How to Create a Skills-Based CV

Skills Over Experience: Build a CV That Works

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Everything about work is changing, from what the modern office looks like, to how employers assess and recruit candidates. Companies and recruitment teams are rapidly recognising that the old-school CV resume isn't as reliable as it once was.

Documents listing job titles and certifications year-by-year don't always tell the full story about how successful someone can be in a role. On the other hand, 94% of organisations say that the people they hire based on skills (rather than traditional credentials) often excel in their roles.

But if companies hire based on skills now, how do you ensure your CV still stands out?

You need a skills-based or "functional CV" that shines a spotlight on your capabilities and potential. Whether you're actively searching for a new role or preparing for the future job market, here's how to build the ultimate skills-focused CV.

Why You Need a Skills-Based CV in 2025

The job market is experiencing yet another period of change. The half-life of professional skills has plummeted to just four to five years, and by 2030, around nine out of ten employees will need new skill sets. This means a candidate's most valuable currency in the job market isn't their years of service or last job title, but their constantly expanding skills.

Nearly three-quarters (72%) of employers say they now prioritise skills assessments over traditional CVs. McKinsey also found that hiring for skills is five times more predictive of job success than hiring based on education.

Technology is driving a lot of the change . AI tools and applicant tracking systems (ATS) now scan resumes in milliseconds, looking for core competencies. If your experience isn't packaged correctly, it might not even surpass the first digital gatekeeper. Plus, there are regional pressures shaping hiring strategies.

In the UK, automation is expected to impact up to 30% of jobs by 2030. Despite high applicant volume in Canada, 40% of employers struggle to find qualified talent. Meanwhile, Australia's booming tech sector is creating demand for cross-disciplinary skill sets, and in the US, the labour market has split. High-skill jobs are growing, while middle-skill roles are vanishing.

All of this means one thing: if you can clearly show what you're capable of, beyond the boundaries of job titles, you'll be ahead of the curve.

Core Components of an Effective Skills-Based Resume

Figuring out how to create a skills-based or functional CV can initially be complicated. Most of us are used to structuring these job application documents in a certain way. Fortunately, once you understand what you must include, it's pretty easy to make the shift.

Here's what a skills-focused resume should include:

A Skill Summary and Professional Profile

This is the elevator pitch at the very top of the page. In a few sentences, you introduce your employer to who you are. Outline your core strengths, your values, and what you bring to the table. This section reads like a confident LinkedIn bio, for example:

"Flexible and outcomes-focused professional with an extensive record in [things you've accomplished]. Skilled in translating data into insights, working with automated and AI-driven tools, and experimenting with new platforms."

Try to sprinkle keywords from the job listing into this section. For instance, if the role mentions "adaptability" or "data literacy," try to include those words.

Skills Categories

Skill categories will comprise the core of your new skills-based resume and should be grouped into logical themes. That might include:

- **Technical Skills** (e.g. Python, CAD software, Google Analytics)
- **Soft Skills** (e.g. problem-solving, communication, leadership)
- **Industry-Specific Skills** (e.g. UX design, clinical compliance, agile methodology)

Each group should list specific, measurable competencies. Where possible, show proficiency levels ("Advanced in Adobe Premiere Pro" or "Working knowledge of SQL") or context ("Used Figma to prototype and test UX flows for a SaaS platform").

Accomplishments

This is where you bring your skills to life by sharing real results and outcomes. Use the "Challenge Action Result" (CAR) method to write your achievement statements, such as:

"Transformed underperforming email campaign (Challenge) by introducing segmentation and A/B testing (Action), leading to a 47% increase in open rates and a 23% boost in conversions (Result)."

Always quantify your results whenever possible. Numbers tell hiring managers you understand what success looks like.

Supporting Experience

You can still include work history and experience in your new skills-focused CV. Just don't make it the main focus. A simple list with a job title, company name, dates, and a few statements about what you accomplished in the role should be enough.

Follow this with relevant education and certifications, listed in reverse chronological order. Remember to mention whether you've done any recent specific online courses, micro credentials, or bootcamps that make a difference to your proficiency for the role.

Optional but Valuable Additions

Depending on your field and experience, you might want to include:

- **A Project Portfolio**: Perfect for creatives, developers, and marketers. Link to samples or GitHub repos.
- **Professional Affiliations:** Associations, groups, or networks that reflect industry engagement.
- **Volunteer Work:** Especially powerful if it reflects leadership, initiative, or skills used in a new context (e.g. leading fundraising, managing events, tutoring in tech literacy).

Overall, your skills-based CV should reflect your evolution, value, and potential. It tells employers, "Here's what I can do, and here's how I've already done it."

Optimising Your Skills-Based Resume for ATS

Once you've built a powerful, skills-first CV, you need to ensure it reaches the right people. For many job seekers, that means learning how to bypass the ATS (applicant tracking system) that companies use to filter applications.

