



Starting Your Skills Portfolio

In building your portfolio you will be exercising your skills. You will be:

- Collecting
- Analyzing
- Planning
- Reflecting
- Making decisions
- Organizing
- Researching
- Recording
- Presenting

In building your portfolio your aim is to reflect on and analyze your educational experience with both work and personal contexts (which might include sports, travel, committee memberships, etc.).

Your objective is to reflect on and analyze the meaning of your learning in relation to your career goals and/or particular employment options.

THINGS TO DO

- 1. Research and identify skills that are relevant to agriculture and life science employment situations.**

If you intend to use your portfolio to market the skills you possess to employers, then you need to know what skills employers are looking for.

This can be done by networking with employers, talking to people who are working in areas in which you would like to work in the future, analyzing position descriptions, company websites and job ads. Visit our web site at www.cals.ncsu.edu/career to view current job ads and find names of alumni for networking purposes.

- 2. Begin reflecting on how you can demonstrate your knowledge, skills, abilities, personal qualities, interests, qualifications and experience to employers.**

Providing evidence of previous times in which you have successfully used a skill or successfully demonstrated your abilities is a strong way to do this.

Skill/Quality	Examples of when I showed evidence of this previously:	How successful I was in using this previously, e.g. achievements:	Other: Why? How? Who?
Self motivated	1. Proactively inquired about and successfully underwent application process and interview, for work experience involving statistical data entry in a research environment.	1. My manager was pleased with my performance and is prepared to act as a reference for me in the future.	1. I enjoy using technology and wanted to expand my knowledge of software applications relating to research environments. I also wanted to gain experience and thereby give myself an employment edge.

3. Reflect on and analyze the skills that you already possess – and need to acquire – relevant to your career goals or to a particular position.

Start a process of self-assessment where you begin reflecting on your present strengths and weakness relevant to future employment in your chosen career area.

Reflect on, and look for evidence of what you have done in your life that you could use to convince the employer that you would fit the advertised requirements for this position.

What evidence can you provide for being self-motivated, a good communicator, analytical and well organized?

“Self-Motivated” may be loosely defined as “being personally responsible for setting goals and motivating oneself to achieve these goals” - as opposed to being dependent on others for their achievement.

Look at your updated resume and scan the sections on “Education”, “Work Experience”, and “Interests”. Can you find experiences or occasions in your life where you have used particular skills or abilities? Analyze your resume to find examples of situations in which “self-motivation” might have been important. You could find the following:

- From your “Education” section; you could perhaps relate “self-motivation” to successfully completing a difficult or long course of study or learning a foreign language.
- From your “Work Experience” section; you could perhaps relate “self-motivation” to previous employer references relating to your successful project management or positive performance statements.
- From your “Interests/Extra-Curricular Activities/Sports” or “Community Activities” section; You could perhaps relate “self-motivation” to sporting success, reaching a personal goal (like successfully completing a gym or fitness course) or contributing to a community activity.

As you read job ads, talk to employers etc, over the next months, you will become increasingly aware of the skills and abilities that employers expect you to be able to demonstrate. For each skill or ability, establish a plastic sleeve in your Skills Portfolio and fill it with examples of how you have successfully used that skill or demonstrated that ability. You will find that the reflection involved in creating your portfolio and the samples collected in each plastic sleeve will be very useful to you when applying for employment positions in the future. If you prefer, you can design a computer database to track your skills instead of hard copies.

4. Keep a section of your Skills Portfolio dedicated to a collection of career information relating to your chosen major.

Collect reference materials (**newspaper articles, websites, contact names and organizations, networking opportunities, professional associations, relevant publications, etc**) for future career reflection, career planning or for job application purposes. Good decisions are based on sound information.

5. Keep a section of your Skills Portfolio dedicated to possible career goals.

You might establish a plastic sleeve, filed in your portfolio, in which you keep notes on your career-related ideas, possibilities, plans and goals. As you go through your degree you will find that your goals might change. Take time to dream!

6. Be a creative thinker!

Think of ways in which you could demonstrate your skills and abilities using alternatives to print media.

DO I POSSESS THE SKILLS THAT EMPLOYERS ARE LOOKING FOR?

