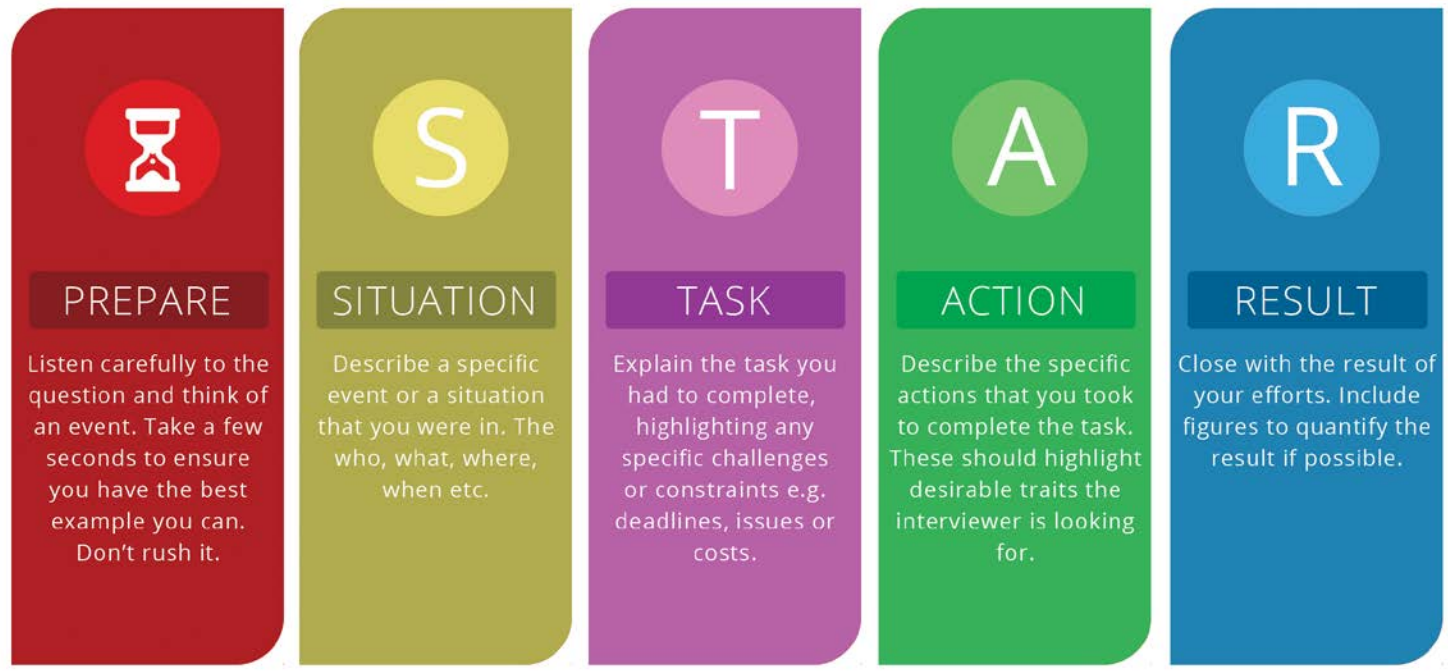




# Make your STAR shine...

**Don't get "lost in translation;" do excel at "science communication!"**

*NB: you can always adapt a story to fit a particular competency, but if you aren't ready, you will tend to generalize or fail to recall a good example.*



And remember, do not think of new details as you answer. Say what you had planned for and end.

Prepare a minimum of **two project stories**, one heroically successful, and one catastrophic! You can then adapt these to cover a wide range of competencies.

Also have two answers each about your **"Strengths"** and **"Weaknesses:"**

Be honest, but not intimate. Choose one for each which is about your character, work ethic or style. The second one of each should be about your technical skills as a scientist/engineer. Everyone is better at some things than others: self-awareness is very much in your favor!



In addition to simply thinking yourself into the role at the company already (which shows both motivation and confidence), you should also prepare two answers to each of the standard HR questions:

1. Please tell me about (one, two, some of) your **strengths**.
2. Please tell me about (one, two, some of) your **weaknesses**.

