



Careers Service

Definitions of Skills

When recruiting, employers seek a mixture of attributes, including **skills**, **relevant knowledge**, and **personal qualities**, as well as any specific academic and experience requirements they may have. This handout looks at what is meant by some of the **skills** most commonly mentioned by employers in recruitment information.

Employers look for evidence of skills through the applications and interview process. They try to find out the skills a candidate has and how readily transferable those skills might be into the workplace. It is vitally important that you understand the skills you possess and where you might have used them already, be it in your studies, in any work experience and in your life generally.

The following descriptions of these skills should help you to:

- understand what employers mean when they refer to particular skills;
- reflect on the extent to which you think you possess them;
- identify examples from your various experiences;
- and recognise areas for skills development.

You also need to be conscious of how being at the University of Sheffield is helping you develop certain talents. The University has published '*Characteristics of the Sheffield Graduate*', listing twelve key attributes that the University aims to foster among its students. Many of these contribute to your effectiveness in graduate employment or enterprise and so relate directly to the skills cited by employers. Where appropriate, elements of the '*Characteristics of the Sheffield Graduate*' are included in the skills descriptions.

ANALYTICAL PROBLEM SOLVING

Formulating relevant questions and engaging critically with a wide range of evidence (from *Characteristics of the Sheffield Graduate*)

- Ability to identify key goals and constraints
- Ability to understand information quickly and accurately
- Logical and objective approach to information analysis
- Appreciation of all the variables affecting an issue
- Ability to evaluate and choose workable solutions to problems
- Willingness to reach decisions and make recommendations based on available information
- Appreciation of the effect and implications of decisions

COMMUNICATION

Communicate effectively, orally, in writing, or by other means as appropriate (*Characteristics of the Sheffield Graduate*)

- Ability to communicate clearly and succinctly both orally and in writing
- Ability to identify the most effective communication medium for a given situation
- Willingness to question and listen to others to aid own, and check others', understanding
- Ability to convey complex information at the right level so it is understood by others
- Applying different styles of communication when appropriate, e.g. negotiating, persuading, influencing

CREATIVITY AND FLEXIBILITY (OPENNESS TO CHANGE)

...applying creativity, enterprise and innovation, to push against the boundaries of current practice (*Characteristics of the Sheffield Graduate*)

- Ability to generate ideas or solutions
- Willingness to adapt
- Willingness to challenge the status quo when appropriate and participate in or drive change
- Ability to identify links between previously unconnected situations or problems
- An openness to others' ideas

IT LITERACY

Handle ICT packages and specialist software efficiently, effectively and innovatively (*Characteristics of the Sheffield Graduate*)

- Familiarity with and ability to use several packages such as word processing, spreadsheets, databases, email, internet
- Ability to select and apply appropriate packages for a given task
- Ability and willingness to learn new packages and applications
- Confidence when using new information technology
- Ability to identify how IT can be applied to improve efficiency and solve problems

INTERPERSONAL AWARENESS

Respecting diverse viewpoints and treating others as equals (*Characteristics of the Sheffield Graduate*)

- An interest in people and what is important to them
- Awareness and tolerance of the diverse needs, feelings and views of others
- Respectful and courteous approach to others
- Co-operative and collaborative approach
- Willingness to support, help and share information with others
- Appreciation of and respect for personal and cultural differences
- Respect for the contrary views of others

SELF-DIRECTION

Work independently setting their own goals and the strategies for achieving them and Critically reflect on their strengths and weaknesses, and plan their personal and career development (*Characteristics of the Sheffield Graduate*)

- Willingness to take responsibility for tasks and outputs without supervision
- Willingness to take initiative and act without prompting
- Having a planned, organised and structured approach to tasks
- Having a conscientious approach to important details
- Ability to remain focused on tasks
- Ability to adapt plans, priorities, or views in light of new or changed information
- Comfortable switching between tasks or problems when appropriate

WORKING WITH OTHERS

Be a constructive team member working collaboratively towards a shared goal (*Characteristics of the Sheffield Graduate*)

- Ability to form relationships at all levels and motivate and support other team members
- Willingness to ask others for advice or help when solving a problem
- Ability to work productively alongside others, keeping others informed of progress or developments
- Positive about enhancing co-operation amongst colleagues

ORGANISING

...effective planning, monitoring and evaluation (*Characteristics of the Sheffield Graduate*)

- Willingness to take responsibility for work or a project
- Sets objectives and plans activities and resources to achieve a goal
- Ability to anticipate difficulties
- Ability to manage time effectively to prioritise activities and meet deadlines

BUSINESS/COMMERCIAL AWARENESS

Fit to practice and progress in their chosen profession, working responsibly, safely and ethically (*Characteristics of the Sheffield Graduate*)

- Awareness of key market forces which influence the priorities of organisations
- Awareness of the importance of competition and other market forces in driving business decisions
- Understanding of the need for high quality customer service and innovative approaches
- Awareness of how economic and political issues can affect organisations and their products or services
- Recognition of the importance of a professional and responsible approach to own role within an organisation

CONFIDENCE / ASSERTIVENESS

- Willingness to express needs, views and feelings clearly, confidently and courteously
- Appreciation of the value of one's own abilities and role and is not overawed by seniors
- Willingness to put forward and stand firm to a minority or unpopular view when appropriate
- Confidence to take calculated risks
- Willingness to negotiate and a desire for a win-win conclusion
- Appreciation of when a compromise represents the best route to a result
- Ability to sell ideas to others, gaining their trust and support

DRIVE AND DETERMINATION / MOTIVATION

- High motivation to achieve and deliver on commitments
- Energetic and enthusiastic approach to work/tasks
- Desire to continuously learn and develop
- Perseverance in the face of obstacles
- Resilience to reasonable demands and pressures

NUMERACY

- Ability to interpret statistics and numerical data
- Ability to make decisions based on non-specialist numerical or financial information
- Ability to make calculations using mental arithmetic and/or a calculator
- Ability to solve numerical problems
- Familiarity with the ways in which numerical information is gathered and is presented

For further help with this topic, ask at the Careers Service to see '*How to Analyse and Promote Your Skills for Work*' (published by University of London Careers Service)