Translating PhD Skills for Non-Academic Employers

Presentation for students in SHEF
(Social Sciences, Humanities, Education, & Fine Arts)

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Overview of presentation

- What are transferable skills & why are they important

- How you can assess your transferable skills

- How you can talk about your transferable skills

- Examples

- How to apply "skills" language to resumes, cover letters, & interviews

Activity

- Fill out Question 1 in Part A

- List some of the skills and accomplishments you have gained from your PhD or Master's program
  - Type of research, data analytics, number of publications and presentations
  - Example: "I presented a paper I wrote at my discipline's national conference"
  - Example: "I taught an upper-division course as the instructor of record"

So what is a transferable skill anyway?

- Skills you acquire in one work setting that can be applied to another setting

- MANY academic skills go beyond academic labels and signifiers of success
  - Academese: "I have X number of peer-reviewed publications"
  - Layperson terms: "I have the ability to synthesize research, formulate an opinion, and share written reports/articles to a broad audience"

- The art is learning how to write about your skills to a non-academic audience

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Why you need to know (or discover) your transferable skills

- Looking for a job outside academia

- Changing your careers/focus

- Re-entering the workforce

- Making a transition from school to work

- Enhancing awareness of skills gained for academic world

Not convinced yet?

- Examine your negative assumptions about skills

- Believe that you have transferable skills (yes, you!)

- Develop your skills & get experience

CHECK YOURSELF YOU MUST

BEFORE WRECK YOURSELF YOU DO

quickmeme.com
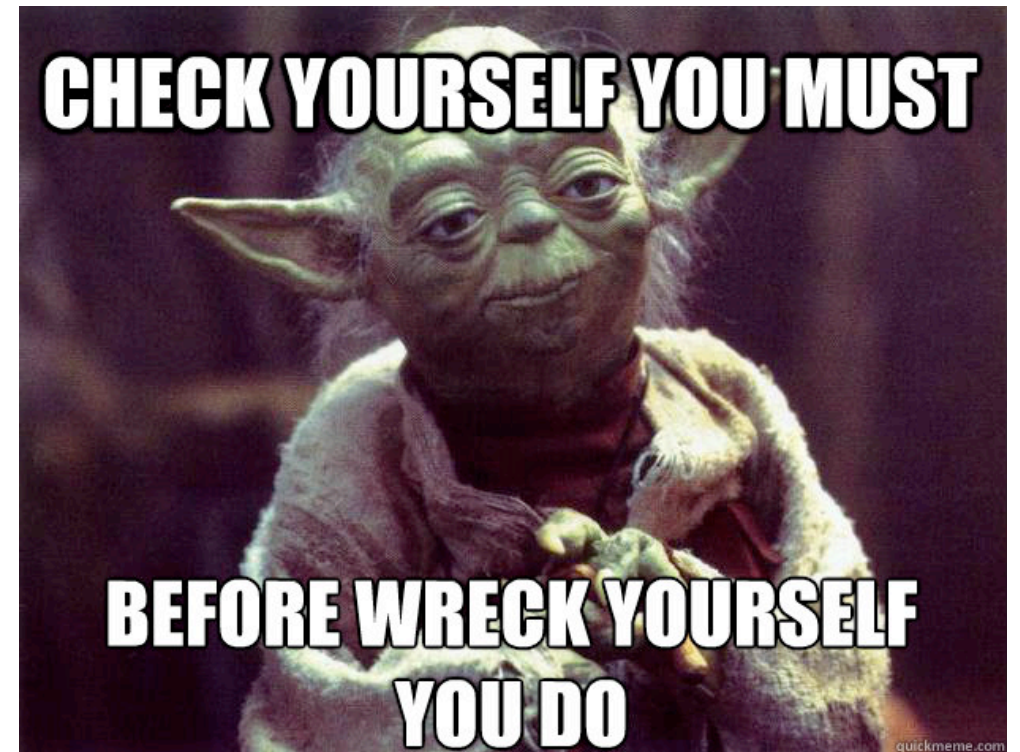
Employer mindset

- Employers care less about the specifics of your research topic and more about the skills you gained in the process of doing your research

- Employers love:
  - People who have leadership skills
  - People who can get along well with others
  - People who work independently
  - People who can write well
  - People who can meet deadlines
  - People who are critical thinkers

- Luckily, that's YOU!

Employer mindset (cont)

- For many employers (except science industries and consulting agencies), working with a PhD might be new for them

- Employers often have assumptions about PhDs that you need to know about, address, and mitigate
  - Can you think of examples of such assumptions?
  - Maybe you also have some fears about the non-academic world?

