

Chapter 7

Job Seeker's Skills Finder

In This Chapter

- ▶ Adding muscle to your cover letters with skills language
 - ▶ Highlighting skills that people will pay you to use
 - ▶ Transferring crossover skills to ease job changing
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Are skills central to driving your workplace wins? Short answer: Don't let your cover letters (and resumes) leave home without them. As you read this chapter, forget about being a grammar snoot; instead, laser your attention like a sci-fi ray gun on your developed abilities.

No matter which niche you occupy in the workplace — technician or green-collar worker, professional or manager — mastering skills you can use, and skills that employers are willing to pay you to use, translates to a wonderful employment insurance policy, a giant umbrella to keep you from getting soaked when economic thunderstorms rain on your parade.



Learning how to identify your skills and to believably write and talk about them will be transformative to your job hunt. The payoff is moving from the crowd to the choice. This chapter shows you how to do that, beginning with the way skills are classified.

Decoding the Skills Lineup

I'm the first to admit that the classification of skills, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder. But we have to start somewhere, so based on government and academic classification systems, here's a no-frills framework that will guide you through the thicket of workplace skills.



One of the noun terms you often find in a discussion of job requirements is *skill set*. If you've wondered what it means, here's a simple definition: A skill set means the skills needed to accomplish a specified task or perform a given function.

Foundation skills

The foundation skills are appropriate for everyone's skill DNA. They are organized into four groups: basic, people, thinking, and personal qualities.

Basic skills

When you have basic skills, you can read, write, perform arithmetic and mathematical operations, listen, and speak.

- ✔ **Reading:** You can locate, understand, and interpret written information such as manuals, graphs, and schedules.
- ✔ **Writing:** You can communicate thoughts, ideas, information, and messages in writing and create documents such as letters, directions, manuals, reports, graphs, and flow charts.
- ✔ **Arithmetic/mathematics:** You can perform basic computations and approach practical problems by choosing appropriately from a variety of mathematical techniques.
- ✔ **Listening:** You receive, attend to, interpret, and respond to verbal messages and other cues.
- ✔ **Speaking:** You organize ideas and communicate orally.

You have skills because . . .

Here are four springboards for writing and speaking of your skills. You can infer your skills based on history, simply assert your skills, refer to others who identified your skills, or be tested by professional bodies.

- ✔ **Inference.** Your prior education and experience suggest your skills.

With my degree in civil engineering, I am competent to design bridges.

- ✔ **Assertion.** You claim you have skills.

I can design and sell a program of services to the Spanish-speaking market.

- ✔ **References.** Others act on your behalf to claim skills.

My former manager, Carlyle Sangi, says I put together a budget better than anyone she knows.

- ✔ **Certification.** Testing and peer evaluation document your skills.

As a certified industrial ergonomist, I can evaluate your workplace and make required changes to conform to new OSHA rules.

People skills

These are the skills that allow the “wonder of you” to mesh well with others. They include social, negotiation, leadership, teamwork, and cultural diversity.

- ✓ **Social:** You respect the feelings of others, assert yourself when appropriate, and take an interest in what others say and why they think and act as they do.
- ✓ **Negotiation:** You present the facts and arguments of your position and listen to and understand the other party's position, create possible ways to resolve conflict, and make reasonable compromises.
- ✓ **Leadership:** You communicate thoughts and feelings to justify the position you champion, encourage or convince others, and motivate people to believe in and trust you.
- ✓ **Teamwork:** You work cooperatively with others, contribute ideas and effort, and do your share of the work.
- ✓ **Cultural diversity:** You work well with people who have different ethnic, social, or educational backgrounds.

Thinking skills

These skills enable you to think creatively, make decisions, solve problems, visualize, and know how to learn and reason.

- ✓ **Creative thinking:** You generate new ideas.
- ✓ **Decision making:** You have the ability to specify goals and understand reasons not to do something.
- ✓ **Problem solving:** You can recognize a problem and devise a plan of action to deal with it.
- ✓ **Visualizing:** You can picture symbols and organize them in your mind's eye.
- ✓ **Knowing how to learn:** You are able to use efficient learning techniques to acquire and apply new knowledge and skills.
- ✓ **Reasoning:** You concentrate on discovering a rule or principle underlying the relationship between two or more objects and then apply it to solve a problem.

