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Unit 4: Achievement Statements

Describing your skills effectively without boasting

After completing this unit you will:

- i) be able to explain how achievement statements can describe your skills in a convincing and interesting way
- ii) be able to explain their use and value in résumés, job applications and when preparing answers to interview questions
- iii) understand the different ways of writing achievement statements
- iv) be able to write achievement statements of different types
- v) be able to compile a Key Skills Statement for grabbing interest fast when making a telephone call

The Job Winners[®] Guide for Young Adults

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Achievement statements and describing your skills, an overview

“But I’ve never had a job. What can I write in my résumé?” Many young people ask this question because they think that the only things you can write about in a résumé are things that have been achieved through paid employment. This is not true. You have the skills to do the job because, otherwise, you wouldn’t be applying for it. Your résumé needs to demonstrate these skills. You should write about everything that shows you have the skills and personal qualities that the employer is looking for.

You also don’t have to have gained good marks in your schoolwork to have developed the right workskills for many jobs. You may have developed your workskills through sport, through performing with a group, helping in the canteen or at the school fair, through working on engines or mowing neighbours’ lawns, through babysitting or, of course, through part-time, casual employment.

One of the best ways to convince an employer that you have these skills to do the job and the motivation to do it well is to use ‘achievement statements’. These usually describe specific achievements in your life and, generally, the more specific the better. If I were applying for a job that required someone physically fit, and I said “Ran 1500m in 4 min 25, school athletics carnival last year”, it would be much more convincing (and much more interesting) than saying “I am a very fast runner” (which also sounds very boastful and, therefore, off-putting).

This unit is all about convincing the employer, both in your résumé and also in answers to interview questions, that you do have the skills to do the job. A further advantage of achievement statements is that they also convey your motivation to do the job well without sounding ‘on yourself’. Some of the examples, shown later in this unit, of the achievement statements of young people result from paid employment but many others eventuate from school or sporting involvement or voluntary work. These examples will show you how others have done it and so help you to write some of your own.

The unit is divided into four parts. The first part explains how to identify the things that you have done in your life that demonstrate that you do have the skills that employers are looking for.

The second part looks at five types of achievement statement and how to write them and the third part contains a number of examples.

The final part helps you to develop a 20-second commercial for yourself, something you can say on the phone to persuade an employer to want to talk to you.

PART 1: Identifying the things you have done

We are going to explore three different ways of identifying the things that you have done that demonstrate that you have the required skills and attitude. Rather than choosing one method and sticking to that one alone, use all three methods one after the other so as to remember as many achievements as possible.

PART 2: Turning achievements into achievement statements

Once you have created a long list of achievements, the next task is to turn these achievements into achievement statements.

Choose the 10 achievements which you consider the most important. Write them down on a piece of paper leaving about 5 or 6 lines between each one. Now look at the examples below and read the notes on how to write achievement statements and try to write achievement statements for just these 10. It may take you several attempts to get it right but the more you do it and the more determined you are to write them in the most effective way, the easier it will become.

And, of course, once you have completed the first 10 to your satisfaction, do the same for the next 10 and so on.

You should find as you write these achievement statements that your self-esteem is being given a boost. Good. That is just what should happen. Whenever you feel rejected, go back to your list of achievement statements and get your self-esteem back up to where it ought to be.

The 5 'rules' for writing achievement statements

The purpose of these five 'rules' is to get you started. They describe how to set about writing five common forms of achievement statement. When you look at the many examples towards the end of this unit, you will notice that many of them mix and match the different types and this is fine. The important thing is to describe your achievements in the way that best convinces the employer that you have the skills to do the job and the motivation to do it well. Therefore, once you can write them fairly confidently, don't feel constrained by the 'rules' - they are just there to help you get started.

