



# Jobseekers Guide

**Collins McNicholas**  
Recruitment & HR Services Group



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# Introduction

Dear Jobseeker,

Today's job market is extremely competitive. It is with this reality in mind that Collins McNicholas has produced this Jobseekers Guide. We hope that this guide will help you to navigate the modern job market. The Collins McNicholas Jobseekers Guide outlines the key steps you need to take to find a job. It will take you through each of the main stages of a job search campaign; you will learn how to search for jobs, write a great cover letter and CV, and prepare for a job interview.

The secret to a successful job search campaign is a steady determination to keep going until you get the job you want. Interviewing for jobs, preparing a CV, and searching for job opportunities all involve skills that have to be developed over time. Practice is the only way to develop these skills; whether this means writing and re-writing your CV several times, or doing mock interviews with your friends or family until you have perfected your answers. Commit to spending some time each week to engage with this work and you will be rewarded for your efforts. It is also important to keep track of your efforts by taking detailed notes of all of your activities.

For more information be sure to visit our website. You will find lots more useful information including CV and cover letter templates, lots of short videos on interview techniques and job seeking skills, as well as all of our latest job listings. I hope that this guide will prove to be a useful starting point on your journey towards finding that perfect job. Good luck!

*Niall Murray*

Niall Murray

General Manager

Collins McNicholas Recruitment & HR Services Group

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# Section I: Cover Letters and CVs

Welcome to the Collins McNicholas Recruitment & HR Services Group Jobseekers Guide. This booklet will enable you to successfully identify, and apply for, job opportunities in Ireland today.

As you begin your search for a new job it is useful to spend a little time assessing what your options are, and what strengths and weaknesses you have. In order to do this it can be useful to perform a Personal SWOT Analysis.

## PERSONAL SWOT ANALYSIS

Strengths	Weaknesses
<p><i>What sets you apart from other people?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Work experience</li><li>• Education</li><li>• Strong technical knowledge in your field</li><li>• Specific transferable skills – communication, teamwork, leadership skills.</li></ul>	<p><i>What are your obvious shortcomings?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lack of training in a particular area</li><li>• Education – lack of a degree</li><li>• Lack of goals, lack of self-knowledge</li><li>• Weak technical knowledge</li><li>• Weak skills (leadership, interpersonal, etc.)</li></ul>
Opportunities	Threats
<p><i>List areas where you can add value to your skill set</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Enhancing your education</li><li>• Increasing your professional development</li><li>• Enhancing opportunities in your chosen career</li><li>• Developing a strong network</li></ul>	<p><i>What may arise to stop you achieving your goals?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Negative trends in your field that diminish job opportunities</li><li>• Competitors with superior skills/experience</li><li>• Competitors with better job hunting skills</li><li>• Obstacles in your way</li></ul>

**Act on the outcomes of this exercise** – Maximise your strengths, minimise your weaknesses, grasp opportunities and find a way to dilute or overcome threats.

## WRITING A GOOD COVER LETTER

### What's in a cover letter?

A cover letter enables you to express your interest in a particular job and organisation, to highlight your main skills and attributes, and to match these to the employer's selection criteria. You can explain which opportunity you are seeking, express your enthusiasm for the role, and demonstrate how you will make a contribution.

### Draft Cover Letter

Keep a draft copy of your cover letter and change it for each job you apply for, highlighting your strengths that are most suited to that particular job.



### Top Cover Letter Tips

- Avoid rewriting your CV in your cover letter. Highlight specific things about your experience and how it relates to the position you are applying for.
- Keep it simple. Avoid long, drawn out sentences with complicated vocabulary.
- Limit your cover letter to one page with three to five targeted paragraphs.
- Use some of the words included in the job

description when writing a cover letter.

- Proofread your letter. Have colleagues/friends check for mistakes.

## HOW TO WRITE A COVER LETTER

### Salutation, Name, Title, Address, & Date

- Put your name and address, at the top right hand corner of your cover letter, put the recipient's name and address further down the left hand side of the page. Address the person by name, rather than using 'Dear Sir/Madam'. Underline the position you are applying for or begin it with 'Re:', and include the job reference number (if there is one).

### Opening Paragraph

- Introduce yourself and clearly explain the opportunity you are seeking.
- Avoid using long words, long sentences and complicated phrases. Stick to language you would normally use when talking to an employer.

### Middle Paragraphs

- Demonstrate that your knowledge, skills and experience meet the job selection criteria.
- Show that you understand the employer's expectations.
- Demonstrate that you can make a significant contribution to the organisation.
- This section of your cover letter is critical. You have to present yourself in the best possible light, without exaggerating.