ANALYZING THE SKILLS AND ATTRIBUTES THAT YOU POSSESS

The following are skills that many employers desire:

IN-DEPTH KNOWLEDGE OF YOUR FIELD OF STUDY

- A comprehensive and well-founded knowledge of the field of study.
- An understanding of how other disciplines relate to the field of study.
- An international perspective on the field of study.

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

- The ability to collect, analyze and organize information and ideas and to convey those ideas clearly and fluently, in both written and spoken forms.
- The ability to interact effectively with others in order to work towards a common outcome.
- The ability to select and use the appropriate style and means of communication.
- The ability to engage effectively and appropriately with information and communication technologies.

INDEPENDENCE AND CREATIVITY

- The ability to work and learn independently.
- The ability to generate ideas and adapt innovatively to changing environments.
- The ability to identify problems, create solutions, innovate and improve current practices.

CRITICAL JUDGEMENT

- The ability to define and analyze problems.
- The ability to apply critical reasoning to issues through independent thought and informed judgement.
- The ability to evaluate opinions, make decisions and to reflect critically on the justifications for decisions.

ETHICAL AND SOCIAL UNDERSTANDING

- An understanding of social and civic responsibility.
- An appreciation of the philosophical and social contexts of a discipline.
- A knowledge and respect of ethics and ethical standards in relation to a major area of study.
- A knowledge of other cultures and times and an appreciation of cultural diversity.

Top 10 Qualities Employers Seek

1. Communications skills (verbal and written)
2. Honesty/integrity
3. Teamwork skills
4. Interpersonal skills
5. Strong work ethic
6. Motivation/initiative
7. Flexibility/adaptability
8. Analytical skills
9. Computer skills
10. Organizational skills

Source: Job Outlook 2002, National Association of Colleges

How can you demonstrate that you possess the knowledge, skills, abilities, personal qualities, interests, qualifications and experience that employers are looking for?

Increasing your own awareness of your employable skills is important – but the next step is to be able to convince an employer that you possess the required skills. When applying for employment positions, it is not enough just to say to employers that, because you have studied in CALS, that you automatically possess particular skills and attributes.

Employers are looking for evidence. They want proof that you possess the skills to do the job. This is the function of your Skills Portfolio.

In a competitive job market, employers are also looking at achievement and quality; they are interested in knowing how **well** you can use your skills and abilities. For example, when applying for a position, you would normally be required to submit a **resume** (electronically or in paper form). The resume provides an updated profile of who you are, what you have done, and how well you have done. It is a formal presentation of your educational achievements, employment history, interests and activities, relevant skills and personal qualities.

Materials collected in your Skills Portfolio will assist you greatly in the task of preparing your resume.

Behavioral Based Interviews and the Skills Portfolio

In interviews for positions, employers are increasingly using **Behavioral Interviewing** techniques. Behavioral Interviewing is a style of interview questioning which asserts “the most accurate predictor of future performance is past performance in a similar situation”. So, if an employer is looking for new staff with excellent team-working ability, they might ask interview questions such as:

- “Tell me about a time when you demonstrated successful team-work ability”

- “Describe a situation in which you successfully handled a difficult person within your team”
- “Give me an example of a time when you achieved a goal while working in a group situation”

In preparing for behavioral-style interviews, it is important to prepare examples of situations in your life (personal, academic, employment-related) when you have experienced using the skills relevant to the particular employment environment.

Companies that use behavioral-style interviewing predetermine the skill sets they require for particular positions by doing a detailed analysis of each position. The interview is very structured with a checklist of skills that you must demonstrate you possess.

The structured behavioral based interview style requires you to reply to each question with the “STAR” approach. You must describe a situation or task, how you acted and what the result was.

S	Situation	Describe a situation you encountered.
T	Task	Describe a task you performed
A	Action	Tell what action you performed
R	Result	Describe the result or outcome, based on your action.

Materials in your Skills Portfolio will help you prepare for Behavioral Based Interviews.

A review of your Skills Portfolio “To Do” list:

- Research skills required for jobs that interest you.
- Reflect on how you can demonstrate these required skills.
- Identify skills you possess.
- Identify skills you need to develop.
- Collect career information related to your major.
- Refine your career goal over time.
- Continue to grow your list of skills.