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5 types of Achievement Statement

1. Experience
2. Classic
3. Position
4. Testimonial
5. SAO (Situation, Action, Outcome)

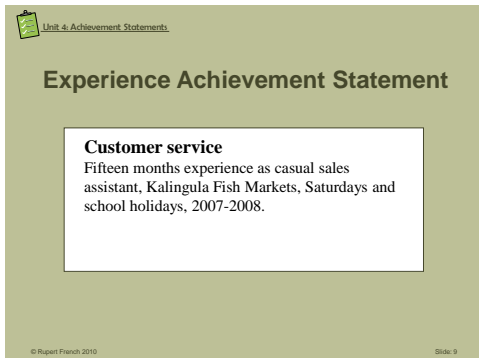
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It is an oversimplification to say that there are five types of achievement statement but it makes it easier to explain how to write them.

The five types are: experience; classic; position; testimonial; and SAO (situation, action, outcome).

Experience achievement statements are generally less specific than the other four types and they are frequently used to precede more specific types of achievement statement that refer to the same skill set or occupation.

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Unit 4: Achievement Statements

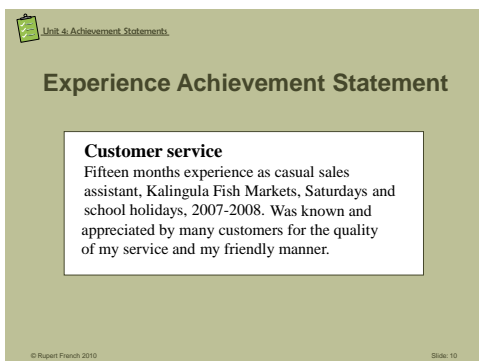
Experience Achievement Statement

Customer service
Fifteen months experience as casual sales assistant, Kalingula Fish Markets, Saturdays and school holidays, 2007-2008.

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The first sentence of Annabel's first achievement statement, beginning "15 months experience ..." is a typical experience statement. A useful formula for this type of achievement statement is "... months/years experience doing what, where and when".

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Experience Achievement Statement

Customer service
Fifteen months experience as casual sales assistant, Kalingula Fish Markets, Saturdays and school holidays, 2007-2008. Was known and appreciated by many customers for the quality of my service and my friendly manner.

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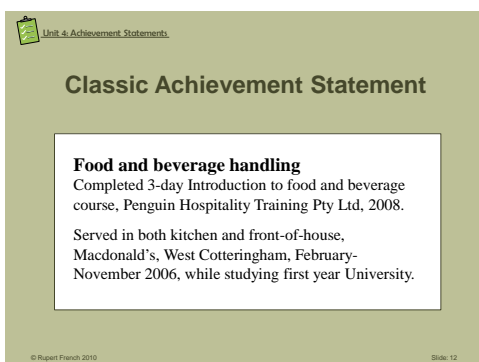
Annabel has then added a further statement to strengthen the point she wants to get across - the quality of her customer service.

She possibly wouldn't get away with this statement if one of her referees were not her boss in this position.

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The following two of Annabel's achievement statements, and her last one are all classic - that is they begin with an action verb - an action she did - followed by what she did, where and when. I have called this type 'classic' because it is the type most frequently used.

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Classic Achievement Statement

Food and beverage handling
Completed 3-day Introduction to food and beverage course, Penguin Hospitality Training Pty Ltd, 2008.
Served in both kitchen and front-of-house, Macdonald's, West Cotteringham, February-November 2006, while studying first year University.

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Let's take a look at how a classic achievement statement is created.

First is the action verb, in this case 'completed' and it's usually in the past tense. Then comes the what, the thing that was done, in this example '3-day Introduction to food and beverage course'. Finally the where and when; 'Penguin Hospitality Training Pty Ltd' and '2008'.

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Here are some classic achievement statements from Chris Turner's¹ résumé:

Achieved 68% for a commerce assignment in which I had to create a business plan complete with text (MS Word), spreadsheets, tables and graphs (MS Excel), and photographs. Put the whole document together using MS Publisher.

