

## Transferable Skills

. . . are non-job specific skills which can be used in different occupations. You may have developed them through course work, jobs, internships, volunteering, or just plain life experience. By communicating your transferable skills effectively, you can enhance your marketability and open yourself up to a larger sector of the job market. This handout is designed to help you identify, promote and develop your transferable skills.

### Step One: Identify the skills you have

Though you may be searching for your first job or internship, you already possess many of the skills employers consider most valuable. Think about skills you have used in coursework, critiques, jobs, performances, internships and extra-curricular activities. Browse through the following list and identify your strong points.

### Management/Administrative Skills

Think about the skills you have used to organize and coordinate people, projects and events. Can you:

- Plan and arrange
- Delegate responsibility
- Bring order out of confusion
- Attend to visual detail
- Assess and evaluate your own work as well as that of classmates or coworkers
- Use databases or software to organize and present information
- Remain flexible—see obstacles as a challenge rather than a setback
- Manage multiple tasks
- Identify and manage ethical issues

### Communication Skills

To succeed in your courses or on the job, you must be able to communicate what you know, both orally and in writing. Can you:

- Listen—answer questions, provide information, accept input
- Write correspondence, reports, records, and technical or specialized documents
- Present information to large and small groups
- Persuade—give recommendations, convince others to adopt your ideas
- Negotiate—settle disagreements, or help others to see all sides of a situation
- Read or speak another language
- Express yourself confidently and creatively
- Communicate electronically—use the web and email to present and exchange information

### Research Skills

You know by now that research is a crucial part of any paper or class project; what you might not know is that you can use your research skills on the job. Can you:

- Identify and classify information—figure out where to find an answer and search for details
- Investigate and record findings
- Determine a hierarchy of tasks even when not given a designated starting point
- Work diligently and patiently

- Manage obstacles—be persistent and resourceful
- Use CD-ROM and on-line databases
- Use the web to conduct research

### Human Relations Skills

Working together isn't always easy. Human relations skills, or "people skills," are some of the most valued skills in the workplace because these skills not only help people overcome their differences, they help them make the most of their diverse opinions and interests. Think about the times you've collaborated on a project. Can you:

- Lead or direct a team
- Appraise and evaluate others' work
- Resolve problems and conflicts
- Motivate people into action
- Encourage others to do their best
- Use intuition to understand and respond to the work environment and people's needs
- Work well with people from a range of backgrounds
- Teach or train peers as well as students

### Problem-Solving Skills

Coursework requires mental gymnastics. Your studies have taught you to integrate large quantities of information, to read between the lines, and to grasp complex problems. You can use these same upper-level thinking skills to find and implement solutions in the workplace. Can you:

- Analyze problems
- Grapple with abstract issues
- Define and expand issues
- Identify several solutions to the same problem and choose the appropriate alternative
- Create new ways to solve on-going concerns and expand the dominant paradigm
- Use critical judgment to determine cause and effect relationships
- Set and attain goals
- Innovate—think "outside the box"

### STEP TWO: Identify the skills employers are seeking

Now that you have identified the skills you have, see how they compare with the skills employers in your field of interest are seeking. Here are some sources that may help you:

#### Contact Alumni

Identify graduates in your field and talk to them about their early job experiences. The following resources will help you to locate Carnegie Mellon alums who are willing to help:

- Alumni Directory  
[http://www.alumniconnections.com/olc/membersonly/CMU/old/old.cgi?FNC=SIMPLESEARCH\\_Aindex\\_html](http://www.alumniconnections.com/olc/membersonly/CMU/old/old.cgi?FNC=SIMPLESEARCH_Aindex_html)
- Alumni information through your home department at Carnegie Mellon

#### Read Classified Advertisements

Search print and electronic advertisements to determine what kind of skills employers are seeking. Look at subheadings like "qualifications," "responsibilities and duties," and "job description" for phrases which describe your skill sets. Pay close attention to the wording—these advertisements often use succinct verbiage which you can borrow to most effectively describe your skills. The following websites are a good place to start:

