Making Job Applications

Write great CVs and cover letters, prepare for job interviews, and discover how to make the most of a career expo

Welcome to
MyCareer

UCT's career portal designed to help you access our services

Opportunities
- Bursaries, jobs, internships
- Employer networking events
- Career events and webinars
- Entrepreneurship competitions

Career Advice
- Job search assistance
- CV / bursary application reviews
- Book face-to-face or virtual consultations

Information
- Job search resources
- Skills development online courses

Log in

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Creating a great CV

A CV is a marketing tool, which is intended to put across your best points. You might have a lot to offer, but if your CV is poor, you may not get past the first stage in the selection process. It is worth spending time reflecting on yourself, understanding your value proposition, and then writing, editing, and updating your CV until you are confident that it presents you in a professional and comprehensive manner.

Here are some tips to help you develop an Impactful CV that you will be proud of:

- **Identify what you will be using your CV for**

If your CV is for a particular job opportunity or bursary, make sure that you have the requirements or the job specifications. This will help you understand what to put in your CV. Bursary or scholarships CVs are different from job application CVs.

- **Choose your headings wisely**

Choose headings that fit your experience. Avoid using templates which constrains you from adding headings, or those that are commonly used. Headings should be eye-catching and be fitting to what you have done and achieved. Refer to CV example provided.

- **What skills are required?**

These are often outlined in the job description. Identify examples of where you have used skills drawing from all your activities and experiences (i.e., studying, course work, part time work, cultural or sporting activities, community involvement or voluntary work).

- **Use evidence to strengthen your skills section**

Many students claim to have skills but give no examples that act as evidence of what they have done. Evidence is powerful and shows that you have thought about how you can transfer a skill from one area to what you are applying to. See our examples in this handout.

- **Avoid repetition!**

DO NOT repeat information. Some of the same information could go under different headings. You need to decide where to put information so that your CV is not repetitive.

- **Check spelling and grammar**

Your CV needs to be error free. Applications can be rejected if they have spelling errors and typos. Also make sure that your formatting, style, spacing and headings are consistent.

TIPS: Targeted Content | Simple | Concise | Easy to read | Unique to you | Error Free

Include supporting documents and a cover letter
Always send your CV with a cover letter and any supporting documents that are requested. Your CV is part of an application package that generally includes:
- Certificates
- Academic records

REMEMBER: a cover letter enables you to write in prose, which you *should not* do in a CV.

Tips on layout and formatting:

- Put all activities in each section in reverse chronological order (start with most recent information)
- Use the same font throughout and consistent font sizes for headings and text
- Font size for body text should be between 10 – 12, use Ariel or Calibri (body)
- Be careful of templates - they may not serve your purpose (use plain and simple ones if needed)
- Avoid using CAPS other than in headings
- CVs are typically two pages, but employers may request otherwise, so always follow instructions. Academic CVs can be longer, and resumes are one page
- Use your space wisely, but don't overcrowd the information (use line spacing between 1 and 1.5 pts)
- Adjust your margins if you are trying to keep to two pages and are one or two lines over
- Do not include a photograph, unless requested by the employer to include it

Sample CV

1

John Doe

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Cell: 082 345 6789 | Email: careers.service@uct.ac.za | LinkedIn: @johndoe | Mowbray, Cape Town

Profile

3

Graduate with a bachelor of arts in Media Studies and Political Sciences,, currently completing Honours in Political Sciences at the University of Cape Town. Interested in social media, vacation work experience in publishing and marketing. Avid blogger (studentponderings.blogspot.com) and winner of Alan Paton Short Story Award in 2022. Proficient communicator, writer, and debater in English, Afrikaans, isiZulu and a conversationalist in German and Spanish.

