

Reflection on Academic and Employability Skills - Donna Wright

by Donna Wright

FILE	11968_DONNA_WRIGHT_REFLECTION_ON_ACADEMIC_AND_EMPLOYABILITY_SKILLS_-_DONNA_WRIGHT_155966_204615223.DOCX		
TIME SUBMITTED	15-JAN-2019 04:25PM (UTC+0000)	WORD COUNT	3199
SUBMISSION ID	99177998	CHARACTER COUNT	19847

Reflection on Academic and Employability Skills

By Donna Wright

Abstract

This report is a reflection of the Academic and Employability Skills module. It describes and outlines the learning undertaken, the skills developed by the author and how they have executed them, providing evidence where necessary/appropriate.

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1 Introduction

The purpose of this module was to introduce and teach students key academic and employability skills required to undertake the course. This included presentations skills, research skills, report writing, time management, data storage and action planning

This paper has been written to demonstrate the authors understanding and application of these skills.

2 Presentation skills

The ability to develop and deliver a presentation is a key skill required by university students. During their academic career a student may be called upon to use these skills, for example to deliver a small presentation or present information relating to their dissertation. It is therefore important that these skills are learnt at an early stage.

Good presentation skills will often be attractive to potential employers and will be evidenced as an essential or desirable skill in a job advert. This will certainly be the case for many management roles where the post holder is required to attend or chair meetings on behalf of the team. For example, a current campaign run by DVLA for an Internal Communications Officer [1] requests that applicants have:

“strong communication and presentations skills”

2.1 Author's presentation

As part of the Academic and Employability skills module students were invited to develop and deliver a presentation on themselves to the class. A copy of the author's presentation can be found in appendix A. This allowed those with little or no experience of this to experience what this work entails. This section of the report details the author's reflections of their presentation.

2.1.1 Overview

For the presentation to the class the author looked at 5 areas. Where they are from, hobbies and interests, likes and dislikes, strengths and weaknesses and goals. Below and over the page I have explained what was included and provided screenshots from the presentation.

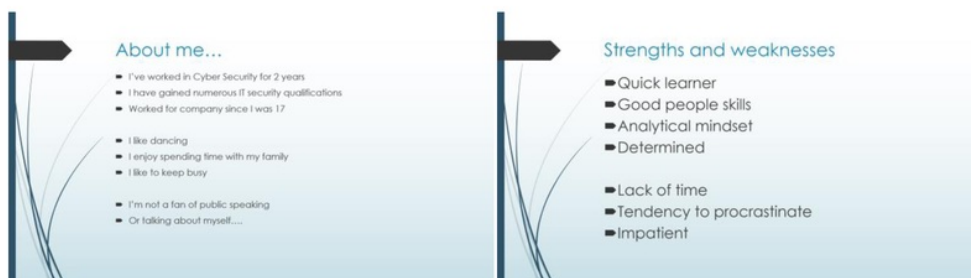
- The presentation started with an explanation of how they came to live in Wales as they are originally from Stoke-on-Trent.



- It summarised some of the author's eclectic hobbies, such as pet snakes and keeping birds of prey and provided some insight into their career.



- They outlined their likes and dislikes and went on to describe their perceived strengths and weaknesses, i.e. being a quick learner with a tendency to procrastinate. The presentation finished up by with a summary of their future goals, namely to gain a degree and further their career in Cyber Security.



2.1.2 What the author learnt

Below are some of the key points that the author learnt whilst producing and delivering their presentation to the class:

- This task removed the author from their comfort zone and despite their prior experience of delivering information in a work context they found the delivery of this presentation difficult.
- Watching other students deliver their presentations proved that there is a benefit to having more images and less text. For example, the author used images in their slide for hobbies but these could have been bigger and better used to display/explain them.
- Relax. The author's nerves were clear during the presentation which showed in the delivery.
- Timing is everything! The author is a naturally a fast speaker which can become a problem when they are nervous. Their speech rate will increase meaning a presentation that took 5 minutes to complete in private will be delivered in a much shorter time period when there is an audience. For this reason it is important that they practice delivering a presentation in front of peers to iron out timing issues before a final presentation.

