



Skills Identification

Employment experts agree that skills identification is essential to a successful job search. Employers want to know what it is you can do for them— not just what you've done for someone else. A knowledge of your unique skills is needed to successfully complete an application, write a resume or answer interview questions. Skills identification is the first step toward new employment.

Webster's *New World Dictionary* defines a skill as "a great ability or proficiency, expertness that comes from training, practice, etc." A simple definition is that a skill is anything you can do right now.

Everyone has skills, hundreds of skills, many of which employers are looking for in an employee. Yet most people can only identify a few skills and are generally unable to describe them to an employer. Employers need to hear what you can do. If you're looking at purchasing a product that will cost you thousands of dollars a year for many years, you also would want to know what it can do. The more skills you have identified, the easier it is to convince a potential employer that you have what it takes to do the job.

Skills Categories

Job Skills

Job skills are those skills specific to a job or occupation. An administrative assistant is skilled in typing, word processing, answering telephones, company correspondence and filing. An accountant would list accounts receivable, performing accounts payable, payroll, figuring taxes, using a 10-key adding machine and computer accounting programs. A salesperson would include customer service, record keeping, order processing, inventory management, billing and product displays.

Job skills are important to employers for obvious reasons. These are the specific skills they look for in a candidate to accomplish the duties of the job. Job skills do not always come from employment. Along with the skills you used in previous jobs, you may have developed job skills through education, hobbies, community activities and life experiences. Common activities such as shopping, managing finances, balancing a bank account, hosting a party and teaching a child all contain potential job skills.

Self-Management Skills

Sometimes called "personality traits," these self-management skills are the skills you use day-to-day to get along with others and to survive. They're the skills that make you unique. Sincerity, reliability, tactfulness, patience, flexibility, timeliness and tolerance are examples of self-management skills. Employers look for these skills in candidates as evidence of how they will fit into the organization. How a person will fit in is an important consideration to employers.

Transferable Skills

These are skills that can transfer from one job or occupation to another. They may be either self-management or job content skills, and may or may not have been developed through previous employment. For most job seekers it's very unlikely that they'll find a job that is identical to their previous employment. For many today, that new job will be totally different from their past experience. Therefore, it's critical for a successful job seeker to carefully evaluate how their skills transfer into other opportunities. It's also important to look for ways to express this transferability to a prospective employer.



Duties

Many people have trouble distinguishing between their skills and duties. Duties are the basic functions of an activity. Skills are tools to accomplish those functions. Duties or functions are a part of any organized activity, whether it's employment, volunteer work or hobbies. A simple example is the management of a lemonade stand. The basic duties of a lemonade stand owner might be to manage lemonade operations including production, marketing, distribution and finances. There are many skills needed to accomplish these functions including: mixing, measuring, planning, sales, customer service, writing, cash handling, record keeping, maintenance, timeliness, dependability, accuracy and motivation. A complete list of skills would be very long.

Writing out the duties or functions of an activity first can be a useful way to begin identifying skills. When presenting your skills to an employer, it's best to tie them to specific activities in which they were used. It's not enough to tell the employer your skills; you need to be prepared to tell where, when and how you used those skills.

Writing Your Skills

Identifying, listing and describing your skills isn't an easy task. However, it's critical to job search success and you should plan to invest the time needed. Listed below is an outline for skills identification that has been successfully used by many job seekers.

- List by title a job you've held. Start with your most recent employment and work backwards.
- Write a detailed description of four to five major duties.
- Think of the skills needed to accomplish each duty you've listed. Write those skills down on a piece of paper. Remember to look for both job and self-management skills. Be sure to include tools used, machines operated, knowledge applied, etc.
- Repeat the above steps for each activity you anticipate describing to an employer either on an application, in your resume or in an interview. Use this process for other work-related activities including hobbies, volunteer work and community experience.

Once you've completed this process, you should have a long list of skills. A list too long to tell an employer. Go through the list and select those skills that match your job goal(s). These are the skills you will use in your job search effort.



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