Personal qualities

Classified as skills, these personal qualities include responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management, integrity, and honesty.

- ✔ **Responsibility:** You put forth a high level of effort and persevere toward reaching your goal.
- ✔ **Self-esteem:** You believe in your own self-worth and maintain a positive view of yourself.
- ✔ **Sociability:** You show understanding, friendliness, adaptability, empathy, and politeness in group settings.
- ✔ **Self-management:** You have a realistic view of your knowledge and skills, set realistic personal goals, and monitor progress toward those goals.

Where There's a Skill, There's a Way

The foundation skills group isn't the end of the story. Other groups of skills are identified by whether they have market value to employers (marketable skills), can be carried around like a mobile phone from one employer to another (crossover skills), or are super-glued to a specific type of work or workplace (job-related skills). Still another term describes skills you're really good at because you love using them (motivated skills).

- ✔ **Marketable skills:** Simply stated, marketable skills are those that an employer will pay you to use. They're often identified in job ads. By contrast, unmarketable skills are those that no one is likely to pay you to use — the ability to bounce for a mile on a pogo stick, for example. Also unmarketable or barely marketable: obsolete skills.
- ✔ **Crossover skills:** You may have heard these skills referred to as *transferable* skills. To my ear, *crossover* is a more modern term. Crossover skills are portable skills that you can use in a wide variety of jobs.

For example, employers value communications skills in positions ranging from apple grower to zookeeper. You can transfer these skills from job to job, industry to industry, or even from one career field to another. I illustrate with a checklist of selected crossover skills in the next section.

- ✔ **Job-related skills:** Job-related skills are also called *technical* or *professional* skills. Because they're suitable for a particular type of job, they assure an employer that you can actually do the job. You can't always move job-related skills from one employer to another, but sometimes you can. (To gauge mobility, ask yourself: "Who would pay me to use this skill?")

Three examples of job-related skills: The ability to use a certain brand of mold-injection machine; the ability to perform cataract eye surgery; and the ability to spot cheating players in a casino.

- ✔ **Motivated skills:** "Do something you'd do for nothing" is the theme song of motivated skills. These are the developed abilities that you enjoy doing. Describing a motivated skill in a cover letter is a subtle way of saying you'll excel at a specific assignment: *One of my motivated skills is _____.*

Understanding competencies versus skills

Competencies, which are also sometimes called *success factors*, *key characteristics*, or *behaviors*, go deeper than skills, according to one definition. A competency is a relatively enduring characteristic that makes possible superior performance in a particular job or role.

In brief, a competency is the X-factor in why of two equally skilled employees in the same company, one hits a home run and another hits a double.

Competency recruiting is an evolving human resource management concept. Study corporate Web sites and determine whether competency recruiting is the policy at your target company. If so, analyze the position you want and develop statements for each competency it requires. If a company is looking for a candidate who has shown "creative leadership," for example, write examples of when you've

demonstrated such behavior. Explain how you did it, distinguishing yourself as a top performer.

As I say in my book, *Job Interviews For Dummies*, 3rd Edition, in today's world, "The operative words are *skills* (what you can do) and, increasingly a newer and broader employment concept termed *competencies* (how well you do what you do using natural talents). The competencies concept includes skills and such related characteristics and natural abilities as motivation, industriousness, and attitudes."

The competency program looks at the whole package as it relates to the job the employer wants done. If a company's Web site or recruitment materials mention competencies, you mention competencies in your cover letter. If not, don't refer to competencies but stick to skills.

Speaking Out about Your Skills

Because spelling out your skills adds substance to your claims of being able to put more money in a company's bank account than it will spend to employ you, I've compiled a couple of checklists to help you claim those you own.

