



Transferable skill sets for job-seekers

Marketable job skills can be broken down into five basic categories or skills sets that job-seekers can use in showing applicable skills from one job/career to the next. Below is a list of five broad skill areas, which are divided into more specific job skills:

Communication: the skillful expression, transmission, and interpretation of knowledge and ideas.

Research and planning: the search for specific knowledge and the ability to conceptualize future needs and solutions for meeting those needs.

Human relations: the use of interpersonal skills for resolving conflict, relating to, and helping people.

Organization, management, and leadership: the ability to supervise, direct, and guide individuals and groups in the completion of tasks and fulfillment of goals.

Work survival: the day-to-day skills that assist in promoting effective production and work satisfaction.

Communication	Research and planning	Human relations	Organization, management, and leadership	Work survival
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Speaking effectively• Writing concisely• Listening attentively• Expressing ideas• Facilitating group discussion• Providing appropriate feedback• Negotiating• Perceiving nonverbal messages• Persuading• Reporting information• Describing feelings• Interviewing• Editing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Forecasting/predicting• Creating ideas• Identifying problems• Imagining alternatives• Identifying resources• Gathering information• Solving problems• Setting goals• Extracting important information• Defining needs• Analyzing• Developing evaluation strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Developing rapport• Being sensitive• Listening• Conveying feelings• Providing support for others• Motivating• Sharing credit• Counseling• Cooperating• Delegating with respect• Representing others• Perceiving feelings situations• Asserting	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Initiating new ideas• Handling details• Coordinating tasks• Managing groups• Delegating responsibility• Teaching• Coaching• Counseling• Promoting change• Selling ideas or products• Decision making with others• Managing conflict	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Implementing decisions• Cooperating• Enforcing policies• Being punctual• Managing time• Attending to detail• Meeting goals• Enlisting help• Accepting responsibility• Setting and meeting deadlines• Organizing• Making decisions

WHAT ARE TRANSFERABLE SKILLS?

They are skills acquired during any activity in your life—jobs, classes, projects, parenting, hobbies, and sports, virtually anything—that are transferable and applicable to what you want to do in your next job.

In resumes, cover letters, and during interviews, always portray your skills as applicable to the job you seek. For example, if you previously held a secretarial/office assistant position but are now applying for an account representative position, you would not emphasize clerical and secretarial skills or even computer skills. Rather, emphasize sales, customer service, interpersonal skills, and communication skills.

Instead of saying “Schedule meetings/appointments and make travel arrangements,” rephrase it to read “Interact with a wide-variety of personalities to schedule meetings and make travel arrangements.” Think of everything you’ve done in terms of how it is transferable to what you want to be doing and portray it that way.

For every item on your resume, think: How can I portray this skill so that it supports the idea of doing what I want to do in my next job? If you can’t make it support what you want to do, leave it out.

The following examples about how a college student can portray transferable skills come from Donald Asher’s book, *From College to Career*. Asher takes a typical job held by a college student, that of receptionist, and portrays it as applicable to her desire to work in finance:

- Proven ability to deal with a wide-range of individuals, including high-net-worth investors and institutional money manager, in a stressful and time-sensitive environment
- Gained knowledge of financial markets and instruments, especially stocks, bonds, futures, and options

See how he makes a waitress seem like the person you’d want to hire in an entry-level marketing job by portraying her skills as transferable:

- Act as a “sales representative” for the restaurant, selling add-ons and extras to achieve one of the highest per-ticket and per-night sales averages
- Prioritize and juggle dozens of simultaneous responsibilities
- Have built loyal clientele of regulars in addition to tourist trade
- Use computer daily

To know what skills to emphasize, research the company at which you seek employment and the particular job you’re applying for. If you’re responding to an ad, it’s easy to find clues in the ad to the most important skills. Emphasizing the skills that virtually all employers are looking for, such as teamwork, communications, interpersonal, and leadership skills is always a good idea.

EMPHASIZING YOUR TRANSFERABLE AND MARKETABLE SKILLS

The college student who has been wise enough to garner some work experience while in school may hold a competitive edge over the classmate who’s done little more than hit the books for four years. How can someone who has been a server in a restaurant every summer portray himself or herself as skilled in marketing? How can the retail associate at the mall near the university appear to be a fabulous teacher? How can the low-level office clerk position himself or herself as exactly the person an accounting firm needs? It’s a matter of breaking down your previous jobs into the skills that you can transfer to your ideal post-college job. Here is a list of the most global and overarching skills and qualities mentioned most often by hiring managers, recruiters, and career experts:

- Communication skills (oral and written)
- Teamwork/group/interpersonal skills
- Leadership skills
- Work-ethic traits, such as drive, stamina, effort, self-motivation, diligence, ambition, initiative, reliability, positive attitude toward work
- Logic, intelligence, and proficiency in field of study

These five skill clusters can be considered the most important in your first post-college job, and some or all of them will be required in just about any job in your career. Describe how your previous experience has provided you with one or more of these skills. Featuring the in-demand skills you possess in your resume can work even if your past work seems totally unrelated to the job you seek.

Career counselor Patrick O'Brien sums up his list of winning characteristics into just two "career commonalities," noting that, "whatever a person does, his or her job is to do two things: solve problems and satisfy customers. The problems and customers can be tremendously different depending on the field," O'Brien says, "but at the end of the day, that is what a person is paid to do. On a global level, employers are looking for the same characteristics." Beyond these commonalities and the five skill clusters, experts mention additional sought-after skills and characteristics, including:

- Organizational skills
- Entrepreneurial skills, a popular contemporary buzzword that encompasses the skills that people use when they start their own businesses. These skills include the capacity to be a self-starter, the ability to manage projects, and a talent for marketing oneself.
- Confidence
- Critical thinking and problem-solving skills
- Flexibility
- Ability to acquire new technical, analytical, computer, or foreign-language skills quickly
- Ability to sell ideas and persuade others
- Creative problem-solving talents
- Ability to follow orders

EMPHASIZING YOUR CLASSROOM TRANSFERABLE AND MARKETABLE SKILLS

Think about the transferable skills you've attained in the classroom. Don't forget to use your classroom experience as an example. According to Fred Jandt and Mary Nemnich in their book, *Using the Internet and the World Wide Web in Your Job Search* (JIST Works). These skills include:

- **Ability to meet deadlines, thrive under deadline pressure:** College is a cornucopia of deadlines. If meeting deadlines is an important skill in the job you seek, by all means exploit your ability to do so in your cover letter.
- **Ability to handle multiple tasks:** Remember how you wanted to smack all of your instructors for requiring simultaneous major papers and projects? Multi-tasking is increasingly valued in the workplace, and your cover letter gives you the chance to boast of your ability to juggle many projects at once.
- **Ability to achieve goals:** Your good grades are proof of that skill, so boast about them if they're exemplary. You may have met other goals while in school, too, such as graduating in three years instead of four (which may be why you don't have any job experience). Any goal you've met while in school is potential cover-letter fodder.
- **Ability to adapt:** Your college years probably gave you your first opportunity to make adult decisions and act independently. How did you handle stumbling blocks and disappointments along the way? The way you rose above difficulties can provide solid examples in your cover letter.
- **Writing skills:** Jobs that require good writing skills are a lot more common than you probably think they are. If you demonstrated your ability to write well in college, you can highlight that skill in your cover letter. And, of course, your writing talents should be self-evident from the quality of your cover letter.
- **Research skills:** How many people who've been out in the "real world" have research skills that are as fresh and recent as yours? How many know as much as you do about, say, conducting research on the Internet? Probably not many, so for jobs where this ability may be helpful, be sure to emphasize your research skills.

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