2.1.3 How the author could improve or enhance future presentations

As previously noted, the use of images is a powerful thing for presentations. For future presentations a stronger focus will be placed to incorporate more images over text (where suitable). This will be beneficial as there will be a lower chance of the presenter purely reading slides to the audience, and instead they will be reinforcing the messages.

On this occasion there was no need for the author to fact check or conduct any research as the subject was them. This will not necessarily be the case in future presentations and therefore adequate research will need to be conducted.

In 2.1.2 it was identified that public speaking is not a strength of the author's. It would be prudent for more practice and an increase in exposure to these situations to improve the quality of any future presentations delivered.

3 Skills evaluation

The ability to identify ones skills is beneficial as it allows an individual to realise what their strengths and weaknesses are and therefore how they can improve. This section of the module focused on educating students not only on how to conduct a self assessment but also to practice research skills.

3.1 Key skills for learning

Students were encouraged to conduct research to identify key skills for learning in higher education. The author's research identified several articles outlining skills written by universities. This included an article by Graeme McKeague [2] listing 5 skills for student success and a webpage on The University of Manchester's website

[3] detailing skills and qualities of successful academics. From this research the below list has been populated identifying some of the most popular skills:

- Presentation skills – as was identified in 2 this is an essential skill for students
- Time management – this skill will be explored further in 5.2, it looks at the ability for a learner to effectively manage their time whilst maintaining a healthy work/life balance
- Communication – sometimes referred to as networking, this skill is the ability to socialise and build relationships with others. In a learning environment there will be instances whereby individuals are required to work as a team. The ability to build good relationships is vital for this to be successful
- Action planning – this skill looks at the ability to create an action plan outlining what an individual plans to do in order to achieve a goal. This is a useful skill as it will focus an individual on the key elements they need to achieve in order to meet their desired goal. This is explored further in 4

3.2 Key skills for employers

There are numerous key skills that in general all employers will expect potential applicants to hold. In order to secure a position within a company, applicants will be invited to demonstrate that they possess these skills. There is a lot of literature available to educate individuals on these skills and often, when advertising a job, an employer will provide guidance on what evidence of the skill they hope to see. Some good examples of this are The University of Exeter who provide a guide on the top 10 employability skills that an employer may want [4] and the DVLA who attach a PDF copy of their professional framework on job adverts [5]. This PDF describes all the essential and desirable skills required for roles within the organisation, a copy of this can be found in appendix B.

From the research conducted the following skills were identified:

- Problem solving – this skill refers to an individual's approach to problem solving. Most employers will seek to attract individuals who possess problem solving skills which are both logical and analytical
- Leadership – this skill can be important in all roles. Whilst this is usually confused as a skill only managers require in order to motivate their teams, this is also an important skill for employees as they may need to motivate and support colleagues. For example, an individual may be called upon to mentor or train a new employee
- Seeing the big picture – this skill refers to an individual's ability to perceive the end goals and all the potential implications. This is an important skill not just for employability but also for learning. This is explored further in 4 where the focus is on action planning
- Teamwork – working with others to achieve a common goal is an important skill to attain. This skill looks at an individual's ability to build effective working relationships with others in order to achieve the company's goals and objectives

3.3 Self evaluation

Self evaluation is a good way of identifying your strengths and weaknesses. As part of this module, students were encouraged to conduct a self evaluation using online tests. The author has provided a copy of their self assessment and some of the results they had from personality tests in appendix C.

The results from the personality test described the author as a natural leader and as excelling at analysis. Both these attributes are required for their role as Lead SOC Specialist. This role requires the author to not only manage the Security Operations Centre but to also undertake the responsibilities of a tier 3 analyst. The results also confirmed the author's assumption that they were an introvert.

