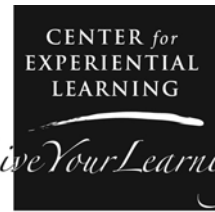


Interviewing Techniques



ST. OLAF COLLEGE

Over 95 percent of employers hire on the basis of a personal interview ... ARE YOU READY?

Transferable Skills

- Employers hire the "promise of potential" so it's essential that you be able to talk specifically about your skills in an interview.
- An often heard criticism from recruiters about the interview skills of liberal arts students is that they have a difficult time talking specifically about the skills they have developed through their education.
- Selling your transferable skills in an interview is a powerful demonstration of what you can do for an organization.

Transferable skills are skills that are developed in a specific context but that are "transferable" to a variety of other situations and tasks. Transferable skills tend to fall into the following skill clusters:

- Human Relations Skills
- Leadership/Motivating Skills
- Training/Instructing Skills
- Supervising Skills
- Managing Skills
- Creating Skills
- Written and Oral Communication Skills
- Analyzing/Investigating Skills
- Problem-solving Skills
- Quantitative Skills

To identify your transferable skills, see the CEL's online transferable skills handout – at www.stolaf.edu/services/cel, click **Students** on the left toolbar, then click on **Resume** and follow the **Transferable Skills** link.

Example

When asked to identify your strengths, an **effective interviewing technique** is to mention a broad skill, for instance, managing, as one of your strengths along with several of the specific skills included in that cluster. So, in response to "What is your greatest strength?" you might answer, "I would have to say my ability to manage is one of my greatest strengths. I'm very good at planning projects and programs, anticipating problems, considering all the details of a project and finishing projects on schedule. A good illustration of my management skills is my role as president of my honor house. ..."

adapted from *Interview Power: Selling Yourself Face to Face*, Tom Washington, Mount Vernon Press, 1995

The Benefit Statement

The Benefit Statement is a brief statement of who you are and how you can add BENEFIT to an organization. It answers the question, "Tell me about yourself."

Your Benefit Statement should be no more than 1-2 minutes in length and should provide a brief synopsis of your background in the following three areas: academics, related work experiences, and relevant extracurricular activities.

Example

I am a senior majoring in English with a concentration in Management Studies. My academic background includes coursework in writing, interpersonal communication, and persuasion as well as accounting, management and marketing. In addition to my academic background, I have had several practical experiences that have enhanced my problem solving and organizational skills. This year as co-executive editor of the *Manitou Messenger*, I manage a student staff of twenty and direct the weekly publishing of our campus newspaper. As a production intern with KARE 11 during the summer of 2005, I interacted with the public in following up on story ideas, produced segments, wrote scripts and assisted with last minute preparations for the show. Last summer's internship was really exciting for me. I worked with The Murphy Group as a public relations intern, assisting the PR director with representation and publicity of various accounts. I have also been involved in various extra-curricular activities while at St. Olaf: I served as a junior counselor, solicited donations through the phonathon and acted as a tour guide for admissions. I believe that the combination of my coursework and practical experience has given me the communication, management and teamwork skills necessary to succeed as an account executive.

The S.T.A.R. Technique

In an interview, you are asked to share details of your experiences on the premise that **past behavior (performance) predicts future behavior (performance)**. Past examples may come from work experience, internships, academic experiences, extra-curricular activities or volunteer work.

St. Olaf College – Center for Experiential Learning

Career Connections

Internships

Civic Engagement

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Interviewing Techniques

(continued from previous page)



The S.T.A.R. technique (*cont.*)

The **S.T.A.R.** technique allows you to talk specifically about the skills you possess. This method provides concrete answers to any type of interview question but is essential for success with behavioral interviewing.

S.T.A.R. = Situation/Task ... Action ... Result

Situation/Task	description of a specific situation, project or task related to skill sought
Action	initiative shown in dealing with the situation or completing the project/task; requires description of specific steps taken
Result	outcome resulting from the action taken

Example: Tell me about a time when you gave exceptional customer service.

As a student worker in St. Olaf's admissions office, I serve as back-up for incoming phone calls. Last week, I answered a call from Mrs. J who had some questions that were pretty specific. When I suggested that she call the academic departments involved, Mrs. J sounded very annoyed and said that her phone call had been transferred several times already. So I offered to gather the info for her and call her back later that afternoon. First, I talked with my supervisor and explained the situation and what I was going to do. Then I made a couple of calls to get the info I needed. I had a class that afternoon and so had to leave a message with one department, but I returned after my class, even though it wasn't a regularly scheduled work time for me, to follow through. When I returned the phone call to Mrs. J, she was very appreciative and said that the St. Olaf admissions office had been more responsive than had other colleges she called. She then made an appointment for her son to have a campus visit next month.

Think of your answer as "**story-telling.**" Tell the interviewer a story with a beginning (the situation, problem or project), a middle, (the action you took), and an end (the result of your action) that illustrates how you used a particular skill. **To be effective your answer must contain all of the S.T.A.R. components.**

Connecting Your Experience to Their Need

- Prepare for the interview by listing the various components and specific responsibilities of the position for which you are applying;
- Identify the qualifications necessary for success in the position – areas of knowledge, technical skills, transferable skills, personal qualities;
- Next, list specific experiences that demonstrate the skills sought;
- Then, identify areas of weakness and determine how you would counter an objection to lack of a particular experience or improve that skill or area of knowledge.

Example: Position: Marketing for a desktop publishing business

Needs of the Employer	Specific Experiences
Sales experience	Experience in retail sales at Old Navy and The Gap, 3 summers
Understanding of the principles of customer service and evidence of meeting customers' needs	Provided excellent service – earned top sales commission for The Gap, June and July 2004
Ability to learn technical information quickly	Assigned to learn and implement several new software packages as a student consultant for IIT
Ability to explain technical concepts in clear language	Worked as computer assistant for English department, trouble shooting and explaining various computer applications
Experience creating and implementing marketing ideas and plans	Created a marketing plan for a small retail business as part of a class project; created membership development plan for a newly created student organization

Next Steps

- Work through the exercises provided in this handout
- Read through CEL's on-line interviewing handout; prepare answers to the questions posed
- View the interviewing video available at the CEL
- Schedule a Practice Interview with one of the CEL counselors

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