

MANUAL FOR INEXPERIENCED JOB SEEKERS WITH A VISUAL IMPAIRMENT



The voice of blind and partially sighted people in Europe

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"I can't change the direction of the wind, but I can adjust my sails to always reach my destination." *Jimmy Dean*

"Optimism is the faith that leads to achievement. Nothing can be done without hope and confidence." *Helen Keller*

"They can because they think they can." *Virgil*

"Don't let your failures define you - let them teach you." *Barack Obama*

"Don't cry because it's over, smile because it happened." *Dr. Seuss*

"A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty." *Winston Churchill*

"The only thing that stands between you and your dream is the will to try and the belief that it is actually possible." *Joel Brown*

"Challenges are what make life interesting and overcoming them is what makes life meaningful." *Joshua J. Marine*

"The only way to do great work is to love what you do. If you haven't found it yet, keep looking. Don't settle." *Steve Jobs*

"A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step." *Lao Tzu*

"Uncertainty is the only certainty there is, and knowing how to live with insecurity is the only security" *John Allen Paulos*

"If opportunity doesn't knock, build a door" *Milton Berle*

"All of our dreams can come true if we just have the courage to pursue them." *Walt Disney*

"We cannot change the cards we are dealt, just how we play the hand." *Randy Pausch*

"What the mind can conceive, it can achieve." *Napoleon Hill*

Introduction

This manual aims to provide visually impaired job seekers with the basic knowledge and concepts required to apply for a job or internship. Finding a job is difficult, and even more so if you are blind or visually impaired. This manual contains general information about best practices when applying for a job. It also contains information that is specific to visually impaired job seekers, for instance on how and when to communicate about their disability. The content of this manual is based on the employability trainings held by the European Blind Union in 2015 and 2016.

With this manual visually impaired job seekers will be able to:

- Reflect on their competences (skills, knowledge and attitudes) and on their professional objective.
- Understand how to build an effective CV and motivation letter, according to their professional objective and their skills.
- Acquire skills in order to face job interviews and be prepared for them, such as presentational skills and how to deal with non-verbal communication.

The information contained in this manual should be valid in all European countries. We do advise to take information regarding the national employment situation in consideration. For instance, there may be subtle cultural differences between countries on how CV's are structured or which style of communication is more acceptable during a job interview. There maybe also be differences between countries regarding the employment and acceptance of people with disabilities in the workforce.

Moreover, we strongly suggest job seekers to seek contact with career counsellors or job coaches within their own country. These professionals can provide help with identifying and selecting realistic professional objectives, and they can provide sighted help when drafting a cover and CV.

In conclusion we hope that this manual will be useful to you. If you have any questions do not hesitate to contact us by email at vanessacascio87@gmail.com and jasper.ebels@gmail.com.

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Our competences

What is a competence?

It's the capacity to apply what we know/we can do to specific situations and context. It is not linked to the quantity of things we know.

A competence is composed of personal qualities or attitudes, knowledge (what we know) and skills (what we can do).

A competence can be related to a specific profession (technical competence) or it can be applied to professional and non-professional situations (soft skills). Soft skills are those skills acquired in life in general through different experiences.

A classification of soft skills can be the following:

- 1) Interpersonal competences. Competence to manage relationships with others: being able to communicate clearly; to persuade, to promote ourselves and brand ourselves (e.g. being convincing during a job interview!).
- 2) Personal competences. This concerns the self-awareness, management of emotions, and the capacity to be objective-oriented.
- 3) Cognitive competences. This is the capacity to be analytic and synthesize, to use problem solving skills, finding simple solutions to complex problems
- 4) Organizational competences. These concern planning, time management (prioritising and respect of deadlines), monitoring (controlling activities).

An overview of ourselves

The first step for any research is awareness! Awareness of your competences, your value and your professional objective!

The combination of our competences, acquired during work and life experience, and our attitudes is something that makes each of us different.

People usually tend to stay hidden in the mass: they are invisible because they don't show their skills and do not show themselves to others by highlighting their competences.

Thus, the first step is to be aware of our skills and competences.

We should communicate our value; we have to become more visible!

We often overestimate what we don't know and we don't give any value to what we can do and to what we know.

Thanks to what we know (knowledge), what we can do (capacities or skills) and our personal qualities (attitudes), we are able to achieve results in our activities and offer an added value to our employer.

The second step is not to use vague words to describe ourselves.

In the curriculum vitae and the cover letter or during interaction with other people we tend not to highlight our experiences and our achieved results.

We are too generic.

We should trust ourselves more and be more convincing!

Therefore it's important not to use vague words but to be specific and clear when presenting ourselves!

This issue is often linked to the previous one as if we're not aware of our competences, it's hard to mention and specify our experiences and the achieved results. Moreover, the fear of not being humble makes us minimize who we are and what we have achieved and obtained in our life and in our professional career.

The third important step is to have a clear professional objective.

A person seeking any kind of job whatsoever does not have a clear professional objective.

If we don't know what we want, the image we offer is unclear and confused.

We cannot highlight our qualities compared to the mass. We might look as if we are not qualified and determined enough.

Moreover, the lack of a professional objective prevents us from understanding the skills that we have and those that we need to develop. This is the reason why it's useful to reflect on our professional objectives.

When defining a professional objective, a blind job-seeker should also take into consideration the limits (but also the potential) of the disability.

Even if it is always necessary to adapt, there are lots of professions a visually impaired person can perform such as psychologist, teacher/trainer, researcher, computer science engineer, sound technician/engineer, journalist, musician,

singer, writer, dancer, lawyer, administrative assistant... I even know a partially sighted graphic designer!

Although we can work on the accessibility of the tools or the work environment in order to be able to perform a certain job/task, we must admit that there are jobs we are unable to perform, for instance, bus driver!

It is an exaggerated example but, what I want to highlight is that for a visually impaired job-seeker to define a realistic professional objective it is important to accept the disability and be aware of the limits imposed by visual deficit. We can find some solutions in order to overcome certain limits and perform some tasks, but we also have to be sincere with ourselves.

