



The Graduate Coach Guide to: Core Personal Skills and how to develop yours



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Dear Graduate,

“Are you the kind of person that believes work is far too important a pastime to spend it languishing in a dead end job or one that you hate? Do you want a job that offers prospects for progress and personal satisfaction?”

Well, we’ve spent hundreds of hours working with graduates like you, helping them to work out how to do more than simply get a good job, but to get the job they really want. Achieving this begins with looking at the skills that you have to offer to a potential employer. But we believe that this can only happen when you really understand what skills are needed for the job and how to demonstrate that you have them.

...that’s what this guide is all about

It will help you to recognise the core skills employers look for and how to demonstrate that you have them. It will help you to find it easier to convince an employer that you are the best person for the job.

We begin by looking at what we call core skills, or employability skills. These are skills that every employer looks for and which can help make the difference between you and someone else who has completed the same or a similar qualification to your own. Because they will be often the only difference between you and other candidates going for the same job, demonstrating that you have them is key to getting ahead.

The best thing about these core skills is that you will have gained them from a variety of different places, from college and university to work placements and personal interests. Once we’ve looked at each skill we will present some questions to help you show that you have these skills. The booklet ends with a look at how to build on these skills so that you can continue to stand out as unique and employable throughout your career.”



Chris Davies - Founder Graduate Coach

Part one

The Core Personal Skills Every Graduate Needs

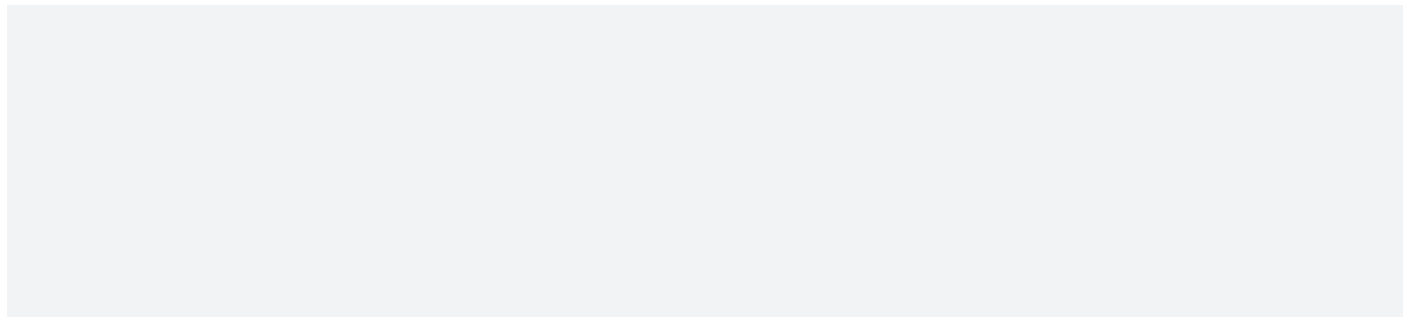
Self-motivation

You're good at coaching yourself to do better, and helping others to do the same

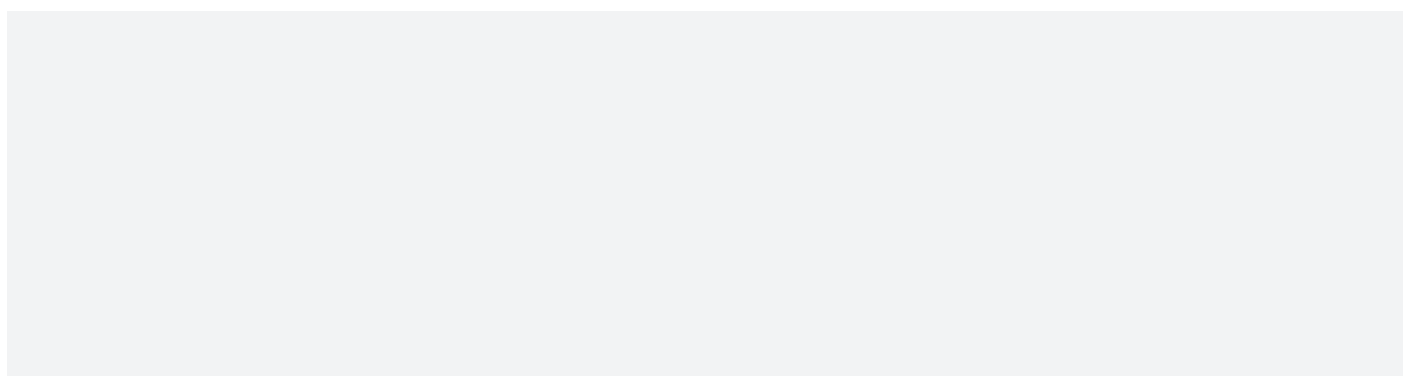
Being a self-starter, having the ability to use your own initiative and showing good personal management skills means you don't need to be hand-held to get a job done. You will know if you have these skills if you can come up with a least two examples of times when you have pushed yourself to move beyond a challenge you've faced in the past, especially one that had the potential to make you feel discouraged about a task. How did you respond? Did you tell yourself that you could do it? Did you refuse to give up? Did you look for ways to manage your feelings so you could get the task done? How about motivating other people to move beyond their limitations so they could do the same? It may have been supporting someone to learn something new or showing determination to complete a task when others thought you might have given up. If you can come up with a couple of examples then an employer will want to know about them.

Got the skills?

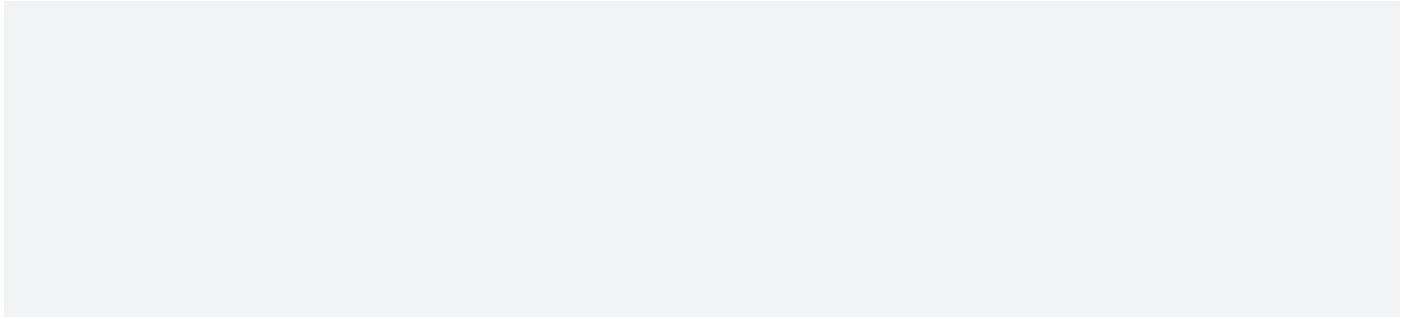
1. Have you ever gone above or beyond what was expected of you to complete work at college or university?



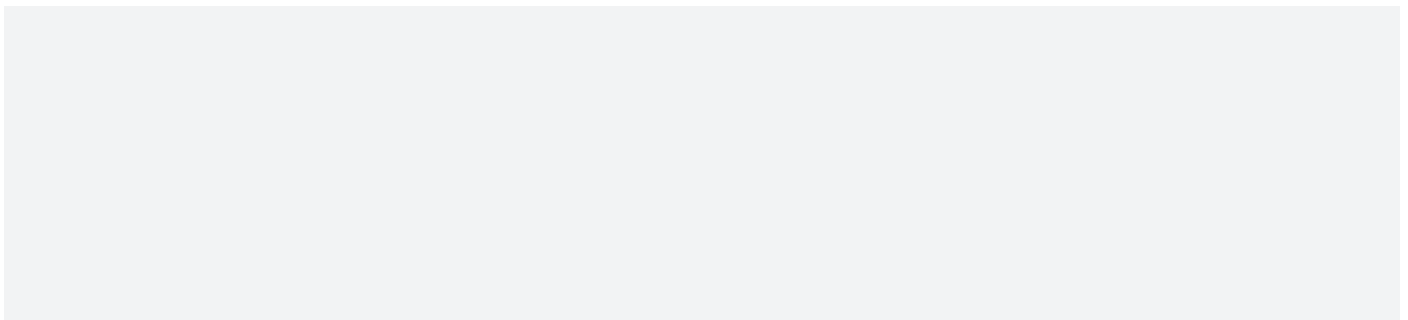
2. Have you ever pushed yourself to achieve something you initially found difficult, whether at work or in your personal life?



3. Have you ever given advice to someone else that helped the person to perform better?



4. Have you ever taken and applied advice that helped you to perform better, perhaps in a sporting activity, a hobby or at work?



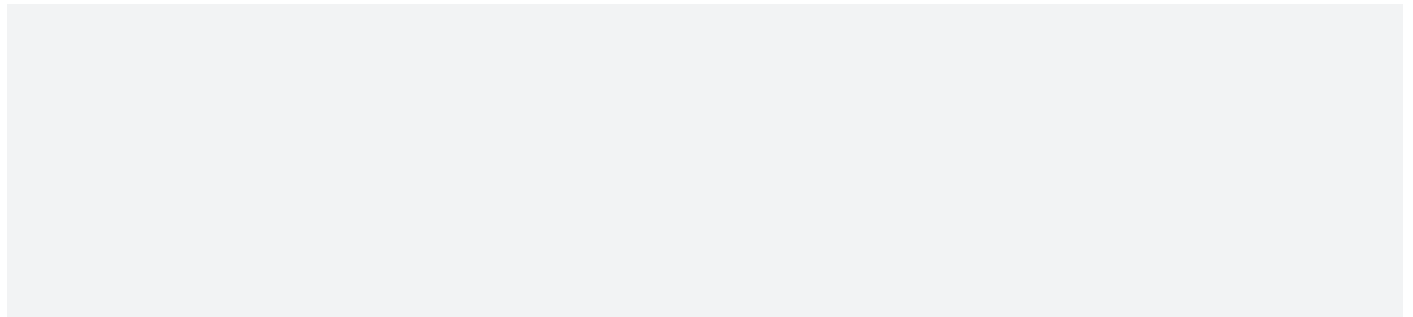
Communication

You're good at expressing yourself and understanding other people's points of view

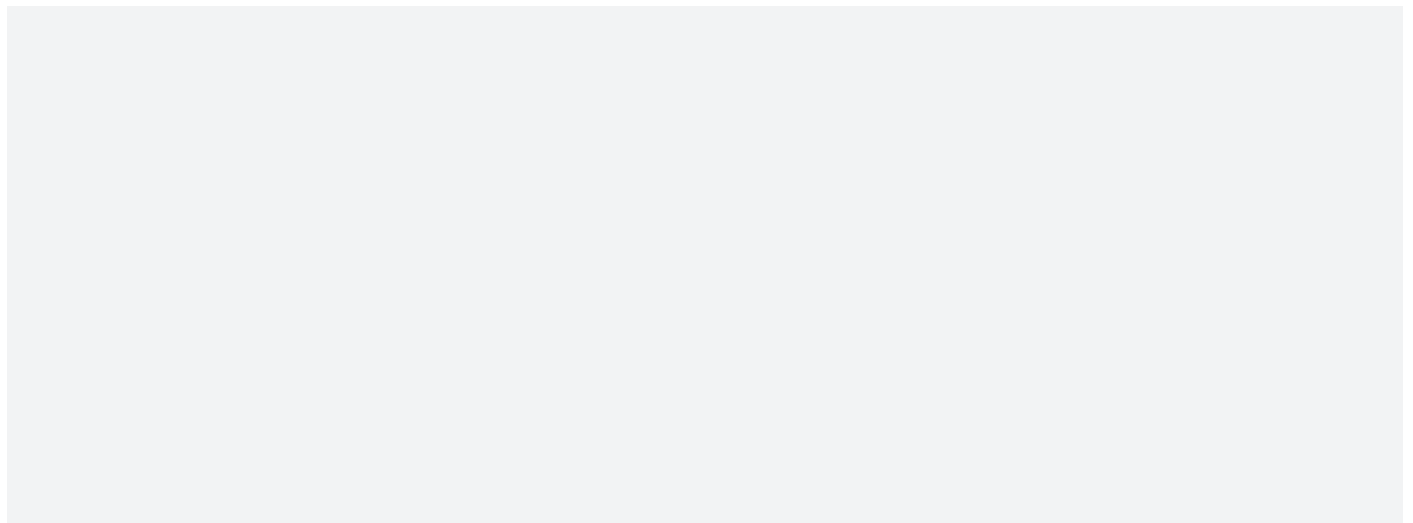
If you find it easy to express your views to others then that's great, but it's only one of half of the set of skills needed to be considered a good communicator. Good communication skills also mean you find it just as easy to listen to the thoughts, opinions and ideas of others too. You need to be able to show empathy and to see stuff from different points of view. The two sides are essential if you are to work well with different people. Employers will be looking for evidence that shows you can communicate well both when writing and speaking and your first opportunity to persuade them of this will be on the application form and, later, during the interview. See whether you can recall some concrete examples by answering the questions below.

Got the skills?

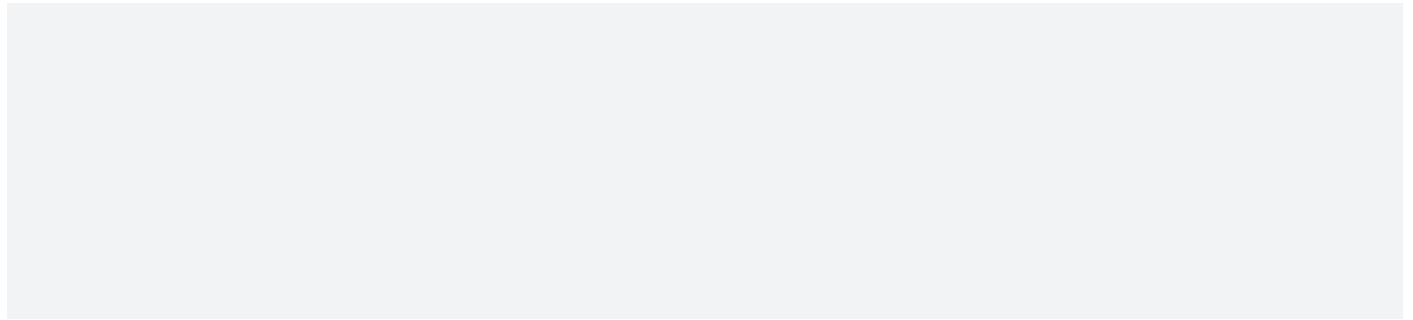
1. Have you ever had to give a talk or do a live presentation on your own ideas to an audience?



