Employability

Where next? Unlocking the potential of your philosophy degree

The Higher Education Academy
Subject Centre for Philosophical & Religious Studies

This guide is an updated version of the 2007 edition, which was compiled from the 2004 Subject Centre publication, 'A Brief Guide to Employability in Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies', written by Julie Gallimore, and research written by Peter Forbes and Bianca Kubler for the Enhancing Student Employability Coordination Team of the Higher Education Academy (ESECT) and the Council for Industry and Higher Education (CIHE), together with new material developed, researched, compiled and edited by Danielle Lamb and Julie Closs, for the Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies, part of the Higher Education Academy.

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Aim of this guide

Using this employability guide is a way to help you, as a philosophy student, reflect on the skills you are gaining as you study, and gather evidence of these skills being put into practice. Sometimes, in a non-vocational course, it can be hard to see how what you learn in the course of your studies will prepare you for your post-university career. Being comfortable with this yourself, and getting it across to future employers, is vital, particularly in a subject such as philosophy where there are plenty of popular misconceptions about what the subject actually entails.

Evidence of the skills you possess can also come from work experience and extra-curricular activities. Reflecting on these skills can help with writing up progress files or personal development planning, CV writing and job applications. There are lots of general resources available about how to write a good CV or job application, and how to do well in interviews, and you will find information about some of these in the 'Resources' section at the end. This guide doesn't attempt to replace those resources, but rather to get you thinking about the specific skills that doing philosophy develops in you, and how you can use examples to demonstrate your skills when you apply for a job or go for an interview. The most important thing that we hope this guide will do is help you to articulate why you will be a good employee (because of all the skills you've developed by doing philosophy) so that you can get the job you want.

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1. What makes philosophy graduates employable?

Introduction to employability

The term 'employability', as we are using it here, refers to how the degree you are studying for prepares you for success in working life. Philosophy graduates are highly employable because philosophy teaches you how to think for yourself and analyse and communicate ideas in a clear, rational and well thought out way. Being a philosophy student is less about building a body of knowledge than about learning how to learn. This is one of the distinctive strengths, and key benefits, of studying philosophy. Whereas the knowledge learnt in other disciplines may be superseded by future discoveries or made obsolete by changes of circumstance, the ability to think critically does not become devalued over time. On the contrary, it is invaluable when new situations occur.

There are plenty of career opportunities for philosophy graduates, but often in roles that bear no obvious relation to the study of philosophy, so you need to be able to demonstrate sound personal transferable skills, which employers value. This guide will help you to think about the general skills you are developing, like the ability to think logically, analyse critically, and communicate articulately and accurately, both orally and in writing. You're also learning reasoning skills and the ability to formulate and address problems creatively.

These are the skills that employers say are desired for management and leadership roles. In an increasingly global economy, the skills of vision, creativity and analytical power being developed through the study of philosophy will be at a premium.

Due to the transferable nature of the skills that the study of philosophy develops, the kinds of jobs that philosophy graduates go on to are extremely diverse. Some areas that employ large numbers of philosophy graduates are:

- the National Health Service (NHS);
- the civil service;
- other government and public administration bodies;
- teaching;
- sales and advertising;
- investment and banking;
- management consultancy;
- law, both solicitors and barristers;
- accountancy;
- the charity or not-for-profit sector;
- Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs);
- publishing;
- journalism;
- recruitment.

Several of these areas include jobs and career pathways that would obviously require further study, training or qualifications, and you can find more information about this in Section 5.

Employability skills

We've already touched on some skills that you will be building up, but what can be expected of you, as a philosophy graduate? What kinds of skills can you expect your degree to develop in you? The QAA is an independent body that safeguards and helps to improve the academic standards and quality of higher education in the UK. One of its tasks has been to develop a 'Benchmark Statement' for each subject, outlining specific skills that students can expect to gain from studying for their degree, to help measure and maintain the standards of the university education you are being provided with. This can be helpful for you to look at as it breaks down what you are actually doing as you read, write or talk about philosophy, in much more detail than you will probably be used to. Hopefully this will help get you into the frame of mind where you can see how what you do in university classes can be transferred for use elsewhere. So, taken from the Philosophy Benchmark Statement, here is a list of the employability skills you are developing as a philosophy student. It is a long list, but it is aiming to be a definitive guide to the skills you are gaining as you study.

(The full benchmark statement can be found on the QAA website at:
http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/benchmark/honours/philosophy.asp)

General philosophical skills

1. Articulacy in accurately identifying underlying issues in all kinds of debate.

2. Logical thinking and presentation in the analysis and formulation of complex and controversial problems.

3. Sensitivity in interpretation of thoughts and ideas drawn from both history and current trends.

4. Clarity and rigour in the critical assessment of arguments presented in such thoughts and ideas.

5. Ability to use and criticise specialised philosophical terminology.

6. Ability to abstract, analyse and construct sound arguments and to identify logical inconsistency.

7. Ability to recognise methodological errors, rhetorical devices, unexamined conventional wisdom, unnoticed assumptions, vagueness and superficiality.

8. Ability to move between general and appropriately detailed discussion, providing examples to support or challenge a position, and distinguishing relevant and irrelevant considerations.

9. Ability to consider unfamiliar ideas and ways of thinking, and to examine pre-suppositions and methods critically within the discipline itself.

Engaging in philosophical debate

10. Ability to conduct arguments about matters of the highest moment without recourse to insult or susceptibility to take offence.

11. Willingness to evaluate opposing arguments, to formulate and consider the best arguments for different views and to identify the weakest elements of the most persuasive view.

