

HOW TO DESCRIBE PREVIOUS JOBS ON YOUR CV

by Rutherford

And on your
LinkedIn page

When applying for a job, it is vital to remember that agencies, companies & organisations hire people only when they have ‘a problem’ (for example, a job that isn’t being done, or an opportunity that would not otherwise be realised). To stand out from the (possibly hundreds of) other applicants, you must be able to demonstrate (not just *claim*) that you can – and will – solve their ‘problem’.

The two key considerations for employers in the recruitment process are:

1. *Can you* do the job?
This refers to your knowledge, skills and abilities.
2. *Will you* do the job?
This refers to your attitude towards your responsibilities.

Proving that you can do the job

Evaluating your knowledge, skills and abilities is (relatively) simple and straightforward – but the basis on which they will evaluate your knowledge, your skills and your abilities is not what you may think.

Despite the importance many students place on the marks they receive, your degree classification tells the employer *almost nothing* about what you know or what you can do.

This is because prospective employers do not know on what your marks were based (what projects you were assigned, the criteria by which your work was assessed, or how strictly these criteria were applied in assessing your work). As a result, employers are well aware that someone with a 2:2 from University X – where assignments are challenging and the assessment of work reflects current industry standards – may actually be more capable and better qualified than someone with a First from University Y – where lecturers are (*ahem...*) ‘encouraged’ by management to award high marks as part of the university’s marketing and recruitment strategy for attracting customers. (***Come and study with us – because our students get very high final marks...***)

(I will spare you a repetition of the argument that students – and their employment prospects – would benefit more by reflecting on the feedback they received in order to understand how to improve their knowledge, skills & abilities than complaining about “unfair” marks. Before you engage in ‘grade grubbing’, consider what it is that you are asking for: a mark that implies that you know more – or that you performed better – than you did. Does that help you improve your knowledge, skills or abilities?)

There are, in fact, only three people who care about your degree classification:

- i. Your nan
- ii. You
- iii. Your parents

End of list.

What *will* convince employers that you have the necessary knowledge, skills and abilities is *a portfolio of your work*. (The term ‘portfolio’ is often mistakenly assumed to refer only to creative executions. It doesn’t. A graduate looking for a job as, say, an account manager should also have a portfolio of work: one which includes examples of your research, analysis & strategy.) **THIS** will show a prospective employer (one way or the other...) what your marks don’t: whether you are capable of doing the job.

Proving that you will do the job

Demonstrating that you will do the job (that you approach and carry out assigned role/s) in a mature, professional and responsible manner is, admittedly, more difficult – which is why it is the aspect of the recruitment process that usually gives the prospective employer the most difficulty.

From the perspective of the applicant (that's you...), there are two issues:

- Making sure that you clearly understand the attitude that will be expected of you
- And then – assuming that you do understand the attitude expected of you – finding a way to *demonstrate* ('prove') this to the prospective employer. (And no; simply claiming or promising that you have a professional and responsible attitude to your work won't convince them.)

How, then, to demonstrate ('prove') that you know what is expected of you and that you will deliver?

As explained at the beginning, agencies, companies and organisations only hire people when they have a 'problem' (or a gap to be filled). Regardless of the role – from Executive Director to junior creative (so junior, they don't even merit sentence case) employers want to hire people who will achieve results. To be the kind of person who achieves results, you have to be *trying to achieve results*. In other words, you must believe – and prove that you believe – that your primary responsibility is 'to achieve results'.

Convincing a prospective employer that you are this kind of person is done in two ways:

In your CV:

Rephrase your description of what you did in your last job (or what you did in your university projects) from a focus on what you were "responsible for..." to what you *achieved* and/or *accomplished*. (What results did you achieve or produce for the organisation? What did you make happen? What does the organisation now have as a direct result of your contribution?)

By describing your previous role(s) in terms of your *achievements*, *accomplishments* or the *problems you solved*, you demonstrate clearly that this is how you 'see' your responsibility.

In your letter of application ('cover letter'):

Explain clearly how your knowledge, skills and abilities will enable you to achieve the results the organisation needs (as defined by the detailed job description which you ignore at your own risk)

This too, will demonstrate clearly that this is how you 'see' your responsibility. But of course, you won't be able to do this *unless you understand the nature of their problems*. This will require research. (This research also 'proves' that you are the kind of person who is focussed on results.)

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