

What are Employability Skills?

Employers are often looking for skills that go beyond qualifications and experience.

Your education and experience may make you eligible to apply for a job but, to be successful in most roles, you will need skills that you are likely to develop over time. Some will be specific to the job, but the vast majority will be so-called 'soft skills' that can be used in any job or employment sectors. These soft skills are '**employability skills**': they are what makes you employable.

As a general rule, employers are willing to teach someone the job-specific skills required, such as how to operate particular pieces of machinery, or use particular computer packages that are very specific to that role or company. However, they usually want to see that you already have the other 'soft skills' before hiring, because they are much harder to teach.



The building blocks of any career

Employability or 'soft skills' are the building blocks of your career. The media frequently run stories on how these skills are lacking in school-leavers, graduates and/or those already in employment. Organisations spend a lot of time and money training staff, not in job specific areas but in general and basic skills.

In times of high unemployment, employers have more choice of applicants and will favour those with well-rounded employability skills.

Most of us start to develop these skills early on in life, but we may not be aware that we are doing so.

Remember, though, that mastering these skills is a long-term process: there are few people who could—or would—ever claim that their soft skills could not be improved.

Being able to apply for a job in the right way, and shine at interview—in other words, get a job—is not a key employability skill.

Creating a strong CV or résumé, writing a good covering letter, and interviewing well, are how you will show off your employability skills to potential employers. They are, however, not generally regarded as 'soft skills', and are not covered on this page. You can find out more about these skills from our pages on:

- ✓ **Writing a CV or Résumé**
- ✓ **Applying for a Job**
- ✓ **Writing a Covering Letter**
- ✓ **Using LinkedIn Effectively**

other people, such as communication skills and other interpersonal skills;

- ✓ **Being reliable and dependable:** doing what you say you will by the deadline you have agreed, and turning up when you are meant to be there; and
- ✓ **A willingness to learn new skills.** whether

1. Working Well with Other People

The skills required to work well with other people are known as interpersonal skills.

Good interpersonal skills allow you to participate effectively as a member of a team, satisfy customers' and clients' expectations, negotiate, make decisions and solve problems with other people, and generally work effectively with other employees. Well-honed interpersonal skills allow us to empathise and **build rapport** with colleagues and clients, leading to a better and less stressful working environment.

There are a range of areas covered by interpersonal skills, including:

required to transmit or receive messages accurately to and from other people by speaking or in writing, without misunderstandings. These skills include:

- ✓ **Verbal Communication** – or the words that we use, whether face-to-face or in writing. The balance between face-to-face and in writing is likely to vary in different jobs, but few, if any, will not want at least some of each type of communication;
- ✓ **Non-Verbal Communication** – or what we communicate without words, for example through body language.

⇒ these skills all relate to finding mutually agreeable solutions to problems or situations, whether by persuading others that your solution is best, or finding a better alternative by sharing ideas.

- ✓ **Conflict resolution and mediation** – or the skills required to resolve disagreements in a positive way, whether your own disagreements or those involving other people. These skills are often underrated until there is a problem.
- ✓ **Problem-solving and decision-making** – or

the skills needed to work effectively with others to identify, define and solve problems, including making decisions about the best course of action. Of course, it is also possible to make decisions and solve problems on your own, but being required to do so with others adds an extra dimension to the situation.

Not all of these areas will be required at all times in every job. However, you can be reasonably certain that you are likely to need them at some point in your career, and many of them will be needed every day.

If you are not sure whether you need to work on your interpersonal skills, or which particular areas to target, you may find it helpful to take our **Interpersonal Skills Self-**

2. Being Reliable and Dependable

Being reliable and dependable means, basically, doing what you say that you will do. It also, however, means being able to look around and see what needs doing—and then do it.

This sounds simple, but it requires a wide range of skills, mostly personal rather than interpersonal.

First of all, doing what you say you will do means **being organised, and managing your time effectively**. You need to know how long things will take, and that you have the time to do them to the required standard. You also need to be able to identify what to do first, so that if anything is missed, it is less important. Our page on **time management** explains how you can do this.

Being reliable also means being trustworthy and conscientious. For example, this might mean not leaving work (too often) when things still need doing. Trustworthiness and conscientiousness are both parts of **self-regulation or self-management**, which in turn is

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take responsibility for their own actions and ensure that they live up to their values. They keep track of deadlines and deliver to them without needing to be chased up.

Being reliable does not, however, mean that you have to do everything yourself.

Sometimes, it **may mean asking for help** when you see that you are not going to be able to meet a deadline otherwise.

THE C O U N C I L O F E D U C A T I O N

A willingness to learn means being open to new ideas and experiences, and always looking to improve your skills and knowledge.

Sometimes this is referred to as personal development, but that term is also used for a more formal process, of goal-setting, action and reflection. Whether you choose to make your learning process formal or informal, there is no question that the modern world requires all of us to continually update and revise our skills.

Change is a constant in most workplaces

A Final Thought

There are, inevitably, a wide range of skills that could be useful to employers. Each of us also has our own personal range of skills, and we therefore can each make a unique contribution to any organisation. Learning to recognise and use your skills appropriately is essential.

An open mind, and a willingness to embrace new ideas, is probably one of the most useful attributes that you can bring to any organisation.