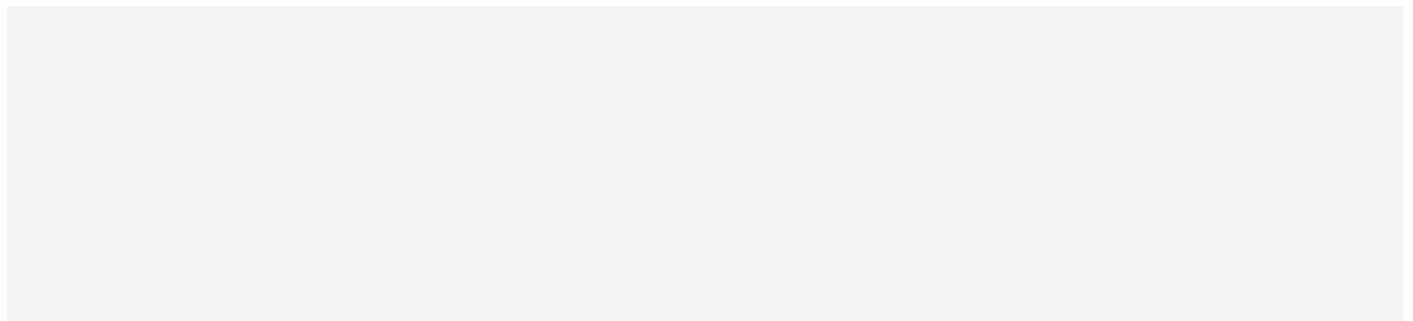
2. Have you ever taken part in a debate or persuaded others to come around to your views, perhaps to vote you in as team leader?



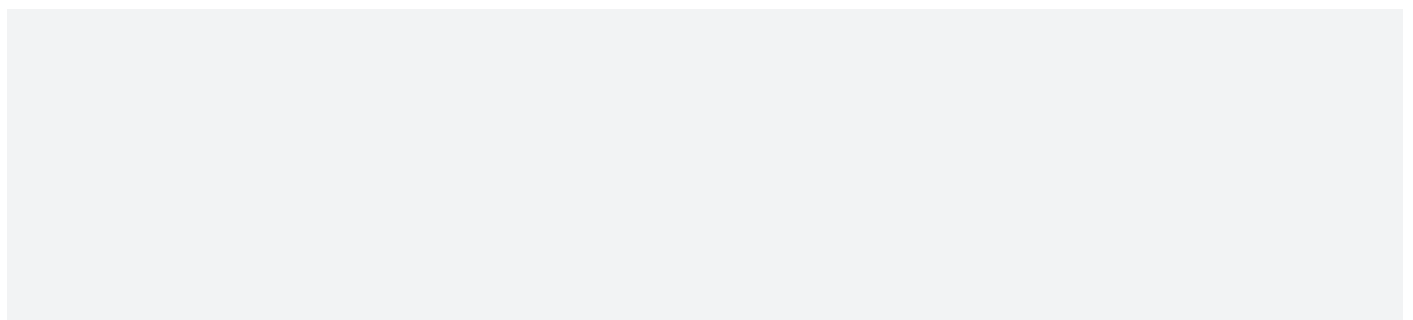
3. Have you ever written a persuasive letter or document that had a positive outcome, like to secure someone's agreement, gain sponsorship or to convince others to sign up to support a cause?



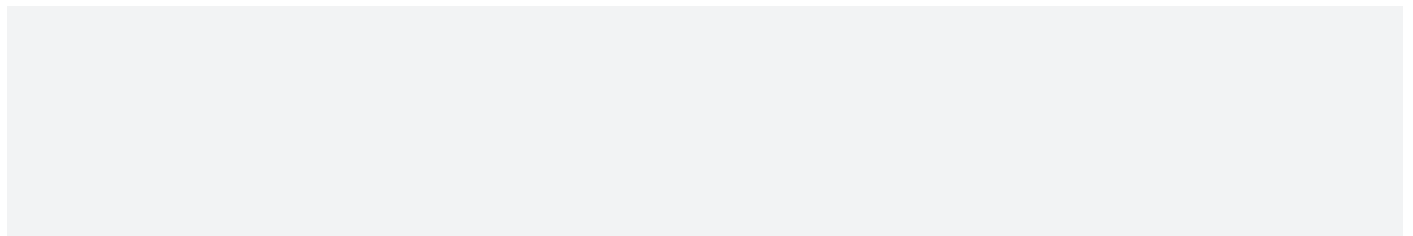
4. Have you ever simplified a set of instructions thus making them less complicated so that others found it easier to understand how to do something better?



5. Have you ever written a speech, a set of aims and objectives or targets for a project, club or organisation?



6. Have you ever understood and/or helped to explain the point of view of someone else when others failed to?



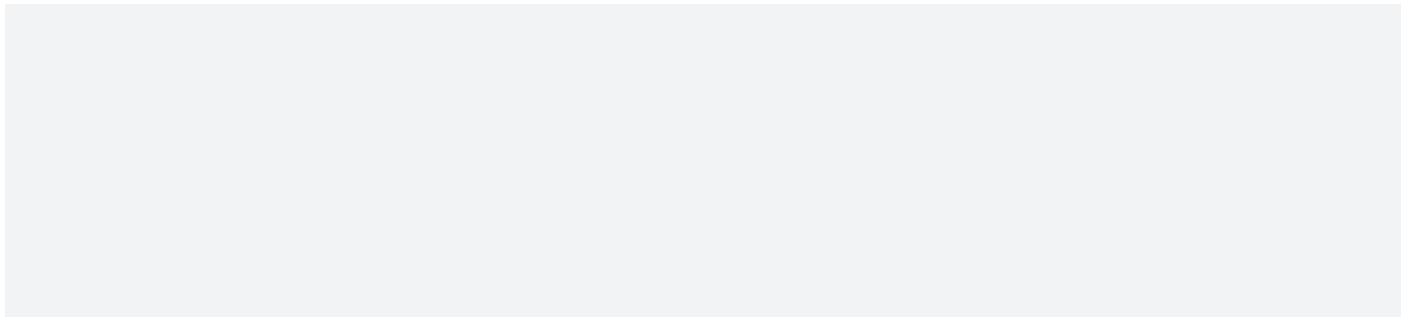
Learning

You like to learn new things, and to apply what you've learnt

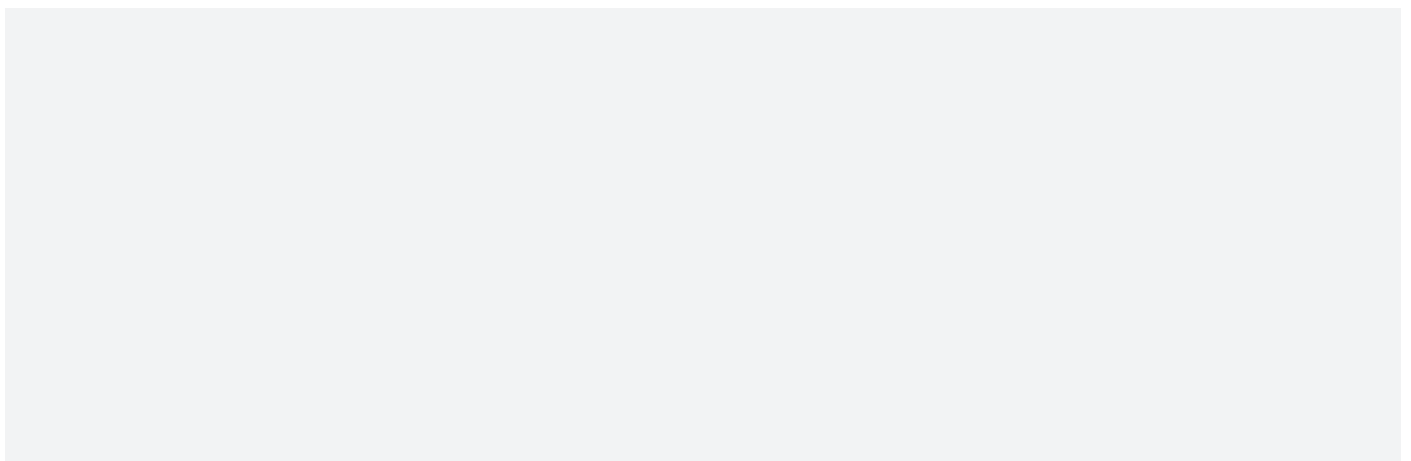
If you're the sort of person who likes to find out the background to a story, or how something works or came to be the way it is, then these are positive signs that you have good learning skills. You will like to research things so you understand them better, and you will use what you have discovered to come up with new and better ways to perform a task. If you can show how you've used these learning skills in the past, both to improve your own skills and the skills of others, then you could be seen as an asset to an employer. Employers will want to see evidence that you are good at learning and applying what you've learnt. He or she wants to see examples of times when you have responded to opportunities to learn so that you could improve your understanding of your role.

Got the skills?

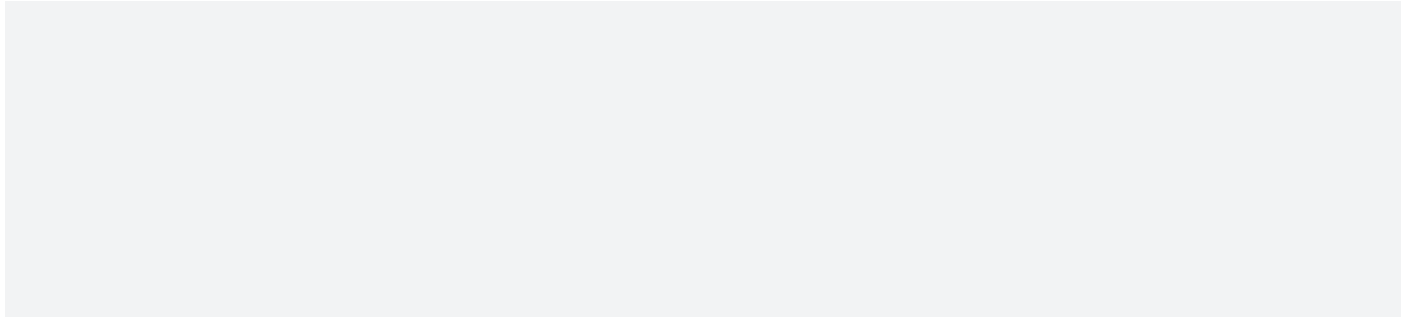
1. Have you ever taken an extra step to find out more about a topic that fell outside of your main course or job area?



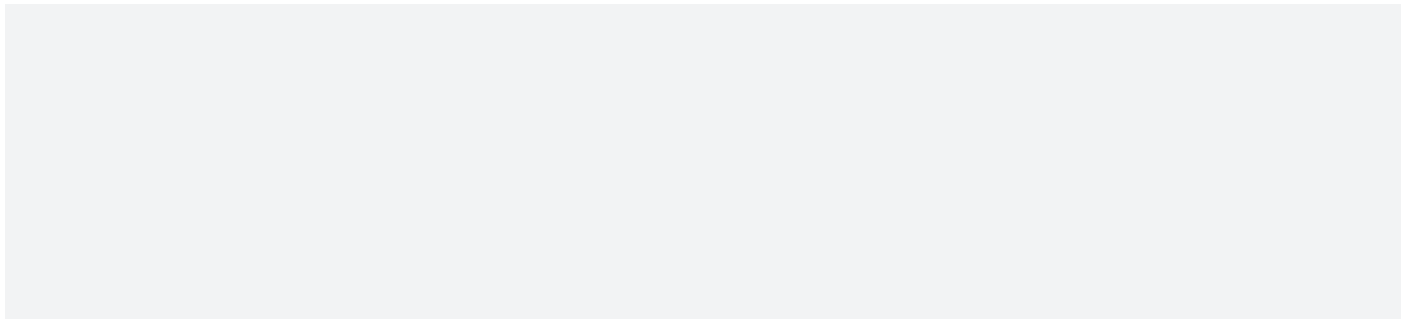
2. Have you ever passed on ideas to people you worked with, or made a suggestion on how they might do something more efficiently?



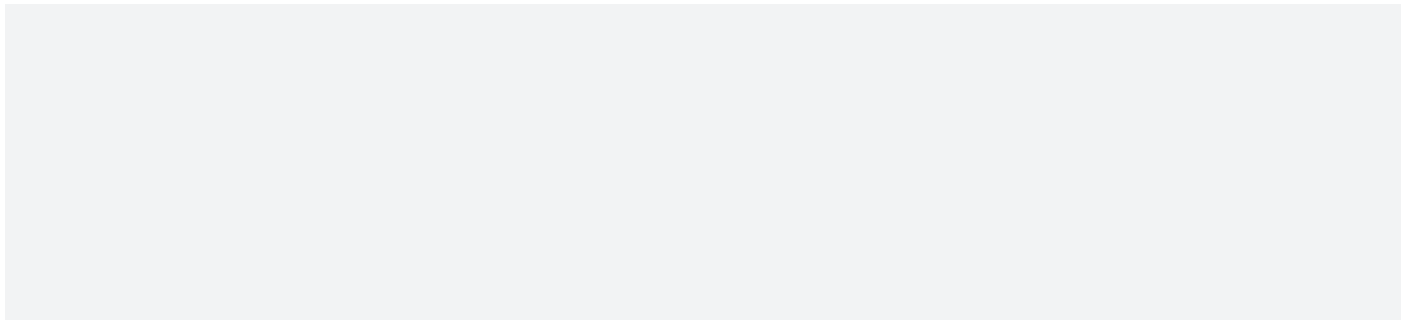
3. Have you ever contributed ideas that made a difference to a project outcome?