Education

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2022 - Current: Bachelor of Arts Honours in Political Sciences, University of Cape Town (UCT)

2019 - 2021: Bachelor of Arts in Media Studies and Political Sciences, UCT
- Deans' Merit Award (2020)
- Achieved 85% passing average

2017 - National Senior Certificate, Matric, Lesonga High School, Cape Town
- Achieved 4 distinctions in Mathematics, English, Biology and Geography
- SRC Chairperson and Class Captain
- 2017 Western Cape Regional Debate finalist

Work Experience

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December 2020 - February 2022: Intern, Media 24, Cape Town
- Assisted with logistics, editing, administration and wrote article "Hungry Students" (Drum, March 2011)

January 2021 - March 2021: Orientation Leader, Faculty of Science, UCT, Cape Town
- Facilitated 3 orientation sessions and presented a talk to 350 first year students
- Provided guidance and clarity to science First Years students on how the university is structured and where to get services

June 2016 - December 2017: Waitress (part-time), Brian's Burger Place, Cape Town
- Provided customer services to all about 40 - 50 customers daily, gained Employee of the Month for five months in a row
- Designed and proposed menu change which increased customer satisfaction and dining

Skills

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- **IT and Computer Skills:** proficient computer user with key skills in Microsft Office Suite (Excel, Word, Powerpoint), Python, Adobe package, Canva and troubleshooting

7

- **Communication:** Developed public speaking skills and presenting through debate participation and further enhanced communication skills as a waitress. Completed Spanish and German courses.
- Marketing and Design: Designed a restaurant menu using Canva and shared the menu on social media to drive engagement, gained 100+ customers per day.

Referees

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- Professor Percy Davis, Head: Botany Department. UCT: percy.davis@uct.ac.za
- Mr Vincent Mabona, Manager: SWAT Marketing: vincent@swat.co.za

Additional Information

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Achievements/roles of responsibility/leadership/community work/cultural activities, sport
- **2021:** Humanities Exclusive, UCT (6 week development programme)
- **2015 - 2018:** 1st Team basketball, Rondebosch Community Team
- **2017:** Member of Students' Representative Council, Lesonga High School

Membership of Professional Associations
- **2020:** Member of Golden Key International Honour Society, UCT

Publications and Conferences

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- **2021:** Africom Conference, Cape Town: co-presented paper on "Do Student Voices Make A Difference: Exploring Outcomes of Student Activism at University of Cape Town

Key

1 Use your preferred name. Do not include all your names. Include one professional email, preferably your Gmail, Apple, Hotmail or Webmail

2 LinkedIn profile link must be hyperlinked. Make sure your account is updated. Include ONLY if you have a profle.

3 This is optional, however, if you choose to include a profile, be specific and concise about your unique selling points. It should be no longer that 4 points. Concentrate on your education, passions, interests and skills

4 Online Courses or additional training should be placed under a different heading (e.g., **Additional training/courses**
   • January 2022 - Jun 2022: Python fundamentals, Coursera

5 Include any work experience (part-time, vac work, volunteer, internships etc.). Use actionable words to describe your impact and involvement in the organisation or company. **Click here for actionable words**

6 Include at least 5 -7 skills ranging from your transferrable skills, interpersonal skills, technical/IT skills, qualification, or industry skills (i.e., As a BA media student, I gained digital marketing skills, research, editing and communications. Additionally, add skills to close the gap from different job postings you are targeting.

7 HELP TO IDENTIFY YOUR SKILLS: https://careers.uct.ac.za/students-considering-your-career/identifying-skills

8 Only include email addresses and exclude cellphone contacts

9 Select a HEADING which is relevant to you. No need to include all of them

10 Publications and conference section can be included if you are compiling an academic CV or a postgraduate scholarship

Writing Cover Letters

A cover letter adds context to your CV. It is your opportunity to demonstrate your knowledge and interest in the employer or position, to highlight what you can offer and why you are a good fit for the role.

What to include in a cover letter for an advertised role?

A cover letter must do the following:
- State the position applied for (if this is not a 'cold call' application)
- Introduce you to an employer as a professional, confident, and enthusiastic candidate
- Articulate your reasons for applying
- Explain why you want to work for that employer
- Showcase your strengths and relevant experience
- Highlight why you are suitable for the job
- Address any gaps or weaknesses in your CV

> Unless otherwise stated, include a cover letter with every CV you send. Thoroughly do research to customise your cover letter for the organisation and position you are applying for.

