



UNIVERSITY OF OTAGO
**Career
Development
Centre**
Te Pokapū Umanga

CV and Cover Letter Guide



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Check out OtagoCareerHub for further resources, making appointments with Career Advisers, and booking into workshops, job database etc. <http://otagocareerhub.ac.nz/careers>

CV PROCESS FLOW DIAGRAM

GET TO GRIPS with the basics	Attend workshop – book on OtagoCareerHub Read this CV guide
RESEARCH	Research the company/organisation Thoroughly review job description (find this on employer’s website or advertisement) and identify the key points the employer is looking for
BRAINSTORM what you’ve got to offer	List achievements (academic & other) Experience (paid and unpaid) & skills gained Personal qualities Qualifications Interests
MATCH	Match your brainstorm with the employer requirements Give evidence to back your skills profile – check employer expectations in this guide (page 6) Approach your referees
DRAFT	Draft CV & Cover Letter
REVIEW	Self-Review using checklist in this guide (page 13)
CHECK!	Get someone else to check your CV, spelling and layout You can book a CV check through OtagoCareerHub See details on Events section in OtagoCareerHub for helpful workshops

WHAT NEEDS TO BE IN MY CV – ESSENTIAL

NAME

CONTACT DETAILS

- Professional email address and phone number. Avoid unnecessary details such as date of birth (unless asked for)
- Address of other professional accounts, such as LinkedIn

QUALIFICATIONS/EDUCATION

- List most recent first with qualifications written in full e.g. Bachelor of Science
- Put emphasis on the qualification rather than the provider
- Highlight your dissertation or thesis (no more than a couple of lines)
- If requested, attach an academic transcript

EXPERIENCE/WORK EXPERIENCE/EMPLOYMENT/VOLUNTARY/PROJECT WORK HISTORY

- Include community or voluntary work as well as study and paid work for evidence (or use a separate heading for these)
- List most recent first
- Indicate whether full or part-time, temporary or permanent positions
- Show position title, employer’s name, location, dates you were employed
- Include details of relevant skills used and achievements
- Think value-added outcomes
- Use action verbs and past tense

INTERESTS/ACTIVITIES

- Limit interests/activities to recent/current ones
- Provide some details so the reader can find out a bit more about you as a person
- Business or research interests

REFEREES

- See page 4

LENGTH OF CV

- For New Zealand and Australian graduate CVs – 2 pages is enough (employers don’t have time to read your life story)
- Requirements for overseas employers CVs can vary. Research country specific practices online. See GoInGlobal (access via OtagoCareerHub or Career Development Centre website).

CLEAN TIDY PRESENTATION

- Use standard fonts and black text
- All text is aligned
- Clear white space with the use of bullet points for easy scan-reading

MY CV – OPTIONAL**CAREER OBJECTIVE/PERSONAL SUMMARY/PERSONAL STATEMENT**

- Useful if your degree appears to be different to the job or field for which you are applying
- Good when applying for a scholarship
- A concise overview of you as a professional - past/present/future
- What role you are looking for and why
- Should be at the beginning to focus the CV and capture attention
- Provides a 'snapshot' of you, before you follow with the skills sections to give evidence, see page 6-11

PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES

- Use quotes sparingly from written references to provide evidence of personal qualities

SCHOLARSHIPS/AWARDS

- Put on first page if they are relevant
- For organisations that prize academic excellence include your prizes, scholarships and awards

TRAINING/PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Include short courses and skills development

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

- Include the professional memberships you subscribe to if these are required for the role e.g. Practising Certificates for health professionals

PUBLICATIONS/CONFERENCES

- Essential for academic positions, see page 14

PHOTO

- Not usually recommended, however, some employers request a photo
- If you include one, make sure it shows you as a professional
- Can remind the person who you are if you've met previously e.g. at employer presentations

hot tip

"Qualifications and academic results are important, but employers are also interested in other aspects of your experience and character. For example, at Kensington Swan, we look favourably on team work, community involvement, work experience and responsibilities, and extracurricular achievements."

HR Advisor, Kensington Swan

REFEREES

One of your referees needs to be someone who can comment on what you have done most recently. So, if you are still at university, or have recently graduated, it is usual to name one of your professors, Head of Department, lecturers, demonstrators or tutors as a referee.

The other referee should be someone who knows you well, ideally in a work capacity; an alternative is someone who has known you for a long time. It is important to choose someone who will speak positively about you.

Employers usually follow up referees to back up the opinion they have formed from your cover letter, application form, CV and job interview. Referees can also corroborate details supplied by the applicant.

Remember to ask permission of your referees before including their names in your CV. Then keep them well informed about you, your career aspirations, applications and activities. It is equally okay to state 'referees available upon request'.

When listing your referees, you must provide their name, title, the name of the organisation where you both worked, email address, and phone numbers (preferably both direct dial and mobile).

hot tips

Avoid using “ability to” statements – instead show you have done it. By using action words (in the past tense to show you have “done” it) to convey your examples (see our list provided page 10). Having the theory is great but employers are interested in how you have applied the learning

Most employers prefer bullets and snappy action statements

EMPLOYER EXPECTATIONS: WHAT THEY WANT AND HOW TO DELIVER

Organisations recruiting at Otago have given feedback to the Career Development Centre. They say:

