

Employability Skills and Resume Preparation

Student Assist
Career Development

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Introduction

In this self-paced workshop we will be developing the skills required to assess your level of employability skills development, and identify those skills which you wish to strengthen by undertaking a work placement. You will also learn how to market yourself effectively to potential employers through well presented and targeted written applications.

Learning Outcomes

After completing this workshop you should

- have the skills needed to successfully engage in successive career transitions throughout your working life;
- have an increased self awareness;
- be able to confidently engage in the job search process;
- be able to identify the skills you have to offer an employer, and articulate these clearly and effectively in the application; and
- be more mindful of the importance of developing Graduate Attributes and generic employability skills - identified by DEETYA as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, initiative and enterprise, planning and organising, self-management, learning and technology

Tasks to complete in these workshop notes

- reflect on the application of the employability skills in the workplace appropriate to your intended profession, vocation or your current area of study;
- critically appraise the level of skill or knowledge you currently have in each graduate attribute; and
- prepare a resume to take with you when approaching a potential employer

In addition to a command of a significant body of knowledge relevant to the discipline being studied, one of UNE's goals for students, is that graduates will exhibit a series of characteristics which are identified as career self-management and core employability skills.

When graduates are employed they are usually judged not just on their academic qualifications, but also on a range of other qualities. It is these other qualities (personal and professional skills) that are necessary for graduates to meet the challenges of the constantly-changing workplace and to be a productive member of professional teams.

These 'employability skills' have been identified as:

- Communication skills
- Initiative and enterprise
- Self management
- Planning and organising
- Technology
- Problem solving
- Learning
- Teamwork

At the end of this module we also look briefly at a number of other qualities which are desirable in a professional person.

You need to be able to demonstrate to a potential employer that you have these skills. To do that you need to be able to give examples of how you have previously demonstrated these skills.

To complete the following exercise, give examples of situations where you have demonstrated each skill. You need only give a brief description, but it should include

- The **S**ituation or context
- The **T**ask or problem
- What **A**ction you took
- The **R**esult or outcome

The acronym **STAR** will help you remember how to present information about your experience in a logical and concise manner.

Not all experiences will describe situations that had an optimum outcome. Often we can learn from experience and realise how we can do things better next time. **Reflection** can be an effective conclusion to the examples you give – in effect **STAR(R)**.

SKILL

Communication that contributes to productive and harmonious relations between employees and customers. This can encompass activities such as:

- Listening and understanding
- Speaking clearly and directly
- Writing to the needs of the audience
- Negotiating responsively
- Reading independently
- Empathising
- Using numeracy effectively
- Understanding the needs of internal and external customers
- Persuading effectively
- Establishing and using networks
- Being assertive
- Sharing information
- Speaking and writing in languages other than English

Examples of how you have demonstrated Communication Skills:-

(place your answer in your Skills Database document)

SKILL

Teamwork that contributes to productive working relationships and outcomes. This can encompass activities such as:

- Working with people of different ages, gender, race, religion or political persuasion
- Working as an individual and as a member of a team
- Knowing how to define a role as part of a team
- Applying teamwork skills to a range of situations, e.g. futures planning, crisis problem solving
- Identifying the strengths of team members
- Coaching, mentoring and giving feedback

Examples of how you have demonstrated Teamwork Skills:-

(place your answer in your Skills Database document)

SKILL

Problem solving that contributes to productive outcomes. This can encompass activities such as:

- Developing creative, innovative solutions
- Developing practical solutions
- Showing independence and initiative in identifying problems and solving them
- Solving problems in teams
- Applying a range of strategies to problem solving
- Using mathematics including budgeting and financial management to solve problems
- Applying problem-solving strategies across a range of areas
- Testing assumptions taking the context of data and circumstances into account
- Resolving customer concerns in relation to complex project issues

Examples of how you have demonstrated Problem solving Skills:-

(place your answer in your Skills Database document)

SKILL

Initiative and enterprise that contribute to innovative outcomes. This can encompass activities such as:

- Adapting to new situations
- Developing a strategic, creative, long-term vision
- Being creative
- Identifying opportunities not obvious to others
- Translating ideas into action
- Generating a range of options
- Initiating innovative solutions

Examples of how you have demonstrated Initiative and enterprise Skills:-

(place your answer in your Skills Database document)