What are employers looking for?

The employers look for evidence that you are a good match for the job. Your task is to convince them to invite you for an interview. They want to see that you can communicate clearly, that you are knowledgeable about the organisation and role, and that you have the right skills and character for the job.

To whom should I address it?

It is best practice to name a person and their position at the organisation, for example: "Dear Dr. Mbabane, Head of Department". If you are responding to an advertisement there may be a contact provided. If you can't find the appropriate person through research, then you may use more generic titles such as "Dear HR Director" or "Hiring Manager"; best to avoid using gender-based terms such as Sir/Madam or the generic "To whom it may concern".

> If you are emailing your application, attach your letter (and CV) as a pdf attachment, with a brief, professional email outlining what you are applying for and attaching.

What should the format be?

Your letter should be one A4 page written using the standard business letter format (see last page for example template). Do not over fill the page, as white space helps with readability and makes the presentation more attractive. It's best to electronically type the letter and convert the document into PDF format to retain your layout. This is particularly important with emailing the cover letter, as words shift when viewed on a different system or version of software.

Do's and Don'ts

Do's

- Be concise, understand that people are busy
- Use clear, simple language appropriate to the industry
- Customise each letter explaining what you might bring to the organisation
- Use descriptions of actual events, qualifications, and skills rather than providing opinions
- Focus on your relevant experiences and pull attention to relevant parts of your CV
- Explain any weak points in your CV, such as gaps in work history
- You can reduce the font and margin-size to fit more on the page but consider the impact as white space aids absorption of information
- Spell check, grammar check and have someone else proofread the final document

Don'ts

- Don't use a font size below 11 pt
- Don't use overly formal or informal writing styles or fonts
- Don't use hyphenated words at the end of a sentence
- Never suggest the job doesn't align with your ambitions
- Never attempt to use flattery
- Don't start every paragraph with "I"
- Don't repeat yourself, this includes simply repeating the information in your CV
- Never lie or exaggerate your experience
- Don't leave the subject line blank in the email
- Don't use abbreviations, slang, colours, emoticons in your letter
- Don't add quotes to your email signature
- Don't forget to attach the CV and provide your contact details

A speculative cover letter is used for when a role is not advertised at an organisation. Do research so that you can explain the role that you are interested in at that particular company. This demonstrates that you are proactive and dedicated.

What will make me stand out?

Each letter will be unique to you and a particular employer, but we examine what makes a good or bad cover letter by looking at specific examples:

Examples

The Good

The Bad

- "I am interested in a career in journalism because I am passionate about communication and people's right to the truth. Current issues awaken my curiosity and often stimulate further research. They make me want to connect with the people involved and to find out more. I gained valuable research experience from my internship at The Daily News." This applicant is conveying their motivation and demonstrating that they have relevant experience.

- *"As an Economics graduate, I have excellent data management skills that will transfer well into project management. I am able to provide solid forecasting and during my internship, could quickly highlight project issues before they have an impact." This applicant provides evidence that their existing skills align with the demands of the job.*

- *"Dear HR manager, I am very interested in being part of Scholarfund. Your focus on assisting underprivileged students to access education is a cause very close to my heart, having been a scholarship recipient throughout my secondary and tertiary education."*
  - *The applicant has failed to find a person to address the letter to but targets it at the most relevant post.*
  - *They name the company.*
  - *They communicate alignment between their interests and the company's aims.*

- "I am interested in a career in journalism because I have always enjoyed watching the news and I am very impressed by the success of Aljazeera. I was very moved by the coverage of the Egyptian revolution of 2011."
  - This applicant comes across a consumer rather than someone who contributes.
  - Their emotional, yet passive response to a world event is not relevant.
  - "I" is overused, a better version would be: "A career in journalism has always interested me because…"

- "As an Economics graduate, I am fascinated by trends in the labour market and hope to move into research. I am excelent at interpreting data and I believe working for you as a project manager will be a good starting point for my career."
  - This applicant admits that their career plans do not align with position advertised.
  - The use of "excellent" is an opinion, and they failed to use the spell checker to correct it.