Read through the following checklist of foundation skills and the checklist of crossover skills. Mark the words and terms that truthfully apply to you. Include the terms as part of your skills language to use for job search documents and job interviews.



Speaking of interviews, when you claim ownership of a specific skill, be prepared in interviews to give a brief example of how you used that skill and its benefits. If you're asked and all you can come up with on the spot is babble, the interviewer will think you're an inventor, but not the good kind.

While these checklists aren't exhaustive, they're a good start; you may think of other words and terms to use as well.

Foundation skills checklist

A

- Ability to learn
- Abstract thinking
- Accepting consequences
- Abstract thinking
- Accepting consequences
- Accepting criticism
- Accepting freedom
- Accepting supervision
- Accommodating
- Active
- Adventurous
- Affable
- Agile
- Alert
- Ambitious
- Amicable
- Animated
- Appealing
- Approachable
- Artistic abilities
- Aspiring
- Assertive
- Astute
- Athletic
- Attendance
- Attention to detail
- Autonomy
- Awareness

B

- Benevolent
- Benign
- Bold
- Brave
- Bright

C

- Careful
- Caring
- Casual
- Cautious
- Charismatic
- Charitable
- Charming
- Cheerful
- Chivalrous
- Clever
- Colorful
- Commitment
- Common sense
- Compassion
- Compliant
- Composure
- Comprehension
- Concentration
- Conceptualization
- Concern

- Confidence
- Congenial
- Conscientious
- Conservative
- Considerate
- Consistent
- Constant
- Contemplative
- Cordial
- Courageous
- Courteous
- Creativity
- Critical thinking
- Cunning
- Curiosity

D

- Daring
- Decisive
- Dedicated
- Deft
- Deliberate
- Dependable
- Desire
- Determined
- Devoted
- Devout
- Dexterity
- Dignity

- Diligent
- Discipline
- Dogged
- Drive
- Dutiful
- Dynamic

E

- Eager
- Earnest
- Easy-going
- Economical
- Efficient
- Eloquence
- Empathy
- Energetic
- Engaging
- Enjoys challenge
- Enterprising
- Entertaining
- Enthusiasm
- Entrepreneurial
- Ethical
- Exciting
- Explorative
- Expressive
- Extroverted

F

- Fair
- Faithful
- Fast
- Firm
- Flexibility
- Focused
- Forceful
- Fortitude
- Friendly
- Funny

G

- Generous
- Gentle
- Genuine
- Gifted
- Good-natured
- Graceful
- Gracious

H

- Hard-working
- Hardy
- Honest
- Honor
- Humble
- Humorous
- Hustle

I

- Imagination
- Immaculate
- Impetus
- Improvisation
- Incentive
- Independent
- Industrious
- Informal
- Ingenious
- Initiative
- Innovative
- Inquisitive
- Integrity
- Intelligence
- Interest
- Intuitive
- Inventing

K

- Keen
- Kind

L

- Likable
- Lively
- Loyal

M

- Maturity
- Memory
- Methodical
- Meticulous
- Mindful
- Modest
- Motivation

N

- Neat
- Nimble

O

- Obliging
- Open-minded
- Opportunistic
- Optimistic
- Orderly
- Original
- Outgoing

P

- Patience
- Perfectionist
- Persevering
- Persistence
- Personable

- Pioneering
- Pleasant
- Poised
- Polite
- Positive
- Powerful
- Practical
- Pragmatic
- Presence
- Pride in work
- Progressive
- Prompt
- Prudent
- Punctuality

Q

- Questioning
- Quick-thinking

R

- Rational
- Realistic
- Reasonable
- Receptive
- Reflective
- Relentless
- Reliable
- Reserved
- Resolute
- Respectful

- Responsible
- Responsiveness
- Restraint
- Retention
- Reverent
- Risk taking
- Robust

S

- Safety
- Savvy
- Scrupulous
- Self-esteem
- Self-motivating
- Self-reliant
- Self-respect
- Sense of humor
- Sensible
- Sharp
- Showmanship
- Shrewd
- Sincere
- Smart
- Sociable
- Spirited
- Stalwart
- Stamina
- Staunch
- Steadfast
- Steady
- Striving
- Strong

