

## Soft Skills for Your Future Job

### Lesson by

Jackie Morgan, senior economic and financial education specialist at the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, Nashville Branch

Claire Loup, senior economic and financial education specialist at the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, New Orleans Branch

Julie Kornegay, senior economic and financial education specialist at the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, Birmingham Branch

### Lesson description

Soft skills are critical to success in the workplace. Students will read an article to learn about essential soft skills, then they'll complete a soft skills self-assessment. Students will then evaluate the soft skills needed for specific jobs and compare them with their self-assessment to determine where skills gaps may exist. Finally, students will watch a video about professionalism, reflect on professionalism in specific jobs, and practice professionalism in a real-life situation.

### Concepts

Careers  
Soft skills  
Workplace expectations

### Objectives

Students will be able to:

1. Identify soft skills desired in the jobs in which they are interested.
2. Compare and contrast the different soft skills needed in various jobs.
3. Critically evaluate their current soft skills proficiency.
4. Evaluate how their current soft skills compare to the soft skills desired in specific jobs.
5. Provide specific examples of situations in which they have demonstrated soft skills proficiency.
6. Practice professionalism in a real-life situation.

### Time required

75 minutes for entire lesson (individual components can be completed separately as standalone activities)



### **Related content area**

Career education, personal finance, economics, marketing, business education

### **Materials**

Visual 1: “What’s the Connection?”

Handout 1: “Soft Skills Self-Assessment” (one copy for each student)

Handout 2: “Evaluating Soft Skills Needed for Your Future Job” (one copy for each student)

Handout 3: “Reflecting on Your Current Soft Skills for Your Future” (one copy for each student)

Handout 4: “Practicing Professionalism” (one copy for each student)

### **Procedures**

Note: Before completing this lesson, it may be helpful to have each student complete an interest inventory to provide ideas for jobs and career paths that may be of interest to them.

1. Display Visual 1: “What’s the Connection?” Ask students what they think the connection is between all of the words. After some discussion, tell students the connection is they are all soft skills. Explain that in order to get a job and be successful in it, people need both technical skills (knowledge, training, and skills related to the subject matter or industry) and soft skills (interpersonal skills such as those listed on the visual).
2. Tell students they are going to learn more about the soft skills needed in the workplace. Have students read the National Soft Skills Association article [Top 10 Soft Skills for Success](#).
3. For this component, you will guide students through the self-assessment. Distribute Handout 1: “Soft Skills Self-Assessment.” As a class, address each of the soft skills one at a time so that the students gain a foundational understanding of the soft skill. As each soft skill is discussed, have students take notes and provide examples in the space provided. Ask students to define the soft skill based on what they read in the article. Poll the class for examples of how they currently display that skill in school, at home, or in other outside activities. On the chart, have students evaluate their expertise in performing that soft skill and explain why they rated themselves in that way. Repeat for each soft skill.
4. Debrief the self-assessment with students. Ask for volunteers to share how they rated themselves on one soft skill and why. Tell students they will later use the information from Handout 1 as part of a reflection.
5. Distribute Handout 2: “Evaluating Soft Skills Needed for Your Future Job.” Explain to students they will identify three jobs of interest and learn more about the soft skills required for that job.

Tell students that they will complete the matrix using information from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics [Occupational Outlook Handbook](#).

6. After students complete Handout 2, debrief the activity. Display Visual 1 again. Tell students that this list shows the top 10 soft skills identified in the article read earlier. Ask students to share something they learned about soft skills needed in the workplace. Have students share other soft skills they find that are not listed on Visual 1.
7. Distribute Handout 3: “Reflecting on Your Current Soft Skills for Your Future.” Students should complete Handout 3 using the information from the matrices of Handouts 1 and 2.
8. After students complete Handout 3, debrief the activity. Ask students what they learned about how their current soft skills matched what is required in the workplace. Ask students what steps they need to be taking to improve their soft skills for their future jobs and career paths.
9. Show the U.S. Department of Labor [professionalism video](#). Discuss with students that professionalism is a soft skill made up of several other skills. Distribute Handout 4: “Practicing Professionalism.” You may want to have students complete Handout 4 as a take-home activity since it requires reflection and an opportunity to practice professionalism. Upon completing Handout 4, debrief the activity by having students share ways in which they practiced professionalism and what they learned. Optional supplemental activity: a Skype session or guest speaker with industry experience who could provide additional information about professionalism and soft skills in specific jobs.
10. Extension activity: Students can further explore the topic using the [Evaluating Postsecondary Opportunities](#) lesson.

## Visual 1: What's the Connection?

Dependability

Problem solving

Motivation

Flexibility

Communication

Teamwork

Commitment

Leadership

Creativity

Time management



classmate  
classroom  
students

# Extra Credit

a newsletter for educators



## Handout 1: Soft Skills Self-Assessment

1. Read the article [Top 10 Soft Skills for Success](http://www.nationalsoftskills.org/top-10-soft-skills-for-success/) (<http://www.nationalsoftskills.org/top-10-soft-skills-for-success/>).
2. For each soft skill, take notes about the specific skill during the classroom discussion.
3. Look at the list of soft skills in column 1, then put a check mark in the column to the right that best describes your expertise in performing each soft skill.
4. In the last column, describe the reason you rated yourself as you did for each of the soft skills.

