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Guide to the Transferable Skills

Note: Request an electronic copy by emailing psyadv@iupui.edu. It will make following the numerous links in this document much easier.

What are Transferable Skills?

You may be feeling like you are not prepared to jump into the real world because you are lacking a large amount of work experience. You have more knowledge, skills and abilities than you think. Quite often students leave a work or volunteer experience and never think of it again outside of reference or past work history. Consider this:

- You probably felt competent and comfortable performing some task(s) you were trained to do.
- You might have participated in a volunteer on nonprofit organization (school organizations, community service, service learning, job shadow, or internship).
- If you have had a part-time job, you worked and got paid for your efforts. Sometimes there is not room for all of your experience on your resume, but the skills you learned are still valuable.

Now, look at your experiences and ask yourself, “What have I learned?” We gain knowledge in doing various activities and learn skills that can be used to perform in another job. **Transferable skills are areas of development that will transfer from one environment to another such as home, school, work, volunteerism or extra-curricular activities.** They can be used in many different environments, such as across occupations, regardless of the type of work!

Some examples of transferable skills come from NACE (The National Association of Colleges and Employers), that lists the top 10 personal qualities employers seek as:

- Communication Skills
- Motivation/Initiative
- Teamwork Skills
- Leadership Skills
- Academic Achievement
- Interpersonal Skills
- Flexibility/Adaptability
- Technical Skills
- Honesty/Integrity
- Work Ethic and Analytical/Problem Solving Skills

Many employers think that if you are able to use a skill in one situation, you should be able to use that skill in another job, even if the work appears to be unrelated to your past employment or educational experience.

Using Transferable Skills

It is important as you begin the job search process, that you know your own qualifications. Prospective employers expect that you will be able to apply previously learned skills from work and school. Consider skills that you have gained from working on projects, papers and various experiences. Here are some areas where applying your transferable skills will be helpful.

Writing a Resume: Transferable skills can be taken from many experiences, whether they are on your resume or not, and placed into your resume to show various aptitudes. This is particularly true when writing your objective or summary

of skills at the top of your resume (see [Guide to Resume](#) for more on this topic). In a chronological resume, you can use transferable skills to highlight what you gained from individual experiences.

Writing a Cover Letter: This is an area when you can really spotlight skills you have gained. Many people use the cover letter as an avenue to expand on specific details that would not fit in the confines of a resume. In the cover letter, you are asked to explain what makes you qualified for the position. Within the cover letter, you can compare the skills required for the position to your own skills. Doing a little research on the company may also help to know on what skills to elaborate. Check out our [Guide to the Cover Letter](#) for examples.

Preparing for an Interview: In an interview, it is not so much what your experiences have been as it is how you communicate those experiences to your prospective employer. Many times in an interview, you will be asked to describe what you have been involved in, how you contributed, and what you took from the experience. Also, many skills can be used in the actual interview. For example, many of your personal relations and communication skills will be important in expressing your thoughts and connecting with the interviewer. See [Guide to Interviewing](#) for more information.

Represent Your Skills

The thing to remember is that having a degree does not guarantee a job in today’s market. You must find the best way to present your qualifications in a multidimensional manner. You must convey yourself as a complete and well-rounded package. The fact that you have an education is a big bonus point for you. Now you have to successfully weave together your skills, experiences, academics, and personality traits that employers are looking for. Employer surveys indicate that a candidate’s experience is a key factor in getting hired. The strongest candidates have “real world” experience in co-curricular activities: co-ops, internships, practicums, part-time jobs, full-time jobs, service learning, and volunteering (from: [The Career Center: University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana](#)).

So, now the question becomes what qualifies as a transferable skill and how do I know if I have performed the task? Use this list below to get you thinking in the right direction. These are samples representing one way you can categorize transferable skills, and are not all inclusive.

*This list of transferable skills comes from the Richard Bolles’ *What Color is Your Parachute?*, ed. 2002. The skills were categorized by the MU Career Staff.

