Sell Your Skills

A Careers Shortcut to the best practice in the job market.

Job adverts always ask the “ideal candidate” to possess a certain set of skills. From ‘team working’ to ‘analysis’, the question is how do you convince the employer that you have the skills they want?

Some skills will be easier to evidence than others. For example, during your course you will have written an assignment, to have done this you will have used a series of skills including research, analysis and decision making. So you will have developed a range of skills whilst at university. Also you will have developed skills from other experiences: university life, work experience, voluntary work, extra-curricular activities or from your interests. The broader range of experience you have, and the more things you have been involved in, the easier this will be. Essentially, these are skills you can ‘transfer’ into the role you are applying for.

Your ability to describe your skills is crucial when completing application forms, quite often you will find questions like: ‘Give an example of when you have been involved in a team.’, ‘What was your role and what did you contribute?’ Additionally you will need to do the same when compiling your CV or writing a personal statement. From your answers to these questions, and your skill descriptions on your CV, employers will decide whether or not to put you through to the next stage in their recruitment process. So getting it right is important.

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Describing your skills is not as difficult as it may seem, try following this simple process:

- **Skill** - select the skill you are going to describe.
- **Reflect** - think about where you have used this skill.
- **Evidence** - write down how you did the skill.
- **Method** - choose a method to help you describe the skill e.g. STAR (see the STAR Technique sheet).
- **Describe** – using your method, describe how you did the skill (within the word limit – if there is one).

Skills / Attributes / Competencies / Assets

**Self-Management**: This assumes you reflect on things – especially if they go wrong. Typical interview questions are: ‘How might you have done that differently?’ ‘What skills do you feel you need to improve upon?’ Another typical interview question: ‘Tell me about your weaknesses’ – and they don’t mean TV soaps and chocolate!

**Team Work**: Do you get on well with others? Good examples would be team based sports, activities with groups of friends, succeeding in a work environment where you worked with a number of other people, or working on group projects at university. Think about your role in the team and how your contribution made the project successful.

**Commercial Awareness/Business Acumen**: So, what does this mean? Broadly speaking, an interest in business and an understanding of the wider environment in which organisations operate, for example its customers, competitors and
suppliers. Do you keep up-to-date with what’s going on in your sector and how? Maybe you read relevant journals or papers, listen to the news or attend conferences, or perhaps you have already worked in this sector and have acquired a level of business acumen from them.

**Problem Solving:** Can you think of creative solutions? Do you see problems through to the end? Would you consider yourself to be a logical person? If so, how would you demonstrate this to an employer? How have you implemented solutions you have found to problems, and what has the result been?

**Communication – interpersonal:** Do you have experience of liaising with tutors, line managers, and people older and younger than yourself? What telephone work or Customer Service experience do you have? Can you negotiate? Are you a good listener? Are you able to put forward an opinion assertively and influence others?

**Communication – written:** Can you present yourself clearly and articulately in writing? Think of presentations, essay and report writing. Don’t forget your application forms, CVs and covering letters are also good evidence of this, so make sure they are written well. Most applications with mistakes or typos will be immediately rejected.

**Numeracy:** Do you have a part-time job where you handle cash? Do you manage your own finances carefully and live on a budget? Are you doing relevant modules such as statistical analysis/data handling?

**Information Technology skills:** Include any specific I.T. modules, CAD, Adobe etc. Demonstrate your competence with computer packages, databases, spreadsheets and other Microsoft Office tools.

**Positive ‘can-do’ approach:** Employers want positive people who will take part in activities, will contribute and who have the drive to make things happen.

**Organisation skills:** Of course employers want to know that you can work on your own too! Think about how you have organised yourself at university, at work, or through extra-curricular activities. How do you manage to combine assignment deadlines with work and home commitments? Do you plan with lists, electronic diaries, spreadsheets, Gantt Charts etc.

**Entrepreneurship/enterprise:** Can you think creatively, solve problems, use your initiative and are you a risk taker? These are skills that some employers are looking for, especially for jobs that have an entrepreneurial flavour. Maybe you have run your own small business or organized events as a member of a university society?

**Other Skills That Are in Demand**

**Language skills:** You can sometimes have an advantage with knowledge of one or more languages other than your first language. Identify your level of ability, for example - fluent/ intermediate/ basic speaking and writing.

**Research skills/ Project Management skills:** Especially important for post-graduate applications, but useful for a number of job areas too. Your dissertation/project demonstrates your ability to plan and progress in your own research. Also think about research methodology – how did you go about getting material together for this? And how did you project manage this from start to finish?