- "To whom it may concern. My name is Rose Theron. This letter serves to introduce myself and inform you of my interest in becoming a part of your company. My CV will furnish you with information concerning my employment history."
  - This comes across as a generic application that could be sent out 100 times or more.
  - There is no need to state your name upfront.
  - They fail to name the company.
  - The language is overly formal with "serves to introduce" and "furnish you".

Cover letter example for an advertised role

<div align="right">

Your address (max 3-4 lines)
Phone number/email
Date

</div>

Company representative name
Company representative title/designation
Company address

Dear [Company Representative name/title/designation or "HR manager"],
Subject line 1 [State purpose of letter] Re: Application for ... advertised in ... (include reference number if provided)

Paragraph 1
- State your current location and occupation (e.g., I am a final-year Humanities student at the University of Cape Town...)
- List any documents that are attached in support of your application (e.g., CV, transcripts, testimonials)

Paragraph 2
- State your motivation for applying to this organisation (ensure you have done the research to be able to persuade that you are a good fit)
- Demonstrate your knowledge about the organisation and how your ambitions align with theirs

Paragraph 3
- Showcase your skills, qualifications and experience to demonstrate that you meet the basic requirements Describe how your career interests, aspirations and personal attributes have led to your interest in and suitability for the position
- Refer to specific examples in your CV to highlight your accomplishments and what you can offer
- Demonstrate how your attributes/accomplishments can benefit the organisation

Paragraph 4 (optional)
- Outline any unique circumstances you may wish to inform the employer of (e.g., special needs related to illness; gap in a CV; prolonged time to complete degree). Disclosure is entirely your choice as, regardless of your circumstances, you have the ability to fulfill the role.
- You may want to refer to your availability

Closing paragraph
- State your appreciation for the consideration given to your application and your interest in receiving a positive response
- If you plan to follow up on the application with a phone call/email, then state that specifically (and ensure that you do follow up)

Sign off with "Yours sincerely" if you have addressed the person by name, or "Yours faithfully" if not, and then your name underneath.

Preparing for interviews

An interview is a meeting between an employer and a job seeker that takes place after applying for a job and being short-listed for the position. The interview is an opportunity for the employer to evaluate you and for you to assess if the job and the company is right for you.

Types of interviews

Employers use different types of interview formats, depending on the company and type of jobs they are seeking to fill. For larger organisations you may already have undertaken a type of assessment test before you are invited to an interview. For others, you may face several types of interview formats throughout the selection process.

> The key to a successful interview is preparation as this helps you to feel confident, answer any questions concisely and make a great impression. Don't leave this until the last minute.

The most common formats of interviews are:

- **face-to-face meetings** with one or more interviewers (a panel) is still the most commonly used format. They typically last between 45- and 60 - minutes and the questions may be competency- or strength-based.
- **telephonic interviews** with one caller used early in the application process to filter large number of applicants. They typically last between 15- and 30- minutes with questions related to confirming your interest in the role, knowledge about the company and your credentials. If you are successful, you will be invited to a face-to-face or video interview.
- **video calls** which last between 30- and 45-minutes using zoom, teams or a similar app are increasingly popular among large employers particularly for graduate programmes. Video interviews can be live or pre-recorded with the latter (in which case you will be required to answer a set of questions or respond to a number of statements) becoming more popular.
- **assessment centres** which you will attend with several other candidates, enable employers to compare the performance of lots of applicants at the same time. You will participate in presentations, team exercises, psychometric tests and sometimes complete case studies to demonstrate your knowledge and skills. Assessment centres lasts the entire day and may be held online as well as face-to-face.

You might be required to attend more than one interview: a telephonic screening interview to secure your place in the more in-depth second face-to-face interview followed by an assessment centre.