For both of the above, choose one hard skill (research, data, lab?) and one soft (character trait or work habit) to speak about, and in each of the “weakness” examples make sure to say how you’re dealing with improving these.

Check out the videos below if you have time; even though they’re done with actors, they give a good approach to both of these.



“My greatest strengths”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=43baEjwM8x8> and  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t9V2VXZSav8>

“My greatest weaknesses”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ubE405nVkZg> and  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2mc2B8NZhvY>

“Tell me about yourself”

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hBD5\\_-TfLCg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hBD5_-TfLCg) and  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MmFuWmzeiDs>

## Next:

Prepare two project stories of about 120-180 seconds long, again using the STAR (see attached), with special emphasis on outcomes (the “R”). One should be about a successful outcome(s) and the other can be a kind of “Hollywood disaster movie,” as my boss once put it, with a bit of exaggeration thrown in about how poorly things turned out, but what you learned from it, and how you’ve managed to avoid a repetition.

Avoid blaming your boss or any of your colleagues; it’s about poor planning, COVID restrictions, program or lab equipment failure, etc. which turned out to be serious obstacles...





## Be ready for the standard question early on:

**Why our company?** (NB: who are their competitors...i.e. Debiopharm, here, but in the UK?). It's also good to drop in something about the sector—e.g. that ten years ago, Novartis would never have dreamt of seconding their pre-clinical trials to a third party, but that they now know it is often more efficient, more cost-effective and (I'm guessing) gives them protection in the event of any errors, too.

Why do you want to work here?

How to answer the Why this Company? interview question

**Focus on your cultural fit and how your core values align with those of the company.**

"I have been impressed by the energetic and collaborative work environment here. My research highlights your focus on teamwork and the value you put on the contribution of new ideas at every level.

I believe that my interpersonal, problem solving, and communication skills will be fully utilized working as part of a group towards a common goal. My experience has convinced me that constructive collaboration in the workplace can help lift every member of the team to the next level.

Your active encouragement of innovation to improve team efficiency is empowering. One of my strengths is creative thinking and the opportunity to develop new ideas is exciting."



At the end, you hope it's not the end, so...



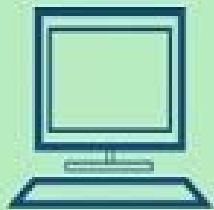
Then, always have three questions prepared for the end, when they ask, “do you have any further questions?” the only wrong answer is “no,” since it makes it seem you can’t wait to leave and/or haven’t really thought about the job or the company. So have one about the job/role itself—something that is less than clear, or something you find fascinating, but want to know more about; a second one about the unit/company (in some cases, maybe related to the organization/communication/teamwork between UK and CH teams, e.g.), and finally, one that is about your own professional development/potential for growth and therefore contributing even more to ERT and taking on increased responsibilities (“do you have customized on-the-job training or mentoring?” “If I continue to take more online courses, will that help me take on more complex tasks more rapidly,” “can you tell me about the evolution of other [data scientists] who joined you in a similar capacity a few years ago=’?”, etc.).

# 3 Easy Steps to Take After Your Interview

to make the right impression



Politely and sincerely thank everyone who assisted you including the front desk before you leave.



Straight after the interview send an email to express your appreciation, restate your enthusiasm and highlight your professionalism.



Follow this up within a couple of days with a typed or hand written thank you letter sent by snail mail. This can set you apart from the other candidates. Don't just repeat your email, use it as an opportunity to demonstrate that you have been thinking about the job opportunity and provide any additional relevant information that indicates your suitability.

# Stories-R-Us



Marie Curie fellows workshop on deciphering job descriptions

Transferable skills are a hot topic amongst postgraduate students looking for a new job within or outside of academia, because **many fail to identify which ones they have**, or how to properly communicate them in a job application or interview. We tried to show that scientists build up many of these transferable skills in their day-to-day activities as a researcher.

In a job interview, questions like, "Please demonstrate how you are an excellent team worker?" Or, "Can you tell me about a time when you had to deal with a difficult situation?" aim at teasing your transferable skills from you. You're expected to tell the interviewer a story about the situation, and how you faced the challenge using those skills. Telling stories on the spot can be intimidating, so it's best to have a few up your sleeve.

