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Qualified finance CV guide

How to present your experience clearly and commercially

- Newly qualified & moving to industry
- Part-qualified
- Senior qualified

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What's inside this guide

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Why your CV matters

Most recruiters and hiring managers will scan a CV quickly before deciding whether to progress an application further.

> ***"A CV has one purpose and one purpose only – to get you an interview with a person who can give you a job."***
>
> – *Bob Griffiths ICAEW Career Advisor*

That means your CV should immediately show:

- What you specialise in
- The complexity of your experience
- The environments you've worked in
- Where you've added value.

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What hiring managers look for first

Given that hiring managers will make an initial judgement on the first page, your key selling points need to be immediately obvious.

1. Qualification status

Make qualifications easy to identify:

- ACA
- ACCA
- CIMA
- CIPFA
- ACMA
- FCA

If you're part-qualified, state your progress clearly.

For example:
ACCA Part-Qualified - 2 exams remaining

Newly qualified?

- If you passed your professional exams on the first attempt, explicitly state "First-time pass" in your summary or education section or highlight modules where you gained top marks
- If you're moving from practice to industry, it's important to highlight your transferable skills (see more on page 11)

2. Your specialism

Employers want to understand where your core experience sits. For example:

- Financial Planning & Analysis (FP&A)
- Group Financial Reporting & Technical Accounting
- Corporate Finance & Deal Advisory (M&A)
- Corporate Treasury & Capital Management
- Risk, Internal Audit & Forensic Accounting.

3. Technical & system skills

Ensure this is at the top of your CV, alongside qualifications. For example:

- **Newly qualified:** NetSuite, SAP, Microsoft Dynamics 365, Workday Financials.
- **Part qualified:** Xero, Sage 50/200, QuickBooks, basic Excel (VLOOKUPs, Pivot Tables)
- **Senior qualified:** ERP system implementation & integration (e.g., migrating from Sage to NetSuite), system controls design.

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Structuring your qualified finance CV

There is no single "perfect" CV format. However, most successful CVs are concise, easy to navigate and achievement-focused.

1. Name and contact details

2. Qualifications and skills

3. Academic record

Summary of qualifications or what you're currently studying and technical skills and knowledge of systems

4. Professional experience or profile

Outline experience and achievements in reverse chronological order (most recent role first).

If you're newly qualified, this is the perfect place to input your professional profile, drawing upon relevant skills gained through studying or working in practice.

Contact details	Qualifications & Skills
Full name [City, Postcode] [Email Address] [Phone Number] [LinkedIn Profile URL]	**ACCA qualified**, date **Systems:** Sage, SAP, Excel

Academic record

Degree (including classification)
A levels (optional, no need to list the subjects – stating the number is sufficient)

Professional experience

Job title
Current company name
Date from – Present

- Bullet points about what you do in your current or most recent role – focus on key responsibilities, notable achievements, any facts and figures etc. Examples below.
- Responsible for a variety of audit clients from plc's to owner managed businesses operating across several industries including retail, financial services and manufacturing industries.

Account Management
Company name
Date range

- Preparation of engagement letters, client acceptance procedures;
- Effective work in progress management on numerous clients varying in size and complexity;
- Structuring and defining the audit approach for clients, taking into account the specific business and financial risks of clients in differing industries, and communicating this approach to both the client and the audit team;
- Managing on site individual teams ranging from two to six employees, whilst coordinating with management as to the progress and completion of the audits;
- Coaching and review of multi-skilled teams to ensure continued training and completion of audits to a high standard;
- Contributing to meetings with key client finance personnel to highlight key audit findings and providing updates on current developments in accounting standards along with the implications for their business;
- Preparation of report deliverables for UK clients and group reports to meet US and European parent company's financial reporting requirements and in doing so identifying any GAAP differences arising;
- Reviewing local subsidiary client controls to report under SOX to group teams of US clients.

How long should a qualified finance CV be?

There are no strict rules, but as a guide:
Junior or "newly qualified" professionals
1-2 pages

Mid-level professionals
Typically 2 pages

Senior professionals
2-3 pages can be acceptable where experience is highly relevant

The most important point is relevance. Avoid adding information simply to increase length.

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Your profile is your shop window

Many finance professionals underestimate the impact of their profile, but it's one of the first things recruiters and hiring managers will read. It's your opportunity to quickly position yourself and explain the value you bring.

