

# COMMUNICATION AND SOFT SKILLS

## What Are Soft Skills?

**Soft skills** are the more intangible and non-technical abilities that are sought from candidates. For example:

- [Communication](#)
- [Teamwork](#)
- [Problem-solving](#)
- [Leadership](#)
- [Responsibility](#)

Soft skills are sometimes referred to as [transferable skills](#) or professional skills.

As this term implies, these are skills that are less specialised, less rooted in specific vocations and more aligned with the general disposition and personality of a candidate.

Soft skills relate to your attitudes and your intuitions. As soft skills are less about your qualifications and more personality-driven, it is important to consider what your soft skills are and how you might show evidence of them before you [apply for a job](#).

This is particularly true of the recruitment process for graduate programmes, where [transferable skills](#) and potential often take precedence over professional experience.

## Why Are Soft Skills Important?

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Soft skills are the difference between adequate candidates and ideal candidates.

In most competitive job markets, recruitment criteria are not limited to technical ability and specialist knowledge.

Every job role requires some interaction with others, whether they are colleagues or customers, so soft skills will be important to most employers.

Earlier in your career, recruiters will be looking for people who have the potential to become leaders.

They won't expect you to have all the qualifications and experience from day one, but they will need to know that you have the qualities that will allow you to learn and grow in the role.

Here are some examples of the difference made by soft skills:

- A doctor is required to have an extensive repertoire of hard skills, especially the ability to diagnose and prescribe treatments for an array of ailments. But a doctor who does not have the soft skills of emotional intelligence, trustworthiness and approachability is not likely to be very highly regarded by their patients.
- A salesperson, who may have an unrivalled and exhaustive knowledge of their market, will find it difficult to close a deal and retain their clients if they lack the soft skills of interpersonal skills and negotiation.
- A customer services professional with amazing organisational skills will only do well if they are also able to interact professionally with customers, and have empathy and listening skills.

Soft skills are not just important when facing external customers and clients. They are equally important when it comes to **interacting with colleagues**.

Employers value soft skills because they enable people to function and thrive in teams and organisations as a whole.

A productive and healthy work environment depends on soft skills. After all, the workplace is an interpersonal space where relationships must be built and fostered, perspectives must be exchanged and, occasionally, conflicts must be resolved.

Soft Skills

## **What Are the 10 Key Soft Skills?**

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This section is an extensive, but not exhaustive, guide to some of the key soft skills sought by employers.

### **1. Communication**

Communication is one of the most important soft skills.

Able communicators can adjust their tone and style according to their audience, comprehend and act efficiently on instructions, and explain complex issues to colleagues and clients alike.

A key, often forgotten, communication skill is **listening**.

Whether you are dealing with a customer complaint or working with your colleagues, good listening skills will help you learn and respond correctly to the circumstance you have been presented with.

Equally as important are your **verbal and non-verbal skills**.

Verbal skills are key to fostering relationships that are collaborative and respectful, and ultimately, productive. This also applies to your written communication.

A lot of business communication is now played out by email, so it's important to know good email etiquette and give instructions clearly and concisely.

## 2. Self-Motivation

Having a positive attitude and the initiative to work well without around-the-clock supervision is a vital soft skill for any employee.

Not only does it demonstrate reliability and commitment, but it also shows that you can fit efficiently into an organisational structure without the need for constant supervision.

To demonstrate your motivation, think about these key skills:

- Positivity
- Ambition
- Commitment
- Initiative

## 3. Leadership

Leadership is a soft skill you can show even if you're not directly managing others.

Those with strong leadership skills will have the ability to inspire others and lead teams to success. This is why it is a particularly sought-after skill.

People with good leadership skills will have a range of skills that are useful in the workplace, including:

- A positive attitude and outlook
- The ability to make quick and effective decisions
- Exemplary problem-solving or conflict management skills

- The ability to communicate effectively
- An aptitude for both self-motivating and motivating others

Even if you are applying for an entry-level role, don't be afraid to demonstrate your potential by showing how you have positively influenced others to take a project to success.

#### **4. Responsibility**

Responsibility is a seldom talked-about but highly valued soft skill.

Colleagues who fail to take responsibility for their work will be less productive and less successful overall.

To demonstrate a high level of responsibility, make sure you can master these skills:

- Trustworthiness
- Discipline
- Motivation
- Conscientiousness
- Accountability

Taking responsibility means taking ownership of not only your goals but the wider company goals. This will mean taking the initiative to make improvements, accepting responsibility for any failures and really caring about working your way to success.

