Tailoring CVs

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Maybe you've heard people talking about how you should tailor your CV each time you apply for a job, rather than simply sending out the same one. This is where this lecture comes in.

'Don't be afraid of having more than one CV.'

Tailoring CVs

'What? After all that work, you want me to rewrite my CV for every job I apply for? You have to be kidding.' I get it, it's natural to question putting yet more effort into your CV – after all, you have a life to lead outside of the job-hunting circus.

The first objection is that it takes more time. It's true, it does, but consider this: it's far more productive to put an extra hour or two into sending out three CVs that win you an interview than into ten that go straight to the delete folder.

Tailoring CVs

The second objection to tailoring is that if you churn out identical CVs you can send your application straight away and beat the competition. A high five to you for wanting to be quick off the mark, but a job hunt isn't a race. No recruiter puts the job advert out, sits waiting by their inbox, and then swoops on the first CV to arrive saying, 'Great! They were quick.

Tailoring CVs

The deadline for applications is there for a reason: to give everyone the chance to apply in a certain time frame so that the company can take a look at CVs in one go, or at least in a few batches.

So look on the positive side, because you're about to learn why tailoring is important. You'll also discover how to do it in the quickest and easiest way possible while still achieving excellent results.

Tailoring CVs

The reality is, you don't have to write an entirely fresh CV each time, you only need to tweak it. When you know what bits to adjust and how, it's not as hard as it sounds because there is a system.

Advantages of tailoring a cv

- The big one: you're more likely to be invited to an interview. In my crowdsourced research with recruiting companies, the number one reason for a CV being accepted or rejected was the presence or absence of relevant work history. That means you're more likely to succeed if you can present your work history so it links directly to the job you're applying for.

Advantages of tailoring a cv

- When a recruiter sees a CV that instantly connects to the job on offer, it's so much easier for them to say 'I'd like to see that person' than if they have to work out for themselves whether you'd be a good candidate for that particular role.
- It's easier for you to shine in an interview. Interviewers use your CV to give them a steer on what questions to ask, so when your CV is geared to a specific job they'll be questioning you about the areas you want them to focus on.

Considerations

- Some recruiters think that for people in the later stages of their career a tailored CV isn't necessary, as you're more likely to have built up experience in the sector you're applying to.
- If you have too many versions of your CV it can be confusing when you do the interview (which one did you send?).

How to tailor

How to tailor

From an employer's perspective, a situation has arisen in their organisation that means that a bundle of tasks and responsibilities must be taken up by someone. That special person must have the right mix of skills and talents to fill the role, together with an adaptable, trustworthy, and tenacious mindset.

Tailoring CVs

This is the bedrock of tailoring your CV: you need to show how you can do that particular job better than anyone else who applies for it. Let's look first at which CV elements to tailor (good news – you don't always need to do them all). They are your:

- Personal statement
- Work history
- Skills
- Work-related qualifications and training

Tailoring CVs

What's more, tailoring is a pretty simple, two-step process:

1. Research the company and the job, so you know exactly what they're looking for in a candidate
2. Adapt your CV to show why you're the right fit for the specific role on offer

Sleuthing made simple

Clues to what your recruiter is looking for in a CV are all around you, but to spot them you need to open your eyes and keep a clear head. Let's start first with what you can find out about the company or organisation you're applying to. Where could you look and what will you be seeking to discover?

Check out the company's website and take the time to read a few blog posts if it has any. Look at its values, which you'll usually find in its vision, mission, and CEO statements.

Sleuthing

What are the organisation's stated goals and purpose? How does it see itself contributing to the world? A company's social media updates can sometimes give you a more up-to-date and realistic picture of what it's like.

What's the tone? Is it informal, friendly, stuffy, or grandiose?

Make a note of any key words and phrases that crop up again and again. Now you can start digging deeper, by seeing if they have any press releases or news articles online.

Next

Ask around. Who do you know who works there? How about friends of friends? If you're stuck, social media platforms like Facebook and LinkedIn are great for finding out where people are employed (although you'll want to be mindful of privacy if you're keeping your job search secret).

Next

You can also take a squint at feedback by their staff on Glassdoor. Gleaning the inside track about the company from real people is a great help when tailoring your CV, and is also useful material for your interview.

PICKING APART THE JOB DESCRIPTION

Take a look at the job advert, and also the full job description if you have one (if not, call the company's HR department and ask if it's available – it often is). Give them a proper read, highlighting the words and phrases that seem important.

You'll want to concentrate on the job factors that are mentioned more than once, or that stand out to you. What skills and experience are they after? What does the job entail? Put these in your list.

