

Building a skills portfolio – audio transcript

Video introduction

Hello everyone.

My name is Kate Colechin, and I work at UWE Bristol as a careers adviser in the pre-HE careers team. We work with local schools and colleges in the area to support students, like yourself, to explore all your options and plan for your next steps after you finish your current course.

During the presentation there are a few opportunities for you to pause the recording to work on particular activities and answer questions. These opportunities will allow you to get more from the session. This is deliberately not intended to be a one-off exercise that you think about your skills, but instead, you will develop useful techniques that can be applied to any future applications.

There is also a downloadable handout which accompanies this session. This includes some of the activities, so it's a good idea to print off a copy if you can.

At the end of the session, I'll give you our UWE Bristol pre-HE team email address so you can contact us if you have any questions. We're always happy to help where we can.

Finally, we have posted lots of sessions and resources on planning for your future and applying to university on the UWE Bristol Schools and Colleges webpages. Make sure you check these out too. I hope you find our resources useful.

Slide 1: Title slide

Today we're going to be looking at skills. This may well be something that you haven't given much, if any, real thought to so far. As you will see during the course of this presentation, now is a good opportunity for you to identify your skills as you begin your post 16 courses as it will allow you to think about how you are doing to develop them.

Slide 2: session overview

We will start by identifying what skills are and why they are important. Employers and university admission tutors are very interested in them and we will help you to see how they assess them. Finally, by giving you an opportunity to think about your skills and the situations you find yourself in, you can start to talk about your own skills. Recognising what you are good at isn't necessarily easy and so we will suggest using the STAR technique as a way of talking about your skills in a confident and meaningful way.

Slide 3: Definition of skills

Let's start with a definition. As you can see on the screen, the Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary says that a skill is an ability to do an activity or job well, especially because you have practised it. The concept of practising an activity is key. You are not all meant to be experts or specialists! Skills is not about being inherently amazing at something.

Slide 4: Word cloud of skills

We all have different skills and it's worth taking a minute to think about which skills we have. This screen gives you a picture of just some skills. You can probably think of many others. It doesn't

always come naturally to think about our own skills. It's often easier to recognise skills in other people.

Slide 5: So, why is this important?

You may wonder why we are focussing on skills in the first few months of your time at 6th form/college. This is a great time to consider what you are going to be doing in these next 2 years and how you will position yourself ready to make successful applications to uni/jobs (i.e. preparing you to make successful transition post-18)

Also, employers will ask you about them. It's not enough to have a list of skills, but as you will see you need evidence to back it up. Universities will require you to write about them in your personal statement. So, this time next year you could be writing about your skills.

As I've hinted it's not easy to talk about our skills. You know your GCSE grades, but it's harder to identify what skills you gained from studying GCSE English for example.

A good idea is to start keeping a record of your skills that relate to particular situations so that you can refer to this when you need to write applications or attend interviews. I'll explain more about this later when I refer to the STAR technique.

Slide 6: What's important to employers?

So we know that skills are important. I wonder where you think skills comes in a list of factors that employers want from graduate applicants (once a university degree course has been completed). All of these factors are important. On this slide skills are referred to as attitude and aptitude.

Stop the presentation for a moment and rank these factors in order. Where do you think attitude and aptitude might come?

Slide 7: Most important factors (graduates) CBI report

Here are the results of a large survey by employers for graduate recruitment.

The dark purple part of the circle shows that attitude towards work and aptitude for work are key factors. Qualifications are important (I'm not at all saying exam results, qualifications [and work experience] *aren't* important) but how you approach tasks will be looked at.

Perhaps surprisingly the university results or degree subject is less important than the skills/attitudes that a person has.

Interesting to note which precise university you attended isn't actually an important factor for many employers.

Slide 8: Most important factors (school/college leavers) CBI report

Similarly, employers who take on school and college leavers feel the same. You will see a sentence from the 2019 report on the screen indicating that a person's character and skills are key. The 2017 report breaks this down in more detail.

Employers want to be confident that you can use your skills in situations within a work context that will help the business, impress clients, win new work, demonstrate professionalism and effectiveness. These are all skills that you can be developing at any point. For employers

identifying who would be suitable for a particular role is a very important task (and recruiting staff is an expensive exercise) so getting it right is vital.

