



# MARKETING YOUR INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE

*A self-directed workbook for students preparing for the job interview process*



Dear Study Abroad Alumni:

Congratulations. You have set yourself apart from other U.S. undergraduates by having studied abroad; only about 10% do so according to the most recent Institute of International Education's Open Doors Survey (2016). Now you need to put that experience to work; it doesn't suffice to simply say you were abroad – you need to be able to show that you have realized some benefits.

By having this workbook before you, you have just taken a key step in your career exploration and job-seeking process that very few students take the time to do. From working with students for many years, we know that after studying abroad, you report that it was a significant learning experience – about the world, about a specific culture, about yourself. So now is the time to examine just what you acquired, blend it with examples from your other life experiences, learn how to explain it to potential employers, and show how it demonstrates your skills and knowledge.

An international experience is often ripe with good examples of learning to appreciate difference, showing you are open to new situations and deepening your cultural sensitivity. If examples don't come to mind right away, it's normal to need some time to think about it. But better to take several days to reflect on your experience than to be caught without anything to say in the actual interview.

This workbook is only one of the steps in the job search process, but an essential one: it will provide you with the 'content' for your interviews.

With wishes for much success –

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## WHY SPEND TIME ON THIS WORKBOOK?

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It doesn't matter to employers that you studied abroad unless you can say something meaningful about it. Thus, this set of short exercises aims to help you do precisely that. Its objectives are to help you:

- Reflect on your experience to identify skills and qualities developed in studying abroad.
- Identify situations experienced abroad to support your claims of skills/qualities.
- Develop short 'stories' to demonstrate your skills in interviews.
- Understand the importance of preparing for job interviews.
- Create an elevator pitch with focus on international experience to use when networking, at a job fair or during an interview.

In working with students, they often do not understand the importance of preparing – in advance and thoroughly – for the interviewing process. If you take the time to follow the steps in this workbook and have a 'bank' of examples ready for your interviews, you will way ahead of most people, and should make a strong impression to potential employers.

Sometimes students question if by having these examples ready, they may seem TOO prepared. We don't think that's likely (as long as you are not telling your stories like a robot!) To the employer, to see someone who has given so much thought and preparation to the process is likely to be quite impressive.

This workbook is only a slice of being well-prepared for your interview. You should also read about all aspects of the search process, etiquette and manners, appropriate dress and follow-up, etc. But to take time to build the 'content' to tell about yourself is the very heart of this process.

## BEFORE WE BEGIN...

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**By having studied abroad, you have set yourself apart as a U.S. undergraduate, but you must also be able to say something substantive about your experience to potential employers.** Global Career consultant Martin Tillman says "It is no longer enough to simply say that you studied abroad; you must be able to show that you developed skills."

**Remember that learning can happen outside the classroom.** Most students claim that the most learning abroad took place outside of the classroom.

**Consider your audience.** Undoubtedly you have many stories from your time abroad. Remember that the stories you share in an interview setting need to be workplace appropriate.

**Capitalize on the fact that your time abroad was a rather recent life experience.** If you studied abroad as an undergraduate and you are now a recent graduate or slightly beyond, it is important that you capitalize on the fact that this experience wasn't too long ago, and bring its relevance to light. (Twenty years from now, your study abroad experience probably won't have as much relevance in a job interview!)

**The study abroad experience should allow you to focus on intercultural skills and sensitivity** – a highly transferable skill set that is applicable across all work sectors and positions.

**Know how to prepare for your interview.** It is always imperative to prepare for interviews, both in terms of knowing about the employer and position but also in terms of preparing examples and stories you can tell to 'substantiate your claims'.

**It is nearly impossible to be over-prepared!** Some students think that they might seem too prepared if they have a set of examples in mind as they enter the interview.

# WARM-UP REFLECTION QUESTIONS

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Your responses to these questions will help to set your mind in the right direction. These questions are a 'warm-up' and will help you hone in and identify even more specific skills and qualities.

