

Communication & soft skills

Communication skills are the abilities you use when giving and receiving different kinds of information. Some examples include communicating new ideas, feelings or even an update on your project. Communication skills involve listening, speaking, observing and empathising. It is also helpful to understand the differences in how to communicate through face-to-face interactions, phone conversations and digital communications like email and social media.

Examples of communication skills

There are different types of communication skills you can learn and practice to help you become an effective communicator. Many of these skills work together making it important to practice communication skills in different contexts whenever possible.

Active listening

Active listening means paying close attention to the person who is speaking to you. People who are active listeners are well-regarded by their co-workers because of the attention and respect they offer others. While it seems simple, this is a skill that can be hard to develop and improve. You can be an active listener by focusing on the speaker, avoiding distractions like cell phones, laptops or other projects and by preparing questions, comments or ideas to thoughtfully respond.

Adapting your communication style to your audience

Different styles of communication are appropriate in different situations. To make the best use of your communication skills, it's important to consider your audience and the most effective format to communicate with them.

For example, if you are communicating with a potential employer, it's better to send a formal email or call them on the phone. Depending on the situation, you may even need to send a formal, typed letter over other forms of communication. In the workplace, you may find it's easier to communicate complex information in person or via a video conference than in a long, dense email.

Friendliness

In friendships, characteristics such as honesty and kindness often foster trust and understanding. The same characteristics are important in workplace relationships. When you're working with others, approach your interactions with a positive attitude, keep an open mind and ask questions to help you understand where they're coming from. Small gestures such as asking someone how they're doing, smiling as they speak or offering praise for work well done can help you foster productive relationships with both colleagues and managers.

Confidence

In the workplace, people are more likely to respond to ideas that are presented with confidence. There are many ways to appear confident such as making eye contact when you're addressing someone, sitting up straight with your shoulders open and preparing ahead of time so your thoughts are polished. You'll find confident communication comes in handy not just on the job but during the job interview process as well.

Giving and receiving feedback

Strong communicators can accept critical feedback and provide constructive input to others. Feedback should answer questions, provide solutions or help strengthen the project or topic at hand.

Volume and clarity

When you're speaking, it's important to be clear and audible. Adjusting your speaking voice so you can be heard in a variety of settings is a skill and it's critical to communicating effectively. Speaking too loudly may be disrespectful or awkward in certain settings. If you're unsure, read the room to see how others are communicating.

Empathy

Empathy means that you can understand and share the emotions of others. This communication skill is important in both team and one-on-one settings. In both cases, you will need to understand other people's emotions and select an appropriate response. For example, if someone is expressing anger or frustration, empathy can help you acknowledge and diffuse their emotion. At the same time, being able to understand when someone is feeling positive and enthusiastic can help you get support for your ideas and projects.

Respect

A key aspect of respect is knowing when to initiate communication and respond. In a team or group setting, allowing others to speak without interruption is seen as a necessary communication skill. Respectfully communicating also means using your time with someone else wisely—staying on topic, asking clear questions and responding fully to any questions you've been asked.

Understanding nonverbal cues

A great deal of communication happens through nonverbal cues such as body language, facial expressions and eye contact. When you're listening to someone, you should be paying attention to what they're saying as well as their nonverbal language. By the same measure, you should be conscious of your body language when you're communicating to ensure you're sending appropriate cues to others.

Responsiveness

Whether you're returning a phone call or sending a reply to an email, fast communicators are viewed as more effective than those who are slow to respond. One method is to consider how long your response will take. Is this a request or question you can answer in the next five minutes? If so, it may be a good idea to address it as soon as you see it. If it's a more complex request or question, you can still acknowledge that you've received the message and let the other person know you will respond in full later.

How to improve your communication skills?

With experience and practice, you can learn and improve communication skills. Start by identifying your strengths and then practice and develop those areas.

- **Ask a close friend or colleague for constructive criticism.** It can be hard to know how you are perceived as a communicator. To get an objective opinion, ask a trusted friend for their honest feedback. Understanding your areas of improvement for communication can help you identify what to focus on.

