

top ten skills that'll get you a job when you leave school



Find out about the essential soft skills you need to get hired, and pick up tips on how to develop your skills through activities such as team sport and present them to employers.

Whether you're applying for a higher apprenticeship, a sponsored degree or a school leaver programme, there are ten key skills that will help you into employment. These

crucial soft skills are high on employers' wish lists, as they will enable you to be successful in your job.

If you have all these qualities, you're likely to be a reliable employee who works well with colleagues and who is capable of using your initiative to find a way round problems and get tasks done. Without them, you're more likely to be a dead weight. These skills are sometimes referred to as competencies, which means that they enable you to do a specific job.

You'll find that much of the school leaver programme recruitment process is designed to establish whether you have these skills. Employers usually devise a list of competencies required for a role and look for candidates that are a good match. Online application forms, assessment centres and interviews are typically designed to present you with questions that will find out whether you have the skills needed.

Here are ten key skills that employers look for. Show you have these, and you'll be well on your way to your first pay cheque.

Commercial awareness

If you take an interest in what businesses and organisations do and how they work, you'll have no problems developing your commercial awareness. When you're applying for a place on a school leaver programme or for a higher apprenticeship, give yourself some time to find out about your potential employer. Read up about them online: check out their website and find out what reputable news sources have to say about them. Who are their customers and who are their competitors? You don't have to become an in-depth expert but having a basic understanding of what they do and why will give you confidence and help you to come across as diligent and well-informed. It will also help you to show that you're ready to leave the classroom behind and you don't

need to have a teacher and a text book in front of you to help you get to grips with a new subject.

Communication

Even in technical jobs, good communication skills are vital, and not just because you need to be able to make yourself understood; to succeed in the world of work, you need to come across as professional.

Your written and spoken communication skills will be assessed at different stages in the recruitment process. Employers will look out for decent spelling and grammar in your online application form, and at interview they'll want to see that you can express yourself. If you are invited to take part in an assessment centre, the group exercise is typically a test of how well you can communicate as a member of group: can you take what other people are saying on board and offer your own contributions?

Here's how to present your communication skills in the best possible light:

- Check out our [advice on cracking the online application form](#). Work on your answers in a word processing programme, use the spellcheck and ask someone you trust to read through what you've written. If you know your spelling, grammar and punctuation can be a bit hit and miss, don't take any chances.
- Make the most of our [interview tips](#) and [assessment centre advice](#). If you're naturally shy or not especially confident, don't despair. Fake it till you make it. It can be easier to compensate for shyness than to tone down arrogance.

Teamwork

Teamwork skills are a priority for most employers and play a part in most jobs. But what does it really mean to be a good team player?

Teamwork is about pulling together with colleagues to achieve a shared goal. There are all sorts of different roles that people can play within a team while still making a vital contribution; some people might be good at supporting others or urging them on, while others come up with fresh ideas or monitor the team's progress and alert everyone else to potential problems.

Think about the times you've worked together with others as part of a team. Your part-time job, project work at school or involvement in team sports could give you great examples that you can use on your application form or an interview to convince employers to hire you. Think about how you have helped your team to succeed, whether that was through encouraging others or by playing a part in organising matches or other activities.

Negotiation and persuasion

Have you ever had to sort out a conflict, clinch a deal, win somebody over or find a compromise solution? Negotiating involves being able to see somebody else's point of view; it calls for a flexible attitude, as you may change your own position in the light of what you come to understand about somebody else's. If you want to be able to persuade people to follow a particular course of action, you need excellent communication skills; you need to be a good listener who can take other people's needs on board as well as being able to express yourself convincingly.

It may be that [persuading your parents to support your choice](#) to get a job rather than go to university – or vice versa – will call on your skills in this area. For other examples, think of times when you've had to step in to sort out conflict within a team or group or have successfully negotiated a better deal or a discount.

Problem solving

Can you take a logical, analytical approach to working through a problem, and can you see it from different angles? If you're invited to an assessment centre, you may be set a group exercise that is intended to test your problem-solving skills. For example, you and the other candidates might be invited to read a case study that sets out the problems facing a particular business before discussing a range of possible solutions.

Leadership

Chances are you're not going to be given a management role straight away, but you could find yourself in charge of a specific project or even managing other people sooner than you might think. Employers will be looking for leadership potential, and you don't have to have been captain of a sports team or head boy or girl to convince them that you've got what it takes. If you've ever motivated others, delegated tasks or kept others on track to meet a deadline, you've shown that you could shape up to be a leader.

Organisation

How do you keep track of everything you need to do and make sure nothing gets missed? Employers will be interested in how you keep your life in order, remember deadlines and commitments and prioritise when you're under pressure. Do you keep a to-do list and an appointments diary, and if so, what format do you use?

Perseverance and motivation

Employers want to know that you're the kind of person who will stick at something when the going gets tough. Have you ever had to deal with a setback and come back from an apparently weak position to turn what looked like failure into success? Have you committed to a challenge and seen it through? Sport, music, drama or dance activities outside school could all be good examples of this, as could caring for

animals, fundraising activities or holding down a part-time job while keeping up with your studies.

Ability to work under pressure

Your academic record will give employers some idea of whether you can cope with stress, as will any sporting or performance-related achievements. Have you taken part in competitions, worked in a busy environment such as a restaurant or had experience of public speaking? Were you able to master your nerves well enough to perform to the best of your ability? Employers will be impressed by any evidence that you can deliver the goods even when you are under pressure.

Confidence

Are you confident? Or can you look as if you are, even when you're feeling nervous – which from an employer's point of view is the same thing? Your confidence will come across in the way you express yourself on your application and in your body language at interview and at assessment centres. Remember, though, you shouldn't overdo it – there is a difference between confidence and swagger.

You'll feel more confident at interview if you've kept a copy of your application to read through beforehand and if you've thought ahead about the kind of questions that might come up. It will help if you've spent some time researching the employer and its competitors, too. It's highly likely that at some point you'll be asked why you have chosen to apply for the school leaver programme you are going for, and it will be much easier for you to come out with a convincing and self-assured answer if you've done a thorough job of finding out what the programme involves