

How to Help Your Students Identify and Develop the Skills They Will Need to Be Hired, to Be Promoted, and to Keep Their Jobs

Drew C. Appleby, PhD

Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis

dappleby@iupui.edu

Skill Category	Specific Skills Valued by Potential Employers During the Hiring Process	Skills That Produce <u>Positive</u> On-the-Job Consequences*	Skill Deficits That Produce <u>Negative</u> On-the-Job Consequences**	Advice for College Students That Can Enable Them to Develop the Skills Necessary to Gain Meaningful Employment and to Survive and Thrive in Their Places of Employment
Communication (85)***	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> writing speaking listening reading 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> presenting ideas well in written and oral form 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ineffective verbal communication ineffective written communication failure to understand and follow written and verbal directions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is crucially important for you to understand that people employed in the management positions to which most college graduates aspire must not only write and speak in a clear, coherent, and persuasive manner, but must also attend to, remember, understand, and act upon the information they read and hear. All students take basic communication courses such as English Composition and Speech. Unfortunately, many students do not understand the relevance of the skills taught in these courses to their professional futures and therefore take them to simply “get them out of the way” rather than to learn from them. Please take these courses seriously; without the skills they teach, you will put yourself at risk not only in the process of acquiring a job, but also in your ability to succeed in that job and to keep it once you are hired. Take advanced classes in these areas (e.g., Interpersonal Communication and Technical Writing), and to seek out experiences that will provide you with opportunities to practice your ability to read, listen, write, and speak (i.e., classes that require extensive reading assignments, information-rich lectures, demanding written assignments, and formal oral presentations).
Critical Thinking and Research (78)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> applying information to solve organizational problems using statistical skills to summarize, organize, and analyze data finding, gathering, and organizing information from a variety of sources creating new knowledge by integrating existing information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> thinking analytically evaluating data remaining open-minded being creative 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employers seek out capable people who can use their intelligence to benefit the organizations who hire them by solving problems, analyzing data, and creating new ideas. Although this may sound obvious, the only way for you to develop the critical thinking and research skills that employers value is to actively participate in research projects that will require the following six critical thinking skills. The <u>retention</u> and <u>comprehension</u> of information about the subject of the research. The <u>analysis</u> and <u>evaluation</u> of the body of research upon which the research is based. The <u>creation</u> and testing of new hypotheses and the <u>application</u> of research findings to advance knowledge and/or improve the quality of human life. It is important to understand that research refers to any systematic and organized method of asking questions and finding answers to these questions. It is <u>not</u> limited to the research method(s) of any particular academic discipline or area (e.g., the scientific method).
Collaboration (74)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> working well in groups dealing sensitively and effectively with diverse populations exhibiting various forms of leadership, including supervising, influencing, and motivating others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> leadership (e.g., management skills, consensus building, and goal accomplishment) organizational savvy (e.g., working well with others and adapting to new work settings) followership (i.e., helping leaders accomplish their goals) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> being ineffective in teams 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Your employer will require you to perform complex tasks that require teamwork. No one works alone and almost all teams are composed of different types of people. The skills necessary to be a productive member of a diverse team must be acquired through practice and the best place to practice these skills is in course-based group projects or extracurricular activities that involve working with groups composed of diverse members where mistakes are far less costly than in the work place. The worst possible thing you can do as a student is to isolate yourself from diversity by living, working, and spending your time with only those students who are similar to you.
Self-Management (53)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> being flexible and adaptable learning new skills and information managing time, stress, and conflict successfully 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> setting priorities to regulate work understanding quality indicators of work managing stress successfully behaving in an accountable manner completing work on schedule 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> missing assignments or deadlines being late for work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employers want to hire people whose inability to manage time, stress, or conflicts causes them to perform poorly on the job by missing deadlines, exhibiting stress-related problems, or causing workplace morale problems. In order to strengthen your self-management skills while you are in college, seek out challenging courses whose instructors will expect you to perform in the same responsible, conscientious, and mature ways that your future employers will demand. Avoid classes taught by instructors (a) whose classes are perceived as non-stressful because their subject matter is easy or that they do not require you to learn new skills, (b) who reinforce procrastination and irresponsible behavior by accepting late assignments or allowing you to make up missed tests, and (c) who do not seem to care if you come to class late, leave class early, or miss class entirely.