12. Honesty in recognising the force of the conclusions warranted by a careful assessment of pertinent arguments.

13. The ability to work with and in relation to others through the presentation of ideas and information and the collective negotiation of solutions.

14. Ability to cross traditional subject boundaries, examining the limitations and virtues of other disciplines and practices, and recognising philosophical doctrines in unfamiliar places.

Breadth of view

15. Ability to apply philosophical skills and techniques to issues arising outside the academy.

16. Ability to adapt and transfer the critical methods of the discipline to a variety of working environments.

17. To listen attentively to complex presentations.

18. To read carefully a variety of technical and non-technical material.

Generic skills

19. Develop the ability to reflect clearly and critically on oral and written sources, employing powers of imagination as well as analysis.

20. To remember relevant material and bring it to mind when relevant.

21. To construct convincing arguments in the evaluation of information.

22. To present, in both oral and written forms, a clear and well-structured assessment of relevant considerations.

23. Develop skills in Information Technology – word-processing, email and Internet, information search and retrieval, using online computer resources to identify and access relevant information/material.

24. Ability to comprehend and develop intricate concepts in an open ended way which involves an understanding of purpose and consequences.

25. The ability to understand, interrogate and apply a variety of theoretical positions and weigh the importance of alternative perspectives.

26. The ability to handle information and argument in a critical and self reflective manner.

27. Self motivation.

28. Ability to work autonomously.

Personal attributes

The study of philosophy fosters the development of a range of personal attributes that are important in the world of work and that will strengthen the graduate's ability to engage in lifelong learning, and contribute to the wider community. These include:

29. Time and priority management skills.

30. Developing a flexible and adaptable mind to face new situations and manage change.

31. Ability to think creatively, self-critically and independently.

2. What do employers want from you?

Desired employee attributes and skills

To help you see things from the perspective of an employer, we have provided a list of the qualities typically sought by employers, with their definitions. These were identified by employer members of the Policy Forum of the Council for Industry and Higher Education (the CIHE is a council of leading people from a wide range of businesses, universities and colleges). The employers on the CIHE believe that these skills are the key components observed in individuals who can transform organisations and add value early in their careers. The skills listed below are ones that employers say they want from all employees, and we have added more detail to help you think about how to demonstrate that your philosophy degree has developed these skills in you.

Cognitive skills/brainpower

The ability to identify and solve problems, work with information and handle a mass of diverse data, assess risk and draw conclusions.

Although this could fall under the heading of 'generic skills' (those that may be covered during the course of study of any degree) note that the 'General philosophical skills' in Section 1 tie in with this particularly well, especially ones such as analysis and judgment, meaning that you, as a philosophy student, have a particular advantage here.

Analysis	Relates and compares data from different sources, identifying issues, securing relevant information and identifying relationships.
Attention to detail	Accomplishes tasks through a concern for all areas involved, no matter how small.
Judgement	Determines the most appropriate course of action and draws conclusions that are based on logical assumptions that reflect factual information.
Planning and organising	Establishes a course of action for self and/or others to accomplish a specific goal. Plans proper assignments of personnel and appropriate allocation of resources.

Generic competencies

High-level and transferable key skills such as the ability to work with others in a team, communicate, persuade and have interpersonal sensitivity.

Looking at the Benchmark Skills, as well as the general philosophical and generic ones, the skills to do with 'engaging in philosophical debate' and 'breadth of view' are particularly pertinent here. Sometimes in philosophy it might seem hard to see where skills such as teamwork or interpersonal sensitivity can be demonstrated, but looking again, perhaps skill 10, 'the ability to conduct arguments about matters of the highest moment without recourse to insult or susceptibility to take offence', or 13, 'the ability to work with and in relation to others through the presentation of ideas and

information and the collective negotiation of solutions' could be relevant. In studying for your philosophy degree you will be familiar with discussing difficult topics with others and developing your ideas through this discussion. Also, remember that there are ways that your course can demonstrate these skills apart from purely what goes on when you study. If you set up a study group to discuss your work, or attend or help run a philosophical society, these are things you could use to demonstrate such competencies.

Influencing	Influences others by expressing self effectively in a group and in one to one situations.
Interpersonal sensitivity	Recognises and respects different perspectives and appreciates the benefits of being open to the ideas and views of others.
Listening	Shows by a range of verbal and non-verbal signals that the information being received is understood.
Questioning	Uses an appropriate approach to questioning in order to gain information from which to draw conclusions and/or assist in the making of decisions.
Written communication	Expresses ideas effectively and conveys information appropriately and accurately.

Personal capabilities

The ability and desire to learn for oneself and improve one's self awareness and performance. To be a self starter (creativity, decisiveness, initiative) and to finish the job (flexibility, adaptability, tolerance to stress).

One of philosophy's particular strengths, as a subject, is that rather than just imparting a body of knowledge, it teaches you how to learn. To succeed in philosophy you need to be able to think for yourself and have the intellectual courage and creativity to develop your own viewpoints. You are also developing skills such as being able to see the wider framework that particular arguments work within, and using opposition to your arguments as a tool to refine them and take them further.

Achievement orientation	Maintains and inspires a results-driven approach, focuses on results and critical performance indicators.
Adaptability/flexibility	Maintains effectiveness in a changing environment.
Creativity	Generates and/or recognises how best practice and imaginative ideas can be applied to different situations.
Decisiveness	Makes decisions and takes action.
Initiative	Identifies opportunities and is pro-active in putting forward ideas and potential solutions.
Leadership	Takes responsibility for the directions and actions of a team.

