



Employers evaluate college students based on the relevant skills and experiences they will bring to the workplace. In varying degrees, their evaluation includes your academic record (i.e., some employers focus more on GPA when making selection decisions than others). All employers, however, will evaluate your readiness competencies, the skills you develop during internships or volunteer positions, while working in a faculty member's research lab, through course projects, by being actively involved in a student organization, while doing freelance work or other gigs, or via other key roles you hold.

As an Arts and Sciences major, your coursework and involvement in the roles listed above contribute to The Buckeye Advantage – ten foundational skills that you should be ready to talk about when interacting with employers or seeking admission to post-baccalaureate programs. Knowing how to describe your skills to others is a skill in and of itself. This tip sheet provides pointers on how to talk about your readiness competencies in a way that is both descriptive and in alignment with the position you want to obtain after graduation.



Communicate Effectively

- Express oneself clearly when speaking and writing
- Listen and read to understand fully
- Adjust communications to maximize engagement



Work With Others

- Capitalize on team members' strengths
- Take a collaborative stance and follow through on commitments
- Work through conflict as a team



Take The Lead

- Inspire action toward a future goal
- Organize, prioritize and delegate essential tasks
- Lead others to achieve goals



Apply Logic

- Determine a problem's root causes
- Obtain, organize and interpret pertinent data
- Synthesize information from multiple sources



Be Productive

- Hold self and others accountable
- Recognize priorities and integrate practices that increase personal impact
- Seek assistance early when faced with roadblocks



Leverage Technology

- Choose tools that will solve problems or increase efficiencies
- Learn about new digital tools as they emerge
- Be adaptable in the face of change



Bridge Cultural Differences

- Apply knowledge of cultural norms, including one's own, to inform interactions
- Learn about and recognize socio-linguistic differences
- Engage with differing perspectives in a productive way



Own Your Career

- Articulate your strengths relevant to a desired position
- Self-advocate for opportunities and engage in professional development
- Set goals and stay nimble on your path forward



Make Contributions

- Devote time to a cause that you care about
- Share your skills and knowledge to benefit your community
- Recruit a team of peers for a community service project



Embrace Diversity

- Understand personal biases and structural inequities
- Interact respectfully so all feel valued
- Seek solutions that achieve equity and inclusion



Learn more about
 The Buckeye Advantage:
go.osu.edu/buckeyeadvantage

Developing Skill Stories to Share with Employers

When communicating with employers during interviews or at career fairs, you need to go beyond simple claims such as, “I’m a great problem-solver.” This can be done by telling a short story related to how you have developed problem-solving skills through internships, volunteer service, research projects, or other experiences.

Example:

“I’m a great problem-solver. While I’ve always been intrigued by how people are quick to jump to conclusions when faced with a problem, I learned first-hand about the value of group problem-solving when I was an intern at Sloopy Apparel. That company has a standard problem-solving process that entails root cause analysis, brainstorming solutions with a team, and determining how to evaluate proposed solutions. I got to work through each problem-solving stage with a team that was dealing with inconsistent application of red dye on jerseys. It was a great learning experience. One of the solutions that I suggested made it to the testing phase.”

If you study the above skill story you will notice a method for how to talk about your skills. That method is to claim a skill (e.g., “I’m a great problem-solver.”) and then go into detail about an experience you had that contributed to the development of the claimed skill. When sharing that detail, you can follow the STAR formula (Situation, Task, Action, Result).

Breaking down the formula: describe the situation you were faced with, share what you considered were the essential tasks for addressing the situation, indicate what action you took, describe the results of your actions. The content of your story can directly address each of the STAR components by using the words “situation”, “task”, “action”, and “result” during your narrative, but that’s generally not needed if you include enough information for the employer to follow along and recognize how what you are sharing fits with the STAR formula.

Consider the following example – enough information is provided to allow the listener to infer the STAR elements.

Example:

“I’m a natural problem solver. I recently used this skill over the summer as an intern at Let’s Plan A Show Productions. I joined a team of actors and entertainers that were seeking to produce works that resonated with more diverse audiences. I contributed to survey development and interviewed current and prospective season subscribers. When that was done, we analyzed the data and picked three key themes to use when considering new programming. Not only did my insights help that decision process but I also landed a role in one of the upcoming productions!”

