

“Top Five” Exercise

Whether you are a first year student, senior, or graduate student, whether you are seeking an internship, grad school acceptance, full-time work, or a volunteer role, your chances of success will depend largely upon your knowledge of:

- what you want to do; and
- why you are qualified to do it.

For example, before starting a job search, you must have a good idea of what will make you happy. e.g., the tasks you would like to perform and the type of place where you would like to work. You must also be able to convince an employer to hire you, rather than another applicant. While this is not easy, quality assistance is available to you on your campus. Visit your college career office to chat with one or more of the staff members. In the meantime, do some valuable homework on yourself by completing this exercise. Once completed, it can be a BIG help in:

- exploring career options – knowing your favorite strengths makes it easier to find ways to engage them;
- identifying suitable positions without worrying about job titles, i.e., you tell people the strengths you wish to use and they suggest options;
- conveying a sense of career direction before you have focused on a particular position or role;
- writing personal statements, resumes, cover letters applications, and conducting interviews; and
- gaining confidence – this is especially key to a successful interview.

Creating Your “Top Five” List

Three steps:

1. Sort through your past experiences and ferret out your strengths. First, list your experiences, including paid jobs, volunteer roles, leadership positions, internships, academic projects, and campus activities. Second, jot down all you did in each experience. Third, list the strengths you displayed in your tasks and roles. Note that strengths involve both skills and personal qualities. Focus on the ones that you enjoy the most – those in which you take pride.
2. After each strength (skill or quality) be sure to list one or more accomplishments or pieces of evidence to make it credible. See examples on the back of this page.
3. Prioritize the list, recording the most important items first.

Three tips:

1. Your “Top Five” can be a generic list, one to guide your thinking or to use in an information interview. It can also be changed and targeted for use in a resume, letter, essay, or interview as you apply for a specific position, graduate school program, or other role.
2. When creating a list for a particular position, always include an item relating to your career/job interest and one on your college preparation.
3. Remember that your strengths are transferable; they can be applied to different opportunities. Also, your list(s) should change over time, although some items may remain constant.

Top Ten Strengths for Entry Level Public Affairs Position

(example)

1. **Very committed to a public affairs career.** Have targeted this field since my sophomore year. Gained related work experience. Talked to a variety of professionals in the field.
2. **Related experience in marketing & public relations.** Worked in sales and marketing last summer. Served as public relations and marketing intern – skills are very transferable to public affairs.
3. **Academic preparation. Soon to complete B.A.** Have liberal arts background with courses in writing, communication, and business.
4. **Competent in handling market data.** Completed courses in Statistics and Survey Research.
5. **Enjoy speaking before groups.** Provided campus tours and information sessions to prospective students and parents. Presented to department managers at Sears. Offered teaching assistantship in public speaking course.
6. **Sales ability.** Led retail store in percentage service contracts sold. Complimented by boss for sales skills as summer clerk/cashier at L.L. Bean.
7. **Hard working & self starting.** Worked 10-20 hours per week in retail job while carrying full course load. Have been trusted to work independently and complimented on my initiative by three different employers.
8. **Strong interpersonal skills.** Experienced in friendly interactions with all types of people as a result of six different jobs and roles. Completed course, “Effective Listening”.
9. **Creative.** Helped to devise merchandising plan at Sears. Complimented on my media book revisions at Hangar Theatre.
10. **Macintosh literate.** Confident with Excel, Superpaint, Macwrite, and Writenow.

Note: Strengths are in bold. Each strength is followed by one or more examples or “back ups”.