- **Practice improving communication habits.** Many communication skills are habits you have developed over time. You can improve those skills by practising new habits that make you a better communicator. That might include being more responsive to communications when they are sent, reminding yourself to make eye contact, practising giving positive feedback and asking questions in conversations.
- **Attend communication skills workshops or classes.** There are several online and offline seminars, workshops and classes that can help you become a better communicator. These classes may include instruction, role play, written assignments and open discussions.
- **Seek opportunities to communicate.** Seek opportunities, on and off the job, that require you to use communication skills. This will help you improve existing skills and allow you to practice new ones.

Communicating effectively in the workplace

While there are several communication skills you will use in different scenarios, there are few ways you can be an effective communicator at work.

- **Be clear and concise.** Making your message as easy to consume as possible reduces the chance of misunderstandings, speeds up projects and helps others quickly understand your goals. Instead of speaking in long, detailed sentences, practice reducing your message to its core meaning. While providing context is helpful, it is best to give the most necessary information when trying to communicate your idea, instruction or message.
- **Practice empathy.** Understanding your colleague's feelings, ideas and goals can help you when communicating with them. For example, you might need help from other departments to get a project started. If they are not willing to help or have concerns, practising empathy can help you position your message in a way that addresses their apprehension.
- **Assert yourself.** At times, it is necessary to be assertive to reach your goals whether you are asking for a raise, seeking project opportunities or resisting an idea you don't think will be beneficial. While presenting with confidence is an important part of the workplace, you should always be respectful in conversation. Keeping an even tone and providing sound reasons for your assertions will help others be receptive to your thoughts.
- **Be calm and consistent.** When there is a disagreement or conflict, it can be easy to bring emotion into your communications. It is important to remain calm when communicating with others in the workplace. Be aware of your body language by not crossing your arms or rolling your eyes. Maintaining consistent body language and keeping an even tone of voice can help you reach a conclusion peacefully and productively.
- **Use and read body language.** Body language is a key part of communications in the workplace. Pay close attention to the messages people are sending with their facial expressions and movements. You should also pay close attention to the way you might be communicating (intentionally or not) with your body language.

How to highlight communication skills?

You will use your communication skills in every step of the job search and on the job. Everything from your resume to the job interview and beyond will require different types of communication skills. Here are a few ways you can highlight those skills at each step.

Communication skills for resume

A well-written resume is a demonstration of strong communication skills. Ensure that your resume is structured appropriately and free of spelling and grammar errors. Additionally, you may also want to include some positive communication skills in your resume skills section, especially if the job post calls for specific communication skills in the job description. You can add skills to your Indeed Resume for employers searching for candidates with your skillset.

Communication skills for cover letter

Your cover letter is a great opportunity to elaborate on your communication skills. While you can talk more directly about how effectively you communicate here, your cover letter is one of the employer's first impressions of your skills. You will want to make your cover letter brief, well-written, free of typos and spelling errors and tailored to the position you're applying for. [Writing a Cover Letter](#)

Communication skills for the job interview

The first, most important way you can communicate in your interview is your presentation of yourself. Show up for the interview 10–15 minutes early and dress appropriately for the job you're applying for. Pay attention to the nonverbal cues you're displaying through body language. Avoid actions such as slouching or looking at your phone during the interview. Looking your interviewer in the eye, employing active listening skills and displaying confidence are all positive ways to communicate in your interview.

Almost everything you do, both on the job and in life, can be seen as a form of communication. By identifying your strengths and weaknesses and regularly practising good habits, you can improve the way you connect and communicate with others.

What are soft skills?

Soft skills are abilities that relate to how you work and how you interact with other people. Popular soft skills include communication, teamwork and other [interpersonal skills](#). Employers look for soft skills in candidates because these skills are hard to teach and are important for long-term success. Soft skills are different from hard skills, which are technical and job-specific.