know us	Research the company by attending their presentations, checking out their website, reading their company profiles and reports, talking to people working in the company, and reading thoroughly the graduate recruitment info provided by the job description.
tailor your CV	One size does not fit all. Make your CV specific to the job you are applying for. Many employers comment that the CVs they receive are not relevant to their company. Watch the cut and paste - some employers commented on reading a letter obviously written for another company whose name appeared throughout! Easy to do when you are in a hurry, but just as easy to put in the bin!
follow instructions	Do what they ask you to do. If they ask for a photo, supply one (but one which shows you as a professional, not as a party animal). If there is an application form provided which asks you to repeat what you have already included in your CV, answer the question – don't write “See CV”. If you can't supply the information, say why.
express yourself accurately	Check grammar, punctuation and spelling. Mistakes create a bad impression and will likely have your CV go no further. Many employers tell us while they don't want long CVs, too brief is just as bad. It must give a picture of you and your skills, not provide the reader with a “find the missing skills” puzzle.
easy to read	Presentation is important and employers expect a professional document. Use a clean, easy-to-read font, no smaller than 11 point. Most prefer the straightforward approach with good use of headings, subheadings and bullet points. However, creative jobs may demand a CV that demonstrates what you can do.
check your image	Google yourself. What will the employer learn about you from your on-line presence? Edit your accounts if needed. Use a professional looking email address. If you haven't got a LinkedIn profile, now is a good time to create one.
write to a person	It can take time to find out to whom to address the letter, but it's worthwhile. It shows you are prepared to go that bit further in what you do. This is doubly important when the job involves building relationships with clients.
tailor your cover letter	In your cover letter, tell them how you match their requirements and the benefits you would bring to the company. This is your chance to highlight your qualifications and other work experience that has provided the skills and competencies for which the employer is looking. Remember to read the job advertisement and job description carefully. Your cover letter should be no more than one page.
why us	In your cover letter, say why you want this particular job and why you want to work for this particular company. Show you have done your research (but don't just copy and paste from their website).
be enthusiastic	Academic study is objective and analytical. You can get so used to writing for academic requirements, you can forget how to enthuse - human beings respond to some warmth. The reader of your cover letter and CV is trying to get a picture of what kind of a person you are, your motivation and your story.
email friendly	Send your CV by email in a common file type such as docx. See Electronic/Online applications, page 20.
sign it	We are so used to word processing documents, it's easy to overlook the signature. Again, this is not a good look if you want to be an accountant or lawyer! If emailing your letter, use a different type font (maybe in colour) for the signature.

hot tip

Many students forget the CV is their first chance to show what they can do. If you want a job as a communicator or marketer, then this is your chance! Don't tell them you have an eye for detail while your CV has a silly mistake. If you want an IT or a design position, think about how you can utilise the very skills you want an employer to pay you for!

EMPLOYER EXPECTATIONS: WHAT SKILLS ARE VALUED IN A CV

Top 10 Skills/Attributes Sought After in University Graduates

Rank	The ten most valuable skills in 2020 ¹	The ten most valuable skills in 2018 ²
1	Complex Problem-solving	Problem-solving
2	Critical Thinking	Teamwork
3	Creativity	Communication
4	People Management	Adaptability
5	Coordinating with others	Data Analysis
6	Emotional Intelligence	Resilience
7	Judgement and Decision-making	Organisation
8	Service Orientation	Technical skills
9	Negotiation skills	Creativity
10	Cognitive flexibility	Leadership

1. 2019 The World Economic Forum reports that you need the ten skills listed to thrive in 2020
2. 2019 NZHerald The QS Global Employer Survey 2018

hot tips

"As we have seen in recent times, it is getting more competitive for students to secure jobs. Therefore it is more important than ever that your CV really captures your skills and experience and helps you to stand out from the crowd. With employers like KPMG you are competing with hundreds of students from all over the country so a badly written or poorly presented CV would certainly prevent you from being short-listed. My advice? Use all the careers services resources available to help you get it right."
Senior HR Manager, People, Performance & Culture, KPMG

"I find that students quite often use university jargon in their CVs. This makes perfect sense to you, but often the employer doesn't understand what you are referring to." Human Resources, Mainfreight Ltd

"We look for a cover letter that gives a brief overview of skills and why you want this position and/or to work for this company. We are looking for a clearly set out CV. Most importantly, remember to run a spell check and check the company name is spelt correctly."
HR/Administration Manager, ADInstruments Ltd

IDEAS FOR RESPONDING TO SKILLS CRITERIA

1. INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

Interpersonal, social or soft skills determine the style of interaction you have with others as well as how you typically behave within given situations. Employers like to know that you are able to effectively interact and build relationships and networks by sharing information and ideas, demonstrating empathy, negotiating with or influencing others appropriately.

evidence

Relationships with peers, co-workers; supervisors, managers; clients; patients or customers; and how you have handled difficult customers or working relationships successfully

2. VERBAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Communication includes listening, engaging in dialogue, giving feedback, cooperating as a team member, solving problems, contributing in meetings and resolving conflict by communicating effectively with others.

evidence

Effective presentations to groups; interactions with customers; explaining complex ideas in a simple way; awards in public speaking; debating experience; student radio

3. WRITTEN COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Employers value clear writing, good grammar and correct spelling. It is especially desirable in jobs which demand an eye for detail.

evidence

Report writing; well-constructed essays; ability to write a good business letter; presenting and communicating scientific results; publications; club newsletters; articles for student newspapers; conference posters; research grant applications

4. FLEXIBLE & ADAPTABLE – “CAN DO” ATTITUDE

Employers want people who are prepared to ‘give it a go’, who are willing to go the extra mile and are not confined by ‘it’s not in my job description’ attitude.

evidence

Times when you’ve learnt new systems; studying or working overseas particularly in very different cultures; summer jobs which required a range of skills; shift work; taking on extra responsibility; range of subjects taken (double degree can illustrate this); overcoming a personal obstacle you are prepared to mention; solutions you have come up with to problems presented in a work setting or as part of your studies

5. SOUND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

Many employers ask for your academic transcript. While they are interested in your performance, they are also often looking for qualities that show a well-rounded person. So, don’t despair if you are not a straight A student.

evidence

Grade average; consistent performance across subjects and years; recovering from a poor year; coherent choice of papers; dissertation or thesis; conference papers and posters; publications; highlight a project you or the team received a good mark for; tutoring experience; awards, scholarships and academic prizes

6. SELF-MOTIVATED, SELF-MANAGEMENT

Employers are often impressed by students who work as well as study. This means you understand the world of work and can balance university deadlines with work responsibilities.

evidence

List your work experience and highlight skills relevant to the position you are applying for; provide an example of promotion (i.e. responsibility for organising others, or teaching newcomers in your casual job); sole responsibility positions (i.e. being left in charge of the store in weekends); managing finances to support yourself while at university

7. TEAM PLAYER / TEAM WORK

Ability to be a co-operative, supportive, reliable and a committed team member.

evidence

Group projects with successful outcomes; customer service teams; sports; leisure activities; use words like “committed” “cooperative”; times when you took initiative to get the team back on track; voluntary work; holiday jobs

8. ENERGY & ENTHUSIASM

You can have an academic record to die for, but if you sound boring in your letter and your CV shows very few outside activities, employers may think you lack people skills and would not fit well into their team.

evidence

Convey enthusiasm for the company and the role by using positive language in your cover letter; evidence might include your contribution to increasing sales; customers seeking you out specifically; public speaking; extracurricular activities; peer support; residential assistant experience; club and sport activities

9. PROBLEM SOLVING SKILLS

Thinking differently to produce new solutions.

