

# Learn New Skills

If you want to keep up with the times, your old skills must be continually sharpened and new ones must be acquired.

Some helpful hints towards keeping abreast of the changes around you are:

- There is no such thing as 'finished learning'. One who stops learning, stops growing. Work hard towards sharpening your Foundation and Transferable skills. It pays to spend some time sharpening your axe before attempting to fell a tree.
- Keep an eye open for new skills and master them. At the same time, improve the ones you already have.
- Do some research to find out what skills are and will always be most valued in your industry.

You will find 'A Career Guide to Industries' and 'Tomorrow's Jobs' a big help. Once you find your industry listed in the guide, you will also find a list of skills needed in the same. TheSite is also a good place to look for job prospects and related skills.

Some questions that may crop up in your mind are:

- **What can I do?** - You can do whatever you want to. Right from cooking to eating, you will find information pertaining to any interest that you may have.
  - Where to look?** - Keep your eyes and ears open. There'll always be something happening in your locality to match your interest.
  - Universities/Colleges:** - Usually, universities and colleges have clubs and student groups which bring together students with similar interests. You can be sure to fit into at least one of them and learn from those who have more experience than you.
  - Leisure Centers:** - These are places where you will find people who like physical activity like trekking, swimming and traveling.
  - Evening Classes:** - Collect details of all evening courses conducted in your area. Learn a language you don't know, or get trained to do creative things like sewing or origami. Our article on returning to school will give you some more ideas.
  - Volunteering:** - Though not as glamorous as a lot of other things, the feel-good factor is immensely high! Giving something back to society is an amazing way to boost your morale. And of course, it looks impressive on your resume too.
- **Distance and Online Learning:** - If you prefer to spend more time at home and if that's the only hindrance you are facing to learning new skills, this is perfect for you. The Open University, The Open College of Arts and The National Extension College are some of the places where you can start hunting for relevant information. As for online courses, the best place to start looking for what you want would be Learn Direct.

# Communicate Your Skills

- The first thing to be perfected if you want to clinch that much-coveted job is the ability to communicate. Nothing can come in your way if you abide by these rules of thumb for communication:
  - You have accomplished something significant. But what good is it if your prospective employer doesn't get the picture right? To get your skills across clearly master the PAR method
    - **Problem:** Paint a clear picture of the problem. There's no use explaining how you solved it if the interviewer hasn't understood it in the first place.
    - **Action:** What did you do that was useful towards reaching a solution?

- **Results:** This is the only part that really matters to an employer so make sure you get it right across. Be crisp so that you've got your contribution across before he loses interest. Practice till you are perfect.
- Do a considerable amount of research to make sure you know all about writing a perfect resume.
- Right from the task of writing your resume to facing that interview and subsequently getting promoted, good communication skills will be your best companion.

## The Foundation Skills

The workplace of today is more challenging and demanding than ever before. And one thing you can be certain of is that this trend is here to stay. Jobs are going to keep demanding more everyday in comparison to the previous day.

The way we execute our responsibilities, the technology we use as a tool and the job expectations are always in a state of flux. Expecting to continue in the same position without any additional effort at learning new skills or sharpening existing ones would be unrealistic. Just as a doctor, to save lives, needs to keep up-to-date with the latest developments in the world of medicine, every employee in an organization needs to work on improving their abilities, to save his/her job!

Here is a list of the 17 Foundation Skills (grouped into four broad classes) that one must have to not only succeed, but also for mere survival in the job market today:

### Basic Skills

- **Reading:** This does not mean a mere skimming through of the material at hand. It means, picking out all the details that matter, researching, clarifying doubts etc.
- **Writing:** When writing letters or reports, make sure they are a pleasure to read. Avoid irksome spelling and grammatical errors and punctuation lapses. Convey your ideas in a crisp, clear manner. And remember no amount of reviewing and editing is too much.
- **Mathematics:** Perfecting this skill will go a long way in proving your sharpness. Practice till you are at ease with all the mathematical mumbo jumbo that exists—numbers, fractions, percentages, pie-charts etc. should be a mere piece of cake. Be computer literate when it comes to entering, using or sharing data.
- **Speaking:** Remember what your audience hears is not the only important thing when you speak. What they see is also very crucial. Perfect your body language. Make a conscious effort to improve this much-ignored aspect of communication.
- **Listening:** Concentrate with all your might when someone is saying something useful. Pay attention to the speaker's tone, body language etc. Whenever appropriate convey that you have understood what he/she said.