Life long learning and development	Develops the skills and competencies of self, peers and colleagues through learning and development activities related to current and future roles.
Organisational sensitivity	Is sensitive to the effect of his or her actions on other parts of the organisation and adopts a mature, direct and up front style in dealing with conflict.
Personal development	Maintains an up to date personal development plan and takes action to ensure personal development takes place.
Teamwork/working with others	Builds and develops appropriate relationships with academic staff, peers, colleagues, customers and suppliers at all levels within an organisation.
Tolerance for stress	Maintains performance under pressure and/or opposition.

Technical ability

For example, having the knowledge and experience of working with relevant modern laboratory equipment.

While you may not think that philosophy imparts any particular technical knowledge, your use of IT to research and write, and the other skills you may learn such as using email to network, or project management software to help you plan larger projects, are invaluable here. Don't underestimate the value of such technical knowledge – use your time at university to develop these skills and always make them explicit when applying for jobs.

Technical application	Has experience of using modern technology.
Technical knowledge	Develops and maintains a body of knowledge of key trends in technology.

Business and/or organisation awareness

An appreciation of how businesses operate through having had (preferably relevant) work experience.

Although this set of skills seems to be purely related to work experience, as a philosophy student you are very well equipped to build up this type of knowledge. When you apply for a job, spend time using your research skills to build up an understanding of the organisation you want to work within, and how your role will interact with the business processes. And of course, if you know what particular line of work you want to go into after your degree, setting up some work experience or summer or part time work in the relevant area will be invaluable.

Commercial awareness	Understands the economics of the business. Understands the business benefits and commercial realities from both the organisation's and the customer's perspectives.
Financial awareness	Understands basic financial terminology used in organisations and is able to construct and maintain simple financial records.

Organisation understanding	Understands the organisation's work environment, internal politics, business objectives and strategy.
Process operation	Begins, controls and concludes a complete process or procedure.

Practical elements – vocational courses

Critical evaluation of the outcomes of professional practice; reflect and review own practice; participate in and review quality control processes and risk management.

Again, while it might be difficult at first to see how you can demonstrate this within the context of your philosophy studies, the robust nature of philosophical debate should give you the confidence to interact at all levels. Go to conferences or philosophy society meetings and gain experience of talking to people at a higher level in the same business (learning about and contributing to philosophy) as you. If you decide that you want to do a particular vocational course, your ability to assimilate knowledge and understand processes will stand you in good stead.

Image	Presents a strong, professional, positive image to others at all times. This image is consistent with all people (colleagues, management and peers, customers etc.).
Professional expertise	Keeps up to date with developments in own areas of professional specialisation. Applies a breadth and/or depth of professional knowledge.

3. Applying your employability knowledge

Two of the main activities involved in acquiring a job are writing applications and attending interviews. Below, we look at some real job adverts and selection criteria used by employers, and suggest some reflective questions that you can ask yourself when preparing for interviews. We have looked at the extent to which they match up with the skills highlighted in Section 1, and this should help you to get a better idea of how to link up what you can do with what employers are asking for.

Job adverts

The criteria taken from the job specification or description are shown in the box in the centre. In the boxes round the outside, we have annotated the criteria with examples of the way in which a philosophy student might demonstrate how their skills satisfy the criteria, and which skills from the Benchmark statement in Section 1 are relevant for each point (shown in numbers in brackets after the text). You could try doing this yourself with job adverts and selection criteria you're interested in.

Example 1: the law firm

These criteria are given by a leading law firm as the qualities and skills they want in a graduate trainee. As you can see, this employer is looking for very similar skills to those listed in Section 2. For example, cognitive skills such as analysis and judgement, personal capabilities such as creativity and teamwork, and technical abilities in the use of IT.

Tackling complex issues is one of the things you do every time you read or write or discuss philosophy, and this **sharpens your mind**. (2, 24)

An **inquiring mind** is one of the core requirements of any philosophy student, and a quality that is developed throughout a philosophy degree by reading philosophical texts, writing essays and discussing issues in class. (9)

Bright – Generally we look for a 2:1 at degree level. You need a **sharp mind**, the **ability to tackle complex legal and business issues** and take a commercial view.

Articulate – Building relationships with clients is a vital part of the modern lawyer's daily workload. We look for **confident, outgoing team players** who can get on well with clients, win their trust and keep their business.

Inquisitive and adaptable – The legal field is always changing – with new statutes to apply, new issues to address and new ways of doing business – so a **naturally inquiring mind** is a great asset. You'll need to relish the fact that you'll **never stop training, learning or adapting**.

Regularly putting forward opinions to back up your arguments in tutorials develops **confidence** and the **ability to work with others** in coming to a mutually acceptable conclusion. (13)

A key feature of philosophy is that it teaches you how to **think** and how to **learn**, and that you constantly **adapt** your opinions to take account of new arguments and evidence. (15, 16)

Interpretation of primary source philosophical texts and arguments is something the philosophy student does on a regular basis. (3)

Critical analysis is another key aspect of doing philosophy, particularly when writing essays. Similarly, **creativity** in coming up with new arguments is very important. (2, 4, 6, 9, 16, 19)

Creative and practical – **Interpreting complex law** and developing solutions to demanding commercial briefs takes a great deal of processing power, coupled with a **creative, analytical and pragmatic approach**.

Common sense – Invaluable when it comes to **developing workable legal solutions** which deliver practical business benefit for clients.

Sense of humour – The law is a demanding occupation, so the ability to take a **philosophical stance** is a valuable quality.

IT literate – Computers form the backbone of our organisation in managing casework, research and communicating with clients, so you should be **comfortable using office packages and the Internet**.

Previous work experience – We don't just take on new graduates in their early twenties. People from many professions convert to the law with us and find their previous experience a real asset.

