

Recognising your skills & strengths

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Selling yourself

- o If you have a doctorate, you represent a tiny proportion of people
- o If you are also published, you represent an even smaller proportion of people
- o You have a range of valuable skills that most people do not have

...the challenge is to sell those skills in a commercial arena

Sharon Smith DPhil (Oxon)

Skills

Excellent writing skills as demonstrated by my thesis and exten

Lucy Weston PhD

writing skills as demonstrated by my thesis and extensive

Writing skills

The main aim of your application is to sell your existing writing skills. Need to make sure that on your application and during your interview you cover all of your experience:

- Thesis** Not just a means to an end; be sure to mention that you enjoyed writing-up (perhaps more than the lab work)
- Posters** Not just a writing task, but also involves design and layout
- Grant applications** A challenging writing task; if you were successful, it must have been because you conveyed your ideas well
- Journal manuscripts** It is not easy to get published, so don't be afraid to talk about your papers

Further writing experience

Further writing experience will be a major advantage:

Academic societies

Magazines and newsletters

(e.g. Physiology News and Genetics Society News)

Clubs & organisations

Newsletters and websites

Blog

- o Doesn't have to focus on medical communications
- o Does have to be well executed

Getting your writing experience on your application

o Up front:

Skills and experience

Writing

- Enjoyed writing my doctoral thesis, and won the Geek Prize 1998 for the best thesis ever to be submitted
- Was lead writer on numerous grant applications, including a successful submission to the Wellcome Trust for a five-year collaboration with NASA
- Extensively published within my field, including two lead authorships, and a paper in Nature
- Help to produce a monthly newsletter for North Yorkshire's Hedgehog Society; as part of the editorial team, helped increase the circulation of the newsletter beyond Society members, and the publication was recently responsible for securing funding for a hedgehog sanctuary in Harrogate

Getting your writing experience on your application

- o Within your employment and education history:

Academic positions

Oxford University, Department of Physiology (2004 – 2009)

Post-doctoral researcher on a multidisciplinary study of the production of snail slime in zero gravity; I was lead writer on the grant application to the Wellcome Trust, which enabled the research group to set-up a five-year collaboration with NASA

Getting your writing experience on your application

Academic positions and education

Cardiff University, Department of Physiology

2007 – 2011

Post-doctoral researcher on multidisciplinary study of production of snail slime in zero gravity.

[View publication: S Smith et al. *Space Physiology International* 2010; 89: 942–949](#)

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**If you are sending your cv electronically, include
hyperlinks to your publications**

University College London, Department of Physiology

2001 – 2004

BSc (HONS) Physiology

Oral presentations

- o Giving an oral presentation requires three main skills:
 - o Ability to write slides
 - o Ability to stand up in front of a crowd and speak convincingly
 - o Ability to think on your feet, i.e. when fielding questions

Oral presentations

Skill	How it transfers to medical writing
o Ability to write slides	o Writing slides for opinion leaders <ul style="list-style-type: none">o If you've given a conference presentation yourself, you will have a good understanding of what works and what to avoid o Writing slide kits, drawing figures
o Ability to stand up in front of a crowd and speak convincingly	o Giving presentations to clients
o Ability to think on your feet, i.e. when fielding questions	o Helpful when talking to clients and opinion leaders

Project management

- o If you've run an experiment, you have project management skills
- o If you've run several experiments all at the same time, you have excellent project management skills

Getting your project management experience on your application

Skills and experience

- **Electrophysiology:** recording electrical activity of giant neurons in the isolated central nervous system of the large snail (*Helix aspersa*) using microelectrodes
- **Calcium imaging:** used Ca^{2+} -sensitive probe to image intracellular calcium in dissociated pyramidal cells of the large snail (*Helix aspersa*)

Skills and experience

Electrophysiology and calcium imaging:

- Used various state of the art physiological techniques to investigate slime production in the large snail; experienced at setting objectives, planning, liaising with colleagues and other research groups, scheduling resources, and troubleshooting

Project leading and mentoring

- o Project student followed you around all summer, took up loads of your time, and did your head in?

Skills and experience

Project leading, training and mentoring

- Managed and supported medical students during their third year research projects; as well as instructing on planning and implementing experiments, advised on report writing and giving presentations

