

# Psychology and Workplace Skills

by Sophia



## WHAT'S COVERED

This lesson will help you apply an understanding of psychology to learning job skills. You will also note how problem solving skills support development of workplace skills. You will do this by covering:

## 1. Workplace Skills

If you lived and worked in colonial times in the United States, what skills would you need to be gainfully employed? What kind of person would your employer want you to be? What kinds of skills would you need to run your own farm or small business? And how different would your skills and aptitudes be then, compared to today?

Many industries that developed during the 1600s–1700s, such as health care, publishing, manufacturing, construction, finance, and farming, are still with us today. And the professional abilities, aptitudes, and values required in those industries are many of the same ones employers seek today.

For example, in the health care field then, just like today, employers looked for professionals with scientific acumen, active listening skills, a service orientation, oral comprehension abilities, and teamwork skills. And in the financial field then, just like today, employers looked for economics and accounting skills, mathematical reasoning skills, clerical and administrative skills, and deductive reasoning.

Why is it that with the passage of time and all the changes in the work world, some skills remain unchanged (or little changed)?

The answer might lie in the fact there are two main types of skills that employers look for: hard skills and soft skills.

- **Hard skills** are concrete or objective abilities that you learn and perhaps have mastered. They are skills you can easily quantify, like using a computer, speaking a foreign language, or operating a machine. You might earn a certificate, a college degree, or other credentials that attest to your hard-skill competencies. Obviously, because of changes in technology, the hard skills required by industries today are vastly different from those required centuries ago.
- **Soft skills**, on the other hand, are subjective skills that have changed very little over time. Such skills might pertain to the way you relate to people, or the way you think, or the ways in which you behave—for example, listening attentively, working well in groups, and speaking clearly. Soft skills are sometimes also called transferable skills because you can easily transfer them from job to job or profession to profession without much training. Indeed, if you had a time machine, you could probably transfer your soft skills from

one time period to another!



## TERMS TO KNOW

### Hard Skills

Concrete or objective abilities that you learn and you can easily quantify, like using a computer.

### Soft Skills

Subjective skills that have changed very little over time; they pertain to the way you relate to people, the way you think, or the ways in which you behave.

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## 2. What Employers Want

Employers want individuals who have the necessary hard and soft skills to do the job well and adapt to changes in the workplace. Soft skills may be especially in demand today because employers are generally equipped to train new employees in a hard skill—by training them to use new computer software, for instance—but it’s much more difficult to teach an employee a soft skill such as developing rapport with coworkers or knowing how to manage conflict. An employer might rather hire an inexperienced worker who can pay close attention to details than an experienced worker who might cause problems on a work team.

In this lesson, we look at ways of identifying and building particular hard and soft skills that will be necessary for your career path. We also explain how to use your time and resources wisely to acquire critical skills for your career goals.

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## 3. Specific Skills for Your Career Path

A skill is something you can do, say, or think right now. It’s what an employer expects you to bring to the workplace to improve the overall operations of the organization.

The table below lists four resources to help you determine which concrete skills are needed for all kinds of professions. You can even discover where you might gain some of the skills and which courses you might take.

Spend some time reviewing each resource. You will find many interesting and exciting options. When you’re finished, you may decide that there are so many interesting professions in the world that it’s difficult to choose just one. This is a good problem to have!

Resource	Description
<a href="#">Career Interest Test</a>	This U.S. Department of Labor Career Interest test helps you match your skills to a particular career that’s right for you. Take 5 minutes to answer about 30 questions and learn which careers fit your interests.
<a href="#">Skills Profiler</a>	Use this U.S. Department of Labor Skills Profiler test to create a list of your skills and match your skills to job types that use those skills. Plan to spend about 20 minutes completing your profile. You can start with a job type to find the skills you need for a current or future job. Or if you are not sure what kind of job is right for you, start by rating your own skills to find a job type match. When your skills profile is complete, you can print it or save it.

This U.S. government website helps job seekers answer two of their toughest questions: “What jobs can I get with my skills and training?” and “What skills and training do I need to get this job?” Browse groups of similar occupations to explore careers. Choose from industry, field of work, science area, and more. Focus on occupations that use a specific tool or software. Explore occupations that need your skills. Connect to a wealth of O\*NET data. Enter a code or title from another classification to find the related O\*NET-SOC occupation.

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## 4. Transferable Skills

Transferable (soft) skills may be used in multiple professions. They include, but are by no means limited to, the skills listed below:

- Agility
- Communication
- Initiative
- Innovation
- Problem solving
- Productivity
- Results driven
- Relationship-building
- Self and social awareness
- Tech-savvy

These skills are transferable because they are positive attributes that are invaluable in practically any kind of work. They also do not require much training from an employer—you have them already and take them with you wherever you go. Soft skills are a big part of your “total me” package.

So, identify the soft skills that show you off the best, and identify the ones that prospective employers are looking for. By comparing both sets, you can more directly gear your job search to your strongest professional qualities.

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## 5. Acquiring Necessary Skills

Lifelong learning is a buzzphrase in the twentieth-first century because we are awash in new technology and information all the time, and those who know how to learn, continuously, are in the best position to keep up and take advantage of these changes. Think of all the information resources around you: colleges and universities, libraries, the Internet, videos, games, books, films—the list goes on.

With these resources at your disposal, how can you best position yourself for lifelong learning and a strong, viable career? Which hard and soft skills are most important? What are employers really looking for?

The following list was inspired by the remarks of Mark Atwood, director of open-source engagement at Hewlett-Packard Enterprise. It contains excellent practical advice.

- Learn how to write clearly. After you’ve written something, have people edit it. Then rewrite it, taking into account the feedback you received. Write all the time.

- Learn how to speak. Speak clearly on the phone and at a table. For public speaking, try Toastmasters. “Meet and speak. Speak and write.”
- Be reachable. Publish your email so that people can contact you. Don’t worry about spam.
- Learn about computers and computing, even if you aren’t gearing for a career in information technology. Learn something entirely new every six to twelve months.
- Build relationships within your community. Use tools like Meetup.com and search for clubs at local schools, libraries, and centers. Then, seek out remote people around the country and world. Learn about them and their projects first by searching the Internet.
- Attend conferences and events. This is a great way to network with people and meet them face-to-face.
- Find a project and get involved. Start reading questions and answers, then start answering questions.
- Collaborate with people all over the world.
- Keep your LinkedIn profile and social media profiles up-to-date. Be findable.
- Keep learning. Skills will often beat smarts. Be sure to schedule time for learning and having fun!

After you’ve networked with enough people and built up your reputation, your peers can connect you with job openings that may be a good fit for your skills. Consider the following tips:

- Get involved in part-time work
- Get involved in extracurricular activities
- Get involved with employment and career development



**BIG IDEA**

Get involved. There are so many opportunities and open doors for you.



## SUMMARY

You can use psychology to understand and develop **workplace soft skills** that help you in whatever career you pursue. Hard skills change from career to career and many **employers** will train you in on those skills, but key soft skills are relevant in any career and across your whole lifetime.

Using tools provided by experts and government agencies, you can assess your own **career interests**, and how career choices can fit your personal psychological make-up. You can combine that analysis with an understanding of 10 key **transferable soft skills** to improve your chances at finding a rewarding career. Finally, an approach of lifelong learning helps you adapt and **acquire necessary skills** across your entire career.

Good luck!

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