So, when defining your professional objective, you should also ask yourself:

What difficulties related to my sight loss might I have in performing this specific job?

Firstly, you can make a list of the difficulties you imagine.

Then, next to each difficulty you have identified, you can write possible solutions to overcome it. If you are not able to find a solution, take it into consideration and imagine that this job/task might be harder for you because of your condition. In the case of the bus driver a limitation would be that you cannot see road signs... And, right now, I can't see solution to this!

If you are thinking of a job you would like to perform but you are not sure it is possible for a visually impaired person, you might also look for other blind people doing the same profession around the world. They might provide you suggestions on how you can make this profession accessible to you and they could advise you on how to overcome some difficulties you might have because of your visual impairment.

Being aware, clear and honest with ourselves regarding our knowledge, skills, the potentialities and limits of a disability and our personal qualities is the key to presenting the best of ourselves.

Last but not least, never forget our passions! If we have passion for what we do, we will be more interested and enthusiastic about our profession! But, once again, don't forget to be down-to-earth and to think about your limits!

How to recognize and evaluate our competences?

The first kind of assessment is self-assessment.

Through self-assessment we can evaluate ourselves on the basis of the results we have achieved and the situations we have been faced with.

In the self-evaluation it is crucial to establish criteria (e.g. what was my level in this skill 5 years ago? What is it now?).

We suggest that you take note of this process by writing it down. It allows us to reflect further in the future about our personal and professional development.

Another kind of self-assessment can help you to reflect about your strengths and your weaknesses, in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes.

To reflect on them will help you to establish what you need to improve in order to reach your professional objective or the position you desire (e.g. through other training/education).

Here are some leading questions which might help you in this process: this kind of questions are often asked by recruiters/employers during the job interview. So, it is very useful to think about your strengths and your weak point, in order to be able to answer to recruiter's questions in the right way... So you won't look surprised!

Strengths points

1. What knowledge do I have (matching the job I'm looking for)?

(what do I know): _____

2. What are my most important skills (matching the job I'm looking for)?

(What can I do according to the experience I have): _____

3. What are my soft skills (personal qualities) which can bring an added value to the job I'm looking for? _____

Weak points

1. What are your weaknesses in terms of knowledge and skills considering the job you want to have? _____

What solutions can you find in order to minimize these weaknesses? (e.g. attending training courses, etc): _____

2. What are your weaknesses considering your personal qualities / attitudes? _____

3. Try to rephrase your weaknesses in a positive manner. For instance: I'm not good using the computer and I'm not able to type a text using a word processor, but I'm taking computer classes in order to improve my computer skills.

Thanks to the self-assessment you can also evaluate your soft skills. Here is a small exercise you can try to assess some of your soft skills: You have several soft skills such as reliability, autonomy, organisational skills, interpersonal skills. Each soft skill presents different items. Rate your level for each item of the soft skill from 0 to 10. You can, in this way, make a self-assessment of your skills and you can watch in which area you need to improve. You can try this exercise in the future, and you can check if anything has changed.

Skill Reliability:

1. How much I think I'm able to trust other people? ____
2. How much I think I'm able to manage activities (at different levels)? ____
3. How much I think I'm able to count on my own working skills? ____
4. How much I think I'm able to count on my own knowledge? ____
5. How much I think I'm able to provide effective and innovative answers? ____
6. How much I think I'm able to demonstrate responsible and committed behaviour? ____

Skill Autonomy:

How much I think I'm able to:

1. Take decisions, assuming the possible responsibilities? ____
2. Learn from experience? ____
3. Keep in touch with other people and maintain positive relationships? ____
5. Make efforts towards personal growth? ____

Organisational skills:

How much I think I'm able to:

1. Organise my working activities autonomously, both in the short and long term? ____
2. Take into consideration the different points of view from which a problem can be analyzed? ____
3. Define effective methods and strategies to resolve a problem? ____

Interpersonal skills (communication, empathy, team working, assertiveness):

How much I think I'm able to:

1. Understand messages and requests of other people / employer / colleagues / clients in the right way? ____
2. Be open to the dialogue?
3. Listen to other people / colleagues? ____
4. Express my feelings in an effective way? ____
5. Express my ideas and my point of view in an effective way? ____
6. Understand someone else's point of view? ____
7. Listen to other people attentively? ____
8. Recognize the skills and competences of people I meet? ____
9. Understand the motivation of other people / my colleagues / my employer? ____
10. Understand formal rules in my working team / in a group? ____
11. Understand informal rules in my working team / in a group? ____
12. Respect the rules in a working team / in a group? ____
13. Help the working team respect my role respected? ____
14. Appreciate my own potential? ____
15. Be available to collaborate? ____
16. Take into consideration other people's point of view? ____

Thus, if we have a solid awareness of ourselves and of our competences even negative feedback can help us to grow and improve! If we are self-aware we can better work on our strengths, using areas of improvement and learn from experience.

However, a second kind of assessment can be carried out by recruiters, by employers, colleagues, clients, by an external expert, etc.

The STAR Method

A great technique to reflect and present your strengths

In this section we're going to introduce you the STAR Method, a powerful tool to valorise your strengths during job interview.

You have to use this technique firstly in order to reflect about your strengths: as far as you have identified a strength, you should think about an experience which can illustrate that specific strong point.

How to use this tool

Let's start from the meaning of STAR!

S – Situation, background set the scene

T – Task or Target, specifics of what's required, when, where, who

A – Action, what you did, skills used, behaviour, characteristics

R – Result – Outcome, what happened?

The STAR method technique will enable you to answer tough work-related questions (not limited to job interviews) in a subtle, compelling and powerful manner.

People like hearing stories, facts are easier to remember if wrapped in a story, stories tend not to get interrupted; basically stories are an ancient proven method of getting a message across!

Listeners will remember more of your answers, and the messages within them, yet your message will be delivered in a friendly likable style.

As far as job interviewing is concerned, your success ratio will go off the scale.

How to build a STAR method story

A Star story should be about 2 minutes long, and delivered with energy and enthusiasm about a real experience you have had (it does not have to be a work experience, as long as it describes a relevant skill or behaviour).