When invited to an interview

An invitation to an interview may come a few weeks after applying for the job, so ensure you keep a copy of the relevant advertisement, the job requirements, and the job description if it was included in the advertisement.

Request and note the following details:
- Date and time of the interview
- Exact location and directions. Find out how long it will take to get there if you are taking public transport or an uber; find out where to park if you are taking your own transport
- If you need to prepare anything specific or bring anything to the interview
- The name of the caller/emailer, the names of the interviewer(s)
- How long the interview will take

What to research before the interview

An essential part of preparing for the interview is to conduct research on the employer, the job you're applying for, the interview panel and the questions you can expect.

- **Employer –** ensure you understand the business of the employer – the sector, industry, the context within which it operates, its values and culture, challenges and competitors it faces. Check its website and LinkedIn pages.
- **Job –** be clear you understand what is expected from the job, the knowledge and skills required and why you are a good fit for it. Can you explain why you want the job, why the company should choose you over other candidates? Read the job description again and again.
- **Interview panel –** try to find our who will be interviewing you. Use LinkedIn and the "About Us" section of the company website to find out more about the interview panel's interest and experience. This may help you establish a positive rapport with them.
- **Questions you can expect –** this is available in our handout: Handling interview questions. Also consider questions you might want to ask the panel and prepare about five questions about things not covered in the advertisement, website or the interview.

Ways To Make A Good Impression
- Do a mock interview – practice at least once before the actual interview. Book an appointment with one of the Career Service Consultants to do so; record yourself answering common questions and review them
- First impressions count - be punctual
- Show enthusiasm for the job and be positive about yourself
- Watch your body language – maintain eye contact (if it a video interview – remember to look into the camera), give a firm handshake, don't slouch – sit naturally upright, remember to smile frequently
- Dress professionally (as if you already have the job)
- Answer all questions clearly, audibly and concisely; pause before answering a question to give yourself time to think; don't speak too quickly

Virtual interviews

For online telephonic interviews, plan and test the following well before the interview:

- Ensure you have access to a quiet space or book a virtual interview room with Career Service
- Make sure you have enough batterylife on the device you are using
- Test call to check the connectivity and stability of the phone or internetline
- Test your camera and make sure the lightingis good (e.g. no bright backlight)
- For video calls, dress smartly and check that the background is clean (e.g. they can't see your unmade bed or a pile of dishes!)
- Frame the camera to include your upper body so you appear natural and there isn't a focus on the top part of your head, which can happen when using a webcam
- If using zoom or teams or a similar application, make sure that your username and profile picture are appropriate and professional (e.g. NOT @cheekySquirrel99 or @soccerHooligan32)

Presentations

If you are presenting something in the interview, you will need to cover logistical items as well as some technological ones. Check that you do the following:

- Have multiple copies of digital files (e.g. on flash drive, in the cloud, emailed to the interviewer, and/or on your computer if you are taking one).
- Test the format on different devices or file types, as layouts may alter during conversions
- Bring any equipment you might need, including power cables and adaptors - ask if you are unsure of what is available
- Limit animations and embedded clips that could malfunction.

> **Within 24 hours of the interview:**
> - Send a short email to thank the employer for the opportunity to interview for the position, mention something you have learned or enjoyed about it.
> - Send any additional information you were asked for or offered to send during the interview

What happens after the interview?

- After the interview, ask when you will be informed of the outcome and thank them for the opportunity
- You are invited to a second interview: you need to start preparing
- You get a job offer: This is wonderful news! The offer normally outlines the conditions of your employment (e.g. the salary they are offering, the amount of leave, the length of the contract (if not a permanent position) and working hours). Make sure you know and understand all the conditions before you sign; you may wish to negotiate the terms before
- You get a rejection: Accept the decision graciously (keeping up your professional
- impression) and ask for feedback on why you did not get the position. This will help you
- to prepare better for the next interview or identify skills that you need to acquire.
- You don't hear from them again - this is frustrating! During the interview, you should have asked for next steps and a timeframe of when you can expect to hear back. If that period passes with no news, it is acceptable to contact the organisation asking for feedback.