Your story should be brief but provide enough information for the employer to evaluate your ability to perform the skill. Following the STAR formula will assure that your story meets employer expectations for desired amount of details.

Developing Skill Stories to Share with Graduate Program Admissions Staff

The STAR formula still applies when planning to interview for admission to graduate school, and you are encouraged to prepare stories that align with the primary factors selection committees use when evaluating applicants. These include one's potential to complete a graduate degree, indicators of a strong work ethic (i.e., potential to complete program in a timely manner), evidence of critical thinking skills, and ability to work independently. Sample story:

Example:

My undergraduate research role really helped to prepare me for grad school. I wanted to work with a faculty member that was doing research on social factors triggering panic attacks, which is one of my top interest areas. A peer helper at my undergrad research office provided some assistance, but I had to do a lot of independent outreach to find an experience that would advance my skills while broadening my knowledge of panic attack triggers. Once I started working on the faculty member's research team, I developed a timeline that pushed me to achieve my deliverables halfway through the semester so I could use the remaining weeks to conduct additional research. My faculty adviser was so impressed with my work that I was allowed to co-author a section of one of the summary chapters and they invited me to co-present at a conference that allowed me to network with experts in my field.

Career Success can support you in understanding your individual competencies, planning ways to further develop The Buckeye Advantage for life beyond Ohio State, learning how to tell effective skills stories. For support, use Handshake to schedule an appointment with a Career Coach.

Writing Your Skills Stories

In preparation for your coaching appointment, you are encouraged to write one or two skill stories. To do this, follow the steps below.

1. Review the ten readiness competencies described on this document. Circle the 2 competencies that you believe represent your strongest skills.
2. Reflect on your various experiences to draft a story for each of your top 2 skills. Remember to use the STAR formula.
3. When describing the strength of your skills, focus on using words that are in line for someone with an undergraduate college education. Employers are quickly turned off by those who seem to be overselling themselves. Consider the differences in the following descriptors:
 - **Safe Choices** - great, excellent, very strong, very capable, solid, top-notch, high-level
 - **Risky Choices** - fabulous, extensive, superb, awesome, expert, profound, stellar, world-class

Write Your Skill Story #1:

Writing Your Skills Stories (*Continued*)

Write Your Skill Story #2:

Other Tips for Talking Up Your Readiness Competencies

- College students often develop their readiness competencies through interactions with others (e.g., working under the guidance of a faculty member, as part of a team of interns, etc.). When describing your individual skills, you'll demonstrate humility by recognizing how others have contributed to your skill development.
- When interviewing for an internship or job, you will likely be asked the question, "What are your weaknesses?" Therefore, you are encouraged to circle the workplace skill that you struggle with the most. Additionally, you should jot down some ideas for how you can make improvements in that area. When employers ask the question, "What are your weaknesses?" they are actually more interested in hearing about your plans for self-improvement. Everyone has weaknesses; those who succeed in the workplace are aware of their weaknesses and strive to overcome them!
- During an interview it is okay and strongly recommended to ask questions. Do not shy away from the chance to ask the employer about the opportunity grow your Readiness Competencies in the role you are applying for. Wondering about phrasing? Something like "Do you have training sessions for those interested in further developing their leadership skills?" would be a good question to ask if you want to parlay past leadership experience into a supervisory role.
- If you don't get a position that you interviewed for, consider following up with the interviewer to see if they are able to provide you with feedback on your interview performance. Maybe you will discover that you are underselling your capabilities more so than not having the skills needed for the position.
- The goal is not to share a memorized skill story during an interview. Instead, you'll want to practice telling your story enough to be familiar with the core content. You will want to memorize "STAR" as telling your story according to that formula will allow you to relay a detailed account of how you applied a skill.
- Take pride in your past experiences and approach conversations with confidence. Employers realize that a college student does not have the same level of experience as a seasoned professional, but they want you to convey what you have done in an assured manner. Not only will a confident approach reveal professionalism, but it will make any achievement you are highlighting seem more fulfilled and complete. Don't shy away from using your best example of how you excelled at a part-time job or as part of a team project for a class. When asserted with determination, these examples will assure the listener that you will continue to achieve when presented with more complex situations in the future.