- Transferable skills help you show with evidence how your graduate work is relatable to lots of different industries

Identifying your transferable skills

- Think outside your current role as a graduate student
  - Consider skills you use in the rest of your life (e.g. family life, volunteer work, hobbies & interests, previous jobs)

- ACTIVITY: Fill out Question 2 in Part A

- List skills and accomplishments you had before being a graduate student
  - E.g., "I worked at a nonprofit where I was promoted my first year for great leadership"
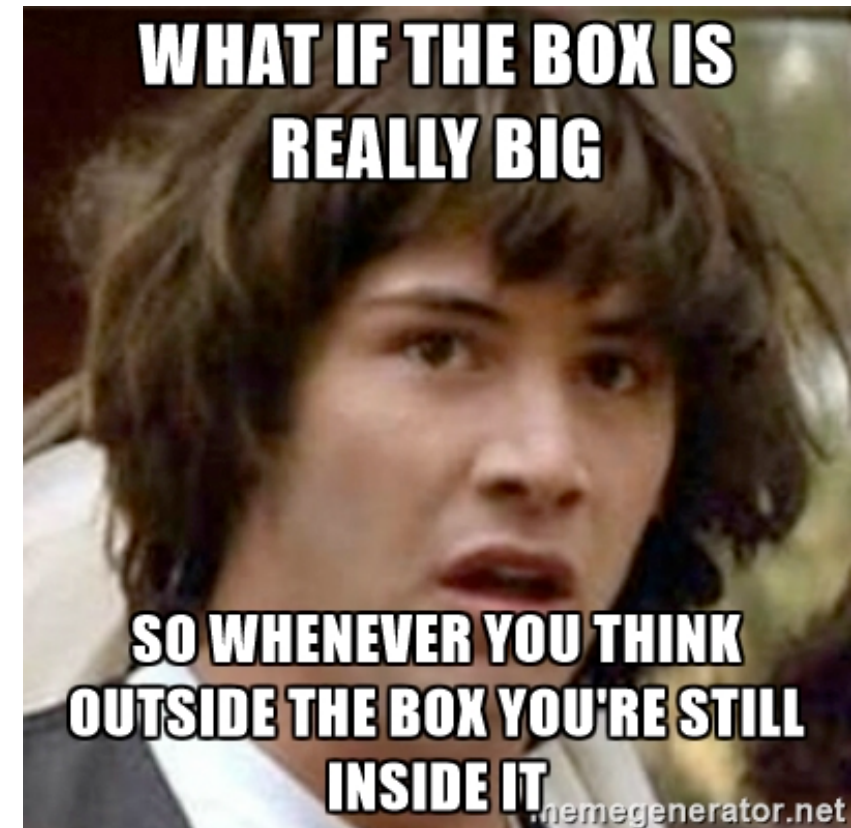
Identifying your transferable skills (cont)

- Research potential job descriptions and past job descriptions
  - Look at roles that interest you
  - Compare what employers are looking for and what qualities fit you
  - Look at your old job descriptions and see how your position/ qualifications were described

- Assessments: Consider taking the MBTI or StrengthsFinder (for free!)
  - Discover personality preferences you have and how to talk about your personality
  - StrengthsFinder identifies your top 5 strengths
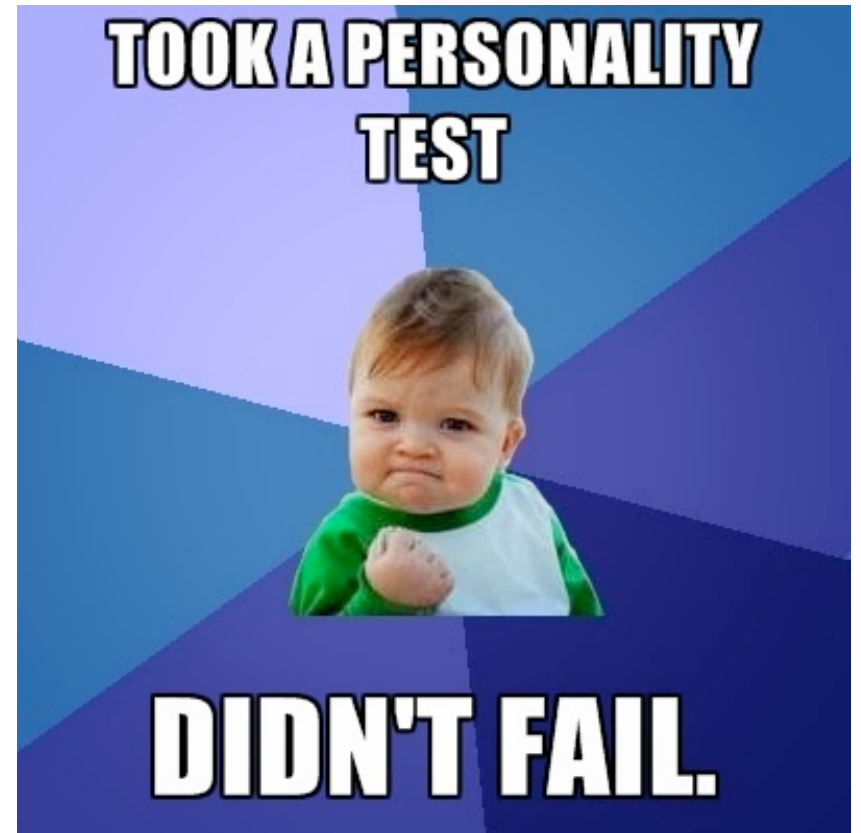
Tasks ➡ skills