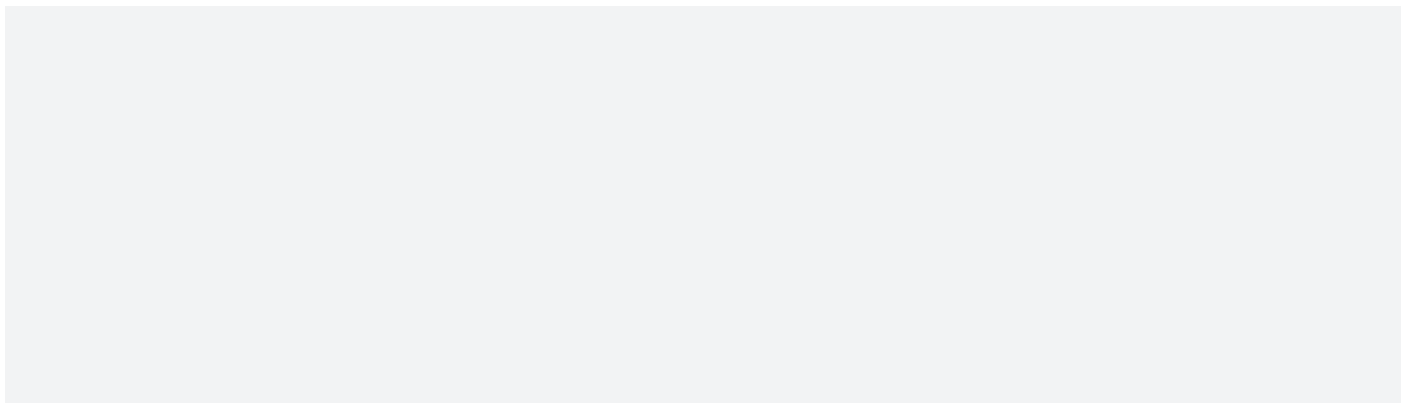
4. Have you ever signed up to an evening class, workshop or seminar to follow an interest?



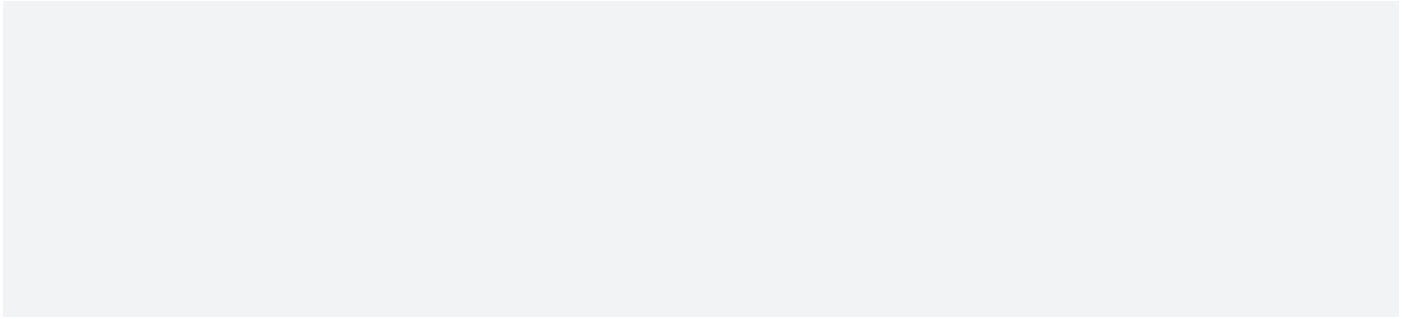
5. Have you ever discovered a new or better way of performing a task?



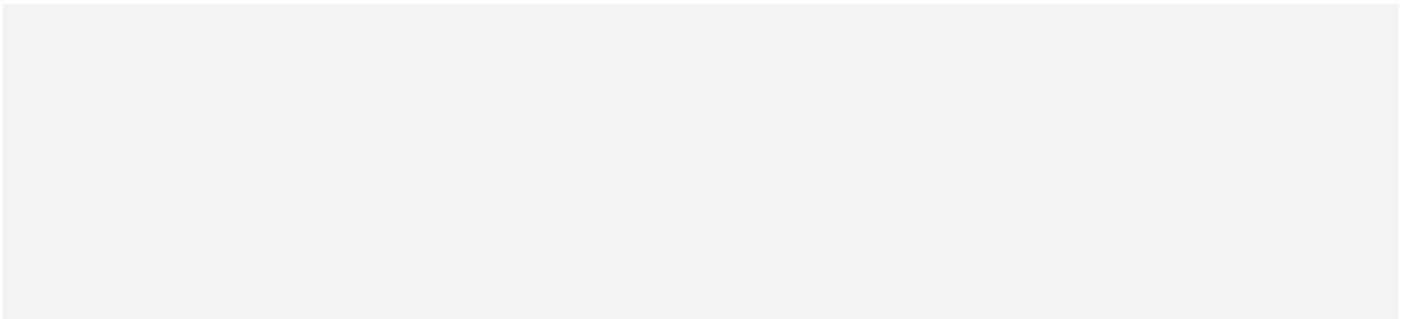
6. Did you make the most of the career events available to you at college or university?



7. Do you have any ideas on how you intend to build on the knowledge you have of your industry?



8. Do you learn from your mistakes and apply what you have learnt to new situations?



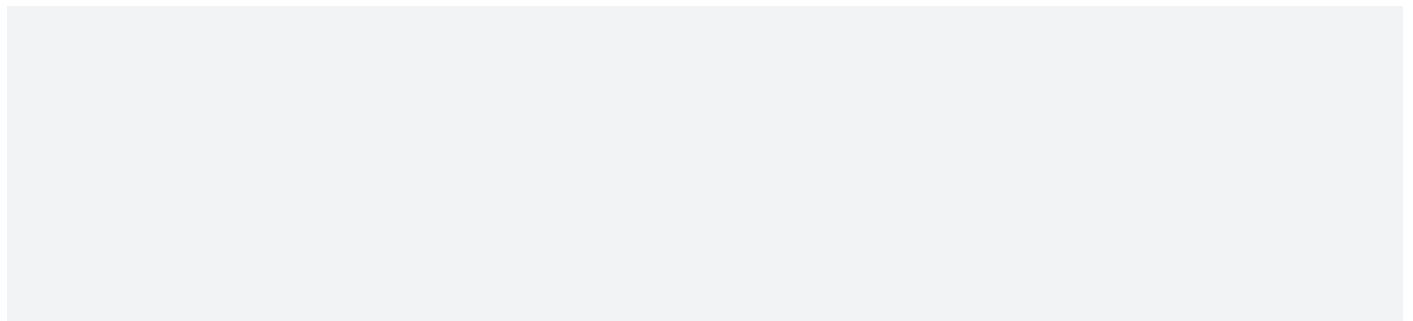
Leadership and Teamwork

You're a great teamplayer, and an even better teamleader

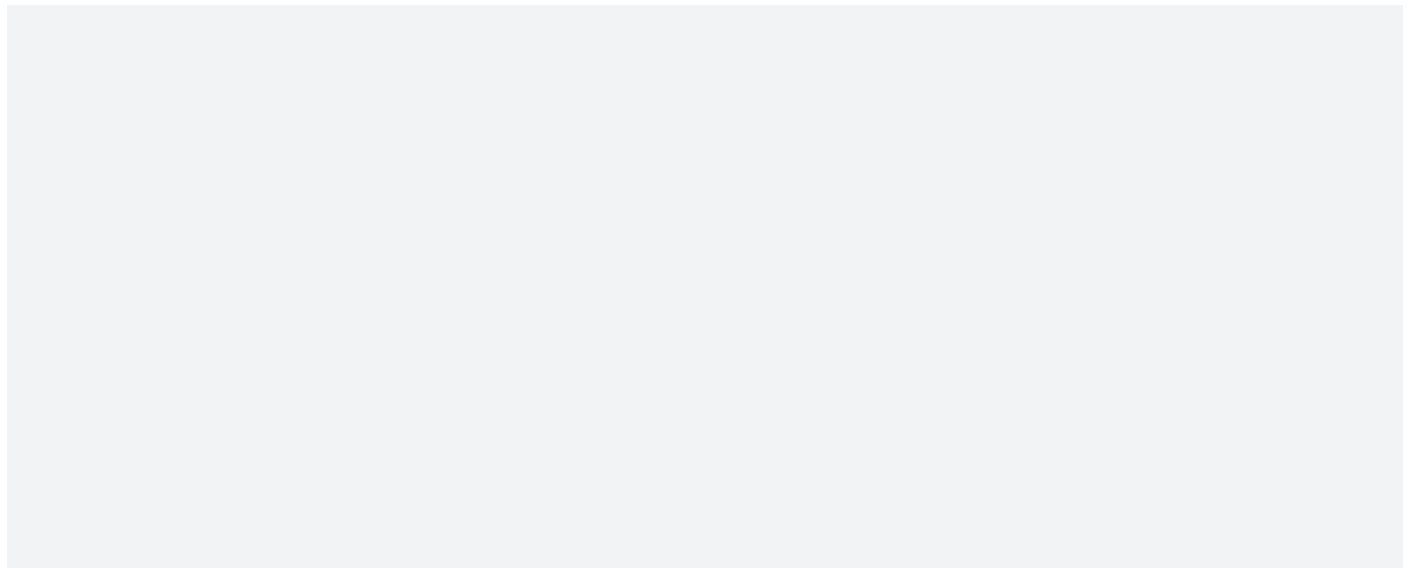
You certainly weren't the one left on the sides when others were choosing teams at school, college or university, because everyone recognises a great teamplayer when they see one. That's what you are. You seem to have a knack for bringing out the best in other people and, as a natural leader, you find you're able to get people to follow you. Very likely you will have discovered these skills through playing sports or being part of a club, group or society. Or your leadership skills came to the fore during group projects while at school, college or university, or while doing voluntary or part time work. If during these times you can show what you did to achieve the group aims, if you motivated others who weren't pulling their weight as much or successfully negotiated terms to get things done, retelling the scenarios could help you stand out as the best person for the job.

Got the skills?

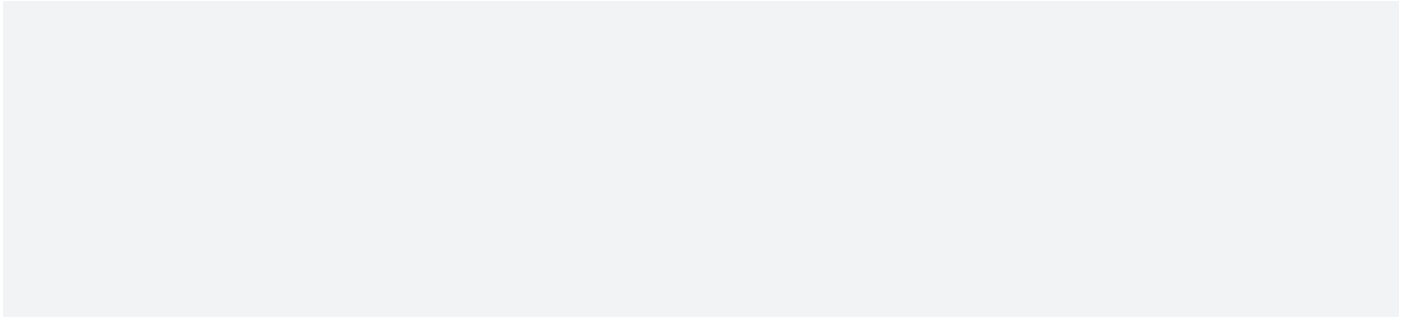
1. What clubs, groups or teams do you belong to?



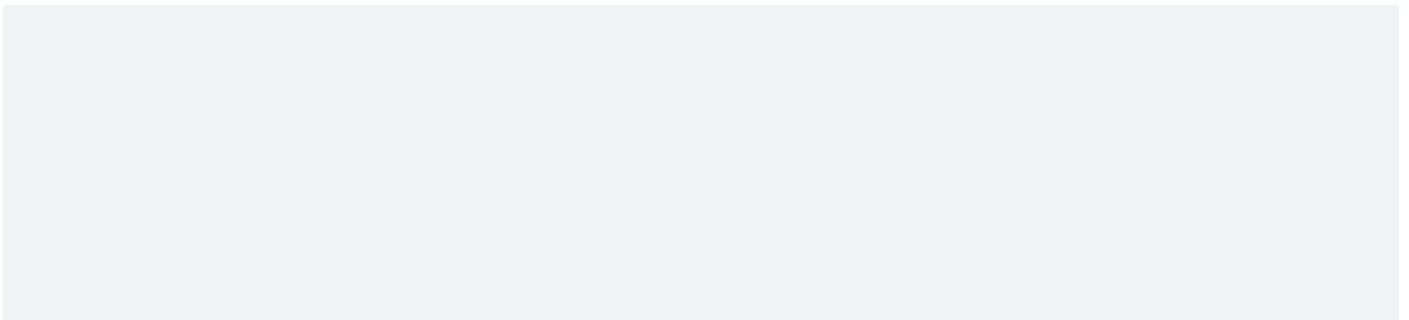
2. Have you ever had to work as part of a group to achieve a common goal?



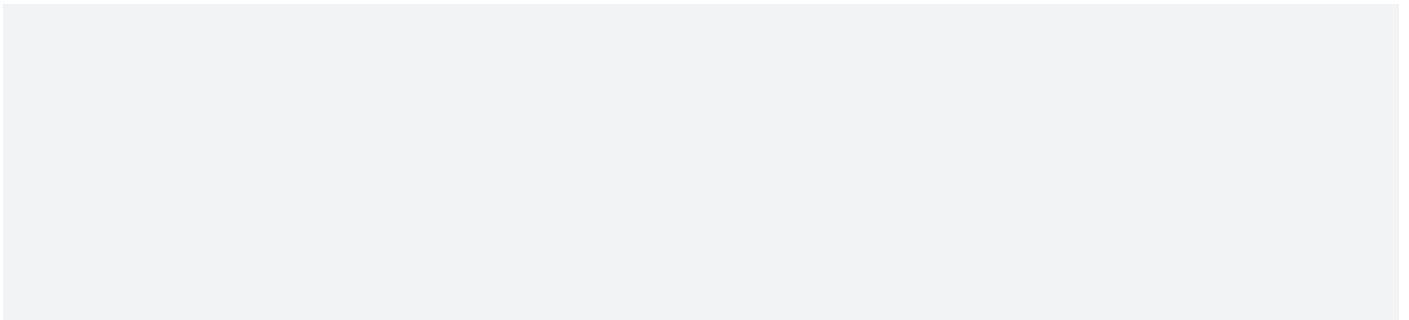
3. What role did you play in the team?



