

USI Career Counsellors' Guidelines for writing your CV

Your CV is a professional document designed to communicate your profile effectively to potential employers. It should highlight the skills and experiences most relevant to the position you are seeking. For this reason, your CV should always be tailored to the specific role.

There are many valid ways to structure a CV, and practices regarding personal information may vary across countries and professional contexts.

Content related

Personal information

- (1) Include a professional, passport-sized, high-quality photo (not required).
- (2) Include your nationality and Swiss immigration status (if you apply in Switzerland), birthdate, email, telephone number, and location.
- (3) Use your private email address and be sure it is reasonably professional or neutral (for example, NOT rocketman564 @xyz. com).
- (4) State only the city and country where you are based; no need to list the street address.
- (5) Use the international phone number format (+41 55 555 55 55). The spaces may vary country by country.
- (6) Include your LinkedIn short URL (not required). Or (for IT students) your github portfolio.
- (7) If using a summary, customise it for each job. Highlight your relevant skills and accomplishments, and communicate your unique characteristics (your brand). Keep it very short (3-4 sentences). Do not repeat the qualifications.

Education

- (8) List education in reverse chronological order.
- (9) Only use the official name of USI not translated: USI Università della Svizzera italiana. The acronym USI can be used, but never "University of Lugano". Always add city, country: Lugano CH. Note the lower case "i" in "italiana".
- (10) Use official names of institutions, including the city and country (use official two-letter country abbreviations CH, IT, FR to save space). Do not translate the names of institutions.
- (11) Use "secondary school" (if including) and specify the specialisation; maximum two lines. Avoid saying "high school" since this refers to the US system, which is not the same (one year less).
- (12) Include any periods as an exchange/mobility student, giving the institution name, location and dates.
- (13) Include papers, relevant group projects, thesis title, or honours received and any study abroad or exchange programme (with the city and country of exchange). With permission, give the name of your thesis supervisor. If you have numerous projects, and they are relevant, give them a separate section below Education.
- (14) Avoid acronyms if possible. Spell out the acronym if meaningful (e.g. MS Office does not need to be spelled out).
- (15) Ensure that the degree, certificate, or diploma appears exactly as the conferring institution calls it.
- (16) For each education entry, be sure to include the output. Optional: if not a degree, you can say the nature of the coursework and the ECTS achieved (e.g. economics courses, 15 ECTS).
- (17) Online and summer courses may be included if relevant and from a recognised provider. Give the exact title of the course, the name of the provider, the date, and the number of hours.
- (18) You can add a subsection for **education/academic experience** (e.g. field project or a case study conducted in a course), separate from **education**. Be sure to indicate that this experience was acquired as part of your study programme.

Professional Experience

- (19) List jobs, internships, voluntary work in reverse chronological order.
- (20) Use official names of organisations, including the city and country (use official two-letter country abbreviations CH, IT, FR to save space). If the name does not indicate the field or what you need to express, add a few words to explain the field (e.g. A.L. Group, a graphic design service).
- (21) Include the job-title you were given by the organisation.
- (22) Internships, even if not paid, are job experiences and should be included
- (23) Include volunteer roles under experience or, if you have several, create a separate section headed "Volunteering".
- (24) For multiple, part-time, or overlapping jobs, consider combining them into one job with several clients. The role can be "freelance" or "independent".



- (25) Try to avoid starting your Professional Experience section with a manual or low-skill job that is not related to your professional aspirations.
- (26) When writing descriptions, think about the skill you learned, then describe the task that helped you acquire the skill.
- (27) Focus your descriptions on areas that interest you and use recognisable terms and keywords.
- (28) Avoid narratives; if you believe a narrative is necessary, keep it very short. If it goes over two lines, switch to bullets. Bullets should be a minimum of 2 and a maximum of 5.
- (29) Start descriptions with an action verb (e.g. provided, created, developed, managed). Use "parallel" structures (each bullet begins with an action verb of the same tense (e.g. developed, designed or developing, designing). Avoid mixing verb tenses.
- (30) Place the most important words in a description towards the beginning. Quantify when possible (trained 12 new recruits, categorised 1200 documents) and mention impact (increased followers by 20%, streamlined process, streamlined process saving one day per week, tracked reputation by implementing sentiment analysis).
- (31) Prioritise information (most important first) and the words within each phrase: most important task in the first bullet; degree first, then institution; job title first, then organisation or employer; specific IT skills first, MS Office last.
- (32) Trim extra words. Make your points interesting but not too long.

Skills

- (33) Name specific hard skills (such as IT, accounting or video editing software) and core skills. Note that soft skills are best shown with evidence in the experience section. Try to be specific (e.g. instead of "communication skills", specify active listening, empathy, and patience gained as a tutor or instructor).

Language skills

- (34) Use the word "native", not "mother-tongue".
- (35) If you acquired two or more languages as a very young child and are fluent in both, use "bilingual"/"trilingual" etc. (e.g. Bilingual German/Italian).
- (36) For each language for which you have qualifications, give the CEFR level (B2, B1, etc.), the exam (IELTS, Cambridge FCE, Cambridge CAE, etc.) and the month and year. You should also specify any USI qualifications in specialist language courses related to your field (e.g. Wirtschaftsdeutsch, Français de la mode, Business English).
- (37) If you are currently studying a language but have no certificate, give the level of the course (e.g. Currently studying B1 French).
- (38) AVOID giving lists of language skills and a breakdown of your abilities (e.g. Speaking: intermediate; Listening: advanced). An overall indication of your level using the CEFR system is enough.
- (39) Hobbies: list pastimes (reading, cookery, hiking) only if really relevant for your profile. However, if you have participated in activities at a high or competitive level (e.g. sports, music, chess) or have other achievements (e.g. climbing Everest, the



- (40) Santiago pilgrimage), that indicate soft skills (such as perseverance, time management, critical thinking, leadership), you should include these. Companies also appreciate knowing if you have any further training such as civil protection, first aid or similar.

References/referees

- (41) DO NOT give the contact details for referees on your CV. If you have references or recommendations and you want to make that known, include a note such as: "References available on request".

Format and logistics

- (42) Always send your CV in PDF format (NOT in MS Word or other software).
- (43) Include your name in the filename and save as a PDF. Use this format: CORTE_Stefania_CV.pdf.
- (44) Include your name on each page of your CV and include page numbers.
- (45) Correct (and double-check) grammar, spelling, and punctuation. The USI Style Guide follows UK English.
- (46) Create a page layout that respects balance (not too much to one side or another) and use white space to make details stand out (such as dates and categories).
- (47) Make dates prominent and set apart with white space in reverse chronological order.
- (48) Use the date format: mmm.yy in a list or dd month yyyy if in a narrative. For example, Mar.24 or 14 March 2024. Avoid using the day unless requested, the month and year are sufficient.
- (49) Use a single consistent font and readable size (11 pt and above).
- (50) Be rigorously consistent with the style (all dates in the same format, and all descriptions end with a full stop). Do not use ":" unless on the same line; avoid using parentheses.
- (51) Do not include the sentence about authorising the use of your personal data (sometimes in CV templates). The GDPR stipulates that organisations handle your personal data with care and not keep this information longer than is strictly necessary, and only for a specific purpose, whether or not you give permission (it is superfluous).

These guidelines were developed by USI Career Counsellors: Edoardo Beretta, Elena Bittante, Simona Bolis, Louise Bostock, Rosalba Morese, Suzanne Suggs, Carol Switzer.

We remind you that you can book a Career & CV Counselling session through [CareerGate](#).