As a philosopher, you are used to looking at problems from a variety of angles, and coming up with ideas which take account of as many eventualities and practicalities as possible, making it likely that you will be very good at delivering **workable and beneficial solutions**.

Taking a **philosophical stance** shouldn't be a problem for you! In discussing philosophy, you learn to be robust and not take criticism personally. (10)

Writing essays using Microsoft Word or other word processing packages, and **using the Internet** to research different ideas or contribute to wikis etc. develops your IT skills. Always make sure you make these skills explicit when applying for jobs. (23)

Always remember that skills you have picked up outside the classroom, from for example work experience, social activities, volunteering and part-time jobs, are often equally valued by employers.

Example 2: the Teach First programme

These criteria are given on the Teach First website as skills they are particularly interested in. Again, you can see that this programme requires very similar skills to the ones given in Section 2; generic competencies such as communication and interpersonal sensitivity (in the form of humility, respect and empathy), and personal capabilities such as creativity, initiative, leadership and teamwork.

Putting your points across in class discussions, and in essays means that philosophy students are **excellent communicators**. (21, 22)

Regularly putting forward opinions to back up your arguments in tutorials develops **confidence** and the **ability to work with others** in coming to a mutually acceptable conclusion. (13)

To be a successful candidate on the Teach First programme you will be an **accomplished communicator** with **proven leadership abilities**; someone who is clearly able to demonstrate **initiative, creativity and resourcefulness** in challenging situations. You will be able to show strong levels of **self-awareness**, **understand the consequences of your actions** and **be able to evaluate your impact on the outcome of a situation**. You will be the kind of person who does not shy away from your responsibilities and have the **resilience** to see things through to completion. It goes without saying that Teach First is not for the faint hearted.

Any application to the Teach First programme and any subsequent interviews will be assessed against the following criteria:

Communication skills

Humility, respect and empathy

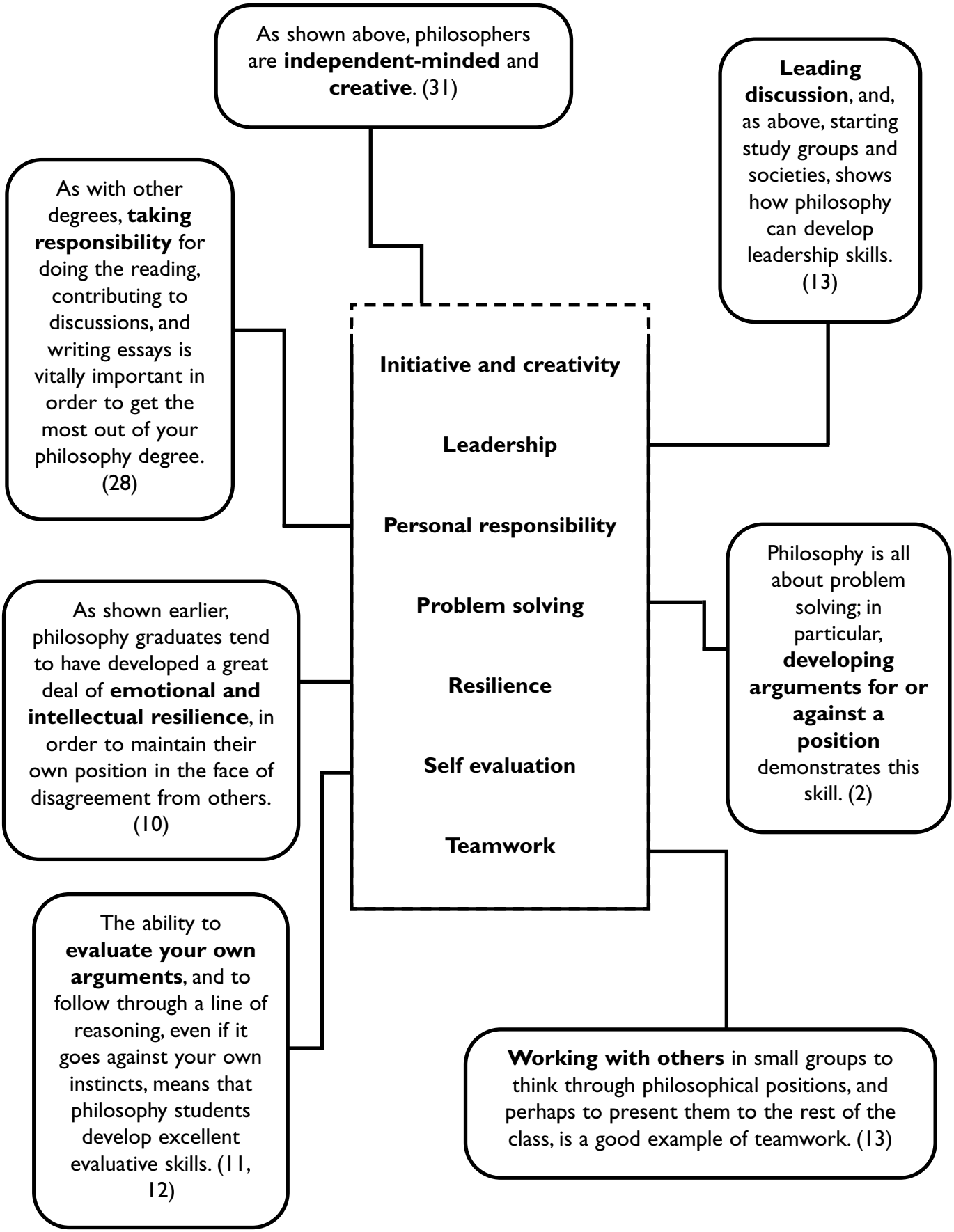
The kind of **rational, logical thinking** that philosophy encourages, along with the **creativity** required to imagine things from other perspectives, means that philosophy students are well placed to follow through from actions to consequences. (6, 7, 24)