### Last paragraph and sign-off

- This section is where you express your desire for an interview.
- Close with a strong reminder of why you

are a good match for the job position and the organisation.

Sample cover letters can be found on the Collins McNicholas website and will provide you with an excellent template for your cover letter.

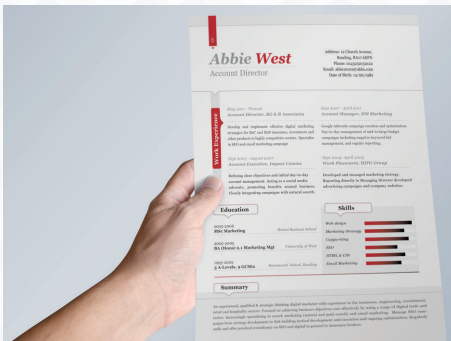
<http://www.collinsmcnicholas.ie/Cover-Letter-Templates.html>

## WRITING YOUR CURRICULUM VITAE

### What is the purpose of a CV?

#### YOUR CV SHOULD BE:

- Clear – organised and clearly presented.
- Concise – not too long and not too short - just get the message across.
- Consistent – all formatted in the same manner, using the same fonts
- Complete – tailored to the industry in question - all information must be relevant
- Current – CV must be fully up to date



### THE STRUCTURE OF A CV

CVs are made up of a number of different sections that contain different kinds of information:



### Personal Information

Your full name, full address, telephone numbers (home and mobile) and email address. Some people also include their place of birth, age, gender and a photograph - but these are optional.

### Personal Profile (Optional)

Include a brief paragraph that gives the employer an insight into your personal qualities, skills and experience. This need only be about 3-4 lines.

### Education

List your academic history in reverse chronological order, include dates, names of colleges/institutions and location. Subjects and examination results should be included if they are directly relevant to the position to which you are applying. You can also include memberships of professional bodies here.

### Further Training (if appropriate)

Depending on your role or your career goals, you may have continued to develop your skills by attending additional training or courses. List any relevant training courses in this section.

## Professional Experience

- List your previous roles in reverse chronological order. Include your job title, employer's name, dates of employment and industry.
- You also need to include your duties/responsibilities and achievements. Keep the information clear, and use bullet points to list the duties and achievements.
- Try to make the information as relevant as possible to the job you are applying for.
- Use specific metrics/examples if possible to highlight achievements.



## Additional Information & Relevant Skills

List in bullet-points any additional skills you have. This could include technical / computer skills, or language skills and fluency level. You could also include soft skills if they are relevant to the position (problem solving, communication, team player skills, interpersonal skills, planning and organisational skills, and leadership and motivational skills).

## Hobbies, Interests & Achievements

List a few of your favourite leisure activities, so that the employer can get an idea of the

type of person you are. It can be helpful to show hobbies if they reflect qualities which relate to the job. If you are just starting out in the job market, give any evidence you can to demonstrate initiative or practical skills, for example, voluntary work, elected office in a society, member of a sports team or contributor to a college magazine.

## List of Referees

Listing referees is optional at the initial stage and you can include “Referees are available on request” instead. However some employers may request them on a CV. It is important to use current references and also ones that are relevant to the sector you are applying to. Include at least 2 referees and make sure that you have correct and up to date contact details for them. Also check with the referees that they are happy to give references.

## SOME COMMON MISTAKES

- A lie, even a small one can cost you a job
- Poor layout – too spread out or too condensed, too many different font sizes and styles
- Referencing the wrong vacancy or company in your cover letter or CV
- Not having your CV fully up to date, e.g. employment dates, personal details
- Jargon and Acronyms – don't use too many in-house terms that others may not understand
- Rambling sentences
- Unexplained gaps, if you were travelling, or on maternity leave, please say so
- CV is too long – using long paragraphs instead of bullet points

## Some Power Words You Can Use in a CV

Advanced	Assessed	Designed
Critiqued	Collaborated	Exceeded
Developed	Enhanced	Implemented
Forecasted	Generated	Justified
Increased	Innovated	Negotiated
Maintained	Measured	Presented
Observed	Obtained	Supported
Provided	Recommended	Translated
Streamlined	Troubleshoot	Upgraded
Trained	Boosted	Validated

## CV Checklist

### HAVE YOU:

#### PERSONAL DETAILS:

- Included your name, address, email, and phone number.

#### EDUCATION:

- Put the most relevant educational qualification first.
- Included the title of the qualification, the grade, the start and finish dates, the full name of the institution
- Highlighted relevant modules or projects and give a short description of your thesis or any other major project

#### EMPLOYMENT:

- Put the most recent job experience first and worked backward
- Included start and end dates, job title, and name and address of employer
- Listed at least 3 tasks or achievements for each job you held

- Used action words to describe tasks

#### INTERESTS & ACHIEVEMENTS:

- Mentioned positions of responsibility, volunteer work, and professional memberships

#### GENERAL:

- Checked that the font and style of the CV is consistent throughout
- Used short and sharp paragraphs and sentences
- Explained any gaps in your CV
- Kept it to 2/3 pages
- Proofread it to ensure there are no spelling or grammar mistakes

## Summary

A strong CV is the essential foundation for any successful job search.

Sample CVs can be found on the Collins McNicholas website and will provide you with an excellent template for your CV.



<http://www.collinsmcnicholas.ie/CV-Templates.html>

## Section 2: Interview Skills

### INTRODUCTION

“You only get one chance to make a first impression”

First impressions do count, and research has shown that the average person can make up their minds about somebody within the first 30 seconds! A job interview is no different. Preparation, presentation and attitude are the key ingredients to be successful.

#### What to Expect?

From the employer’s perspective, the purpose of the interview is to evaluate you and your capabilities, to assess your ability to contribute to the organisation and to see how well you might fit into the organisation.

#### The Stages of an Interview

There are 4 stages in a typical job interview:

- **Breaking the ice** - introductions and ‘chitchat’ designed to help you relax and feel comfortable.
- **Exchanging information** - questions that focus on the organisation, the job and your interest in both.
- **Expanding the focus** - specific questions about you and how well you will be able to do the job.
- **Wrapping up** - time for clarifying, asking questions and final comments.

#### Interview Preparation

Preparing yourself properly for an interview will help you relax and give you the confidence to answer tough questions. Thorough preparation will dramatically improve your chances of getting the job.

#### Research the Company & the Role

Firstly make sure you read through the job description carefully. If you are dealing with a recruitment consultant they should also be able to tell you about the company you are going to see, and about the person who is interviewing you.



You should also conduct your own background research on the firm and the individuals you are meeting. You will then be able to make a much better impression at the interview.

#### What to research?

Go to the company’s website and research:

- What products/services do they offer?
- Who are their major competitors?
- Where is the company’s headquarters located?
- Have they been in the media or received any awards recently?
- Use LinkedIn and Google to find out more about the company, and the people you are meeting.
- Try to identify someone you know who works in that company and ask them to tell you what they can about the company.



## Review and know your CV

Thoroughly familiarise yourself with your CV. Pay particular attention to things that you may have listed as accomplishments or achievements and be prepared to discuss these.

## Personal Presentation

Before going for an interview make sure that your interview attire is appropriate. Don't dress casually even if the employees of the company are wearing casual clothes. If in doubt, dress formally.



## Body Language

Research has shown that only 7% of the message we send out is based on the actual words we use. The rest is down to body language and tone of voice.

- Stand tall and confident, nerves make you slouch.
- Smile and make good eye contact.
- Avoid negative body language such as shuffling, scratching, looking around, folding your arms, etc.
- Speak with energy and enthusiasm.

## COMPETENCY BASED INTERVIEWS

Companies are increasingly using a competency based interview model to screen job candidates. This involves asking job applicants to give specific examples where they have displayed certain competencies, or skills, and to describe the result of their actions.

### Sample Competency Based Interview Questions:

#### Teamwork

Give an example of a time when you have been asked to work in a group to complete a project. How did the group organise priorities and the delegation of tasks? What was the overall outcome of the project?

#### Decision Making

Describe a situation when a project or piece of work was going to miss a set deadline, how did you prioritise which parts of the work to complete first and how did you go about completing the existing work?

#### Problem Solving

Describe a significant problem that you have encountered recently. How did you approach this problem? Who was involved and how did you go about resolving it?

#### Personal & Career Objectives

What are your short, medium and long term goals, how have you gone about identifying and developing these goals and how do you intend to achieve them?

#### Motivation

Can you tell me about a time when you have performed over and above the expectations of your role?

## Communication

Give an example of a time when you have had to communicate with individuals and groups. What methods of communication did you use and what problems did you face?

### THE STAR TECHNIQUE:

This technique is particularly useful when answering competency based questions but can be applied to almost any interview question.

Structuring your interview answers using the STAR (Situation, Task, Action, Result) interview technique will give you confidence and clarity when answering your interview questions. Following its form will result in your answers being high quality, comprehensive and detailed. This technique will also help you avoid deviating from the question and keep your answers structured and to the point. We would strongly advise you to use the STAR technique.