Most large and mid-sized companies (and an increasing number of small ones) use ATS software to scan CVs before a human ever lays eyes on them. These systems sort, filter, and rank resumes based on keyword matches and formatting cues. If your resume isn't optimised for ATS, it might not make it through to human beings, even if you're perfect for the job.

First, you need to know that not every ATS is AI-powered, but they are automated. The software looks for alignment with the job description: specific keywords, qualifications, and relevant skills. These systems are tricky, as they can sometimes <u>filter out the best job applicants</u>.

To avoid that fate:

- **Use natural, targeted keywords** from the job listing, especially in your skills and professional summary. But don't keyword-stuff. Instead of writing "project management project management project management," say something meaningful like, "Led cross-functional teams through the full project lifecycle using Agile methodologies."

- **Stick to clean formatting.** ATS can struggle with tables, graphics, columns, text boxes, and headers/footers. Save the design-heavy version for human readers, but always keep a plain text or Word version for ATS upload fields.

- **Keep job titles standardised.** If you were a "Customer Happiness Hero," consider renaming it to "Customer Service Specialist" with the original title in parentheses.

- **Test your CV** with tools like Jobscan, Resume Worded, or SkillSyncer to see how well it matches target job descriptions.

Remember, optimising for ATS isn't about gaming the bots; it's about learning how to speak their language while still telling the right story for human employers.

Tailoring Your Skills-Based CV for Different Situations

One of the strengths of using a skills-based resume to apply for roles is that these documents are highly adaptable. You can adjust the structure and content based on what's happening for you right now. For instance:

If You're Changing Careers
Draw the most attention to your transferrable skills. Maybe your retail experience sharpened your communication, leadership, and problem-solving abilities. These are all fantastic for project coordination, tech support, or HR roles.

Frame your skills in the language of your target role or new industry. Directly address any leap: "After a decade in hospitality, I'm pivoting into UX design, where my customer-first mindset and attention to detail are major assets."

If You Have an Employment Gap
Most people will have a gap in their employment history at some point during their career. That's particularly true following the pandemic. You don't have to ignore the gap to stand out when applying for a new role with a skills-based CV.

Use your CV to focus on what you maintained or developed during that time: online courses, freelance projects, parenting, caregiving, volunteering. These experiences build organisational, empathy, resilience, and digital literacy skills.

(Read our article on Explaining Breaks in Your Career here)

If You're a Recent Graduate
If you've just finished a course or certification and don't have much experience in prior roles to mention, lead with your academic projects, internships, and extracurriculars.

Did you manage events for a student society, coordinate team projects, or build an app for your final-year assignment? That's an experience worth highlighting. Employers today are looking for emerging skills like data fluency, adaptability, and AI literacy. Lean into those.

Remember, different industries focus more on specific skills. In tech, focusing on technical proficiencies, collaboration, and agile workflows makes more sense. In creative roles, your innovative nature and portfolio (even if it's a personal project portfolio) can be valuable.

Getting Ready for the Era of Skills-Based Hiring

The job market continues to change at a record pace. Today's hiring managers and employers now value capabilities over credentials, and a skills-based resume gives you a valuable way to present your experience in a relevant and powerful way.

Remember, you don't need a perfect timeline or a linear story. What matters is that you can show what you've learned, how you've applied it, and where you want to grow next. The skills-based format gives you room to do that, whatever your next step.

So update your CV, focus on your skills, and remember to keep adapting.

A little about Sarah Bishop and Recruit Recruit Ltd

Whether you're a sole trader hiring your first team member, a VC-backed startup needing to scale fast, or a corporate looking for top-tier C-suite talent, one thing stays true:

Your business grows when your people grow.

I help founders, CEOs and business leaders build brilliant teams through:

- **Recruitment:** finding and placing the right people for the right roles or embedding a talent team into growing businesses
- **Sales & Leadership Training:** developing high-performing teams that sell, lead and deliver
- **Speaking & EmCeeing:** energising events and conferences with insight, humour and practical takeaways
- **Coaching:** supporting leaders to grow confidently, communicate better, and build culture that sticks

Over the years, I've supported businesses at every stage, from bedroom startups to scale-ups and established firms navigating change. What they all have in common? A vision to grow and the ambition to get the right people on board to make it happen.

I bring no-nonsense advice, energy, empathy and results, whether I'm:

- Hiring a game-changing leadership role
- Training a founder-led team to sell with confidence
- Speaking on stage about team-building, fearless follow-up, or people strategy
- Coaching a business owner through their first ever hire

So, let's talk If:

- You're ready to grow and want to hire with confidence
- You need training or coaching to get more from your team (or yourself!)
- You're planning an event and want a speaker or EmCee who brings both energy and value

Drop me a message or connect - let's build something brilliant together.

Contact

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