Universal Essential Skills Framework

This document combines essential skills identified across several skills frameworks including the Competency Model Clearinghouse's Building Blocks Model and McKinsey's Defining the skill citizens will need in the future world of work, supplemented with definitions from various other sources. The essential skills listed are critical for worker success. This Framework is intended to be shared directly with stakeholder constituencies who can utilize this Framework, especially those in the low-to-moderate income workforce. The Framework aims to eliminate biases that may be inherent in the language of other models.

Endorsements

We support this guide as individuals. Our organizations have not formally endorsed this guide; affiliations are listed for informational purposes.

Stuart Andreason, *The Burning Glass Institute*

Rose-Margaret Ekeng-Itua, *Ohlone College*

Scott Fast, *Innovate+ Educate*

Jaimie Francis, *U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation*

Ellen Frank-Miller, *Workforce & Educational Research Center*

Jane Graupman, *International Institute of Minnesota*

Roman Jackson, *JobsFirstNYC*

Beila Leboeuf, *Walmart*

Deeneaus Polk, *3LEVATE*

Priya Ramanathan, *General Assembly*

Eddie Santiago, *Bowery Residents Committee*

Lisa Schumacher, *McDonald's Corporation*

Mike Schwartz, *YWCA of Seattle King Snohomish County*

Jenna Shrove*, U.S. Chamber of Commerce*

PERSONAL EFFECTIVENESS SKILLS
Sometimes referred to as 'soft skills', these are critical for all aspects of life, including on the job.

Skill	*Definition*	*Examples of the Skill*
Active Listening	Be present, remember what is being said, and acknowledge it in following conversations and decisions.	→ Building trust and establishing rapport. → Demonstrating concern. → Asking specific questions and using brief verbal affirmations like: "I see," "I know," "Sure," "Thank you," or "I understand" or "I think this is what you said, and repeating what you think they said for clarification.

Adaptability & Flexibility	Adapt to new, different, or changing requirements, be open to new ideas, and dealing with change.	→ Incorporating a new piece of technology into your work for example, Zoom video conferencing. → Adapting to "hybrid" workplaces. → Being open to learning and considering new ways of doing things. → Embracing new approaches when appropriate and discarding approaches that are no longer working.
Collaboration	Strive for collective goals and coordinate effectively to achieve them. Ensure all voices are heard.	→ Openly receiving feedback from and giving feedback to coworkers and supervisors. → Collaborating on team projects. → Knowledge sharing.
Verbal Communication	Deliver constructive criticism and voice objections to others' ideas and opinions in a supportive, non-accusatory manner, and respond appropriately to positive and negative feedback.	→ The ability to ask good questions and give critical feedback. The ability to solicit feedback. → The ability to be proactive in requesting information from co-workers. Participating in brainstorming sessions. → Listening to a customer's concern and summarizing it to them so that they feel heard.
Written Communication	Express relevant information appropriately to individuals or groups taking into account the audience and the nature of the information. Proofreading skills.	→ Drafting clear and effective emails and other written communication. Summarizing your thoughts in precise language and in a logically organized and coherent manner.
Conflict Resolution	Identify, surface, and solve a conflict in a way that is conducive to both progress and good team dynamics. Individuals consider disagreement to be normal	→ Assertiveness, addressing issues in a timely manner. → Mediation, empathy, facilitation, creative problem solving and[with] accountability.

	and tend to identify and address potential conflicts.	
Critical Thinking in Workplace	Use logical thought processes based on facts, statements, or arguments to analyze information and draw conclusions.	→ Problem-solving: Identifying causes of a problem and evaluating various solutions. → Decision making: Considering possible outcomes and risks. → Identify inconsistent or missing information. → Drawing conclusions from relevant information.
Dependability & Reliability	Display responsible behaviors at work by fulfilling obligations, attendance and punctuality, attending to details, and following directions.	→ Being of your words; others know they can count on you or your guidance for successful completion or best satisfying option per desired and shared wants/needs. → Behaving consistently, predictably, and reliably. → Fulfilling obligations, completing assignments, and meeting deadlines.
Empathy	Understand and share the feelings of another. Understand how different personalities feel and react in various circumstances and make others feel better through appropriate actions and behaviors.	→ Ability to put oneself in others place without judging, and treating others as you want to be treated. → Demonstrating respect for the opinions, perspectives, customs, and individual differences of others. → Providing equal access to opportunities and resources for all people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalized.
Initiative	Demonstrate a commitment to effective job performance by taking action on one's own and following through to get the job done. Persisting, taking initiative, setting challenging goals, working independently, and achievement motivation.	→ Voluntarily taking on a project that is not part of your usual workflow in order to help the team or company. → Seeking out new responsibilities and work challenges, increasing the variety and scope of your work.