## From My International Experience...

*I can identify a change in myself – my values, outlook, attitude and/or abilities:*

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*I experienced new cultures. One strategy that was really helpful in learning how to interact with people from another culture was:*

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*I have clarified what is important to me – who I am, who I want to be, and what I want to accomplish. For instance...*

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*I had to learn how to adapt. One change that was really hard for me to adapt to in my host culture was:*

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*I gained a greater perspective on global issues. One social issue (local or global) that I learned more about is...*

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# WHAT HAVE YOU GAINED FROM YOUR EXPERIENCE?

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Use this list to put your experience into words.

Go through this list first and check everything that you believe applies.

Then go back and review, and select what you think the top three traits are so that you have some to focus on in the remaining exercises.

## Cultural Understanding and World View:

*As a result of my international experience(s), I have developed:*

- A greater knowledge about another culture
- Awareness of political, economic or social events around the world
- My interest in global or transnational issues
- My involvement with a global issue
- My involvement with a civic cause
- A definition of my political views
- My ability to speak a foreign language

## Personal Growth and Values

*My international experience(s) have helped me to grow and develop:*

- My desire for more diverse friendships and social networks
- My desire to further my education (e.g., postgraduate degree)
- A better understanding of myself and my values
- My sense of confidence in new situations or when meeting new people
- My ability to accept differences in other people
- My ability to empathize with people, especially those who are different from me
- My ability to be more flexible and open-minded
- My tolerance of ambiguity in a variety of situations
- An understanding of my own strengths and weaknesses
- My ability to be independent
- My ability to take initiative

*And, I have:*

- Become more aware of the way I use and structure time
- An increased capacity to profit from my mistakes
- Strengthened relationships with my family members
- Strengthened relationships with my friends
- A clearer notion of what I will do with my life

*Additionally:*

- I am more capable of solving life's day-to-day problems
- I think more critically: I am more discriminating and skeptical
- I have improved observation skills
- I can appreciate time to be alone, disconnected from social media, etc.
- I am more confident about the decisions I make
- I recognize the importance I put on developing my skills and talents
- I have an increased willingness to work hard and sacrifice in order to do well in school or in my job

## Professional & Career Development

*Studying Abroad contributed to:*

- My ability to formulate my career goals and clarify my professional aspirations
- Greater awareness of the opportunities in life that are open to me.
- Developing skills and intercultural competencies which will aid in obtaining my first job after graduation
- My increased willingness to take on roles and tasks to which I am unaccustomed
- The importance I place on working in a field that I find interesting
- The importance I place on having personal fulfillment in my work
- My ability to speak a foreign language in the workplace
- Developing my ability to understand an organization's culture
- My ability to adapt in diverse workplace environments
- Other things you want to list:

# POSSIBLE OUTCOMES OF AN INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE

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Review these lists of skills and qualities to help you articulate the skills you may have developed studying abroad.

See the short prefaces in the remaining sections to further understand how this categorization can help you depending on your audience.

## SKILLS

- Establish rapport quickly
- Function with a high level of ambiguity
- Achieve goals despite obstacles
- Take initiative and risks
- Manage time and multiple tasks
- Identify and solve problems
- Accept responsibility
- Communicate despite language & cultural barriers
- Ability to compromise
- Learn quickly
- Handle stress/difficult situations
- Manage/Organize
- Lead formal and/or informal groups
- Cope with rejection, criticism, constructive feedback
- Capacity to ask for & receive help
- Adapt to new environments
- Understand an organization's culture
- Learn through listening and observing
- Gain foreign language skills

## QUALITIES

- Self-reliance
- High energy/enthusiasm
- Appreciation of diversity
- Perseverance
- Tolerance/open-minded
- Assertiveness
- Self-confidence
- Self-knowledge/Self-awareness
- Independence
- Inquisitiveness
- Flexibility

## SKILLS DESIRED FOR ENTRY-LEVEL JOBS

Here is a list that employers seeking to hire recent graduates recently offered to campus career professionals. This list is important if you are graduating with your Bachelors and setting off into the working world. Focus on this list to come up with examples of how you have demonstrated these skills. Employers expect new college graduates to have the ability to:

