

IDENTIFY YOUR SKILLS

Are you a strong team player ... or a good communicator... or a good listener...or good at managing your time?

Everyone has a variety of skills they can use in today's changing world and analysing your strengths will help you decide which careers to investigate further.

Skills act as a basis for career choice. If you are good at something, this will provide clues about the type of career that might suit you. By completing the following questionnaires you will identify your strengths, so that you can then identify careers that use these skills more than others. Employers all seek a different range of skills but the questionnaires below cover some of the core ones employers look for are: teamwork skills, communication, planning and organising and creativity. There are others, but these will help you get started. Complete the ones you think are important for you - you don't have to do them all.

You can also use the questionnaires to help you see which skills areas need improving, and so enhance your employability.

TEAMWORK SKILLS

How do you work with others? Are you a constructive team member and contribute successfully to the success of a team? Being a good team member is more than having experienced working in a team – it's about what you say and do while you are a member that counts.

- Think about a team or group activity you have been part of recently. This could be a project group for your course, a sports team, organising a social event or work experience.
- Think about **specific meetings or incidents**. Think about what you said and what you did.

Put X below on the dotted line in the middle column where you think you currently sit for each statement. Be honest – no-one is perfect!

Weak team member	<.....>	Strong team member
In meetings:		In meetings:
Interrupt before others have finished		Listen fully to others' points
Say nothing		Contribute to the discussion
Ignore quieter members of the team		Encourage quieter members to contribute
Talk at length about your point, taking up too much meeting time		Speak concisely to make your point
Demolish others' ideas at first hearing		Respect others opinions. Consider others' points, ask questions then give an opinion

Don't turn up to planning meetings without letting anyone know		Always turn up – or send apologies if can't make it
Promise to do tasks knowing you have no time to do them		Do what you agreed to do on time
Jump topics before everyone has had their say		Ensure everyone has had their say before introducing new topics
Never volunteer to do any of the tasks		Volunteer to do what you think you can accomplish
Outside meetings:		Outside meetings:
Don't tell others when a change occurs that affects the groups plans		Keep others informed of developments that affect plans – in person, by telephone or email
Weak team member	<.....>	Strong team member
Get annoyed with others who don't do what they promised		Help others who are struggling to do their tasks without being resentful you are doing more than them
Diverge from agreed actions because you think something else is better		Keep to agreed actions or consult with others if changes are needed
Assume you are performing OK as a team member		Ask others for feedback about your contribution
Put down others who don't think the same way you do		Aware that others may think/approach tasks differently to you and have different learning/thinking styles

Join up the Xs. What does the pattern look like?

Are you:

- Mainly strong, but one or two points need improving?
- Mainly weak, you need to think about what you say and your approach to tasks. Are other barriers affecting your performance? e.g. no interest in the team task, poor English language skills, lack of confidence.
- Average. Do you need to identify the areas which need more practice which could help you become a stronger team member?

What can you do about it?

- Get more practice. Identify opportunities – in your course, in part-time work, in vacations, in extracurricular activities - that will enable you to engage in more team activities.
- Think more about how teams work. Analyse your actions and reactions to specific incidents when working in a team and how they might appear to others.

- Address any barriers stopping you from contributing effectively e.g. if you are an international student and your English language skills are poor, contact the English for International Students Unit (EISU) for help.

The University of Kent Interactive Teamworking Skills exercise suggests you should try to avoid destructive or selfish group roles such as¹:

- **Autocrat** - tries to dominate or constantly interrupt other members of the team.
- **Show Off** - talks all the time and thinks they know all the answers.
- **Butterfly** - Keeps changing the topic before others are ready.
- **Aggressor** - Doesn't show respect to others, comments negatively about them.
- **Critic** - Always sees the negative side to any argument, but never suggests alternatives. Puts down the ideas of others.
- **Self-confessor** - Uses the group as a forum for inappropriate talk about self
- **Avoider** - refuses to focus on the task or group relationship problems
- **Clown** - shows non-involvement in group and engages in distracting communication.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Employers expect graduates to be good communicators, but what exactly do they mean? What sorts of actions demonstrate good communication skills? The questionnaire below covers the three main aspects of communication:

- Speaking – with individuals or in groups
- Listening
- Writing

Think about specific situations. Think about what you said and what you did.

Put **X** below on the dotted line in the middle column where you think you currently sit for each statement. Be honest – no-one is perfect!