### Thinking Skills

- **Creative Thinking:** Don't ever restrict your imagination. Creativity is one of the most profitable and sought after quality in the job market.
- **Problem-Solving Skills:** Being very alert has never hurt anyone. Being the first to recognize a problem gives you a head start towards finding a solution. Implement the solution to see whether rework is required.

- **Decision-Making Skills:** Be clear about what you are aiming for. Then start finding ways to get there and list them out. Your decision-making skills will be put to test when you have to pick out one of the alternatives in your list.
- **Visualization:** This is imagination to the maximum. Given a design of a building, you should be able to paint a clear picture in your mind's eye of what it will look like in reality.

## People Skills

- **Social:** Be pleasant to all around you however much you dislike them. If there are unpleasant people around try and understand why they are so and help them if you can. Be assertive when you need to.
- **Negotiation:** In case of a difference of opinion, list out the common goals, communicate your argument with the facts to support it, try and understand the other party's wishes just as you would want them to understand yours. Compromise.
- **Leadership:** You cannot be a leader by forcing people into abiding by your orders. Talk with respect and put your points across without creating dissent. Be competent and honest and people will automatically put their faith in you.
- **Teamwork:** Co-operate with the rest of the team and only then can you expect any co-operation from them. Avoid arguments with peaceful discussions and healthy debates. Always think of the big picture—the team before self.
- **Cultural Diversity:** Do not be narrow-minded when it comes to working with people who come from a different cultural background than your own. Respect them, as you would want to be respected. Help them if they have problems related to culture change.

## Personal Qualities

- **Self-Esteem:** Look within yourself for qualities that need to be changed—like some beliefs you may have been harboring for a long time. Take up a positive attitude and consciously change your outlook.
- **Self-Management:** Be your own best critic. Get a realistic view of what abilities you possess and how you can improve those as well as acquire those you don't have. Set realistic goals and work hard towards achieving them. Monitor milestones as and when you get to them.
- **Responsibility:** Lack of which you will lose your job before you settle into it. Be almost religious when it comes to finishing the tasks assigned to you. Try and meet the highest standards of honesty and integrity. Display eagerness to shoulder more responsibilities.

## Identify Your Skills

Looking for a change of job? The first thing you should do is prepare yourself really well before taking the plunge. After all, opportunity knocks but once. Here are some tips which can make the ride a little smoother.

- List out your skills. In order to make sure you don't forget the ones you haven't touched on recently, visit the NCSOICC's website. Here, in the Resume section, you will find a whole lot of skills. All you have to do is pick out the ones you think you have and make your own list.
- If this is not your first job, visit the website called O\*NET Code Connector and look for the kind of job you've been at. Once you find it, you will see a list of skills that your job typically revolves around, or to use their term, 'Work Content Statements'. Copy these into your List of Skills.
- Pick out all the Foundation skills that you possess and add them to the list

- Look back into last two to five years of your life. List out all the good things you did in your career and beyond it. These should be things that you actually feel good about. Either because you did them well, or because you enjoyed doing them or maybe even because you feel a certain amount of pride in them.

- Now choose the seven best ones and explain, either to a friend or on paper, what you did, how you went about doing it and what came of it.
- Have another look at your list and this time, mark those that you enjoy using your Motivated Skills.

## **Know which are your Marketable Skills and reinforce them**

Be aware of the fact that no company is going to hire you unless you generate profits for them. Therefore, for your own good, be alert to the changes going on around you. Always keep an updated resume handy and be ready to move on to another job before you get the pink slip.