		→ Pursuing work with energy, drive, and effort to accomplish tasks.
		→ Going "above and beyond".
		→ Offering to serve and not waiting to be asked for needed help.
Integrity	Being honest, ethical, and trustworthy in interactions with others.	→ Accepting responsibility for one's decisions and actions.
		→ Demonstrating respect for company's time and property
		→ Compliance of agreed upon rules at all times [project duration]
Negotiation	Communicating and bargaining with others. Finding common ground, understanding the needs of all parties involved, and working collaboratively to reach a solution that benefits everyone.	→ Request and receive pay rate with benefits per your experience and skill set when accepting a job offer.
Ownership & Decisiveness	Be responsible for achieving outcomes, taking decisions and actions that drive progress without delays. Individuals feel responsible for achieving outcomes, understand how their work fits into the work of others, taking responsibility for your actions and not blaming others, and making decisions to move things forward.	→ Working independently and effectively at work
		→ Being proactive, accountable, and transparent.
		→ Working to continuously improve. With the ability for work to identify as your brand.
Relationship Building	Develop constructive and cooperative working relationships with others.	→ Respecting others, one needs to communicate effectively for successful relationships.

Self-Control & Regulation	Be rational and calm in emotionally charged moments. Understand what may make you upset at work and manage those feelings as best as you can or talk with your supervisor if they persist. Understand how emotions affect decisions.	→ Staying calm and clear-headed in stressful situations. → Problem solving effectively with coworkers; with the understanding rules and boundaries are for safety and wellbeing of/for everyone.
Self-Advocacy	Speaking up for oneself and taking an active role in communicating and advocating for one's needs, rights, and goals, in a respectful, assertive, and effective manner.	→ Identifying needs and goals. → Communicating assertively. → Seeking support. → Taking a stand for your values without intentionally harming or hurting others.
Lifelong Learning	Demonstrate a commitment to self-development and improvement of knowledge and skills by participating in learning activities, using change as a learning opportunity, identifying career interests, and integrating and applying learning.	→ Providing examples of how you are self teaching. → Embracing emerging technologies. → Explaining how your ideas have helped the bottom line. → Asking questions and showing rather than telling.

ACADEMIC KNOWLEDGE
Critical skills usually learned in a school setting, but which can be learned at any point throughout life.

Skill	*Definition*	*Examples of the Skill*
Reading	Understand written sentences, paragraphs, and figures in work-related documents on paper, on computers, or adaptive devices. This includes understanding meaning, paying attention to detail, critically analyzing information, and integrating new information with existing knowledge and applying what is learned.	→ Following directions, instructions and communication on the job → Reviewing written materials and directions, understanding them, and

		be able to apply what is learned to work situations
Writing	Use standard English to compile information and prepare written documents on paper, on computers, or adaptive devices.	→ Writing effective emails and other communication at work. → Using correct grammar, spelling, punctuation and capitalization in writing. → Writing in a factual manner in a tone appropriate for the target audience.
Math	Use mathematics to solve problems. Computation, measurement and estimation, and application of basic math skills.	→ Adding, subtracting, multiplying and dividing whole numbers, fractions, decimals and percents. → Taking measurement of time, temperature, distance, length, width, height, and weight.

DIGITAL SKILLS
A range of abilities to use digital devices, communication applications, and networks to access and manage information.

Skill	*Definition*	*Examples of the Skill*
Digital Access	Knowing how and where to access technology if you do not have a computer at home.	→ Finding your local library, obtaining a library card, and accessing library computers.
Digital Foundation	The basic skills needed to engage in work with digital devices.	→ Turning on a device. → Using the available controls on the device. → Making use of accessibility tools on the device to make it easier to use. → Interacting with the home screen on the device.