#### Situation:

Describe the background of a particular situation when you used the key competency. For example if the competency is budgetary control:

“In my last job I was appointed to lead a project involving a £600,000 engineering factory shut down lasting 2 weeks. I had overall responsibility for the budget for this project. I did face some challenges on this project which required careful management to keep to budget.”

#### Task:

Describe what your particular task was in relation to this, i.e. “My responsibility was to ensure that the project came in on time

and on budget, which required close liaison with the department heads, maintenance managers, and cost and planning team. Any overspend, delay or conflict had to be resolved immediately to keep the project on budget. One week into the project we were faced with unexpected delays due to the unavailability of essential maintenance equipment which threatened the completion of the project on time and would ultimately have prevented the plant from becoming operational again on time. This would have obviously created a loss in production and revenue.”

#### Action:

“I worked long hours with the buying and contracts manager, sourcing alternative suppliers and negotiating price, to keep to the original estimates. I worked closely with the planning team to reschedule some of the other work to ensure no time was lost. It was key that I kept in close contact with the whole team throughout, as any delay would affect the budget. I examined all aspects of the project to ensure that there were no wasted costs and that despite the tight budget safety standards were never compromised.”

#### Result:

“I am pleased to say that through perseverance and my determination to deliver on time, and on budget, the long hours paid off and a new supplier was found who have since proved to be a more effective supplier. The project was completed on time and came in a little under budget, and the whole project was carried out without accident or injury.”

N.B. You might also add your observations about what you learnt from the experience.

## ANSWERING THE DIFFICULT QUESTIONS

### Tell me about yourself?

Try to be yourself. Prepare your response

Experience - choose relevant examples

Skills – make sure they are relevant e.g. attention to detail or strong communication.

Education – this is important for less experienced candidates. Be prepared to demonstrate the relevancy of your educational background to the role.

Ambition – be clear about your future career ambitions and aspirations.



### What is your biggest weakness?

Don't be afraid to mention your weaknesses. Discuss what you have done to overcome it. Turn your weakness into a strength. Weaknesses should be:

- Real
- Understandable
- Relatively harmless
- Work-related

Example: "Sometimes, I focus too much on the details of a project. So now, when I'm working on a project, I make sure at the end of the day to sit back and take a few minutes

to think about the general scope of my work. This forces me to keep priorities straight and helps me keep the right mind-set."

### Practicing Interview Skills

An excellent way to prepare for an interview is to do a mock interview. Prepare sample answers and get a friend or someone in your family to ask you a few questions before the interview. If you've practiced recently with a few questions, it will feel more familiar and you won't be so nervous on the day. Ask them to observe your body language. They will hopefully be able to pick up on any obvious problems with your answers or on any nervous habits you might have.

## TOP 20 MOST FREQUENTLY ASKED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- Why should we hire you?
- What are your strengths?
- What is your biggest weakness?
- What qualities will be needed for this job?
- How would you describe your personality?
- How do you react to pressure and working to deadlines?
- Tell me about your previous job
- Why are you leaving your present job?
- What is your biggest achievement to date?
- Tell me about a difficult situation you faced. How did you overcome it?
- Describe a recent project that you were involved in, and its outcome.
- How might you contribute to our company?
- What important trends do you see in our industry?
- Have you any concerns about this role?

- Why do you want to work for us?
- How would your boss describe you?
- How would your colleagues describe you?
- What do you look for in a job?
- What qualities/skills do you have that would make you good at this job?
- What do you do to relax?



### ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

At the end of an interview you are usually given the opportunity to ask them a question. The question should show an interest in the role and how to do well in the job. It should not be about what you can get from it. Here are a few examples:

- I see from your website that you have recently opened a branch in London, do you have any plans to expand in other overseas locations?
- What challenges could I expect to face in the first 6 months?
- How would you describe the culture of the company?

### On the Day – 10 Things to Remember

- Punctuality is crucial, double check the location of the interview and plan how you will get there.
- Make sure you greet the interviewer with a firm handshake.
- Stay calm; it is natural that you will feel nervous; the key thing is to control it.
- Listen to the questions asked and take your time answering.
- Answer the questions as fully as possible without getting carried away.
- Don't be afraid to ask for a question to be repeated or explained.
- Give responses that are clear, relevant and provide adequate information.
- Highlight your skills and experiences in a positive way in your answers.
- Don't panic if you are asked a question you haven't prepared for.
- Thank the interviewer for the opportunity and add how much you would like to work for the company.

