hard copy that gives the impression that the author has tailored the CV to the school. Such CV are always given serious consideration, more so than one that comes across as generic.

In our technological age, it is easy to individualise your CV to the job applied for. The inclusion of photos or logos from the school’s website helps to create the right impression. If you need help with your layout to develop a pleasing, aesthetic presentation, then find someone with that expertise.

If you are willing to pay a tradesman hundreds of dollars an hour to repair something in your home, then why balk at investing in a graphic designer to win you the promotion that pays you thousands more a year? Once this is done, you can modify your new CV for other positions you are interested in.

In a nutshell: your CV must not only contain good information about yourself, it must have the “Wow!” factor.

If your hard copy is in a clip type folder, then you can be very flexible in developing a CV for any school. Fully bound folders don’t give you such flexibility.

## LET YOUR PERSONALITY SHINE THROUGH

Boards often complain that they struggle to gain an impression of the person behind the document.

Your personality certainly doesn’t come through if the CV is just a list of offices, responsibilities, and qualifications. Personalising your CV requires a change of mind-set so that part of the focus is about other people that you have helped – your employees, colleagues, and above all, your learners. This will do more to get your character and personality across than just about anything else. Read what follows with this concept in mind.

There are times when, despite your best efforts, your CV looks tired and you need to start from scratch. Take your time deciding what you want to include. One of the reasons many recruitment companies operate an application form is because applicants omitted important things from their CV. These could include teacher registration details – type [“full”], number [142568] and expiry date. Applicants even sometimes forget to include an email address. Provide your school and personal addresses as well as those of your referees.

## WHAT SHOULD BE IN MY CV?

There are many ideas about what should be included in a CV: qualifications, work history, professional development, philosophy and pedagogy, awards and honours, publications and presentations, professional strengths and personal attributes.

Feel free to create your own and find a point of difference. With regard to qualifications, you should be careful to provide the name of the qualification, the provider, and the year of graduation.

You should also be wary of claiming a qualification such as a diploma to be 'post graduate' when it might actually be an undergraduate diploma. Your diploma provider will be able to help.

## WORK HISTORY

Give details such as where you worked, your position, the years you were there, and very helpfully, the actual total time you were there. If you have gaps in your work history, then explain – overseas travel or parenthood are two common scenarios. Your work history should be easy to understand. If you are going for a principalship, then all positions under management may be consolidated so the focus is on your management experiences.

If your work history contains jobs outside teaching, then list them briefly, but provide information as to how these may have put you in good stead for the job you're applying for. You might say something like "this position gave me experience in analysing data" – the transfer of knowledge effect. Make your experiences outside of education count in your favour.

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Some applicants approach the professional development section of their CV by listing 20 years of courses, contracts, and seminars.

Applicants should try to prioritise this section, and less can indeed be more, if it allows you space to highlight the most significant development, and then describe the effect that it had on you and your school. Show the reader that your PD has an effect on children's learning. Make this section powerful rather than passive.

## ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Every CV has a section on roles and responsibilities, but again, this is a great opportunity to demonstrate that you have a finely tuned sense of proportion and can prioritise.

We do not need to know that 20 years ago you were in charge of first aid, for example. Every person reading a CV understands that certain jobs – such as a deputy principal – generally have certain roles and responsibilities, and it is OK to list 'the usual duties and responsibilities of a deputy principal', but then pick out the most significant to elaborate upon and tell the reader what you achieved in that role. Show that you made a difference. Excite the reader!

Over the past two decades, schools have been collecting and analysing achievement data on their learners. Every school now has, thanks to SMS, a tool to analyse data.

Given this, it is surprising how few applicants for any role use this information to show they have made a difference to their learners. It really stands out when principals who are interviewed can inform the panel as to how they have improved pupil performance, citing school research evidence while also making a connection between PD provided to teachers. This is truly compelling to an interview panel.

Every applicant regardless of role can have a section on “making a difference” – choose your own title. Be creative and make your CV stand out from the crowd with this section.

## REFEREES

Referees should be carefully selected for each position that you are applying for.

Two or three referees are appropriate, as long as they know how effective you are in your present position and can talk knowledgeably about you.

Giving more than three referees may give the impression that you can't prioritise – I have seen up to ten! You should provide full contact details for all referees. You should also inform them of the schools you are applying to, so they are prepared when an employer calls.

Referees would probably appreciate a copy of the application pack – and your CV – so they can ‘read’ themselves into the situation and be supportive of you. Everyone must think long term about their referees and keep them informed constantly about their achievements so they may be very assertive and spontaneous when they are in support on an application. The person who does your appraisal or who is your mentor is always a good choice to be selected as your referee.

## THE PERFECT JOB - FIVE THINGS TO THINK ABOUT:

- Don't chase jobs that aren't right for you.
- Create the perfect CV every single time for the job you are after.
- Write the CV for the person reading it not the person writing it.
- Be prepared to support anything in your CV with hard evidence at interview.
- Don't allow spelling mistakes, typos, or grammatical errors to mar your CV.