- Studious
- Sturdy
- Style

T

- Tactful
- Tasteful
- Tenacious
- Thinking
- Thorough
- Thoughtfulness
- Trustworthy

U

- Unbiased
- Understanding
- Unprejudiced
- Unpretentious
- Unselfish

V

- Venturing
- Versatile
- Vigilant
- Vigorous
- Visualizing

- Vivacious

W

- Warm
- Wary
- Watchful
- Willingness to follow rules
- Wisdom
- Work ethic
- Work habits
- Working alone
- Working under pressure

Crossover skills checklist**A**

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Accelerating | <input type="checkbox"/> Administering | <input type="checkbox"/> Appraising |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Accomplishing | <input type="checkbox"/> Advertising | <input type="checkbox"/> Appreciation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Accounting | <input type="checkbox"/> Advising | <input type="checkbox"/> Arbitrating |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Accuracy | <input type="checkbox"/> Aiding | <input type="checkbox"/> Argumentation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Achieving | <input type="checkbox"/> Allocating | <input type="checkbox"/> Arranging |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Activating | <input type="checkbox"/> Altering | <input type="checkbox"/> Articulation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Active | <input type="checkbox"/> Amending | <input type="checkbox"/> Assembling |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Active learning | <input type="checkbox"/> Analyzing behavior | <input type="checkbox"/> Assessing cost |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Active listening | <input type="checkbox"/> Analyzing costs | <input type="checkbox"/> Assessing damage |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Adapting | <input type="checkbox"/> Announcing | <input type="checkbox"/> Assigning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Addressing | <input type="checkbox"/> Anticipating | <input type="checkbox"/> Assisting |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Adjusting | <input type="checkbox"/> Appearance | <input type="checkbox"/> Attaining |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Application | <input type="checkbox"/> Attending |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Appointing | <input type="checkbox"/> Auditing |

- Augmenting
- Authoring
- Automating

B

- Balancing
- Bargaining
- Blending
- Bookkeeping
- Boosting
- Bridging
- Briefing
- Budgeting
- Building

C

- Calculating
- Calibrating
- Cataloging
- Categorizing
- Chairing
- Charting
- Checking
- Clarifying
- Classifying
- Clerical ability
- Coaching
- Coaxing
- Cognizance
- Coherence

- Collaborative
- Combining
- Comforting
- Commanding
- Communicating
- Comparing
- Competence
- Compiling
- Complimenting
- Composing
- Compromising
- Computing
- Condensing
- Conducting
- Confidentiality
- Conflict resolution
- Conforming
- Confronting
- Consolidating
- Constructing
- Consulting
- Contingency planning
- Contracting
- Controlling
- Converting
- Convincing
- Cooperation
- Coordinating
- Copying
- Correcting
- Correlating
- Corresponding
- Counseling

- Counteracting
- Counterbalancing
- Counting
- Creating
- Creative writing
- Crisis management

D

- Data collecting
- Data entry
- Debating
- Decision-making
- Deductive reasoning
- Defending
- Defining problems
- Delegating
- Delivering
- Demonstrating
- Depicting
- Describing
- Designating
- Designing
- Detecting
- Developing ideas
- Devising
- Diagnosing
- Diagramming
- Diplomacy
- Directing
- Discretion
- Discussing
- Dispatching

- Dispensing
- Displaying
- Distributing
- Diversifying
- Diverting
- Documenting
- Drafting
- Drawing
- Duplicating

E

- Editing
- Educating
- Effecting change
- Elevating
- Eliminating
- Empowering
- Enabling
- Enacting
- Encouraging
- Engineering a plan
- Enhancing
- Enlarging
- Enlisting
- Enlivening
- Enriching
- Envisioning
- Equalizing
- Escalating
- Establishing objectives

- Establishing priorities
- Estimating
- Evaluating
- Examining
- Exchanging information
- Executing a plan
- Exhibiting
- Expanding
- Expediting
- Extracting

