



# HOW TO DEVELOP YOUR LEGAL CV



WHERE LAW FIRMS COME  
**TO RECRUIT LEGAL TALENT**

# **CVs have been connecting qualified candidates with their ideal roles for centuries.**

According to an infographic from the National Careers Service, the first curriculum vitae emerged in 1482, and it was written by Leonardo Da Vinci when he applied for a local painting job.

The nature and role of the CV have changed since then.

In the past, connections and status were crucial components of a CV. Today's Legal recruitment companies like ourselves and the employers we work with use the CV to search for skills, relevant experience and knowledge to choose the right legal candidate.

While the details on the average CV have changed, the document itself has always been a crucial part of any job search. Your CV is still the first thing our legal clients ask for when looking for the talent they need, and it's the critical document that decides whether you'll take the next step towards the new legal role.

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# Do You Really Need A Legal CV?

Your CV is one of your most critical 'tools' for your career success.

In a world of online portfolios and LinkedIn profiles, it's easy to assume that the CV is outdated. However, this document does more than list your skills and experience. A CV introduces you to an employer as a reputable legal professional.

Whether you're a graduate or a veteran employee, your CV is your first chance to make a lasting impression on the right people. CVs boost your chances of being selected by legal recruitment companies and put you on the path to a job interview.

## The Purpose of a CV for Employers

Employers and legal recruitment companies rely on a candidate's CV to separate unqualified candidates from prospective talent who fit the role specification.

When browsing through applications, recruiters and employers don't just look for education and industry knowledge; they're also searching for evidence that the candidate has researched the role. A well-designed CV that's tailored to the job in question demonstrates:

- Passion for the legal industry.
- Commitment to the role.
- Research and writing skills.
- Evidence of the results they have and therefore can achieve.

CVs show your potential employer that you fit both the demands of the role and the needs of the company culture.

A good CV also saves an employer a lot of valuable time and effort. When legal recruitment companies can easily select the ideal candidates from a range of well-written CVs, they reduce the chances that the employer will waste time interviewing inappropriate applicants.

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# The Purpose of a CV for Employees

For employees, a CV may not be a legal requirement, but it is the ultimate way to stand out and prove yourself to an employer. On average, only around 2% of candidates make it to the job interview when the 'go it alone' without the help of a specialist legal recruitment consultant.

Without a legal CV to make a favourable first impression, a prospective employer or recruitment agency will ignore your application and move on to the next person.

Think of your CV as a marketing tool, placing essential details about your skills, background, and education into a beacon that shouts "hire me" to your hiring manager.

In today's competition-heavy job market, your CV will:

- Capture the attention of the legal recruiter or employer.
- Clearly, illustrate your abilities and accomplishments
- Demonstrate that you're a match for a position or project
- Improve your chances of getting a first interview.

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***A well-written and properly formatted CV can also act as a confidence boost. Seeing your achievements on paper is a great way to remind yourself that you have what it takes to succeed in a role, particularly when you're preparing for an upcoming interview.***

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Often, this means starting with an introduction to your achievements, backing your claims up with evidence of your skills and experience, and finishing with additional (relevant) information.

Here's how you can make sure you include the right information in your CV.

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## Step One - Be Relevant

A CV must always be tailored to the role you're applying for.

At all times when writing your CV, ask yourself: "How will this help me get this particular legal role?"

For instance, your opening statement is the space where you can sell yourself at the top of page 1. Make sure you address points that the company described in their job description.

For instance, if they're looking for a passionate professional, show how you've devoted yourself to learning more about the legal sector in your free time.

- Make sure your CV includes everything the job advert asks for.
  - Use similar terminology to trigger connections with the recruiter or employer.
  - Demonstrate your desire to learn in areas where you don't have the exact experience you need.
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## Step Two - Keep It Short and to the Point

Remember that the person reading your CV is likely to have dozens, if not hundreds of applications to get through. Keep your CV to two pages, with a maximum of three.

Two pages give you enough room to show your potential, without overwhelming your legal recruitment consultant and prospective employer.

To make sure that the most critical aspects of your application aren't hidden on page two, introduce a "core skills" section under your personal profile.

In "core skills" you can list your most notable abilities and achievements related to the role.

Throughout the rest of your CV, assess every word critically, and remove anything that isn't necessary.