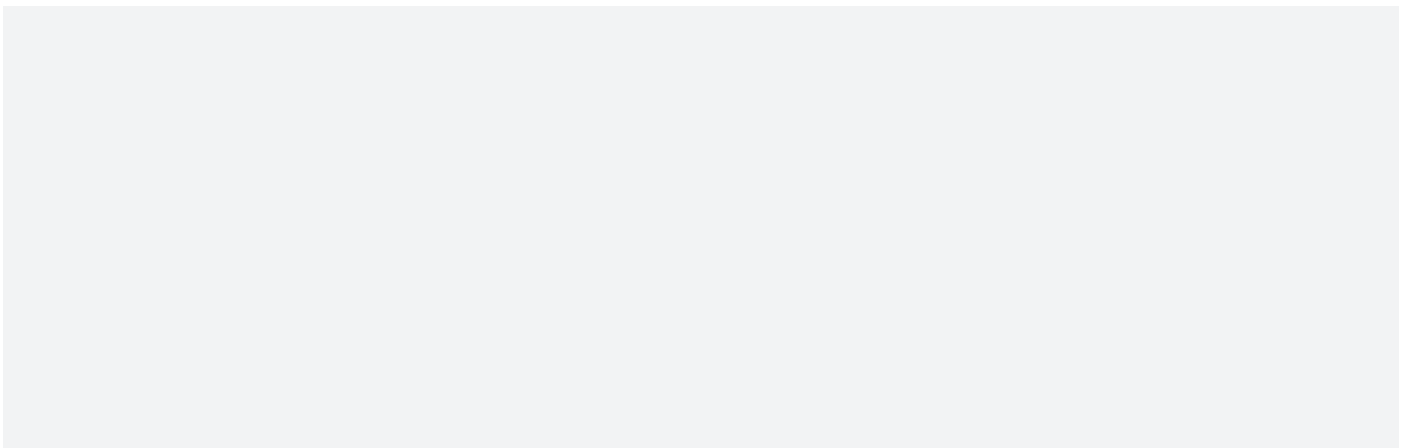
4. Did you have to compromise to take on board other people's thoughts or ideas?



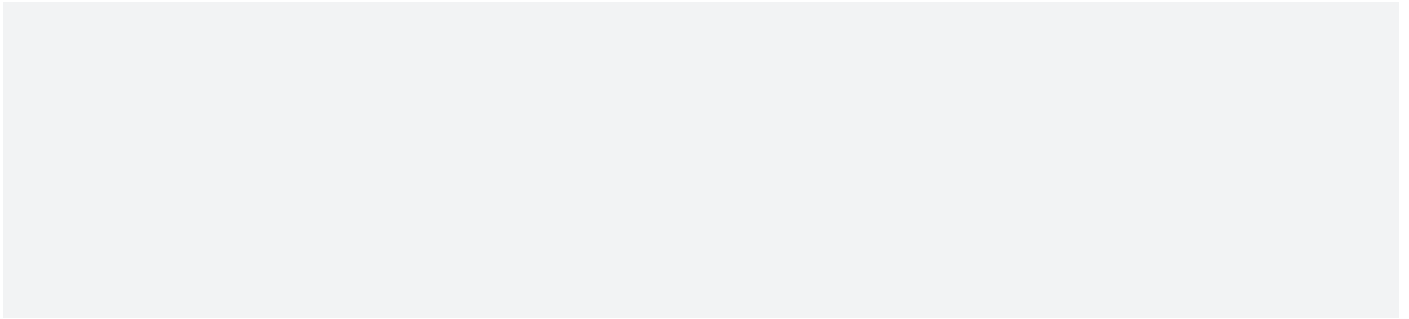
5. Did you have to settle any disagreements?



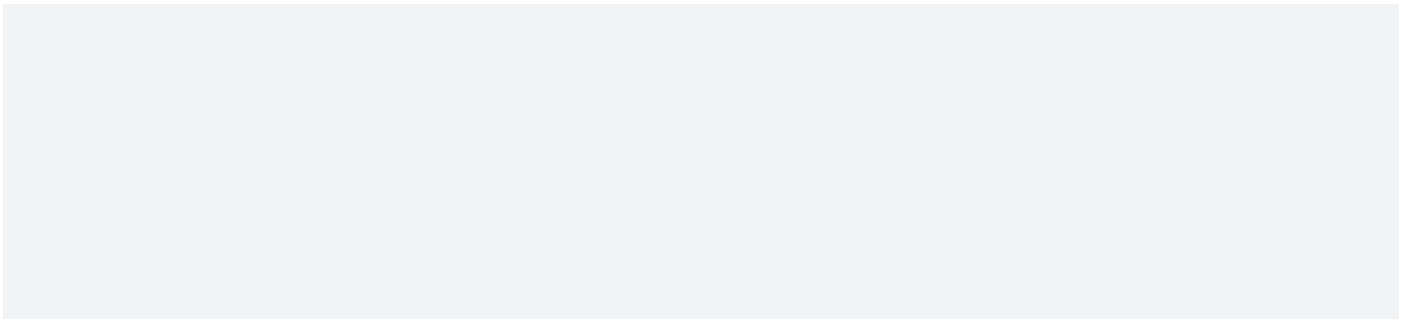
6. What did you do to resolve disputes?



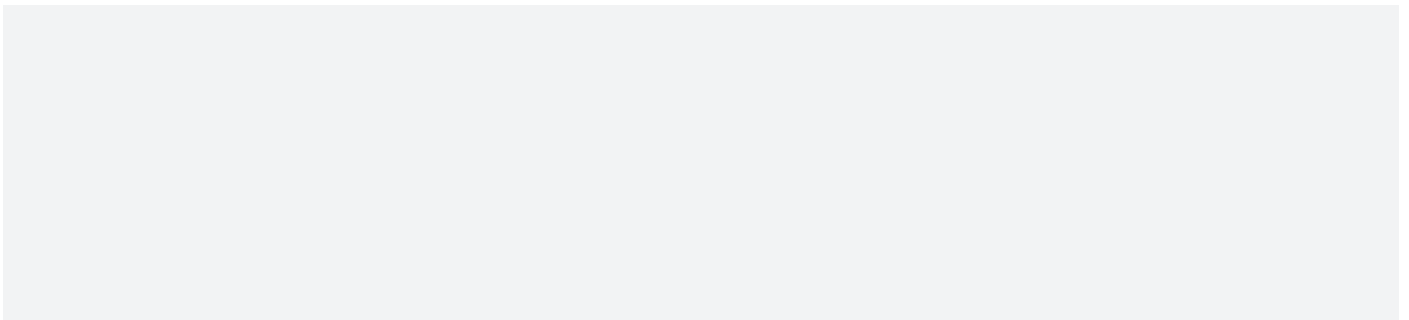
7. What compromises did you have to make to ensure the common goal was achieved?



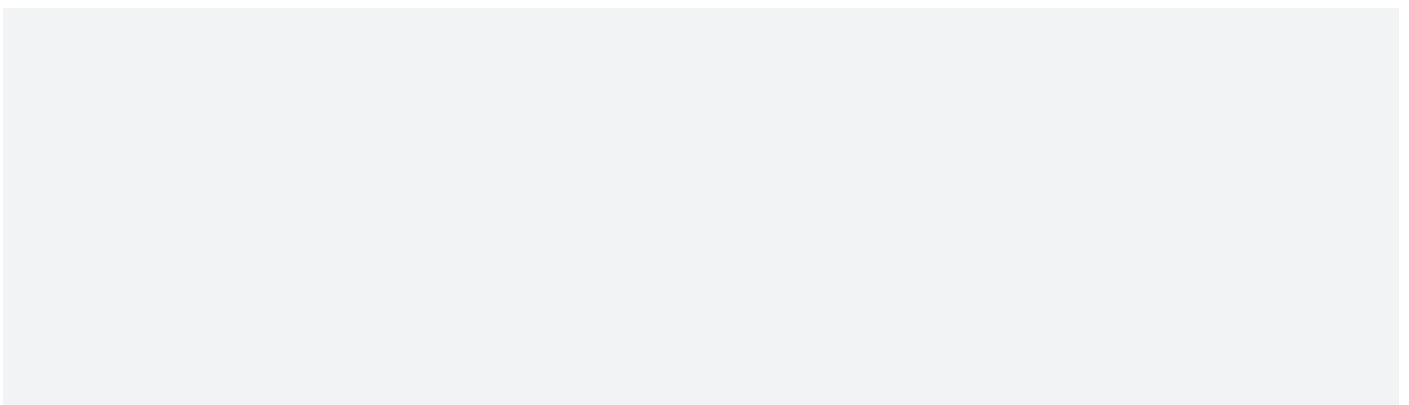
8. How did you go out of your way to ensure everyone participated and felt valued?



9. How did you organise everyone to them play to their strengths?



10. How have you shown commitment to teams you have worked with?



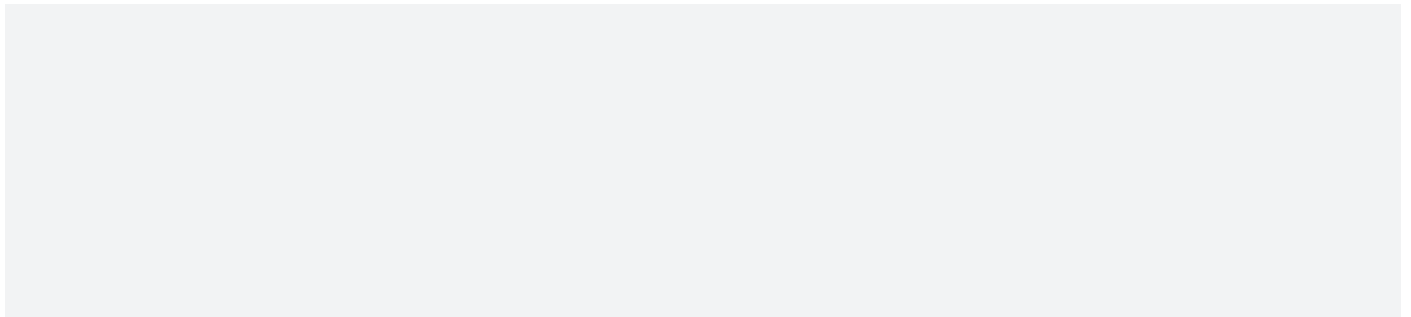
Relationship Building

You're good at building and sustaining relationships with different people

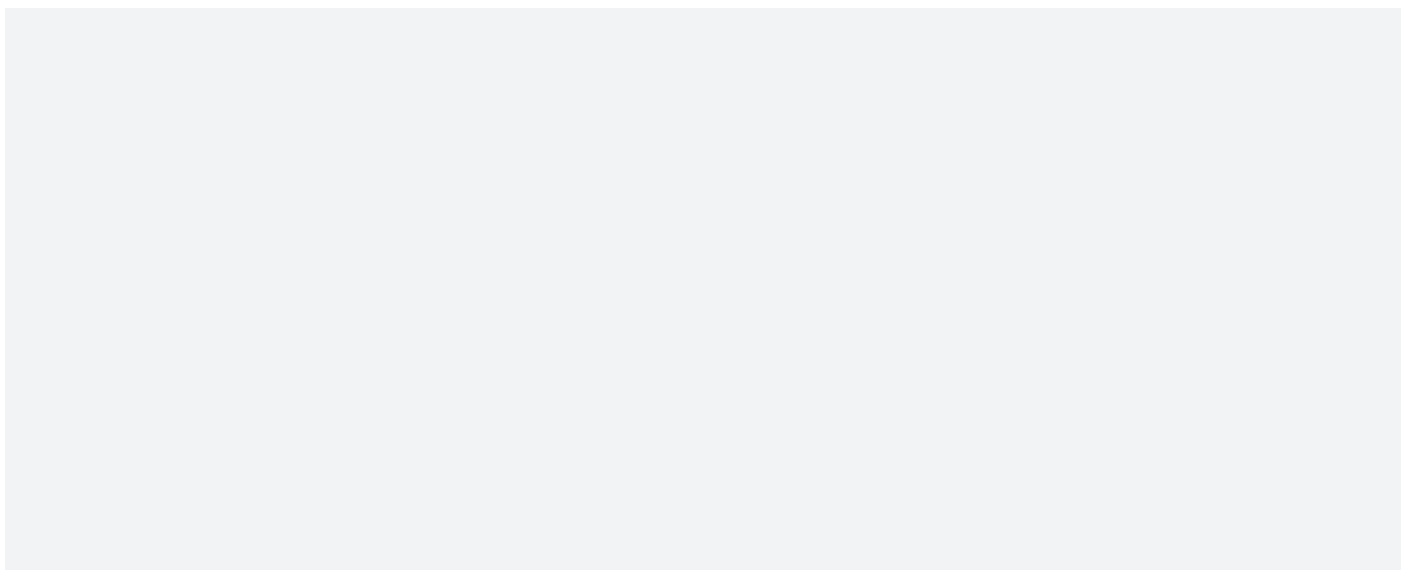
Some people are good at working out what people need and then helping to provide it; they seem to know how to make people feel at ease and they gain satisfaction from doing so. In a work environment these skills are central to building great customer and client relationships and they are an asset to every organisation. If you have these skills then very likely you're the kind of person who tends to maintain relationships with the people you meet, from college to work placements, university to voluntary or paid jobs. You're the sort that makes the effort to get know people and you will have made friends and acquaintances from all walks of life. If this is you then you will make a big difference when it comes to customer care and client relationships. Employers need your skills.

Got the skills?

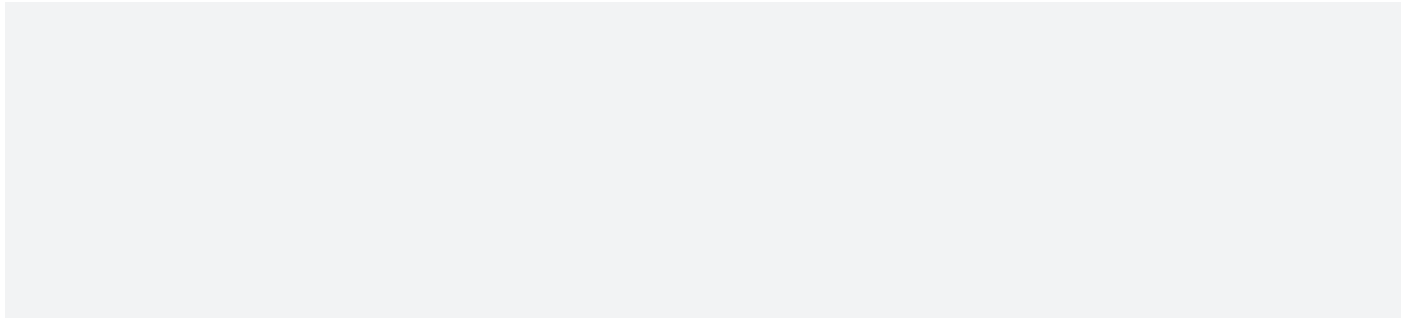
1. Are you a regular attendee at the clubs, groups or societies you've joined?