evidence

Lateral thinking i.e. looking at a problem from differing perspectives; conflict resolution in group work; case study recommendations; initiatives adopted by employer in holiday jobs; successful application of evidence experimental method; experimental design; testing and proving hypotheses; systems design or redesign; improvements to existing methods or structures

10. ANALYTICAL, CONCEPTUAL AND RESEARCH SKILLS

Understanding, analysing, reasoning, interpreting and presenting information and/or data, and the ability to think critically.

evidence

Provide the range of research methodologies you have used; include projects, case-studies; mention the dissertation or thesis you are writing; recommendations you have made as part of course work; interpreting figures, charts, graphs, tables; critical thinking, manipulation of data and results; reporting and writing up of experiments; literature searches and reviews

11. PROFESSIONAL ETHICS

A situation where the opportunity to be unethical exists but sticking to professional standards which you considered ethical.

evidence

Times when you were responsible for handling cash or cashing up; responsible tenant, trained staff, confidentiality with personal or sensitive information, resisted pressure or temptation, treasurer or other committee member, involvement with Ethical Behaviour Committee or standing up for others in difficult situations, residential assistance activities or involvement as a class representative

12. CREATIVE / INNOVATIVE

New ways of looking at things and coming up with new ideas, theories, concepts, methods and designs.

evidence

Design and innovation of new products or processes for a project or as part of your course work; creative visualising; conflict resolution in interpersonal activities; products designed; solutions to problems; case study recommendations; prizes or acknowledgement for bright ideas

13. TECHNICAL EXPERTISE

This is the depth or leverage you bring from your degree and/or experience directly related to the job requirements. This may be IT, dentistry, marketing, accounting, genetics, chemistry, languages etc. If you're an IT/ Computer major this section should be visible on the front page, and for once you are encouraged to use jargon – to show exactly what you can do.

evidence

If your degree does not have a vocational focus, your technical expertise will be critical thinking, data manipulation techniques, reliable field work and data recording, writing skills, database/software skills. Provide examples of the specifics of what you have done in your course work; methodologies, tools and techniques used, software and equipment involved; practical projects especially if done for a real business

14. LEADERSHIP / INITIATIVE

Employers are looking for people who have foresight and can be proactive. Work is frequently carried out in autonomous, self-directed teams so employers need people who don't require constant supervision.

evidence

Team leadership including sports; being chosen to represent a group; promotion in holiday jobs; delivering to targets; goal setting; possibly include a career objective which shows you are heading towards responsibility; include the results or outcomes of what you have achieved.

15. ORGANISING / PLANNING

Employers are expecting more from fewer staff and limited resources. Being able to organise and prioritise your time is essential. Today's workplace requires managing multiple projects at any given time.

evidence

Any projects you have taken from beginning to successful conclusion; membership of club committees; events organised; time management of study work and outside activities

16. COMPUTER LITERACY

Most employers expect that you have basic workplace computer literacy. If the job description indicates any specific computer skills needed for the role, include evidence of this in your work experience

evidence

Highlight software and programmes you have used during your studies, in holiday jobs or placements; list programmes you have used (Word, Excel) and any specialist software e.g. Toniq, Xero; include internet research; building and manipulating databases; desktop publishing, scanning and layout work; web development and maintenance

17. BUSINESS ACUMEN / COMMERCIAL AWARENESS

Often employers like to know you are not a novice when it comes to understanding customer service, competition, and managing resources, and have experienced (or at least understand) the pressures of running a business.

evidence

Working to sales targets; cash handling experience; reading a balance sheet; starting up or running own small business; applied project work; holiday jobs where you worked in an office; enterprise scheme at school; participation in stock market; attending business or industry specific network meetings; including a referee who is a business person; being raised in a family of entrepreneurs or small business; treasurer for clubs and societies

18. TREATY OF WAITANGI

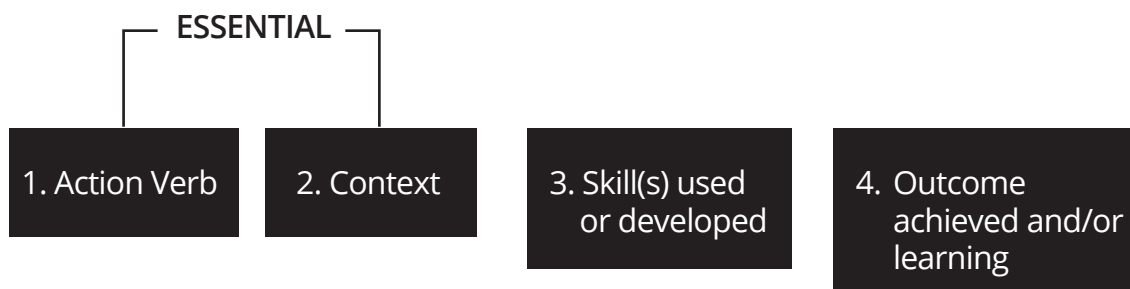
Public sector, Iwi enterprises and educational organisations are very keen to find out what you know about biculturalism and Treaty obligations.

evidence

Mention papers which have covered resource implications of the Treaty; Māori language and culture papers studied; participation in bicultural awareness seminars or workshops; include whakapapa and/or iwi affiliations when appropriate

PRESENTING YOUR EVIDENCE

The following is a useful way to present evidence of your skills (as bullet points under your work experience/the relevant heading).

**Example:**

Led a team of five students to develop the online marketing strategy for a local start-up. This required strong leadership and collaboration skills to manage the overview of the project and build an effective working relationship with the client company. The new marketing strategy resulted in a 25% increase in sales.

hot tips

"Your CV needs to convince an employer that your skills, experience, and personal style are relevant to the position you're applying for."
HR Advisor, Kensington Swan

LIST OF ACTION VERBS

Achievement Skills

accomplished
achieved
awarded
commended
established
expanded
implemented
improved
increased
initiated
overcame
procured
produced
raided
received
secured
set up
succeeded

Clerical or Detail Skills

approved
arranged
catalogued
checked
classified
collated
collected
compiled
corrected
detailed
dispatched
distributed
documented
enforced
executed
expanded
filed
generated
implemented
inspected
located
managed
monitored
operated
ordered
organised
placed
prepared
processed
purchased
reconciled
recorded
reduced
reported
retrieved
revamped
screened
sorted
specialised

streamlined
systematised
tabulated
transcribed
typed
updated
utilised
validated

Communication Skills

addressed
advertised
answered
arbitrated
arranged
authored
communicated
composed
conducted
contacted
corresponded
developed
directed
discussed
disseminated
drafted
edited
encouraged
explained
expressed
formulated
influenced
interpreted
lectured
mediated
moderated
motivated
narrated
negotiated
persuaded
presented
promoted
proposed
published
recommended
recruited
reported
solicited
spoke
supplied
translated
transmitted
wrote