Weak communicator	<.....>	Strong communicator
Speaking/listening		Speaking/listening
Ignore non- verbal signals from others e.g. boredom, irritation		Aware of and act on non-verbal signals e.g. move to another topic, shut up, acknowledge the issue
Don't acknowledge that someone has spoken		Listen to and indicate you have heard others' comments
No eye contact when speaking to /listening to someone		Appropriate eye contact – not staring
Interrupt before someone has finished speaking		Wait for an opening before making your point
Use a loud voice to drown out others		Speak clearly, so that you are audible
Never ask questions to elicit more understanding		Ask questions frequently
Assume someone		Check their level of

¹ <http://www.kent.ac.uk/careers/sk/teamwork.htm>

doesn't already know about the topic you are telling them about		knowledge before elaborating on a point
Use jargon or high level language unnecessarily		Use plain understandable language or explain any necessary jargon
Think about other things when listening to someone		Actively listen to what people are saying
Assume you have understood another person's point		Clarify you have interpreted their point correctly by summarising what you think you have heard
In writing		In writing
Use informal 'texting' language to strangers/those in authority in emails/all professional contacts		Use standard English in emails to strangers/ those in authority/all professional contacts
Write in 'essay style' regardless of the situation		Use appropriate style for the occasion e.g. business style, report style
Not write in grammatical English		Check sentence construction to ensure the text is grammatically correct
Weak communicator	<.....>	Strong communicator
Write using elaborate, lengthy sentences		Write concisely
Never spell check		Always spell check
Never proof read the text – just rely on spell checker		Read the text thoroughly and spell check

Join up the **Xs**. What does the pattern look like?

Are you:

- Mainly strong, but one or two points need improving?
- Mainly weak, especially in one area e.g. listening?
- Mainly weak across all three areas of communication? Are other barriers affecting your performance? E.g. poor English language skills, lack of confidence.
- Average. Do you need to identify the areas which need more practice which could help you become a stronger communicator?

What can you do about it?

- Reflect on what you have said and done regularly. Analyse specific situations which you feel could have gone better, and think about what you could have said or done that would have been better.
- Address any barriers stopping you from contributing effectively e.g. if you are an international student and your English language skills are poor, contact the English for International Students Unit (EISU) for help.
- Ask others their opinion of your speaking, listening and writing skills
- Get more practice in your weak areas. Identify opportunities – in your course, in part-time work, in vacations, in extracurricular activities - that will enable you to develop particular aspects of your communication skills.

PLANNING AND ORGANISING

Planning and organising skills include the ability to manage your time effectively, prioritise tasks, and pay attention to the details that leads to successful implementation of a task/project and the ability to initiate changes to plans if needed.

Think about specific tasks or projects you have been involved with recently. Think about what you said and what you did.

Put **X** below on the dotted line in the middle column where you think you currently sit for each statement. Be honest – no-one is perfect!

Weak organiser/planner	<.....>	Strong organiser/planner
Never on time for meetings/events		Arrive on time or early
Never meet deadlines		Always meet deadlines
Rush about trying to fit everything in		Reflect on your workload – change things if you are too busy
Underestimate the time it takes to do things		Estimate well how long you expect a task to take
Leave tasks to the last minute		Plan in advance and try to complete ahead of time
Weak organiser/planner	<.....>	Strong organiser/planner
Do the tasks as they occur to you, without much thought		Prioritise tasks in order of importance/deadlines
Vague about when you will do tasks		Allocate times in your diary for specific tasks
Never reflect on your plans to see if changes are needed		Reflect regularly and initiate changes to your plans
Once broad ideas in place, lose interest in the detail		Maintain interest right through to implementation of the plans
Keep the plans in your head		Make lists/use mindmaps/project planning software of details to ensure all aspects of your plans are covered
Get distracted from the task and go off at a tangent		Keep focussed
Untidy approach to paperwork		Keep paperwork etc tidy/ well labelled/ in order
See the task as a whole – not in its component parts		Analyse the task into segments
Think about/discuss plans but never take action		Schedule time to take action on plans

Join up the **Xs**. What does the pattern look like?

Are you:

- Mainly a strong organiser/planner, but one or two points need improving?
- Mainly weak across all points? Are other barriers affecting your performance? e.g. poor English language skills, lack of knowledge about resources that can help you
- Average? Do you need to identify the areas which need more practice which could help you become better at planning and organising?

What can you do about it?

- Reflect on a recent situation – whether planning for a deadline or organising an event. Analyse what you did, when you did it, if the situation could have been better if you had organised it or yourself differently. Decide how this is going to make a difference next time.
- Address any barriers stopping you from developing this skill effectively e.g. if you are an international student and your English language skills are poor, contact the English for International Students Unit (EISU) for help.
- Ask others their opinion about your planning and organising ability.
- Get more practice in your weak areas. Identify opportunities – in your course, in part-time work, in vacations, in extracurricular activities – that will enable you to do more planning and organising than you do normally.

CREATIVITY

What is creativity?

Definitions abound. Although often associated with art and literature, it is an essential part of success both in the business world and in other organisations.

A good starting point for a definition is outlined in a government report:

‘First, they [the characteristics of creativity] always involve thinking or behaving **imaginatively**. Second, overall this imaginative activity is **purposeful**: that is, it is directed to achieving an objective. Third, these processes must generate something **original**. Fourth, the outcome must be of **value** in relation to the objective.’ (‘All our futures: Creativity, culture and education’, DfEE, 1999).

