

# How to address a career break on your CV

## Is a career break a deal-breaker?

Absolutely not!

In the modern world of work, a job is rarely for life; even before COVID-19, non-linear careers with gaps, breaks and shifts were commonplace.

To borrow Helen Tupper and Sarah Ellis's term, careers are less ladder-shaped today and are far more "squiggly" instead (I'd highly recommend their book with the same title).

Since the pandemic, when UK redundancy rates hit record highs, career breaks are no longer the taboo they once were; in fact, in 2022 LinkedIn even created a feature so you can add them to your profile and choose from 13 different reasons to describe time away from paid employment.

## What approach should I take?

The best strategy is to control what you can and own your narrative.

**Be honest** – if your CV contains an unacknowledged gap, then someone reading it (i.e. the recruiter or hiring manager you're looking to impress) will draw their own conclusions. It's much better to take control and by being transparent, you'll build trust too.

**Don't apologise** – you don't have to justify your time out or share more than you want to: just explain it clearly and succinctly. Using language like "transitioning" instead of "unemployed" can help you frame it positively.

**Highlight what you bring** – great CVs are all about how you will add value so focus the reader's attention on this. Your time "off" won't have been a void, so include any pro bono work, volunteering, online study or professional development that evidences your abilities.

**Consider a skill-based or functional CV format** – rather than leading with chronological experience, showcase your key skills and achievements with plenty of examples on page one, with a succinct work history on page two (but as above, do address the gaps).

**Write a cover note** – you can provide further context to your career gap either in a standalone document or within the body of an introductory email. If you're on a break currently, be prepared to talk about how you've prepared for work readiness.



# How do i do it?

If your gap was for less than 12 months and happened over 10-15 years ago then listing early career roles using only the years (not months and years) will minimise scrutiny.

If the gap was longer and/or more recent there here are two options:

## Option 1:

For more recent short-term breaks, a simple “short career break following redundancy” on a separate line between your professional experience is all you need (I often use a smaller font, italics or square brackets so it’s there but tucked away). Some examples include:

- Planned career sabbatical incorporating consultancy, part-time work and European travel
- Career Break: fulfilled a lifetime ambition to travel across South America for 6 months
- 9-month planned career sabbatical during which I completed 3 property renovations
- Planned career sabbatical, including paid and pro-bono independent consultancy
- Planned career sabbatical, gained Level 7 Executive Coaching Qualification
- Career Break: cared for a terminally ill family member
- Career Break: an intentional wellness-focused temporary pause
- Short gap between roles due to company restructuring

If a tongue-in-cheek tone of voice works for you and for the reader then you can fully embrace it with something like...

- Full-time parenting: creative planning, high-level negotiation and continuous multitasking

Remember that if you refer to pro-bono or consultancy projects then make sure you can substantiate these if quizzed at interview (or even better – name check them in your CV).



## Option 2:

If it's a longer period (multiple years), or where you want to highlight what you accomplished during your time away from paid employment, then you can create a standalone 'experience' within your employment history and write about it as if it were a job. Some examples include:

### **Planned Career Sabbatical, 2018 to present**

- Took a step out to parent three children
- Maintained professional membership with the Association for Project Management
- Attended annual conferences, monthly webinars and regional networking events

### **Professional development between contracts, September 2022 to present**

- Established an artisan food e-commerce business and completed Alison courses in Advanced Excel, Content Design and Adobe Photoshop

### **Career Transition, July 2019 to February 2021**

- Helped at a local food bank, coordinating services for 100 families per week
- Created an online community of 60 members to support others seeking employment

## Summary

Don't qualify yourself out of a role simply because of a career break – but do think about who is going to be reading your CV and what they need to know.

Confidence breeds confidence so show how you've embraced the opportunity to enhance your adaptability, self-improvement and personal growth.

Good luck!