Thinking & Cognitive Skills

adapted
applied
balanced
conceived

conceptualised
created
derived
developed
discriminated
generated
improvised
integrated
memorised
perceived
recognised
researched
synthesized
theorised
updated
visualised

Creative Skills

acted
composed
conceived
conceptualised
conducted
created
danced
designed
developed
devised
directed
drafted
drew
edited
entertained
established
expressed
fashioned
filmed
founded
illustrated
imagined
initiated
instituted
integrated
introduced
invented
learnt
mapped
mastered
modelled
operated
originated
performed
photographed
planned
presented
published
revitalised
sang
styled
taped
wrote

Financial Skills

administered
allocated
analysed
appraised
audited
balanced
calculated
computed
costed
developed
doubled
estimated
evaluated
forecast
managed
marketed
planned
prepared
priced
programmed
projected
purchased
reduced
researched
reviewed
revised

Helping Skills

advised
appointed
assessed
assisted
cared
clarified
coached
contributed
conveyed
counselled
demonstrated
diagnosed
educated
empathised
engaged
escorted
expedited
facilitated
familiarised
guided
liaised
listened
mediated
motivated
nursed
participated
provided
raised
referred
rehabilitated
related
represented

resolved
restored
served
serviced
sympathised
trained
understood
utilised
volunteered

Leadership Skills

arbitrated
chaired
confronted
directed
guided
initiated
inspired
led
managed
mediated
motivated
negotiated
organised
recruited

Learning Skills

acquired
appreciated
attained
assessed
combined
commenced
committed
discovered
estimated
evaluated
expanded
experienced
exposed
familiarised
gained
graduated
grasped
learnt
observed
obtained
perceived
progressed
recognised
scanned
sized

Management Skills

administered
analysed
appointed
approved
assigned
attained

authorised built chaired commissioned consolidated contracted controlled coordinated dealt delegated designated designed developed directed employed enforced evaluated executed fired hired improved increased initiated issued maintained managed ordered organised oversaw planned prioritised produced programmed projected recommended reviewed scheduled selected strengthened supervised	<p>People Skills</p> <p>appointed assessed assigned built conducted counselled employed engaged enlisted formed graded guided liaised managed mediated motivated negotiated provided recruited related selected screened stimulated</p> <p>Problem-solving Skills</p> <p>advised applied arranged changed converted determined eliminated furnished grasped handled identified implemented</p>	<p>initiated modified proposed pursued rectified refrained repaired replaced resolved restored reviewed revised saved streamlined studied subcontracted submitted supplied</p> <p>Research Skills</p> <p>analysed assessed clarified classified collated collected compiled critiqued diagnosed dissected enquired evaluated examined extracted hypothesized identified inspected interpreted interviewed investigated</p>	<p>learned observed organised prepared recognised re-evaluated researched resourced reviewed revised studied summarised surveyed systematised</p> <p>Teaching Skills</p> <p>adapted administered advised briefed clarified coached communicated coordinated counselled designed developed empowered enabled encouraged evaluated explained facilitated guided helped informed initiated instructed lectured listened</p>	<p>organised persuaded planned prepared set goals stimulated taught trained tutored utilised</p> <p>Technical Skills</p> <p>applied assembled built calculated coded computed constructed designed devised engineered fabricated installed machined made maintained manufactured modified operated overhauled programmed rebuilt remodelled repaired replaced solved tested trained upgraded wired</p>
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hot tip

"Take a moment to think about all the skills you have acquired and experiences you have had and how these might link to the opportunity you are wanting. They don't necessarily have to be in the same realm in order to show you have skills and experience that would make you an asset. For example, if you were to apply at Chapman Tripp, having worked in a café/supermarket/dairy etc. means you would have needed to hone your skills around customer service and building rapport; two exceptionally useful and important skills required to work with internal and external clients. In a nutshell, think broadly on **all** the things you've done and qualities you have that make you **you** and how they could make you a great fit for that workplace/role."

Graduate Talent Acquisition Specialist, Chapman Tripp

PRESENTING YOUR RELEVANT EXPERIENCE

If you have experiences that are relevant to your field, you can choose to 'package' these together in a section on the front page of your CV, separating them out from your overall experience. This can increase the impact of your CV by immediately showing the employer you already have experience in the field and are a potentially strong candidate. (Remember that on average, employers only spend a few seconds deciding whether it is worth reading your CV, so make it easy for them).

For this section, choose a relevant and/or industry-based heading (e.g. Marketing Experience, or Food Industry Experience, etc.) This section could include:

- Part-time or holiday work
- Internship experience
- Volunteer or community experience
- Your own part-time business venture
- Any relevant project or research work from your studies
- Any specific technical skills or qualifications

This is not always possible, but if you already have a range of experiences and skills in your field, then it is an effective way of quickly and clearly showcasing this. For example, if you are studying Food Science, then you could choose to have a heading 'Food Industry Experience' on the front page of your CV that brings together any of the above that is relevant to this sector.

If you arrange your CV like this, then you would follow this section with an 'Other Work Experience' where you present those other things you have done that are not specifically relevant to your field but are still good evidence of your work ethic and transferable/people skills.

PERSONAL STATEMENT/CAREER OBJECTIVE/PROFESSIONAL PROFILE ON YOUR CV

The first thing to know is that a personal statement (or whatever you choose to call it) is optional. Often the template you have selected will start with a statement of some kind – this does not mean that you HAVE to have one on your CV. You could remove it altogether and get more of your qualifications and relevant work experience/skills onto the front page.

If you are required to submit a separate personal statement (essay) or respond to a number of questions in the online application process, then you may also find that a statement on your CV is unnecessary.

Many people find these statements hard to write. They often end up repeating information or wording from their cover letter or CV, or write a statement full of generic wording e.g. 'I am a highly motivated, hardworking graduate with a strong desire to help people'. This adds nothing to your application and can downgrade the impact of your application in the eyes of employers and recruiters. Ask yourself; could your friend or classmate write the same words on their CV? If the answer is 'yes', then your statement is not individual enough.

