

Understanding your skills

Skills inventory

Before you try to convince an employer that you're the person they need to hire, you should identify all the skills you have to offer. It's a lot harder to talk about your strengths if you don't know what they are in the first place!

Find your transferable skills

Everything you learn and every skill you have is part of your personal tool kit. You carry these "tools" with you as you move through school and into the job market. When you develop a skill or gain experience in one place and put what you've learned to use someplace else, you're using transferable skills.

Look through the following lists and check off every skill that you think you have.

Key skills

I can:

- meet deadlines
- supervise others
- solve problems
- teach others and give clear instructions
- manage people
- organize and manage projects
- speak in public
- accept responsibility
- plan daily work or special events
- follow instructions
- generate creative solutions to problems

Hands-on skills

I can:

- assemble kits
- build or repair things
- work well with my hands
- operate tools or machinery
- use complex equipment
- drive or operate vehicles
- inspect and maintain equipment or vehicles

Data/information skills

I can:

- make a budget, manage money
- record facts, classify information by date
- analyze data, audit and maintain records
- check information for accuracy
- pay attention to details
- investigate and clarify results
- locate answers, gather information
- calculate or compute
- evaluate
- take inventory
- keep financial records
- research and write reports

Leadership skills

I can:

- arrange meetings or social functions
- be competitive when necessary
- make decisions
- direct the work of others
- help set goals for my team
- explain things to others
- solve problems
- motivate people
- settle disagreements
- plan activities and put them into action
- take risks when necessary
- organize and chair a meeting
- show self-confidence

People skills

I can:

- help and care for others
- manage conflicts, resolve issues
- counsel people
- be tactful and diplomatic
- interview people
- be kind and understanding
- be a good listener
- negotiate
- be outgoing
- show patience
- be pleasant and sociable
- supervise, teach
- be tough when necessary

- trust people
- trust my instincts

Creative/artistic skills

I can:

- be artistic
- write short stories or articles
- draw or create other art
- express myself through music, poetry, or art
- design posters, draw cartoons and illustrations
- perform and act
- present artistic ideas
- dance, create body movement
- use computers to create presentations
- design and layout Web pages

Verbal/communication skills

I can:

- clearly express myself
- talk easily with others
- create and talk about new ideas
- design presentations
- be inventive
- conduct research in a library or on the Internet
- set up my own network of experts or helpers
- be logical
- speak in public
- write clear and concise reports
- work well with others

Find your hidden skills

You may have some valuable skills that you haven't thought about including on your résumé. Follow these six steps to identify your hidden skills:

1) List all your previous and current experiences, at work and in other contexts.

When you think about your skills, don't just consider paid work. You can also draw from extracurricular activities at school, time spent volunteering, and even hobbies.

2) Describe the tasks you completed using action words for each experience.

For example, suppose you worked in a coffee shop. You might describe the tasks you completed like this:

- I followed recipes, mixed ingredients, set temperatures, baked muffins, and mixed a variety of hot and cold coffee and tea drinks.
- I worked with complex equipment.
- I operated a cash register, made change, and balanced the day's receipts.
- I worked with others under sometimes busy or stressful situations.

3) Identify the skill(s) required to complete those tasks.

Your list of skills might look something like this:

- manual skills
- computer skills
- financial and number skills
- teamwork and patience skills

4) List other things you learned to do in that job.

Other things you learned working in the coffee shop include how to:

- manage your time responsibly and organize your work
- serve customers in a professional and friendly way
- display products so people will buy them

5) Identify the skills you gained from the other things you learned.

Your list of skills might look something like this:

- time management skills
- customer service and communication skills
- marketing and promotional skills

6) Build strong sentences by combining the skills you developed with the tasks you completed.

I developed marketing and creative skills while designing window displays to attract customers.

- I developed communication skills while serving customers and working with my co-workers.
- I developed promotional skills while helping customers decide what to order.
- I developed financial skills while making change, ordering inventory, and balancing the day's receipts.

Find your job-related skills

Job-related skills are those that you need for a particular job. An office worker needs computer and keyboarding skills, a mechanic has to understand repairs and how to use tools, and a cashier must be able to make change and use a cash register.

When you're about to apply for a specific job, review your lists of skills and highlight the ones that are most relevant to the job you're applying for. Once you have these elements, put them together into a résumé that will work for you.