CV CHECKLIST

7 QUESTIONS TO ASK

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YOUR CV IS YOUR GOLDEN TICKET

When it comes to global development recruitment, the hiring process is often complicated and very competitive. Recruiters receive hundreds — sometimes thousands — of applications for positions. So how can you stand out and make an all-important first impression?

According to development careers experts, CVs still serve as the golden ticket to getting into the "yes pile" for job opportunities. To help job seekers do just that, we've compiled this CV checklist, featuring insights from professional development writer Kathryn Harper and various recruiters from leading development organizations. Our aim is to ensure that your skills and experience are presented properly in your next job application.

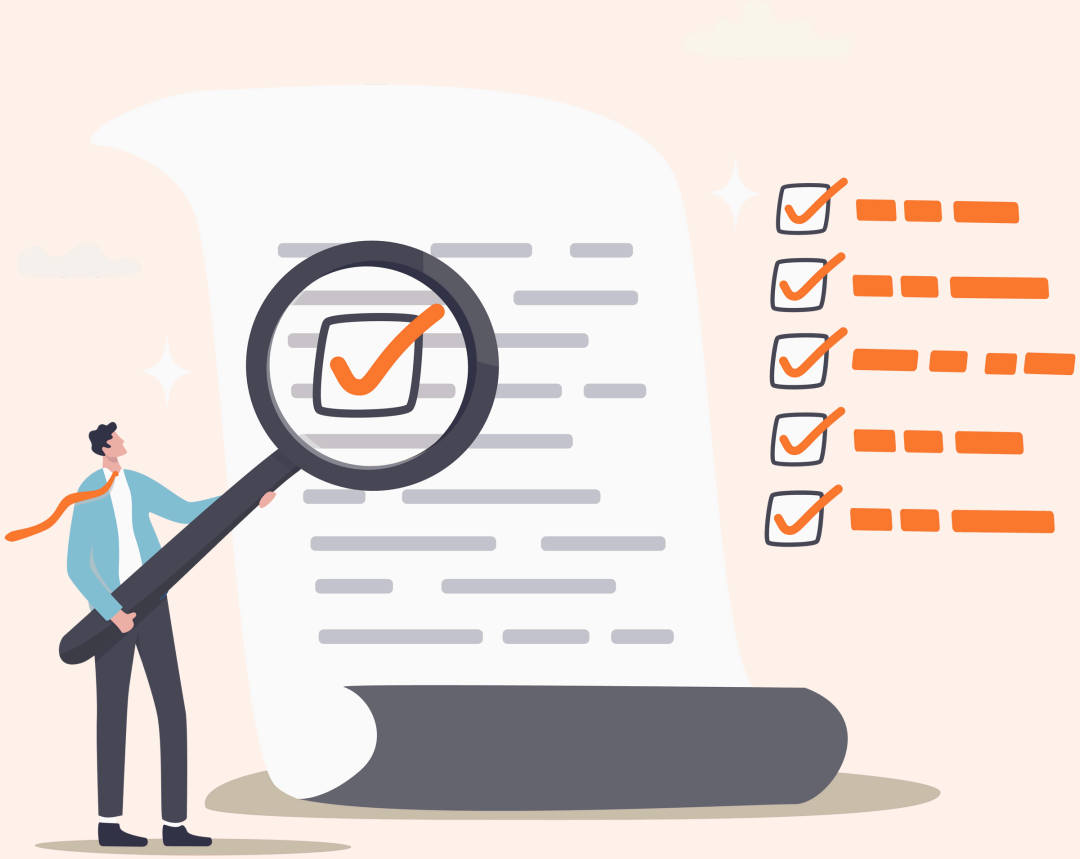


1. ARE YOU USING THE RIGHT FORMAT?

The first thing to check is whether you're using the right format, which should depend on whether you are a consultant or a full-time staffer. There are similarities between consulting CVs and ones used to apply for staff positions, but consulting CVs should have more emphasis on subject matter expertise and quantifiable achievements.

WHAT TO DO:

For consultants, Harper recommends using a topical or functional CV format rather than a chronological approach. This way, "you're grouping together all your areas of expertise … [and] the length of time you've been doing that work to convey that you … have this expertise and that you're bringing this expertise to the organization," she says.



Watch: What a standout consulting CV looks like

2. IS IT TAILORED TO THE POSITION?

Failing to align your CV to the position and organization you are applying for is a common mistake. Prasun Chakraborty, UN Women's director of human resources, also advises candidates not to use a generic CV and says it's clear to a recruiter when a candidate has put in extra effort and time.

WHAT TO DO:

Instead of using the same CV for different opportunities, candidates should "really invest in preparing a good application and understanding the job description," Chakraborty says. Maria Chaney, a former staffing specialist with Tetra Tech, suggests that by revising and tailoring their CVs to the position, candidates can use keywords and better highlight their relevant experience.

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"[The candidate] has to make a compelling case and not have one standard CV for everything they apply [to]. Then you actually see that this person is really interested, is motivated."

Prasun Chakraborty
Director of human resources, UN Women

3. ARE YOU USING KEYWORDS?

With just a few minutes to scan each CV, recruiters look for keywords that quickly convey a candidate's expertise in a specific area. Whether an organization first vets an application using an automated computer system or screens every application manually, keywords play a critical role in whether a candidate moves to the next round.

WHAT TO DO:

Several recruiters, including UNDP's Andersen, suggest using the job description of the role you're applying to as a guide for determining which words should be incorporated. "If we say 'lead,' 'facilitate,' 'communicate' … refer to some of the keywords from the job description in your application. Because when we are screening applications, we also look for these keywords and you have to make an application that stands out," Andersen says.

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"If you are applying for a role within [gender-based violence] and you don't mention the word GBV anywhere in your CV, it's unlikely that you will be selected even though you have the right skill set."

Peder Apall-Olsen
Former head of recruitment and development unit, Norwegian Refugee Council

4. ARE YOUR ACHIEVEMENTS CLEAR?

Harper often sees “an over-reliance on using one's job description as a CV” with the candidates she works with. She emphasizes that a CV and a job description “are two different things, and never the two shall meet,” Harper said. The job description of a role is “What you were hired to do. Your CV is what you actually are doing, and what you're achieving, and what impacts you're achieving at what outcomes you're achieving,” she explained.

WHAT TO DO:

Be mindful of whether your CV reads too much like the job description you were hired to do. If so, think about what you accomplished in the role, and what the impact of your work had. “Be specific about your achievements. Don't just write what you were responsible for or your general tasks. What concretely did you achieve?,” says Loksan Harley, co-founder of Impact Consulting Hub.



5. ARE YOU QUANTIFYING YOUR ACHIEVEMENTS?

Once you have achievements that are worth highlighting, it's time to harness the power of numbers, which Harper says is the way to bulletproof your CV. "Numbers cannot be argued with in a résumé [or] CV. They convey scope and scale like nothing else." You don't want to "leave your reader guessing because they're gonna guess wrong," Harper adds.

WHAT TO DO:

As a guiding example, Harper says to think of a pharmacist or medical professional who may write on a CV that they worked with doctors and nurses and have administered vaccines. A recruiter might wonder, "how many doctors, how many nurses, how many customers? What size is your vaccine inventory? … these little numbers … can really paint a strong picture of what you do," Harper says.

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"Being able to quantify as much as you can, whether it's multigeography, population served, if you know how much the project is being funded by who and by how much, those types of things give you a distinguishing position."

Kathryn Harper
Professional development writer

6. ARE YOU CONNECTING THE DOTS?

Especially if you're looking to transition into the development sector, it's imperative that you present existing experience that may not appear relevant on the surface in a way that clearly shows why it is. This is key to compensating for aspects of a development background that you may lack.

WHAT TO DO:

As a guiding example, Harper talks of a client who is a lawyer looking to break into development. "When you hear 'attorney,' most people think 'litigator' ... they can think 'adversarial.' [But] the vast majority of attorneys never go to court; are not litigators, but they're advocates, ... they're mediators, they're negotiators, and these are the skills surrounding that profession that we highlight to show a potential employer that those skills are equally important as a chief operating officer."



7. IS YOUR CV TOO LONG?

Unlike other sectors that generally follow a one-page rule, the length of a development CV can vary. Most experts agree that 2-3 pages is an appropriate target length, but it depends on the relevance of your experience. “A great two-pager with specific keywords matching those of the job description will stand out over a five-page CV every time,” says Lorene Kuraishi-van Haalen, NORCAP’s senior recruitment and communications adviser.

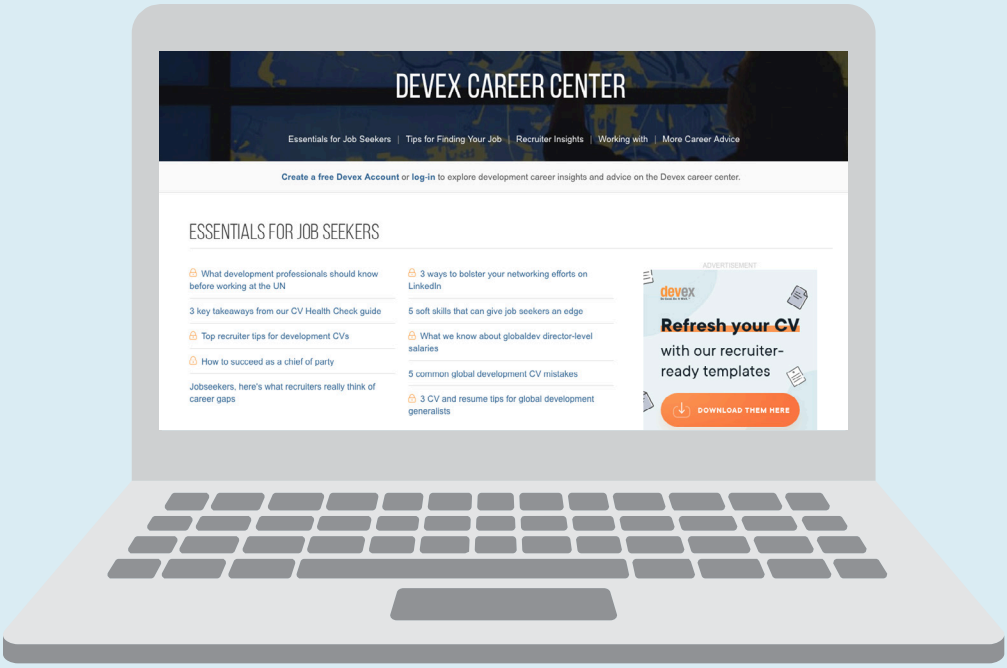
WHAT TO DO:

Review your CV and compare it closely to the job description of the role you’re applying to. If an achievement or work experience is not relevant, you should strongly consider removing it from your CV for this application. It’s helpful to have one master CV that contains all of your experience to select from as you tailor a shorter, focused CV for each of the roles you’re applying for.

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“Your story should be as long as it needs to be, as long as it's compelling.”

Kathryn Harper
Professional development writer



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