

ARE THEY REALLY READY TO WORK?

Employers' Perspectives on the Basic Knowledge and Applied Skills of New Entrants to the 21st Century U.S. Workforce



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Applied Skills and Basic Knowledge: Combining and Ranking

Before examining the specific applied skills, it is valuable to consider the relative rankings of a combined list of basic knowledge areas and applied skills. One difficulty in defining the ideal skill set needed for new entrants' workforce readiness is determining the relative importance of basic knowledge, such as *Reading Comprehension*, *Writing in English*, *Mathematics* and *English Language* skills, and the applied skills, which are often considered to be more social or behavioral. While several of the applied skills are social or behavioral in nature, others, such as *Critical Thinking/Problem Solving* and *Creativity/Innovation*, are also based on cognitive abilities (see Definition of Terms, pages 15–16). To determine how employers view the relative importance of basic knowledge versus applied skills, both skill sets are combined and the overall rankings are considered for each of the three educational levels in Tables 3, 4, and 5.⁹

Table 3

For new entrants with a high school diploma, applied skills are four of the top five “very important” skills in combined ranking with basic knowledge and skills.

Rank	Skill	Percent
1	Professionalism/Work Ethic*	80.3%
2	Teamwork/Collaboration*	74.7
3	Oral Communications*	70.3
4	Ethics/Social Responsibility*	63.4
5	Reading Comprehension	62.5
6	English Language	61.8
7	Critical Thinking/ Problem Solving*	57.5
8	Information Technology Application*	53.0
9	Written Communications*	52.7
10	Diversity*	52.1
11	Writing in English	49.4
12	Lifelong Learning/ Self Direction*	42.5
13	Creativity/Innovation*	36.3
14	Mathematics	30.4
15	Leadership*	29.2
16	Foreign Languages	11.0
17	Science	9.0
18	Government/Economics	3.5
19	History/Geography	2.1
20	Humanities/Arts	1.8

Basic and applied skills rank ordered by percent rating as “very important.”
Number of respondents varied for each question, ranging from 336 to 361.
* Indicates an applied skill

Table 4

For new entrants with a two-year college/technical school diploma, applied skills are four of the top five “very important” skills in combined ranking with basic knowledge and skills.

Rank	Skill	Percent
1	Professionalism/Work Ethic*	83.4%
2	Teamwork/Collaboration*	82.7
3	Oral Communications*	82.0
4	Critical Thinking/ Problem Solving*	72.7
5	Reading Comprehension	71.6
6	Written Communications*	71.5
7	English Language	70.6
8	Ethics/Social Responsibility*	70.6
9	Information Technology Application*	68.6
10	Writing in English	64.9
11	Lifelong Learning/ Self Direction*	58.3
12	Diversity*	56.9
13	Creativity/Innovation*	54.2
14	Leadership*	45.4
15	Mathematics	44.0
16	Science	21.2
17	Foreign Languages	14.1
18	Government/Economics	6.7
19	Humanities/Arts	4.4
20	History/Geography	3.6

Basic and applied skills rank ordered by percent rating as “very important.”
Number of respondents varied for each question, ranging from 334 to 360.
* Indicates an applied skill

Table 5

For new entrants with a four-year college diploma, applied skills are the top five “very important” skills in combined ranking with basic knowledge and skills.

Rank	Skill	Percent
1	Oral Communications*	95.4%
2	Teamwork/Collaboration*	94.4
3	Professionalism/Work Ethic*	93.8
4	Written Communications*	93.1
5	Critical Thinking/ Problem Solving*	92.1
6	Writing in English	89.7
7	English Language	88.0
8	Reading Comprehension	87.0
9	Ethics/Social Responsibility*	85.6
10	Leadership*	81.8
11	Information Technology Application*	81.0
12	Creativity/Innovation*	81.0
13	Lifelong Learning/ Self Direction*	78.3
14	Diversity*	71.8
15	Mathematics	64.2
16	Science	33.4
17	Foreign Languages	21.0
18	Government/Economics	19.8
19	History/Geography	14.1
20	Humanities/Arts	13.2

Basic and applied skills rank ordered by percent rating as “very important.”
Number of respondents varied for each question, ranging from 382 to 409.
* Indicates an applied skill

⁹ It should be noted that employers may assess as more important those skills they can observe directly. Applied skills rather than basic skills are more likely to be observed in day-to-day job performance.