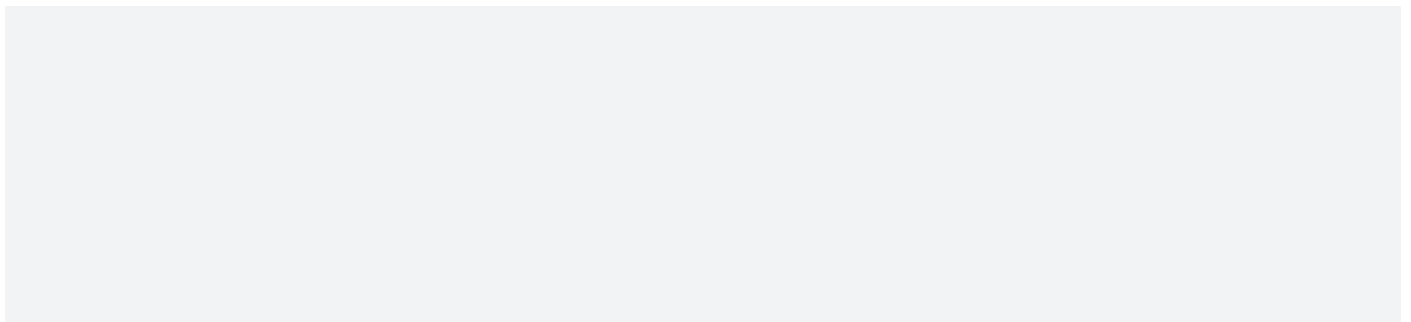
2. Have you stayed in contact with people you've met through past courses, jobs, work placements or groups?



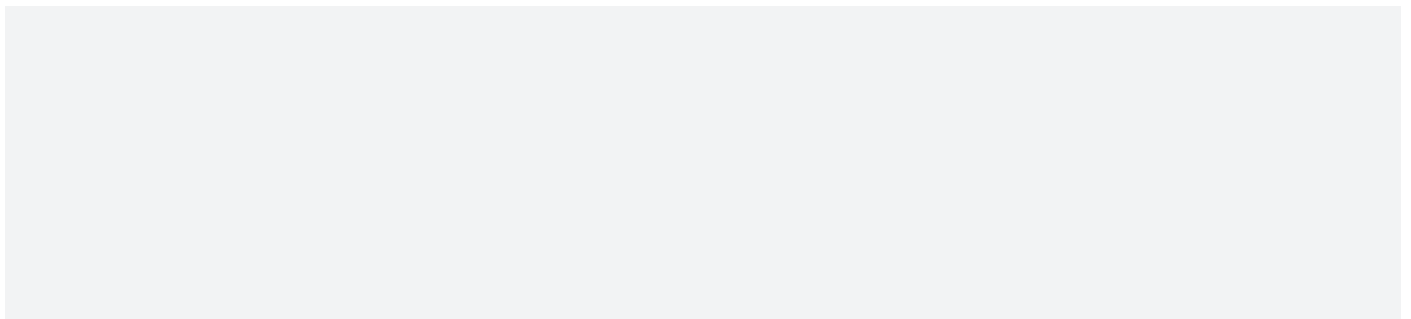
3. Have you ever taken the time to get to know a customer, client or supplier really well?



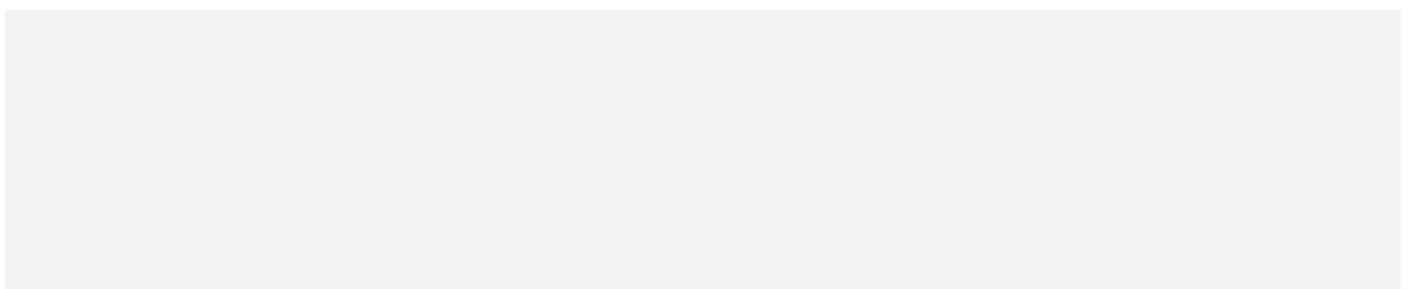
4. Can you think of a relationship you developed that later became an asset to an employer at a current or past place of work?



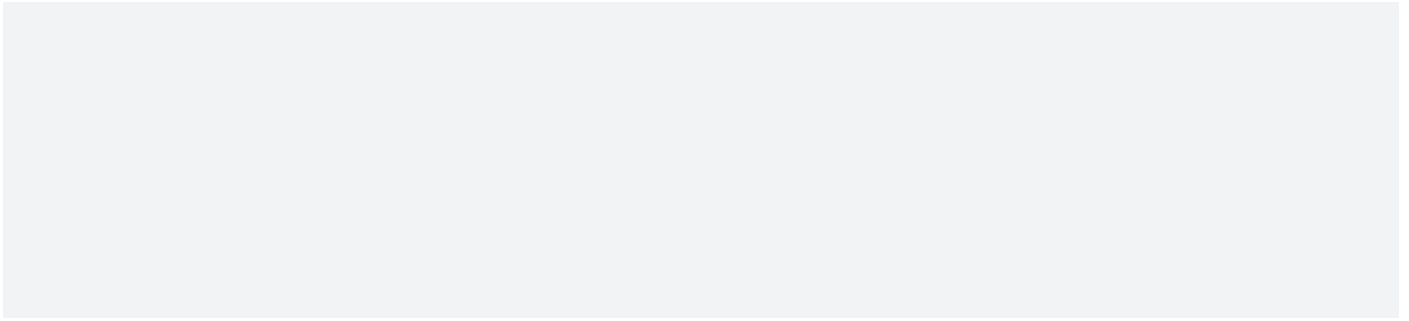
5. Have you ever had to calm down an angry client or customer or helped them to sort out a difficult problem?



6. Have you ever had to keep your cool while dealing with a customer or client who was being unpleasant toward you?



7. Have you ever got on with a task you were asked to do with enthusiasm even though you found it boring?



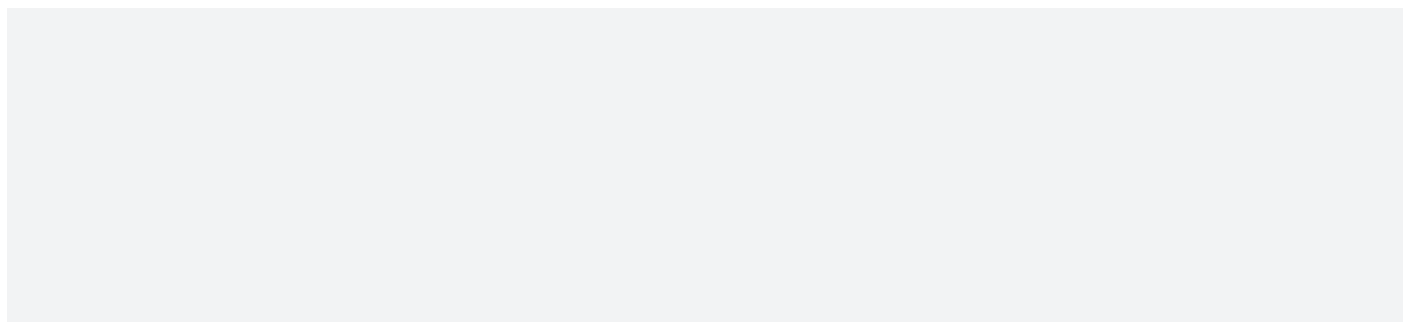
Organisation

You're good at managing people, projects, budgets and workloads

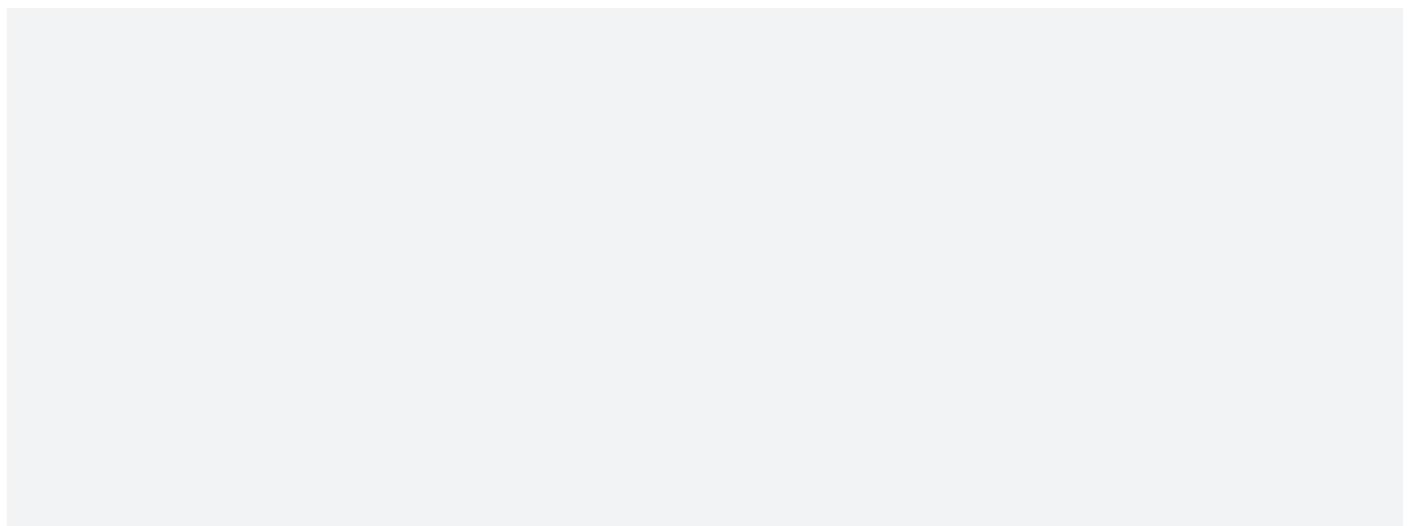
The ability to juggle competing priorities is essential to lots of jobs. You need to be able to keep your cool, to be very good at organising resources, time, tasks and even others. You need to be aware of the risks associated with a task and to have a back up plan in case things don't go to plan. These skills are needed to manage projects, budgets and to meet deadlines so if you can show you have them an employer may well remember you above other candidates. One of the ways you may have developed these skills is through your studies but other ways may have been as part of a teamwork project or through having to manage your work, student and personal life. You may have had to make personal sacrifices to manage a stretched budget. Perhaps you have organised an event or helped to raise funds for a charitable cause.

Got the skills?

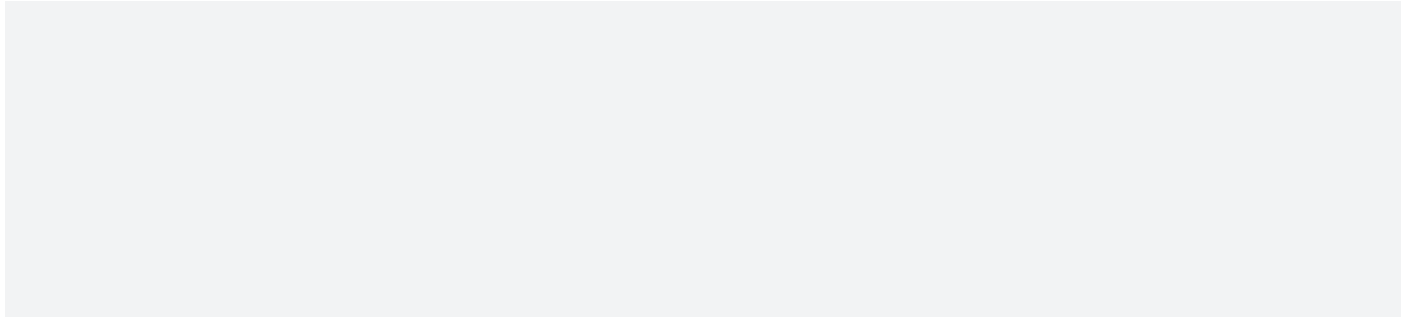
1. What steps have you taken to manage your student, work and social life?



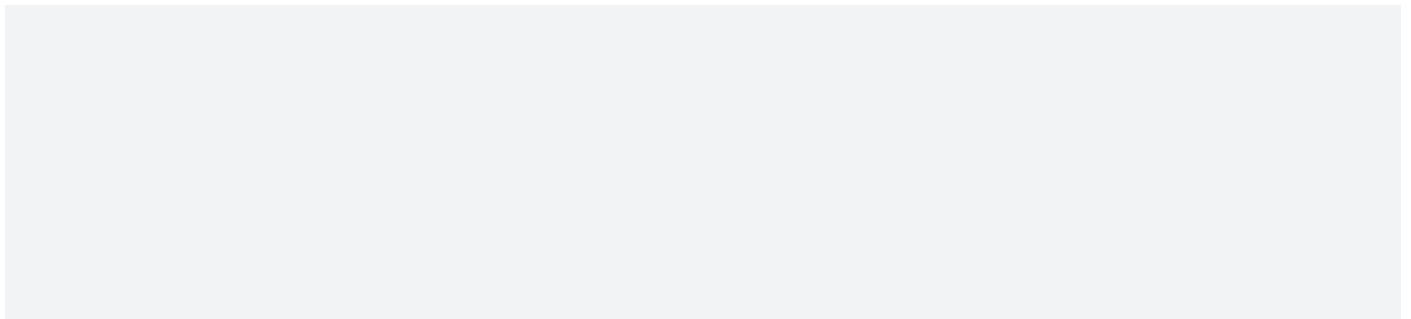
2. How have you managed competing deadlines, such as for different pieces of coursework due at similar or the same times?