PHD ACCOMPLISH-MENT

Teaching Assistant for upper-level religious studies course

TASKS FOR CV

Preparing lesson plans

Gathering information and organizing slides

Lecturing a class of 50-100 students

Grading papers

Answering student questions and concerns

TRANSFERABLE SKILLS

Organizational ability

Planning and scheduling

Public speaking

Ability to explain difficult concepts

Utilizing diplomacy in managing conflict

WORDING FOR THE RESUME

Developed and implemented complex material in the field of religious studies

Provided engaging presentations to 50-100 students with varying levels of understanding

Mentored students on writing and research, evaluated student performance

Managed course policies, enforced necessary procedures, and utilized diplomacy in managing conflict
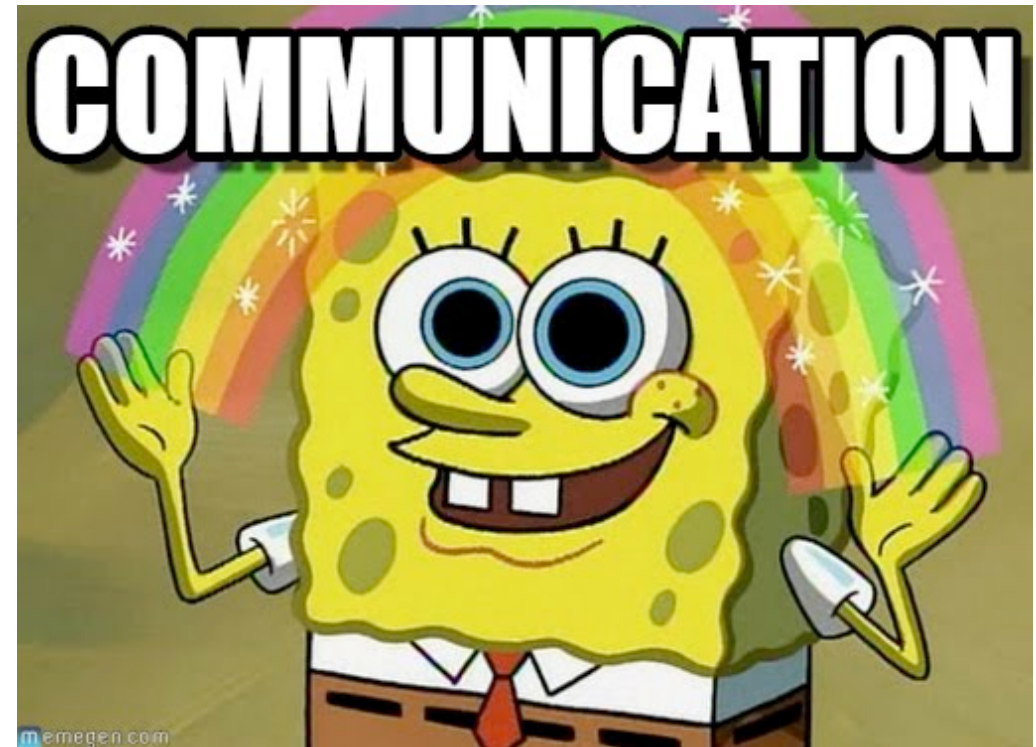
PhD transferable skills list
(Michigan Career Center, 2016) (Chris Humphrey, 2016) (Vitae, 2010)

- Research and Information Management
  - Identify sources of information applicable to a given problem
  - Understand and synthesize large quantities of research/data, develop conclusions and reports based on findings
  - Design and analyze surveys/experiments/data
  - Develop organizing principles to effectively sort and evaluate data
 - Manage a budget, organize meetings and events