Submitted all assignments on time, English Expression, Legal Studies and Commerce. Created a study plan for each assignment so that none of them were rushed and all have so far achieved good marks.

As part of my Computer Programming studies, wrote a program to track and record share prices for the Investment Club. The program has been very successful and is now being used by most of the club's members

As they were all achieved while he was a high school student, there is no need to put in the time and place because these details are self-evident. The same point could be made for the following examples:

Achieved High Distinction in the Shell National Mathematics Competition in year 11.

Gained High Achievement for studies in Society and Culture in Year 11.

Won 2nd Prize in the Alliance Française oral French competition last year.

Working to a pattern, made my Leavers Dinner dress as part of my assessment in Textiles and Design. Received a mark of 18 out of 20 from the teacher and lots of positive comments at the Dinner.

Came second in the Junior Cattle Handlers competition at the Devonport Show last November as part of my Agriculture and Rural Studies course.

The next two examples start as classic achievement statements but end up being more like SAOs. Don't feel constrained by the 'rules' - write your achievement statements in the way that best demonstrates your skills and motivation.

Volunteered to assist in the school canteen so as to gain relevant experience for my Catering Studies course. Was able to persuade the canteen manager to increase the amount of healthy food offered and became effective in encouraging other students to choose the healthy options. As a result, the canteen has continued to increase the amount of healthy food it carries.

Helped on the construction of the set for the school production of 'Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat'. We had just 3 weeks to construct and paint the set and towards the

¹ Chris Turner and the other people whose résumés are quoted in this unit are completely fictitious. Any resemblance to any real person, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

end, we had to work around rehearsal times. There were 4 of us students and one teacher and we worked together as a good team. The set received good comments in the local paper's review of the play.

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“Member of the school netball team ...” is an example of a position statement. The fact that Annabel held a position on the school netball team implies a fair degree of commitment to the team and ability to work as a good team member.

This position achievement statement is followed by a classic, “Won Premiership in Under 14 ...”

The usual formula for a position achievement statements is “position, what, where, when”.

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Here are some more examples of position statements:

- Member of the team that set up the expanded The Clothing Shop in Carlisle, 2007. Erected shelving, created displays and helped with the layout of merchandise.

Library monitor

Appointed Library Monitor in year 8 ...

(This achievement statement seems to start with an action verb but it doesn't. 'Appointed' isn't an action verb because it wasn't the job seeker who did the appointing.)

- Team leader commented on my willingness to work hard and my commitment to do the job properly, Greening Australia, restoration of the McKenzie Mine Site project, July-October 2009.

In this example, Dale Knight uses a spoken testimonial at the end of what is really a SAO:

Builder's labourer (casual)

EJ & R Knight Builders, since January 2009 (Ted Knight is my dad's brother)

- On Ted's instructions, I measured up and cut the reo for the 6-square slab for his new workshop. After laying the plastic underlay, I joined the sheets together with wire and put the chairs in place. When Ted inspected my work, he said that I had done a good job.

It is also valid to quote something that was spoken rather than written and it doesn't matter if the quote is not word perfect. What is important is that the spirit of the quote must be true. Never falsify or be tempted to 'gild the lily'.

SAO stands for 'situation, action, outcome'. Statements of this sort are generally longer because they tell the whole story. Here is one from Clinton who is applying for an automotive apprenticeship:

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SAO Achievement Statement

In my course for Certificate 1 in Automotive Mechanical, I was asked to dismantle a Robins 4-stroke petrol engine, identify the parts and reassemble it. Cleaned and examined it according to instructions, shut off the fuel and removed the petrol tank and then proceeded to strip down the engine, identifying the parts as I removed them. Reassembled the engine, turned on the fuel, pulled the cord and it started straight away.

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Clinton starts by explaining the situation, the task he has been asked to complete. He then states what his actions were and finally he gives us the results of those actions.

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End of slide show