Contemplating your own beliefs and why you hold them is central to philosophy, and so develops your **self-awareness**. (10, 26)

Holding out for a position that you strongly believe in develops the kind of **resilience** much sought after in the business world. (1)

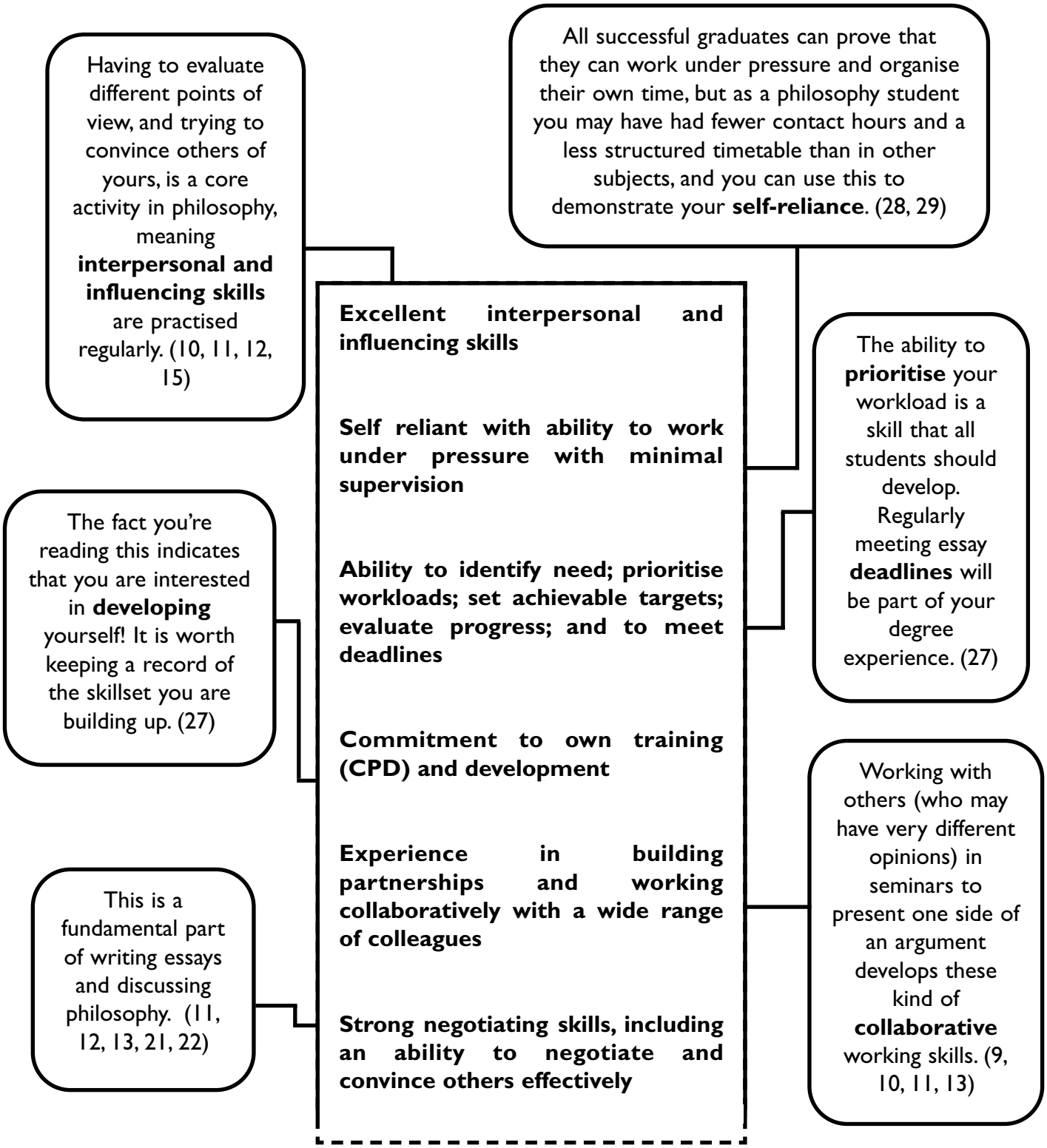
Through writing and discussing philosophy, students develop highly sophisticated written and verbal **communication skills**.

