



# The Master CV Guide

"The only way to get the job you want is to figure out what is in the minds of the people who can give it to you."

**BATTLE  
PROVEN**  
*Strategies*

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# Master CV: the foundation of career strategy

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An effective Master CV begins with clarity about what it is trying to achieve. Its purpose is not to produce a document for direct submission, but to create a strategic record of your full career value, so that future applications can be shaped quickly, credibly, and with far greater precision.

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In the context of this article, that matters because AI has made generic polish cheap. What now carries more weight is relevance, judgement, proof, and the ability to show how your experience translates into value under real conditions.

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The most important consideration is relevance to target roles, because a Master CV is only useful if it helps you respond intelligently to the opportunities you actually want.

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Remember, the only way to get the job you want is to figure out what is in the minds of the people who can give it to you, then prove you meet it.

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Next comes evidence of value, especially achievements, turning points, and decisions that reveal judgement, adaptability, and impact. After that comes clarity of career narrative, so that the material does not read as a long inventory of roles but as a coherent proposition. Then comes transferable strength, which is vital if you are moving sector, stretching upwards, or broadening your options. Finally, supporting detail matters, because dates, qualifications, scope, context, and references all help turn loose claims into credible, usable material.

Below is a practical checklist of what a candidate will need in order to create a proper Master CV in readiness for a job search.

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## Recommended sequence for creating a Master CV

A Master CV is built most effectively in a clear sequence. First, establish where you want to go, then gather the evidence that proves your value, then shape the narrative that connects your experience to future opportunities. Only after that should you focus on supporting detail, digital alignment, and application readiness. In practical terms, sequence matters because it prevents the document becoming a long, unfocused archive. Importance also matters, because some elements carry far more weight than others in a market shaped by AI, where generic polish is easy to produce but relevance, judgement, and proof remain hard to fake.

- **Target direction** - Define the types of roles, sectors, and levels you want to pursue, including stretch roles, sector moves, consultancy work, or board opportunities.
- **Career chronology** - Gather a full and accurate record of your employers, job titles, dates, promotions, secondments, consulting assignments, and changes in remit.
- **Role context** - Capture the scale, reporting lines, team size, budget scope, geography, complexity, and regulatory environment surrounding each role.
- **Responsibilities** - Summarise your actual remit in each role so there is a clear foundation for understanding your level and accountability.
- **Key achievements** - Identify outcome-focused achievements that demonstrate growth, turnaround, transformation, commercial impact, innovation, or risk reduction.
- **Judgement under pressure** - Gather examples of difficult decisions made in ambiguous, politically sensitive, or high-pressure conditions.
- **Scars of real life** - Record the restructures, crises, failures, conflicts, and unexpected shifts that sharpened your judgement and demonstrate senior credibility.
- **Transferable strengths** - Identify the capabilities that travel well across sectors, business models, and role types.
- **Original thinking and creativity** - Note where lateral thinking, innovation, or fresh problem-solving created traction where standard approaches would have fallen short.
- **Evidence of adaptability** - Capture proof that you can respond to change, absorb new contexts, and lead effectively in shifting environments.
- **Metrics and proof** - Add measurable results wherever possible, including revenue, savings, margin, growth, delivery, quality, or risk outcomes.
- **Selection criteria alignment** - Collect job adverts, specifications, competency frameworks, and role profiles from relevant opportunities to reveal recurring employer expectations.
- **Implicit employer needs** - Consider the hidden concerns employers may have, such as cultural repair, pace of change, digital maturity, stakeholder confidence, or governance risk.
- **Career narrative** - Distil the patterns that run through your career so the Master CV supports a coherent proposition rather than a loose inventory of roles.
- **Value proposition** - Clarify what employers should quickly understand about your strengths, your level, and the types of problems you solve.

