

ENGLISH LANGUAGE TIPS: CV AND COVER LETTER

Describing your personal qualities

As a recently qualified professional, you can make your application stand out by drawing attention to the personal qualities of yours which are suitable for the position. Think carefully about the qualities and skills you have gained through your studies, part time work, life experiences, hobbies and extracurricular activities.

e.g.

What skills might you have learned from playing the piano?

E.g. discipline, application, precision, persistence.

What skills might you have learned from playing football? Retail work? Waiting on tables?

E.g. teamwork, responsibility, reliability, accuracy, good work ethic.

What skills might you have acquired from completing your studies?

E.g. time management, working to deadlines, collaboration, research, professional communication.

Here are some personal qualities which are highly valued by employers. These are the nouns, but adding an adjective can make them stronger (e.g. **totally** committed).

Take a look at the examples below, then practice writing nouns and adjectives in a grammatically correct sentence.

Honesty *"I am extremely/scrupulously/very honest."*

"I demonstrated complete honesty in my management of funds for the University Chess Club."

Integrity *"I am a person of high/absolute/complete personal integrity." (There is no adjective for integrity)*

Can you do the same with the following?

*Adaptability/Flexibility; Loyalty; Dedication/Hard-Working/Work Ethic/Tenacity; Positive Attitude/Motivation/Energy/Passion;
Dependability/Reliability/Responsibility; Professionalism; Self-Confidence; Self-Motivated/Independent; Willingness to Learn.*

Adverbs to express strength of your personal qualities can be found in a collocations dictionary.

E.g. prowritingaid.com/Free-Online-Collocations-Dictionary.aspx

Experience and skills - It's all in the verbs

The verbs you use to describe your experience are important – make sure they are precise enough and use appropriate formality. Here are some examples of imprecise verbs to avoid and some suggested alternatives:

Don't Write

Did: *"I did a course in statistics"*

Made: *"I made a plan for..."*

Kept: *"I kept studying"*

Put: *"I put tables out for the customers"*

Had: *"I had a job as a waiter"*

Got: *"I got first class honours"*

Instead, Write

undertook, completed, instigated

created, designed, organised

continued, persevered with, maintained, prolonged

placed, arranged, organised, filed, aligned, positioned

held, maintained, engaged in, sustained

received, obtained, was awarded, procured, acquired

NB: Use a good dictionary, with examples, to check the exact meaning of the word you have chosen and if it is appropriate in this situation.



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Choose the correct verb tense

Tense	What for?	Example
Simple past	Events, completed activities, specific dates	"I completed my Bachelor of Arts in 2013."
Present perfect	Skills acquired when exact time is not relevant For unfinished activities	"I have been trained in Halftix event booking software." "I have worked for IBM since 2014 / for two years."
Future	Use 'will' not 'going to' (formality)	"I will complete my Bachelor of Arts in November this year."
Present simple	Ongoing qualities or states/habits	"I am punctual."
Passive	Centre of action	"I was promoted." *Compare this with "they promoted me" (active voice)

Make sure you know the exact meaning of the verb you choose by looking it up in the dictionary to establish who is doing what. Getting tense right in passive verbs can be difficult. Hint: put the sentence in the active form, then take the verb tense and put it on the verb "to be". Below are some examples of the correct usage of passive verbs in different tenses:

I learned software design = They **trained** me in software design → I was **trained** in software design
They **will train** me → I **will be** trained/They **have trained** me → I **have been** trained/They **are training** me → I am **being** trained

End sentences with important, useful or positive information

Readers tend to view the end of a sentence as the most important part. So if you want to make your message clear, move the part you want your reader to focus on to the end of the sentence. Compare the following:

X	✓
<i>I learned many useful skills although my placement lasted only twelve weeks.</i>	<i>Although my placement lasted only twelve weeks, I learned many useful skills.</i>
<i>I was responsible for keeping records and coordinating staff in the day to day running of the business.</i>	<i>In the day to day running of the business, I was responsible for keeping records and coordinating staff.</i>

Use positive language wherever possible

Negative	Positive
<i>I do not have much experience in...</i>	<i>I have some experience in...</i>
<i>Although I can complete all stages of the project assessment, I am not yet qualified to provide certification.</i>	<i>I can complete all stages of assessment prior to certification.</i>
<i>I graduated in November but I did not get a job until April.</i>	<i>I graduated in November and commenced work soon after.</i>
<i>While my first job was interesting it did not provide opportunities for promotion.</i>	<i>My first job was interesting but lacked opportunities for promotion.</i>

Understate detail: put the most useful information in the main sentence

X	✓
<i>I was placed at XXX for three months and during that time I organised...</i>	<i>During my three months at XXX, I organised...</i>
<i>I worked at the NAB where I gained experience in modelling of...</i>	<i>While at the NAB, I gained experience in...</i>



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