SKILL

Planning and organising that contribute to long term and short-term strategic planning. This can encompass activities such as

- Managing time and priorities – setting timelines, coordinating tasks for self and with others
- Being resourceful
- Taking initiative and making decisions
- Adapting resource allocations to cope with contingencies
- Establishing clear project goals and deliverables
- Allocating people and other resources to tasks
- Planning the use of resources including time management
- Participating in continuous improvement and planning processes
- Developing a vision and a proactive plan to accompany it
- Predicting – weighing up risk, evaluating alternatives and applying evaluation criteria
- Collecting, analysing and organising information
- Understanding basic business systems and their relationships

Examples of how you have demonstrated Planning and Organising Skills:-

(place your answer in your Skills Database document)

SKILL

Self-management that contributes to employee satisfaction and growth. This can encompass activities such as:

- Having a personal vision and goals
- Evaluating and monitoring own performance
- Having knowledge and confidence in own ideas and vision
- Articulating own ideas and vision
- Taking responsibility

Examples of how you have demonstrated Self-management Skills:-

(place your answer in your Skills Database document)

SKILL

Learning that contributes to ongoing improvement and expansion in employee and company operations and outcomes. This can encompass activities such as

- Managing own learning
- Contributing to the learning community at the workplace
- Using a range of mediums to learn – mentoring, peer support, networking, information technology (IT), courses
- Applying learning to ‘technical’ issues (e.g. learning about products) and ‘people’ issues (e.g. interpersonal and cultural aspects of work)
- Having enthusiasm for ongoing learning
- Being willing to learn in any setting – on and off the job
- Being open to new ideas and techniques
- Being prepared to invest time and effort in learning new skills
- Acknowledging the need to learn in order to accommodate change

Examples of how you have demonstrated Learning Skills:-

(place your answer in your Skills Database document)

SKILL

Technology that contributes to effective execution of tasks. This can encompass activities such as

- Having a range of basic IT skills
- Applying IT as a management tool
- Using IT to organise data
- Being willing to learn new IT skills
- Having the occupational health and safety knowledge to apply technology
- Having the appropriate physical capacity

Examples of how you have demonstrated Technology Skills:-

(place your answer in your Skills Database document)

In addition to Demonstrated Employability Skills, there are certain Personal Attributes that contribute to overall employability. These include:-

- Loyalty
- Commitment
- Honesty and integrity
- Enthusiasm
- Reliability
- Personal presentation
- Commonsense
- Positive self-esteem
- Sense of humour
- Balanced attitude to work and home life
- Ability to deal with pressure
- Motivation
- Adaptability

When you review your examples for the employability skills, you will notice that for some skills you will be able to present a strong set of demonstrable examples, while for other skills you may not have many, or even any, examples that you can use to demonstrate your skills in this area.

The list of Skills which you have compiled will be the 'data base' that underpins all stages of the application process - resume, selection criteria and interviews. Your Skills Data Base is a living document, which will change and grow as you gain experience and a greater range of skills. Setting up this document is a reasonably lengthy process, but it pays dividend over and over again because it makes each subsequent step in the process so much simpler and quicker.

An example of how you might set out your Skills Data Base to facilitate information transfer across to your resume is given on the following page.

SKILLS DATA BASE

Set up a document on your computer, listing your transferable skills with one or more examples. For example.....

Communication – oral and written

Give one or more examples of how you have demonstrated this skill, using the STAR formula.

Problem Solving

Give one or more examples of how you have demonstrated this skill, using the STAR formula.

Teamwork

Give one or more examples of how you have demonstrated this skill, using the STAR formula.

Leadership

Give one or more examples of how you have demonstrated this skill, using the STAR formula.

Project Planning

Give one or more examples of how you have demonstrated this skill, using the STAR formula.

Organisational Ability

Give one or more examples of how you have demonstrated this skill, using the STAR formula.

Time management

Give one or more examples of how you have demonstrated this skill, using the STAR formula.

Preparing your Resume

A resume or CV (the terms are interchangeable) is NOT a complete record of everything you have ever done. A resume is primarily a marketing tool - it is the promotional document which allows you to match your skills and experiences to the needs of an employer. There is no point in sending out the same resume to a dozen different employers. Like any marketing document it needs to sell the 'benefits', and be targeted to the particular recipient. The aim of the resume is to get you to the interview stage where you can further 'sell' your skills and abilities.