- **Executive profile material** - Prepare the raw material for your summary, leadership themes, sector strengths, and positioning language.
- **Qualifications and development** - Gather degrees, certifications, executive education, governance training, and relevant professional development.
- **Board and governance exposure** - Record trustee, committee, non-executive, governance, audit, or risk responsibilities where relevant.
- **Awards and recognition** - Include meaningful awards, promotions, industry recognition, or invitations that strengthen credibility.
- **Media and public credibility** - Note press coverage, conference appearances, published work, or public authority signals that support market positioning.
- **LinkedIn and digital footprint** - Review your profile and visible online presence so they can later be aligned with the Master CV.
- **References and endorsements** - Assemble referee details, testimonials, recommendations, or endorsements that may support future applications.
- **Sensitive or confidential material** - Flag anything that must be anonymised, summarised, or handled carefully for legal, political, or commercial reasons.
- **Gaps and weak spots** - Identify thin evidence, vague claims, missing dates, unsupported achievements, or underdeveloped transferable value.
- **Supporting documents** - Gather appraisals, old CVs, project notes, board papers, biographies, presentations, and review records to recover forgotten evidence.
- **Interview and pitch material** - Note the strongest stories and examples for use in networking, interviews, and senior recruitment conversations.
- **Priority opportunities** - Keep a shortlist of likely target roles so the finished Master CV can be translated quickly into tailored applications.
- **Time for reflection** - Allow space to think through patterns, turning points, and the real sources of your value, rather than treating the exercise as data entry.

## Order of importance

1. **Target direction** - This comes first because a Master CV is only strategic if it supports the opportunities you genuinely want to pursue.
2. **Key achievements and proof of value** - Outcome-focused evidence matters more than generic descriptions of responsibility, especially in a market that is increasingly sceptical of polished but empty claims.
3. **Judgement under pressure and scars of real life** - These are often the strongest indicators of executive level, because they reveal how you operate when the stakes are high and conditions are imperfect.
4. **Career narrative and value proposition** - A coherent proposition helps employers understand why your experience matters now, rather than leaving them to interpret a long career history for themselves.
5. **Transferable strengths and adaptability** - These become critical if you are changing sector, stretching upwards, or positioning yourself for a market shaped by disruption and technological change.
6. **Selection criteria and implicit employer needs** - Relevance remains the defining measure of a strong executive application, so the Master CV must support both visible and unspoken employer expectations.
7. **Role context and scope** - Context helps employers understand the level, scale, and complexity of the environments in which you have operated.
8. **Original thinking and creativity** - These matter because they help distinguish human value from routine, commoditised output and show how you create traction in difficult situations.
9. **Metrics and measurable outcomes** - Hard proof strengthens credibility and makes achievements more persuasive to decision-makers.
10. **Supporting detail and documentation** - Dates, qualifications, references, and supporting materials matter because they turn broad claims into usable, credible application content.
11. **LinkedIn and digital alignment** - This matters because your visible professional presence should reinforce, not dilute, the strategic narrative created in the Master CV.
12. **Reflection and refinement** - Time spent thinking critically about patterns, judgement, and positioning often makes the difference between a factual record and a genuinely strategic career asset.

## Selection criteria typically sought by employers

Below is a distilled set of the executive skills most consistently sought at senior level, particularly in a market shaped by AI, complexity, and heightened scrutiny. These go beyond functional competence and focus on judgement, influence, and the ability to deliver outcomes under real conditions.

Executives often focus on the wording of selection criteria, but employers assess something more specific underneath. Each criterion is a proxy for a deeper concern about risk, performance, or fit.

Understanding this link is critical.

- **Strategic thinking** - Ability to define direction, anticipate change, and position the organisation for long-term success
- **Commercial judgement** - Understanding of financial drivers, trade-offs, and value creation in complex environments
- **Decision-making under uncertainty** - Confidence to make sound calls with incomplete or conflicting information
- **Leadership under pressure** - Maintaining clarity, control, and direction during crisis, change, or instability
- **Stakeholder influence** - Ability to align, persuade, and manage expectations across boards, investors, regulators, and teams
- **Communication and storytelling** - Translating complex ideas into clear, persuasive narratives that drive action
- **Change and transformation leadership** - Leading organisations through restructuring, growth, or cultural shift
- **Execution discipline** - Turning strategy into delivery, ensuring plans translate into measurable outcomes
- **Risk awareness and governance** - Identifying, assessing, and managing operational, financial, and reputational risk
- **Political and organisational awareness** - Reading informal dynamics, power structures, and unspoken agendas
- **People leadership and talent development** - Building, motivating, and retaining high-performing teams
- **Adaptability and learning agility** - Responding effectively to new conditions, technologies, and market shifts
- **Innovation and creative problem-solving** - Generating original approaches when standard solutions fall short
- **Customer and market insight** - Understanding client needs, competitive positioning, and market dynamics
- **Negotiation and conflict resolution** - Managing tension, resolving disputes, and securing favourable outcomes