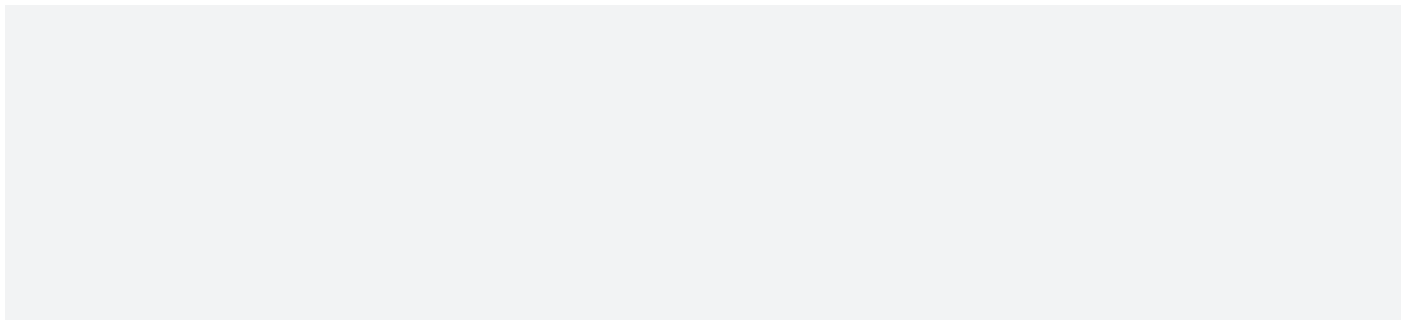
3. Have you ever made a financial sacrifice in order to save for something you wanted?



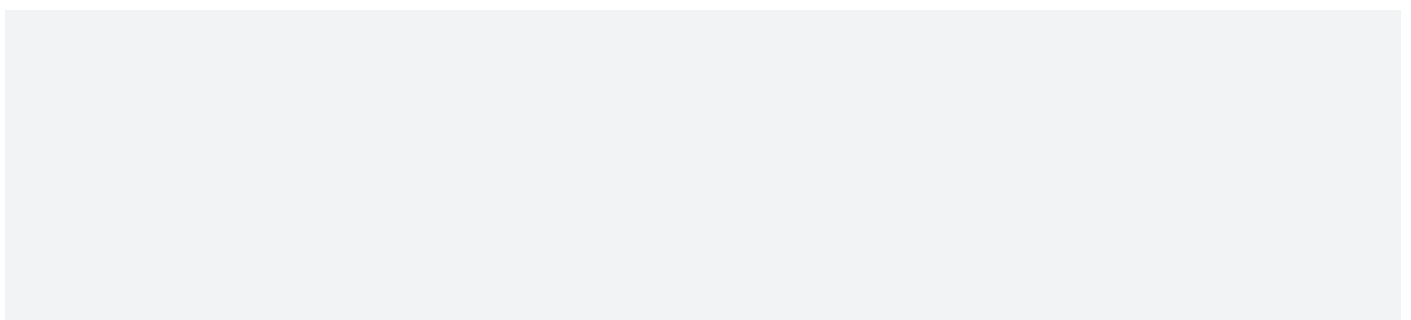
4. Have you ever organised an event and planned for risks and anything else that might go wrong?



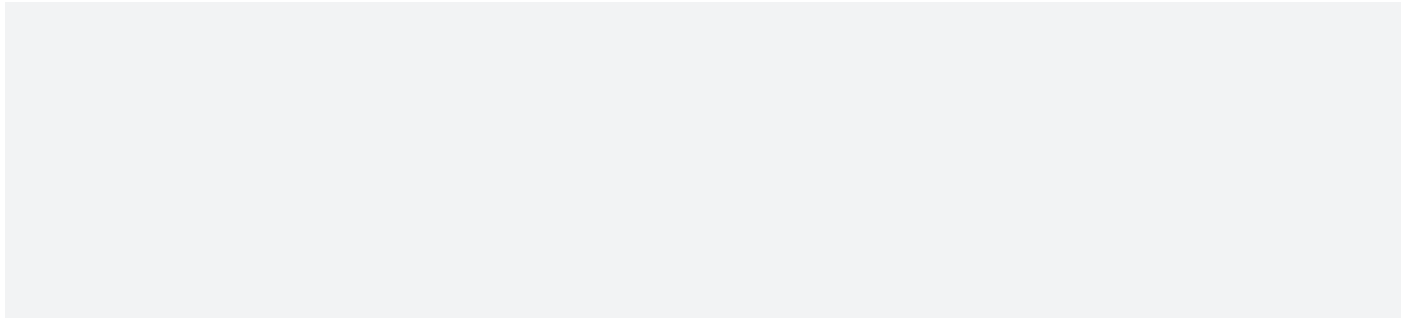
5. Have you ever had to put a back-up plan into action?



6. Have you ever had to manage a budget for an organisation or individual?



7. Can you remember a time when you have worked under pressure and what you did to manage the situation?



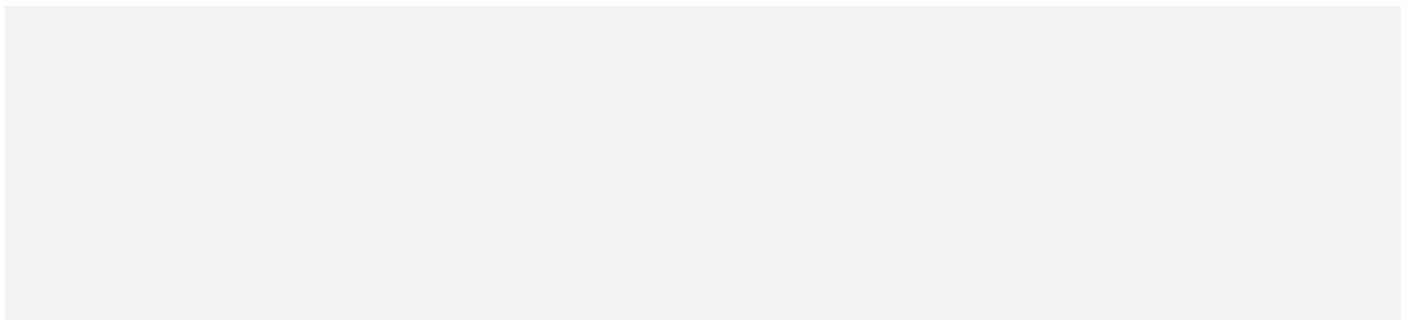
Focus

You're flexible and good at adapting to change

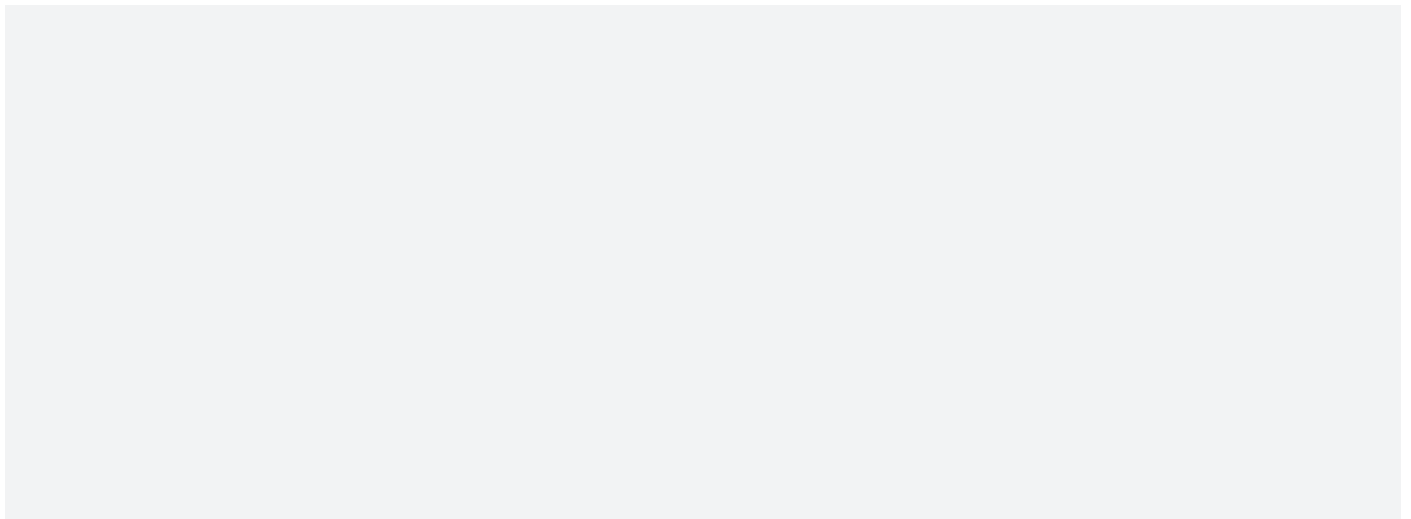
What's your attitude to change, especially when they occur at the last minute? Can you keep your cool and get on with what needs to be done? This is where thinking on your feet and being a problem solver comes in. If you find that you are the kind of person who always tries to remain practical, who focuses on what needs to be done, and who tries to be flexible without compromising the required standard, then you have skills that will be valuable to many employers. You will be the kind of person who is flexible and unfazed by sudden changes or developments because you know that there is always a way to get to the bottom of things. You will have shown that you have these skills through being able to respond well to situations or needs at short notices.

Got the skills?

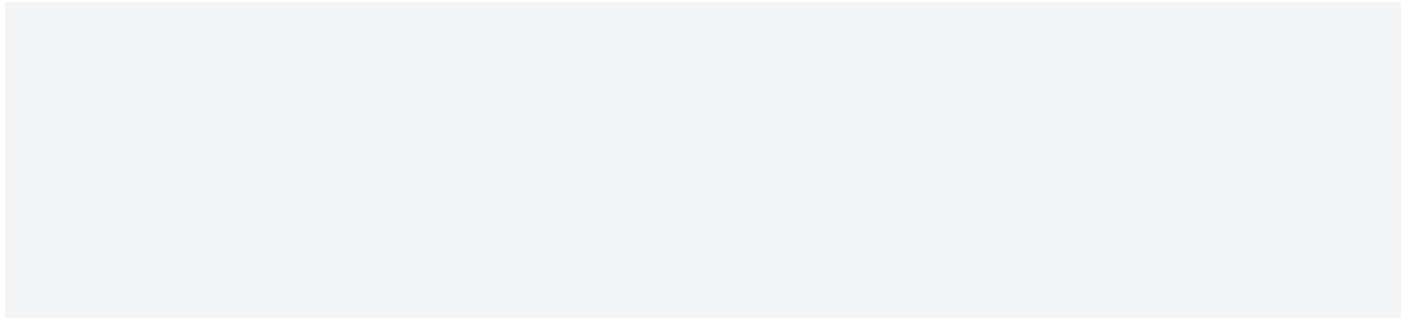
1. Have you taken part in treks or other achievements such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award?



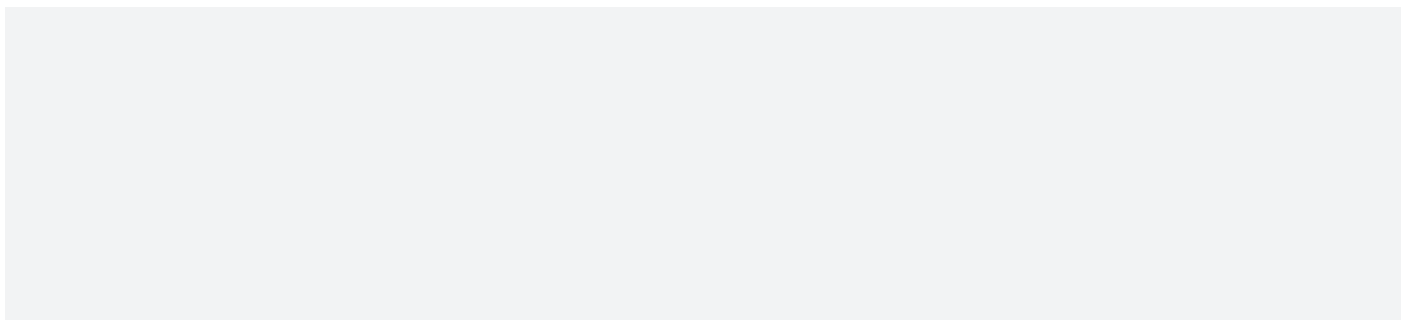
2. Have you ever gone out of your way to complete a task or to ensure a deadline was met?



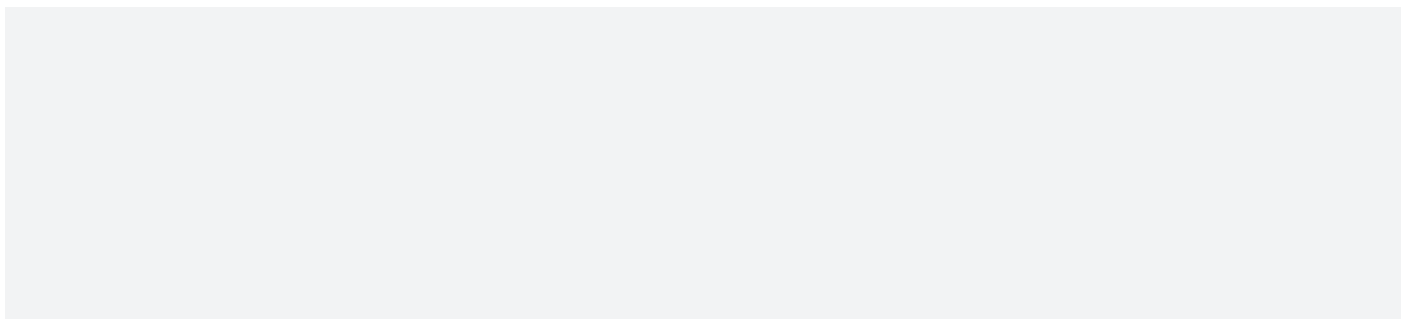
3. Are you the type of person that is willing to take up a shift at work at short notice?