The resume format that we recommend is the **skills-based, or functional style**. Research has shown that this style of presentation tends to be more effective in getting across to potential employers 'what I can offer your organisation.' It is an especially effective format for new graduates who do not have extensive work experience in their chosen field, or people who are making a significant change in career direction.

Before you sit down to begin constructing your resume, start by getting out a pen and paper and writing down all the activities you have been involved in over the past few years. Include paid work, volunteer work, academic studies, cultural and sporting activities etc. From this list, identify the skills that you have developed through participating in these various activities. This is where it is helpful to work with a friend – often an outsider can identify a talent that you possess, but which you take for granted. Group together similar skills which you may have developed across a range of activities eg 'teamwork' may have been developed in your sporting activities, community service and part-time job in a retail outlet.

You will end up with quite an extensive data base of 'transferable or employability skills.' For each skill, briefly describe how, and in what context, you have demonstrated that skill. This is now your 'master list' of skills that you can present to a potential employer. Each time you prepare your resume to submit to a potential employer, you will need to select (as a guide) the 5 – 7 most applicable skills and include them in your resume.

This Skills section in your resume is really the core of the document. Coming after your personal details and qualifications, it presents in a clear and concise manner, just what it is you have to offer. It should run to approximately a page and a half.

It is most important that you check to ensure that the skills you have to offer are a good match for the skills that are required for the job you are applying for. Use language that reflects the language of the employer eg if they refer to 'networking skills', change your skill title of 'liaison skills' to 'networking', if they refer to 'client contact' change your 'customer service skills' to 'client contact'.

Careful attention to the format as well as the content of your resume will significantly enhance your chances of gaining an interview.

Your resume should be as long as it needs to be to provide the employer with a comprehensive, yet concise, picture of how you will be an asset to their organisation. Generally your resume should be 3-4 pages in length.

- Aim for visual appeal -
 - clear headings
 - point format
 - large margins
 - wide spaces between categories
- Be consistent with headings and fonts
- Use spell check and proofread. Have someone else proofread as well.

RESUME CHECKLIST

- Can it be scanned rapidly?
- Is it well organised?
- Is the presentation professional and of high quality?
- Can the employer identify the benefits you have to offer as an employee?
- Can you talk about every item in your resume?
- Are you happy that the employer is getting the total picture of you as an employee?

The onus is on you to demonstrate your value - it is not up to the Selection Panel or employer to decipher this from your resume. The format for a functional or skills-based Resume is given on the following page. Use this as a guide to compose your own resume.

YOUR NAME

Contact Details

- Address
- Telephone number
- Mobile number
- (Fax number)
- E-mail (check that the address you use presents a 'professional' image eg use your UNE email name)

Education

- Dates (reverse Chronological order)
- University
- Course of study

Descriptor (or what differentiates or personalises your studies)

- Majors; Academic achievement (do not list all subjects – you can attach academic transcript if needed.)
- Any awards
- Major achievements

Other Qualifications/ Training (choose an appropriate heading)

Only list those that are relevant

Skills/Qualities/Attributes (choose an appropriate heading)

- Name the skill
- How have you demonstrated it
- How was it developed
- Visually, it helps to write the name of the skill in bold type, and then indent slightly for the paragraph describing an example of how you have demonstrated that skill.

Professional Experience

- Detail relevant professional experience
- Identify the 'transferable' nature or value of that experience

Employment History/Work History / Work Experience (choose an appropriate heading)

- List the period of employment, name of the employer, your position title.
- Reverse chronological order or group to illustrate particular skills or qualities
- Don't write out the Duty Statement for each position, this can become repetitive, takes up a lot of space and actually says nothing about how well you performed in the role.
- Some positions are self explanatory, while others may need a sentence or two to describe what your work entailed. Then add a line or two to state something you achieved, or some recognition you gained, in your work.

Activities/Interests/Hobbies (choose an appropriate heading)

- Don't just list – give a descriptor of how well or in what capacity you are involved in this activity. Focus on those activities and interests that relate to the job for which you are applying.

Referees

- Name
- Position
- Contact details – telephone, fax, and email if available