All stories have a basic framework: a beginning, a middle and an end. For those highlighting transferable skills, these can be translated into:

- 1) a challenge that the scientist had;
- 2) what s/he did to overcome it and;
- 3) what the outcome(s) was (were).

While volunteers told their stories, we asked listeners to think about what skills they used to overcome a particular challenge. This was the list:

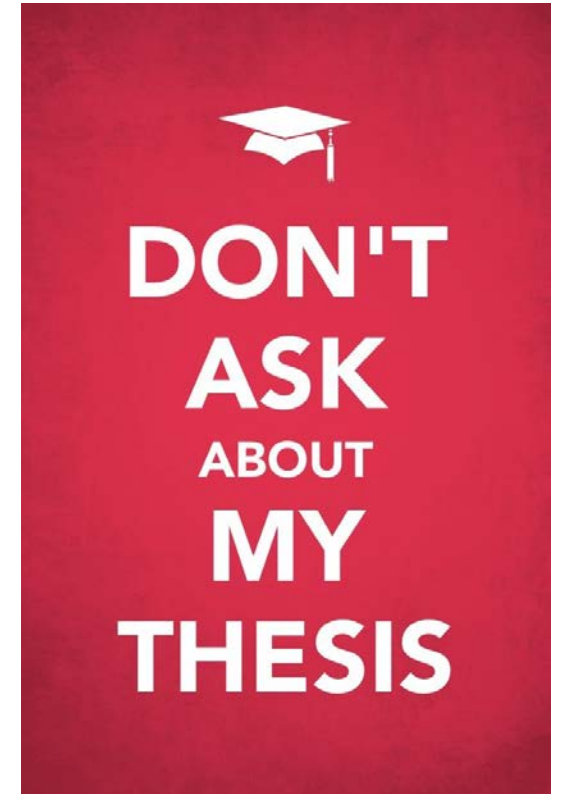
Organisation, Time management, Teamwork, Leadership, Independence, Analytical thinking, Understanding organisational structures, Grant writing, Communication, Perseverance, Coordination, Diplomacy, amongst many others





# Your thesis in five lines (or less)

- Describe your work clearly, in terms which a generalist can understand, but which would also make sense to another engineer/scientist.
- Explain your responsibilities in terms of project management: timeline, budget, team/meetings/role/language(s), innovations, extra tasks + evaluation (successful? how did you know?).
- If linked to industry highlight this; otherwise describe outcomes in terms of research or potential commercial applications.
- Teaching and supervising MSc theses are less important (add under "Additional Experience").



# “Selling” your thesis work to industry



*"My objective was to determine the main parameters of the dynamics of molecules during a chemical micro reaction in a helium droplet. In a very short timeframe, I developed a powerful yet simple model that predicts the resulting stereoisomers with 40% higher precision than traditional methods. This could lead to significant savings for the chemical industry. I was also involved in the purchase of mission-critical lab equipment, and negotiated a 20% price discount."*

- ❖ Describe your work clearly, in terms which a generalist can understand, but which would also make sense to another engineer/scientist.
- ❖ Explain your responsibilities in terms of project management: timeline, budget, team/meetings/role/language(s), innovations, extra tasks + evaluation (successful? how did you know?).
- ❖ Emphasize results and other contributions, including "hidden duties or responsibilities." Describe any potential economic implications.
- ❖ Teaching and supervising MSc theses are less important (add under "Additional Experience").
- ❖ If linked to industry highlight this; otherwise describe outcomes in terms of research or potential commercial applications.