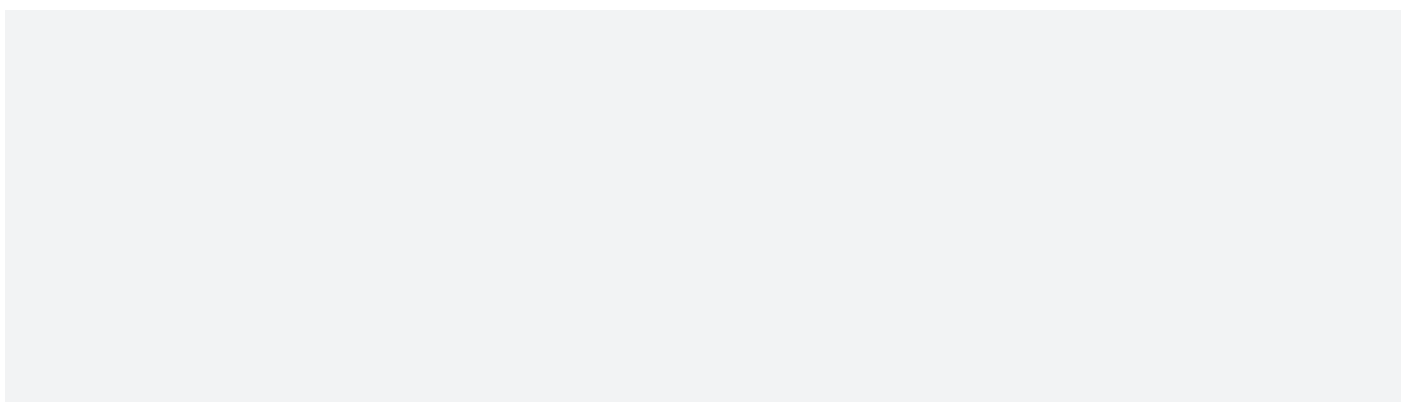
4. Do you try new things that are outside of your comfort zone?



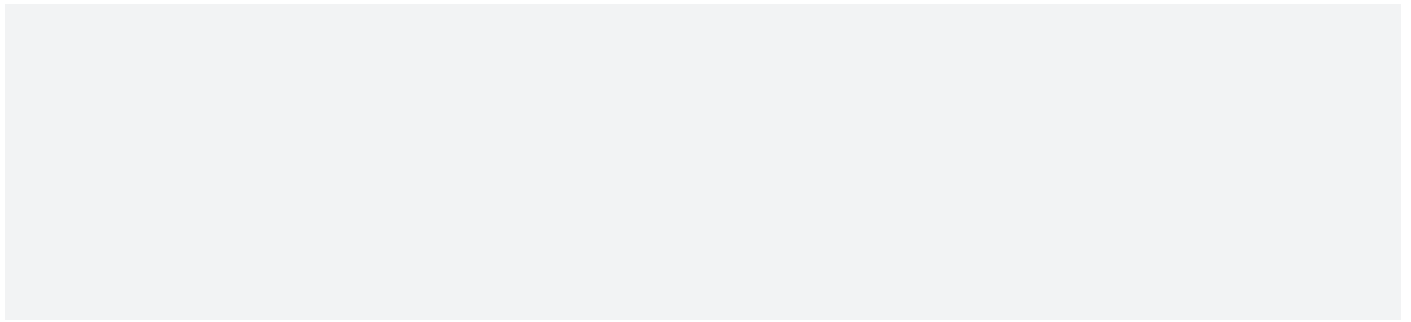
5. Are you good at handling new or unfamiliar situations?



6. Have you ever had to adapt to a change at college, work or university that others found difficult?



7. Have you ever kept your cool in a crisis and/or had to calm down others while doing so?



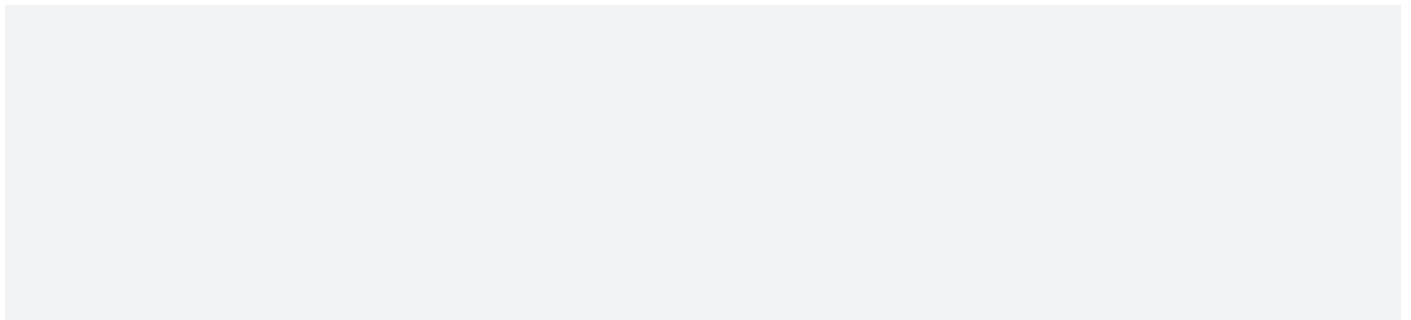
Personal Development

You have a good idea of the type of professional knowledge you want to acquire, and seek it

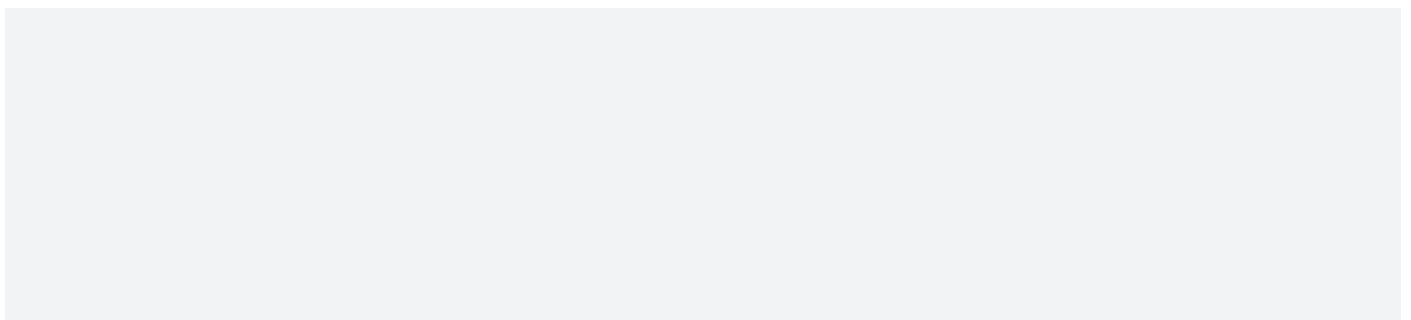
Employers understand that you will be new to some situations but also want to see some evidence of a desire to personally develop your skills. They want to know that you are the kind of person who thinks about how to build on the skills you have and will do your own research into how best to go about getting the knowledge you need. This is especially so if you can show how these skills will help you perform your job better, so think about how you have demonstrated this in the past – at college, university, work or in your personal life perhaps around an interest or hobby.

Got the skills?

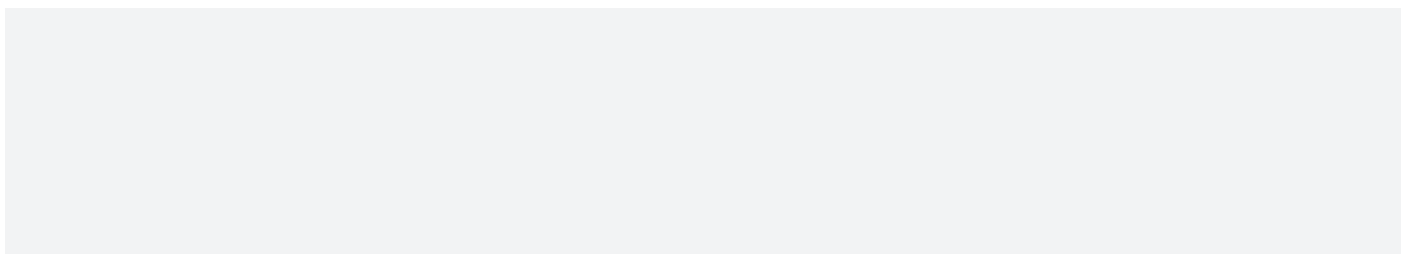
1. Have you thought about what professional qualifications you want to gain in the future to move your career forward?



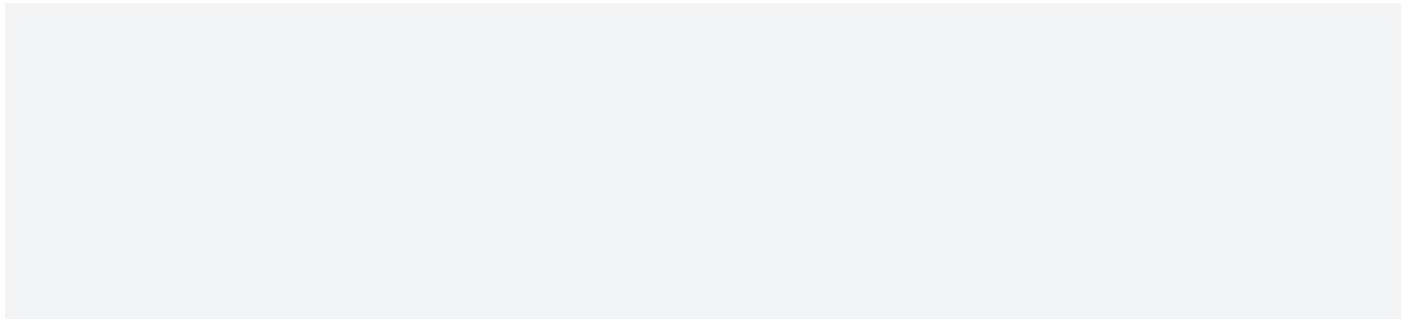
2. What steps have you taken so far to achieve the skills you want to gain?



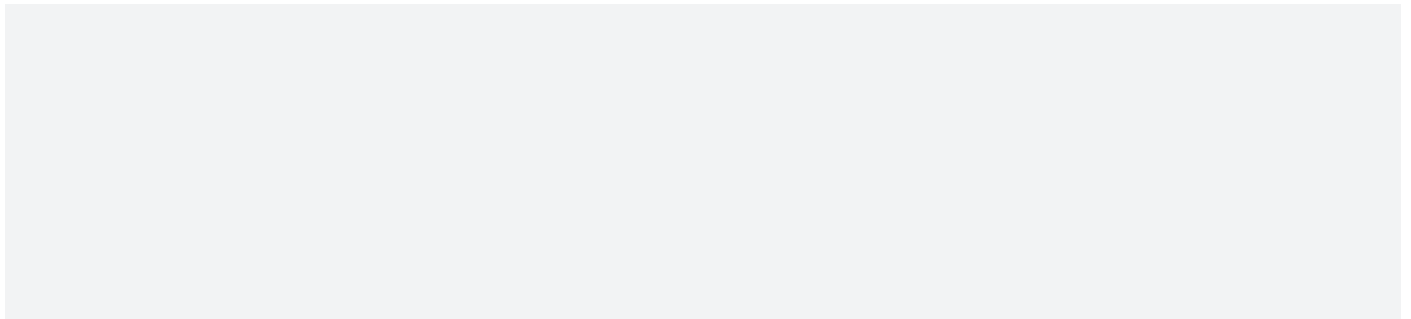
3. What are your aspirations for your career – where would you like it to take you?



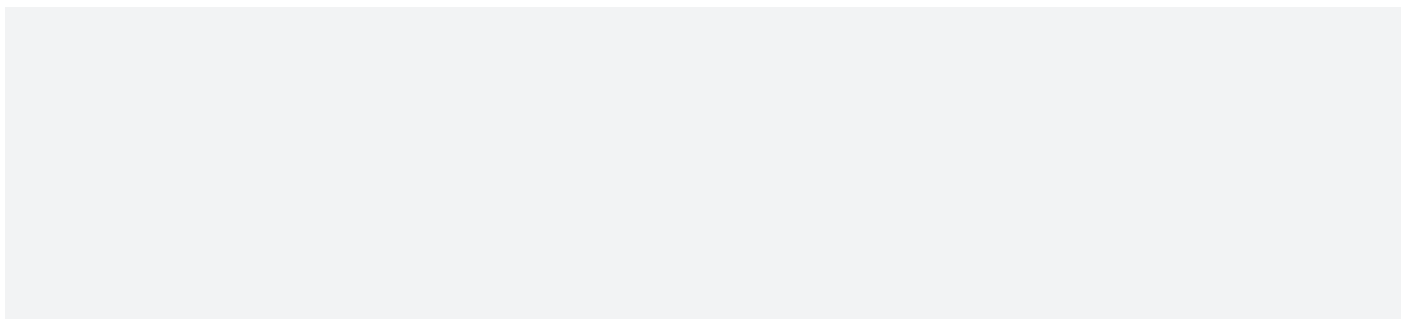
4. Does the company you're interested in have current or future plans that complement your own?