- Work in a team structure
  - Make decisions and solve problems
  - Plan, organize and prioritize work
  - Obtain and process information
  - Analyze quantitative data
  - Create and/or edit written reports
  - Sell to influence others
  - Verbally communicate with persons inside and outside the organization
- And possess:
- Technical knowledge related to the job
  - Proficiency with computer software program

## CROSS-CULTURAL SKILLS

This list shows a skill set that includes some very likely to be developed from an international experience. Students can determine what overlaps with their own skills and what employers are looking for, etc. *From Survival Kit for Overseas Living, L. Robert Kohls, 2001.*

- Tolerance for Ambiguity
- Sense of Humor
- Warmth in Human Relationships
- Motivation
- Self-Reliance
- Low goal/Task orientation
- Strong Self-Awareness
- Tolerance of Differences
- Open-Mindedness
- Perceptiveness
- Non-judgmentalness
- Empathy
- Communicativeness
- Ability to Fail
- Flexibility/Adaptability
- Curiosity

## SKILLS DESIRED BY INTERNATIONAL EMPLOYERS

Employers around the world were surveyed about the traits they seek most in employees. This list may not have direct relevance to your first job, but at some point in your career, these may be important if not essential:

**Highest ranked skills:** Demonstrates respect for others • Builds trust • Works effectively in diverse teams • Open to new ideas/way of thinking • Qualifications related to job • Expertise related to field • Collaborative • Seeks opportunities for continuous learning • Self-motivated • Time management

**Lowest ranked skills** (from 'bottom-up'): IT Skills • Tolerates ambiguity • Awareness of own cultural influence • Communicates in other languages • Entrepreneurship • Understands the marketplace • Understands different cultural contexts and viewpoints • Creativity  
(See Resource List on last page for link to complete survey results, published by The British Council).

# JOB PROFILE - SAMPLE

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Below is a sample summary worksheet for an entry-level position in a study abroad office. Most job ads list a set of qualifications which include a combination of experience, skills and knowledge. The purpose of this is to help identify what the needed qualifications are for the target position. In an interview, you will likely get asked about the required skills. You will want to highlight your matching skills and perhaps add some of your own strengths that you think are helpful. You can look up positions in a wide variety of job sectors on a website such as this one: <http://www.onetonline.org/find/career> where you will find the requirements – including experience and skills – typical of each position.

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**Position Title:** Program Coordinator

**Type of organization:** Study Abroad Office on a U.S. college campus

## Knowledge & Skills required of successful people in this position:

- Knowledge of study abroad programming, policies, procedures, and recruitment
- Social media & marketing skills
- Knowledge of budgets
- Experience with campus student data system
- Ability to coordinate group travel
- Microsoft Office Suite

*Helpful: a study abroad experience; foreign language proficiency*

## Qualities possessed by successful people in this position:

- Interpersonal/human relations skills
- Strong verbal and written communication skills
- Planning, organizational, and presentation skills
- Ability to demonstrate self-direction, motivation, and work in a team setting
- Ability to interact effectively with a diverse client group
- Highly organized
- Creative thinker/problem solver

## A typical day/week in this position:

<u>Activity</u>	<u>% time spent</u>
Managing study abroad enrollments	25%
Communicating with registrar, financial aid, business office	10%
Liaising with travel organizations & agents regarding group travel	15%
Coordinating social media & promoting study abroad on campus	30%
Staff meetings, meeting with faculty	20%

# JOB PROFILE WORKSHEET

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Complete this worksheet for a position or job function you would (realistically) like to have within the next five years. List the required experience, knowledge, skills and credentials for this position. You must address these specifically in your resume and cover letter, especially given that many/most applications are scanned by automated readers, programmed to look for certain key words. If granted an interview, you will want to have real-life examples ready to show that you have indeed demonstrated these skills.

**Name of targeted position/job function** \_\_\_\_\_

**Type of organization(s):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Skills necessary by successful people in targeted position:**

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

**Qualities possessed by successful people in targeted position:**

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

**A typical day/week in the life of a person in a targeted position:**

<b>Activity</b>	<b>% time spent</b>
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____



## FOCUSED INTERVIEWING (ALSO KNOWN AS BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEWING)

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Use the STAR technique to build concise, but descriptive responses.