In addition to the self assessments available online, the author has included a copy of the self assessment they completed as part of their annual appraisal in work.

4 Action plans

As explained in 3.1 the ability to produce an action plan is a useful skill to have. This allows an individual to strategise what they need to do in order to meet their goals. A good way of doing this is through SMART objectives. These are objectives that are achievable and timely. They allow an individual to step back and break down the requirements of a goal in order to ensure they have covered all aspects. For example, if an individual's goal is to get promoted they may set themselves SMART objectives in order to develop the skills they will require.

4.1 Goals

As part of their presentation the author outlined their short and long term goals. They were:

- Expand existing knowledge of Cyber
- Develop a better understanding of Networks
- Gain new skills they can take back to the workplace
- Earn a degree
- Progress their career in Cyber Security

4.2 Dedicated action plan

To assist in achieving the identified goals the author has a training plan outlining the training they will undertake within the financial year and SMART objectives. These, in tandem with the ongoing learning for this course will assist in attaining the goals. Copies of both of these documents can be found in appendix D.

5 Application

5.1 Looking after data

Ensuring data is secure is an important act in both learning and employment. From a learning aspect, students will be required to produce numerous assignments and pieces of work throughout their academic career. Ensuring this is easily accessible, secure and safeguarded against potential disasters is of great importance. From an employment standpoint the same concerns will be present; however there will be additional requirements and considerations such as data protection laws for an individual to take into account. For this module we focused less on the employment aspect and more on the learning requirements.

In the lectures several strategies for looking after data were discussed. These included the “in 3 different places” rule, as explained in 5.1.1 and cloud storage. There are many options available for cloud storage, such as Dropbox and Google drive. Each cloud storage option has positives and negatives and there have been numerous comparisons made to inform individuals when making a decision of which to use, for example the YouTube video by dottotech [6].

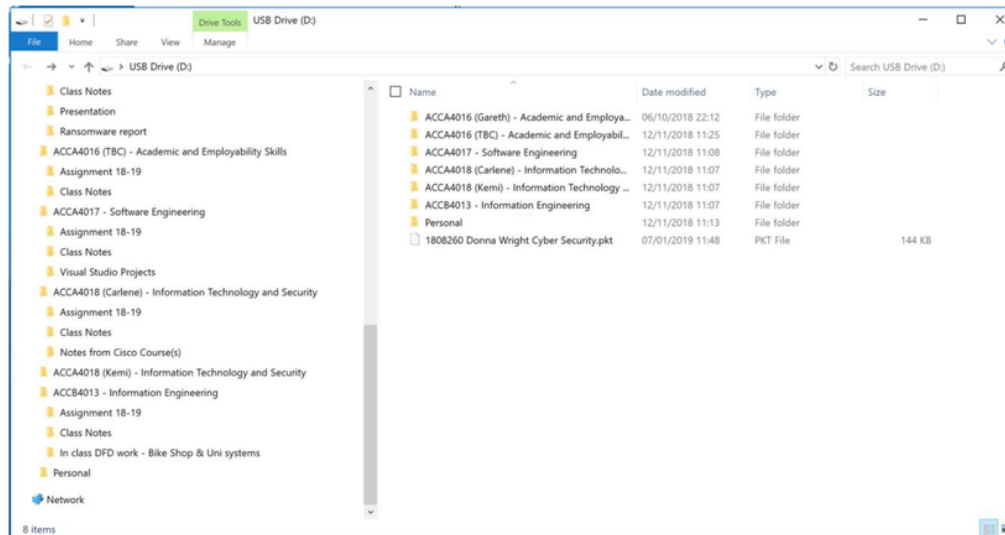
5.1.1 Backup strategy

It is important to ensure that your data is safe and in accordance with this the author has in place a backup strategy which provides a level of assurance that their data is protected from potential disaster scenarios.