5. How have you built on what you learned at university during work placements or voluntary work?



6. Is there anything you found difficult or challenging in the past that you can now approach with greater confidence?



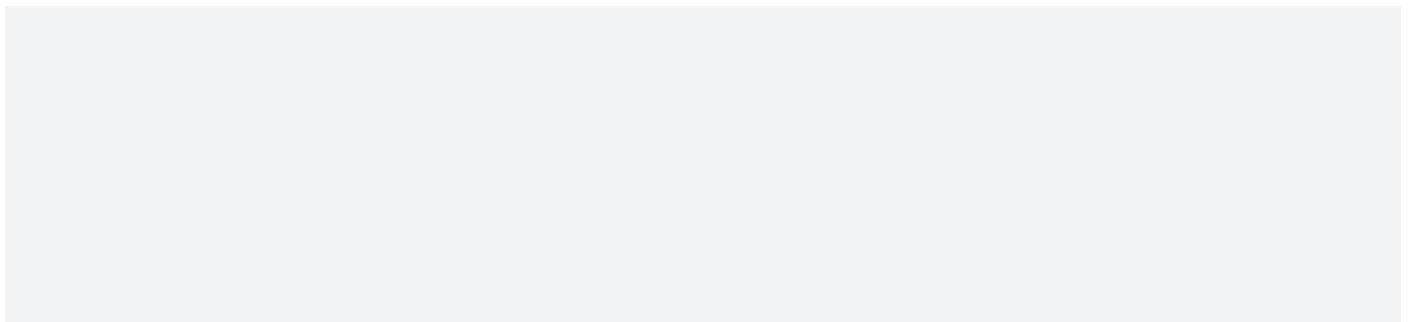
Business Awareness

You make it your business to understand how business works

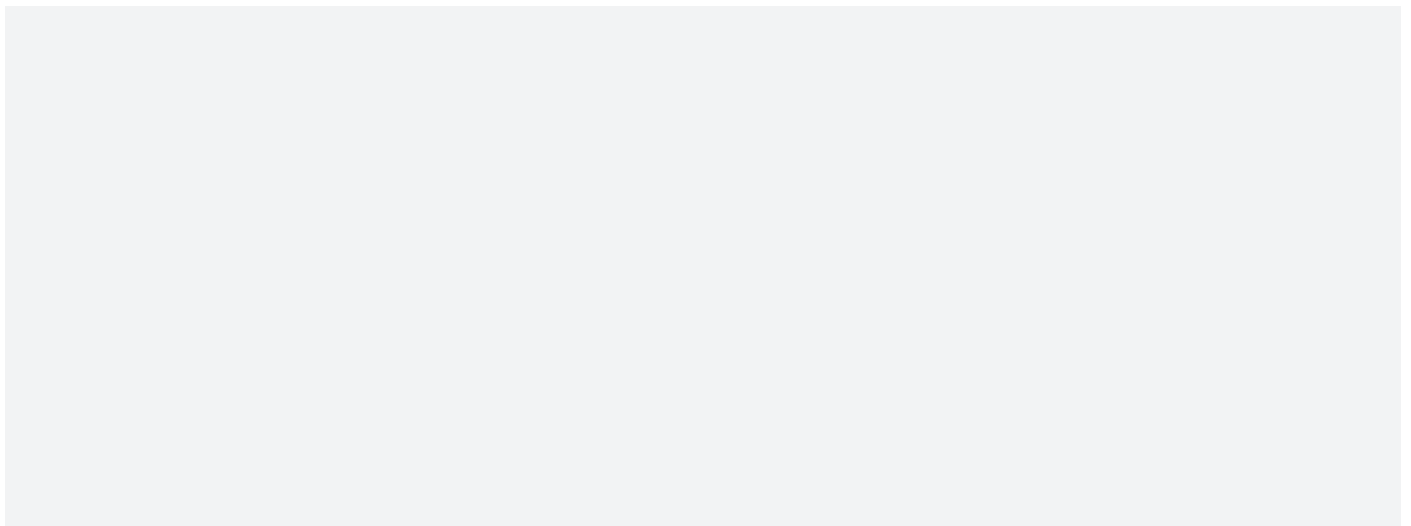
You are the sort of person who puts both care and effort into what you do in order to get the results that are needed. You understand the difference between performing a job and getting results. You will be passionate about getting the results because it gives you a sense of satisfaction to see customers and clients satisfied, so you often go out of the way to find the right solutions, even if it means going above and beyond what's expected. This means you understand what makes a business tick and you think about how to improve its processes. If finding out how a business works, how different departments work together, who its target customers are, and who its competitors are, is important to you, then you have skills that will be important to an employer.

Got the skills?

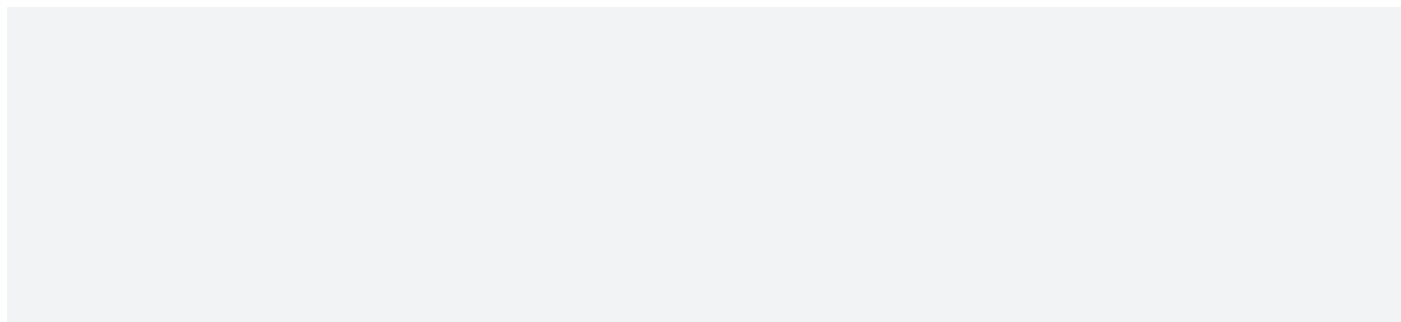
1. What extra steps have you taken to find out about a company, about its vision and how it operates?



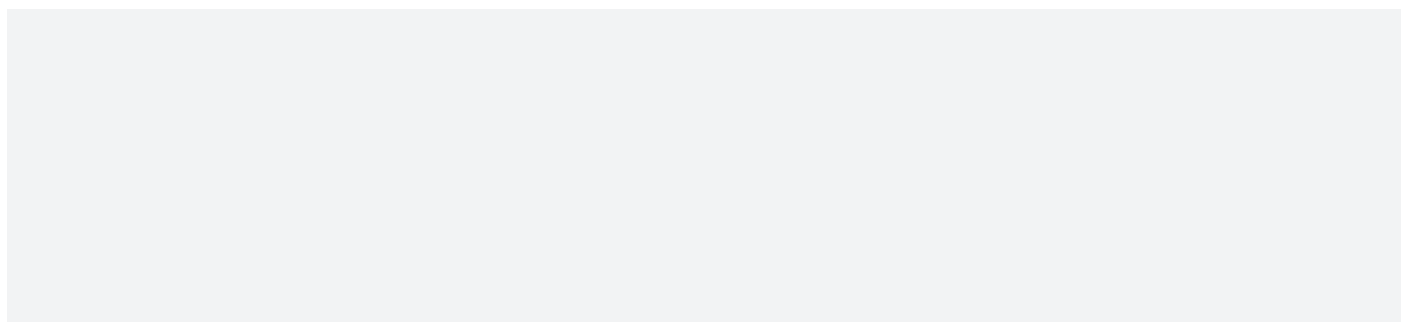
2. Do you have career goals that would also help the company to achieve its objectives?



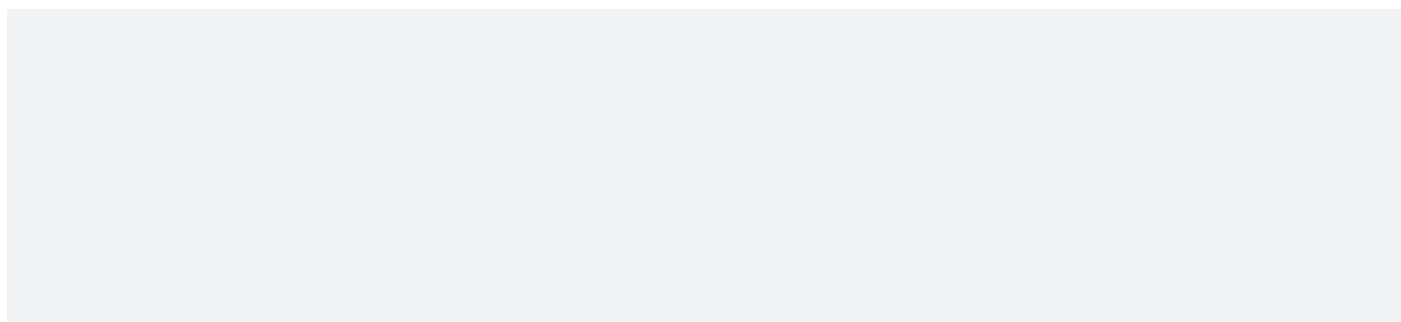
3. What do you do to keep up with news relating to the industry or with current affairs?



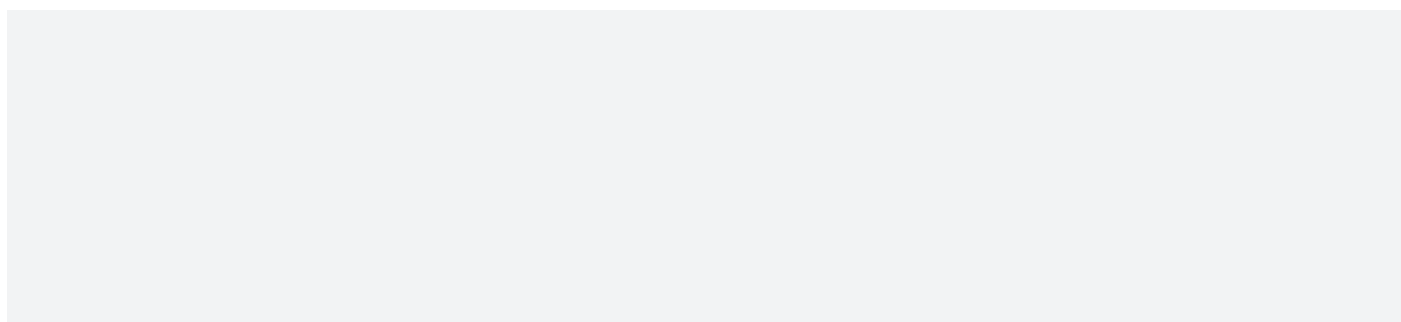
4. Do you know what makes a business tick?



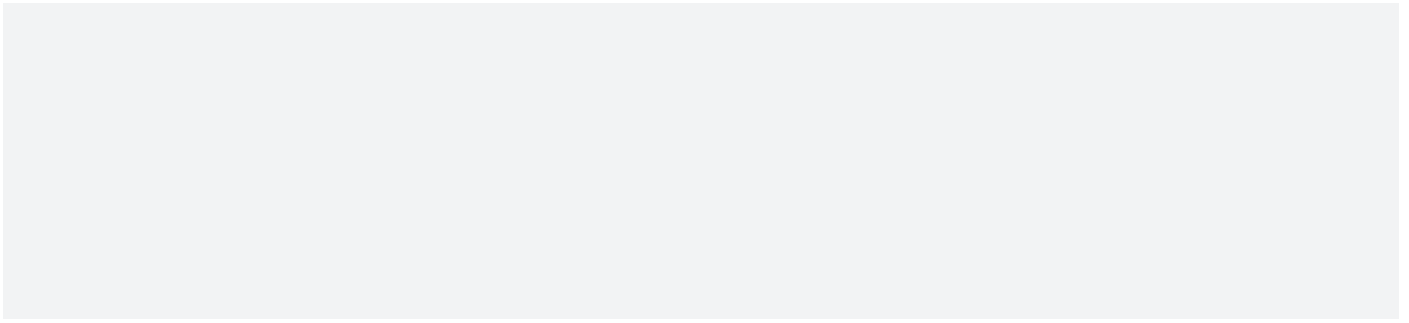
5. Have you ever organised a social event that went well – do you know why it went well?



6. Have you ever contributed ideas on how to make a project, event or department more successful?



7. Can you identify an area of knowledge or skills gained from your studies that would help a business?



Part Two

Building on your skills

Now that you have spent some time thinking about the core skills you have you need make time to build on them. Have you ever thought about how to build on the skills you have? If not, don't worry, as most graduates haven't either, at least not with any clear purpose in mind.

However, as a result everything can seem haphazard and inconsistent and, as there is no clear objective, it looks as if anything goes. If you can consciously develop your skills in line with a clear purpose then it will increase your value, or personal branding. This can make a huge difference to your efforts, not only when looking for a job but lifelong into your career. Here are a few ideas to help.

Be part of the right networks

Make networking a part of your weekly routine. Not only will it help you to strengthen both your communication and relationship building skills but it is also a valuable activity for people looking for a job or who want to develop their careers. Aside from the skills gained while building your networks, you never know when your contacts will come in handy – such as hearing about vacancies, finding the expertise needed to solve a work related problem or getting help to answer a question that's likely to come up in an interview. Think about the type of people you'd like to meet and talk to – job areas, such as marketing, finance or HR, or in connection with specific tasks, such as improving social media skills, sales skills or copywriting. Use a variety of methods to when networking: you could send a email to someone you have spoken to in a while asking what they are up to; make the time to attend events and meet people face to face; join professional industry groups and/or social media networks such as LinkedIn.

Develop a pitch

All sales people have a basic pitch that is used to begin a conversation. As you're selling your skills you should have one too. Your pitch will help to strengthen your communication skills, and the more you practice it the more perfect and fluent you will become at presenting yourself. Begin with what marketers commonly call the 'elevator pitch'. This is basically a summary of who you are, what you do and what you want to achieve – said in about the same length of time it takes to travel a couple of floors in an elevator. You can use it while networking at events, visiting a careers fair and even on your cover letters or during an interview. People should get a good sense of who you are and then if they want to know more they can ask questions. When writing your elevator pitch try to be clear and concise on the following: What did you study? What do you do / want to do to earn a living? Do you have a specialist area of interest within your field? And where do you want your career to go in the future? Once you've written it, practice it with a friend or colleague in an elevator!

Develop your writing skills

In our age of technology and speed-of-lightning automated systems, don't underestimate the importance of good old-fashioned writing skills. Writing is an area that lets down a lot of jobseekers. They forget to capitalise, how to use proper grammar, where to put full stops and commas, and perhaps most importantly, to check spelling. Get into a habit of reading through everything you write before you send it off to others. Read it aloud and you're more likely to recognise where commas and full stops need to go. Do not rely on spell checkers alone or forget to check a person's name has been spelled properly. Your sentences and paragraphs are also important. Try to make your point as early as you can whether writing an email, letter or personal statement, and please avoid those horrible and unnecessary !!! . Help your reader by alternating between long and short sentences and opt for shorter paragraphs. When sending an email try to make your subject line reflect the topic you want to talk about as closely as possible.

Keep your online image consistent and clean

Wise up on the damage certain information can cause to your job prospects, reputation or image if included on your social media profile. Information about your wild party nights, strong personal convictions or personal problems are best kept private or between your personal friends as they could be detrimental to your career. It's best to avoid using personal social media accounts for the professional contacts you are trying to build up. Your online image can work to help you move your career forward if you stick to information, interests and news that will demonstrate your professional interests and present you as the type of person someone wants to hire. Be consistent in what you say about yourself both within your profile and across different social media sites. Pick out the achievements you've had from paid and unpaid work, internships, freelancing, college, university and even hobbies. Talk about your career aspirations and achievements, any specialist areas, awards and successes. Talk about interesting events you've attended, stuff you've learned, books you've read or videos you've watched that relate to your interest area. Follow people you admire, and occasionally reply, comment on or retweet their messages. You might just get noticed.

Make first impressions count

It's the little things we do that are most likely to help us to stand out, such as remembering a person's name or something else they've shared, sending a thank you note or congratulating someone on an achievement. Get into the habit of always following people up: if you had a conversation with someone who found something you shared interesting, send them more information, such as a link to find out more; follow up interviews and meetings with a thank you email; try to meet up with people on your network now and again for a coffee; research the background of people and companies before a meeting or interview. All of these are great for building on your people skills, networks and business awareness.

For more help or information with finding the job you really want contact us at;

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