

Marketing Your Major Skills: How to identify your skills and describe them compellingly



Pacific University Career Development Center

Identify Your Skills

Distinguish among skills and other aspects of yourself:

- Experience
- Characteristics
- Preferences
- Interests
- Courses
- Beliefs
- Knowledge
- Other?

Examples of skills? What can you do? I can... I am able to...

- Juggle multiple projects and meet deadlines.
- Prepare graphs in Excel to present statistical information.
- Manage a group of people to achieve goals and objectives.
- Evaluate an argument for fallacious reasoning.
- Transform a concept into an interactive, data-based website.
- Prepare a business plan.
- Prepare a profit and loss statement in accord with established accounting practice.
- Use the scientific method to design an experiment and test a hypothesis.
- Lead a group on a rigorous, multiple-day backpacking trip.
- Design multi-color brochures to convey promotional information.
- Communicate in a second language.
- Stage an effective public relations campaign.
- Organize a grassroots campaign for change.
- Analyze and present historical data for significant information and trends.
- Offer an interpretation of a literary text using proper citation guidelines.
- Moderate a dispute among people and establish a process for reaching resolution.
- Compose an original piece of music to conjure an emotion or convey a message.
- Others?

Try categorizing* skills to help you inventory yours:

- Bodily-Kinesthetic
- Logical-Mathematical
- Linguistic
- Spatial
- Interpersonal
- Intrapersonal
- Musical
- Others?

(* Categories from Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences Theory.)

Identify arenas in which you exercise skills:

- Academics: major, minor, core classes, senior project
Skills: Learn, study, question, analyze, write, debate, theorize, test, retain, essay
- Social: friends, family, church, extracurricular activities, athletics
Skills: organize, negotiate, moderate, plan, inspire, lead, converse, cooperate
- Personal: exercise, self-improvement, spiritual life, athletics
Skills: discipline self, manage time, set goals, manage stress
- Career/Work: internships, summer jobs, volunteer positions
Skills: take initiative, follow directions, take responsibility, commit
- Hobbies: cooking, watching sports, exercising, play an instrument, surfing
Skills: create recipes, memorize facts, improve fitness, perform music, swim
- Other arenas and skills?

Inventory your skills and practice verbalizing them. (I can... I am able to...)

Attach Your Skills to Experience

For every skill you can claim, identify situations in which you practiced the skill. Develop statements that link the claim and the experience:

- I'm skilled at using SPSS to analyze and report statistical information. **For instance**, for a project in my Cognitive Psychology class, I obtained a large data set from a quantitative survey I administered. I was able to present the findings in a way that captivated audience attention by using SPSS to identify significant correlations among various responses and then graphically portray conclusions.
- I'm able to manage a group of people to achieve goals and objectives. **For example**, during the Summer of 2006 I managed a crew of 12 laborers on an organic farm and exceeded all expectations of the owners and customers.

- I can transform a concept into an interactive, data-based website. **For instance**, for my senior Business Administration project I am the web designer in a group of 4 students developing an e-commerce business site at which users can post their resumes and job search parameters to facilitate their job hunts.

Promote the Quality of Your Skills

Develop ways of discussing the quality of your skills by illustrating your skill claims with examples that highlight the full extent of your skill.

- I am able to speak, understand, read, and write Spanish with near fluency. **For instance**, after studying abroad for a year in Argentina, I can now read *The Buenos Aires Herald* cover to cover with no more trips to the dictionary than I would need to read *The New York Times* in English.
- I am very capable of teaching a course on English poetry. Besides having a good grasp of conventional poetic forms, such as ballads, sonnets, sestinas, epic poems, lyric poems, and others, I am able to teach prosody and have effective and fun strategies for helping students with rhythm and meter.
- I am very good at preparing research studies for submission to professional journals in the field of psychology. For instance, I have been repeatedly asked by two professors in the Psychology Department at Pacific University to check their manuscripts for APA compliance and ensure proper format is in place before submission. To date, my “editorial fingerprint” is on seven articles in *The Modern Journal of Research Psychology*.

Think of the quality of your skill at any given task as existing on a spectrum from extremely low to extremely high. Especially if your skill is high, do your best to inform your audience.

Talk About Your Skills

- Highlight your skills on your résumé and in cover letters.
- Position yourself in conversations with employers so that you can discuss your skills.
- Use interview questions as opportunities to describe your skills.
- Ask people questions about their work that position you to talk about your skills. For instance, “What sorts of information do you need (and lack) to support decision making?” Answer might be followed up with explanation of your skill at compiling information and presenting it compellingly.