- **Resilience and composure** - Sustaining performance and decision quality under sustained pressure
- **Ethical judgement and integrity** - Making principled decisions in complex or ambiguous situations
- **Digital and AI awareness** - Understanding how technology shapes operations, risk, and opportunity
- **Cross-functional integration** - Connecting strategy, operations, finance, and people into a coherent whole
- **Credibility and executive presence** - Commanding confidence through clarity, consistency, and authority in communication

Taken together, these skills reflect a shift away from narrow functional expertise towards broader leadership capability, judgement, and the ability to operate effectively in complex, human, and often unpredictable environments.

### **Unadvertised roles and selection criteria**

For roles where selection criteria are not explicitly set out you infer them from the market, the firm, and the people they hire. In practice, it is a triangulation exercise rather than a single source.

- **Firm lens - what they sell** - Start with the firm's core offering. For example, a firm advising clients on uncertainty, access, and judgement under pressure immediately defines the core criteria: discretion, trusted judgement, ability to operate with incomplete information, and credibility with senior stakeholders.
- **People lens - who they hire** - Analyse current Senior or Director profiles. Look at backgrounds, language used, and career trajectories. Patterns emerge quickly, for example former diplomats, intelligence, senior civil service, or consultants with strong client exposure. This tells you what "good" looks like in their terms.
- **Client lens - who they serve** - Consider the end client. These firms advise boards, governments, and investors. Therefore, implicit criteria include board-level communication, commercial awareness, and the ability to translate complex situations into actionable advice.
- **Role proxies - adjacent advertised roles** - Use similar roles from competitors or public sector advisory positions as proxies. While not identical, they surface recurring requirements such as stakeholder management, strategic analysis, and delivery under ambiguity.
- **Language patterns - how they describe value** - Review website copy, thought leadership, and partner bios. The repeated language becomes your keyword set: "judgement", "insight", "trusted adviser", "complex environments", "geopolitical risk". These are effectively the selection criteria in narrative form.
- **Network intelligence – conversations** - At this level, criteria are often clarified through discussions with recruiters, insiders, or alumni. Even a single conversation can validate assumptions or highlight what is currently in demand.

In short, for unadvertised roles, selection criteria are **inferred rather than declared**. The task is to reverse-engineer what the firm values and ensure the CV aligns explicitly with those signals, rather than expecting the reader to interpret them.

## Personal attributes typically assessed in executive applications

Below is a distilled set of the attributes employers typically look for in executive applications, aligned to the skills noted above but expressed in the way they are assessed during screening and shortlisting.

- **Relevance to selection criteria** - Clear alignment with both explicit and implied requirements of the role, demonstrating understanding of what the employer actually needs
- **Evidence of impact** - Tangible outcomes that show value delivered, not just responsibilities held
- **Judgement and decision quality** - Examples that show sound decisions made under pressure, ambiguity, or competing priorities
- **Commercial awareness** - Demonstrated understanding of financial drivers, trade-offs, and business performance
- **Strategic contribution** - Evidence of shaping direction, influencing strategy, or positioning organisations for growth or change
- **Leadership credibility** - Signals of authority, trust, and the ability to lead teams, functions, or organisations effectively
- **Delivery and execution** - Proof that strategy has been translated into measurable results
- **Adaptability** - Evidence of responding effectively to change, disruption, or new operating environments
- **Stakeholder effectiveness** - Ability to influence, align, and manage relationships across complex stakeholder groups
- **Cultural and organisational fit** - Signals that the candidate understands and can operate within the organisation's values, pace, and expectations
- **Clarity of communication** - Well-structured, concise, and human language that is easy to read and not generic or AI-like
- **Authenticity** - A sense that the application reflects a real individual, not templated or over-produced content
- **Consistency and coherence** - A logical, connected career narrative rather than a fragmented list of roles
- **Transferable value** - Clear articulation of how experience applies to the target role, especially when changing sector or scope
- **Credibility of scale and scope** - Context around size, complexity, budgets, teams, and environments managed
- **Problem-solving capability** - Examples of resolving complex, ambiguous, or high-stakes challenges
- **Resilience and stability** - Evidence of maintaining performance through pressure, change, or setbacks