Soft Skills	Rate yourself at each soft skill			
	Good	OK	Want to Improve	Why do you think you are good, OK, or want to improve in this area?
<b>Dependability</b> <i>Notes:</i>				
<b>Motivation</b> <i>Notes:</i>				
<b>Communication</b> <i>Notes:</i>				
<b>Commitment</b> <i>Notes:</i>				
<b>Creativity</b> <i>Notes:</i>				
<b>Problem solving</b> <i>Notes:</i>				
<b>Flexibility</b> <i>Notes:</i>				
<b>Teamwork</b> <i>Notes:</i>				
<b>Leadership</b> <i>Notes:</i>				
<b>Time management</b> <i>Notes:</i>				

## Handout 2: Evaluating Soft Skills Needed for Your Future Job

1. Go to the [Occupational Outlook Handbook \(www.bls.gov/ooh\)](http://www.bls.gov/ooh). From the Occupation Groups on the left, click on a group, then select one of the occupations.
2. Click on the occupation title to display the Summary page for that occupation.
3. Look for the tab How to Become One, and click on it. Scroll down to Important Qualities and use this information to identify the soft skills for the occupation. Complete the matrix below.
4. Repeat this process for each additional occupation. To return to the home page, click OOH Home on the upper left of the toolbar.

	Occupation Title 1	Occupation Title 2	Occupation Title 3
Soft Skills			
Soft Skill 1 <i>Skill and description</i>			
Soft Skill 2 <i>Skill and description</i>			
Soft Skill 3 <i>Skill and description</i>			
Soft Skill 4 <i>Skill and description</i>			
Soft Skill 5 <i>Skill and description</i>			

### Handout 3: Reflecting on Your Current Soft Skills for Your Future

Respond to the following questions based on the information gathered in Handouts 1 and 2.

1. Which soft skills are similar among the jobs you reviewed? Why do you think these soft skills are needed in these jobs?
  
2. How do the soft skills required in the three jobs compare to your self-assessment?
  
3. Were soft skills listed in the three jobs that were not on the self-assessment? If so, list these soft skills below and conduct a self-assessment of those skills.

Soft Skills	Rate yourself at each soft skill			
<i>Soft skill from Handout 2 not included in Handout 1</i>	Good	OK	Want to Improve	Why do you think you are good, OK, or want to improve in this area?

4. In the article [Top 10 Soft Skills for Success](#), it states "...no interviewers will ask students if they have a soft skill. Instead, they'll ask for proof of the skill based on concrete examples." Imagine you are interviewing for one of the jobs on your list. Give specific examples of how you demonstrated proficiency in each of the listed soft skills for that job. Your response should be two to three paragraphs.

## Handout 4: Practicing Professionalism

1. After watching the [professionalism video \(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7dPWVjQSad4\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7dPWVjQSad4), reflect and respond in two to three paragraphs to the following questions:
  - Why would professionalism be important in the jobs you selected?
  - How might you integrate professionalism into your everyday life?
  - In what ways could you model your behavior to reflect professionalism?
2. Find an opportunity to practice professionalism. This could be an interaction with a classmate, teacher, coach, administrator, or employer. Reflect and respond in one to two paragraphs to the following questions:
  - Describe the interaction and how you demonstrated professionalism.
  - What went well during the interaction?
  - What could be improved on in the future?

## Standards addressed

The Common Career Technical Core Standards—Career-Ready Practices (CRP)

2. Apply appropriate academic and technical skills. Career-ready individuals readily access and use the knowledge and skills acquired through experience and education to be more productive. They make connections between abstract concepts with real-world applications, and they make correct insights about when it is appropriate to apply the use of an academic skill in a workplace situation.

4. Communicate clearly, effectively, and with reason. Career-ready individuals communicate thoughts, ideas, and action plans with clarity, whether using written, verbal and/or visual methods. They communicate in the workplace with clarity and purpose to make maximum use of their own and others' time. They are excellent writers; they master conventions, word choice, and organization and use effective tone and presentation skills to articulate ideas. They are skilled at interacting with others; they are active listeners and speak clearly and with purpose. Career-ready individuals think about the audience for their communication and prepare accordingly to ensure the desired outcome.

6. Demonstrate creativity and innovation. Career-ready individuals regularly think of ideas that solve problems in new and different ways, and they contribute those ideas in a useful and productive manner to improve their organization. They can consider unconventional ideas and suggestions as solutions to issues, tasks, or problems, and they discern which ideas and suggestions will add greatest value. They seek new methods, practices, and ideas from a variety of sources and seek to apply those ideas to their own workplace. They take action on their ideas and understand how to bring innovation to an organization.

8. Utilize critical thinking to make sense of problems and persevere in solving them. