

Career Planning & Job Placement Services



Skills Employers Want! **Hard & Soft Skills**

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Defining Your Skills

Sometimes it is difficult to find the words to identify our skills. When we write a resume, for example, we try to recall a specific skill we possess and it takes time to put those skills on paper in the appropriate words.

The attached information can help you identify specific skill sets. You probably possess most of these skills but you just don't realize it. If you find that you are lacking any of these skills, take some time to refine the skills you do have, and work to develop the skills that you need. All of these skills will be useful to you throughout your life.

For the purpose of this booklet, most of these skills you will read about are defined as "Hard" or "Soft" Skills. You will, however, hear these skills referred to in other ways as well.



What Do Employers Want?

- Employers are looking to find someone who will help them grow their company, and increase over-all success of the organization.
- Hiring is a time-intensive and costly endeavor for a company. Don't forget, they have a *need* they are trying to fill through the hiring process.
- Companies do not want to hire unless it is something they *must* do. Someone is taking the time out of their schedule to look through applications and conduct interviews.
- New employees must be trained and oriented to the company. This all takes time and money before employees can start giving back to the company.
- All of this is done because companies believe that you will help them become more profitable.
- The best way an employer can determine your ability to help their company is by looking at your hard and soft skills.

Figure 1: Employers rate the importance of candidate skills/qualities

Skill/Quality	Weighted average rating*
Ability to work in a team structure	4.55
Ability to make decisions and solve problems	4.50
Ability to plan, organize, and prioritize work	4.48
Ability to verbally communicate with persons inside and outside the organization	4.48
Ability to obtain and process information	4.37
Ability to analyze quantitative data	4.25
Technical knowledge related to the job	4.01
Proficiency with computer software programs	3.94
Ability to create and/or edit written reports	3.62
Ability to sell or influence others	3.54

*5-point scale, where 1=Not at all important; 2=Not very important; 3=Somewhat important; 4=Very important; and 5=Extremely important

Source: *Job Outlook 2014*, National Association of Colleges and Employers

Hard Skills

- Hard skills are *learnable*.
- Hard skills are generally listed in the job postings or job descriptions.
- Hard skills are closely associated with a specific program of study (major) or career field; so often hard skills are referred to as “Discipline Related” or “Content Specific” skills.
- They are the **Technical Skills** necessary for success in the workplace. Such as pharmacy skills, biology skills, architecture skills, computer skills, math skills, therapeutic skills, teaching skills, graphic design skills, etc . . .
- Hard skills are often learned in schools and from books. A nursing student learns how to give a shot to a patient, an architect learns to draw building plans, a therapist learns how to counsel patients.
- They may be easy to observe, quantify, and measure. Typically, there is a direct path as to how one would excel at each hard skill. A person may take accounting courses, then take advanced accounting courses, then work to get experience, then take an exam to become a CPA.
- Hard skills are often consistent regardless of which company you work for, what circumstances you may be in, or who you work with.

Soft Skills

- Soft skills are not closely associated with a specific program of study (major) or career field. They are applicable to all workplaces or careers, and can “transfer” across all disciplines; so often soft skills are referred to as *transferable skills*.
- They are the **Non-Technical Skills** necessary for success in the workplace. Such as interpersonal skills, human relations skills, social skills, organizational management skills, time management skills, critical thinking skills, problem solving skills, etc. . .
- They are more of your “people” skills. Where rules change depending on the company culture or the people you work with.
- Soft skills are hard to observe, quantify, or measure. They are typically associated with behaviors and personality traits of an individual.

Nine Essential Skill Sets

There are typically nine clusters of skills that are recognized as essential in a variety of careers.

Communication Skills: ability to...

- I.
 - A. listen with objectivity and paraphrase the content of a message
 - B. use various forms and styles of written communication
 - C. speak effectively to individuals and groups
 - D. use media formats to present ideas imaginatively
 - E. express one's needs, wants, opinions and preferences without offending the sensitivities of others
 - F. identify and communicate value judgments effectively
 - G. describe objects or events with a minimum of factual errors
 - H. convey a positive self-image to others

II. Design and Planning Skills: ability to...

- A. identify alternative courses of action
- B. set realistic goals
- C. follow through with a plan or decision
- D. manage time effectively
- E. predict future trends and patterns
- F. accommodate multiple demands for commitment of time, energy, and resources
- G. assess needs
- H. make and keep a schedule
- I. set priorities

III. Research and Investigation Skills: ability to...

- A. use a variety of sources of information
- B. apply a variety of methods to test the validity of data
- C. identify problems and needs
- D. design an experiment, plan or model that systematically defines a problem
- E. identify information sources appropriate to special needs or problems
- F. formulate questions relevant to clarifying a particular problem, topic or issue