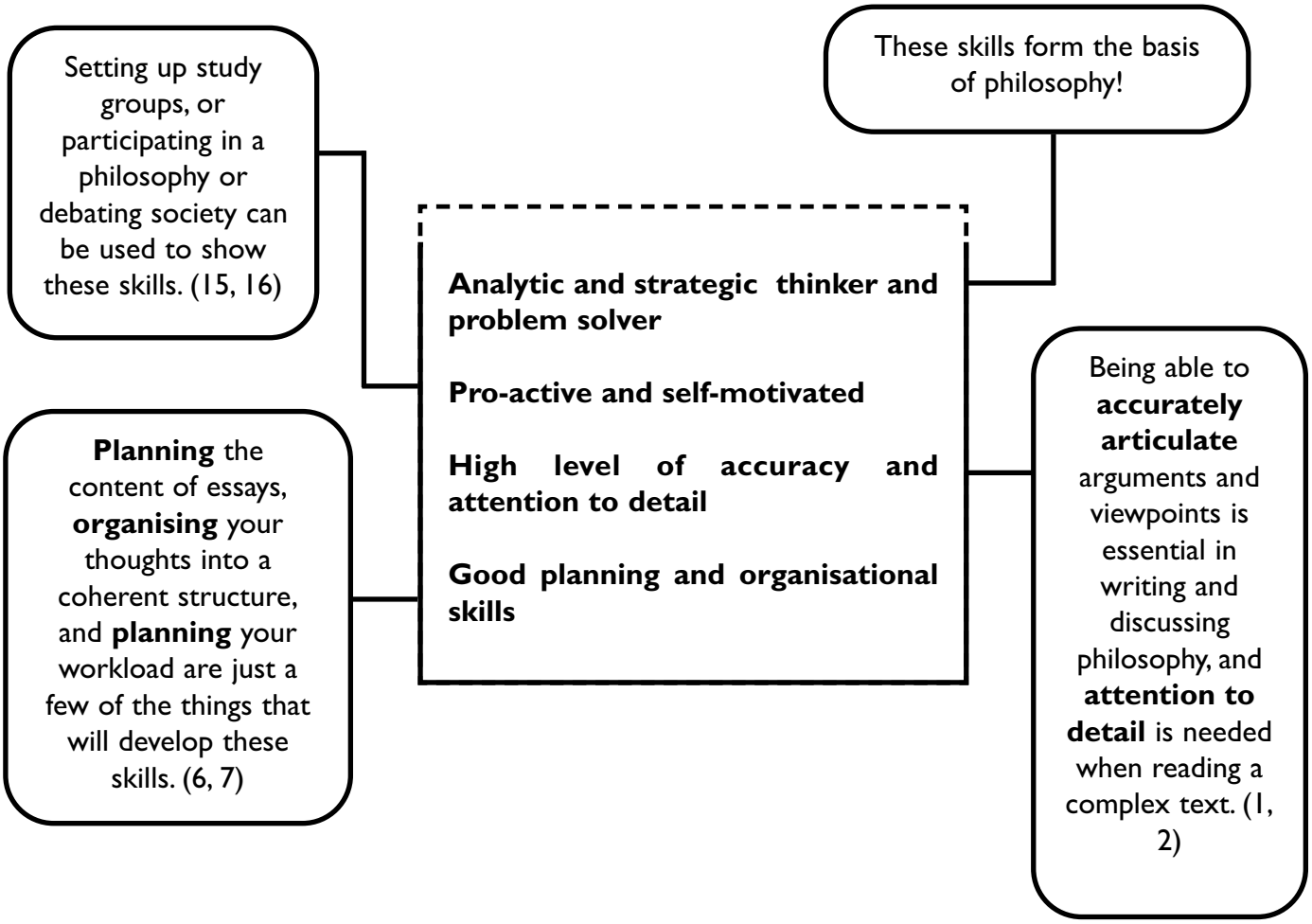
Respecting the views of others, **understanding** why people have different beliefs, and seeing how these can be reconciled develops a healthy **respect for diversity**. (3, 10)


As shown above, philosophers are **independent-minded** and **creative**. (31)
Leading discussion, and, as above, starting study groups and societies, shows how philosophy can develop leadership skills. (13)
As with other degrees, **taking responsibility** for doing the reading, contributing to discussions, and writing essays is vitally important in order to get the most out of your philosophy degree. (28)
Initiative and creativity
Leadership
Personal responsibility
Problem solving
Resilience
Self evaluation
Teamwork
Philosophy is all about problem solving; in particular, **developing arguments for or against a position** demonstrates this skill. (2)
As shown earlier, philosophy graduates tend to have developed a great deal of **emotional and intellectual resilience**, in order to maintain their own position in the face of disagreement from others. (10)
The ability to **evaluate your own arguments**, and to follow through a line of reasoning, even if it goes against your own instincts, means that philosophy students develop excellent evaluative skills. (11, 12)
Working with others in small groups to think through philosophical positions, and perhaps to present them to the rest of the class, is a good example of teamwork. (13)

Example 3: best of the rest

In addition to the full sets of criteria above, we have compiled a collection of frequently used criteria that appear in a lot of job adverts and graduate training schemes. Each individual point is one that appears in an actual person specification, although we have drawn them from several different sources.




Setting up study groups, or participating in a philosophy or debating society can be used to show these skills. (15, 16)
These skills form the basis of philosophy!
Analytic and strategic thinker and problem solver
Pro-active and self-motivated
High level of accuracy and attention to detail
Good planning and organisational skills
Planning the content of essays, organising your thoughts into a coherent structure, and planning your workload are just a few of the things that will develop these skills. (6, 7)
Being able to accurately articulate arguments and viewpoints is essential in writing and discussing philosophy, and attention to detail is needed when reading a complex text. (1, 2)

Interviews

Once you have applied for a job you will (hopefully) be asked to attend an interview. There are many resources already available about interview preparation, and you can find further information about these in Section 5. However, the activity of doing philosophy instils an aptitude for self-reflection that can be particularly helpful when thinking about interview situations.

Here are some sample questions and suggested responses that relate to the kinds of skills and attributes that you are developing by studying philosophy, and that employers say they look for. We have not listed questions for every quality mentioned by employers in Section 2, but you can practice by applying the same kind of thinking to the other areas. The questions are necessarily broad, and, as with the example job criteria, are aimed at getting you to think about the kinds of responses you can give, taking into account the skills your degree is developing in you. The numbers in brackets below refer to the numbered benchmark skills in Section 1.

Cognitive skills/brainpower

Planning and organising (6, 7)

Can you tell me about a time when you had to plan a piece of work, and how you went about that?