This section should be concise (around 4-6 lines), relevant, and tailored to your level of experience. A good profile should quickly cover:

- Qualification status (e.g., ACA, ACCA, CIMA)
- Finance specialism (e.g., FP&A, commercial finance, financial control)
- Number of years of post-qualified, industry or practice experience
- Sector exposure (e.g., SaaS, retail, manufacturing)
- Key strengths and achievements.

Avoid generic statements

Most CVs contain phrases such as:

- "Hardworking"
- "Team player"
- "Works well independently"
- "Excellent communication skills

These don't really tell an employer anything meaningful. Instead, focus on:

- Technical capability (e.g., statutory reporting, IFRS/FRS 102, system migrations)
- Commercial exposure (e.g., budget ownership, margin analysis, business partnering)
- Leadership (e.g., managing direct reports, mentoring junior trainees)
- Stakeholder management (e.g., presenting monthly packs to the C-suite or advising non-finance heads)
- Measurable impact (e.g., cost-saving initiatives, reducing month-end close times).

Example

CIMA-qualified Finance Manager with close to 10 years' progressive experience built entirely within a large retail group. Experience spans core accounting, FP&A, strategy, transformation and working capital.

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Presenting your experience effectively

One of the most common finance CV mistakes is listing responsibilities copied directly from a job description. Most hiring managers already know what somebody in your role is expected to do. What they really want to understand is:

- The complexity of your work (e.g., handling multi-currency reconciliations, managing audit deliverables, or leading complex system integrations)
- The scale of responsibility (e.g., transaction volumes processed, the size of the P&L or entity you manage, or the value of the budgets you oversee)
- Where you've added value (e.g., streamlining month-end processes to save days, identifying cost-saving opportunities, or providing analysis that improves business margins).

Responsibilities explain what you did; achievements, metrics, and context demonstrate the impact you had. This helps employers build a much clearer picture of your level, commercial exposure and the complexity of your experience.

Weak example
Responsible for implimenting cost-saving initiatives across the business.

Stronger example
Delivered £1.5m in cost savings within a single financial year through targeted efficiency initiatives; a tangible, board-level result.

Weak example
Managed junior staff.

Stronger example
·Helping to complete course registration, qualification certificates and forms to ensure ACCA qualification reached. Coaching and helping within the role to ensure students able to balance work-study balance.

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How to showcase achievements

Strong finance CVs explain outcomes, not just duties. Hiring managers want evidence that you:

- Improved something
- Solved problems
- Added commercial value
- Influenced processes
- Managed complexity.

Use measurable outcomes where possible

The strongest achievements often include:

- Percentages
- Cost savings
- Timelines
- Efficiencies
- Reduced risk
- Improved accuracy.

Don’t undersell process improvements

It’s easy to assume process or compliance improvements are “just part of the job”. In reality, these examples often demonstrate:

- Initiative
- Commercial awareness
- Leadership
- Problem solving
- Technical capability.

These are exactly the types of things employers want to see.

Examples of strong statements

- Built a company’s first ever structured management reporting framework from scratch, including KPIs, rolling forecasts and board-level reporting
- Redesigned P&L structures and strengthened revenue recognition processes, directly improving reporting accuracy and commercial insight
- Established improved finance controls and processes to increase efficiency, scalability and accuracy — comfortable professionalising a function rather than just maintaining it
- Strong stakeholder collaboration skills, partnering directly with senior leadership on strategic planning and operational decision-making
- Managed all core compliance requirements including HMRC submissions, Companies House filings, and statutory accounts — solid regulatory grounding for an organisation operating across multiple jurisdictions.

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Using the STAR approach

One of the easiest ways to strengthen achievement statements is by briefly explaining:

S	T	A	R
Situation	**Task**	**Action**	**Result**
What was happening?	What were you responsible for?	What did you do?	What improved?

This approach and can help make your experience sound more commercial and achievement-focused.

Weak example
Assisted with group tax reporting.

Stronger STAR-based example

Identified an operational issue where the finance team spent 15 hours every month manually consolidating payroll and timesheet data across 5 retail sites, leaving minimal time for commercial analysis. Engineered an automated data pipeline using Excel Power Query to automatically extract, clean, and map the data directly into the master management accounts file. This intervention permanently reduced the reporting data-prep time from 15 hours to less than 30 minutes, cutting the overall month-end cycle by an entire business day and delivering performance insights earlier.