IV. Information Management Skills: ability to...

- A. sort data and objects
- B. compile and rank information
- C. apply information creatively to specific problems or tasks
- D. synthesize facts, concepts and principles
- E. understand and use organizing principles
- F. evaluate information against appropriate standards

V. Human Relations and Interpersonal Skills: ability to...

- A. keep a group “on track” and moving toward the achievement of a common goal
- B. maintain group cooperation and support
- C. delegate tasks and responsibilities
- D. interact effectively with peers, superiors, and subordinates
- E. express one’s feelings appropriately
- F. understand the feelings of others
- G. use argumentation techniques to persuade others
- H. make commitments to people
- I. be willing to take risks
- J. teach a skill, concept or principle to others
- K. analyze behavior of self and others in group situations
- L. demonstrate effective social behavior in a variety of settings and under different circumstances
- M. work under time and environmental pressures

VI. Critical Thinking Skills: ability to...

- A. identify quickly and accurately the critical issues when making a decision or solving a problem
- B. identify a general principle that explains inter-related experiences or factual data
- C. define the parameters of a problem
- D. identify reasonable criteria for assessing the value or appropriateness of an action or behavior
- E. adapt one’s concepts and behavior to changing conventions and norms
- F. apply appropriate criteria to strategies and action plans
- G. take given premises and reason to their conclusion
- H. create innovative solutions to complex problems
- I. analyze the interrelationships of events and ideas from several perspectives

VII. Management and Administration Skills: ability to...

- A. analyze tasks
- B. identify people who can contribute to the solution of a problem or task
- C. identify resource materials useful in the solution of a problem
- D. delegate responsibility for completion of a task
- E. motivate and lead people
- F. organize people and tasks to achieve specific goals

VIII. Valuing Skills: ability to...

- A. assess a course of action in terms of its long-range effects on the general human welfare
- B. make decisions that will maximize both individual and collective good
- C. appreciate the contributions of art, literature, science, and technology to contemporary society
- D. identify one’s own values
- E. assess one’s values in relation to important life decisions

IX. Personal/Career Development Skills: ability to...

- A. analyze, and learn from life experiences--both one's own and others'
- B. relate the skills developed in one's environment (e.g., school) to the requirements of another environment (e.g., work)
- C. match knowledge about one's own characteristics and abilities to information about job or career opportunities
- D. identify, describe, and assess the relative importance of one's needs, values, interests, strengths, and weaknesses
- E. develop personal growth goals that are motivating
- F. identify and describe skills acquired through formal education and general life experience
- G. identify one's own strengths and weaknesses
- H. accept and learn from negative criticism
- I. persist with a project when faced with failure unless it is clear that the project cannot be carried out or is not worth the time or effort needed to complete it
- J. recognize when a project cannot be carried out or is not worth the time or effort required to complete it
- K. generate trust and confidence of one's actions
- L. take risks
- M. accept the consequences of one's actions
- N. "market" oneself to prospective employers

Skills Checklist

No one has these skills to the extent that he or she is completely satisfied. Most people will find themselves highly competent in some areas, and not as competent in others.

This list is intended to be used as a tool for use in recognition of stages of development.

Rate yourself on this scale (1 is low, 10 is high) then discuss this list.

	Rating (Circle One)									
	Low					High				
1. Effectively communicate (i.e. clearly explains) both orally and in writing).	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2. Demonstrate an ability to think critically (i.e., plans ahead carefully to include possible changes, makes necessary decisions).	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
3. Demonstrate problem-solving skills (i.e., recognizes possible problems in a situation, begins to work them out in planning).	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
4. Demonstrate an ability to make decisions (i.e., does things without constantly being told).	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Rating (Circle One)
Low **High**

- | | | |
|-----|---|----------------------|
| 5. | Shows capacity to grow by dealing maturely with new experiences (i.e., looks forward to new experiences or responsibilities). | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 |
| 6. | Express personal opinions in a constructive and informational manner (i.e., have skills for participation in discussion). | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 |
| 7. | Demonstrate leadership skills (i.e., takes charge, develops ideas, chooses the right people to get the job done). | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 |
| 8. | Is responsible and dependable (i.e., shows up on time to get the job done). | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 |
| 9. | Get along well with others (i.e., gets along well with fellow workers). | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 |
| 10. | Reflect self-confidence (i.e., volunteers for new assignments, makes decisions easily). | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 |
| 11. | Understand the environment (i.e., knows about social, cultural, physical, and biological factors in human life). | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 |
| 12. | Demonstrate an awareness of creative contributions of our and other cultures (i.e., is acquainted with literature, art, music, and with other races and religions). | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 |

**Hard skills will get you an interview,
soft skills will help you get—and keep—the job.**