**Marketing Your Liberal Arts Skills Outside of Academe**

**Making the Liberal Arts Degree Pay Off**

By [Nick Corcodilos](http://www.twitter.com/nickcorcodilos%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank)

I confess: I was a liberal arts major and it has helped my career.

I once worked for a CEO who couldn't write well, but he knew enough to surround himself with people who could. His success rested to a large extent on his team's ability to communicate his great ideas effectively. When I applied for this job, my liberal arts education gave me an edge over other job candidates who couldn't write to save their lives. The simple ability to communicate well can give you an edge, too.

**The door has opened.**

As the world of online commerce expands and the scarcity of talented technical and business professionals becomes painfully evident, employers are turning to a relatively untapped pool of job candidates: liberal arts majors. These are the people who majored in subjects like English, art, history, psychology ... you know: the non-business disciplines.

While employers are welcoming them, liberal arts majors — whether they're fresh out of school, or whether they have years of experience in non-business jobs — too often stumble all over themselves trying to figure out how to present their "qualifications" for jobs they might never have considered before.

More than they realize, people with liberal arts backgrounds have readily identifiable skills that can be directly applied to solve business problems in Internet-related businesses including new media, e-commerce, enterprise planning and software development. But, here's the challenge: *few employers will help job hunters figure out how to transfer those skills*.

**Walk into a new mindset.**

If you have a liberal arts background and have never applied it to business, it's up to you to figure it out for yourself. And that means getting out of the academic mindset. You need to shake the attitude that your education limits your options, because your success in fact depends on shoe-horning, forcing, pounding and otherwise mapping your skills to the jobs you want.

I started my college career as an English major. When I realized English majors were a dime a dozen, I switched to psychology. (Psych majors were about a quarter a dozen — I wasn't thinking very "big" at the time.) How did I make it in headhunting? The ability to grasp a problem, research and develop alternative solutions, and make a clear, effective presentation won me my first job and has served me well for over twenty years. I didn't need business experience to acquire these skills, but *I did need to learn how to apply them in business*.

Your advantage is that with a liberal arts degree, you possess many fundamental skills and attributes that your competition may lack.

Skills:

* Defining problems and tasks.
* Mastery of information retrieval systems (libraries, books, periodicals, Internet, personal interviews).
* Planning and executing research.
* Organizing ideas and solutions.
* Writing and communicating.
* And perhaps most important, a well-honed ability to learn what you need to in order to accomplish a task.

Attributes:

* An open mind to new ideas and approaches.
* Disciplined work habits.
* A critical eye and ear.

These fundamentals can be applied to business. In fact, they're important *advantages* in the business world — however, they're useless unless you know what to do with them.

**Re-map yourself.**

What intimidates liberal arts majors is their lack of detailed knowledge about the problems and challenges the business world faces. Upon attaining that knowledge, any smart person with the skills listed above can proceed to map her skills to the work and create a compelling presentation to win a great job.

In a nutshell, here's what a liberal arts major needs to do to prepare for a business job.

* Select a business you want to work in.
* Study it in excruciating detail. (There is no way around this if you want to succeed.)
* Learn enough so you can begin mapping the aforementioned skills to the business.

Sound simplistic? It's the same approach you take to create a painting, write a term paper or conduct an experiment. Follow these three steps (I didn't say they were easy), and you will be on your way. Ignore these steps, and you will be at the mercy of the "random resume, random job" process that dominates most job searches.

**Get Started.**

The purpose of this article isn't to walk you through the re-mapping you must do. It's to make you start thinking about the key challenge you face: to take responsibility for figuring out how your abilities can be used to solve an employer's problems. Don't wait for an employer to figure it out for you — they won't.

Outline your thoughts about this re-mapping. There's no need to get it perfect. Once you have started in this new direction, you'll be ready for the job search methods that are introduced in [The Basics](http://www.asktheheadhunter.com/basics.htm%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) and covered in more detail in the books, [Fearlesss Job Hunting](http://www.asktheheadhunter.com/store/fjh/books.htm%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) and [How Can I Change Careers?](http://www.asktheheadhunter.com/store/HCICC/hcicc.htm%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) For more about transitioning from liberal arts to a job, please see [Breaking Ranks & Rules: How academics can avoid 5 fatal mistakes in the job hunt](http://www.asktheheadhunter.com/haacademics.htm%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank).

Few businesses are so complicated that it is impossible to figure out where you would fit within them. But, few job hunters are diligent enough to do the exercise and preparation that yields the job.

*[Nick Corcodilos](http://www.twitter.com/nickcorcodilos%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) (ΦBK, Rutgers University, 1977) is a syndicated columnist and author of* How to Work with Headhunters... and how to make headhunters work for you*. His iconoclastic techniques for job search, hiring and career development are used by job hunters and employers alike.*