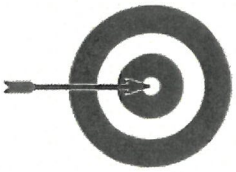
How to Determine Your Skills



Employers want to know if you have the knowledge, skills and abilities needed to perform the tasks required on the job. When examining your job application and résumé, the employer looks for documentation that you can do the job. In order for you to be able to provide an employer with documentation, it is necessary that you be able to identify your knowledge, skills and abilities.

Knowledge is something you have learned in school, from training or from experience. A **skill** is something you can do. An **ability** is a special talent or even a personality quality that you have. Knowing what your knowledge, skills and abilities are will help you:

- Identify jobs that match *you*
- Properly fill out applications
- Write a better résumé
- Interview more effectively
- Make satisfying career choices
- Increase your self confidence

It is difficult for most people to talk about their skills. In fact, a majority of people who interview for jobs are unable to clearly state what their skills are. It is essential, however, to know specifically what you can offer to an employer. Even though you have the necessary skills for a job, you may not get hired if you cannot communicate to an employer that you have those skills and that you are able to do them well.

Your skills are the foundation on which you build your career. All of us have hundreds of skills. We are average in some skills and excel at others. It will be easier to identify jobs that suit you when you know your unique combination of skills. This combination of skills is called a **skill set**.

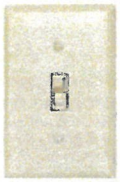
Job-specific skills

Job-specific skills are skills that you use when you perform a particular job task. These skills are developed when you participate in specialized training and formal education or they are learned on the job. For example, plumbers need knowledge about how plumbing systems work. They must be familiar with the tools of the trade and have the ability to perform specific tasks, such as cutting pipe, installing fixtures, etc. Most jobs have specific skills that are unique to that job.

A person can also learn job-specific skills through volunteer work, hobbies or personal experience.

Transferable skills

Transferable skills are skills that are not unique to a particular task and can be used in more than one job. Some examples of transferable skills are the ability to read and write, do arithmetic, speak in public, supervise people, solve problems and organize events. Unlike job-specific skills which people have or do not have (such as, you can install a light fixture), transferable skills are measured according to their complexity. The ability to read varies from knowing how to read simple sentences to being able to read complex scientific literature. The more advanced the skill is, the less competition there is for jobs that require that level of skill.



Skills are not all or nothing

Many people believe that either you have or you don't have that skill. Like a light switch, it is either on or off. Experts know that this is not true. People possess skills in varying degrees. Most people are average on a majority of skills, below average on some and above average on others. When you think of skills, don't sell yourself short just because you can name someone who possesses that skill at a higher level than you. Think of the many people whose level is less than yours.

You are unique

Possessing a single exceptional skill does not make you special. It is your combination of average and above average skills that makes you special. Being able to accurately shoot the basketball through the net does not make an exceptional basketball player if the player cannot run fast, jump high, dribble the ball or get along with their fellow players. Remember, you are the only person in the world who has your unique set of skills. Your combination of average and above average skills is your skill set. Emphasize your special combination of skills on your résumé and in your job interviews.

Your Job Objective

If you know what your knowledge, skills and abilities are, you will be able to formulate your job objective. Your job objective is a simple (usually one or two sentence) statement of what you want to do. It is important to define your job objective so that you can focus your job search on jobs that match your objective.

The job objective focuses on what you can do and what you want to do. Your job objective is an important part of your successful job search. Review the **JobSearch Guides**: ***How to Complete a Job Application***, ***How to Write a Résumé*** and **Components of a Résumé**.

Decatur Illinois workNet Center
757 W. Pershing Road
Decatur, IL 62526
217-875-8751
www.worknet19.org

ILLINOIS workNet® CENTER

A proud partner of the AmericanJobCenter network

©1998-2020 JobShop Publishing, LLC. Reproduction by any means without written permission from the publisher is prohibited by law.

Discovering your skills

Everyone has a variety of skills and abilities. Although most people find it difficult to clearly identify what they do well, it is essential that you do so when looking for a job. There are several ways to identify your skills:

Identifying Your Skills

Complete the **JobSearch Guide**, ***SCANS Competencies***. This will help you identify specific skills that you have.

Tell a story

Tell a story about something you accomplished that you enjoyed and felt was a success. Write the story down. In the story describe what you did and what obstacles you overcame in order to reach your goal. Review the story and note what skills (use the definitions found in the **JobSearch Guide** ***SCANS Competencies***) you used to accomplish this. Repeat this exercise a number of times and you will begin to have a good inventory of your skills. Remember to be specific.

Review your job history

What work have you done in the past? What tasks did you enjoy and feel confident doing? Sit down with someone and explain to them exactly what you did on each job. Break the job down into tasks and list the skills needed to perform each task.

Some employers will overlook a lack of job-specific skills if someone has basic reading, writing and math skills, an ability to listen and speak clearly and a willingness to learn.

Enthusiastically and effectively present to an employer your eagerness to learn. You may be chosen over a candidate who has more credentials than you but does not show a willingness to learn new skills.

Look at your life

Outside of work, what do you do in your life that you really enjoy? The skills you use to perform these enjoyable activities are probably things you do well. List these.

Use career assessments

There are a number of career assessments, available through career counselors and your local American Job Center and on the Internet, that will help you identify your skills. Check the web sites listed below for free career assessments.

What employers want

The U.S. Department of Labor has issued a report defining the skills that employers identified as necessary for employment. This was known as the SCANS report. The report divided skills into two areas, competencies and foundations. The competencies and foundation skills defined by SCANS are required for most jobs. A detailed description of each is found in the **JobSearch Guide** ***SCANS Competencies*** and online at ***http://www.sjsu.edu/faculty/chang/sped/scanskills.html***. They are:

Foundation Skills

Reading
Writing
Arithmetic
Mathematics
Listening
Speaking
Creative Thinking
Decision Making
Problem Solving
Self-Esteem

Reasoning
Responsibility
Self-Management
Social Abilities
Knowing How To Learn
Integrity/Honesty
Visualizing

Competencies

Allocates Time
Allocates Money
Allocates Material and Facility Resources
Allocates Human Resources
Acquires and Evaluates Information

Organizes and Maintains Information
Interprets and Communicates Information
Uses Computers to Process Information
Participates as a Member of a Team
Teaches Others

Serves Clients/Customers
Exercises Leadership
Negotiates to Arrive at a Decision
Works with Cultural Diversity
Understands Systems

Monitors and Corrects Performance
Improves and Designs Systems
Selects Technology
Applies Technology to Task
Maintains and Troubleshoots Technology

Internet resources

www.thebalance.com/free-career-aptitude-tests-2059813 -- This site offers a free career test. Registration may be required. Provides good information.

www.careerfitter.com/free_test/careerbuilder-- Free career test.

www.careerkey.org/professional-resources/misleading-career-assessments.html#.VnxYEPkrLIU-- Good advice on the value of career assessments.

www.careerintelligence.com -- Good information about skill sets. Also free assessments. Registration may be required.