One approach to help you decide whether to use a statement is to write your CV and cover letter first. Then see if there is anything else you wish to include in your application that could be communicated through an effective statement. If you do decide you need a statement, then think about what you want to call it. Is it actually a personal statement? Or might it be more professional to call it something else e.g. career statement or profile? Remembering that the top of the front page of your CV is where you hold the reader's attention most. Have you made good use of this precious space with a strong, effective, individual statement?

Some situations where a statement can be of real advantage to you:

- Where you are submitting your CV without a cover letter (e.g. following up on a conversation). In this case, your statement should cover the key aspects of a cover letter – why you want the position and your strengths/points of difference for the role.
- Where you need to explain a change of career direction, gap in study, unusual path or circumstances
- Where you can use the space to clearly state your points of difference

Your statement should be unique, to the point and effective. Make it clear who you are, what you are looking for, your specific goals and/or your ambitions for the future. Tailor your statement to the employer and what they are looking for, and always include data/evidence to back up your claims.

hot tips

Remember that your statement is about you in the context of this specific application – your greatest strength may be your saxophone playing, but it's unlikely to be relevant here. Only include relevant material.

Get someone to read it over to see how it flows and/or if you have addressed the key points. You could make an appointment with a Career Adviser at the Career Development Centre to do this.

Less is more. Reviewers have to read lots of these things; the concise and succinct ones will make an impression, but the rambling and incoherent ones will too!

Does it convey a sense of you? The exercise is trying to get a sense of you as an individual and your motivation for the field/organisation/position. Tell them, honestly, why you want it, what your driving force is.

OPTIMISE YOUR CV FOR APPLICANT TRACKING SYSTEMS

WHAT IS AN APPLICANT TRACKING SYSTEM?

An applicant tracking system (ATS) is a software application that is primarily used to help hiring companies collect and organise large numbers of applicants. Instead of reviewing each and every application, the recruiter can focus squarely on candidates the ATS has identified as a strong match. The applicant pool is narrowed down by searching for key words such as job titles, or qualifications, required skills, as well as other information like former employers, experience, universities, and qualifications.

WHY DO APPLICANT TRACKING SYSTEMS MATTER?

Job seekers interact with an ATS just about any time they apply for a role through an online form. The best way to ensure you have the right search terms and a high match rate is to study the job description. Also search all the organisation's publications and communications with the outside world and pick out the language the company uses. Repeat back in your CV the organisation's own terminology.

Other Tips:

- **Use text** – it can be tempting to jazz up your CV with graphics, but the ATS won't see these. The same applies for tables, they often cause problems
- **It's best to use recognised sections such as Education, Qualifications, Experience, Interests, and Referees** rather than making up clever new ones
- **Spell out acronyms.** AFA may be the acronym you use in your industry. But the ATS may be programmed to look for "Authorised Financial Adviser". Likewise, include both Bachelor of Commerce and BCom, so that the machine understands
- **Don't go overboard** though and stuff your resume with keywords. Sprinkle these in lightly, keeping in mind the human who eventually sees your CV
- **Don't Use images, pictures, symbols and shading, and try to stick to well-known fonts.** Some older systems prefer web-safe fonts such as Arial and Courier
- **Save your file as a .docx if possible**

Many recruiters still choose to glance at every job application that comes through their ATS. They take a quick glance at the applicant's past highlights, job titles and companies. They can make a determination about whether they want to learn more in about 6 seconds. It's important to make sure your top skills and qualifications are quickly and easily identifiable.

LINKEDIN CV/RESUME BUILDER

There are currently two ways in which your LinkedIn profile assists development of your CV. (This is likely to change as software and AI develops).

1. You can download the key information from your LinkedIn profile as a pdf and use this as a basis for your CV. BEWARE that this is not sufficient on its own and needs to be developed and edited in light of everything you read in this resource.
2. For Microsoft Office 365 users, the Resume Assistant in Word pulls in content suggestions from LinkedIn public profiles, based on the job description and industry you are applying for. These descriptions provide examples of how to include key words and provide evidence of your skills etc. in your CV.

ACADEMIC CVS

Academic CVs have a similar format and purpose as general CVs, with headings such as education (including your thesis topic/supervisor), work experience, awards and achievements. You may wish to include further sections outlining your technical skills, research activities/interests, teaching/tutoring/lecturing experience, publications, conference presentations/attendance, university/community service, professional activities, positions of responsibility, memberships, awards and research grants (including \$ figures or convert to the country for which you are applying). The order in which you present your information should reflect the content and requirements of the job description to create a targeted CV that makes use of their key words.

An academic CV provides evidence of experiences that highlight your strengths/talent, your knowledge base and your transferable skills. It should be free of errors and presented in an easily read format, in a style that is relevant and recognised by those to whom you are applying. Always send a letter as an introduction – and consider your audience. A professor might need more information than just one page.

TIPS FOR CRAFTING YOUR ACADEMIC CV:

- Research the university to which you are applying; use any suggested CV formats or templates and identify your fit with the current department
- Carefully read the advertisement to get an idea of the specific competencies or requirements over and above the usual academic qualifications. You may need to adapt your research to the particular audience or department
- Seek feedback about the impression your CV gives a reader who does not particularly know you
- Make sure you check with your supervisor for any ideas or tips, feedback and suggestions for structuring your academic CV. Some academic staff have on-line CVs or an E-portfolio and could provide ideas for developing a style of CV that suits you, your discipline and your particular strengths
- Ensure when discussing your research that you identify the aims, outcomes and techniques or research methodologies used
- Think about what has made you successful to date and ensure that you have identified or highlighted these in your CV
- Some departments may require written statements, teaching philosophy, or specific responses to the selection criteria
- If the academic CV is being requested to apply for further study or if it is the only document that is being requested, consider an about me section to provide a future focus to the document

You may find useful career information on vitae.ac.uk.

