



You're Qualified: Translating Academics into Employment Assets

You will be asked many questions during an interview. Most of these are designed to answer the same question: What have you done that qualifies you for this position? Translating classroom and part-time work into experiences a prospective employer understands requires some thought and practice – before you arrive at the interview.

The first step is to examine the job description and highlight the skills the employer seeks. If the job description is very brief, do an internet search for “What makes an outstanding (type of job you are applying for).” You will probably find multiple articles written by leaders in the field, describing the characteristic and skills sought by employers in your field.

We have created the chart on the next page that shows how to use classroom and part-time work experiences to respond to questions about your qualifications, such as “Tell me about a time you....”

As you prepare your responses, make sure to put them in context. Describe the situation, the actions you took, and the outcome. Remember, it may have been years since the employer graduated; it is your challenge to translate your experience into information he or she can use to determine if you are the most qualified candidate.

– Interview2Work is committed to assisting new graduates prepare for interviews, salary negotiations, and the first 30 days on the job. Visit interview2work.com to view all available resources and coaching services.

The job requirement	What the employer really wants to know	Your related academic experience
Managed a project	If I give you an assignment, will you complete it?	Pick a project most related to the type of work you would be doing. Give an overview of the goals of the project. Specify if you were part of a team or worked on your own, discuss the tools/skills you used, and the outcome. Develop three or four examples of your project management skills. The size of the project is less important than the processes.
Lead a team	Can you build trust-based relationships with your peers?	If you think you have never been a team leader, think again. Team leadership is about gaining the support and cooperation of others. Whether you have been an elected/appointed group leader or got everyone to agree where to go for dinner — you have demonstrated leadership skills. Think about how you got the group to reach agreement. Did you share lots of ideas and ask the group to pick one? Did you survey what everyone wanted, and find a middle ground? If your leadership experience is informal, like the restaurant choice, introduce your answer by saying something like, “It seems like my peers count on me to take the lead in event planning ...” and then talk about your style. If you have held an elected/appointed leadership role, respond by naming the position, your responsibility, and what you achieved.
Improved a process	Are you a creative thinker?	When did you improve efficiency? Did you find a better way for your group to complete an assignment? If you did not have the opportunity to make a change in a group or academic setting, reflect on the changes you have made since you first started school. Did you improve your approach to completing assignments? Whatever your example, talk about the situation before you made changes and the result from the method you implemented.
Took initiative	Will you require minimum supervision?	Did you volunteer to get a project group together? Did you get your books early and start studying before classes started? The employer wants to know you are a self-starter.
Mastered a new skill	Will you stay current on developments in your field?	This should be easy because it is what education is all about. However, you want to talk in detail about a skill related to the job. Go into depth on one skill. The employer wants to determine how quickly you learn new skills.
Handled a crisis	Do you have critical thinking skills?	You don’t need to have rushed into a burning building to have a strong answer for this. A crisis is when things are just not going how they should. Reflect on a time you came to the rescue of a project or assignment. Detail the steps taken, how you interacted with those around you, and the outcome.
Dealt with a difficult client	Do you have good people skills?	If you have not had direct client/customer experience, think of other students or staff as clients. In either case, describe the situation, what you did, and the outcome.
Applied what you learned in the classroom	Do you understand the connection between what you learned and what we do here?	How have you used what you have learned to complete a project, improve your understanding of a social issue, or taught someone else something you learned? Provide details on the project, the skills you used, and the outcome.