

Lesson 3 — Workplace Job Skills (hard skills or job specific skills)

In the prior Lessons, we've discussed how to look or appear professional ("Workplace Presences" or soft skills) and how to act as a professional ("Workplace Practices" or medium skills). Now, we need to discover, define and learn how to effectively communicate our job-specific technical skills – or "hard skills" – to get the job you want.

Pitching our hard skills is like developing and selling any new product in "the marketplace." Product developers know that what they're selling has to first be appealing (catch the customer's eye) second, act or show itself as a desirable object (grab the customer's interest) and third, have the qualities that the customer needs or wants (close the sale).

In this Lesson, we're going to review the third aspect of pitching yourself to an employer. And that's convincing a potential employer (customer) that you have the specific technical job requirements or duties they need.

While you're not a product, you are "selling" your labor in the competitive market place. Employers pay you to perform certain tasks – so they are purchasing your time, energy and skills when you're working. And you're competing with other similar products (other job seekers and their labor) to get the sale (hired for the job). As a result, you must prepare yourself to be able to explain why your labor is something the employer should buy (hire) over other job candidates'.

This Lesson will help you learn how to identify, understand and communicate effectively what exactly you can do for an employer.

Identify and describe your job-specific skills

As mentioned, job-specific skills are the hard skills you must be able to perform to complete the technical duties of the job in question. They are the skills we think about first when applying for a job. We see a job posting – whether for a not a mechanic or a legal assistant – and ask, "Am I qualified to be in that position? Do I have the skills they asked for and can I perform the tasks well?"

Can I do the work?

There are several ways to approach the subject of documenting your skills for a specific occupational area and, in turn, for the exact job within that occupation that you are competing to get. (For example, the occupational area could be "community law" and the occupation would be "legal assistant"). The method suggested here is using the knowledge, skills and abilities method – or KSAs.

KSAs are:

- Knowledge is being informed about how to perform a function, act or task – or “I know how to do it”
- Skill is being able to perform a specific act or task – or “I can get it done”
- Ability is having significant experience or a proven ability to routinely do a task – or “I’ve done it before and I’m good at it”

Here are some examples of each level of competency for particular type of job.

Knowledge:

- ✓ I know HR policies and procedures
- ✓ I know computer programming techniques
- ✓ I know legal principles and practices
- ✓ I know graphic design techniques
- ✓ I know how machinery works
- ✓ I know principles of book-keeping or accounting

Skills:

- ✓ I can write and edit documents well
- ✓ I can do thorough research
- ✓ I can deliver strong presentations and public speeches
- ✓ I can produce communication materials such as advertisements
- ✓ I can work with conventional media and social media (public relations)

Abilities:

- ✓ I have managed one dozen projects and many beat expectations
- ✓ I have managed budgets and kept costs in-check
- ✓ I have worked in several teams and always shared tasks well
- ✓ I have developed software programs and none have bugs
- ✓ I have done book-keeping for an entire company, with no errors

The KSA categories above give you a framework to build your listing of employment-related proficiencies or “hard skills.” This approach gives you a broader range of ways to describe your workplace skills, which helps when you might not have a long history of prior work experiences.

It’s important to remember that you should first create a general or broad listing of your KSAs around your occupation’s typically required job skills. By doing so, when you apply for a specific job, you will be ready to refine and edit this general list to match the actual job duties of the job under consideration. Various jobs and their employers will prioritize the skills they want job applicants to have differently, so you’ll need to always refine your general KSA qualifications for each specific job you’re seeking.

You will know what the specific job requirements are only when you read the job’s vacancy announcement and/or the job’s written job description. When you read these job-specific documents,

try to match each of that specific job's major duties with your KSAs which best match them. That's when you can both determine if you might be qualified for the job, as well as begin to generate the content you need in order to create a competitive application.

The turnaround from when a job opportunity is posted and when employers want job applications can be very fast. Know that when the time comes to submit a specific job application, you will probably have just a few days or weeks to do so. Hence, it's important for you to prepare with the general KSA list in advance.

Furthermore, the process of preparing your KSAs will help you with both your resume and job interviewing preparation, which we will be discussing in Lesson 5. In all three areas (KSAs, resumes, and interview talking points) you must be sure to refine your content in each document to match the specific vacancy announcement or job description you might want. Again, having general statements prepared in advance for these three key items will assist you greatly.