NOW YOU HAVE YOUR DRAFT ... TIME FOR SELF-REVIEW

CV CHECKLIST

Tailoring	Have you thoroughly read the job description and responded to what the employer is looking for?	Is everything you have listed relevant to the target role (either directly or indirectly)?	When listing your skills and experience, have you placed those of most interest to the employer at the top?
Format	Hold out the CV at arm's length. Is the structure obvious?	Is your CV well laid-out with clearly labelled sections?	Pages are filled evenly and not overcrowded? No more than 2 pages?
	Are there no grammar or spelling errors?	Is the layout consistent and font size 11 or 12?	Have you made good use of headings and bullet points?
Contact details	Does your name stand out, and is it included in the footer of the other pages?	Are your email and phone number available, and is your email address professional?	Is your customised LinkedIn URL provided?
Education (or Qualifications)	Are your qualifications on the front page?	Have you listed the most recent first (and then worked back)?	Is the emphasis on your qualification not the learning institution?
	Does the information include institution and its location, graduation year, and major?	Have you included extra information such as study abroad, research projects and thesis work?	Have you given the full title of your qualifications?
Experience Section (This includes paid and unpaid work)	Is experience provided well defined and does it relate to the intended career field?	Are places of work, location, job titles, and dates included for each position?	Is your experience listed in reverse chronological order?
	Are descriptions clear and formatted as bullets beginning with action verbs?	Have you provided evidence of 'technical expertise' and experience from degree or course work?	Have you given evidence of skills and achievements?
Unique categories: Awards, Projects, Achievements.	Are sections well organised and easy to understand?	Do headings chosen relate to the intended field?	Do activities listed include skills gained and leadership roles held?
Interests	Have you explained something about the activity rather than simply used one word?	Can the reader get a picture of you as a well-rounded person?	Have you used this section to demonstrate examples of skills that the employer is looking for?
Referees	Have given the referee's full name, job title, work email address, and phone number?	Have you also given the organisation where you both worked?	Have you actually asked the referees and given them details of the application?

WRITING YOUR COVER LETTER

Your cover letter is your opportunity to explain to your prospective employer why all the information in your CV and background makes you the perfect choice for them. You need to take full advantage of this opportunity!

To write an effective cover letter, you need to know the answers to two different 'whys':

- Why they should pick you (i.e what you can do for them)
- Why you want *this* job/role, with *this* organisation

The only way to figure out the answers to these 'whys' is to do some research. That's your first step...

RESEARCH

To convince the employer that you're just who they're looking for, you need to figure out what it is they are looking for in an applicant. It's worth it – the results of your research will not only help you put together the most effective CV and cover letter possible, but will also come in handy when you reach interview stage. There are plenty of resources that could help you:

- The job advertisement should provide some brief information on the company.
- The job description should outline the company and its values as well as in-depth detail on the job itself.
- The company website could provide information on past successes, current projects and future directions; provide staff profiles in a tone which can reveal how they see their employees; and present the company's strengths and values.
- Company brochures/promotional material can reveal what opportunities the company can offer, what they're proud of, and how they wish to be seen by their clients and staff.
- People you know who have had experience with the company can tell you a lot about its direction, strengths, and values.
- Phoning the company and asking questions is a great way to do accurate research on the company, and doubles as a way to get yourself on the radar. Plan before you pick up the phone – make a list of questions you'd like to ask (and NOT things that are obvious in the advertisement or on the website), and check the contact/s given on the job description or website to figure out who it is you should be talking to. Remember that this is your first chance to make an impression so approach the conversation professionally.
- Online networks – does the company have a Facebook site or a LinkedIn page? Bingo! Tons of info at your fingertips.

FIGURE OUT WHAT'S SO GREAT ABOUT THEM

Now you've done the research, you're in a much better position to figure out what it is about them that makes you want the job, and what would make you a good addition to their company. Think about how your professional values align with theirs; opportunities they can offer that would help you further your career or extend your expertise/knowledge; past, current or future projects that spark your interest; how they see their employees and so on.

To figure all this out, you have three built-in filters through which all your research can pass (take lots of notes as you go!).

FIRST, YOUR BELIEFS AND VALUES:

You might find that you have more in common with the company ideologically than you do in terms of specific relevant experience. Consider your field or profession. Why are you doing it? Why do you believe it's important? What about your approach to clients or customer service? You may have done a lot of volunteer community work and have strong beliefs about the importance of community – how does this fit with the approach of the company you're applying to? To use this filter, compare how you see yourself (professionally and personally) with how they see themselves.

NEXT, YOUR EXPERIENCE:

Look back over your employment history, education, volunteer, cultural or travel, and life experience. Would this company/position offer you the chance to use the skills and learning you have gained in any of these areas of your life? Maybe it would give you a chance to expand your horizons, develop specific skills, or indulge an interest usually confined to your leisure time? You need to use this filter twice – once to find out what they can offer you in terms of providing opportunities you want, and once to figure out what you have in your background that could help you excel in the role they are offering. The key is, if you've done something well once, you can do it well again – and this includes learning. If you've done lots of stuff but nothing exactly like what they would be asking you to do, but you can come up with plenty of times you've had to push your boundaries to learn a new role, don't forget that the ability to learn and adapt is a very valuable asset!

AND FINALLY, YOUR FUTURE:

Where is your motivation and drive taking you? How would this role fit in with that career objective?

Stay away from things you think they want to hear. They'll spot dishonesty and false flattery a mile away, but are likely to be convinced by a genuine explanation of aspects of the company that are particularly interesting and motivating to you.

GET WRITING

A standard cover letter has four key components. You've done your research, you've filtered the info and taken lots of notes, so now you're ready to begin writing...

PARAGRAPH ONE:

This one's easy. You need to state the position you're applying for, and tell the employer how you found out about the position (this will help them out by letting them know how they're advertising or networking systems are working). If someone within the company or field recommended that you apply; if you met a representative of the company at a Careers Fair or seminar and they said something that made you want to apply; or you have had an internship or some other previous experience with the company, this is also the perfect opportunity to mention it.

Be professional, but enthusiastic!

PARAGRAPH TWO:

In this paragraph, focus on what you can offer them in the role you're applying for. You should focus on the key aspects of the job description – what the company is most seeking in someone who will be successful in this position. Now respond to it by describing how the previous experience/skills/values or motivations you have could make you awesome in the role and contribute to their company.

Use specific information to get their interest - and avoid bland generic statements.

PARAGRAPH THREE:

This one starts to use your research. You need to tell the prospective employer why you want to work for them. You've already figured it out, back when you filtered your research. Look at your notes, and pick the genuine reason that is most important to you. Explain your reason, then relate it to your history and skill to give it a context that is personal to you.

It's important to strike a balance of 'you' and 'them'. Remember your audience – they need to know how they would benefit from hiring you (and less about what they can do for you). Keep making connections between yourself and them throughout these paragraphs to achieve this balance.

PARAGRAPH FOUR:

Another easy one – this is where you open a dialogue with your potential employer. First, note the documents that you've attached in a brief sentence like this:

Please find my curriculum vitae and application form enclosed.

