

DEMONSTRATING YOUR SKILLS

MAKE IT EASY FOR EMPLOYERS BY MATCHING YOUR SKILLS TO THEIR REQUIREMENTS.

Understanding the skills or competencies recruiters are looking for is vital when it comes to making successful applications and doing well in interviews. Knowing what they want will help you sell yourself effectively. By giving examples that demonstrate you have the skills they need, you are more likely to convince them of your ability to do the job.

Demystifying job descriptions

Start with the job advert. If it says, 'We're looking for a proactive Accounts Officer to join our busy team', 'proactive' indicates they want someone who can act on their own initiative without constant direction, and 'busy team' implies the candidate will need to work well with a range of colleagues. The job description and person specification will outline and explain the skills they are looking for. An 'E' or 'Essential' listed next to a specific skill is a definite requirement, so evidence it clearly in your application. 'D' is for 'Desirable' – try to cover as many of these as possible in your application as it could set you apart >>

What if there is no job description?

You may be applying speculatively for an unadvertised role (see our article on page 35 for how to do this), or the advert may simply state 'Marketing intern required, send your CV...' or something equally brief. So how can you begin to find relevant examples when you don't know what skills to demonstrate?

- Ask them. If they have provided contact details, be proactive and get in touch. You may be the only candidate who does so and then you'll have made a positive first impression which you can follow up with an application perfectly tailored to their requirements.
- Look at similar job adverts. Two marketing interns in two small business-to-business marketing agencies may not be doing exactly the same job, but there is likely to be some overlap. Find a similar opportunity in a similar organisation, and think about how the requirements they list would map over onto the position you are applying for.
- Look at a different job advert for that organisation. This might give you an insight into their culture and the kind of people they look for, for example

'We are looking for someone with creative ideas to join our innovative and fast-moving team'.

- Create your own person specification. What duties might you be carrying out? What skills would you need to perform those tasks effectively? For example, are you likely to be researching what competitors are doing and writing a report for the management team? If so, this would require good research skills and attention to detail, but also the ability to condense information and summarise the key points.
- The websites targetjobs.co.uk and prospects.ac.uk profile lots of different types of jobs, with lists of typical duties and transferable skills that are commonly needed for them. This might help you to identify skills you have overlooked.



from another candidate. However, don't be put off from applying if you don't meet all the 'desirable' skills or experience.

Examples as evidence

Simply listing the required skills in your CV or application won't suffice – the employer needs evidence of each of these skills to feel confident that you have what they need.

Think through your experiences carefully and find the best example to highlight each skill required. Seeing the words 'leadership skills required' can be daunting, but you don't have to be the president of a club or society, or a supervisor at work, to have gained leadership skills. Work experience, volunteering, part-time work, extra-curricular activities and your studies can all be useful sources of examples.

For example getting your colleagues together at the weekend to complete a group project would require leadership skills such as consulting, motivating and supporting others. If there is an area you feel you have little experience of, think about how you could get some exposure to it.

The STARR technique


Follow the STARR structure when giving an example of a particular skill.

SITUATION: set the scene by briefly outlining the context for your example.

TASK: define what the task, problem or goal was.

ACTION: explain in specific detail *what* you did, with analysis of *why* and *how* you did it (to demonstrate the skill they are looking for).

RESULT AND REFLECTION: outline the outcome to show your success in using that skill; you may also want to reflect on what you could have done differently.

Top tip: be specific. Focus your answer on the action, and make sure you describe what *you* did, not just your team. Try to keep the actions and results as objective as possible. 

AN EXAMPLE OF INTEGRITY, USING THE STARR TECHNIQUE

Question

'Can you describe a time when someone you were working with made a decision which you disagreed with on moral terms?'

SITUATION & TASK

'I'm on the Film Society committee and we were planning an event to raise £100 to subsidise a special screening. The ticket price included a film screening and a drink. We had already started to promote our event when we costed it, and we discovered that we would make a loss.