Handling interview questions

Employers need to decide if you are the best person for the job and a good fit for the organisation. How you respond to the interview questions is a key factor in their decision making. Considering and preparing for some of the questions you expect to be asked so that you convey the relevant information, will boost your confidence and performance during the interview.

And while you can never be sure exactly what you will be asked, here are some common questions you should be prepared for:

- **Tell us about yourself**

This is a common and important opening question as it enables you to create a great first impression. Generally, start with an overview of your highest qualification, achievements you are proud of, any work experience you may have had and the skills you developed. Try to articulate what you can offer and why you are a good candidate. To sound confident, practise this out loud, but don't sound too rehearsed in your response.

- **Why did you apply for this position? Why are you a good candidate for this role?**

You need to demonstrate that you have researched the role, and what is required to perform successfully in it. Study the job description, or research what the position usually involves. Be ready to provide examples for each of the competencies and skills required. Be honest but optimistic if you don't have some of the skills required. Employers prefer someone who is honest about their abilities and is keen to learn. Also mention the aspect of the job advertisement that attracted you to it, what you would enjoy about the job.

- **What are your strengths?**

Identify four to five strengths that align with those skills the employer is seeking in the advertisement. Whichever strengths you choose to share, you must be able to provide evidence of having demonstrated them in the experiences you have had or where acquired them.

- **What are your weaknesses?**

You can frame your weaknesses more positively as areas of development. Rather think about one to two skills you would like to improve and mention what you have done to do so. For example, you might want to improve public speaking deciding to join Toastmasters to gain confidence in doing so.

- **How do you prioritise your work?**

Employers are interested in how you plan and organise yourself and your work; how meet deadlines and competing priorities. Think about how you have managed multiple tasks and delivered them on time. Provide insight into the ways in which you keep track of what you need to deliver and produce.

- **What has been your greatest achievement?**

Think about achievements whilst at university, awards you received, accomplishments you are proud of in any of your experiences (sport, vacation work, voluntary work, extra-curricular activities), overcoming significant challenges. Try and link your achievements to what the employer might value.

- **What has been the most difficult situation you faced?**

This question is designed to assess how you cope under pressure and seeks to understand how you overcame the difficult situations, how you dealt with unexpected situations, tight deadlines or difficult people.

STAR technique for answering questions

Interviewers commonly use 'behavioural' questions so that they can get a sense of how you handle different situations. Some examples are:

- Describe a time when you faced conflict in a professional setting and how you resolved it
- Tell us about an experience where you have had to take the lead in a team

You can refer to things you have done in work/study/extra-curricula/personal contexts. When answering, use the acronym STAR to structure your answer:

- **Situation –** where, when, and with whom
- **Task –** the task or project that you were working on
- **Action –** the actions you performed in response to or to complete the task
- **Result –** the outcome you achieved, what you learned, what you would do differently

Questions about the employer

Research the company website and social media platforms to know more about the company, the people you will meet and the industry. This research helps to identify questions you may add to your own list of questions to ask and to demonstrate your interest in the sector.

Questions to ask the interviewer

Towards the end of the interview, you are normally given a chance to ask questions of your own. Take along a list of questions, but do not ask any that were answered in the interview. Some examples include:

- Something you noticed on their website that interested you but wasn't covered in the interview (e.g.a product/project, international offices/opportunities, team structure)
- What training or induction process is run for new recruits?
- How big is the team you would join?
- What is the work environment like?
- How often and how are performance appraisals done?
- What are the next steps in the hiring process? (This is important to ask so that you know when to follow up and what to expect.)

Questions to avoid asking

- Asking about the salary in the first interview
- Personal and irrelevant questions
- Anything that is explained on their website

Making the most of a careers expo

A careers expo offers many different opportunities. Decide what your needs are and be intentional about what you would like to get from attending a careers expo. There are opportunities for internships, undergraduate programmes and graduate jobs so make sure that you are prepared to get the most from attending.

