Sense making

We are living in an increasingly complex world and employers need people who can analyse vast amounts of data, resolve complex problems, and take a deep and critical look at situations. The ability to make sense of information incorporates

- **Pattern recognition** - The process of classifying information into objects or classes based on key features
- **Holistic thinking** - The ability to see the big picture and understand subtle nuances of complex situations
- **Synthesis** - The process of organising, manipulating, pruning and filtering gathered data into cohesive structures for information building
- **Opportunity recognition** - The ability to identify areas of opportunity for innovation
- **Analysis** - A systematic examination and evaluation of data or information, by breaking it into its component parts to uncover their interrelationships

Developing sense making skills involves questioning what you see and hear, identifying problems, providing solutions and coming up with new ways of doing things.

**How can I develop sense making skills on my course?**

- If you are taking part in a group project, think about ways you can contribute new ideas or innovative ways of approaching the project task
- Contribute to class discussions and debates by asking questions, listening to other peoples’ perspectives, and providing counterarguments
- Think about how you can apply what you are learning in your course to other settings, such as a working environment or volunteering opportunity. This will develop your ability to think holistically and look at the bigger picture from your studies
- Consider the various ways you are using data or information in your course. What approach are you taking to analysing and evaluating the data?
- Identify opportunities and provide innovative solutions by representing your School, Department or Course as an Academic Rep and create positive changes to the educational experiences of students across the College.

**How can I develop sense making skills outside my course?**

- Become an active member of a student society, or create your own! By joining a student society, you could be involved activities such proposing new ideas for events or analysing data
• Develop your sense making skills virtually by taking part in a virtual internship programme. Employers may offer tasks that will involve organising, analysing and communication information.
• Look for volunteering opportunities where you will have the opportunity to share ideas or get involved in assessing a wide range of data.
• Look for work experience opportunities such as a part-time job or internship where you can develop your ability to think holistically and consider the bigger picture.

How is sense making used in the workplace?

Royal Holloway graduates have used sense making skills as:

• An Investment Analyst spotting trends in data to support investment decisions
• A Parliamentary Assistant to an MP assessing the wider impact of government policies
• A Museum Curator finding innovative ways to clean and store new archaeological finds
• A Geographical Information Systems (GIS) Officer capturing and analysing a range of geographical data to help an organisation develop a long-term strategy
• A Social Media Executive identifying patterns in social media engagement and recommending influencers who can boost further engagement
• A Charity Fundraising Officer pitching a proposal to a potential corporate sponsor who aligns with the charities vision.

How will employers assess my sense making skills?

It is unlikely that an employer will use the term ‘sense making’ in job descriptions. Instead, look for terms such as ‘critical thinker’, ‘analytical’ and ‘commercial awareness’. If you are applying for a role and the job descriptions states they are looking for sense making skills, ensure you can demonstrate the skill on your CV with strong evidence.

You may also be asked specific questions on an application form or in an interview which are designed to assess your sense making skills. Examples of questions that could be asked include:

• Can you give me an example of a situation in which you have had to analyse complex information in order to make a decision? How did you approach it?
• Can you give an example of when you have had to make recommendations about something based on your analysis of information?
• Describe a time when you came up with a creative solution to a problem.
• Are you someone who typically comes up with new ideas or build on existing ones? Give examples.

If you’d like to get some help with structuring your answers for application forms or interviews, visit the CVs and interviews section of the Careers Moodle site.
ShortListMe, Graduates First and eCareersGrad are available on the Moodle page to help you practice interview skills, case studies and psychometric tests.

For more ideas on how you can ‘sell’ your skills on your CV then please watch our VIDEO CV workshop series, Part 3: Selling your 'Skills' on your CV (panopto.com)

If you are applying for a graduate scheme and are invited to an assessment centre, you may be assessed on your sense making skills. You might be given a business case study to analyse or a group activity to complete. Assessors will want to see sense making skills such as your ability to collate, filter, analyse and present data, how you think about situations holistically and what solutions you provide to potential problems. If you’d like to practice a group activity keep an eye out for the Assessment Centre workshops that run during the Autumn and Spring terms. These will be available to book via The Careers Portal.

You can make an appointment to speak with one of our Careers Consultants via the Careers Portal, where we can give feedback on your CV or application or help you to prepare for interviews and assessments, as well as help you think about your career options.