

Quick tip 1 – Employability skills examples

Think about ways you use these employability skills on a day to day basis and how you could demonstrate these skills to an employer in your interview or in a conversation with an employer.

- > **The importance of communication skills is increasing all the time.** The ability to communicate clearly with customers, employers and other staff is becoming more important. For many of us, this can be a whole new challenge! Communication skills can also include things like: having good oral and listening skills, writing documents and using technology in sharing or presenting information.

Example from job advert:

'Must possess good interpersonal and communication (verbal and written) skills.'

- > **Employers value staff who are good problem solvers.** The ability to quickly attend to difficult situations that arise and resolving those problems successfully, will most certainly be a positive attribute you can take to any workplace. Employers appreciate resourceful workers!

Example from job advert:

'Demonstrated effective problem solving and conflict resolution ability.'

- > **Being familiar with technology.** Most jobs these days require staff to have some level of skill in using technology. Try to keep up to date with training in these skills, especially if they are important to the jobs you are seeking!

Example from job advert:

'Demonstrated computing skills, including the ability to learn and apply new applications.'

- > **Being able to work as part of a team.** There are very few jobs that operate in complete isolation. Being able to support and contribute positively to your colleagues and successfully work with a wide range of people will be a great asset to you!

Example from job advert:

'The ability to work with limited supervision in a team environment to provide a customer focused service.'

- > **Be aware of your personal attributes.** Being able to self-manage, take responsibility, show initiative, learn quickly, have good planning and organising skills – these are all positive attributes. If you have particular skills which come easily to you, be aware of how useful these are in the workplace and to potential employers!

Example from job advert:

'Highly motivated self-starter who takes initiative with minimal supervision.'



Quick tip 2 – Filling out hard copy forms

- > Make sure you have the right form. This is not as silly as it sounds. Some large businesses have several forms that look the same but are for different purposes.
- > Read the form before doing anything. Check the back so you don't miss anything.
- > Always have two or more forms. Do a practice run on your spare form. Do it in pencil so you can rub it out until it is perfect. In other words, it contains no crossing out, is nicely spaced, easy to read and contains no spelling mistakes.
- > Copy the practice form onto the real form in blue or black biro. Do not use a pencil or red or green ink.
- > Always print in BLOCK LETTERS unless the form requests handwriting.
- > Check to see you have answered every question and sign the form. If any question does not concern you, write 'not applicable' or 'N/A' in the space provided.
- > Check you have attached any other information that is requested such as school reports, birth certificate, resume or references. Never send or give originals - only photocopies.
- > Check who to send the form to and when it is due. Always use a large enough envelope, write on the envelope carefully and attach the correct amount of postage.
- > Put your practice copy and company address or a photocopy of the application form in your Employment Folder (see page 19, step 3). This is your personal record.
- > You should attempt to follow-up the employer by telephone if you have not had an answer after 10 days. Ask for the person by name.



“If you carry your Employment Folder with you, and an employer or employment agency wants you to fill out the application form on the spot, you will have all the right information and paperwork with you. It helps to be prepared!”

Quick tip 3 – Filling out printable application forms

- > You may need to email an employer your letter, resume (sometimes selection criteria) and an application form. Many government bodies use these.
- > These are printable forms generally attached to the advertisement, however you usually fill them out on your computer, save the file and then email to the employer along with your other documents.
- > Always make sure you keep a copy of this form with your other application documents for that position.
- > You need to type in all the personal details requested, including the position you are applying for (and position number, if applicable) - so have this information handy.
- > Fill out the form using black text, uppercase and mark check boxes with an 'X' or tick. Use fonts such as Times New Roman, Arial, Calibri, Verdana. Try to match the font used in your letter and resume.
- > These forms may ask about criminal and medical history, compensation claims, citizenship status, references etc. You will need to answer all mandatory sections.
- > There is usually a declaration to sign. You may use an electronic signature, however this is not advised. Type your name where requested. Most employers are happy to receive these documents unsigned when emailed.
- > If you are posting the form, or hand delivering – always sign and date the declaration section.



Quick tip 4 – Contacting employers by phone

Some general tips:

- > **Firstly, call at a time where you will have no distractions.** Ensure there is limited background noise – turn off the radio or television. Maintain some privacy if necessary (ie try not to call from your current place of work).
- > **Be prepared with pen and paper** to write down important information they may give you. You may not have success with this employer, however they may be able to provide further contacts to call. Alternately, you may be offered an interview and need to take down location details and names of people you will be meeting.
- > **State clearly who you would like to speak with.** Be prepared to answer questions regarding what your call is about.
- > **Have a list of relevant and informed questions** you wish to ask.
- > **Have your resume and other relevant information** (eg school reports, references, qualifications) handy.
- > **Try to be succinct** in your queries and answers as employers are often very busy people. Be prepared for a short discussion, rather than a long one!
- > **Refer to basic points** you have written down so you remember to cover important information about your skills and abilities relevant to the company and/or the position. Know something about the job and what you would be required to do.
- > **Be prepared to say why you want the position.** Sounding confident and positive about your skills and why you suit the job will give the employer confidence in you.
- > **Always keep a record of your call.** For instance name of the company, name of person you spoke to, any relevant details of the conversation and date of call for future reference.
- > **Be as clear in your speech as possible.** Try to sound positive, bright, confident and relaxed. Avoid mumbling and speaking too quickly.
- > **Call the employer at a convenient time.** For instance not during lunch or dinner for hospitality jobs.
- > **Always speak politely to administrative or other staff** who may answer the phone.



Quick tip 5 – Online applications

- > You will often be asked to complete an 'online application form' by entering text into database fields. This may vary in time taken to complete, so allow up to 60 minutes on average.
- > If there is no ability to save your application, always ensure you have sufficient time to complete the process.
- > In some cases, however, you may save your work and edit at a later date. This is most often stated clearly on the site before you begin. Usually you will need to register for this service, create a login and password.
- > Usually, you are able to attach a cover letter and /or resume. Documents are often required to be in Word .doc, PDF or RTF format, should be no larger than 2Mb and the file name can only contain alphanumeric characters.
- > Prior to starting any online application process, ensure you have the following details available:
 - dates and details of any courses, degrees, certificates or diplomas you have;
 - dates and details of any previous employment experience;
 - your current email address to allow confirmation that your application has been received; and
 - a list of current referees, both professional and personal, with current contact details.
- > As part of the online process you may be asked to read the 'Terms and Conditions' of your application and requested to answer some further questions and provide details of your employment history.
- > If you are applying for an advertised vacancy, you may be requested to fill in fields with a maximum capacity word count. Sometimes you will need to cut and paste your letter or selection criteria into these fields. Do not be alarmed! Just check the word limits comply on your .doc or .docx file and paste into the relevant section.
- > Always record your application number if you are given one and print off any information as a record that your information has been submitted. Keep this information in your Employment Folder.
- > If you are concerned about the process or are unsure if your documents/application were submitted correctly, contact the employer.



Quick tip 6 – Writing letters

- > Always type your letters, unless the employer has requested a hand written one.
- > Be prepared to write a couple of draft copies and avoid using slang terms and abbreviations.
- > Address the letter to a specific person by name if possible, even if it isn't advertised. Ring the company and find out. Then make sure you spell the person's name correctly!
- > Go through the advertisement and highlight all the key words and skills they are asking for. Make sure you address how you meet each of these skills in your letter.
- > Keep it short, but explain how you fit the requirements and why you want the position. Try to keep your letter to one page only.
- > Use words that give a positive impression (see page 79 for a list of positive action words).
- > If you are applying for work that has not been advertised, then ensure you have stated how your skills, experience, qualifications and interest in their company would be an asset to their company.
- > Check that the letter is correctly set out and contains no errors. If possible, ask someone to check the spelling and punctuation and/or use spell check on your computer.
- > To close the letter use: 'Yours sincerely...'
- > Sign and date the letter.
- > Include a resume, references and school, TAFE or university records with the letter. Keep a copy of your letter in your Employment Folder.
- > If emailing your application – see page 25 for tips.
- > If posting your application, address the envelope to the same person you addressed the letter to and use a large envelope. Use a hard folder and avoid folding the documents.
- > Place enough postage stamps on the larger envelope to ensure it reaches the business on time!



Quick tip 7 – Resume writing

- > **Ensure your name or other personal information is on each page.** Always include a header or footer to ensure your resume is easily identified from others. Include page numbers.
- > **Keep it concise** and to the point. If an employer has to go through hundreds of resumes, you do not want to hinder your chances of an interview by putting them off with an untidy or difficult to read resume. A concise resume is usually the most effective.
- > **Appearance is just as important as content.** Ensure there are no spelling errors and that your resume is presented in a way that is easy to read and well organised.
- > **Use of font.** If you are going to submit your resume electronically by email, or if it is going to be scanned, make sure it is in a basic font, like Times New Roman/ Arial/Calibri/Verdana/Tahoma. If you don't have access to a computer and a good printer at home, talk to your local Career Centre or other agency which can offer assistance.
- > **Avoid cluttering.** Keep the paragraphs short and space them out, make the headings clear and leave plenty of visible space on each page.
- > **Modern resume styles often focus more on skills and accomplishments** than just past responsibilities and tasks. Outline your current skills, future aspirations and use positive skill words (see page 79).
- > **List the qualifications, skills and abilities you can offer the potential employer.** Emphasise the aspects of your background and abilities that are likely to be attractive to the employer and suitable to the position.
- > **Check over your resume.** Be sure to look for errors in spelling and grammar, check its readability and the content. Get a friend to help you and always use your computer's grammar and spell checker.
- > **Never handwrite a resume!** (Unless requested.) It should always be typed and printed on clean A4 size paper, normally white.
- > **Contact your referees regularly.** Check you still have their correct details and phone numbers. Also ensure it is OK for you to list them as referee and advise them you are looking for work.
- > **Between 1-4 pages long only.** This may differ depending on the nature of the vacancy and your experience, however the vast majority of resumes are no more than four pages long.