#### **5. Teamwork**

Like leadership, good teamwork involves a combination of other soft skills.

Working in a team towards a common goal requires the intuition and interpersonal acumen to know when to be a leader and when to be a listener.

Good team players are perceptive, as well as receptive to the needs and responsibilities of others.

Top 10 Soft Skills

## **6. Problem Solving**

Problem solving does not just require analytical, creative and critical skills, but a particular mindset; those who can approach a problem with a cool and level head will often reach a solution more efficiently than those who cannot.

This is a soft skill which can often rely on strong teamwork too.

Problems need not always be solved alone.

The ability to know who can help you reach a solution, and how they can do it, can be of great advantage.

## **7. Decisiveness**

Decisiveness is characterised by the ability to make quick and effective decisions. It does not mean recklessness or impulsiveness.

Decisiveness combines several different abilities:

- The ability to put things into perspective
- Weigh up the options
- Assess all relevant information
- Anticipate any consequences, good and bad

A decisive employee will take effective and considered action quickly, especially when under pressure.

They take responsibility for the consequences of their decision and can adapt when mistakes are made. This ensures that opportunities aren't missed by lengthy analysis or debate.

## **8. Ability to Work Under Pressure and Time Management**

Many jobs come with demanding deadlines and, sometimes, high stakes. Recruiters prize candidates who show a decisive attitude, an unfaltering ability to think clearly, and a capacity to compartmentalise and set stress aside.

**Time management** is closely related to the ability to work under pressure, as well as within tight deadlines.

Employees who manage their time well can efficiently prioritise tasks and organise their diaries while adopting an attitude which allows them to take on new tasks and deadlines.

## **9. Flexibility**

**Flexibility** is an important soft skill, since it demonstrates an ability and willingness to embrace new tasks and new challenges calmly and without fuss.

Flexible employees are willing to help out where needed, take on extra responsibilities and can adapt quickly when plans change.

Employers are looking for candidates who can show a willing and upbeat attitude, and who are unfazed by change.

## **10. Negotiation and Conflict Resolution**

This is another of those soft skills which employers look for in **potential leaders**.

To be an adept negotiator is to know how to be persuasive and exert influence, while sensitively seeking a solution which will benefit all parties.

Similarly, [conflict resolution](#) depends on strong [interpersonal skills](#) and the ability to establish a rapport with colleagues and clients alike.

## How to Push Your Soft Skills in Your Resume and at Interview

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As with hard skills, you should spend some time considering **what your soft skills are** (it may help to ask people who know you well) and [highlight them in your resume](#) and in job interviews.

Hard skills can be shown via qualifications, but soft skills are more slippery.

It is important to fully **research the company** you are applying to and identify which of your soft skills are most relevant to the role.

Once you have identified the soft skills that are most relevant to the role you are applying for, make sure you [prepare to talk about them](#) at interview and include them as keywords in your resume or cover letter.

Since soft skills are necessarily [abstract](#), you should **reinforce any claims with examples** of when you were able to use them to achieve positive outcomes.

These examples can be drawn from professional, personal or academic experiences:

- If you've been an **undergraduate student**, you will probably have experience of juggling various deadlines and extra-curricular responsibilities.



- If you have previously worked in any job with a **customer service** element, you may have had to use your **communication** and **conflict resolution skills** to manage any complaints.
- **On your resume**, the easiest and most essential way to show your soft skills of communication and attention to detail is to proofread ruthlessly and eliminate any typos.
- In your **interview**, demonstrate your **interpersonal skills** by being professional, making eye contact, shaking hands, listening closely to the questions and answering them fully.

## Can I Learn Soft Skills?

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Even though soft skills are not as easily learnt as technical ability or passing an exam, they can certainly be developed and improved over time.

Improving your soft skills can be tricky as this requires quite a lot of introspection, which can be difficult or uncomfortable if you haven't done it before.

If you want to improve on your soft skills or have some you need to develop to work in a certain role, here are some tips to help:

- **Participate in self-reflection.** In order to improve, you must first be honest about where your shortcomings are. This isn't always easy. If you are struggling, ask a friend or family member to help you identify your true strengths and weaknesses.
- **Look for online training.** Once you have identified the areas you need to improve, look for some online courses that will help you learn skills that would be useful in the workplace.

- **Observe others.** Look to others who exemplify the soft skills you want to improve. If you have a relationship with them, ask for their advice or coaching.
- **Practice.** All soft skills will improve with practice. Once you have obtained training or coaching, practise using your new-found skills with friends or family before your interview. This will give you the confidence to take these skills into the workplace.