Time for an example:

Question: Have you ever lead a team before?

This is another reason why the STAR method is so powerful. The above question is a terrible closed question.

You could answer “yes” or “yes on three separate occasions” and move quickly onto the next question.

But leadership is an important skill, and you must not miss this chance to shine. A lot of folks would give the easy answer here, you have a great chance to impress, and basically do all the interviewers work for them.

Let's build a STAR method story answer

(Situation) “Yes; a relevant example being at my last company, where I was initially a software developer, in a team of 6 developing a new finance module for our core accounting product.”

(Task) “The project was critical as launch dates had been set with a lot of sales and marketing investment riding on the product being ready. However the project was behind schedule, when our team leader unfortunately became ill, and had to leave.”

(Action) “I had been sports team captain at school, where I loved the challenge and responsibility of leadership. So I volunteered to stand in, and by using my technical analysis skills, spotted a few small mistakes made in the initial coding, that were causing the sporadic errors, and slowing us down. I then negotiated with our product director a small bonus incentive for the team, and budget for two pizza evenings, so we could do a couple of late night shifts to correct the coding and catch up with the critical project landmarks.”

(Result) “Though this took us 1.5% over budget the software was delivered on time with a better than target fault tolerance. The project was seen as a great success as the additional project cost was minimal compared to the costs of delaying the launch, and the negative affect on our product branding. The team where delighted with the extra bonus and I have now been officially promoted to team leader as a result.”

You need to practice your answers out loud, to ensure continuity and that you don't go over 2 minutes.

The example above not only answers the leadership question asked, but also conveys that you have other skills and qualities any interviewer would be interested in.

Answering tough interview questions like this will work wonders, but answering poorly worded questions will really set you apart.

Note: this explanation has been downloaded from:

<http://www.idemployee.id.tue.nl/g.w.m.rauterberg/jobs/STAR-method.pdf>

The Curriculum Vitae (CV)

What is a CV?

A CV is the summary of our educational and professional journey, of the experiences and the skills that we have developed in our life and career.

The aim of the CV is to get us an interview for a job!

- The CV is our calling card: it describes us and what we can do in few lines;
- It is our advertisement: in few seconds it has to gain the attention of the recruiter and communicate our unicity and value compared to other people;
- It communicates what we can offer in performing a specific activity or job.

Therefore, we remind that your CV is not and cannot be your autobiography! It is not a full description of your experiences and choices, but an essential presentation of your career, of your main characteristics, of your strengths, of the things you have achieved in life.

Note that US recruiters use the word “*resume*” instead of “CV”

Before writing a CV...

The first step is to take some time to reflect on who you are, what you can do and more than everything else on what you want to do. Only after having defined your professional objectives can you prepare a CV for each of them. If, for instance, you have several occupations you are interested in, I advise you to choose only 3 of them and to write a CV for each one, starting from the one that you consider the most important (it is a matter of priority!).

In order to reflect on this issue, here are some leading questions:

- What is my professional objective? What kind of job do I intend to apply for?
- In what kind of company (public, private, freelance....)? In which field?
- Am I interested in just one position or more than one?
- To what measure are my professional and educational experiences coherent with my objective?
- What are the main skills I have developed and can use for the profession I'm interested in?

... and add to these general questions a specific one related to blind job-seekers:

- What are the difficulties I might have in pursuing this professional objective in relation to my visual impairment?

Only by answering these questions will you be able to decide:

- if you need just one version of your CV or several;
- which experiences and activities it is important to valorise and those which it is better not to mention in your CV (including the visual impairment).

A CV should be:

- Short: 2-3 pages maximum;
- Clear and well-structured: never forget the visual impact;
- Logical: make use of different sections and bullet points;
- Coherent: it has to show a continuity between your education and your work experience;
- It has to communicate your abilities in the role you are applying for;
- It has to be written taking into consideration this question: why should we hire you?
- It has to express in a convincing manner not only what you know but especially what you can do.

If you are visually impaired, especially blind, you must be sure your CV and/or cover letter has a nice layout and good visual presentation.

As you will read below, the visual aspect is the first issue taken into consideration by the recruiter during the selection of CVs: you cannot risk not getting the interview or the job just because your CV was visually untidy, unclear and not well structured.

So, ask always to someone you trust in (a friend/relative/professional) to check your CV from a sighted point of view and, eventually, to improve it.

Be sure, with the support of your sighted helper, that the paragraphs are written using the same typeface (e.g. Arial).

Also, be sure that the titles of the different main sections (Personal Information, Education, etc.) are also always written using the same typeface.

Check that formatting such as bold and italics is correct and required, not accidental.

Asking for support from a sighted person to check the visual presentation of a CV is very important for blind job-seekers but of course it is very useful for partially sighted job-seekers too. Don't feel frustrated because you cannot do it on your own. Asking for support is something you are doing for yourself, because it can help you to get the job interview or the job itself. Finally, we recommend you to ask for the support of a sighted person to check the visual presentation of the cover letter too.

Common mistakes in a CV

Here is a selection of incorrect received ideas concerning a CV:

1. The European standardized Europass CV is the best.
It is not true. It has some advantages and some disadvantages e.g. excess of information or repetitions and excessive length.
We advise you to use this format only when required. Recruiters usually prefer a personal CV.
2. The CV has to mention all the work experience of the applicant.
This is not true.
It has to show a growth in the same or related fields. It does not have to include all work experience. If you really wish to mention other professional experiences (not coherent with the occupation you're applying for) you should add them in a specific section called "other professional experience".
3. The CV should express a career in its totality, avoiding gaps.
This is not true.
If you have had different kinds of job, in order to avoid gaps related to jobs which are not useful for the occupation you are applying for, you should mention the period using only years/months e.g. September 2007 – November 2009 – worked as shop assistant, or years e.g. 2007-2009 – worked as shop assistant.
Don't use specific dates e.g. from 8/11/2006 till 21/12/2011 – worked as shop assistant.
Otherwise, we advise you to use the functional CV, which allows you to mention your work experience, avoiding multiple gaps in your career.
Never explain why you stopped a certain profession e.g. the contract was over.
If the recruiter wants to know, he'll ask for sure during the job interview!
4. In the CV you should be brief and concise so it is enough to make a list of jobs performed.
This is not true.
Even the simplest jobs such as shop assistant or barman need to be valorised, mentioning tasks performed and responsibilities held.
You can do it using short sentences with bullet points.
5. In a CV you must describe your personality, your organizational and interpersonal skills in a specific section.
This is not true.
The recruiter is interested in concrete indicators of experience and skills obtained.

