

What "Six Seconds on a CV" Really Means - And How to Make Them Count

We've all heard the stat: "Recruiters spend just six seconds on your CV."

And let's be honest-it's enough to make anyone feel anxious.

But here's the truth: after years working in recruitment and reading thousands of CVs, I can tell you it's not about being lazy or dismissive. It's about how quickly recruiters learn to spot key information.

Now that I help individuals like you understand how CVs are read-and how to craft one that gets noticed-I want to demystify this whole "six-second" idea and show you how to use it to your advantage.

What actually happens when your CV is opened

Think of a recruiter or hiring manager reading in layers:

1. Quick scan: Are you broadly relevant for this role?
2. Closer look: Does your experience line up with what they're looking for?
3. Deep dive: Are you a potential interview candidate?

That first scan really does happen in a few seconds. But if you've made the right details easy to find, they'll keep reading. That's the goal.

Here's how to get their attention (for the right reasons)

1. Make the top third of your CV count

This is your prime real estate. Use it to highlight your most relevant strengths:

- Your current or most recent job title
- Key achievements or metrics (if applicable)
- A short, sharp summary of your experience and what you're looking for

Also: don't forget your name, location, and contact details-these should be easy to spot.

2. Focus on clarity over creativity

You don't need fancy designs. You need to be easy to read.

Use:

What "Six Seconds on a CV" Really Means - And How to Make Them Count

- Clear headings
- Bullet points
- Consistent formatting
- White space (don't cram everything in!)

List your jobs from most recent to oldest. For each role, briefly explain:

- What you did
- What you achieved
- How it relates to the role you're applying for

Achievements matter more than responsibilities. They show impact, not just tasks.

3. Tailor your CV to the job

You don't need to rewrite it every time-but small tweaks go a long way. Match the language in the job ad. Show how your experience connects with what they need. That little extra effort? It gets noticed.

4. Use your cover letter to show personality

Yes, many people skip it-but those who write a genuine cover letter stand out.

Don't just repeat your CV. Instead, explain:

- Why you're excited about this role
- What attracts you to this company or industry
- What value you bring

Even a few short paragraphs can add warmth and intention to your application.

Behind every CV... is a human

I know how frustrating it can be to apply for jobs and not hear back. You wonder if anyone even read your application.

Here's what I want you to know: a well-written CV helps you get seen.

What "Six Seconds on a CV" Really Means - And How to Make Them Count

It doesn't have to be perfect-it just needs to make it easy for someone to quickly see how you might fit the role.

When you connect the dots between what you've done and what a job needs, it invites the reader to pause... and read on.

In summary: Keep it simple, clear, and relevant

Forget about trying to game the system. Focus instead on helping a real person-reading quickly under pressure-see what you're great at.

That's how you make those six seconds count.

You don't have to figure it out alone. Visit samleroux.co.za for more real-world job advice.

Sam Le Roux - Career mentor, CV writer, and former recruiter