During the Academic skills lectures and tutorials, Gareth Jones discussed with the class the “in 3 different places” rule. This rule states that unless data is in three different places it doesn't really exist. He encouraged us to look at our own backup strategies to determine whether they met this rule. The author conducted some research into this back up strategy and found the information on VEEAM's website regarding a 3-2-1 rule [7] helpful. This research assured the author that their own strategy was adequate. This strategy is described below alongside an explanation how it adheres to this rule.

For all university work the author has a folder structure on their personal laptop where assignments and class notes can be saved. This folder structure is replicated on a work PC and saved to the Agency's network. It is also saved to a USB flash drive.

A screen shot of the structure can be seen below:



The individual files have been opened on the left hand side to show the different file names utilised.

When working on a document email functions are used to transfer/backup the documents from one machine to the other. Therefore the data is stored in 4 places, on a personal laptop, on the personal email, on the works email and on the works network. The company author works for enforces endpoint lockdown, therefore the use of external memory devices such as flash drives cannot be used in this strategy. However, in order to increase accessibility a USB flash drive is used to save documents from the personal laptop on a weekly basis in order to work on them from a university machine. This in effect creates a 5th storage place.

5.1.2 Potential disasters

There are many potential disasters that could affect stored data. Some of these disasters have been looked at below and over the page, with an evaluation of what this would mean for the backup strategy described in 5.1.1.

- **Malware on device** – there are several different types of malware which can affect an individual's device and any data stored on it. For example, ransomware is a form of malware which uses encryption to hold the data stored on a pc to ransom (this type of malware is described further in 5.1.3). In this scenario a device would be compromised, however as the strategy has the data held in multiple places and on more than 1 network, the risk would be mitigated.
- **System failure** – this refers to a device ceasing to function for example due to disrepair or damage. As with the malware disaster this would be mitigated by holding the data in numerous places.

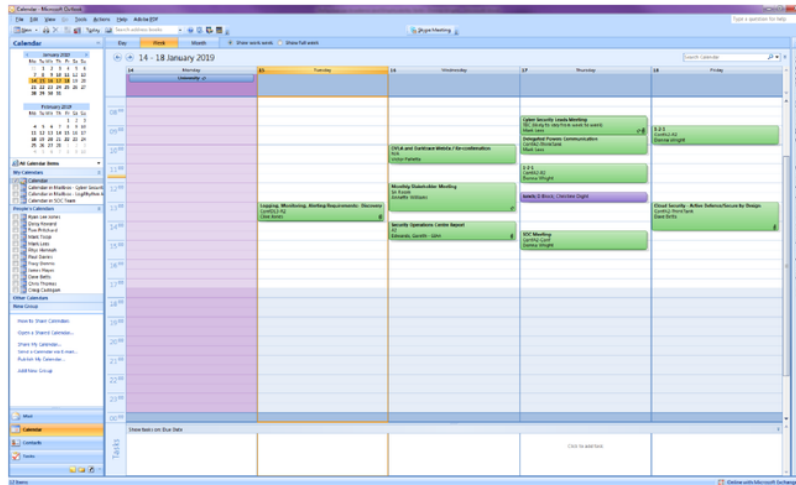
- Corrupt/lost files – this scenario looks at the potential of the files becoming corrupted or lost. For example a file being overwritten in error or deleted. The strategy takes this into account by have numerous copies of the data in different places. In addition, as the backups are not automatic there is no risk of the copies being influenced. However, if a corruption or loss happened whilst the document was being worked on the author would have to revert to an old version.
- Site inaccessible – in this scenario the disaster would be that the author could not attend their place of work. This risk is mitigated as the author has a work laptop which allows access to the network through a secure VPN. In addition, there is resilience in the network as there is more than one data centre meaning availability should not be affected.
- Unauthorised access – this disaster refers to a threat actor accessing the stored data without permission and changing it, releasing it or using it themselves. The author mitigates this risk by using secure storage, i.e. password protection on devices. In addition, the author can validate the dates and times of changes to ensure they align to the dates and times that backups occurred.

