

## **What Works At Work: Developing Workplace Skills**

There are certain skills to do well in any job. You are expected to know them when you start any job. Employers are willing to teach you job-related skills if you show that you already understand and follow the following expected skills:

### **I BASIC SKILLS**

#### **A. Reading**

Most employers expect employees to be able to read and understand:

- instructions, memorandums, and other information
- procedure manuals and guidelines

#### **B. Writing**

Employers expect employees to be able to write clearly to inform or persuade others.

You need to use acceptable writing skills to write:

- letters or memos
- reports or proposals

#### **C. Math**

Math is used in almost every job. For example, some jobs require math skills to:

- count change
- plan budgets
- analyze statistics
- calculate nutrient content

#### **D. Computer Skills**

Today, most places of work rely on computers. Knowing basic computer operations helps open doors to many career choices.

---

#### **Assess Your Basic Skills:**

- \_\_\_ Do you remember what you read?
  - \_\_\_ Can you summarize the main ideas of an article or book?
  - \_\_\_ Do you know and use rules for grammar and punctuation?
  - \_\_\_ Can you perform basic math functions, i.e. addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division with ease?
- 

### **II THINKING SKILLS**

Thinking skills are important on the job. They can help you:

#### **A. Solve Problems**

Supervisors often rely on individual employees and teams to help solve problems. The problem-solving process involves the following steps:

1. identify the problem
2. gather information about the problem

3. develop possible solutions
4. choose and carry out the best solution
5. evaluate the results

**B. Be Creative**

Many places of work welcome original thinkers who can present new ideas and unique solutions.

**C. Use Good Judgment**

This means evaluating facts and beliefs to arrive at sound conclusions.

**D. Persuade Others**

Using logic to convince others can help you reach your goals and move forward in the workplace.

---

**Assess Your Thinking Skills:**

- When faced with a problem, do you try to think of more than one possible solution?
  - Are you open to new ideas?
  - Do you weigh the consequences of your actions?
  - Can you separate fact from fiction?
  - In a discussion, can you present facts and ideas in an organized and convincing way?
- 

### III SELF-MANAGEMENT SKILLS

Personal management skills (or the way you conduct yourself) can help you achieve in any field. The personal qualities of successful employees include:

**A. Self-motivated or self-starter**

- enthusiastic, good attitude
- shows initiative - takes on work that needs to be done without being told
- hard-working

**B. Self-confident and Accepts Constructive Criticism**

This means you believe in yourself and your ability to do the job well.

Being criticized or redirected at work is similar to being coached, and is part of the learning process. In order to learn, it is important to be a good listener and to be open to new ideas.

**C. Responsible**

- being honest - admit mistakes and learn from experience
- dependable - show up for work as scheduled, arrive on time and ready to work.  
Employers put a lot of emphasis on being on time and getting a full day of work from an employee for a full day's pay.

**D. Able to Adapt to Change**

Things continue to change. Be ready not only to make the best of it, but to look for ways to take advantage of that inevitable change.

E. **Manage Time Wisely**

This means that you are able to organize your time and finish the most important tasks first. Working at a steady, efficient pace is more productive than carelessly rushing through your tasks. Learn how to manage stress through relaxation and exercise.

F. **Leave Personal Life At Home**

It is important for you to keep your personal life from interfering with your job performance. Every effort should be made to anticipate personal problems and to find ways of coping with them in advance. If all your planning and good intentions still leave you with a need to attend to *urgent* personal problems/matters during work hours, bring that to the attention of your employer.

---

**Assess Your Personal Management Skills:**

- Can you accept compliments... and criticisms?
  - Do you keep a positive attitude ... even when things are not going well?
  - Do you arrive on time for work, meetings, other scheduled events?
  - Do you accept responsibility for mistakes you make? Do you work to correct and learn from those mistakes?
  - Are you able to balance your personal and work life so that one does not interfere with the other?
- 

**IV COMMUNICATION SKILLS**

Good communication skills are the key to getting along with co-workers, supervisors and clients. Good communicators are able to:

A. **Express themselves effectively**

- think carefully before speaking
- speak clearly and confidently
- present one idea at a time, and make sure it is understood
- focus on being specific to avoid any misunderstanding

B. **Use Appropriate Body Language**

Nonverbal communication, such as eye contact, facial expressions, and tone of voice, sometimes speaks louder than words.

C. **Listen Actively**

- give full attention to the speaker ...tune out distractions
- do not rush or interrupt
- ask questions if you do not understand or need more information
- show you understand ... one way of doing this is to rephrase the speaker's main points in your own words, e.g. "What I hear you saying is...."

D. **Avoid Habits That Hurt Communication**

- making fun of others
- lecturing
- taking others' problems lightly

- thinking of a response while the other person is talking
- giving orders
- giving too much advice

---

**Assess Your Communication Skills:**

- Do you think carefully about what you want to say?
  - Are you comfortable speaking in front of a group?
  - Do you give your complete attention when another person is speaking?
  - Are you aware of your body language?
- 

**V BE A TEAM PLAYER**

Being on a team means working with others to reach a common goal, i.e. excellent client service, excellent product, etc. Being a team player means:

**A. Understanding Differences**

Team members bring different abilities, experiences, and backgrounds to the team. Being able to recognize this and understand how to work with a variety of people who have different backgrounds and work styles is a valuable skill.

**B. Cooperating With Others**

This means helping out when needed. It does *not* mean: doing just the work you are assigned to do, giving orders, or expecting others to do all the work. It means a give and take relationship.

**C. Handling Conflicts**

Team members will not always agree. However, effective teams can work together to solve conflicts.

**D. Treating Co-workers With Courtesy & Respect**

Courtesy and respect for co-workers and their opinions are key ingredients in making winning teams.

---

**Assess your team player skills:**

- Do you respect and value the opinions of others?
  - Can you share credit with others for a job well done?
  - Do you offer to help when someone is in a bind even if it is not your responsibility?
  - Can you sit down and resolve conflicts you may have with others?
- 

**Assessment score:** If majority of your answers to the questions are “Yes”, you understand the unspoken expectations of the workplace and will be an asset in your job.

**References:** Walton, P. and Lane, K., *What Works At Work: A Study Guide*, El Camino Community College, June 1993.  
*Developing Workplace Skills*, Channing L. Bete Co., Inc., S. Deerfield, MA, 1999.