

2026 EDITION

CV & Career Action Guide

Build truthful evidence, create clearer applications and run a disciplined job search.

This guide is free. No email, no paywall, no promised outcome. Use it, test it, adapt it to your circumstances, and do the work.

How to use this guide

Read one section, complete the action, collect evidence, and only then move forward. AI may help you research, organise, critique and practise. It should not invent your experience, make your decisions, or replace your judgment.

Remember: guidance improves decisions; persistence and execution create results.

1. Start with evidence, not adjectives

A strong application is a clear argument supported by proof. Recruiters cannot assess qualities that only appear as labels.

Build an evidence bank

List projects, responsibilities, decisions, constraints, tools, people affected and measurable changes. Include academic, volunteer and personal work when it is genuinely relevant.

Use the action-impact pattern

Write: action taken + context or difficulty + result or learning. Quantify only when the number is honest and meaningful.

Remove unsupported claims

Replace 'hard-working', 'passionate' and 'excellent communicator' with an example that allows the reader to reach that conclusion.

Action: Create 12 evidence statements before editing your CV.

AI support prompt

Act as a strict editor. Using only the evidence I provide, identify vague claims and ask me for the missing proof. Do not invent facts or metrics.

2. Build an ATS-safe CV

Applicant tracking systems are not mysterious judges. They store, search and present information. Clarity helps both software and people.

Use a simple structure

Name and contact details; short targeted profile if useful; skills; experience; education; relevant projects. Use familiar headings and a single-column layout.

Match language honestly

Mirror important role terminology only when it accurately describes your experience. Never copy every keyword or hide text.

Prioritise relevance

The first half of page one should quickly show why you may fit this specific role. Older or unrelated material can be shortened.

Check the file

Use a readable PDF unless the employer requests another format. Confirm text can be selected and copied in the final file.

Action: Run a 20-second test: can another person identify your target, strongest evidence and recent experience?

AI support prompt

Compare my CV with this job description. Produce three lists: strong matches, truthful gaps, and questions I must answer before revising. Do not rewrite yet.

3. Write useful achievement bullets

A bullet is useful when it tells the reader what changed because you were involved.

Weak

Responsible for reporting and stakeholder communication.

Stronger

Rebuilt the weekly exception report and introduced a concise stakeholder summary, reducing follow-up questions and helping the team resolve priority cases earlier.

Technical example

Automated a repeatable reconciliation step with Python, documented validation checks and reduced manual review time while preserving an audit trail.

Graduate example

Coordinated a four-person university project, clarified ownership and delivered the final prototype two days before the assessment deadline.

Action: Rewrite five bullets, then ask a knowledgeable person whether each one is believable and clear.

AI support prompt

For each bullet, show what is clear, what is unsupported, and what evidence would make it stronger. Preserve my voice and facts.

4. Cover letters that add information

A cover letter should not repeat the CV. It should explain motivation, fit and context that the CV cannot show efficiently.

Opening

Name the role and give one specific reason the organisation or problem matters to you.

Evidence

Choose one or two examples that demonstrate the most important requirements. Explain your reasoning, not every task.

Gaps and transitions

Address a career change or unusual path briefly and positively. Show transferable evidence and the work already completed.

Close

Express interest in discussing the contribution you could make. Avoid begging, exaggeration and guaranteed claims.

Action: Draft 250-350 words, then remove every sentence that could be sent to any employer.

AI support prompt

Critique this cover letter for specificity, evidence and tone. Highlight generic sentences. Suggest questions that would help me make it more personal.

5. Run a disciplined job search

More applications are not automatically better. Use a repeatable process that protects quality and creates learning.

Choose a lane

Define one primary role family and one adjacent option. Research recurring requirements across 20 real vacancies.

Track decisions

Record role, source, date, match evidence, gaps, contact, follow-up and outcome. Review patterns weekly.

Use networking properly

Ask informed questions, share useful context and build relationships before requesting referrals.

Learn from outcomes

No interviews suggests positioning or targeting problems. Interviews without offers suggests evidence, communication or role-fit problems.

Action: Set a weekly target for high-quality applications, relevant conversations and skill-building outputs.

AI support prompt

Analyse this anonymised job-search tracker. Identify patterns and suggest experiments for next week. Do not promise outcomes.

6. Interview preparation

Preparation is not memorising perfect sentences. It is organising truthful evidence so you can think clearly under pressure.

Build a story bank

Prepare examples covering collaboration, disagreement, learning, failure, ownership, prioritisation and measurable impact.

Use STAR flexibly

Situation and task should be brief. Spend most time on your actions, reasoning and the result or learning.

Practise aloud

Record answers, remove unnecessary background and check whether your contribution is distinct from the team's.

Ask better questions

Ask about priorities, success measures, team challenges and how decisions are made. Avoid questions answered on the first page of the website.

Action: Complete three recorded mock answers and improve one variable at a time.

AI support prompt

Interview me one question at a time for this role. After each answer, evaluate clarity, evidence and relevance. Never invent a stronger story for me.

Target role and why it fits my current evidence:
Three requirements I can prove with examples:
Two honest gaps and the action I am taking:
Most relevant achievement for the first half of page one:
One person who can review clarity, not just grammar:

7. A 30-day improvement plan

The goal is not a perfect CV. The goal is a stronger body of evidence and a more informed search.

Week 1

Choose target roles, analyse vacancies and build your evidence bank.

Week 2

Revise the CV and LinkedIn profile; obtain human feedback; test PDF readability.

Week 3

Create tailored cover-letter material, practise interview stories and begin focused outreach.

Week 4

Review outcomes, identify the weakest link and run one controlled improvement experiment.

Action: At day 30, keep what produced evidence and change what did not.

AI support prompt

Help me conduct a monthly review. Ask for numbers, examples and outcomes before suggesting changes.