You don't have to be a final year graduate to attend!

As a first-year student, you can discover different companies, sectors and industries to broaden your options with your future career. Also look out for bursaries and scholarship offers.

> The atmosphere at a Careers Expo/Fair can be overwhelming if attendance numbers are large. Allow a suitable amount of time for the event, relax and be prepared.

How to prepare

- Through the careers expo advertising, find out which companies are attending, what is on offer and decide who you most wish to speak to
- Research these organisations using their website or their social media presence
- Based on your research and careers expo advert, formulate the questions you wish to ask – see some ideas below; capture your questions to refer to before you approach employers
- Update your CV in readiness to apply for any opportunities; ensure that the skills you reflect in your CV are those that employers seek in graduates
- Take a notebook along or be prepared to capture notes electronically after each meaningful engagement at the expo. These notes can be used when following up
- Be curious! Do not rule out an employer because of the industry they represent (A publishing company, for example, provides opportunities in finance, marketing, and HR, in addition to writing and editing)

At the expo, present your best self

There are certain professional guidelines that can help you improve the impression you make:

- Be polite and confident; face and eye contact, as well as body language are important
- Dress smartly; you don't have to wear a suit to impress, but avoid dressing too casually
- Keep your phone on silent and speak loudly and clearly
- Practice a 30 second speech (elevator pitch) to introduce yourself – include your name, where you are at with your education, summary of your skills and career goals
- Ask about the work, business, and culture and where there are potential opportunities
- Leave discussions about salary and benefits until the job offer stage
- Make notes about your conversations for future reference
- Take the opportunity to network with fellow attendees, not only potential employees, you never know where your paths may cross in the future
- Collect any available brochures or literature supplied
- If you've engaged with a company representative, ask for a business card and follow up:

"Hi, I am xxx and I'm in my xxx year here at UCT studying xxx. I am really interested in finding out more about your company as my particular interest is in xxx"

Suggestions for what to discuss and ask (meaningful, relevant and tailored to the organisation)

As you would have done your research before attending, only if unclear, use the opportunity to clarify offerings and application processes

- How would you describe your company culture?
- What advice would you give me as a x-year student thinking of joining your company/this sector?
- What do you think makes a candidate stand out?
- What sort of experience would you like graduates to have?
- How will I be developed if I come in as a graduate?
- Why did you choose this company/role?
- What do you enjoy about working for this organisation?
- What do you wish you would have known when you were job hunting as a graduate?

After the expo

- If someone gives you their card/contact details, use the invitation to contact them and follow-up within 48 hours
- Connect on LinkedIn with people you meet and follow companies of interest
- TAKE ACTION! Apply to the company or submit any materials requested, such as a CV and cover letter

TAKEAWAY SHEET

In this takeaway sheet:

USING AI IN YOUR JOB APPLICATIONS

1. Introduction
Applying for jobs can be stressful, and in South Africa's competitive graduate market, artificial intelligence (AI) tools are increasingly being used to support CV writing, cover letters, and interview preparation.
Employers also use AI extensively in recruitment — from Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS) that scan CVs for keywords, to automated communication platforms. Universities, including UCT, recognise that students will experiment with AI tools, but they emphasise the importance of using them responsibly and ethically.
This guide will help you discover ways to use AI in your job search, avoid common mistakes, and keep your applications authentic.

2. What are AI tools?

AI tools are software applications trained to generate or analyse text, provide suggestions, and assist with tasks such as writing, editing, and interview preparation.

Examples relevant to South African students include:

- Generative AI - https://copilot.microsoft.com/, https://chatgpt.com/, https://gemini.google.com/ap
- Writing / text - https://quillbot.com/
- Refer to CILT's - STUDENT GUIDE_ Using ChatGPT and other AI tools in Education for additional AI tools.

3. How AI is useful for CVs and cover letter

According to global surveys graduates increasing use AI to:

- Tailor and edit their CVs to specific roles.
- Identify relevant keywords from South African job descriptions and job advertisements (important for ATS systems used by large firms).
- Suggest professional phrasing and structure when tailoring their CVs.
- Help answer application from question.