He wants to see coherence and motivation in pursuing a specific career. Thus, even if in the Europass CV it is important to mention such skills in a specific section, in a regular CV it is not necessary.

It is better to mention your strengths (only those relevant for the job you're applying for) in a cover letter. Furthermore, it is suggested not to use technical and specific terms in a CV. It doesn't show your competence. It is just a sign that the job applicant is not able to communicate with people not experienced in the same field.

General overview of the recruiting process

Each employment agency or company has its own ways of selecting CVs. So, here you can find a general overview. This overview has been provided by JobMeToo (www.jobmetoo.com) an Italian employment agency dedicated to disabled people. This agency was founded by a deaf person in 2012 and in its working team it includes a blind junior recruiter. In order to facilitate disabled job-seekers, JobMeToo realizes the first job interview of the selection process by phone.

Generally speaking, screening is the first phase.

In this phase, the first impression counts a lot! It is said that a recruiter takes only 8 seconds to determine if a resume is relevant or not for the vacancy and therefore if he will read it more carefully or not.

As the role of the recruiter is to reject the majority of CVs received in order to select and choose the most suitable candidate for a specific position, your aim should be to make your CV attractive in order not to be rejected!

How?

- Avoiding the mistakes we mentioned above;
- Paying attention to the visual impact the CV has on the reader: it has to be easy to read, tidy and clear (see previous paragraphs for more clarification) and, above all, don't forget to ask for help to check your CV from a visual point of view before sending it to the company/employment agency!
- Highlighting key points e.g. professions covered, studies, keywords, etc. You can use bold highlighting.
- But, don't highlight too much! It wouldn't be meaningful and it might make it difficult to read.

During the second phase, the CV is examined in more detail.

Steps:

1. The first screening (also called pre-screening), is the phase where the recruiter assess the different CVs according to the selection criteria

established in advance (e.g. kind of diploma obtained, years of previous experience working in the same area, etc).

2. In the second screening, the real one, the recruiter selects the CVs according to more specific criteria. For this assessment he uses his personal rating modalities: some recruiters attribute points, other recruiters give stars, etc. In this way he constitutes two or more shortlists (the first choice of candidates, the second choice of candidates, etc).
3. Candidates of the first shortlist are invited to the first interview.
4. If some of them pass the interview, they are called for the second interview. Otherwise candidates of the second shortlist are contacted.
5. If it is not possible to find the required profile, the offer can be published again to collect more CVs.

Basic structure of a CV

The main sections of a CV are:

1. Personal information.
2. Professional objective (not compulsory). It is suggested only for spontaneous candidature. In this section you can indicate the area you would like to work in, or the specific occupation you would like to perform. You can also include it in the cover letter.
3. Professional experience. Indicate clearly:
 - Period of time (from ... to);
 - Role or position;
 - Name of company (field) and address;
 - Activities and responsibilities held (highlight the most important) and valorize your achievements.

Note: Remember to select only the experiences coherent with the position you are applying for.

Remember to start from the most recent to the least recent working experience.

In addition, internships are considered as professional experience.

Volunteering activities and irrelevant occupations should be mentioned in a section called "other professional experience".

Example:

1998 - Present - Manager

Jackson Shoes- 23, Green street – 78100 - London (UK)

- Manage staff of 10
- Provide helpful service to customers concerning shoe choices

- Design and implement computer based tools using Microsoft Access and Excel for staff
- Monthly book keeping.
- Suggest changes in product offerings on a quarterly basis based on detailed analysis of sales patterns
- Provide in-house training for new employees as needed

4. Education and vocational training. Always go from the most recent degree/diploma to the least recent. Indicate when you obtained your certificate (year), the name of the institution (university/school/other), the title of your degree and the mark obtained.

If you don't have much work experience or you are a recently graduated student, you can valorise your educational career indicating:

- Subjects studied or preferred;
- Projects or research you took part in.

Moreover, you can rearrange the order of the two sections, putting the one about education before the one concerning "professional experience".

Note: Vocational training. You can add this in the section related to education or you can create a different section. Seminars attended can be included here.

If training courses attended are of the same area/topic, they can be gathered together with a sentence such as: "attended computer courses from 2002 till 2006".

Example:

1995 - Bologna University (It) - department of Economics, Management and Statistics
 Bachelor of Business Administration – graduated cum laude
 Four year business administration course focusing on retail work environments

5. Languages. For each language indicate your level in written skills and speaking skills. Mention the courses you attended and certificates you got mentioning the name of the institution which organized the course and the mark you got.

Example:

Spoken and written proficiency in French. This language was practiced and improved during six-months Erasmus in the university of Grenoble (Fr);
 Very good spoken and written skills in English. 2012: "FCE - First Certificate in English" issued by Cambridge University.

6. Computer / technical skills. Mention all your skills and knowledge related to IT. You can also add certificates e.g. ECDL.

Example:

Advanced level skills in Microsoft Office Suite, basic HTML programming

7. Hobbies/volunteering activities/other work experience

Here you should provide only elements which can give meaningful information to the recruiter: as mentioned above, everything which can show your skills, qualities and your added value for the position for which you are applying. So, this section might concern volunteering activities, travel, sport at competitive level, etc.

Note: mentioning your hobby of photography can be useful for a graphical designer, not for an administrative employee.

8. Personal qualities. Optional. Not recommended.

In 3-5 lines you should describe your strengths for the position for which you are applying. However we strongly recommend pointing out your personal qualities in a cover letter, instead of this section.

9. Additional information. Optional. In this section you can indicate your availability for travelling, transfers, etc. You can mention everything you think useful.