Other names for soft skills: personal skills, interpersonal skills, non-technical skills, essential skills, transferable skills

Popular soft skills with employers

In a recent Indeed survey of 1,000 hiring managers, we asked them to list the most important attributes of top performers at their company. The top five attributes they named were¹:

- [Problem-solving](#)
- Effective [communication skills](#)
- Self-direction

- Drive
- [Adaptability/Flexibility](#)

Other sought-after soft skills include:

- Effective [communication](#)
- [Teamwork](#)
- Dependability
- [Adaptability](#)
- [Conflict resolution](#)
- Flexibility
- [Leadership](#)
- [Problem-solving](#)
- [Research](#)
- [Creativity](#)
- [Work ethic](#)
- [Integrity](#)

Broad types of soft skills, which you can read more about below, include:

- Communication
- Problem-solving
- Creativity
- Adaptability
- Work ethic

Why are soft skills important?

Soft skills play an important role in resume writing, interviewing, job performance and finding success in communicating with people at work and in other areas of your life. For example, as you look for jobs, you may find that many employers list specific soft skills on their job posts in the “required” or “desired” sections.

For example, a job posting for a human resources associate may list “attention to detail” as a desired trait, while a job for a marketing specialist could list “leadership” and “great communication skills” as required traits.

Soft skills are often [transferable](#) across careers and industries. As a result, you may find that you possess many of the required traits even if you don’t match the exact profile in a job description. As you search for jobs, pay special attention to posts calling for candidates with soft skills or traits you possess.

Even if the job title isn't a great fit, you may find that the description makes sense for you. As you progress through the job search process, keep your resume updated to reflect soft skills most relevant to the jobs you're applying for.

While having your soft skills on your resume can catch the attention of an employer, the interview is where you'll be able to showcase that you actually possess these skills. While you can display some skills like good communication, you may consider weaving others into your answers to interview questions.

For example, you might talk about your problem-solving skills when answering a question like, "Tell me about a time you overcame an obstacle." If the employer prompts you to provide references, think of those that can speak to examples that verify your soft skills and other strengths.

Top soft skills with examples

Soft skills include innate personality traits and abilities that can be learned. Here are key soft skills and how they can help during the job search:

Communication

Effective communication skills will be helpful through the interview process and in your career overall. The ability to communicate involves knowing how you should speak to others in different situations or settings. For example, when working with a team on a project, you may need to communicate when you believe an idea or process is ineffective. Finding a way to tactfully and skillfully disagree with others on the job without creating conflict is an important skill that employers value.

Related communication skills

- [Active listening](#)
- [Confidence](#)
- [Conflict resolution](#)
- [Negotiation](#)
- [Public speaking](#)
- [Writing](#)
- [Nonverbal communication](#)
- [Empathy](#)

Problem-solving

Employers highly value people who can resolve issues quickly and effectively. That may involve calling on industry knowledge to fix an issue immediately as it occurs, or taking time to research and consult with colleagues to find a scalable, long-term solution.

Related problem-solving skills

- [Creativity](#)
- [Research](#)
- [Risk management](#)
- [Teamwork](#)
- [Critical thinking](#)
- [Analysis](#)
- [Decision-making](#)
- Resourcefulness
- Troubleshooting

Creativity

Creativity is a broad ability incorporating many different skill sets including other soft skills and technical skills. Employees with creativity can find new ways to perform tasks, improve processes or even develop new and exciting avenues for the business to explore. Creativity can be used in any role at any level.

Related creativity skills

- Curiosity
- Learning from others
- Open-mindedness
- Taking calculated risks
- Innovation
- Experimentation

Adaptability

How easily do you adapt to changes? If you're working in a technology-driven field or startup, adaptability is especially important. Changes in processes, tools or clients you work with can happen quickly. Employees who are capable of adapting to new situations and ways of working are valuable in many jobs and industries.

Related adaptability skills

- Consistency
- [Organization](#)
- [Optimism](#)
- [Flexibility](#)
- Enthusiasm

- Cooperation
- Patience
- Growth mindset

Work ethic

Work ethic is the ability to follow through on tasks and duties in a timely, quality manner. A strong work ethic will help ensure you develop a positive relationship with your employer and colleagues, even when you are still developing technical skills in a new job. Many employers would rather work with someone who has a strong work ethic and is eager to learn than a skilled worker who seems unmotivated.

Related work ethic skills

- [Attention to detail](#)
- [Integrity](#)
- Persistence
- [Time management](#)
- [Organization](#)
- Dependability
- Motivation
- Perseverance
- Results-oriented