Quick tip 8 – Selection criteria

- > **Check grammar and spelling.** Make sure you get someone to look over your application, it is sometimes difficult to have a clear and unbiased view of our own work.
 - > **Use each selection criterion as a heading** and remember to address all parts of the selection criteria. See our response to Criterion 3
 - > **Focus on key words** in each criterion. For instance, if you are addressing a criterion that requires you to demonstrate your knowledge, then respond by writing HOW and WHERE you gained that knowledge.
 - > **Give concrete examples** to support your claims.
 - > **Be results-oriented** wherever possible. Give examples of times where you had success.
 - > Remember the **SAO** technique:
 - Situation:** Where and when did you do it?
 - Action:** What did you do and how did you do it?
 - Outcome:** What was the result of your actions?
- Some people also like the **STAR** technique: **Situation, Task, Action, Response**. Either way, these are tools to help you to demonstrate skills, abilities and experience.
- > **If you don't have the employment experience they are asking for in a criterion, don't leave it blank!** Still address the criterion, as shown in our example Desirable Criterion 5.
 - > **Save your work** to a USB or your computer; you can use it later, with some changes, for other job applications.
 - > **Give yourself plenty of time to complete your application.** It is a good habit to complete applications in stages, or at least a few days prior to the closing date. This allows you to take a break from your work and reassess some of your responses more clearly.
 - > **If you need further assistance** contact your local **Career Centre, Career Centre** or Employment Service agency. Please refer to the list on page 70.



Quick tip 9 – Interviews

- > Arrive ten minutes early. Give yourself time to gather your thoughts and check your appearance.
- > Introduce yourself politely. For example: “Good afternoon. My name is Peter Brown and I have an appointment with Mrs Green at 2 o’clock”. The receptionist will tell you where to wait. Thank the receptionist and wait quietly.
- > Greet the interviewer(s) and introduce yourself, smile and be ready to shake hands.
- > Enter the interviewer’s office and wait to take the seat which is offered to you.
- > Maintain eye contact. This shows interest and demonstrates confidence.
- > Try to remain calm and not fiddle. No chewing gum.
- > Answer questions honestly and politely. Consider your answers carefully and speak clearly. Give brief, clear answers to questions (not just “Yes” or “No”).
- > Volunteer positive information only. Stress your GOOD points: skills, qualities, experience – remember they won’t know anything positive about you unless you tell them. This is your opportunity to show that the skills, interests and experience you have meet the requirements of the job.
- > It’s OK to pause, take a breath and THINK before you answer.
- > If they haven’t asked, make sure you tell them WHY you are interested in the job at the end of the interview.
- > When given the opportunity, ask job-related questions that are not about salary or benefits.
- > If you are offered the job on the spot - accept it there and then. You can always turn it down later if you are successful at another interview.
- > Thank them for the interview, remember even if you don’t get the job – a positive last impression will stay in their mind and they may contact you in the future for another position.



Quick tip 10 – Interview questions

Commonly asked interview questions

- > Why would you like to work for our organisation?
Why should we employ you?
- > What made you choose this as your career?
- > Where do you see yourself in 3-5 years time?
What are your long term career plans?
- > What are your greatest strengths and weaknesses?
- > Tell us about an achievement you are particularly proud of.
- > Tell us about your previous employment. Have you had any work experience in this type of work?
- > How would you say you deal with conflict? Give us an example.
- > When can you start?
- > What aspects of this job interest you most?
- > What do you consider your special skills and abilities are?
- > What do you know about our company?
- > Are you active in any clubs or community organisations?
What are your leisure activities/hobbies/interests?
- > Which of your school subjects interested you most?
- > Would you undertake further training if it was required for this position?
- > How do you cope with new situations/procedures?
- > How do you feel about working as part of a team?
- > Would you be prepared to work overtime or on weekends if required?

Questions to ask an employer

Prepare some questions you will ask the employer. It creates a good impression and lets the employer know you want to work for the company. Try to avoid questions about money, you can find this out prior to your application or when you are offered the position. Some questions you can ask employers are:

- > When would you like the person in this position to start?
- > Do you provide opportunities for further training or professional development?
- > What would be my career prospects?
- > Where and with whom would I be working?