Also keep the following points in mind:

- Make sure you put across your plus points very clearly.
- Give examples by explaining some problems you faced and how you tackled them. What were the results of this? This is also called PAR or Problem Action Results.
- As always, practice makes perfect so do everything from talking to the mirror to sking a friend to be your sounding board.
- This approach will train you for job interviews as well talking to your boss about a pay hike.
- Learn as many new skills as you can and strengthen the Foundation skills that you think are not strong enough.
  - Recognize your Motivated Skills and reinforce them.
  - Look around you and be clear about what skills are in demand the most.
  - Adopt some skills that you can make use of if you ever join another company. Transferable skills are very sought after by prospective employers.

## **Know the Different Types of Skills**

If there's one word in a resume that every prospective employee looks for and every applicant mentions, it is 'Skills'. That's proof enough to show how important it is for one to know his /her skill set and to expand it to include the ones that are required but missing.

There are different types of skills which can be broadly classified into the following categories:

- **Foundation Skills:**  
These skills are a must for any employee. They are classified as Basic, People, Thinking and Personal Qualities. They all fall into the following two categories.
- **Marketable Skills:**  
These are skills which are useful to your employer. They include
  - All the different types of skills mentioned in the foundation skill set above.
  - All the skills that the employer has specified in the advertisement for the job.Other than these two sets, any extra skills that you have, which are of absolutely no use to the boss are unmarketable skills. For example, singing a song backwardsâ€”no matter how good you are at it!

### **- Transferable Skills:**

These are the skills that are useful in more than one kind of job. The more you develop these,

the more are your chances in the job market. An employer might be attracted to your profile even if he has no immediate use for your extra skills, if he foresees any use for them in the future. The most common skill in this category is computer literacy. Armed with this, one can be a typist, a helper in a store, a document writer and a variety of other things.

- **Motivated Skills:**

There is a saying that goes like thisâ€"Find a job you love and you will never have to work a single day'. This is what motivated skills are all about. Things that you want to doâ€".not things you have to do.

## Language Skills

Effective communication is essential in any job; if you are searching for a job, it becomes even more important. Language skills are very important, and can make the difference between success and failure in a [job search](#). Because language skills are so critically important, this article includes some vital information to keep in mind regarding your language skills.

The native language that someone speaks-be it English, Spanish, French or even Swahili- is of course the main way that [communication with others](#) in their culture takes place. When looking to [fill an open job](#), employers are always looking for someone who has the language skills to interact productively with co-workers, subordinates and [superiors](#). This is why it is so important to speak your native language exceptionally well. Without solid language skills, a person is prejudged to be [less educated](#) than they actually are, and that spells disaster when [searching for a job](#).

Beyond this, if you do happen to [get the job](#), not being able to properly tell others something can lead to mistakes on the job, and in the worst cases, can lead to expensive mistakes, injuries, or even death. If someone cannot tell someone something in the case of an emergency, it can truly be a tragedy. This leads to the consideration of language skills in a second language.

Your chances of a successful job search can be greatly increased if you can speak a second language well. Especially in light of the increasing cultural diversity that so many countries are encountering given the modern world where people routinely relocate in search of better opportunities, the average person is bound to find themselves working with people who speak another language, causing a communication problem. If you are able to speak a second language well, this will be a huge plus in terms of the job search itself. As a matter of fact, those who are fluent in a second language often are able to secure well [paying jobs](#) in government, law enforcement, and more because of their ability to bridge the language barrier and simply get things done effectively and correctly. Language skills, as you can see, are not limited simply to one's native tongue.

If you do not have solid language skills, do not despair. There are a wide variety of resources available that can help someone to either sharpen skills in their own language or expand their abilities by learning to speak a second language fluently. If the second language that a person wishes to speak is in high demand in a given profession or community, many times, free training in the language can be obtained. Jobs can even be obtained upon the promise of learning a given language.

Be flexible, and take the chance- it could be the break that you are seeking! To sum it up, the more language skills you can develop, the better off you will be, whether you are looking for a [new job](#) or simply to improve your image in the eyes of others. To communicate well is to relate to others in a new way, and it will definitely be worth the effort.