# How to Talk About Your Academic Background: Transferable Skills Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CV entry or PhD activity</th>
<th>Transferable career skills</th>
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| I completed an advanced graduate degree.                      | • Ability to set, negotiate and meet priorities under multiple deadlines  
• Comfortable operating independently and as part of a team  
• Lab management skills (if applicable)  
• Establishing and maintaining collaborative working relationships  
• Problem-solving in evolving contexts and the ability to pivot when necessary  
• Collaborate and communicate with experts across fields  |
| I wrote a 50,000 word thesis or dissertation.                 | • Researching, organizing and clearly presenting information  
• Critical thinking and analytical skills  
• Strong writing skills  
• Project management skills to plan, coordinate and deliver a multifaceted project—can also be framed as experience in directing a large-scale, complex research endeavor  |
| I analyzed lots of data/conducted many interviews for my research. | • Quantitative literacy to analyze and critically interpret data and persuasively present conclusions and concepts  
• Fluency with specific software, programs or databases  
• Awareness of and adherence to best practices in ethical research  
• Advanced interpersonal communication—diplomacy and sensitivity  
• Iterative research development and design thinking  |
| I published papers, book chapters and presented at conferences. | • Communicating complex ideas effectively in a range of formats  
• Developing and executing effective presentations  
• Ability to synthesize complex concepts for a variety of audiences  |
| I applied for grants, research awards or scholarships.        | • Familiarity with and adherence to federal or state regulations  
• Knowledge of foundation/grantmaking landscape  
• Creating, managing and administering a budget  
• Persuasive writing and case-making skills  
• Synthesizing complex concepts for stakeholder audiences  
• Evaluating and effectively communicating impact  |
| I taught undergraduate classes.                              | • Instructional design  
• Experience synthesizing and translating specialist knowledge  
• Develop and implement metrics aligned with organizational goals  |
| I worked as an academic or career advisor.                    | • Big-picture thinking: understanding and operating within organizational structure, relationships and objectives  
• Robust institutional knowledge and/or federal or state regulations  
• Confidentiality, sensitivity and good judgment  
• Customer-service oriented approach  |

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Getting Started: Gaining Transferable Experience in Grad School

Being positioned on a university campus offers you unique opportunities to gain relevant career experience and build your resume during grad school. Below is a (by no means exhaustive!) list of ways to acquire professional experience.

- Work as an undergraduate or graduate career advisor or tutor
- Pursue part-time or hourly positions in administration and campus service units
- Participate in graduate professional development programs (e.g. Mellon Public Scholars, Leaders for the Future)
- Undertake research or writing roles at campus research, policy or advocacy centers
- Work as a teaching assistant or consultant at the departmental or university level
- Take accredited certificate programs or courses, such as the American Academy for the Advancement of Science’s career courses (accessible through GradPathways Institute)
- Conduct freelance work in writing, editing, research, graphic design, and more
- Volunteer for fundraising or awareness-raising positions for organizations internal and external to the university
- Write articles or copy for strategic communications offices, departments, research centers or external organizations
- Join a departmental or university-wide committee to build institutional knowledge and gain experience shaping policy
- Participate in an internship through the university or outside the university
- Propose your own opportunities as appropriate

Building Your Portfolio and Networking in Grad School

What counts as a writing sample for a portfolio?
- Public-facing articles, op-eds, reviews
- A series of coordinated social media posts used to promote a program or event
- Grant proposals, concept papers and letters of intent
- Slide decks, data visualizations and other materials developed for presentation—especially those that translate complex academic topics to a lay or non-expert audience
- Material developed to communicate a research project to a broad audience—such as explanatory handouts, one-pagers, executive summaries, and more

How do I network as a graduate student?
- Go to beyond-ac professional workshops, networking events and career treks
- Seek out university opportunities that gather people with shared interests across disciplines—e.g. networking for women in STEM, climate advocacy days
- Conduct informational interviews with people whose jobs are interesting to you or job-shadow them, if appropriate
- LinkedIn: Practice discussing your skills and experience while building networks
- Twitter: Many professional circles use Twitter to solicit article requests, offer pitch or collaboration information and build professional networks