F

- Fabricating
- Facilitating
- Figuring
- Filing
- Finding
- Finishing
- Fixing
- Fluency
- Following through
- Forecasting
- Foresight
- Forging
- Forming
- Formulating
- Fostering
- Founding
- Framing
- Fulfilling

- Fundraising
- Furthering

G

- Gauging
- Generalizing
- Generating
- Grammar
- Graphics
- Grouping
- Guessing
- Guiding

H

- Handling complaints
- Harmonizing
- Heading
- Healing
- Helpful
- Hypothesizing

I

- Identifying alternatives
- Identifying causes
- Identifying downstream consequences
- Identifying issues
- Identifying needs

- Identifying principles
- Identifying problems
- Illuminating
- Illustrating
- Impartial
- Implementing
- Improving
- Incitement
- Increasing
- Indexing
- Indoctrinating
- Inductive
- Inductive reasoning
- Influencing
- Information gathering
- Information management
- Information organization
- Information receiving
- Informing
- Infusing
- Insightful
- Inspecting
- Inspiring
- Installation
- Instilling
- Instituting
- Instruction
- Integration
- Interaction
- Interceding
- Interpersonal skills
- Interpretation

- Interrupting
- Intervening
- Interviewing
- Introducing
- Investigation
- Isolating
- Itemizing

I

- Joining
- Judgment

K

- Keeping deadlines
- Keyboarding
- Knowledge of subject

L

- Language
- Launching
- Laying
- Leadership
- Learning
- Lecturing
- Listening for content
- Listening for context
- Listening for directions
- Listening for emotional meaning

- Listing
- Locating
- Logical reasoning
- Long-term planning

M

- Maintaining confidentiality
- Maintenance
- Managing
- Maneuvering
- Manipulation
- Mapping
- Marketing
- Masking
- Matching
- Mathematics
- Measuring
- Mechanical ability
- Mediating
- Meeting
- Mending
- Mentoring
- Merchandising
- Minding machines
- Minimizing
- Modeling
- Moderating
- Modifying
- Modulating
- Molding
- Money management

- Monitoring
- Motivating

N

- Negotiating
- Nonpartisan
- Number skills
- Nursing
- Nurturing

O

- Objectivity
- Observing
- Operating vehicles
- Operations analysis
- Oral communication
- Oral comprehension
- Orchestrating
- Organizational
- Organizing
- Outfitting
- Outlining
- Outreach
- Overhauling
- Overseeing

P

- Pacifying
- Paraphrasing

- Participating
- Patterning
- Perceiving
- Perfecting
- Performing
- Persuasion
- Photography
- Picturing
- Pinpointing
- Planning
- Plotting
- Policy-making
- Polishing
- Politicking
- Popularizing
- Portraying
- Precision
- Prediction
- Preparation
- Presentation
- Printing
- Prioritizing
- Probing
- Problem-solving
- Processing
- Producing
- Professional
- Prognostication
- Program design
- Program developing
- Program implementation
- Projection

- Promoting
- Proofreading
- Proposing
- Protecting
- Providing
- Public speaking
- Publicizing
- Publishing
- Purchasing

Q

- Quality control

R

- Raising
- Ranking
- Readiness
- Reading comprehension
- Reasoning
- Reclaiming
- Recognition
- Reconciling
- Recording
- Recovering
- Recruiting
- Rectifying
- Reducing
- Referring
- Reformative
- Regulating

- Rehabilitating
- Reinforcing
- Relationship building
- Remodeling
- Rendering
- Reorganizing
- Repairing
- Repeating
- Reporting
- Representing
- Researching
- Resolving
- Resource development
- Resource management
- Response coordination
- Restoring
- Restructuring
- Retrieving
- Reversing
- Reviewing
- Revitalizing
- Rhetoric
- Rousing
- Running