Don't forget the date, your signature and always remember to send an updated CV!

Other tips to write a good CV

The order of the sections mentioned in the previous paragraph, as well as the titles of the different sections mentioned, can be used as a template to prepare your CV.

In addition:

- Be brief and concise, 2-3 pages is enough;
- Use bullet points and very short paragraphs;
- Use a regular character set such as Arial, it is pleasant and easily readable.
- Last, if you like, you can customize your CV by putting a small picture of yourself on the first page (it is optional but not recommended by the authors of this manual, we suggest to put it only if required in the job post).

What about my visual impairment?

Should we mention the visual impairment in the CV/cover letter?

We would say: no!

In fact, we wouldn't mention our disability in the CV/cover letter if we are not sure it is a strong point for the job vacancy.

But it can also depend on several factors and it is important to assess them to make a responsible decision.

We suggest examining the company culture, mission and values, as well as the culture of your country. Then, you should be sure that you can perform the job you are applying for.

If you think that your disability might be seen as an added-value or a strength by the company, because of the company's values and culture, or because of the kind of tasks you should perform if you will be engaged, then you can decide to mention it in the CV / cover letter. Otherwise, as said at the beginning of this paragraph, we advise not to mention it.

If you decide not to mention your disability in the CV/cover letter be aware that, if contacted for a job interview, the recruiter will definitely notice it.

At that moment, before the job interview takes place, you should decide whether you wish to inform the employer before the job interview (e.g. if you call asking for the way to reach the company workplace you can mention your visual disability explaining you need to know the way to go by bus), or during the interview itself: in this case, don't be surprised if the recruiter is astonished at your arrival! And be prepared to face his/her reaction.

During the EBU 2015 training, a participant mentioned a blind girl who took different assistive devices with her to the job interview, in order to show them to the potential employer. We had never thought about this, and we guess it might be a good idea to take some assistive devices. The interviewer will see with his own eyes that assistive technology exists and can support blind people in performing many tasks.

Another concrete example: once, a young Italian person told me he mentioned his visual impairment in his cover letter. He described briefly how a screenreader works and he added the Internet website of a screenreader producer so that the company could get more information. Thanks to this, he was able to get the job without any problem because the company had information and the employer felt more comfortable in engaging a visually impaired person.

Unfortunately, we have to say that recruiters and employers aren't always so open-minded... they are often capable of prejudice or stereotyping.

If you manage to get the job, it might be your challenge to demonstrate that a blind person can be a resource for the other workers and that sometimes the disability can be an added-value for the company! For instance, thanks to the engagement of a blind worker, the company might decide to process all data in electronic format (excluding thousands of paper-printed documents).

Proofreading your CV

Is it clear and readable?

Is this CV suitable for the job vacancy / the sector for which I'm applying?

Does this CV highlight my skills and qualities taking into consideration the position for which I'm applying?

In addition, if you decide to mention a visual impairment in the CV you could ask to yourself: is my visual condition seen as a strength or does it appear as a weak point?

Examples of CV

Example 1

It's a CV from a recently-graduated job-seeker for the position of administrative assistant

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Rita Shaw

Born on 4th of March 1991

347, Green Street - 50100 - Florence (It)

(0039) 0552781762

rita.shaw@gmail.com

PROFESSIONAL OBJECTIVE: Fresh college graduate with international internship experience.

Seeking for administrative assistant position.

I'm a dedicated worker aiming to help achieve company goals and take on responsibility.

EDUCATION

February 2014 – University of Bologna (It) - department of Economics, Management and Statistics

Bachelor in Business and Economics – 105/110

Subjects studied: microeconomics, principles of management, macroeconomics, principles of law, commercial law, accounting, computational tools, marketing, financial analysis, statistics, business strategy

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

March 2014 – March 2016 - Junior Payroll assistant and Customer Service

SEMA COPIES – 46, Yellow Street, 40100 - Bologna (It)

- Observed payroll activities for 250+ employees and posting of checks before end of month
- Assisted in answering incoming calls (avg. 60/day) helping in resolving issues with both customers and billing department
- Helped in analyzing all company data entry systems and assisted in preparing recommendations for system-wide efficiency improvements

July 2013 – December 2013 - Office assistant Internship

GAMMA CORPORATIONS – 26, Garden Street, 30012 - Liverpool (UK)

- Assisted in document scanning (100+/day) and logged them in the company's proprietary computer system for future review by other internal departments as well as the company's international offices.
- Assisted in typing and distribution of confidential letters for senior members daily
- Recorded, transcribed and distributed minutes of meetings

VOLUNTEERING EXPERIENCES

2011 – present - Youth Center Association - volunteer with the position of **accountant**:

- Register incomes and outcomes, daily
- Manage the association accountancy
- Prepare financial statements

LANGUAGE SKILLS

- Fluent in English – acquired First Certificate in English issued by Cambridge University in 2013
- Very good skills in speaking and writing Spanish acquired during 9-months Erasmus project at the university of Barcelona in 2012

COMPUTER SKILLS

ECDL issued by AICA in 2011

20th of June 2016,
Signature

Example 2

It's the CV of a 2-year experienced business manager who wishes to work in an international company, improving her role and increasing her responsibilities

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Sona Smith

Born on 5th of June 1983

26, Garden Square – 40100 Bologna (It)

(0039) 051 3346182

Sona.Smith@gmail.com

PROFESSIONAL OBJECTIVE: 2-years' experience as business manager and 3-years' experience as administrative assistant. Masters degree in Economics and Management and a huge expertise in Sap system.