PICKING APART THE JOB DESCRIPTION

Now you know a bit about what the company's like and have an understanding of how it sees the role, you're ten steps ahead of the other applicants already.

Next, find a way of moving it to the top of your CV, creating a new section for it if necessary. Be creative with this. If the key skills in demand are analytical problem solving and experience with spreadsheets, create a section at the top called 'Analytical problem solving and spreadsheet experience'.

PICKING APART THE JOB DESCRIPTION

So you've positioned the best bit at the top, where it's clearly visible. What do you do with the rest?

You give a new emphasis to the relevant areas of your CV by the way you word them.

For instance, if you currently work as a programmer and the job description says the ability to work in a team is important, add the fact that you work as part of a team of programmers into your role description. You could even highlight an achievement that you made as part of that team,

PICKING APART THE JOB DESCRIPTION

Here's a matching exercise to make it easier for you. Take a piece of paper, and on the left-hand side list the skills and experience you've identified as key from the job advert or description you're interested in.

On the right-hand side, list your own skills and experience, including soft, hard, and transferable skills. Focus on the top five, so it looks like this:

PICKING APART THE JOB DESCRIPTION

Job requirements experience

My skills and

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

PICKING APART THE JOB DESCRIPTION

Now draw a line from each job requirement to one or more of your own skills and experience. You'll notice some of the latter have more than one line ending up at them, and others none at all.

The ones with lots of lines are the ones you want to highlight on your tailored CV. Here's an example of a person who's currently a salesperson in a clothing chain store, applying for a job as a sales trainer in an electronics retailer:

Requirements

Job requirements   My skills and experience

1. Communication skills   1. Five years' experience in sales

2. Understanding of sales process   2. Great at developing a quick rapport

3. Knowledge of electronics   3. Energetic and enthusiastic

4. PowerPoint skills   4. Understands the fashion business

Tailoring

Guess which skills and experience will go at the top of their CV? It'll be sales experience and the ability to develop a rapport with people quickly and easily.

The ability to motivate themselves could also go in there as a subsidiary quality. The other job requirements are those they can't demonstrate so easily, but these skills can be learned, so they could emphasise their willingness to develop knowledge about new areas elsewhere in their CV.

Fundamentals of tailoring

Fundamentals of tailoring

So you understand the principles behind tailoring your CV, but how do you do it without looking like you're parroting the job advert? You use the relevant skills and experience you picked out above to prove it. Here are some examples of how you can do this.

<u>They want someone who's 'innovative'.</u> Everyone's come up with something new and different at some point or other, so think broadly around this.

How to

For instance:

- Came up with a new way of storing stock in the warehouse so everyone could reach things more easily
- Increased sales by 6 per cent when I reorganised the store layout more efficiently
- Suggested a new team structure to manager, which reduced staff turnover
- Key words to use: idea, came up with, suggested, innovated, created

How to

They want a 'self-starter'. Highlight the times you've motivated yourself to achieve something of value without being asked, or when you've worked well on your own. Make it clear that you don't need to be managed on a daily basis, and that you enjoy setting yourself challenges rather than having them set for you.

How to

For instance:

- Set up a system to alert customers when new stock arrived
- Created a marketing plan for a product launch without being asked
- Offered to contribute to the organisational newsletter

How to

They want a 'team player'. Point out the occasions when you've worked well with other people to achieve a worthwhile result.

For instance:

- Worked with IT department to create voucher scanning system which increased sales by 12 per cent
- Teamed up with colleagues to organise first departmental social

How to

- Collaborated with finance team to set budgets for the next year
- Key words to use: joined, collaborated, worked with, participated, contributed

The Power of Words

The Power of Words

We've touched on specific words and phrases in passing so far, but it's time to look at them in more detail. You'll have picked up by now that it's not just the facts of the job that you need to look at, but the words the company chooses to describe it.

The Power of Words

When you mirror the most important words a recruiter uses to outline the role in your CV, the person reading it will have two simultaneous reactions. One is conscious ('She can obviously do the job') and the other subconscious ('There's something about this person I trust'). Your choice of words has a powerful effect.

The Robot Factor

There's another implication for your choice of words, which you probably haven't thought of yet, especially if you haven't applied for a job in a few years. It's how to make your CV friendly to an Applicant Tracking System (ATS).

Like it (and believe it) or not, the first scan of your CV may not be by human eyes, but by a computer programme.

The Robot Factor

This isn't the case for every recruiter, but with many jobs receiving hundreds of applications, it's become a necessity for some companies to sort the wheat from the chaff in an automated way.

Most recruiters are well versed in ATS software and know how to use it to search for the best candidates. They use what are called Boolean searches to do this.