Don't forget that you have something to offer them as much as they have something to offer you! Don't put yourself in a passive, inferior role by saying that you 'hope they will consider your application' or 'hope to hear from' them. Instead, create equality by becoming an equal participant, but also acknowledge that they're putting in some effort here too ... something more like this:

I appreciate your consideration, and look forward to discussing this opportunity with you further.

Short, simple, and effective.

SUGGESTED COVER LETTER LAYOUT

Line Spacing

Your name
Contact details
(Alternatively you can set your details up as a professional looking 'banner' across the top of the page)

2 spaces

9 May 2020

2 spaces

First name, Surname
Human Resources Officer
ABC Company
101 Sunset Drive
Auckland Postcode

2 spaces

Dear first name & surname (if you know Mr/Mrs/Ms/Miss use this with the last name)

1 space

Job title and Reference Number

1 space

1) Details of the Job

State the job for which you are applying. Be enthusiastic for the company and the position. Indicate the source and date of the job information. Provide details of contact you have had with the organisation. If you have been referred by a friend or colleague of the employer give details.

1 space

2) What you have to offer the organisation

Highlight the extent to which you match the requirements of the job, e.g. qualifications, experience, qualities, capabilities, transferable skills. Outline any further points in your favour related to the job. Be enthusiastic.

1 space

3) Why you want to work in this position for this organisation

Outline your interest in the particular job and/or the position and the organisation. Make realistically positive comments about the reputation and performance of the company. This is where your research shows.

1 space

4) Conclusion

Keep it short, reiterate your enthusiasm and refer to your attached curriculum vitae and other requested material.

2 spaces

Yours sincerely

5 spaces

(Signature here)

First name, Surname

FINAL CHECK

- margins Make sure there's at least 2cm of clean white space down each side of the page, and at the top and bottom. Don't let your letter get 'crowded'
- font Use one font only, and make it something sensible – Times New Roman, and other traditional fonts like Garamond, Arial and Calibri should give you an exemplary standard for font sensibility. The font you use should be the same as the one used for your CV.
- colour Stick to black and white
- borders Avoid putting a border around your letter. Think about this psychologically – a border will 'enclose' your letter, and you want it to 'flow' on to your CV naturally so that they function as a unit. It also reduces the space available for what you want to say.
- now get out your fine-tooth comb Proofread at least three times! Use spell check, but also check your spelling yourself. Don't forget about 'watt yore spell cheque cant Czech!' Make sure all your sentences are complete and make sense, that your tone is appropriately formal, and that the company name, contact details, and facts are all correct.
- check Check the name of your cover letter (and CV) document (a big mistake is to send it off with another employer name in the document name). It's a good idea to get someone else to check all this as well – they might pick up something you missed!

hot tip

It is essential you write a fresh and tailored cover letter for each job

Highlight the jobs or experiences that best match what it is the employer is looking for

Avoid phrases that will draw attention to experience or skills you may lack, such as 'although I don't have' or 'while I have not'

USING SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS

Building an effective professional network (both in person and online) can provide valuable information, advice and opportunities.

Recruiters are increasingly using LinkedIn to search for talent, so your LinkedIn profile can be equally as important as your CV and cover letter in your job search process. While your LinkedIn profile should include all the key information from your CV, it also provides you with an opportunity to add additional depth, with more information about relevant experiences, projects you have been involved in, your skills, awards and achievements and so on.

Your LinkedIn Summary provides a key opportunity to explain and 'sell' yourself. You can also upload documents here such as your CV, or any photos, websites, videos etc which provide further evidence to your skills.

Beware – research indicates the 60%-70% of employers use social media to screen prospective employees. This includes searching your LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter presence so it is important your 'brand' is consistent across all channels and your privacy settings are correct.

hot tip

Use LinkedIn to find and reach out to the hiring manager or employer. Ask to connect or send a message and have some good questions to ask. This will help you stand out from the crowd and show your real interest in the role. Putting in the extra effort helps to create a good impression.

ELECTRONIC/ONLINE APPLICATIONS

The guide and best practice for writing Cover Letters and CVs applies equally to completing online applications. It is worth considering the following points when dealing with electronic applications.

instructions Always read these very carefully and follow them!

time It is likely to take longer to complete than you think and you need time to navigate your way round the website. Many people assume because it is an online form, it is going to be easy and won't take long to fill in. Wrong! By not allowing enough time, you may miss the deadline and find the application process is removed before you complete.

keep a copy Many online applications ask you to register before you can access the form. Make a note of your registration details (it is not a good to look to be talking about 'eye for detail' or 'your good organisational skills', and then have to send an email because you've forgotten your password).

familiarise yourself If you cannot look at the whole form (you may have to work through it) then note the questions as you come to them. Many online forms allow for the applicant to complete the application across several sessions.

query If you have a query or a problem with the form or website, or are unsure of some instruction, use the help contact which will be on the webpage. It is perfectly acceptable to ring up as well.

check numbers Each answer usually has a word (or even a character) limit. This is a useful guide as to what the employer is looking for. A short word limit for a complex answer is a test of your ability to write well. Equally if your answer is well under the limit, then you have probably not provided sufficient depth of information/explanation. A good strategy is to write your answers in a Word document and when you are happy with what you have written, cut and paste your answers into the form. Keep a copy of your answers for your own reference.

answer Make sure you have addressed what is being asked of you in the question. You may feel the question is already covered in your CV or Cover Letter. Resist any temptation to say, 'Refer to my CV' or 'See my Cover Letter', as your answer. Many questions are often behaviour-based for example: "Tell us about a time when..." The Career Development Centre's Interview Skills guide provides strategies for answering these questions well.

Proof reading is as essential for online applications as it is for hard copy applications! Have another pair of eyes to read your application for any mistakes or answers not answered properly. Avoid giving the reader an excuse for consigning your application to the 'No' pile.

hot tip

"Equally a CV does not stand alone. You need a strong, compelling and personalised cover letter to go with your CV adding motivation to the skills and knowledge your CV demonstrates."

HR Manager, L'Oréal New Zealand Ltd.

COVER LETTER CHECKLIST

Use this rubric to help you to check through your letter.



