

How can I develop my skills effectively?

You can gain skills in a variety of settings. You will develop some skills from your course of study perhaps research or report writing skills. Leadership, team work and time management may be developed through extra-curricular activities such as being a member of sports societies. Perhaps you are involved in volunteering, showing project management skills or maybe other activities such as independent travel have built and demonstrated your international outlook. A part time job can help you to develop and demonstrate skills from customer service to commercial awareness depending on the role. The best way to improve your employability whilst at university is to get involved in the widest range of extra-curricular activities you can - though obviously not at the expense of your studies!

How can I evidence my skills to employers?

Employers often say that applicants are unsuccessful in recruitment processes not because they lack the required skills, but because they fail to evidence and articulate them effectively on application forms and at interview. The STAR system is a helpful way of communicating your skills to employers. This approach will also encourage you to reflect on your experiences and what you have learned from them. The technique can be used at all stages of selection including application and interview. Some employers will even use the STAR acronym themselves to evaluate the information you supply.

To use STAR effectively, first think about which skill or competency you need to demonstrate to your potential employer (e.g. team-working, leadership, commercial awareness). Next, think of a situation when you have used this skill. It doesn't need to be dramatic, but it does need to be true! You may find you can illustrate more than one skill with each example, but keep the focus on a single skill at first.

Now, use the following plan to help you recount both the event and how you used or developed this skill or competency. You could also use this approach to populate your DIY skills audit table.

- **Situation** (What was the context? Where were you and what were you doing?)
- **Task** (What goal did you set yourself? What was the problem or challenge?)
- **Action** (What action did you take? Be explicit about your role.)
- **Result/ Reflection** (What was the outcome and why? What would you do differently next time?)

Top Tip: - if you are using an example where you worked as a group, be really clear about your own unique contribution to the project, the employer wants to know what YOU did, not the whole group.

Useful resources:

- www.prospects.ac.uk/options_with_your_subject.htm remind yourself of the skills you have developed through your subject of study by finding your course on this link
- www.prospects.ac.uk/types_of_jobs.htm look at the entry requirements for your target job to see what specific skills employers in that sector are seeking

What next?

- Carry out a DIY skills audit
- If you have gaps, take steps to fill them
- Get in the habit of keeping a reflective diary evidencing how your skills are growing
- If you want feedback on how effectively you are selling yourself in applications, make an appointment to see an Employability Adviser for further support at <https://unihub.shu.ac.uk/students/appointments>
- Want to talk it through? Contact Student and Graduate Employability for further advice and support via the contact details below.