PGR tips: Evaluating and developing your skills

Evaluating your skills is a useful exercise as it can help you to think about your future career path and is useful when you are applying for jobs. It can also identify what you need to improve on to help you finish your research.

Use the checklist below to identify the skills you already have and those you'd like to develop:
(these examples have been taken from the UK Research Councils' Skills Statement for research students - visit www.grad.ac.uk/jss for the full list)

Personal Effectiveness

- I have a willingness and ability to learn and acquire knowledge
- I am creative, innovative and original in my approach to research
- I am flexible and open-minded
- I am self-aware and able to identify my own training needs
- I am self-disciplined, motivated and thorough
- I recognise my own boundaries and draw upon/use sources of support as appropriate
- I show initiative, work independently and am self-reliant

Communication Skills

- I can write clearly and in a style appropriate to purpose, e.g. progress reports, published documents, thesis
- I can construct coherent arguments and articulate ideas clearly to a range of audiences, formally and informally through a variety of techniques
- I can constructively defend research outcomes at seminars and viva examination
- I contribute to promoting the public understanding of my research field
- I effectively support the learning of others when involved in teaching, mentoring or demonstrating activities

Networking and Team working

- I am developing and maintaining co-operative networks and working relationships with supervisors, colleagues and peers, within my institution and the wider research community
- I understand my behaviours and impact on others when working in and contributing to the success of formal and informal teams
- I listen, give and receive feedback and respond perceptively to others

Career Management

- I appreciate the need for, and show commitment to, continued professional development
- I take ownership for, and manage, my career progression, set realistic and achievable career goals, and identify and develop ways to improve employability
- I can demonstrate an insight into the transferable nature of research skills to other work environments and the range of career opportunities within and outside academia
- I can present my skills, personal attributes and experiences through effective CVs, applications and interviews

Collecting evidence of your skills

For the skills you already have, write down evidence of when you have demonstrated them. You could use the 'STAR' Approach to help you lay out examples:

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Situation - When, where, with whom?
Task - Describe the situation or the task you were faced with
Action - How? What action did you take? Sometimes people focus on what the group did without mentioning their individual contribution
Result - What results did you achieve/conclusions did you reach/what did you learn from the experience?

After identifying the areas you want to develop think about:

- What is stopping you from achieving your goal or things that concern you
- What will help you achieve your goal
- The resources that might help you

Then set some deadlines! Have a look at www.grad.ac.uk/evaluateskills to see some examples of personal objective plans.

2007 GRADschools

GRADschools offer you the opportunity to identify ways to develop yourself, to see the relevance of your skills in different environments and aim to support you in keeping your research on track. Details of the 2007 GRADschools have recently been added to the UK GRAD website so visit www.grad.ac.uk/courselist to book a place!

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