Transferable Skills

In a job market where recent graduates indicate they are changing jobs four times within five years of graduation, it is important to articulate the skills you have developed as they relate to new opportunities. How portable is your skill set?

Skills can be acquired in a variety of settings. As a student, you develop technical skills related to your major. In addition, you work in teams on class projects or take on leadership positions in a student organization. As an intern, you begin to build your professional portfolio as you help your employers solve problems and meet customer needs. Make a list of your experiences both on- and off-campus and develop an inventory of skills.

What is your expertise? If you are having trouble answering this question, this tip sheet is designed to help. To be successful in the job search, you must relate your skill set to the job description and support it with accomplishments.

Each year the CPPC surveys our employers to determine the 'ideal candidate.' While this may vary among employers there are three major competencies that all organizations seek: communication, problem solving and teamwork.

Communication Skills
This includes writing, speaking and interpersonal skills. This is where Writing 140/340 translates into a valuable skill set to employers. An 'ideal candidate' has the ability to articulate their ideas in an organized and concise format. Platform skills will also contribute to your success in the hiring process. How often have you spoken in front of a group or class? Can you be persuasive in your presentation of a concept? Finally, employers are looking for someone who is engaging and enthusiastic. Your ability to connect with others as well as with the recruiter demonstrates your interpersonal skill set.

Problem Solving/Analytical Skills
Think of a problem that you encountered at USC or in your workplace. How did you arrive at a solution? Most employers derive revenue by solving problems for their clients. In recruiting for entry level positions, organizations are tapping into a new and fresh resource for creative solutions. This is where you can highlight your research experience. It is also an opportunity to describe how you go about making a decision.

Teamwork
Becoming skilled at sharing responsibility and work with others may be the most important thing you can do to add to your value. What role have you played on teams? Use examples of classroom group projects, sports teams, internships, and student organizations. What are the elements that contributed to team success? What did you learn when you failed as a team? Why do some teams succeed and others fail? This is not about building your resume to include participation in 30 organizations, but about demonstrating effectiveness and results as a member of a functional team.

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There is also a subset of skills that employers consider when reviewing resumes and interviewing prospective employees. Here are a few to consider:

Initiative/Self-Starting
In the past 12 months we have received more employer feedback on this skill than on any other. Employers are telling us that—to their dismay—new employees and interns are waiting to be told what to do. Demonstrate ways you have taken initiative and achieved positive results. Did you address a problem that was causing a loss in productivity? Many of you have brought your technology expertise to the workplace to streamline a variety of projects. This is an 'energy and enthusiasm' skill. What have you done to go beyond the job description?

Leadership
This was the number one requirement for a number of years. However, employers found that they could not run a successful business if everyone was in charge. As organizations collapsed their bureaucratic structures there were fewer opportunities for advancement. Teamwork became more important to the actual practice of an organization, though leadership is still important. If you have been a student leader, founded an organization or led a project team, you have demonstrated this skill. The result of your leadership is what counts. What did your group/team accomplish during your tenure as the leader?

Flexibility
The world of work is in constant flux. Employers are looking for people who thrive on change and are not paralyzed by it. Very often students will describe this as being 'open minded.' In fact, it means you are willing to change course and adapt to new rules quickly. How does your experience demonstrate your ability to adapt to change?

Creativity
In any organization, there is a need for fresh perspectives on existing problems. How original is your approach to a challenge? Did you color outside the lines? Do you think outside the box? Can you give a specific example of innovation?

Willingness to Learn
You don't have all the answers. None of us do. You are applying to a position to add to your education in the workplace. In an interview you will convey your interest in the position. You will talk about what you bring to an organization to help them be successful. But you also want to express your interest in learning more about the field. Can you reference a previous experience that illustrates your willingness to learn?

Attention to Detail
This is the 'common sense' skill. Do you take notes in meetings? Do you ask questions to clarify directions? Do you read and follow directions? Do you proofread your e-mail, PowerPoint presentations and final papers? How committed are you to excellence in the small things? Be sure to proofread your cover letter and resume. A mistake on either will indicate a weakness in this critical skill.

Remember, when composing your resume and cover letter focus on the skills required in the job description. Utilize this transferable skill concept to demonstrate how your experience matches what the employer is seeking. The cover letter is your introduction. If you are applying for a position that is not related to your major or previous work experience include a paragraph in the cover letter that connects your transferable skills to the job description. Demonstrate to a prospective employer that you have developed an expertise based on a skill set that suits their hiring needs.