Slide 9: Picture the situation

Picture the situation where an employer advertises a vacancy. Imagine, just for this particular situation that everyone in your 6th form or college wants to apply. Every applicant has very similar experiences and in this example similar grades. This makes it very difficult for the employer to select the right candidate for the role.

The magic ingredient is for each applicant to expand on their skills used in particular situations which not only helps to bring the application to life, but also makes it interesting, realistic and the employer can assess whether the applicant could apply their skill in a similar situation within their business or team.

Slide 10: skills differentiate people

On this slide you can see different examples of skills being illustrated. Suddenly this same group looks much more diverse and interesting. They may come from the same school and have similar experiences and grades, but each person is unique and can offer different skills.

This is why job roles suit certain people with their likes, interests and qualities playing a big part in helping people decide the types of work that might suit them best.

Slide 11: How would employers see you?

Let's think about your skills for a few moments. How would employers see you?

Slide 12: Demonstrating skills

There are lots of ways that you can demonstrate your skills. Remember, that you don't need to be perfect. Skills are something that you develop over time as you take part in different activities or tasks and have different opportunities.

On the screen you will see examples to develop skills.

It's worth seizing opportunities NOW! There are lots of great activities that you can do whilst in 6th Form or college, and although this year things might be a bit different, you can certainly try to develop your skills in lots of situations. Don't forget your lessons at school and college naturally give you opportunities to develop skills, without you really realising.

If you aren't doing much already outside of your school/college work, this is a wake-up call to start! The more you can do, the richer your applications and interviews become. This enhances your attractiveness to employers / universities.

Slide 13: Chart of skills from apprenticeships website

To reinforce previous point, and emphasise that you can develop skills from so many activities take a look at the table on the screen. It illustrates lots of examples that might get you thinking about your own skills.

Slide 14: How would employers see you?

So, you've heard examples of situations that you can naturally demonstrate your skills, now it's your turn to identify your skills for a few moments. How would employers see you?

Stop the presentation and write down at least 5 skills that you use in and out of school or college. In addition, think about the particular contexts that you use these skills. This will help you understand that skills must be linked to an actual situation and when you come to talk about your skills in a minute this will really help you.

Slide 15: Evidencing skills using STAR

During this presentation I've mentioned that situations are important to put the skills that you have into context. This now becomes really useful when using the STAR technique to talk about your skills. This technique provides a framework to tell your story about your particular skill.

You can see on the screen what STAR actually stands for.

The 'situation' is key to the whole description. This is where the employer (whether they are reading your application or in an interview setting) understands where you were and then, when you describe the 'task', what you were trying to do.

The 'action' is the most important part of your description. This is when you can really showcase your skill, whether that might be problem solving, team work or creativity by highlighting what you did. Sometimes this is where people end the description, but the person listening or reading your application will ideally want to know what happens in the end of your story or description.

This is where the 'result' wraps up the description very neatly and proves to the employer that you can display certain skills. This doesn't mean to say that every situation has to be perfect as we know that some groups don't necessarily work harmoniously or that problems can't always be solved quickly and easily, but it's the process that you describe that it's important. Anyone reading or listening to you will want these examples to be realistic and genuine, so don't be tempted to think up an elaborate story as you may become unstuck if they ask follow-up questions!

Slide 16: Evidencing skills using STAR

This is a typical question for an application form or interview. It deliberately asks you to describe a situation. This gives you a real clue to use the STAR technique and tell them about a particular occasion when you have used this skill. Try not to talk hypothetically as they want to really understand how you've used the skills before and if so, will be thinking whether you will be able to use this skill again in their business context.

Slide 17: Evidencing skills using STAR

Here's another example, but this time for 'customer service' as a skill.

Situation – remember, here give one or two introductory sentences to explain the general situation of your example, setting the scene (don't assume the interviewer will know what you are talking about). So, such as, you could say *"A good example of providing excellent customer service is from when I worked at the local B&Q store last year..."*

Task - here, it's a sentence explaining the specifics of the situation you were in and what you were trying to achieve. For example, *"We were exceptionally busy during a couple of weeks of hot*

weather during the summer, as lots of customers wanted to do home / garden improvements. This meant at certain times we had lots of customer queries to deal with and queues in store..."