The deeper skills

The truth is that employers aren't *only* looking for those hard skills (or KSAs) when they finally get to interviewing job candidates. KSAs are absolutely vital in job applications (paper or online), listing skills and writing resumes. However, research has shown that while the job specific "hard" skills are the obvious skills being questioned and evaluated during a job interview, employers are subtly measuring the applicant's "soft" and "medium" skills even more.

While employers do want to hire people who can do the job, they are even more interested in people who have the right "soft" and "medium" skills for the job. Employers value these additional skills even more highly because they can't teach them easily on the job. As far as many employers are concerned, you either have them or you don't. (As we've learned in this book, though, you *can* learn soft and medium skills – just put in the effort!)

Here's what research tells us about the relative value of these deeper "soft" and "medium" skills. The National Business Education Association surveyed 500 employers interviewing college students for jobs and found that among the top 10 things these interviewers were scoring job applicant on during an interview, the "can you do the job" question was way back in 7th place!

Here are the top 10 things they were scoring job applicants on during the application and interviewing process. And keep in mind that you get more points for the number one item listed below than for the number two, and so forth. That means the number seven item ("can you do the job") gets less points than all of the higher ranked skills (1-6).

1. Ability to work in a team structure
2. Ability to verbally communicate with persons inside and outside the organization
3. Ability to make decisions and solve problems
4. Ability to obtain and process information
5. Ability to plan, organize, and prioritize work
6. Ability to analyze quantitative data
7. **Technical knowledge related to the job (“can you do the job”)**
8. Proficiency with computer software programs
9. Ability to create and/or edit written reports
10. Ability to sell or influence others

Let’s put both together

In order to be able to mount a successful employment campaign, you simply must take the time to reflect and prepare your listing of what you have to offer an employer (KSAs). This is often thought of as a job resume. However, it’s really a diary about what you’ve learned, done and experienced through your education and employment. This diary should be kept current as you continue on throughout your work life.

You can follow any format for your KSA diary, just as long as you include the key elements which are listed in the headings of the **columns** and **rows** in the table below. Sample entries are also included in the table as examples which might further help you understand how this can help you create an effective marketing campaign around your job search.

A blank KSA Top Ten form see Appendix C in *the Make It Work* book at <https://wid.org/wid-e3/employment-empowerment/>. In the chart on the following page, listed the top ten things scored in a typical interview with each item allowing space for you to identify your KSAs for each.

SAMPLE

	Knowledge: I know about/how to...	Skills: I can do it...	Abilities: I'm good/ experienced at it...
1) Team Work	<i>Studied team work strategies in management class</i>	<i>I can work in competition teams, such as my science team in school</i> <i>I can work on specific positions within larger teams, like when I played wheelchair basketball</i>	<i>I worked with a group of volunteers to organize and produce a fundraising event and raised over \$10,000 for charity</i>
2) Verbal Communications	<i>Learned public speaking skills in a "Speech" class</i>	<i>I can give speeches with PowerPoint slides or just on my own</i>	<i>I am a regular speaker for our area's UCP organization</i>
3) Make Decisions & Solve Problems	<i>Studied various customer survey techniques</i> <i>Understand business-decision strategies from a management course in college</i>	<i>I can go through materials and note areas for improvement</i>	<i>During my internship I was given assignment to fix accounting problems and gave 5 recommendations that were used by management</i> <i>In school science club, organized membership, wrote by-laws and got group moving again</i>
4) Get and Use Information	<i>Learned about various research methods</i>	<i>Developed research models for two project</i>	<i>Worked for research group and led effort to collected financial data</i>
5) Plan, Organize and Prioritize	<i>Studied strategic planning concepts</i>	<i>Can use many types of software to organize tasks, budgets, and projects</i>	<i>Worked on an action plan for a company which helped to establish their work priorities for the next quarter</i>