Teamwork

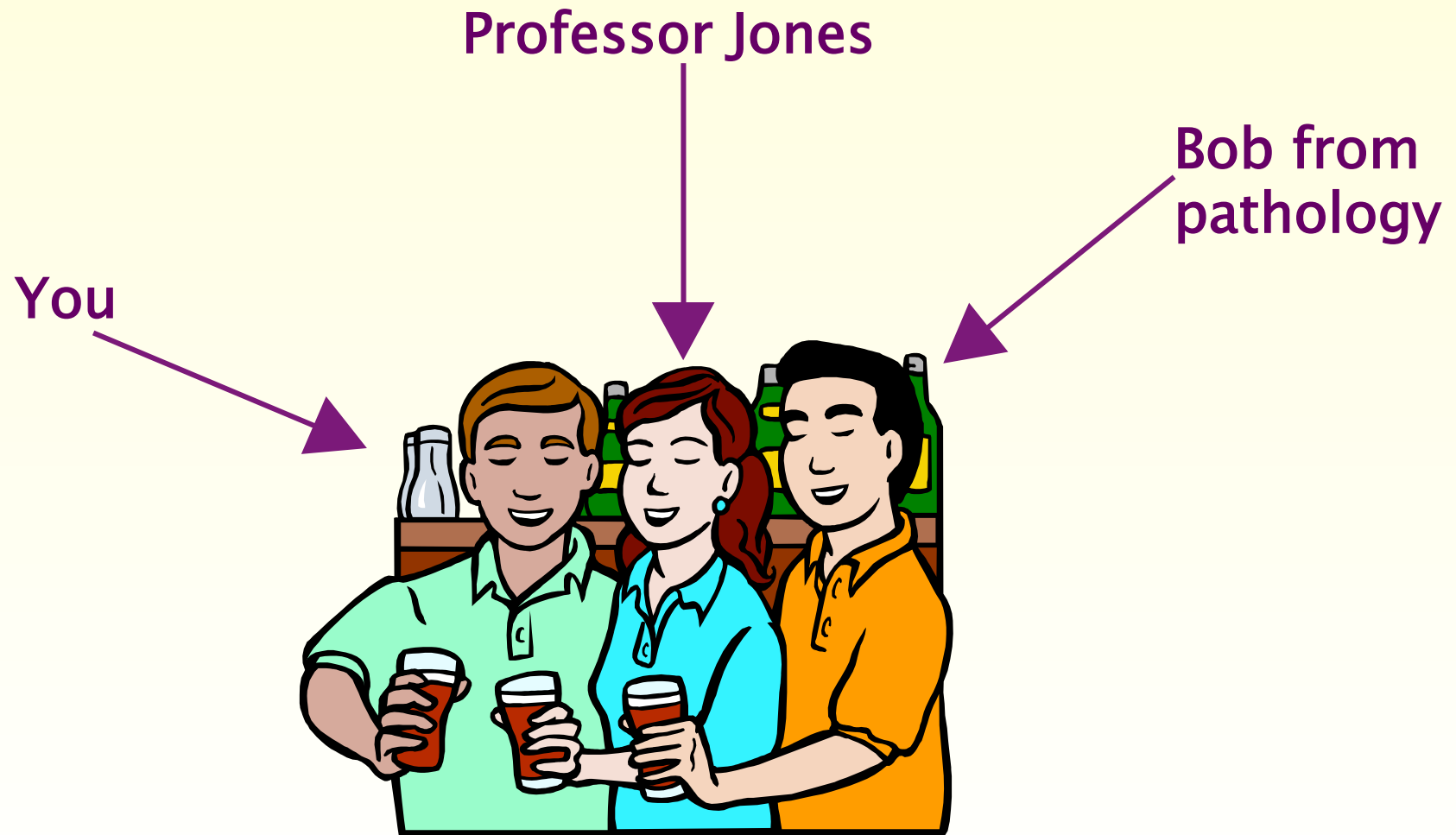
- Had to share your equipment with someone who always left the lab in a mess?
- Your supervisor made you collaborate with the lab upstairs, you did all the work, and the lab upstairs took all the credit?
- Ability to work in a team will be essential in medical communications

Skills and experience

Teamwork

- Experienced at working as part of a multidisciplinary team, and set-up international collaborations with leading research groups in the US and Australia

Opinion leader experience



Cover letter

- o Introduces you and the reason you are contacting the company
- o Reinforces the highlights of your cv
- o Three paragraphs
- o One page

Cover letter

o Don't:

- o Write an essay repeating your entire cv – a cover letter should not be an autobiography
- o Write an essay expanding on one aspect of your cv, which you feel needs more detail – if this is the case, then re-write that section of your cv
- o Demonstrate your writing skills with long words and elaborate sentences
- o Demonstrate your copywriting skills with clever strap-lines and clichés (unless you are applying for a place on The Apprentice, in which case clichés are obligatory)

First paragraph

- o Why you are contacting the company in one or two sentences:
 - o I would like to apply for the position of associate medical writer, which is currently advertised on your website
 - o This is a speculative letter to ask about undertaking unpaid work experience at MedCom Ltd, and to enquire about trainee writer opportunities

Second paragraph

- o Highlights from your cv in three sentences:
- o Your scientific qualifications:
 - o I recently completed a PhD in comparative physiology, which involved imaging the nervous system of snails
- o Link what you've done in the past with what you want to do in the future:
 - o As an academic researcher I became interested in the communication of science, and therefore have decided to pursue a career in medical writing
- o Summarise your writing experience:
 - o In addition to writing a thesis, numerous peer review publications, and other academic communications, I have also written news articles for various scientific societies and I'm currently the editor of Save the Hedgehog Magazine

Third paragraph

- o Politely sign off. One or two sentences:
- o I look forward to discussing the role of associate medical writing with you in due course. If you need any further information, do not hesitate to contact me.

Good luck!