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## Step Three - Structure your CV into Sections

With a focus on relevancy, structure your CV into these sections:

- **Personal Details:** At Clayton Legal we frequently hear from employers who receive CVs that miss out on personal details like a name, email address, contact number and address. Make sure all of these details are at the top of the page.
  - **Personal statement:** Use the first paragraph on your CV to explain who you are and why you're ideal for the specific role you're applying for. Keep the section succinct. Hobbies and interests aren't a necessary part of your CV. However, mentioning relevant vocations can make your application stand out. Avoid saying that you like "socialising with friends."
  - **Work experience:** Include all relevant work experience that demonstrates your ability to thrive in a similar role. Include the name of the organisation, your job title, and the time you spent in the post.
  - **Achievements:** Demonstrate how your previous experience gave you the skills you need to excel in this new role. Make it clear how you'd apply the skills you've earned to the position in question and support your achievements with quantifiable evidence. For instance: "obtained favorable settlements for 85% of cases"
  - **Education:** Only list educational achievements relevant to the job. The number of educational details included on a CV will depend on your circumstances. If you have more educational achievements than work experience, you may give this section more focus.
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# The Most Important Elements in a CV

A legal recruitment agency will look for key components when searching for the right candidates.

When you're applying for a new role, you aim to appear as more qualified and compelling than the other candidates. This means taking every possible opportunity to impress.

To ensure you make the right first impression, ensure you always include these essential elements on your CV.

## 1. Up-to-Date Contact Information

As mentioned above, your contact information is the first thing a legal recruiter will see on your CV. Making sure that you include this information is only the first step. As you enter your contact details, remember:

- Remove any old business email addresses or work numbers.
- Double-check that you've spelled your email address correctly and that your phone number is correct.
- Consider updating your email address. If you set your address up years ago with something like "FoxySarah28@gmail.com", replace it with a professional new address like SarahG@gmail.com.
- Include links to relevant social profiles. Your new employer or legal recruiter may appreciate the opportunity to learn more about you on your LinkedIn profile.

## 2. Excellent Formatting and Appearance

CVs are all about making the right first impression. This means that the document's appearance needs to demonstrate the time and care you've put into crafting it.

Formatting and structure on your CV play a big role in how legal recruiters perceive you. Aim to make the document as easy to read as possible. Avoid rambling paragraphs and break up the content with bullet points and headings.

Remember with smartphone technology taking over the world the first time your CV is read could be on a recruitment consultants' phone and there is nothing worse than looking at 'bunched up text that is difficult to read.

- Choose a font that looks good both on a screen and printed, such as Arial or Helvetica.
- Head your page with your name, not "Curriculum Vitae."
- Include plenty of white space.

If you're sending your CV as a digital document, make sure to save it with an easy-to-find title like "John Smith -CV."

I know this might seem totally logical to you and yet here at Clayton Legal we see CVs every day where the individual has not taken the time to make their presentation stand out.

There is a well known saying that says; "the way you do anything is the way you do everything", imagine then the impression a rushed CV might give to a potential new employer; let's explore this more.

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### 3. Accurate Grammar and Spelling

Aside from skills and experience, your legal recruiter or employer will also be looking for things like attention to detail when reading your CV.

Remember that the smallest mistake can make a significant impact on your ability to get a job, and your word processor won't pick up every typo. The sentence "I am an accomplished Manger" won't stand out on your computer, but it's a red flag to an employer.

Read through your CV at least three times before sending it. Consider asking a trusted friend or mentor to read the document too, as sometimes it's hard to pick up issues in your writing. Look for:

- Bad spelling
- Incomplete sentences
- Long, rambling paragraphs
- Filler words like, very, actually etc.

### 4. Selling Points: Roles, Responsibilities, and Skills

Your experiences are some of the most essential details on your CV. Examine the job description for the role you're applying for and focus on using your knowledge and relevant skills to prove you have what your employer is looking for. For instance:

- Roles: If you're applying for a managerial position: Highlight roles where you acted as a leader. If you have no prior management experience, look for other ways to exemplify your leadership skills. Perhaps you lead a volunteer team for your community?
- Responsibilities: When listing prior positions, you'll need to include some information about what your job involved. Don't list everything you did in your last post. Instead, focus on echoing some of the responsibilities listed in the job description.
- Skills: Cut out any skills that aren't relevant to the role. The goal here isn't to show that you're a person of many talents. Instead, focus on proving that you're specifically suited to this particular legal role.

### 5. Facts and Evidence

There are plenty of stories out there of people who have embarrassed themselves by "embellishing" their CVs. While it might be tempting to put some extra flourishes on your application by bending the truth, it's not worth the risk.

The digital world means that it's easier than ever for legal recruiters and employers to find out whether a candidate is exaggerating their achievements or making them up on their CV. To ensure that you come across as honest and trustworthy, make sure that you use quantifiable facts and evidence.

If you claim that you've accomplished something incredible for your last employer, explain the details in depth using numbers and statistics. For instance: "I have the highest win rate in my firm." Be prepared to provide reference details if necessary, too.

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## 6. Specific Words and Phrases

The right language can make or break your application. Unfortunately, figuring out which words to use isn't always easy. Start by making a list of any repetitive terms you can see in the job description or on the company's website. This will help you to choose words that create a synergy with a recruiter or employer.