COMMUNICATION			
Communicating	Mentoring	Reporting	Telling
Editing	Promoting	Representing	Translating
Explaining	Proofreading	Responding	Understanding
Informing	Providing	Selling	Verbalizing
Interpreting	Publicizing	Sharing	
Lecturing	Reading	Speaking	
Listening	Relating	Talking	
CREATIVE			
Acting	Drawing	Interpreting	Publicizing
Composing	Expressing	Inventing	Rendering
Conducting	Founding	Modeling	Shaping
Creating	Generating	Originating	Showing
Designing	Illustrating	Painting	Singing
Detailing	Imagining	Performing	Sketching
Developing	Improvising	Photographing	Symbolizing
Displaying	Initiating	Playing	Writing
Dramatizing	Innovating	Printing	

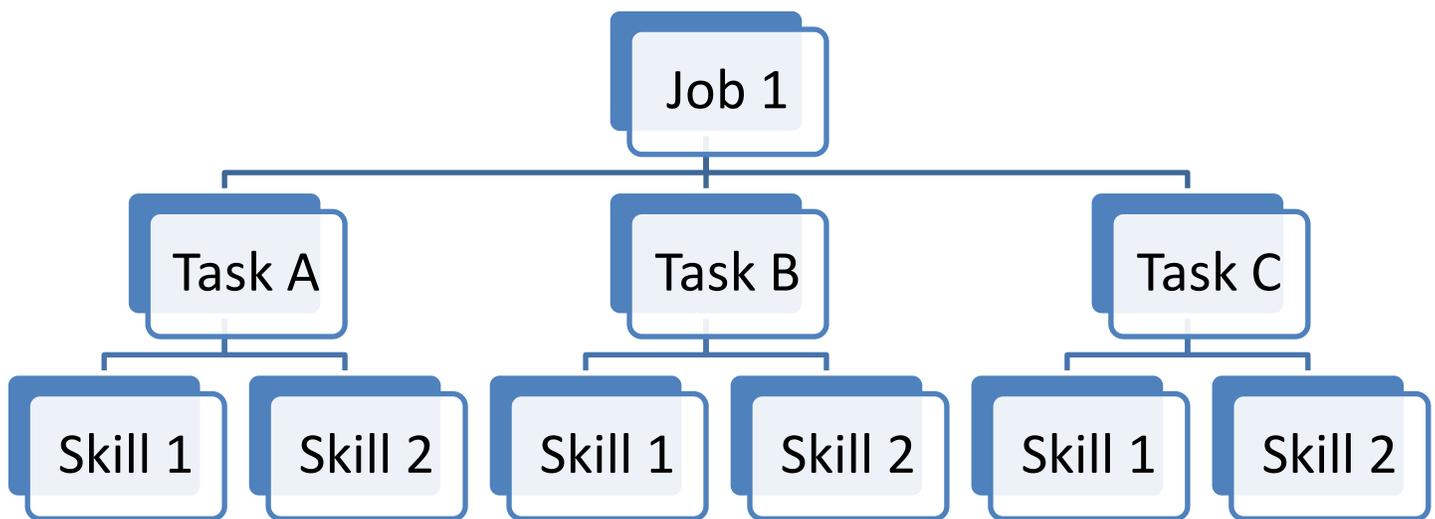
HELPING AND TEACHING			
Advising	Guiding	Processing	Teaching
Coping	Helping	Referring	Tending
Counseling	Instructing	Rehabilitation	Training
Empathizing	Mediating	Resolving	Tutoring
Giving	Offering	Serving	
MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP			
Addressing	Heading	Negotiating	Recruiting
Arbitrating	Implementing	Ordering	Separating
Coaching	Influencing	Overseeing	Supervising
Consolidating	Informing	Persuading	Team Building
Controlling	Inspiring	Piloting	Umpiring
Coordinating	Instituting	Planning	Unifying
Deciding	Integrating	Prescribing	Uniting
Devising	Interviewing	Presenting	Upgrading
Directing	Judging	Programming	
Diverting	Leading	Protecting	
Enforcing	Managing	Recommending	
ORGANIZATIONAL AND FINANCIAL			
Administering	Defining	Logging	Retrieving
Arranging	Detailing	Manipulating	Reviewing
Auditing	Dispensing	Monitoring	Schedule
Budgeting	Distributing	Organizing	Selecting
Calculating	Estimating	Preparing	Sorting
Checking	Filing	Projecting	Summarizing
Classifying	Financing	Purchasing	Supplying
Collecting	Gathering	Raising	Systematizing
Compiling	Inventorying	Reconciling	Transcribing
Computing	Keeping	Recording	Typing
RESEARCH			
Analyzing	Disproving	Interpreting	Researching
Ascertaining	Dissecting	Intuiting	Solving
Assessing	Evaluating	Learning	Studying
Charting	Examining	Observing	Synergizing
Conceptualizing	Experimenting	Predicting	Synthesizing
Detecting	Formulating	Problem Solving	Testing and Proving
Determining	Hypothesizing	Processing	Troubleshooting
Diagnosing	Identifying	Questioning	Weighing
Discovering	Inspecting	Reasoning	
TECHNICAL			
Assembling	Extracting	Making	Sewing
Building	Fixing	Operating	Treating
Conserving	Handling	Producing	Washing
Constructing	Installing	Repairing	
Digging	Lifting	Setting	
Driving	Maintaining	Setting Up	