Further interview advice can be found on the Collins McNicholas website at:



<http://www.collinsmcnicholas.ie/Interview-Tips.html>

# Section 3: Managing Your Job Campaign

## WHAT IS A JOB SEARCH CAMPAIGN?

A job search campaign is a structured and consistently employed plan to promote a positive self image and enhance your career opportunities.



### Key Steps in a Job Search Campaign:

- Apply yourself fully to your job search campaign; your job now is to get a new job
- Research the market, evaluate possible options and opportunities.
- Generate a list of companies to target in your region and research how to target these companies.
- Set daily, weekly and monthly targets.
- Organise your job search and establish an efficient record keeping system.

### Succeeding in Today's Job Market

Over half of vacancies are filled without being advertised, this is what is known as the Hidden Job Market. There are many different routes to market, both advertised and hidden:

## ROUTES TO MARKET:

### 1. Recruitment Agencies

Select agencies that best suit your needs.

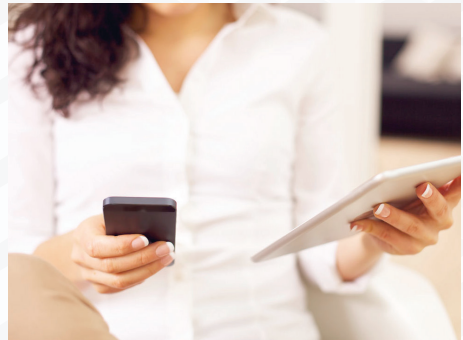
It is important to build a relationship with the recruiter.

The onus lies with you to keep in contact with the agency and to follow up regularly. Try and arrange a meeting with the agency and treat it as an interview.

Continue to review websites for suitable positions, and if you locate a position that is of interest to you discuss this role with your recruiter and seek their advice.

### 2. Start Networking

Networking events include; Open Coffee Mornings, Chamber of Commerce Meetings, College Seminars, public networking events at local sports / communities / parishes, etc.



It is vital to use these opportunities and to be proactive while attending.

Attending networking events gives you the opportunity to meet new people that may be of assistance to you in finding work in the future.

Networking events keep up to date with developments in your profession.

Always connect with people on LinkedIn following a networking event.



### 3. Improve Your LinkedIn Profile

- Ensure your LinkedIn profile is up to date.
- Use a professional looking photo.
- Build your network.
- Contribute to discussions and groups.

### 4. On-line: Job Boards & Websites

Some of the most popular job sites are: Irish Jobs, Recruit Ireland, Publicjobs.ie and Jobs.ie, but there are many more.

Sign up for job alerts on these sites so that you will be notified when jobs that you might want to apply for are first advertised.

Set up Google job alerts.

Make sure to keep accurate records of every position that you apply for and target niche websites for your particular specialism.

Be sure to follow up with companies within two weeks after the initial contact.

Download any job apps to your phone, stay connected 24/7 to maximise your chances of finding a job

### 5. Direct Applications

Before making any direct applications, build a list of potential companies in your region that you may decide to approach.

For each company it is advisable to have a specific contact before approaching them as this gives you a greater chance at meeting someone within the company.

Take your time filling out candidate applications online, save the automatic response they send you.

Personalise the application; use the persons name and title instead of 'Dear Sir/Madam.'



### 6. Referrals

Referrals can come from a number of different sources: previous college lecturers, friends and neighbours, former employers or HR managers, and LinkedIn testimonials

Let your network know that you are back in the job market and seeking a new opportunity.

## 7. Traditional Advertising

Read local and national newspapers for job advertisements and check their websites regularly.

## 8. Recruitment Fairs

Recruitment Fairs are a great way to meet a number of potential employers at the one event.

Always have lots of CVs with you, approach as many recruiters as possible, and treat every meeting like an interview.



## 9. Volunteering

Volunteering allows you to update and enhance your skills.

Volunteering can give you the opportunity to meet with a new group and network of individuals which may stand to you in the future.

It is also a very positive thing to talk about at an interview.

## 10. Internships / Job Bridge

Although often maligned internships can give you an opportunity to gain experience, learn new skills, and get an important first step into an industry.

For more information on how to find work in today's job market go to:

<http://www.collismcnicholas.ie/Jobseeking-in-the-current-market.html>

## CONCLUSION

Finding a job is a process. Sometimes it can take only a few weeks, but frequently it can take a few months. Given the length of time involved it is important for any jobseeker to be patient and maintain a positive routine around looking for employment. This guide should provide you with some of the skills you need, and be, we hope, a useful starting point for you to begin your job search. Good luck!

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