- **Ethical judgement** - Signals of integrity, governance awareness, and responsible decision-making
- **Awareness of modern context** - Indications that the candidate understands current challenges such as digital change, AI, regulation, or market shifts
- **Tailoring and intent** - Evidence that the application has been prepared specifically for the role, rather than reused with minor edits

Taken together, these attributes reflect a shift in how executives are assessed. Employers are not just looking for capability. They are looking for credible proof, relevance to their specific context, and signs that the candidate can operate effectively in complex, human, and evolving environments.

## Capturing personal action accomplishments

A Master CV is only as strong as the evidence it contains. At senior level, this means moving beyond description and identifying the specific problems you have addressed, the actions you took, and the outcomes you delivered.

In this context, a problem is any constraint on an organisation. This may be commercial, operational, regulatory, cultural, or reputational. You need to examine your experience from the perspective of a prospective employer.

1. What challenges did you resolve
2. What risks did you reduce or contain
3. What opportunities did you identify and convert

This is where many executives undersell themselves. They describe roles. Employers assess outcomes.

### Using PAR to structure your evidence

A practical way to extract and organise this material is through the PAR discipline:

#### **Problem → Action → Result**

This provides a simple structure for turning experience into evidence.

- **Problem** - What constraint, risk, or opportunity existed
- **Action** - What you did, decided, or led in response
- **Result** - What changed as a result, ideally with measurable impact

Statements built using this structure form the core of your experience. They demonstrate that you can operate at the level required and deliver against employer needs.

Similar frameworks are used in formal recruitment processes:

- **STAR** - Situation or Task, Action, Result (common in government, academia, and healthcare)
- **SAO** - Situation, Action, Outcome (common in education)

The principle is the same. Employers are looking for evidence of applied capability, not stated competence.

### Financial and commercial impact

- **Revenue growth** - Increasing sales, opening new markets, launching new services or products
- **Cost reduction** - Removing waste, reducing time, improving efficiency or productivity
- **Margin improvement** - Enhancing profitability through pricing, process, or operational change
- **Risk mitigation** - Reducing financial exposure through compliance, WHS, or security improvements
- **Operational restructuring** - Streamlining functions, reorganising teams, or improving delivery models

### **Innovation and problem-solving**

- **New solutions** - Designing or implementing new products, services, systems, or processes
- **Process improvement** - Developing more effective ways of working where standard approaches were insufficient
- **Opportunity identification** - Recognising unmet needs and acting on them
- **Technical or strategic innovation** - Introducing new methods, tools, or approaches that were adopted

### **Interpersonal and leadership impact**

- **Team performance** - Improving capability, engagement, or retention within teams
- **Stakeholder alignment** - Managing conflicting interests and building agreement
- **Communication** - Creating clarity across complex or sensitive situations
- **Coaching and development** - Supporting managers, teams, or individuals to improve performance
- **Influence** - Shaping decisions across different audiences, including boards, clients, or partners

### **Quality and added value**

- **Standards improvement** - Raising quality in products, services, or delivery
- **Customer experience** - Enhancing satisfaction, retention, or reputation
- **Process integrity** - Strengthening governance, consistency, or reliability
- **Capability building** - Improving recruitment, training, or organisational capability

### **What this means in practice**

A Master CV should not read as a list of responsibilities. It should function as a structured repository of problems solved, decisions made, and outcomes delivered.

This is what allows you to respond to selection criteria with precision.

It is also what allows you to surface the moments that demonstrate your level, particularly where judgement, pressure, and consequence were involved.

Without this level of detail, most applications default to broad claims. With it, you are able to present clear, credible evidence aligned to what employers are actually assessing.

## **Closing positioning**

A Master CV is not a document. It is a working model of your value.

It allows you to respond quickly, but more importantly, it allows you to respond precisely. It forces you to move beyond description and into evidence. It ensures that when an opportunity arises, you are not reconstructing your career under pressure.

In a market shaped by AI, that matters. Because while polished language is easy to produce, credible judgement, relevance, and proof still require deliberate thought.