



Ignite's Guide to Writing Your Own 'Bullseye' CV

by Sarah Dudney



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Producing the 'bullseye' CV is a much underrated business communication skill. It is possibly the most challenging part of writing in your career as it is absolutely critical to nail it first time around. In the pressure of our daily lives where the urgent normally supersedes the important, writing a perfect CV can sometimes get swept under the pile of paperwork on one's desk. As in most business communication exercises whether that is writing a keynote speech for an industry conference or writing a board paper, writing a CV is one where every single idea and word has to earn its place. Preparation is everything to get your CV to stand out from the crowd. In this summary outline we will give you time and insight to enable you to nail it first time round in terms of content, layout and structure.

As in any business communication exercise we always have to put ourselves in our target employer's shoes. A Head of HR of major global investment bank told us:

*"I want to probe deeply behind a CV –
what is the substance behind the candidate's claims"*

Her counterpart at leading commercial bank lamented:

"I am fed up with sloppy CVs, with imprecise dates"

proving how important it is to get even these simple facts right.

In your correspondent's earlier career as a City headhunter, 100s of CVs arrived each week. The main challenge candidates had was creating a career narrative that kept our interest beyond the third line. Most professional writers endeavour to keep in mind the famous Pulitzer Prize criteria on writing:

*"Put it before them briefly so they will read it, clearly so they will appreciate it,
picturesquely so they will remember it and, above all,
accurately so they will be guided by its light."*

Joseph Pulitzer

Like any successful business exercise writing a great CV requires preparation time, rehearsal and a good supply of paper.

Here is one of our Ignite CV Preparation Exercises which many of our clients find invaluable.

For the purposes of this exercise file away old CV copies just for the moment. Start afresh for this exercise.

- **Write down on a clean piece of paper your top ten career achievements**
- **Note that these should be achievements and not responsibilities**
- **Ignite note: On first attempt most people only reach to four or five. Keep going.....**

Now put this to one side.

- **Repeat the exercise, however this time repeat for your personal life achievements – from marathon running to achieving your degree to vital fund raising for a charity**

This should be a vital aide memoire of all that you have done in your professional and personal life and help your recall.

What we have given you here is the basis of the master copy of the CV that you will password protect and that only you will refer to and add to. Use this master copy as an index and a key reminder of what you have achieved in your career. Please remember to write all CVs using reverse chronology so that your current or most recent employment will be what your reader sees first.

The master copy is a vital device from which you can update every quarter and edit from onto a fresh document.

As you edit, imagine your reader sitting with your job specification and your CV sitting side by side (it rarely happens like this but this is a great way to be focused and think of your reader). As we all know reading in the business world is the equivalent of the quick step. Using key words helps get your CV moved from long list to short-list.

The critical lesson is that each CV will require its own edit depending on the opportunity you are aiming for. Certain roles demand emphasis on certain skills, behaviours and achievements. A career opportunity that demands a CEO requires a precise engaging narrative on leadership. So to give an example that CV tells an engaging narrative with key words of strategy, leadership, people management skills and less on technical skills say a MSc in nanotechnology and 20 years of lab work with 3 other colleagues.

A CV for a senior sales professional demands again precision on client types, segments and geographies (never ever name names) with some indication of scale of revenues achieved against targets.

- Sold to pension funds in Netherlands and Scandinavia

Tells the client reader absolutely nothing

However honest reflection might produce the following:

- Developed Mega Bank plc entry strategy for our Wizard FX product in the Dutch pension fund market 20XX
- Identified target client in Q 1 and won key clients by Q4 achieving revenues of XX million £/\$

Just as the CEO or HR director will grab every word in the first two paragraph of your CV there are many who relish the last CV paragraph of interests or hobbies. Interests give us the third dimension of any person, they are what makes us interesting people to be around. Give us a candidate who loves reading Italian crime fiction or would walk across Britain to collect Elvis Presley singles or spends every Saturday with a well loved yet little known charity fundraising tirelessly. They are the special interests that inspire the reader to reach out to the phone to get you in for interview.

So as in the rest of your CV be specific about special interests and be honest.

Language needs to be vital, and leap off the page. Immediate past tense is your best friend when writing. Structure your points in short concise bullet points. Dig out a good dictionary and get used to “wordsmithing.”

Never forget a thorough proof read as the best way to blitz lazy language quickly or terrible typos. Running a spell check over your CV document is a given but beware leaving this to a machine which can miss fundamental errors.

Ignite’s critical proof reading tips are as follows:

- Read your CV out loud
- Then read it backwards which will mean you will immediately spot and remove any literal errors. This is a top tip from the world of professional editing. Reading backwards means that you will stop reading for sense and look at each word and pick up literal errors (hear/here)

Finally we always coach Ignite clients on CV layout. A very wise City fund manager once told me when writing his CV he always remembered how Gordon Ramsay would write a menu. A Gordon Ramsay menu looks clean, fresh, and well laid out with lots of white space around the margins. He also meant that our eye always moves to the upper right corner of any document so do not distract your own reader with secondary information on that vital first page (like home address or date of birth which you do not need to insert in any case). This is the ‘buy me corner’ so use it to include such things as the line relating to your professional experience rather than telling people your phone number or date of birth.

Following these Ignite tips will mean that your own CV will be able to achieve ‘bullseye’ status when it catches the interest of your very busy target employer

reader.

We hope you have found this summary informative and useful for your own CV writing. We would love to hear your thoughts or any questions you might have so please feel free to contact Sarah at...sarah@ignitecareer.com mobile - 07793204220

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