OTHER SKILLS

Achieving	Expanding	Obtaining	Taking Instructions
Adapting	Following	Perceiving	Traveling
Anticipating	Getting	Realizing	Understudying
Attaining	Having Responsibility	Receiving	Undertaking
Completing	Improving	Reducing	Using
Delivering	Increase	Remembering	Utilizing
Eliminating	Memorizing	Risking	Winning
Establishing	Navigating	Sensing	Working

Map it Out

Start with one job or volunteer experience you have been involved with. Break down the major tasks that you performed. Then divide each task into the skills that you acquired from performing that task (Charts from *What Color is Your Parachute?* Richard Bolles ed. 2002).

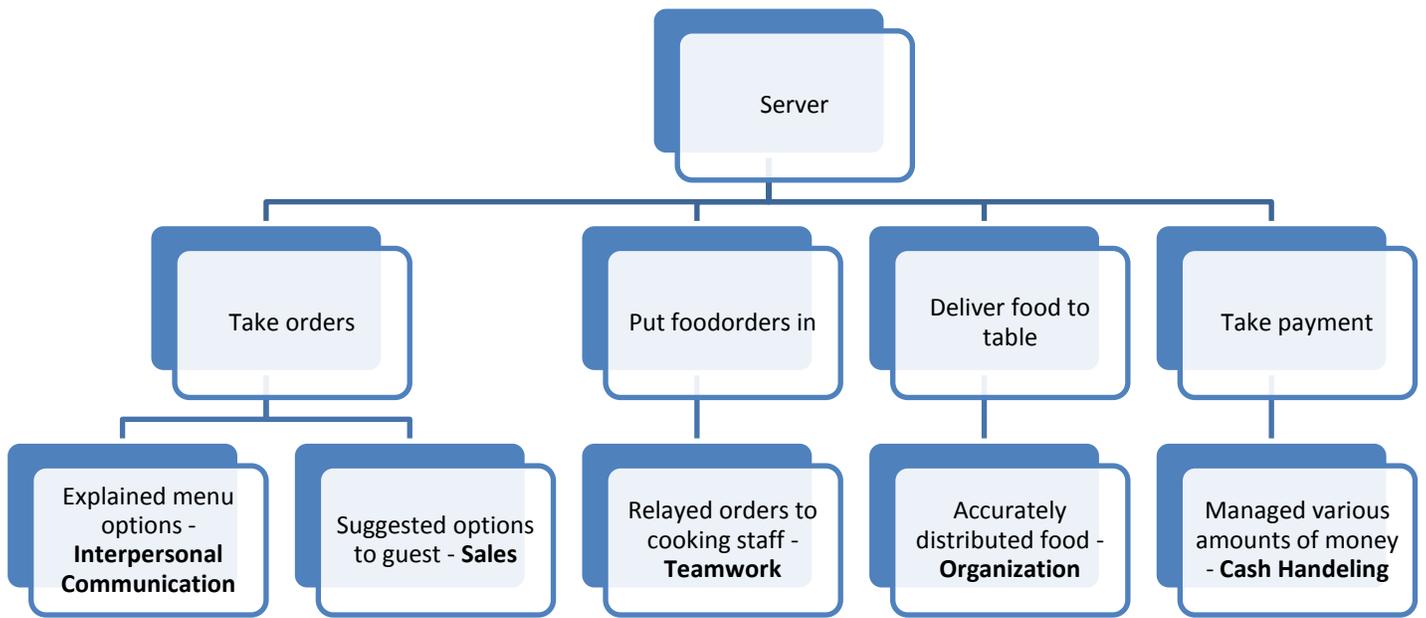


This approach will help you in thinking about job descriptions for chronological resumes, responses to interview questions, and comments to add to your cover letter. If you group experiences from which you have derived similar skills, you can develop a skills and competencies section for resume and answers to behavioral interview questions.

Do not think about a job or experience based on what you did, but rather what you gained and learned that a future employer may be looking for. After all, an employer will be evaluating you based on what you can do for his/her company; your past experiences are a means to determine whether or not your contribution would be positive, not an end.

Consider what skills will be the most meaningful for the job you are investing. Do not get trapped into simply explaining your qualifications by what you did for your past employer.

Here is an example:



Adapted from Missouri University Career Center. (2010). *Career Specialist Training Manual Appendices*. Also available at <http://career.missouri.edu/handouts>. Special thanks to MU for freely sharing their resources.