6) Analyze Data	<i>Studied statistics</i>	<i>Can use Microsoft Excel for high-level data analysis</i>	<i>Did an accounting projects for a prior employer guiding them on productivity and results, with 10% improvements in efficiency</i>
7) Specific Job Skills (to a specific job you're applying for) ID Specific JOB: Social Worker	<i>Majored in Social Work at UC Berkeley with a 3.0 GPA</i> <i>Concentrated on family and children services</i>	<i>Can collect family information and match against useful government programs</i> <i>Can work calmly and professionally with stressful clients</i>	<i>Had a social work internship with family services, worked with a 50-family case load</i> <i>Had a second internship with Child Protective Services with abused and neglected youth</i>
8) Proficiency with Computers	<i>Learned new software programs in an online course, with certificates [list software type]</i>	<i>Can use the full Microsoft Office and Google Suites</i> <i>Proficient with my assistive technology and very productive</i>	<i>Integrated 7 new software programs into a system for a company doing an IT upgrade</i>
9) Create/Edit Written Reports	<i>Studied technical report writing in school</i> <i>Took a writing course with proper formatting, grammar, punctuation etc.</i>	<i>Can use Word and Google Docs for writing documents</i> <i>Can produce properly-formatted PDF documents</i>	<i>Wrote a 75-page annual report for previous company covering projects, budgets, fundraising and more</i>
10) Convince or Influence Others	<i>Practiced debate technique on school debate team</i>	<i>Can identify areas for improvement and present alternatives</i>	<i>Convinced my company's leadership to adopt new social media strategies</i>

Your KSA listing should be like a diary and be added to and updated as you have new experiences. For example, under “teamwork,” new examples might happen with sports teams, study groups, project teams, etc. And regarding sports, you don’t have to actually play on a team to get this qualification: you could be a sports team manager, cheerleader or announcer. As another example, under “verbal

communications,” list any and all presentations you may have made (even in school), important conversations, etc., and what you learned through these experiences on how to be an effective communicator. It may seem like a long diary, but when it comes time to apply for a job, it’s a good thing to be able to pick-and-choose from a large list than come up with ideas at the last minute (especially if your best examples are hard to remember). In each section, list examples and, as always, be specific.

Your KSA diary will help you to better understand the value of these various experiences and give you some direction about seeking other opportunities in these areas. Plus, as the list begins to grow, you will become increasingly ready to mount a successful job search effort.

And please remember: if you are a student and have never worked before, all is not lost. Think about your educational- or community-related experiences and seek to identify those school or community projects activities and assignments that developed your KSAs in these top ten employment skills. Just check out the example table above: there are plenty of classes, clubs and internships that can be put on a KSA list. If you’re in school and deciding which classes to take or what to do in your free time, try to choose ones that can best build your knowledge, skills and abilities (so maybe the debate team instead of the fantasy football league).

Also, know that getting a job is a precise or surgical process. Using the same statement about your KSAs for every job you apply for is a mistake. Each job is different the strongest applications address a job’s specific tasks and requirements. Many hiring managers can also spot an application that was copied-and-pasted from a mile away and will simply set it in the “no” pile. Thus, each KSA statement should be fine-tuned for each specific job.

How to improve your skills

If you feel you don’t have many KSAs to document, what should you do? What if your KSAs are less than what might be needed for the job you want?

If after analyzing your situation you feel that’s true, do something about it.

Identify which KSAs you need to become more proficient with or experienced in for the job(s) you are seeking. Develop a plan to improve. Use the KSA table and process above to clearly outline what’s missing or needed and, in turn, make a plan to increase your skills in these areas. For example, if you need more KSA examples or “brag bites” regarding teamwork, get busy looking for volunteer situations, internships or activities that can give you the opportunity to grow your teamwork experiences.

If you have a job opportunity but feel you are missing a “knowledge” piece, it can be surprisingly easy to learn useful information on a short timeframe. Developing your knowledge list is a constant process, so you can teach yourself throughout your job hunt – not just in school or at work. Buying an instructional book, taking an online course, and just researching over the Internet are great ways to build your “hard skills” in time for a job application or interview.



Published by the World Institute on Disability
3075 Adeline St., Suite 155
Berkeley, CA 94703
www.wid.org

© 2018 by the World Institute on Disability

Portions of this text may be reproduced for educational purposes, only if individual authors and the World Institute on Disability are fully credited in each transmission or reproduction in any form, provided parts reproduced are distributed free – not for profit.

Any organization or individual who wishes to copy, reproduce, or adapt any or all parts of this book for commercial purposes must obtain permission from the World Institute on Disability.

Published 2018.

Printed in the United States of America

“Part II: Workplace Job Skills” from *Make It Work: Disability & Competitive Employment*