Professional (24)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> organizing, planning, and carrying out projects managing resources acting and dressing in a professional manner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> taking initiative (e.g., being self-motivated, volunteering for additional activities, and being a self-starter) displaying commitment and passion for the job demonstrating competence acquired during internships displaying professional attributes (e.g., being dependable, patient, flexible, reliable, and friendly) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> lack of motivation or work ethic failure to take initiative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Because employers want to hire employees who can carry out tasks and behave in a professional manner, you should choose classes taught by instructors who have the same high expectations as employers, such as those who (a) help their students develop a strong work ethic by providing them with opportunities to work hard and receive high grades only for excellent work; (b) do not allow students to make up for low performance on assignments or tests with extra credit; (c) require students to create, plan, organize, and carry out complex projects; (d) promote professional behavior and appearance by modeling it themselves; and (e) do not tolerate the kinds of behaviors in their classrooms that are unacceptable on-the-job (e.g., texting, surfing the Web, or receiving cell phone calls; coming to class unprepared to participate; falling asleep, or behaving and dressing in a distracting manner that disrupts the learning process).
Technological (18)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> computer literacy word processing email 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> technical competence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> inappropriate use of technology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Although undergraduates often appear to be technologically savvy, they must realize that sending text messages to their friends, checking social media pages, and shopping online are not skills valued by employers. In fact, the presence of these actions on-the-job can lead to highly undesirable outcomes. Employers expect their employees to select and use appropriate technological tools to identify, locate, acquire, store, organize, display, analyze, and evaluate verbal, numerical, and visual information. Therefore, students should enroll in classes that require <ul style="list-style-type: none"> papers written with word-processing programs, the organization of information with databases, the manipulation of numbers with spreadsheets, the analysis of data with statistical programs, the location of information with search engines, the enhancement of speeches with presentation software, and communication with their instructors and fellow students via the Internet. Savvy job-seeking students master these skills while they are in college so they can “hit the ground running” when they are hired and not waste their employers’ time by having to taught these skills on-the-job.
Ethical (9)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the ability to make ethical decisions based on appropriate ethical knowledge the willingness and ability to act on these decisions 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> unethical behaviors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Although this was the least often mentioned skill by employers during the hiring process, it is a crucially important skill for job-seeking college students to possess because of the dire consequences for new hires who fail to demonstrate it on-the-job. You should be aware that job interviews can include questions designed to evaluate your ability to think and act in an ethical manner, such as “Tell me about a project that required you to be aware of and act in accordance with a set of ethical principles.” The only way to answer this question in a credible manner is to have actually participated in such a project. Therefore, you should engage in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> research projects that require the creation of IRB protocols, writing assignments that must conform to guidelines that prohibit plagiarism, or internships that will require you to be aware of, understand, and act according to ethical guidelines such as those you would need to follow when you would work with clients whose confidentiality must be protected or who may be exposed to risks.

*Positive on-the-job consequences occur when supervisors promote new college hires or give them new assignments.

**Negative on-the-job consequences occur when supervisors reprimand, discipline, or fire new college hires.

***The number in parenthesis after each skill category represents the total number of times that category’s component skills appeared in Appleby’s (2009) meta-analytic data set of 341 total skills from 31 publications.

The information in columns 1 and 2 comes from: Appleby, D. C. (2009, August). The skills we believe psychology majors possess and the skills employers value in potential employees. In R. E. Landrum (Chair), *Essential work skills for psychology majors: Do out students actually acquire them?* Symposium conducted at annual meeting of the American Psychological Association convention, Toronto, Canada.

The information in columns 3 and 4 comes from: Gardner, P. (2007). *Moving up or moving out of the company? Factors that influence the promoting or firing of new college hires*. East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University. Retrieved from <http://ceri.msu.edu/publications/pdf/brief1-07.pdf>

The information in column 5 comes from: Appleby, D. C. (2014). A skills-based academic advising strategy for job-seeking psychology majors. In R. Miller & J. Irons, *Academic advising: A handbook for advisors and students, Volume 1: Models, students, topics, and issues*, p. 143-156. Retrieved from <http://www.teachpsych.org/Resources/Documents/ebooks/advising2014Vol1.pdf>