If you do decide to use AI tools, remember:

- Always review and personalise AI-generated content.
- Never submit AI text unchanged — recruiters in South Africa value authenticity and cultural fit.
- Your goal is to land an interview, so you must be able to confidently discuss everything you've written.

4. How AI can support you with interview preparation

AI tools can support you by:

- Generating common interview questions for South African graduate programmes
- Helping you structure answers using frameworks like STAR (Situation, Task, Action, Result), Strength-Based Interview techniques
- Offering mock interviews and feedback through specific AI interview tool platforms

The limitations of using AI for interview preparation

AI cannot replicate your experiences reflected in your CV or cover letter, creativity, or personality. So, be honest and authentic — your individual, authentic lived experiences is what sets you apart.

5. How recruiters use AI to check CVs and cover letters

South African recruiters and companies are aware of AI use and some actively scan for AI-generated content. They may:

- Use software to detect AI-written text.
- Compare your application with your interview responses.
- Spot language that feels out of contextually out of place.

This being the case, it's best to:

- Use AI to enhance or edit, not to create documents entirely from scratch
- Personalise using your own voice and experiences.
- Be authentic. Authenticity and trust matter — not just for securing the job, but for succeeding in it.

6. Is it fair to use AI in your job applications?

AI is fair to use when you use it responsibly and it helps you:

- Organise your thoughts.
- Overcome writer's block.
- Boost confidence.

Irresponsible and unfair use of AI include:

- Misrepresenting your skills.
- Exaggerating experience.
- Submitting content that isn't truly yours.

Your application reflects your professional identity. Misleading employers can damage your reputation and harm your career prospects.

7. When not to use AI in job applications

Avoid AI in situations where authenticity is essential:

- Completing **psychometric or aptitude tests** (common in South African graduate recruitment).
- Inflating skills and abilities or fabricating experiences.
- Replacing your authentic voice in interviews or video interview responses.

8. How recruiters use AI

Recruiters in South Africa use AI to:

- Scan CVs for keywords and qualifications.
- Rank candidates based on job criteria.
- Reduce unconscious bias by anonymising applications.
- Analyse video interviews (tone of voice, facial expressions, word choice).
- Use chatbots to update candidates throughout the process.

9. Key principles when using AI responsibly and ethically

AI tools can be powerful allies in your job search — but only if you remain the author of your own story. Use them to support, not replace, your voice. This being the case:

- **Tailor your CV with relevant keywords, but ensure it remains authentically you,** reflecting your voice, your why.
- **Respect employer policies on AI.** Some South African companies now include statements in job adverts about disclosing AI use. Failing to do so may disqualify you.
- **Be transparent:** If asked, disclose when and how you used AI in your application process.
- **Critically evaluate:** Don't accept AI output at face value. Check accuracy, relevance, and tone.
- **Avoid over-reliance:** Use AI as a support tool, not a replacement for your own thinking or creativity.
- **Maintain academic and professional integrity:** Just as in coursework, misrepresenting AI-generated work as your own is dishonest.
- **Develop your own voice:** AI can suggest phrasing, but your unique perspective and experiences must shine through.
- **Respect context:** AI tools may not understand South African cultural nuances, workplace expectations, or industry-specific language. Always adapt content accordingly.
- **AI biases** still exist, so check for nuances in what is generated and personalise the output.

10. Career Service Resources (South Africa)

UCT Careers Service offer strong career development support alongside AI tools:
- **Book a 1:1 appointment** with your university's career advisor using this link - https://mycareer.uct.ac.za/students/appointments/app/
- **Access Careers Service guides** on CV writing, cover letters, and interview preparation - https://careers.uct.ac.za/students-making-applications-cv-cover-letters-and-linkedin/creating-great-cv
- **Download your university's job applications resource book -** https://careers.uct.ac.za/students-making-applications/resources-booklet

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