Employers most often ask questions such as: “Tell me about a time when you had to problem-solve” or “Tell me about a time that you were part of a team and talk about the role you played and what you contributed to the group.”

If you are able to respond with a STAR, your responses will be concise, descriptive and relevant -- and will be more credible.

### What is a STAR?

**S** – Describe the specific setting or **situation** for which the experience took place.

*Example: While studying abroad in Germany, I found that my coursework was extremely different from what I was accustomed to in the U.S. I was used to having assignments due throughout the semester, but for my German courses the entire grade was based on the final with no accountability beforehand.*

**T** – Describe the specific **task** or project related to the skill sought.

*Example: During that semester, I was taking a full load of coursework for my major, and I was really motivated to do well during my semester abroad. I had to figure out a way to stay on top of it all because it would be impossible to do well at the end of the semester if I left studying all to the end.*

**A** – Describe the specific steps or **actions** you took to complete the task or project.

*Example: I had to act as a self-starter, and I set out a structured study plan for myself for the entire semester. I formed small study groups with a few classmates for each of my classes, and we’d meet once a week.*

**R** – Describe the **results** or outcomes resulting from the actions taken.

*Example: I developed strong time management skills because of the new type of academic setting I experienced in Germany. Because I kept up with my study plan throughout the semester, I ended up earning A’s and B’s in my classes, and I was able to keep my stress level down before final exams.*

This is a typical STAR answer. It could be the answer to, “Give me an example of an accomplishment you are proud of.” If someone asked, “What’s your greatest skill?” you might answer, “I believe I can set goals and meet them,” and then give a story like the one above. Or, if the interviewer says, “Why should we hire you?” you can begin with “I am a good problem solver, for instance...” and continue with an example like the one above.

**Having a specific example gives you much more credibility that if you merely say “I can set goals and meet them” or “I am a problem-solver.”**

*The STAR technique is widely cited by career specialists; its origin appears to be unknown. An online search will result in many additional resources about this interview technique.*

## STAR STRATEGIES

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- **Have 10-12 stories ready when you go into any job interview.** Use real-life experience stories from which you:
  - learned or accomplished something with relevance to your personal growth, etc.; or
  - acquired a new or reinforced an existing skill or positive quality
  - It is important to focus on the behaviors you displayed (for example, conflict, problem-solving, creativity, communication, teamwork, etc.) and to develop stories around these.
- **Keep your answers succinct.** Response time to an interview question is from 30 seconds to 2 minutes maximum (if you exceed that, you may start losing your audience)
- **A common interview technique is Behavior-Based Interviewing.** The interviewer will ask you “Tell me about a time when [you were part of a work team]” or “Tell us about your experience in [problem-solving].”
- **Include at least a few stories from your semester or travels abroad.**
- **Profound learning from challenging situations and the unique experiences make great examples**
- **Your time abroad has a certain ‘shelf life’ for greatest relevance, and you should use it to your advantage.** Stories are highly relevant upon your return and for at least awhile after graduating.
- **Don’t have all of your stories be from your time abroad!** You don’t want the interviewer to think that you can speak only about your study abroad experience; you should develop examples from other life experiences (summer jobs, student clubs, volunteering, athletics, etc.). Diversify your examples, stories and experiences. Again, interviewers are less concerned of which experience and more interested in the actual behavior, skill or competency

## TELLING YOUR STORY

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Utilize the STAR format. Your story should last between 30 seconds to 2 minutes.

Highlight what is clearly relevant; avoid unnecessary details.