Once you have a list of terms to use, create a second list of words to avoid. Overused clichés will either leave your legal recruiter rolling their eyes, or they'll mean you just blend into a sea of other candidates. Words to avoid include:

- Go-Getter
- Goal-driven
- Out-of-the-box
- Multi-tasker
- Self-Motivated

## Should You Add A Photo To Your CV?

There are plenty of additional details that you can add to a CV if you feel that they're relevant. For instance, if the role you're applying for requires you to drive frequently, then assure your legal recruiter that you have a clean driving license. If you're going for a role in web design, direct them to a recent app or website you've created.

One recent debate in the recruitment world is whether it's useful to add a photo to a CV. On the one hand, a picture can make your application to stand out, and it's becoming increasingly common across mainland Europe. However, some people find a picture distracting and believe it may lead to unintentional bias.

Whether you should add a picture to your CV will depend on the role. If you'll frequently be working behind the scenes in an office, then it doesn't matter what you look like. However, if you're a front-of-house employee dealing with customers, your employer might want to see that you have a professional and friendly appearance.



# What Not To Include On Your CV

As there are crucial things that you absolutely must have on your CV, there are also important elements to leave out.

Many candidates still believe that the more information they include on their CV, the better their chances of earning that critical first interview will be.

However, the truth is that legal recruiters and employers are searching for only the most relevant and specific information. With that in mind, go through your CV and remove any of the following elements you find:

- **Outdated educational achievements:** If you have a master's degree in your industry, then you don't need to include GCSE results too. Stick to your most recent accomplishments.
  - **Irrelevant work experience:** No matter how proud you are of your work in a previous role, only include work experience that's connected to the position you're applying for now.
  - **References:** If employers want to speak to your references, they can ask you for them. References are an outdated portion of a CV that simply take up space.
  - **Personal pronouns:** Use phrases like "Accomplished Manager" instead of "I am an experienced manager."
  - **Company-specific jargon:** Many businesses have their own internal names for specific technologies and processes. Avoid any words from your CV that wouldn't apply to the entire sector. Instead, replace them with phrases or terms you may have noticed on the job description for the role you're applying for.
  - **Meaningless buzzwords:** "Ninja", and "People pleaser" are all phrases that don't say much about you. Focus on terms that will highlight your skills and the corresponding results they can deliver for your new employer.
  - **Fancy formatting:** Headers, footers, images, and charts aren't necessary on a CV. Many of today's recruiters use applicant-tracking systems today, and excessive formatting can cause the software to scramble your application.
  - **Opinions:** CVs are all about the facts, don't use subjective words to describe yourself. For instance, your CV isn't a place to tell your hiring manager how "likeable" you are. Let them form that opinion themselves when they meet you.
  - **Reasons you left previous roles:** There's no need to over-explain your job history. If a hiring manager has additional questions, they can bring them up with you in the interview.
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# Should You Include A Cover Letter?

A great way to give an extra kick to your CV, and make sure it stands out, is to include a cover letter. Your cover letter is another opportunity to show you've researched the business and made sure that you're appropriate for the role.

Within your cover letter, you can go beyond the skills and education outlined in your CV to show a recruiter or employer that you:

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Understand the sector and their business: Highlight how you can help the company achieve their goals.

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Will fit with the company's culture and demonstrate the correct attitude: Show that you've learned the organisation's values, and that they match your own.

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Are willing to adapt to change and learn new skills: Demonstrate your commitment to continuous learning and improvement by mentioning what you're doing to improve your skills.

Importantly, if you do include a cover letter with your CV, don't just write about why you want to work for the business.

Explain why you're a good fit for the role, and the benefits that you can bring to that organisation. At the same time, avoid anything generic that may look as though you've copied and pasted it from an application for a previous job.

## Creating the Ideal CV for Your Legal Role

Having a good degree or a history with a well-known company won't automatically get you an interview today. Today's employers are looking for people that fit with their company culture and demonstrate the skills and attitude necessary to deliver in a specific legal role.

Your CV is your chance to introduce yourself to a legal recruitment company or hiring manager in a meaningful way.

If you can show the person looking at your CV that you match the job description as closely as possible, then you'll get the interview.

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## CLAYTON LEGAL

We understand that while talent is your greatest asset -it can also be your scarcest resource -which is why you need a recruitment partner with the market expertise, insight and network to deliver the right people at the right time.

Clayton Legal has been partnering with law firms across the country since 1999 and during that time has built up an enviable reputation for trust and reliability.

We provide an experienced and credible voice in the market by being able to demonstrate a detailed knowledge of the legal sector's talent agenda. Talent is all about people and just like you, our consultants are true experts in theirfield with a real drive for excellence which informs everything they do.

From Partners and Associates through to Solicitors, junior fee earning positions and support staff, Clayton Legal is the only name you'll ever need -and what's more -we are nice people to do business with!

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