PhD transferable skills list (cont)

- Communication, Oral, and Written Skills
  - Prepare concise and logically-written materials
  - Craft arguments and make recommendations in reports
  - Evidence of written skills through multiple publications
  - Explain complex concepts in basic terms and language
  - Write effective grant proposals, past experience has resulted in $$$
  - Comfortable presenting to a large audience at varied levels of expertise

PhD transferable skills list (cont)

- Interpersonal and Leadership
  - Facilitate group discussions and lead meetings
  - Collaborate with others on projects

- Organization and Project Management
  - Complete project timelines and meet deadlines consistently
  - Identify goals to be accomplished
  - Prioritize tasks while anticipating potential problems

- Entrepreneurial and Self-Management Skills
  - Work effectively under pressure to meet deadlines
  - Comprehend new material and subject matter quickly
 - Work effectively with little supervision and within a group setting
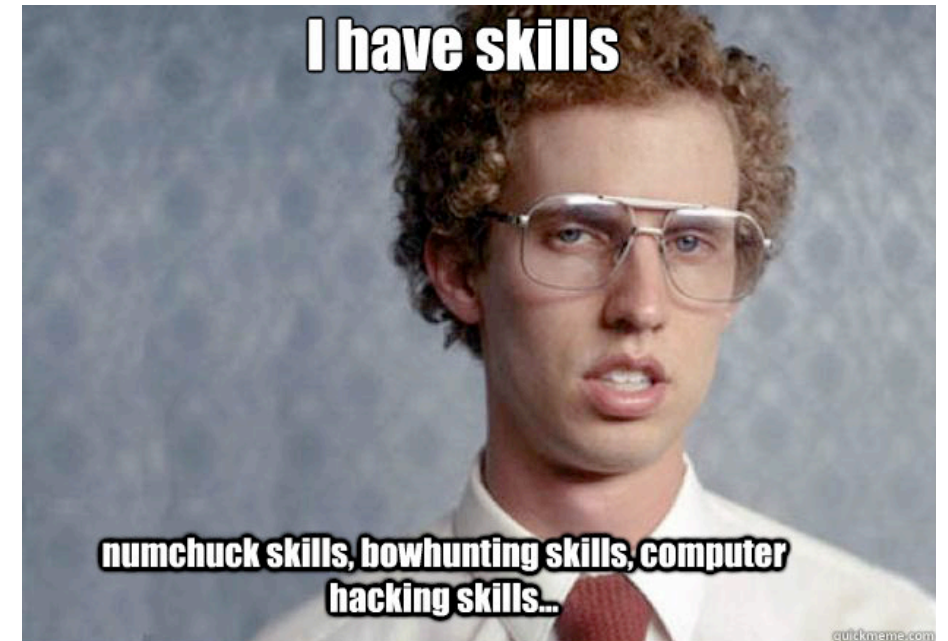
Activity

- FILL OUT QUESTION 3 ON PART A
  - Rewrite one of your PhD accomplishments as a transferable skill

- SHARE YOUR RESULTS
  - Turn to your neighbor and discuss how you translated your accomplishment into a skill (or multiple skills!)

Having trouble thinking of skills? Be sure to visit the Imagine PhD website to use their skills inventory tool!