### SAMPLE STORY #1

*(S) I learned how to take initiative and problem-solve in in a class I took abroad in England. The format was very different from what I was used to in the States. There was no syllabus and we received a very long reading list instead. There were mostly lectures given and not much discussion or interaction.*

*(T) At first I was really worried because it’s not how I was used to learning. But instead of panicking, I tried to examine the differences from a more ‘outside’ perspective. I realized that if the British students managed in this system, I likely could as well.*

*(A) I figured out that by asking my classmates a few questions about what was expected of us, by identifying and focusing on several of the key texts the instructor referenced and by committing to study time each week even though I wasn’t required to submit any work, I could keep up and succeed in the course.*

*(R) The final exam was a bit daunting, but I ended up doing quite well in the course. I realize now that I not only learned a lot about the subject area, but about my own learning styles and my ability to take initiative and succeed when challenged as well.*



Note: Showing cultural respect is important. Note how this story doesn’t log any complaints about the system abroad. It speaks respectfully, in descriptive terms about the differences.

## SAMPLE STORY #2

*(S) In my homestay in Spain, I learned how to consider and respect different viewpoints. I grew very close to people with very different opinions than my own – and all of this was accomplished despite the fact that my Spanish was not quite yet fluent.*

*(T) My host father wanted to engage me in discussions on world politics, especially about U.S. foreign policy. He wasn't happy about the U.S. influence in the world and asked me questions that honestly, I wasn't prepared to answer. I felt so ignorant with my limited language skill and by not knowing the specifics about the foreign policies of my own country.*

*(A) I faced this challenge head-on: I made a point to read the Spanish newspaper each day so that I could acquire both the knowledge and the vocabulary.*

*(R) Over time, I got pretty good at being able to engage in discussion with him. We had quite different viewpoints on a number of things, but his approach was not to insult but to challenge me. I respect him for this, and I am grateful for the opportunity to see political discourse as an exercise in learning and not demeaning anyone. I am very close with everyone in my homestay and am still in touch with them.*

Note: Carefully consider whether you think it's a good idea to reveal your political party preferences in a job interview. This story does not 'call' either point of view by a name. While perhaps the listener could speculate on the political orientation of the storyteller, it still leaves room for ambiguity.

## SAMPLE STORY #3

Note how this story doesn't log any complaints about having to limit personal desires. It speaks of the challenges, but focuses on being successful in personal obligations.

This example might be used to demonstrate a quality such as flexibility or open-mindedness. It is good use of a cross-cultural situation.

*(S) I was working in India, managing a team who were all Indian. I quickly realized that they said 'yes' to everything I asked of them when in reality, they had not done the work I asked about.*

*(T) I needed to find a way to understand why they told me they were willing to do the work but did not deliver.*

*(A) I sent up a meeting with each of them and talked about their performance. They explained that they were willing to do the job but did not always understand what was required of them and were not comfortable telling me, nor did they want to respond with a 'no' for fear that I would think I was being unreasonable.*

*(R) By working more closely and creating a relationship with each of them -- so as a manager but in a friendship kind of way as well – we were able to get everything done, avoid problems and even find innovative solutions together.*

## SAMPLE STORY #4

*(S) I walked into a gelato shop in Rome and saw that customers were to take a number [in order to be served]. I did so, but after 10 minutes, I realized that they weren't actually using the number system.*

*(T) I had to decide what I was going to do if I was going to get ice cream, but it did not feel right being so assertive; in US culture it would be considered rude to advance without honoring the number system.*

*(A) I decided that I would follow what I saw others doing. I realized that if I observed how others were advancing, I could follow along.*

*(R) I never would have guessed that something as simple as ordering a gelato would be such a chance to learn. But it taught me that good observation skills are key and that it's not only OK but essential to shift your thinking sometimes and do things differently than you are used to. Before this, I may have said that Italian culture was unorganized or chaotic, but I learned there are just other ways of doing things.*

# PREPARING “STARS” FOR YOUR INTERVIEW

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Prepare a collection of ‘STAR’s in advance for your interviews – we recommend having 10-12.

Map out the skills and qualities below so that you can speak about them in full sentences.

Include some examples from studying abroad as well as from your involvement in campus activities & clubs, athletics, part-time work and internships or volunteering as well.