If you wrote a dissertation this would be a good example of your planning skills, but essay-writing or even exam preparation could be used here as well. As a philosophy student you will be particularly adept at organising your thoughts into a coherent structure and communicating this to others.

Generic competencies

Influencing (10, 11, 12, 15, 21)

Can you describe a time when you have had to persuade someone to change their opinion?

It should be easy to think of examples of when you have tried to persuade people to change their opinions; in tutorials and seminars you will have discussed topics that brought a variety of views, and you will frequently have been asked to defend your own, or even those of someone else, in order to persuade others to agree with you.

What do you do when you are right and others disagree with you?

This kind of question gives you an opportunity to demonstrate that you are capable of being persuasive and assertive without coming across as dogmatic or inflexible. The discussion of philosophy in seminars will have given you lots of practice at remaining calm in the face of disagreement and coming up with a variety of points to support your claims, as well as probably having sometimes to agree to differ gracefully.

Communication (8, 22)

Describe a presentation you have given. What were you proud of/what would you do differently?

At some point in your degree it is likely that you will have given a presentation to your fellow students and tutor/lecturer, but even if you haven't been required to do so on a formal level you will still have experience of presenting your thoughts to others in seminars and tutorials, and you can emphasise the confidence you have gained from doing so.

Personal capabilities

Teamwork (10, 13)

Describe a team that you have worked in – what was your contribution?

Working in small groups with others in order to come up with a coherent argument to present to the rest of the class could be one example you use here. Alternatively, if you have helped to set up or run a study group or society you could use this experience to demonstrate how you can work well with others.

Give me an example when you have worked in a team and had to persuade the group of your argument. Can you tell me what you did and what you learnt?

As above, there should be plenty of examples you can give of working in groups and using the kind of rational, logical thinking that philosophy encourages to convince others of your point of view. Reflect on the times that you feel such exchanges went well, and see if you can draw out some points that could be applied generally.

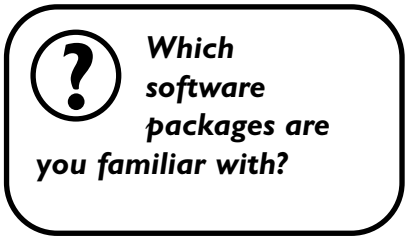
Leadership (13)

Can you tell me about a time when you had to take on a leadership role?

Hopefully you will have lead discussions in your classes, and you can use these instances to demonstrate skills such as drawing out others' opinions, ensuring that everyone got to contribute, making sure that the discussion stayed on topic, and that you came to a mutually acceptable conclusion.

Technical ability

Technical application (23)



As part of your degree you will almost certainly have had to submit essays or coursework in printed form, and so are likely to be familiar with word processing software such as Microsoft Word. You may also have used PowerPoint to give presentations, and various different Internet browsers. Anything you have gained experience with during paid or voluntary work is also worth mentioning, as is the fact that the logic skills built up in the study of philosophy make you an adept learner of computer programmes.

Business and/or organisation awareness

Organisation understanding (16)

Before the interview you should use the research skills you have developed during your studies in order to find out as much as possible about the organisation you want to work for, and the role you have applied for. Think in advance about how you can show that the skills you have, and the values you hold, match those required by the organisation you want to work for.

Practical elements – vocational courses

Image

This area is not one that is likely to come up in interview *questions*, but it is certainly something to be considered when preparing for interviews. Think about your appearance (i.e. dress smartly, make sure you are clean and tidy, arrive in plenty of time to avoid appearing flustered, etc.) so that you create the best possible impression. Again, you can find more information about pre-interview preparation in the further resources listed in Section 5.

4. Case Studies

Real life examples of philosophy graduates' experience

These case studies are designed to get you thinking about where your degree might take you, not just for your first job but on into your future career.

They give you a snapshot of two philosophy graduates' experiences during and after university, and show how careers can develop after leaving university, and how the skills and attitudes you develop whilst studying can continue to stand you in good stead long after graduation.

Elisabeth – BA (Hons) Philosophy, Hull University, 1985-1988

"Studying philosophy has allowed me to consider the bigger picture on all issues and to understand there are always opposite opinions and there are no absolute truths in life. The notion that there is always a deeper level to issues that may seem simple has given me strong investigative and problem solving skills in the workplace.

To me as a person the subject has been really useful as it's helped me understand myself and others. I would describe myself as 'philosophical' and am constantly using my ability to constructively challenge others' thinking and beliefs. As a philosopher I am aware that people have their own belief systems and I am happy to debate others' belief systems in the workplace to challenge processes and develop new ways of doing things."

Graduate programme at Commercial Union

"This allowed me to develop my employability and recognise my strengths, particularly in regard to managing others and planning.

Regional Office Manager for the Criminal Intelligence Service

In this job I managed a team of over thirty staff. Here the problem solving skills I developed studying philosophy helped me support my team through times of change and in stressful situations.

Delivering training in stress management skills opened the door for me to think about training for a career in alternative therapies. For two years I combined studying with work and qualified as an alternative therapist.

Founder and Director of a Complementary Health Centre

I then set up my own business and managed it very profitably for four years. Studying philosophy gave me a great deal of self belief, which drove me during this time. I prepared financial plans, marketed my business and recruited staff.

Research Associate for the University of Birmingham

From my previous work, I was recruited to be a research associate. Whilst researching the benefits of hypnotherapy on patients with particular health issues I gained an M.Phil.

Current job roles

For the past four years I have combined two roles that utilise different sets of skills. This gives me more variety, as I am easily bored, and more flexibility to use a broader range of my abilities.