S

- Saving
- Scanning

- Scheduling
- Schooling
- Science
- Scientific reasoning
- Screening
- Scrutiny
- Searching
- Selecting
- Selling
- Sensitivity
- Sequencing
- Serving
- Setting up
- Settling
- Shaping
- Shielding
- Situation analysis
- Sketching
- Social perceptiveness
- Solidifying
- Solution appraisal
- Solving
- Sorting
- Speaking
- Spearheading
- Specialization
- Specifying
- Speculating
- Speech
- Stabilizing
- Stimulating

- Stirring
- Storing information
- Streamlining
- Strengthening
- Structuring
- Styling
- Substituting
- Summarizing
- Supervising
- Supplementing
- Supporting
- Surmising
- Surveying
- Sustaining
- Synthesis
- Systematizing
- Systems analysis
- Systems management
- Systems perception
- Systems understanding

T

- Tabulating
- Taking instruction
- Talking
- Teaching
- Teamwork
- Technical writing
- Tempering

- Terminology
- Testing
- Theorizing
- Time management
- Training
- Translating
- Traveling
- Treating
- Troubleshooting
- Tutoring
- Typing

U

- Unifying
- Updating
- Upgrading
- Using tools

V

- Values clarification

- Visual communication

W

- Word processing
- Working with earth
- Working with nature
- Working with others
- Written communication



You can track down more specific skill words in three main ways:

- ✓ Search job ads in print and online. Pay particular attention to each job's requirements.
- ✓ Search online for "sample job descriptions." You may have to surf a large number of sites because each typically offers only a half-dozen occupations.
- ✓ Go to a Department of Labor Web site, O'Net Code Connector, www.onetcodeconnector.org, where you see the skills required for an occupation of interest. The skills are called "Detailed Work Activities."

No frills, just skills

Define your skills and what you bring to a new job. When prospecting for your skills, review your last job or college post and think about these issues:

- ✓ What did you do?
- ✓ What did you direct others to do?
- ✓ What did you manage, create, approve, or instigate?
- ✓ What was the outcome of your actions?
- ✓ More profits? (How much?)
- ✓ More revenue? (How much?)
- ✓ More savings (how much can you claim?)
- ✓ More accounts (How many? What are they worth?)

Popular Skills that Employers Want



After pinpointing the skills that sell your value, how do you know which of those most help you stand out from the crowd?

A roundup of several surveys suggests skills and qualities that employers often admire. The following list is representative but not comprehensive.

- ✓ **Effective communication:** Employers seek candidates who can listen to instructions and act on those instructions with minimal guidance. They want employees who speak, write, and listen effectively, organize their thoughts logically, and explain everything clearly.
- ✓ **Computer and technical literacy:** Almost all jobs now require an understanding, ranging from basic to advanced, of computer software, word processing, e-mail, spreadsheets, and Internet navigation.
- ✓ **Problem-solving/Creativity:** Employers always want people who can get them out of a pickle. Problem-solving ability can aid you with making transactions, processing data, formulating a vision, and reaching a resolution. Employers need the assurance that you can conquer job challenges by thinking critically and creatively.
- ✓ **Interpersonal abilities:** Relationship-building and relationship-management are high priorities with many employers. These skills confirm that a candidate can relate well to others, both co-workers and customers.
- ✓ **Teamwork skills:** The ability to work well with others while pursuing a common goal is a long-running favorite of employers. But so is the ability to work with minor supervision.
- ✓ **Diversity sensitivity:** In today's world, cultural sensitivity and ability to build rapport with others in a multicultural environment is highly valued by employers.
- ✓ **Planning and organizing:** Workplace life requires prioritizing and organizing information. Employers value people who, metaphorically, dig a well before they're thirsty.
- ✓ **Leadership and management:** Leadership consists of a strong sense of self, confidence, and a comprehensive knowledge of company goals. These are qualities that motivate and inspire, providing a solid foundation for teamwork.

Year after year, in survey after survey, employers continue to look for assurances that you can in some way either make money for them or save money for them. If the employer is a nonprofit organization, generally you should substitute the skills you can bring to bear on helping the organization fulfill its mission (unless the mission requires selling products to earn money). Skills useful in saving money are universally desired, including by the nonprofits.

