

# Recognising your skills & strengths

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# Who are you?

As an academic you spend your life surrounded by very bright, educated people, most of whom have doctorates and are widely published, but remember:

- If you have a doctorate, you represent a tiny proportion of people
- If you are also published, you represent an even smaller proportion of people
- 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 extensive publication

# 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 'bang on' about how great your papers are

# Getting your writing experience on your application

- 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

- 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

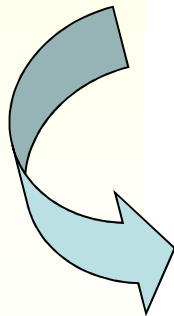
You want to avoid gimmicks on your cv, but if you are sending it electronically, consider including a hyperlink to your publications; be careful to execute this well, or it may execute your application

BBSRC funded postdoctoral researcher. neurotransmission in dissociated pyramidal cells of the large snail (*Helix aspersa*)

**Oxford University, Department of Space Physiology**  
1995 – 1998  
DPhil Physiology

[View publication: S Smith et al. \*Space Physiology International\* 1999; 89: 942–949](#)

**University College London, Department of Physiology**  
1992 – 1995  
BSc (HONS) Physiology



# Oral presentations

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

# Oral presentations

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



# Project management

- If you've run an experiment, you have project management skills
- 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  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ -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

- Feckless 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

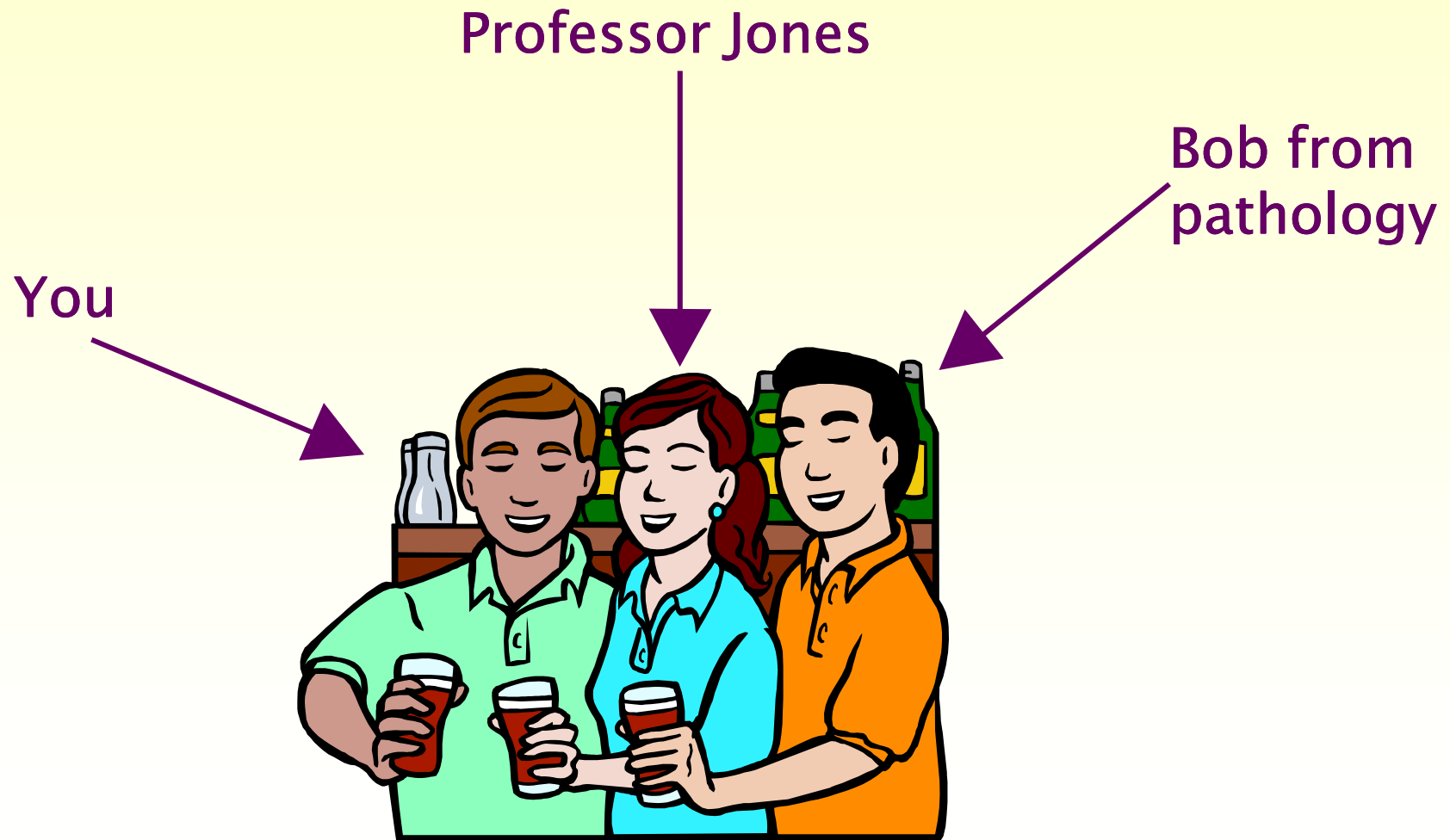
- Had to share your equipment with someone who always left the lab in a mess?
- Your supervisor made you collaborate with the lab upstairs, you did all the work, and the lab upstairs took all the credit?
- Ability to work in a team will be essential in medical communications

## **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



# Opinion leader experience

I am comfortable with discussing complex issues with leading experts; when I was a post-doc, I was sent to Boston to represent our group and ended up going to dinner with Professor Davis; I persuaded him to fund my trip to Australia, despite having four gin Martinis