## Skills/Traits

EXAMPLE:

Problem-solving, initiative, adaptability

**STAR** (Situation, Task, Action, Result)

**S:** Academic system abroad was different, challenging

**T:** I needed to have a plan to succeed

**A:** Set up weekly study groups, set schedule for myself

**R:** Did well on final exam, earned A’s and B’s for semester

## Skills/Traits:

\_\_\_\_\_

**S:** \_\_\_\_\_

**T:** \_\_\_\_\_

**A:** \_\_\_\_\_

**R:** \_\_\_\_\_

## Skills/Traits:

\_\_\_\_\_

**S:** \_\_\_\_\_

**T:** \_\_\_\_\_

**A:** \_\_\_\_\_

**R:** \_\_\_\_\_

## Skills/Traits:

\_\_\_\_\_

**S:** \_\_\_\_\_

**T:** \_\_\_\_\_

**A:** \_\_\_\_\_

**R:** \_\_\_\_\_

# LEARNING MOMENTS ABROAD

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What new situations and challenges did you face in these areas? Make notes and use them to build your STAR's

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**Academics, in/out of classroom:**

**Preparing to go abroad (visa applications, account arrangements, etc.):**

**Engaging in local culture - Housing, Daily Life:**

**Traveling, Exploring, Site visits:**

**Meeting new people (of host culture, other cultures, my own culture):**

**On my own, learning about myself, my own culture:**

**Internship, volunteering, other:**

## PREPARING YOUR ONE-LINE RESPONSE TO “TELL ME ABOUT YOUR TIME IN...”

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You may be asked an interview warmup question such as: “Oh, I see you spent a semester studying in Spain, how was that?” Be prepared to respond with a concise and meaningful response – and in interviews that means more than just “it was awesome.” Instead, try responding with a short but focused statement – at least to start -- such as:

*“I realized that studying abroad not only meant learning a lot about another culture but learning a lot about myself”*

- OR -

*“I am so happy that I chose to study abroad since I not only met wonderful people and saw wonderful places, but being put outside my comfort zone meant that I developed a lot of skills too.”*

## THE “ELEVATOR PITCH”

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It is important to make a good first impression. That’s why you need to be able to introduce yourself and answer the question “tell me about yourself” clearly and concisely. You may use your elevator pitch when you are networking prior to your actual job search; or to answer “tell me about yourself” during the job interview.

### USES FOR YOUR PITCH

- Response to “tell me about yourself” during job interview
- In any situation when you are making “networking” connections
- Portions can be used on your resume and cover letter
- Increase confidence as you introduce yourself
- Script when making “cold” telephone calls

### KEY COMPONENTS

- Introduction
- Education; professional development
- Work experience; key accomplishments
- Transferable skills, if necessary
- Current status; what you have to offer
- Employment opportunities you are seeking
- *Length – 30 seconds to max of 2 minutes*

**NETWORKING EXAMPLE:** (use only as a guide – create your own, specific to your situation)

*Thanks so much for being willing to speak with me. My name is Jane Jobseeker, and Nan Networker gave me your name as someone who might have information for me about the field of journalism, in which I am very interested.*

*In May I will be graduating from the University of Great State with a major in Broadcast Journalism and a minor in Creative Writing. While in school, I spent a semester in London and I am especially proud of the fact that I was chosen to narrate a short feature clip that appeared on the BBC as part of a course project.*

*I am exploring different opportunities that combine putting my skills and education to work in a newscast setting. I have a few questions about your position and this agency and wonder if you could tell me a little about what you do and what it is like to work here.*

**INTERVIEWING EXAMPLE:** (use only as a guide – create your own, specific to your situation)

*First, thank you for this opportunity to interview with you today. As you know from my resume and cover letter, my undergraduate degree is in Biology, and I graduated with honors from the University of Wisconsin at Madison. I became interested in public health while I was volunteering at a community clinic, and realized how prevalent the issue of health disparities was.*

*I enrolled in the University of Minnesota’s School of Public Health, and in May, I will be graduating with an MPH in Community Health Promotion. While in school and through my community service activities, I developed skills and strengths both in research and public speaking – especially presenting educational sessions on a variety of health issues to diverse populations. I am especially proud of the fact that one of the sessions I designed and created was so popular, I have been asked to present it to several more groups. One of the reasons I am excited about interviewing for your agency is that it has such a great reputation, and the position sounds both challenging and like a perfect fit for my skills.*