5.1.3 Ransomware

As identified in 5.1.2, malware is a potential disaster that could affect stored data. Ransomware is a form of malware which has been used in many high profile incidents. As part of this modules classroom activity, an exercise was undertaken to look at ransomware as a threat to data and the associated risks. The resulting report written by the author for this exercise can be found in appendix E.

5.2 Time management and self organisation

Time management is a useful and important skill to master. It allows individuals to lower potential stress levels and ensure a healthy work/life balance. The author uses numerous methods in order to achieve this. Within their workplace they make use of the calendar function for their email in order to undertake diary management. Below is a screenshot of the author's calendar:



This allows the author to easily determine when they have 'free time'.

In their home life the author uses a similar system to record key or notable events. A family account has been created to allow all members of the household to update the calendar with appointments, anniversaries, planned activities or reminders (for example which week is black bag week). This allows all members of the household to be aware of conflicting appointments before make arrangements.

The author also ensures to keep their CV up to date, completing revisions as new skills are achieved. This can help to gain clarity on required skills and also provides a reminder of the activities already undertaken. A copy of this can be found in appendix F

6 Conclusion and Evaluation

The author had recently completed a level 4 apprenticeship in professional business and administration and therefore many of the subjects were not new to them. They material covered reinforced their previous learning and, for some elements, provided the author with ideas to improve. For example, LinkedIn was discussed as a good platform for building your professional network. Therefore the author will now look to create a LinkedIn profile.

In addition to this, the discussions concerning backup strategies were particularly useful and have influenced the author to review the strategy they use at home with a view to improve. Further research into the cloud storage options and external hard drives will be undertaken.

7 Appendices

7.1 Appendix A



Donna Wright.pptx

7.2 Appendix B



DVLA Competency
framework.pdf

7.3 Appendix C



Personality
tests.docx



Self_Evaluation_of_
Academic_Skills.doc



DDaT -
CapabilityAssessment

7.4 Appendix D



Work
Objectives.docx



Donna Wright-
PTP.xlsx

7.5 Appendix E



A report on
Ransomware.docx

7.6 Appendix F



CV.docx

8 References

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GRADEMARK REPORT

FINAL GRADE

GENERAL COMMENTS

Instructor

75/100

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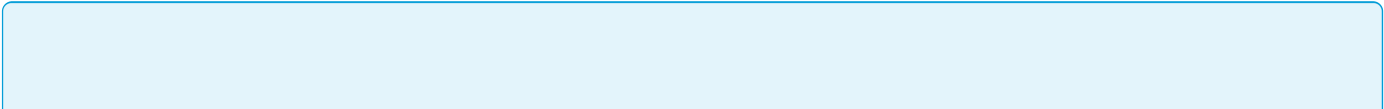
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ENGAGEMENT WITH LITERATURE

 Some good research sources used, but this needs to be even more extensive, and show in more detail how your reading has influenced or backs up your own comments (and where possible, this needs to be done through ALL sections of the assignment).

62

KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING

 Excellent level of understanding demonstrated, with all required areas covered.

78

COGNITIVE AND INTELLECTUAL

 Excellent level of personal analysis applied to the gathered information, with all required areas covered and extending beyond simply presenting the data obtained.

75

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

 Good level of content to show that all the various aspects have been attempted, with no areas omitted.

80



Generally well laid out and presented. Good use of formatting and breaking the report down into sensible nested numbered sections that follow the numbering convention detailed in class. Good writing style. Reads well with a good 'flow'. As turnitin needs to render the uploaded file - don't embed the appendices or they won't appear. You need to cut, paste and format them into the one main document. I'm in a good mood so I looked at them manually, other lecturers may be more grumpy and ignore the added content :-)