Employers often put creativity at the core of their business:

‘And because our business is based on innovation, we also encourage people to be continuously creative, to question assumptions and systems, to challenge each other and build on fresh insights to find new and better ways of doing things. Within our culture, “we have always done it this way” is the best reason to think again.’ (Astra Zeneca)

‘Creativity is the lifeblood of our organisation’. (BBC)

‘Fast Streamers think imaginatively and creatively - whether tackling the finer details of the Treaty of Rome or masterminding your department’s move to another building. Big picture thinking, while focusing on the small details is all-important. You’ll also be expected to challenge accepted ideas and ways of doing things while still being open to new ideas.’ (Civil Service)

In a business context creativity is usually about being able to come up with new ideas and concepts and look at alternative solutions to a problem. These ideas often go beyond the

obvious and provoke discussion to encourage alternative ideas to emerge. Creative people use lateral thinking to transfer ideas suggested for one situation to another, making relevant new associations between ideas and concepts.

Employers seek those who are imaginative, but who can apply their ideas in the context of the organisation. The ideas need to be relevant to the situation, time, and place and within budget constraints. This type of creativity is sometimes referred to as innovation.

If you want to know more about creativity, see www.mindtools.com.

Creativity and you

Think about specific tasks or projects you have worked on recently. Think about what you said and what you did.

Put X below on the dotted line in the middle column where you think you currently sit for each statement. Be honest – no-one is perfect!

Less creative	<.....>	Strongly creative
Adapt existing /others' ideas		Coming up with new /novel ideas
Rarely come up with any alternative solutions to a situation		Come up with several alternative solutions
Use familiar sources to get ideas		Take inspiration from a wide range of sources to come up with alternative suggestions
Dislike brainstorming activities in lectures and groups sessions		Enjoy using brainstorming techniques in sessions
Analyse a task into segments, without looking at the whole picture		See a task as a whole – not in its component parts
Focus on the detail almost as soon as an idea occurs		Can put detail to one side, so that the wider picture can be visible
Always use tried and tested methods		Prepared to take risks to try out ideas
Accept a procedure/method/process as it is		Regularly think 'there must be a better way to do this'
Once started thinking about the detail of an issue, find it difficult to take a step back and take a broader view		Often take 'one step back' to get a broader view of a problem
Tentatively suggest new ideas that occur to you		Confidently suggest new ideas because you enjoy breaking free from the norm
Rarely make links between solutions for one problem and another		Often see how solutions designed for one purpose can be transferred to another
Overemphasise practicalities when thinking of new ideas		Focus less on practicalities when coming up with new ideas
Do not use facts and data to support suggestions		Backs up suggestions with facts and data

Simply states an idea without explaining the benefits		Explains and sells the benefits of ideas
Uncomfortable with thinking of ideas on the spot, prefers to think things through and research first		Happy to generate ideas quickly and spontaneously

Join up the Xs. What does the pattern look like?

Are you:

- Mainly a strong creative?
- Mainly weak across all points? Are other barriers affecting your performance? e.g. poor English language skills, lack of confidence, lack of knowledge about resources that can help you
- Average. ? Do you need to identify the areas which need more practice which could help you show your creative potential?

What can you do about it?

- Develop a better understanding of what creativity is about and do some research into it. Start with www.mindtools.com
- Address any barriers stopping you from contributing effectively. For example, to build your confidence, gradually try out making more creative suggestions in any teams you are involved with
- Reflect on what you have said and done regularly
- Get more practice in situations where you need to be creative. Identify opportunities – in your course, in part-time work, in vacations, in extracurricular activities - that will enable you to use more creative approaches than you do normally.

HOW WILL SKILLS ANALYSIS HELP?

1. Use this list of your strengths to do a direct comparison with the skills required by employers for a specific career of interest.
2. Self awareness is becoming an increasingly important skill to develop. Many employers expect you to take responsibility for your own development and training and this is very difficult to do if you have little self awareness. Reflecting on and analysing your skills will help with your self awareness.
3. When applying for jobs – by CV or application form, illustrate your strengths to persuade the employer to interview you
4. At interview, illustrate your strengths when answering interview questions
5. When in your job, you can use this knowledge to plan your 'CPD' – continuing professional development – a requirement of all graduate level jobs.

Using your skills analysis

Employers are interested in your skills profile, and how you can illustrate that you are good at what you claim.

Knowing your skills and strengths is the first step – you now need to be able to illustrate these – in writing and verbally. Choose a strength from the skills questionnaires on previous pages. Write a paragraph in each section below about an incident or situation which demonstrates what you have claimed. Be specific and use detail – avoid general sweeping statements.

Skill	Evidence
Planning and organising	<p>Example: Organised end of term event for my department for 100 people. Decided on and booked venue, booked DJ, distributed publicity, printed tickets, organised sales, managed budget. Sold 78 tickets, 70 attended. Planned well in advance – but sales were slow, so changed plans and increased publicity. Night successful - positive feedback from those who attended.</p> <p>I am player-coach of a local amateur football club. I evaluate our performances after matches by holding discussions with others in the team, and organise future training sessions and decide on match day tactics on the basis of such evaluation. (Team logs, my own notes, reports to club committee)</p>
Skill	Evidence
Skill	Evidence