Looking to exploit my knowledge and experience in a role as business manager in an international company.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

July 2014 - Present - Business manager

Seat SPA - 56, London Street – 00187 - Rome (It)

- Organizing and planning essential central services such as reception, security, maintenance, mail, as well as day to day maintenance
- Responsible for making sure that contracts, insurance requirements and safety standards are correctly assured
- In charge of 10 members of staff
- Manage cash loss prevention procedures and establish security policies
- Analyzing sales figures and forecasting future sales volumes
- Involved in the recruitment and interviewing of new staff
- Producing reports on performance, then measuring these against set indicators

November 2011 – July 2014 - Administrative Assistant

REDFORD & SONS – 75, Walter Street - 20183 - Milano (It)

- Schedule and coordinate meetings, appointments, and travel arrangements for supervisors and managers
- Manage travel and expense reports for department team members
- Trained 2 administrative assistants during a period of company expansion
- developed new filing and organizational practices
- Maintain utmost discretion when dealing with sensitive topics

September 2008 – September 2011 - Secretary
BRIGHT SRL – 89, Beverly Street - 20018 - Milano (It)

- Typed documents such as correspondence, drafts, memos, and emails, and prepared 3 reports weekly for management
- Opened, sorted, and distributed incoming messages and correspondence
- Purchased and maintained office supply inventories, and being careful to adhere to budgeting practices
- Recorded, transcribed and distributed minutes of meetings

EDUCATION

July 2008 – University of Bologna - department of Economics, Management and Statistics

Masters degree in Economics and Management – curriculum Business and Administration, graduated Cum Laude

Main subjects studied: financial accounting & reporting, business plan, administration and strategy, cost management, management accounting and strategic control, international management.

LANGUAGE SKILLS

CAE in English issued by Cambridge University in 2008

COMPUTER AND TECHNICAL SKILLS

- **Very good knowledge of Sap FI-CO modules** for the administration and business accountancy
- Expert in Microsoft Office, with a focus on Excel

Other information

Available to travel abroad and to transfer within the country

20th of June 2016
Signature

As you can see from the 2 examples above, for each position, activities and responsibilities held are mentioned and, when possible, quantified.

In addition, you can remark that for each professional experience are indicated:

- the period of time (from... to... in months/year);

- the position covered;
- the name and address of the company;
- the activities and responsibilities held and an eventual quantification (achievements).

Some bullet points from the above sample CV for you to consider:

Developed new filing and organizational practices:

The above bullet point proves that the candidate is a skilled, competent, and motivated worker. She took the initiative to create a new organizational policy.

Trained 2 administrative assistants during a period of company expansion: As shown above, the ability to train new employees also demonstrates competence and confidence, and also proves that she is trusted by management to handle sensitive tasks.

Typed documents such as correspondence, drafts, memos, and emails, and prepared 3 reports weekly for management:

Here, the candidate quantified the amount of reports she made weekly, giving the hiring manager a strong mental picture of the scope of her responsibility, and how much work she had to do. Preparing 3 reports weekly shows that she is an efficient worker who can process data quickly and manage time expertly, and it is an achievement she can show.

Last but not least, some keywords/important sentences have been highlighted in bold character:

- in the professional objective section, the position the candidate is seeking for;
- in the Education section, the graduation field as it is coherent with the position the person is applying for;
- in the volunteering experience section, a particular volunteering experience which is useful for the position the candidate is applying for;
- in the computer skills section, the expertise in specific software packages, as it is important for the role/ position for which the person is applying;
- In this way these highlighted points are more visible from the first glance at the CV.

The Cover Letter

The cover letter introduces your CV when applying for a job. In the cover letter it is important to show your specificity, the skills that can distinguish you from other people and your motivation in applying for that specific vacancy in that specific company. So, highlight what you can bring to the company, your added value! Don't forget to address the letter to a specific person (e.g. the HR manager). Use clear, direct language.

Avoid introducing yourself with a list of positive adjectives. It is more important to highlight your skills and those which match the job position, specific roles you have had, names of companies and achievements. It has to convince the recruiter to read your CV!

There are a few important things which need to be included in the cover letter. Most importantly, the cover letter should point out why you are particularly suited to the position. The best way to do this is to take the job description and point out the highlights in your CV that exactly match the desired qualifications. We can distinguish two kinds of cover letter: the letter accompanying a spontaneous candidature and the specific motivation letter for a well-defined job placement.

For spontaneous candidature:

- 10-15 lines maximum;
- To be addressed directly to the company or, even better, to the human resources manager;
- Mention, in the object, the area or the position you are applying for;
- Offer a brief description of your profile corresponding to the role you are applying for. In your description, start from your most recent job and indicate your educational degree;
- Highlight the strengths point of your professional/educational career, coherent with the company and field of activity;

The specific motivation letter has the same characteristics of the previous one and in addition:

- It might be longer (never more than 2/3 of an A4 page);
- respond to criteria defined in the advertisement;
- it is aimed at the job position mentioned in the object and it has to fulfil point by point the required criteria;
- It has to express clearly your interest in that specific occupation and that specific company.

Don't forget to ask to a sighted person (friend/relative/professional) to check the visual presentation of your cover letter. As we said for the CV, it has to be clear and tidy and it is very important to ask someone to check this aspect for you.

Furthermore, if you decide to mention your disability in the cover letter, as we already said concerning the CV, we suggest you present it as a strength. In order to do so, you can for instance ask yourself: what did I learn from my disability? Was my visual impairment something which helped me to develop my communication skills or other skills I might have?

Example of cover letter

This example is a cover letter for a spontaneous candidature for the position of administrative assistant (see first example of CV)

“(Manager’s Name /hr manager’s name)

Company Name
Company Address

Date

Object: spontaneous candidature for the position of administrative assistant

Dear Mr./Mrs./Ms. (Manager’s Name)

I completed my Bachelor’s degree in Business and Economics in February 2014. Since then, I’ve performed two-years of administrative work experience. I worked at SEMA COPIES as Junior Payroll assistant and Customer Service. In my job, I handled payroll activities for 250+ employees and posted of checks before the end of the month.

I assisted in answering incoming calls (avg. 60/day) and I helped in resolving issues with both customers and the billing department.

I was recognized by the company for my work ethic. My key skills include IT skills for data entry, high attention to detail, the ability to run a payroll, and an excellent telephone manner.

Throughout my tenure I was reputed for taking the initiative, welcoming challenges, and scrutinizing alternatives to overcome obstacles.