Personal Qualities That Employers Want

In the Great American Skills Sorting, some list-makers mix in personal values, personality traits, and personal characteristics with skills — and that's okay with me. But I've made a second list focusing on a few personal qualities that employers rate highly.

- ✓ **Adaptability and flexibility:** Nearly half of employers in a recent survey gave a high rating to “openness to new ideas and concepts.” They also like candidates who can work independently or as part of a team, changing gears when required, whether multitasking or adapting working hours and locale.
- ✓ **Professionalism and work ethic:** Employers seek productive workers with positive work ethics who stick with challenges until they meet them.
- ✓ **Positive attitude and energy:** The last to be picked and promoted are candidates who show gloomy outlooks and emotional immaturity. Exhibit a sunny outlook and energetic, organized behavior.



Everyone wants to hire a paragon of virtue, a model of excellence and perfection. Don't overlook adding your personal qualities — and the behaviors they drive — where appropriate when composing your job-search correspondence.

Give Serious Thought to Certifications

A professional certification can be a kind of passport, identifying you as a citizen of a career field with all its rank and privilege. In other words, professional credentialing is one way to document your ownership of the skills you claim.

Not all credentials are worthy. A credential is worth the effort only if it has industry recognition and respect.

Crash course on certification

Differences in certification exist, but for ease of communication, I include other terms of validation such as *registered*, *accredited*, *chartered*, *qualified*, and *diplomate*, as well as *certified*. Whether the professional designation carries statutory clout or is voluntary, common elements include professional experience, often between two and ten years, sometimes reduced by education. Education standards are included, which may call for minimum levels of both academic and professional education.

Certification examinations are uninviting to many professionals; generally, they require time-consuming study and may include both experience-based knowledge acquired working in the field, and curriculum-based knowledge gained by assigned learning texts.

What's certification worth?

Is certification worth your effort?

Certification has strong appeal in your early career — say, the first 12 to 15 years — as a technique to control your earnings environment. But in business, certifications lose their luster at the vice-presidential level and above. Why? Certifications zero in on specific skills, while top managers are more concerned with the big picture. For consulting, medicine, law, and technology careers, professional certifications never lose their punch, especially for those who hope to work internationally. Continuing education may be required to keep them updated and active.

The credential may be a license awarded by a state board, such as the familiar Certified Public Accountant (CPA), or a voluntary program sponsored by a professional organization, such as the Accredited in Public Relations (APR) designation awarded by the Public Relations Society of America.



Because a given professional certification may not carry stripes for your sleeve, much less stars for your shoulder, investigate first! Clues to look for include the following:

- ✔ Do recruitment ads call for the professional designation? Do trade publications mention it? What do practitioners in your field advise?
- ✔ As you change jobs more often, certification can be a kind of passport. It shows that you're a player in your field's global body of knowledge and that you have documented standards and achievements.
- ✔ Certification can be very helpful if you become sidetracked into too narrow a specialty or stagnate in a company with antiquated technologies or find yourself boxed in by a hostile boss. The boss can still claim that you lack interpersonal abilities, but a professional designation leaves little room to say you're short on job-related technical skills.
- ✔ You may earn more money by going the certified route. A study of project managers reveals that those with a PMP (Project Management Professional) designation with seven years' experience annually earn \$7,000 more than non-certified project managers, a differential that adds up to serious money over the years.

Good Luck on the Great Skills Search

When you're really stumped on naming specific skills that make you stand out and need more help than this chapter or your informal efforts provide, the Internet beckons: Call forth the genie of Google and type "discover your skills." More than 625,000 resources are yours to command.

You can't beg off identifying your skills when writing cover letters and other job search documents. Every employer looks for the skill sets a candidate offers.

Shopping for skills

Small businesses are creating most of the new jobs. But small companies have fewer resources to use in training new hires. That means that for most jobs, you're pretty much on your own to acquire the skills you need.

Large companies, although offering fewer jobs in the aggregate, are still the best places to work to acquire up-to-date skills you can market on future jobs.

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