# How it should look on the CV

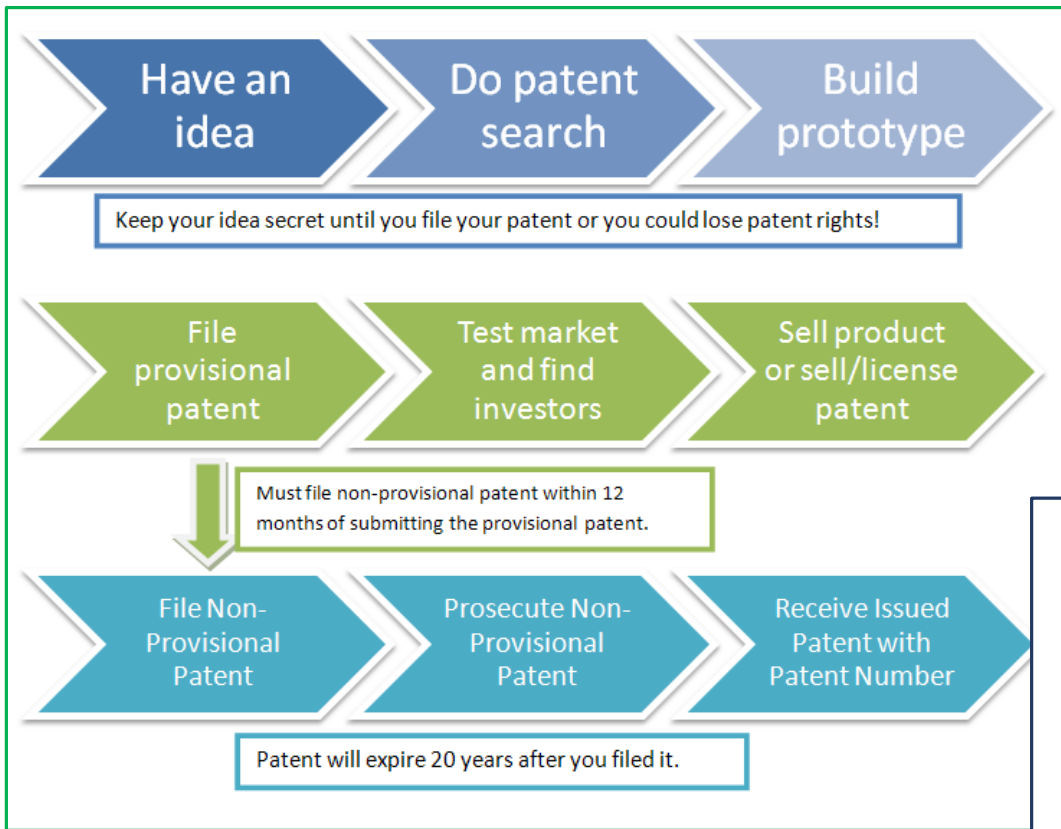
## Core experience

Laboratory of Nucleic Acid Chemistry, EPFL

2017-present

"Stereoisomer Modeling in Helium Micro-Reactions" (PhD Thesis)

*My objective was to determine the main parameters of the dynamics of molecules during a chemical micro reaction in a helium droplet. **In a very short timeframe**, I developed a **powerful yet simple** model that predicts the resulting stereoisomers with **40% higher precision** than traditional methods. This could lead to **significant savings** for the chemical industry. I was also involved in the purchase of **mission-critical lab equipment**, and negotiated a **20% price discount**.*



Your experience, repackaged for non-specialists

Learn to borrow from the language of the discourse community you wish to enter (cf. “business”) and describe your research, supervision, lab training, logistics, data skills, etc. in terms of project management. Emphasize any and all collaborative elements, specifying your role(s).



# “Resumé (or CV) killers”



Here are some of the biggest no-no’s that hiring pros say they see all the time:

- 1. Using a ridiculous email address:** Your friends may know exactly why [hairofthedogdude@yahoo.com](mailto:hairofthedogdude@yahoo.com) is fitting for you, but recruiters and hiring managers may not be so amused.
- 2. Making spelling errors and grammatical mistakes:** You will be hired in a role requiring attention to detail and accuracy, so not proofing your own documents discredits you from the start.
- 3. Including crazy fonts, colors and other graphics:** Creativity is desirable in many jobs, but CV’s that look like art projects are not. Keep it simple and clear, and don’t use too many different fonts or blocks of color. Even for architectural or industrial design jobs, the best place for displaying your design skills is not in the application itself, but rather in a portfolio or via a link to a website with samples of your work.
- 4. Not using keywords:** Terms particular to the job you want and the relevant skills you have should feature prominently on both your CV and your LinkedIn profile.

**NB:** “useful repetition” of technical skills, certifications and instruments in the descriptions of your experience will reinforce these.

*Adapted from:* <http://money.cnn.com/2014/11/02/pf/resume-red-flags/>