In 2013 I worked as an office assistant internship at Gamma Corporation in UK. In that time, I gained in-depth knowledge of the various tasks and duties required of office assistant. I have a wide ranging familiarity with Microsoft Office and other office management software, and have developed a suite of efficiency tools to keep the office organized and on task.

I have shown my competency in clerical duties such as filing, typing, document scanning, answering phone calls, and dealing with senior members and public.

Enclosed is my CV for your review. I would welcome the opportunity for an interview to discuss my additional skills, previous work experience, and what I have to offer your company.

Please feel free to contact me at your earliest convenience. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Name

Address

T: Phone number

E: email address

Body language and presentational skills

So you have written a good CV and a great cover letter and you have been invited to a job interview. What are you going to say? How are you going to act? How and when do you talk about your visual disability? These are all questions that we will try to answer in this chapter on body language and presentational skills. The way you talk and act very much influence the chances you have of getting the job. But these skills are not only important during job interviews. During most of your professional life you will be required to present yourself or your work. And the manner in which you do this can have a very large effect on your success.

Presentational skills

Giving a presentation, presenting your work or giving a speech is often an important part of any job or career. The skills needed for giving a good presentation are also very useful in other parts of (professional) life, for instance during a job interview where you have to present yourself. Therefore please consider the following points when giving a presentation:

- The layout/structure of your presentation: think in advance what you want to say and in what order you want to say it. The structure and layout of your presentation are very important. Having a clear structure will make it easier for you to memorize your presentation. It will also be easier for the audience to understand your presentation if you have structured your information in a way that makes sense.
- Speak clearly, loudly and not too fast.
- Try not to say 'uhmm' too much; it's better to just take a pause and think about what you want to say. Being silent for a few seconds sounds much better than saying 'uhmm'
- Try to practice your presentation in advance, for most people their confidence increases when they have practiced their presentation a few times. Giving a presentation is somewhat like acting in a play: you wouldn't consider acting in a play without practicing it first!
- Have open and energetic body language, be aware of distracting mannerisms. You can practice presenting in front of some people who know you well, and ask if they spotted any distracting mannerism or body language.
- It helps to be passionate about the subject you are speaking on.
- Find the right balance of stress: being somewhat stressed before and during a presentation is normal and okay. If you are too stressed or afraid, try to focus on your breathing. The best moment to do this is right before

you start your presentation. Take a few deep breaths before you begin speaking.

- Decide in advance whether or not you want to answer questions during or after the presentation. Interruptions or difficult questions during your presentation can ruin the flow of your presentation and influence your self-confidence.
 - Don't let people who ask unrelated questions drag you into a discussion that is not important for the point you are currently trying to make.
- If you use a PowerPoint presentation:
 - Use short bullet points instead of longer paragraphs of text.
 - Don't use too many pages.
 - Consider the size of the text; ask someone with good vision to evaluate the text size.
 - If you are blind, have someone look at the presentation before you use it. This is to make sure there are no weird quirks in the makeup of the presentation.
- Be brief and concise. Think about what the most important points are that you want to make, and focus on those.
- Look good, make sure your clothes are clean and presentable.
- Stay in control as you give the presentation; don't let audience members distract you.
- Don't read text from a paper or computer screen, unless it is a short quotation. If you cannot memorize the entire presentation you can carry some notes outlining the most important points or keywords that will help you remember the structure of your presentation.
- Get to know the room or stage before the audience arrives. This way you will be more confident when starting your presentation.
- If you are anxious or nervous when public speaking, prepare by focusing on your breathing instead of on your thoughts just before the presentation.
- Don't start talking as soon as you come on stage; have a moment of silence and take one last deep breath before you begin.
- Make sure that you know what your first few sentences will be and practice them at least once.

Extra important points for the visually impaired:

- Practice how you will come on stage and make sure that you know the layout of the stage. This way you don't have to worry about stumbling into things when you walk towards the microphone.
- Be sure to look at your audience, even if you can't see them.

Body language

The way you act with your body has a big influence on the way your communication is perceived. A large part of communication between people is done through eye contact, facial expressions, gestures and other aspects of body language. These aspects can be very challenging to someone with a visual disability. If someone is blind, they cannot see the body language of others and so they miss out on a part of interpersonal communication. For someone who is visually impaired it depends from person to person how much of the body language of others they can perceive.

Teaching body language skills to the visually impaired is important because in some situations their body language can be lacking. This causes others to perceive them as less capable, nice or social even though in reality they are not. This can especially be a problem for people who have been blind since birth. As children we learn to use body language by observing adults and recreating their behaviour. For someone who has always been blind this has been impossible. It is especially important to teach these people how to use their body language.

The first important part of good nonverbal communication is keeping eye contact. By looking at people we indicate that we have noticed them or are listening to them. Of course this is often very hard or impossible for someone with a visual disability. Luckily they can simulate eye contact to a very believable level. They can do this by turning and tilting their head to where they hear the other person's voice coming from. People who are not used to dealing with someone with a visual disability will greatly appreciate this, because it gives them the illusion that they really have eye contact.

Another important basic part of good nonverbal communication is body posture. A slouched position shows laziness or low self-esteem, while an upright position shows confidence and competence. This is true for sitting as well as standing.

A third important part of body language is mirroring. Mirroring is basically the recreation of the body language of those you are in contact with. For instance, when two people are talking it is normal for them to recreate each other's body language. If one person is standing, the other will almost automatically also stand up and vice versa. It can be very uncomfortable for one person to be sitting and one person to be standing while having a conversation.

A final important part of body language that is important during a job interview is the handshake. When meeting and saying goodbye to the interviewers you shake their hand. If you are blind or visually impaired this can be a little hard to do because you cannot see their hand. The best thing to do is to take the initiative and hold your hand out toward them when meeting them. They will automatically grab your hand. During the handshake it is important to have some tension in your hand. If you keep your hand too weak, you will come off as having low self-confidence. If you use too much force, you risk coming off too strong and dominant. It is important to find the right balance of strength.

Here you can also use the technique of mirroring; if someone is giving you a strong handshake return with strength and vice versa.