Where to go from here

- For the remainder of the presentation, we'll talk briefly about how to apply your skills:
  - Writing about them in your resume
  - Writing about them in your cover letter
  - Talking about them in an interview
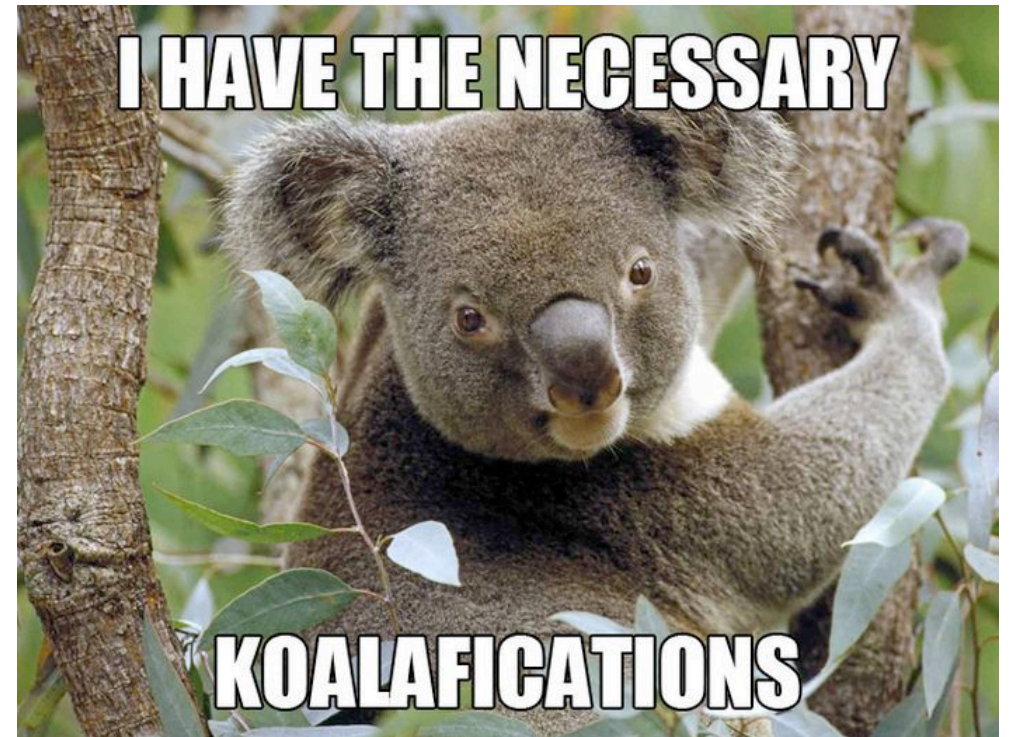
Resumes

- Transferable Skills → Resume Language
  - Instead of listing duties or tasks on your resume, utilize transferable skills
  - Write descriptive bullets showing accomplishments & quantify where you can
  - Start with action verbs
  - Focus on job ad language

EXAMPLE
Position: Graduate Student Researcher

- CV/Task
  - Recorded and tracked data from surveys from 1999-2009, used STATA to analyze results, 2 publications in XXXXX, presented at YYYY conference

- Transferable Skills
  - Designed experimental research projects, utilizing expertise in social psychological theories to formulate hypotheses
  - Presented research that resulted in successful publication and conference presentation
  - Clearly conveyed results to audiences with varied backgrounds and technical expertise
  - Management of undergraduate researchers

- For the Resume
  - Interviewed, hired, trained, and managed research staff (teams up to 10 people)
  - Distilled complex information into accessible visual, written, and oral formats
  - Independently developed and managed 2-year interdisciplinary research project that examines how survey practices change in the digital age from 1999 to 2009

EXAMPLE
Programming Co-Chair for
Graduate Student Career Conference

- CV/Task
  - Led programming sub-committee for a conference for over 150 participants

- Transferable Skills
  - Coordinated programming for 150+ participants and 20+ speakers to engage them in diverse career options
  - Collaborated with team members to ensure smooth execution of the conference

- For the Resume:
  - Co-chaired a committee of 6-8 graduate students to delegate and oversee programming details for 2-day conference
  - Acted as a liaison between 20+ speakers and facilitators
  - Created innovative programming that met the needs of the diverse career goals of conference attendees

Check out the grad career guide for more examples!

Cover Letters

- Use more "soft skills" to help bring your resume skills and experience to life

- Target your cover letter
  - Review job description and company website
  - Network to gather information about who they want for the position

Interviews

- Present relevant experience in a personal narrative
  - You DON'T need to include a long, detailed account of what you struggled with to choose a non-academic position
  - (And by the way, don't refer to it as a non-academic position!)

- What to include:
  - How you gained relevant skills
  - How you can help the company with these skills

How to talk about transferable skills

- Be confident when talking about your skills

- Own your part in the work you've done

- Describe what you bring to the job as "relatable," "similar," "applicable," "relevant," "comparable"

- You can talk about your specific expertise, but it needs to be in a way that shows that you are not too narrow to have other interests

Personal narrative

- Make sure you believe it
  - It should explain why you want to go into this (new?) career path

- Highlight relevant skills
  - Make connection between your skills and the job

- Don't critique academia
  - Speak from experience, but stay positive because it reflects on who you are as a professional
  - E.g., I realized what interested me was _____ and I wasn't able to do that as much as I would like to as a professor

Personal narrative

- Practice!
  - With friends, colleagues, partners, pets...
  - Figure out what feels genuine, positive, and professional

- Keep perspective
  - The average person will make a career change approximately 5-7 times during their working life
  - Being able to pivot during a career transition is a skill you will probably need again later in life

Questions and follow-up

- Consider meeting with our resident graduate career counselor to discuss further!
  - Lana.Smith-Hale@sa.ucsb.edu
  - Call 805-893-4412 to schedule an appointment
- Consider taking a career assessment