Action – worth remembering that this is the most important element. Sentences explaining your specific role, the skills and qualities you used (self promote, don't be modest). For example, *"I used my initiative to get colleagues to open up extra tills to cope with queues, I decided to take my scheduled break at later time once busy period had subsided, I also worked quickly but efficiently with other team members on the shop-floor to provide excellent customer service/ensure customers weren't waiting long."*

Result – This is a brief summary of the (positive) outcome of your involvement For example, *"The outcome as that our customers appeared happy and satisfied on leaving the store. Also we were praised for our work by store management."*

Slide 18: Answer a question using STAR

Stop the presentation again and have a go at answering one of the three questions on the screen. You can answer all 3 questions if you have time! Think about what we have just covered about each of the 4 elements of the STAR technique and go back to any of the previous slides to refer back to the examples.

Slide 19: You're the interviewer

The quality of any answer is vital as employers will usually use a scoring method to assess your answer. On the screen you can see a question that wants an answer about a team work.

In green you can see an example answer. What do you think of this example? What score would you give? Stop the presentation to consider your answer. I would probably give it 1 out of 3.

Slide 20: example of team work question

What do you think of this example? Stop the presentation again to consider your answer.

I'd probably give it a 3/3. It provides a clear picture of the situation of playing twice a week for the county team as the other example outlined. However, it provides much more evidence of the 'actions' such as listening to team mates, communicating with the coach and sharing ideas. The 'result' finishes off the example well by highlighting that they'd won most of matches.

So, whenever you are describing your skills, think about using the STAR technique to frame your answer. This way it will be concise and logical, which will help the person listening to you or reading your form to give you a high score. A high score will help you get into the next round of the recruitment cycle or even get the job, so it's worth doing!

Slide 21: What employers want

Employers want a mixture of skills, qualifications and experience from you.

On the screen you can now see a diagram of this mixture. As I've mentioned earlier employers don't want one factor more than others. Your qualifications will underpin everything that you have. Your skills, attributes and experiences enhances your applications and helps you stand out from other applicants.

To finish, let's look at how you can find out what employers and university courses want from you with regard to skills.

Slide 22: Marine biologist profile and IT apprenticeship screenshot

Here you will see a job profile of a marine biologist from the Prospects website and also an apprenticeship vacancy that was advertised in August 2020.

Stop the presentation and have a think about 3 skills that would be useful for these job roles after reading the brief information on the screen about both job roles.

Slide 23: Highlighted skills screenshot

As you can see here the job descriptions/person specifications, as well as job profiles will provide you with clues what the employers are wanting.

If you have a career idea in mind have a think about the skills required. This will help you to consider the skills that you need to develop.

Maybe you don't know what job area would suit you. The job profiles, like the marine biologist example that I have shown you in this presentation will give you a really good insight into different jobs. You can search into areas of work and explore different job roles and this might help your ideas become a bit clearer.

Slide 24: Medicine at university

It's important to mention that universities will refer to skills too as you can see by the example on the screen. Applications are not purely based on qualifications. If a course is really popular and lots of people apply (as will definitely be the case with medicine, where applicants have the same grades too), it will be the personal statement that matters and in that document you write about your skills and attitudes to work/study.

Slide 25: Not sure about skills

You may be still a little unsure about your skills. As a starting point you may find it helpful to use the Careerpilot website. You can complete the skills map and it will generate a profile of your skills. An example profile can be seen on the screen now.

Slide 26: Summary

To summarise this session on identifying skills:

Start to identify and develop your skills now (don't leave it until the end of year 13). Maybe even keep a document so you can remember activities that helped you to develop skills.

Try to take up opportunities so that you have lots of situations and examples to use when making applications.

Research what employers and universities are looking for to ensure you develop skills in line with your interests. However, keep an open mind as you might think of potential career ideas as you carry out all sorts of activities. Developing skills can happen at any time, not just in school or college.

Using the STAR technique can really help to structure your answers and talk with more clarity and eloquence. It does take practise as we don't often talk to our friends about our skills and so it can feel quite uncomfortable to start with.

I hope this presentation has helped you to understand why it's important to identify your skills and enabled you to begin thinking about your own skills.

Slide 27: Good luck

So we've reached the end of the session. If you have any questions about the topics I've covered please do email our team at the address on the slide – prehecareersadviser@uwe.ac.uk We will try our best to answer them. It's really important to point out though that you must email us from your school or college email account, rather than a personal account, otherwise we won't be able to reply due to data protection. We look forward to hearing from you.

Thanks very much for listening to the session. I hope you've found it helpful and I wish you all the best with exploring your options during your post 16 courses.