Writing Achievement Stories

What is an Achievement Story?

An achievement is something you did that had a clearly identifiable result and was measurable in time. You were either the primary person involved or you had a significant role in it as part of a team. An achievement is not a general statement about what you are good at doing. The example in this handout demonstrates how to write about a specific achievement. Try to write at least ten stories taken from your experiences and include some from both work and outside of work.

Why is it Important?

Writing achievement stories helps you in the following four key areas:

- Identify your skills.
- Highlight the ones you use most often and are your strongest.
- Create powerful statements you can use in your job search that demonstrate your skills.
- Explore and pursue new career directions that you had not considered previously.

Step-by-step instructions:

1. If you're using a word processing program, start with a blank page and make two columns with the right column two inches (5 cm) from the right side of the paper (use the column command or create a table with one row and two columns). If you're not using a computer, use a blank sheet of ruled paper leaving a two inch (5 cm) margin on the right side.

2. Start by writing a simple one-sentence statement that describes the essence of the achievement.

3. Explain, in detail, everything that was involved in leading to the achievement. Include those actions you took that contributed in some way for you to realize the achievement even if there was no direct link between the action and the achievement. Start at the beginning and describe in steps what you did first, what you did next, and then what you did after that. Keep asking yourself "and then what did I do" or "what happened next" until you finish the analysis. Be as detailed as possible.

4. Quantify statements wherever you can. Use percentages, actual numbers, or reasonable estimates, such as "more than," "in excess of," if you can't be precise. If the quantification seems unrealistic, such as 1,000%, use actual numbers instead. By quantifying your statements, you enable the reader or listener to grasp the significance of the achievement as you know it.

5. When you've finished describing the details, summarize your achievement into a story of one paragraph containing two or three sentences. The story should capture the essence of what you achieved and demonstrate your strongest skills and the ones that you prefer to use most often.

6. Review your detailed description and circle, highlight or underline each action word (verb). These are your skills. Your achievements will demonstrate the skills you already have and use or they will demonstrate new skills you learned or developed by achieving what you did. Write the skill word in the right column. Add additional skills where your statements infer that you used a skill.

7. Review the right column for consistent patterns of skills that you used most often. These skills usually indicate the ones you prefer to use because they are easy for you, you enjoy using them, and you're knowledgeable about how to use them effectively and to your advantage. Consistent patterns of your skills usually indicate your key strengths and are what makes you unique and sets you apart from others.

Detailed Description	Skills Identified
Achievement statement: Received an award for organizing an annual community event that was the most successful of its kind in 21 years. **Analysis:** I was asked by the *Great Falls Chamber of Commerce* to organize the 21st Annual Community Street Faire to raise funds for the handicapped, elderly and disadvantaged in the county. Although I had never produced anything before, I love the theatre, and it was an opportunity to widen my experience of project management while helping a good cause. I started by underlining interviewing those who had been involved before, reviewing previous efforts and preparing an outline plan of action. Then I identified potential scriptwriters from referrals and interviewed several. I chose scriptwriters and helped them to create a story board for the program. I checked progress periodically to confirm we were progressing to plan. I wrote job descriptions for the production team and sent out a newsletter to the press and to people who had been involved in previous years or who had expressed an interest in getting involved. I arranged and held auditions. The production director and I assigned roles. Approximately 30 volunteers were involved. Using my computer and learning new software, I produced sponsorship brochures that attracted local businesses. I came up with the idea to place a "price on the head" of each character, whom businesses could sponsor. They could then promote their sponsorship for each character. Businesses liked it so much that they began to bid against each other for the privilege of saying which character they sponsored. It created a lot of media attention and visibility for the sponsors, who contributed $16,000, which exceeded our budget by $4,000. We used the excess to fund more community programs as chosen by the sponsors. With the production director's agreement, I set up a timetable for meetings and rehearsals. I booked the school hall, negotiated charges with the school, and persuaded a local accounting firm to keep financial records and write checks. I managed the production team by holding weekly status meetings and kept detailed notes so I could report progress to the Chamber regularly. I organized rehearsals requiring detailed planning, and kept everyone informed. We began to fall behind in our preparations when work pressures for some of the key members took precedence. I convinced others to step up and cover for them, and we were able to get back on track with a minimum of disruption. I had to schedule my own time carefully because I was trying to wrap up a major project at work. I took cameo roles myself and also had to ghost sing for one of the principals who took sick and couldn't sing. I organized all the publicity and was interviewed by local press and radio. We performed five superb shows to capacity audiences. Afterward, I arranged a debriefing meeting where I thanked everyone and evaluated what we had learned and what we could pass on for a future occasion. I reported financial results to Chamber. Our total costs were less than we had budgeted because some sponsors who originally declined to participate decided that they had to be involved after seeing how the other sponsors benefited. We ultimately made over $6,000 profit, and I received the *Good Citizen Achievement Award* for staging the community's most successful event ever. **Achievement Story:** I received the *Good Citizen Achievement Award* for organizing the community's most financially successful fundraising event ever. I created highly entertaining programs, recruited talented people who donated their time, devised merchant sponsorship programs that increased revenue by 33% over estimates, effectively managed over 30 volunteers and delivered the most successful program in over twenty years.	interviewing, reviewing, analyzing, preparing plan of action; deciding, supporting, creating, monitoring, creating job descriptions, involving others, organizing and assigning responsibilities learning new software, producing brochures, developing innovative promotion, raising money, creating publicity increasing revenue, budgeting and forecasting, negotiating persuading managing, delegating, monitoring, preparing status reports, organizing, planning, informing, convincing, problem resolution, time management, scheduling, balancing, innovating, creating, risk- taking, organizing, PR, publicity, producing, networking, reviewing and debriefing, rewarding, reporting financial results, creative business development, achievement