The Interview

Before you go on a job interview, it's important to find out as much as you can about the company. In that way you'll be prepared both to answer interview questions and to ask the interviewer questions. Also, as already mentioned, it will help you to understand the position of the company towards recruiting a disabled person. Finally, you will also be able to find out whether the company and the company culture are a good fit for you:

Visit the company website, review the mission statement and company history, products and services, management, as well as information about the company culture. The information is usually available in the "About Us" section of the site.

Before the job interview, we suggest you ask a sighted person you trust in (friend/relative/professional) to help find an outfit to wear for the occasion. You can decide how you wish to dress according to the company culture: you can wear formal, casual, sporty, etc. A sighted person can help you to choose the right clothes and he/she can help you to match the colours of your clothes, with hair styling or to put make-up on.

Before the job interview, make sure you can easily get to the job interview site. You can decide to ask to someone to drive you there. If you prefer to be independent and to go by yourself, we suggest you to learn the way in advance. You can for example try the way some days before, so that you will be sure of yourself and you will not risk getting lost on the day of the interview. Whether you prefer to go by yourself or with someone else, be sure to be on time.

Some countries have professional job coaches. In Belgium, for instance, some institutions who deal with visual impairment have a job coaching service. These specialists are skilled in job issues (seeking job announcements through specialized websites, how to write CV and cover letters, etc) and about visual impairment too. The job coach supports the blind job seeker in several issues like preparing for the job interview, choosing appropriate clothes and, if required by the candidate, the job coach can drive the person to the interview site. In addition, the job coach can support the candidate during the employment phase, because he/she can support the company to get the benefits it can have as it has employed a disabled person.

You can check if any of the institutions dealing with visual impairment in your country has a similar service. It might be very useful to have this kind of support if you are seeking a job, especially for the first time.

Be On Time: Come to the interview 10-15 minutes early. This shows you respect their time and you are organized and dedicated. Make sure you leave with plenty of time to arrive so you don't appear rushed or out of breath. This will also keep you calm for the actual interview.

Plan what you are going to say: review your work experience, know past dates of employment and specific job tasks - and make sure that what you say matches what's on your CV. Take the time to learn about the company and about the job you're applying for and how your experiences match. Practice common interview questions ahead of time.

What Do You Say: Verbal communication is important. Don't use slang. Speak clearly and precisely. If you need to think about a response to an interview question, that's fine. It's better to think before you talk than to stumble over your words. Practice answering some interview questions so you're comfortable responding to the basics.

Listen: It can be easy to get distracted during a job interview. It's stressful and you're in the hot seat when it comes to having to respond to questions. That said, if you do your best to listen to what the interviewer is asking, it will be easier to frame appropriate responses.

Ask questions: You should always have some questions for your interviewer to demonstrate your interest in the position. Prepare a minimum of five questions, some which will give you more information about the job, and some which delve deeper into the culture and goals of the company. (e.g. What kind of salary can I expect?, What will my responsibilities include?, What would an average day look like?...))

Common Interview Questions:

- Tell me about yourself - This is usually the opening question and, as first impressions are key, one of the most important. Keep your answer under five minutes, beginning with an overview of your highest qualification then running through the jobs you've held so far in your career. You can follow the same structure of your CV, giving examples of achievements and the skills you've picked up along the way. Don't go into too much detail – your interviewer will probably take notes and ask for you to expand on any areas where they'd like more information. If you're applying for your first job since leaving education, focus on the areas of your studies you most enjoyed and how that has led to you wanting this particular role.

- What are your strengths? - Pick the three biggest attributes that you think will get you the job and give examples of how you have used these strengths in a work situation. They could be tangible skills, such as proficiency in a particular computer language, or intangible skills such as good man-management. If you're not sure where to start, take a look at the job description. There is usually a section listing candidate requirements, which should give you an idea of what they are looking for.

- What are your weaknesses? - The dreaded question, which is best handled by picking something that you have made positive steps to redress. For example, if your IT ability is not at the level it could be, state it as a

weakness but tell the interviewer about training courses or time spent outside work hours you have used to improve your skills. Your initiative could actually be perceived as a strength. On no accounts say “I don’t have any weaknesses”, your interviewer won’t believe you, or “I have a tendency to work too hard”, which is seen as avoiding the question. The recruiter might follow this question with one specific to your visual impairment, as he/she might see it as a weakness. Be ready to answer any question related to your disability, and be prepared to explain how you can overcome this weak point by turning it into a strength!

- Why should we hire you? or What can you do for us that other candidates can't? - What makes you special and where do your major strengths lie? You should be able to find out what they are looking for from the job description. “I have a unique combination of strong technical skills and the ability to build long-term customer relationships” is a good opening sentence, which can then lead onto a more specific example of something you have done so far in your career. State your biggest achievement and the benefit it made to the business, then finish with “Given the opportunity, I could bring this success to your company.”

- What are your goals? or Where do you see yourself in five years' time? - It’s best to talk about both short-term and long-term goals. Talk about the kind of job you’d eventually like to do and the various steps you will need to get there, relating this in some way back to the position you’re interviewing for. Show the employer you have ambition, and that you have the determination to make the most of every job you have to get where you want to be.

- Why do you want to work here? - The interviewer is listening for an answer that indicates you’ve given this some thought. If you’ve prepared for the interview properly, you should have a good inside knowledge of the company’s values, mission statement, development plans and products. Use this information to describe how your goals and ambition match their company ethos and how you would relish the opportunity to work for them. Never utter the phrase “I just need a job.”

- What are three positive things your last boss would say about you? - This is a great time to brag about yourself through someone else’s words. Try to include one thing that shows your ability to do the job, one thing that shows your commitment to the job, and one thing that shows you are a good person to have in a team. For example, “My boss has told me that I am the best designer he has ever had. He knows he can always rely on me, and he likes my sense of humour.”

- What salary are you seeking? - You can prepare for this by knowing the value of someone with your skills. Try not to give any specific numbers in the heat of the moment – it could put you in a poor position when negotiating later on. Your interviewer will understand if you don’t want to discuss this until you are offered the job. If they have provided a guideline salary with the job description, you could mention this and say it’s around the same area you’re looking for.

END OF MANUAL