		→ Understanding that the internet allows the individual to access information and content and that one can connect to it through Wi-Fi. → Connecting the device to a safe and secure Wi-Fi network. → Connecting to the internet and opening a browser to find and use websites. → Understanding that passwords and personal information need to be kept safely as they have value to others. → Updating and changing password when prompted to do so.
Digital Collaboration	Collaborate effectively through digital channels, including email, videoconference, file-sharing platforms, and other messaging applications.	→ Participating in online meetings, webinars, and team chat rooms. → Using social media. → Co-authoring documents.

Digital Literacy	Digital literacy is the ability to navigate, evaluate and communicate information online or in digital format.	→ Things you can accomplish with basic digital literacy skills:
		
		   o Sending email
		
		   o Utilizing social media for networking and finding and applying for jobs
		
		   o Academic uses
		
		   o Online banking
		
		   o Looking for answers to questions
		
		   o Researching local government
		
		   o Telehealth
		
		   o Arranging transportation
		
		   o Housing search
		
		   o Applying for benefits

WORKPLACE SKILLS
Skills that are generally applicable to a large number of occupations and industries.

Skill	*Definition*	*Examples of the Skill*
Professionalism	Maintain a professional presence. Demonstrate self-control and social responsibility, take responsibility for actions, have a professional appearance, maintain a positive attitude, and the ability to receive feedback and adjust performance going forward.	→ Demonstrating self-control by maintaining composure and keeping emotions in check even in difficult situations. → Dressing appropriately for the job and maintaining personal hygiene. → Using professional language when speaking with others.
Teamwork	Work cooperatively with others to complete work assignments. Know when to show leadership, when to delegate, and value other's contributions.	→ Actively looking for additional tasks when work is done. → Actively looking for ways to help other people. → Developing constructive and trusting working relationships. → Interacting respectfully with team members.

Planning & Organizing	Plan and prioritize work to manage time effectively and accomplish assigned tasks.	→ Scheduling tasks so that work is completed on time.
		→ Allocating time and resources effectively.
		→ Setting S.M.A.R.T. goals:
		  o **Specific**: Be specific. Clearly state what your goal is. What do you want to achieve?
		  o **Measurable**: How will you track your progress? How will you know you're on your way to achieving your goal?)
		  o **Achievable**: Is this goal attainable? Do you have the skills and tools you

		need? If not, how can you gain them? ○ **Realistic**: Is your goal too ambitious? Is your aim practical? Is it pie in the sky? ○ **Timed**: When do you want to achieve your aim by? When's the deadline?
Problem-Solving & Decision-Making	Generate, evaluate, and implement solutions to problems. Identify the problem, locate, gather, and organize relevant information, break the problem down into smaller pieces if necessary, generate alternatives, choose a solution, and implement the solution.	→ Working with a frustrated customer to identify the source of their frustration and then making decisions about the best way to address their dissatisfaction. → Identifying and defining the problem, generating possible solutions, and choosing a solution.
Checking, Examining, & Recording	Enter, record, store, or maintain information in written or electronic/digital format.	→ Completing and reviewing timesheets. → Recording notes from a meeting.
Time Management & Prioritization	Identify urgent and important activities, prioritize them appropriately, choose the most efficient way to complete them, meet deadlines, and respect other people's time.	→ Using to-do lists and checklists. → Stress management. → Setting short and long term goals.
Work Plan Development	Identify and group the tasks needed to achieve a certain goal and assign deadlines and responsibilities.	→ Input and follow-up with decision-maker and/or immediate supervisor of resource, data and/or appropriate tools needed in a timely manner for achieving win/win goals. → Performance measure and/or productivity evaluation/review fairly apply for timely adjustments.

		→ Prioritize multiple expected goals delivery from/with decision-maker and/or immediate supervisor's order of urgencies, and reaffirm order as challenge/issues encountered shared at scheduled check-ins. → Have expected merit, reward, recognition and/or promotion agreed upon per company and/or dept. head clearly stated and sign-off on
Customer Service	Actively looking for ways to identify market demands and meet the customer or client need.	→ Listening to customers intently, summarizing what they have said, and making them feel valued. This could include discussing products or solutions to any needs they identified.