Should you include client names?
Where confidentiality allows, including recognisable clients can add credibility but this isn't essential. You can instead describe:

- Sectors
- Business size
- Ownership structure
- Portfolio complexity.

For example:
"Portfolio included multinational manufacturing groups, PE-backed businesses and HNW individuals."

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Moving from Practice into Industry

If you are ACA qualified and have previously worked in an audit or tax role and are trying to move into a commercial industry position such as FP&A or Financial Analyst, it's important to translate your practice skills into industry "language" on your CV.

Practice example
Auditing client financial statements

Reframe for industry
Gained deep, practical exposure to FRS 102 / IFRS across diverse sectors, analysing complex balance sheets and P&L structures.

Practice example
Answering client queries

Reframe for industry
A trusted business partner to senior client management, translating complex financial audit findings into actionable business advice.

Highlighting achievements

IYou don't need a £1.5m budget saving to show impact. At the NQ stage, saving time is just as valuable as saving money. Identify the achievements where you made a process better, faster, or more accurate.

Practice example
Rebuild a messy Excel spreadsheet that the team uses every month

Reframe for industry
Overhauled a legacy month-end Excel template, automating reconciliations via Power Query and saving the team 4 hours per month.

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Systems and technical skills

Hiring managers also want to understand how quickly you can add value operationally. Where relevant, include systems such as:

- SAP
- Oracle
- Sage
- Xero
- NetSuite
- Power BI

For Excel, be specific:

- Pivot Tables
- VLOOKUP/XLOOKUP
- Macros
- Power Query

Career breaks, long tenure and interim work

There is no need to worry unnecessarily about these areas. In reality, career breaks and long tenure are extremely common and rarely a concern when presented clearly.

Career breaks

A short explanation is usually enough. For example:

- Relocation
- Professional study leave
- Career break to be a carer
- Parental leave

You don’t need to over-explain personal circumstances. If relevant, you may also include:

- Courses completed
- Voluntary work
- Committee roles
- Continued professional development.

Long tenure

Staying with one employer for a long period is not a negative. In fact, many employers value loyalty and progression. The key is showing how responsibilities have evolved over time. Highlight:

- Promotions
- Portfolio growth
- Leadership exposure
- Project involvement.

Interim and contract work

If you have completed multiple short-term assignments, it can sometimes help to group them together under: “Contract assignments”

This keeps your CV cleaner and avoids repetition.

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Common finance CV mistakes

Listing responsibilities without outcomes
Focus on achievements and impact wherever possible.

Including too much technical jargon
Remember that HR and recruiters may review your CV before technical hiring managers.

Generic profiles
Your profile should reflect your actual specialism and experience.

Underselling client work
Include size and sector of client accounts to showcase your level of responsibility.

Too much detail on older roles
Recent experience is usually most relevant.

Poor formatting
Use:
- Clear headings
- Consistent spacing
- Professional fonts
- Bullet points.

Spelling and grammar mistakes
Use 3rd person and not 'I' or 'my' and always proofread carefully.
Useful tip: read your CV out loud to yourself.

Formatting tips

Keep formatting simple
Avoid:
- Excessive colours
- Graphics
- Overly designed templates
- Large blocks of text

Use:
- Professional fonts
- Clear spacing
- Consistent layout.

Save as PDF
Unless requested otherwise, sending your CV as a PDF is usually the best for preserving formatting.

Use a professional filename
Avoid: CVFINALFINAL2.pdf

Use:
- JaneSmith_CV.pdf
- JamesBrown_FinanceCV.pdf

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Final CV checklist

Before sending your CV, ask yourself:

- Is my current role clear within the first page?
- Have I shown achievements as well as responsibilities?
- Is my specialism obvious?
- Does my experience translate to industry?
- Are my qualifications easy to identify?
- Is the formatting consistent?
- Have I removed unnecessary information?
- Have I proofread thoroughly?
- Is the file saved professionally?

Thinking about your next move? Let's talk!

At Distinct, we specialise in finance and accounting recruitment across the midlands and The North, connecting talented professionals with a variety of firms and businesses.

Whether you are ready to make a move after a long, successful tenure, interested in making a move to industry, or simply want an objective opinion on how your profile stacks up in the current market, please get in touch with our finance recruitment team today.

Our finance specialists can assist with:

- CV feedback
- market insight & salary benchmarking
- interview preparation.

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