	Cover letter that is enthusiastic, engaging and has a good flow. Top marks and go to the head of the queue.	Cover letter that is good example, a few clichéd sentences and some evidence of skills but something missing.	Cover letter needs significant improvement as doesn't really give a good sense of the writer. Far too generic.
Business format and overall quality of writing ability	This letter uses correct business format with date and addresses at the top, and has your name at the bottom. This letter looks clear and concise, without spelling errors and is grammatically correct. It is not double-spaced and uses a font that is easy to read.	This letter uses correct business format with date and addresses at the top, and a signature at the bottom. There could be a better flow to content, a story that engages and has minimal grammar and spelling errors.	Business formatting is not used in this letter. The details are not consistent with formal business letter formatting. The grammar and spelling need further attention. The content of this letter is not genuine and has too many clichéd sentences.
Section 1: Introduction	This section identifies the position for which you are applying, explains why you are interested in applying for the job and has a genuine and engaging opening that responds to questions or identified criteria in the job advertisement. The wording is creative and catches the reader's attention quickly.	This section identifies the position you are applying for, and where you saw the advertisement, but does so in a generic and clichéd way. You describe why you are interested in this job but are not specific. This section is bland and does not capture the reader's attention.	This section does not clearly identify what position you are seeking or the opening is vague and generic. There is no discussion about the actual position or the company. This letter does not encourage reading any more. Interest is lost.
Section 2: Identification of skills and experiences as related to position	This letter clearly provides evidence of the skills discussed in the job advertisement and matches them clearly with demonstrated experience. You refer the reader to specific job titles or employers using verbs and adjectives appropriately. This letter explains why you are interested in the position and this type of job, company, and/or location not just that it is any old job.	This letter is not closely related to the position, instead it talks only about you, why you want the job and what you will get if they give it to you. You do not state very clearly why you are a good fit with the role, or overstates your skills and experience. This letter does not really convince the reader of your skills and experience. You are too vague.	This letter does not discuss any relevant qualifications. There is no reference to a resume or other materials. You have not related your skills to the position for which you are applying. This letter does not state why you are interested in the position, company, and/or location. It states that you are the ideal candidate without any real evidence.
Section 3: About them and why you would like to work for them	This letter shows the reader that you know what they do, where they are or what makes them special, you may have spoken with someone working there and clearly shows that you have researched them thoroughly.	It is hard to tell if this was actually written to this specific company, you say some nice things about them but it could have been any company that you are flattering.	Oh dear... you got your cut and paste wrong. You are addressing this letter to someone different than who you state below. Bad form and no attention to detail.
Section 4: Closing	This letter uses positive and optimistic language that is genuine and 'speaks' to the reader in uncomplicated and simple statements. You are assertive as you describe how you fit with the culture of the company, community or organisation. It clearly demonstrates that you know what they do and how they do their work.	You thank the reader for taking time to read this letter. This letter assumes that the employer will contact you to follow up.	This letter could have been written to anyone and for any job. It looks like a letter template that was found on the internet and just about copied word for word. It also gives the reader too many instructions or thanks them too many times for reading or considering you. They do not have to consider you even if you thank them.

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EMAILING APPLICATIONS:

- email** Generally, when emailing attachments, you will need to include a short professional note in the body of the email, telling the recipient why you are sending the email. While you don't have to lay the email out as a formal business letter, you do want it to look professional. Make sure you use professional written language – again a demonstration of your ability to communicate in the workplace (so avoid text spelling, overuse of capitals, exclamation marks, emoticons etc.). All the rules of good grammar and punctuation apply to email!
- clearly name** Write in whole sentences. E.g. 'Please find attached my CV and cover letter for the position of'
- how many** It helps the reader process your application more efficiently if the attachment is named appropriately. You don't want your precious documents being lost or overlooked because they are unnamed and 'got mislaid in the system!' And again, check the name of your attached document(s) – ensure their title does not include the name of another company you have applied to.
- Sometimes the request is for one document. If in doubt, check. Always find out what is wanted and follow instructions.
- subject line** The receiver can then see what the email is about before they open it. Remember people receive large quantities of email. A clearly identified email is less likely to get lost in someone's Inbox.
- Use a salutation or greeting. When finishing off, 'Yours faithfully, Yours sincerely, and 'Kind regards' are acceptable. On another line, write your name. Consider the language most appropriate to yourself and the organisation you are applying to - English or Te Reo is equally acceptable in these parts of your formal communication.

APPLICATION STATEMENTS

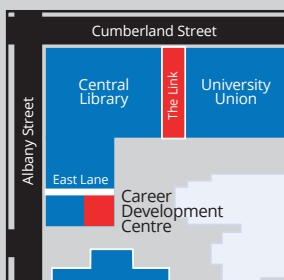
(Sometimes also referred to as personal statements).

- formats with guidelines** Where guidelines have been provided, for some positions a separate personal statement is requested. Some organisations make it clear what they want from this exercise (Please tell us a little about you. Why do you want this position? What strengths do you bring to the role? How does it fit in to your 5 year career plan? Use no more than 350 words). Other organisations give no indication whatsoever. In the latter case, we recommend you contact the organisation and ask them for guidelines.
- without guidelines** Where you have not been provided with guidelines, it is a good idea to break the statement into the suggested segments (e.g. ...tell us a little about you. Why do you want this position? What strengths do you bring to the role? How does it fit in to your 5 year career plan?), to answer each fully, separately and concisely, and then to merge the answers to fit the statement. This will take several drafts of each part of the answer. Beware of over-emphasising or omitting any one part of the answer – this is a classic error in these statements and tells the reviewer that either you didn't realise that each part had to be answered equally or that your written communication skills just aren't up to the standard required. In either case your application is edging towards the "No" pile.
- Typically, organisations are interested in your motivation for the profession, organisation and position concerned. They are also interested in what strengths you have that would enable you to adapt and excel in their work environment. Often, they would like some sense of your personal values in the context of the position, and in how you see your career developing over the short to medium term, say 2 - 5 years.
- research** Use the organisation's website, the relevant professional association (e.g. the Publishers Association of New Zealand for those interested in publishing), CareersNZ and Occupational Outlook (MBIE) and other resources. Talk to employers at one of the University of Otago's Career Expos or other employer events, or use your personal network or LinkedIn to meet people from the organisation – New Zealand only has 2 degrees of separation, remember! From this research you can get a sense of what the organisation thinks is important in people, for example it might place a strong emphasis on client satisfaction, personal integrity, or self-motivation. You can then use this insight to write a statement that addresses their issues.

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Find graduate jobs on
OtagoCareerHub
otago.ac.nz/careers



Career Development Centre
ISB Building (NE corner - next to the Library)
Tel 03 479 8244 | Email careers@otago.ac.nz