- TartanTRAK  
<http://www.studentaffairs.cmu.edu/career/TartanTrak>
- The Vault Reports  
[http://www.studentaffairs.cmu.edu/career/students\\_alumni/successguides/pdf/vault-membership.pdf](http://www.studentaffairs.cmu.edu/career/students_alumni/successguides/pdf/vault-membership.pdf)

- Consult Professional Associations

Professional associations—organizations that represent and serve professionals in a specialized field—often publish superb career development guides on-line or in print. They may also support their own specialized job database. The Internet is a good place to search for professional organization's web sites. Also, ask faculty or networking contacts about professional organizations they may belong to that are related to your field of interest.

### Speak with Employers

No one knows what employers want better than the employers themselves. Capitalize on every opportunity you have to speak with employers about their expectations, and the types of jobs in your field. The following campus and off-campus events provide great opportunities to speak with employers:

- Job Fairs <http://www.studentaffairs.cmu.edu/career/events/jobfairs/index.html>
- Information Sessions Log in to your TartanTrak account for details  
<http://www.studentaffairs.cmu.edu/career/TartanTrak>
- Networking Events Log onto the Career and Professional Development Center for information  
<http://www.studentaffairs.cmu.edu/career/events/index.html>

### STEP THREE: Learn how to communicate the skills you have

Now that you have matched your skills with the skills employers are seeking, practice communicating your skills. Preparing answers to commonly-asked questions will help you market your skills in an interview:

- Describe a situation in which you had to draw a conclusion quickly and take immediate action.
- Describe a time when you had to work with a group to get something accomplished.
- Describe a situation where you felt it necessary to be attentive to your environment.
- Tell me about a time in which you were very persistent in order to reach your goals.
- Describe the most difficult person you ever had to work with.
- Describe a time when you felt it was necessary to modify or change your actions in order to respond to the needs of another person.
- Give me an example of an important goal you set and tell me about your progress in reaching it.
- Describe the most significant written document, report, project, or presentation that you've completed.

### STEP FOUR: Continue to develop your skills

Naturally, no one becomes the perfect job candidate overnight. But, even before you begin your first job, you can continue to develop your skills. Take the incentive to pursue leadership roles. Here are some ways you can build your skills:

- Become involved in campus life. Carnegie Mellon students organize exhibitions, run job fairs, and orchestrate Festivals-employers know leadership experience on campus can translate into the workplace.
- Pursue volunteer and internship opportunities.
- Be an active employee. If you are working at a campus job or internship, don't surf the web in your spare time. Ask your employers what else you can do to help, and let them know you're looking for a challenge.
- Immerse yourself in class projects—take on challenging roles that will showcase your talents.

### Additional Resources

#### Library

- Bolles, Richard Nelson *What Color is Your Parachute?* Ten Speed Press: Berkeley, CA 1996. \*

- Camenson, Blyth. **Great Jobs for Art Majors**. VGM Career Horizons: Chicago 1997.\*
- Eberts, Marjorie and Margaret Gisler. **Careers for Culture Lovers & Other Artsy Types**. VGM Career Horizons: Chicago 1992.
- Maisel, Eric PhD. **A Life in the Arts**. Penguin Putnam Inc.: New York 1994.  
\*Available in the Career and Professional Development Center Library.

### **Career and Professional Development Center**

- Career Consultants—Call (412) 268-2064 to schedule an appointment with your career consultant.
- Myers-Briggs Type Indicator – Make an appointment to take this evaluation through your career consultant.
- Strong Interest Indicator—Make an appointment to take this evaluation through your career consultant.

### **Web-based**

- Quintessential Careers: Transferable Skills  
[www.quintcareers.com/transferable\\_skills.html](http://www.quintcareers.com/transferable_skills.html)

*Material based in part on “Artists and Designers Transferable Skills” by Duane Seidensticker, of the Placement/Career Services, Milwaukee Institute of Art & Design, for the 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Career Issues in Art & Design Conference.*