The President of the society wanted to charge for the drink, and not change the promotion. The rest of the committee agreed, but I felt that this was dishonest and misleading.'

ACTION

'I suggested that instead of changing what we offered, we should buy drinks from a wholesaler so we could save money. I worked out the cost of value drinks and presented my working out on Excel to the rest of the committee. I persuaded them that we could make a profit if we focussed on promoting the event to full capacity. We therefore agreed as a team to focus our efforts on promoting our event to sell out. I also suggested that we seek sponsorship to cover the costs of the drinks and set about arranging meetings with some firms.'

RESULT & REFLECTION

'Due to our extensive promotion we managed to sell all the tickets. I was also able to negotiate a deal with a local retailer and so made an additional £100 profit. I learnt the importance of speaking up when you disagree with a teammate but at the same time having useful suggestions about how things can be done differently.'

Skill	What does it mean?	Examples of evidence
Written and verbal communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicating information and ideas clearly and accurately. Using appropriate language, style and writing methods when communicating with different people in a range of situations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wrote article for SU magazine to raise awareness of the low contribution to the Global Fund to fight malaria, tuberculosis and AIDS. Illustrated argument with photos and statistics, and provided clear instructions on what students could do to lobby for change.
Teamwork	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assigning or taking on clear roles and responsibilities within the team. Supporting others and encouraging co-operation. Having an awareness of the needs of others and responding flexibly. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Group coursework: contributed to group presentation, taking on my own research and helping others with theirs. Arranged session to practise material and timings.
Commercial awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knowing how to talk to clients, establish their needs and identify opportunities. Understanding how an organisation works, how it makes a profit and what internal/external elements influence its business. Taking time to understand what is going on in your chosen industry. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Asked manager at my part-time retail job if I could spend a day at the head office in order to better understand how shop targets are set. Learned about negotiations with suppliers, the price of raw materials and the impact these have on retail prices. <p>See 'Commercial awareness' PAGE 28</p>
Attention to detail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensuring work is thoroughly checked for errors and omissions without compromising timescales. Following instructions carefully and accurately. Picking up on details in your work, whether in interactions with clients or in work documents. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completed data-entry project as a summer job, working with large volumes of data from numerous sources. Developed system for checking for accuracy and allocated time to allow for proofreading.
Time management (organisation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prioritising a workload to meet multiple deadlines. Planning use of time to ensure tasks are delivered to a high standard and to deadline. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Managed a final-year project, while having a part-time job and a volunteering project. Set monthly goals and weekly tasks, which were reviewed regularly to ensure they were on track.
Adaptability and flexibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Responding positively to change. Adapting to new situations quickly. Taking on a diverse range of tasks equally effectively. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Took on group leader role for an SU volunteering project at the last minute to replace a sick member of the team. Quickly learned finance and client-record systems to ensure smooth continuation of project.
Responsibility and reliability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Being trusted to manage tasks or deliver results. Taking a key role in an organisation and executing it successfully. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As a part-time sales assistant, took on responsibility to cash up at end of the day, following security procedures. Trained new members of staff.
Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leading a team or project group. Delegating and motivating others effectively. Encouraging input from others. Putting the group's or organisation's needs ahead of your own. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Led and inspired a new tennis team to train on a weekend. Created the post of Vice-Captain to support scheduling of matches, after consulting the rest of the team about problems with this issue.
Decision-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ability to select the best course of action from multiple alternatives and justify decisions logically. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Made the decision to cancel one of two society fundraising events after reviewing options and explained to members.
Initiative/self-starter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working without supervision. Tackling new duties or projects without help. Originating new schemes and methods. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As a part-time tutor, developed a new online portal to share ideas and resources with other tutors, including a chat zone to ask for advice and find cover for shifts.
Innovation and creativity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coming up with new and original ideas. Considering issues and dilemmas from a new perspective. Making an artistic contribution. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As a student mentor, suggested and developed new marketing campaign to encourage first-year students to sign up to the mentoring scheme.