Project Development Officer for Walsall Hospice Appeal	I work for Walsall Primary Care Trust fundraising for a hospice development.
Private Practice Hypnotherapist	This involves seeing clients one to one and supporting them as they make changes in their lives related for example to health or personal relationships.
Reflections on my career path	I have enjoyed the flexibility that my career path has offered. I left my philosophy course with a strong sense of the need to be flexible and take risks. All my work experience has been useful and helped me develop a good understanding of people in different working environments and organisational cultures. I plan to continue progressing and changing within my career. I see the career choices I have made as part of a continual process of learning and growing in self awareness, and my own personal development is firmly at the top of my agenda."

James – BA (Hons) Philosophy, University of Wales, Lampeter, 1990-1994

"The ability to reason, question and learn is probably the most important skill required in a job market that is always growing and changing. For every career that can be defined and a vocational course built around it there are many that simply rely on individual aptitude and the ability to create. It is here that I think philosophy though maligned in the past really shines."

Diagnostics Technician in NTL Telecommunications	"I suppose the old chestnut 'Learning *how* to think not *what* to think' really sums it up. The ability to think laterally and find alternative solutions to problems, the ability to empathise with the positions of others and find the best overall course of action, and the ability to plan in a structured way and separate the relevant from the irrelevant, have all come in useful in my career.
Capacity Planner and Controller in NTL Telecommunications	When I graduated I was looking for a job that would use my creative ideas and logic skills. The ability to logically evaluate a problem helped me diagnose the cause of new problems. I was also able to build structured and intuitive resources for others to learn from. In demand planning I had to identify processes and then model their behaviour to perform forecasts. This meant being able to interview people and get all aspects of their part of the puzzle, understand the system processes and ultimately model the entire thing to generate plans of action. I can only attribute my ability to do this to the skills of structured thought, logic and discussion I gained from my degree. There were several instances where simply by challenging existing working practices, huge improvements were made.

Senior Analyst in NTL Telecommunications

In my work as a Senior Analyst the real benefit of having studied philosophy was that I had the skills to evaluate business practices, identify the moments of truth within those practices and then define and implement the measurements that reflected true evaluation of performance whilst giving a sense of ownership to individual areas of that business practice. Central to this is the understanding and application of positive and normative analysis, phrases stolen by economics but with a good healthy philosophical ancestry.

Current role: Strategic Implementation Manager in NTL Telecommunications

This role covers the scoping, design, implementation and review of business analysis strategy. A large part of my current job is to provide IT solutions for large complex businesses. This is a problem solving role on a big scale and often involves helping businesses to make huge cost savings.

I don't see my role now as particularly technical – more a case of understanding models, structures and concepts and coming up with creative solutions. Combining business thinking with technical sense involves interviewing clients to understand both their business needs and technical problems. Then it's up to me to put my creative thinking to the test and come up with solutions that aim to improve business performance and profitability.

Reflecting on my career path

I have spent the last eight years in Telecoms, and I still enjoy applying my ability to think laterally and find alternative solutions to both business and technical problems.

I really believe that philosophy graduates have something distinct and valuable to bring to the workplace. I think they represent the ideal candidates for new developments and markets where there is little precedence, let alone vocational training."

5. Resources

Extra resources on the PRS website

We hope that you have found the information in this guide a helpful way to start thinking about employability. There are additional resources available on our website, at **http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk/projects/employability**, that expand on some of the areas covered, including reflective questions to help you think about ways to demonstrate that your skills match the qualities employers are looking for, and a report on a project commissioned by the Subject Centre on self-employability in TRS.

One of the fastest growing areas of interest in many organisations is that of Corporate Social Responsibility, or CSR. This covers topics as diverse as sustainability and 'green' issues, awareness

of cultural and religious diversity, and business ethics, all of which you, as a philosophy student, will be well equipped to think about. In particular, issues around ethics and values in general are ones that you will have encountered frequently during your studies. The Subject Centre for PRS ran a project about CSR in 2008, and the resources that came out of it, including case studies and a literature review, are available here: **http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk/projects/eee/index.html**

Other resources

Here are some other sources of careers information that may be relevant as you make the transition from university to work, further study or other developmental opportunities.This information represents a starting point and we would strongly advise you to visit your own university Careers Service, which will have many additional sources of information and advice.

Prospects	This is described as the official graduate website and has a lot of useful information linked to job vacancies, postgraduate study and information on what graduates go on to do. There are also lots of useful resources on how to write your CV, tips for filling in job applications, and advice about interview techniques in the 'Jobs and Work' section of the site. **http://www.prospects.ac.uk**
Milkround	This is a graduate careers portal for students and graduates, listing jobs on the site, and emailing relevant opportunities directly to those who sign up. It also has a useful 'News and Advice' section, containing profiles of different types of jobs, advice about job applications, covering letters, CV writing, psychometric testing, interviews etc., and interesting profiles of recent graduates now working for different companies. **http://www.milkround.com/**
Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS)	The professional association of careers staff working in the sector. The site gives an insight into the work of AGCAS and its careers information products including books, videos and useful web links. There are several useful resources in the 'Resources' section of the site. **http://www.agcas.org.uk**
Association of Graduate Recruiters (AGR)	The AGR is an independent, not-for-profit organisation dedicated to supporting employers in all aspects of graduate recruitment. They produce research surveys on graduate salaries, skills and other labour market information. **http://www.agr.org.uk**
National Council for Work Experience	This site offers excellent links to schemes offering work experience, placement and year out opportunities. The 'Case Studies' section contains useful information from both the employer and student perspective. **http://www.work-experience.org**