

Brilliant CV: What Employers Want To See and How To Say It

Jim Bright and Joanne Earl. New York: Prentice Hall, 2001. 190 pages.

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THE PACE OF CORPORATE RESTRUCTURING in the US and elsewhere has quickened and, in many cases, taken a turn for the worse. For example, Hewlett-Packard, after its merger with Compaq, is in the process of shedding tens of thousands of jobs worldwide. Ford aims to cut 35,000 jobs. Thousands have lost their jobs due to the implosion of Enron and the fall of Andersen. The economic situation led NACE, the National Association of Colleges and Employers, to predict a twenty percent decrease in college hiring in May 2002. The result is a ruthlessly competitive job market that makes the job-search process even more challenging, thereby increasing the need for an effective résumé or CV.

It is not surprising, then, that students find learning to write "effective" résumés or CVs that will help them secure that coveted or ideal job more gratifying than other subjects in business communication courses (Andrews, 2001). Although many standard texts in our field cover the fundamentals of writing effective job application materials, it is refreshing to find a separate text on the subject that offers clear advice without reducing the process to recipe-writing.

Bright and Earl's *Brilliant CV: What Employers Want To See and How To Say It* is not another "Resume 101" or "Resume for Dummies." Grounded in research on résumés by organizational psychologists, human resource managers, and recruitment consultants, and relying on interviews of hundreds of recruiters across different industries, Bright and Earl provide invaluable insights for teachers and students of business communication.

The book is divided into four parts. In Part 1, "Writing A CV from Scratch," the authors cover the process of job searching and writing a CV in nine chapters. Even for readers who are familiar

with writing a CV, the first part offers a good refresher. In Part 2, “The Icing on the Cake,” which consists of four chapters, the authors focus on the traditional contents of the CV and job application letters: language, competency statements, and career objectives. Parts 3 and 4 consist of one chapter each. In Part 3, “The Doctor Is In—Your Problems Solved,” the authors tackle a range of “tricky CV issues.” In Part 4, “Resource Bank—Useful Ingredients and Tips,” the authors cover Internet sites and other useful resources.

The format of the book is very user-friendly and accessible for both teachers and students. Each chapter comes with specific learning objectives, and the layout is well structured. Headings are used appropriately as signposts, and short paragraphs make easy reading. Appropriate visuals and graphics are used to highlight key points, principles, and illustrations. The authors also demonstrate their sense of humor by giving chapters names such as “Where is the prime suspect?” and “Mind your language!” What stands out is the authors’ use of several analogies that help readers understand the essence of key concepts in resume writing, for example, “first dates,” “icing on the cake,” and “job detective.”

A unique feature of the book is the “Recruiters’ Tips,” indicated by a distinctive icon (a tick in a box), which spotlights advice from human resource experts and professional recruiters. The inclusion of professional advice reinforces the relevance of the materials. As readers, we obtain insights into the recruiters’ minds. The authors tell us what recruiters think when they read CVs to make hiring decisions, what recruiters like most in CVs (we are told that recruiters most appreciate relevant experience, layout, qualifications), and what recruiters dislike in a CV. We learn that recruiters *do not recommend wacky and way-out CVs because they attract attention and may risk evoking negative reactions.*

In the “Introduction” to the book, the authors use the analogy of “first dates”: “Like the first date, [CVs] are the first time an employer gets to form an opinion about you—and first impressions can make all the difference” (p. xi). The authors assert “the CV is the only step where you have control over the information that you present” (p. xi). How writers exert control over the

process of writing a résumé or CV is a theme that runs throughout the book.

One chapter I especially liked is Chapter 4 (“How to read a job ad”). The authors offer seven job advertisement interrogation questions that teachers and students will find particularly useful in résumé writing. They explain how to read or decipher a job ad and provide advice from experts, which focuses on the type of industry, main purpose of job, importance of role to company, skills required, personal qualities, and knowledge/training. Teachers will find particularly useful the exercise on getting readers to compare how they performed on the exercises with the experts’ analysis. In addition, Bright and Earl provide scoring charts which students would find interesting. Based on the scores, students can be categorized as Inspector Clouseau, Dr. Watson, or Sherlock Holmes, in terms of their ability as “job detectives.”

A number of useful templates are provided in the book to help students learn to write resumes or CVs. For instance, the authors present a general template of the “see-saw” to highlight the importance of striking a balance between presenting facts and achievements (Chapter 5, “Job Descriptions,” p. 51).

Another notable chapter is Chapter 7 (“What Sort of Person Are You?”). In this chapter, the authors discuss the qualities employers look for in different career stages of job applicants. Unlike other books on resume writing, *Brilliant CV* delineates clearly the different expectations of employers that cover an entire career trajectory, from graduate through late career. The authors cover career changes, and even re-entry to the workforce after a break. What is even more remarkable is that in each career stage, the authors describe for us what information to emphasize and the key challenges for CV.

In Chapter 8 (“Making the Perfect Fit”), the three most popular CV styles—chronological CV, functional CV, and hybrid CV—are covered. Bright and Earl add value by presenting their four Gestalt rules of CVs: similarity, grouping, closure, and continuity. I found their Gestalt rules of CVs really helpful. In my teaching, I found students could understand these rules and apply them in their resume writing. Each Gestalt rule is explained with clear examples.

In Part 2, the authors cover content areas such as layout, headings, use of white space, font size, and bullet points. Examples of CVs are given to help readers understand how to create a CV with maximum impact. Chapter 10 deals with language matters such as how to avoid clichés. Chapter 11 deals with competency statements. Chapter 12 deals with career objectives. Here again, I find that the authors' research reinforces the relevance of the point they make in this chapter, that is, statements of career objectives do work. The authors found in their study with recruiters that CVs that included career objectives influenced recruiters to think the applicants were more suited to the job they had applied for.

In Part Three "Doctor Is In—Your Problems Solved," the authors again demonstrate how their research can help us understand some of the "tricky issues." One such "tricky issue" is dealing with gaps in career history. The authors studied the impact of gaps in career history on recruiters' perceptions of applicants' honesty. Based on their research, they found that when recruiters noticed gaps in career history and these gaps were not explained in the CV, recruiters thought the applicant was less honest than the average. However, they found that when recruiters noticed gaps in career history and these gaps were explained in the CV, recruiters thought the applicant was more honest than the average. The authors' advice is to explain gaps in career history. This is timely advice as there is a general tendency for job applicants to fudge or not disclose relevant information in their resumes (Robb, 2001).

The book is not perfect. Although the authors deal with electronic resumes and job-searching, more coverage could have been provided. All in all, however, I recommend Bright and Earl's *Brilliant CV* for use in business and management communication courses that cover resume writing and for anyone interested in writing "brilliant" CVs. Given the increasingly competitive state of the job market, everyone needs to learn how to create an outstanding resume that effectively communicates value and talents to prospective employers.

References

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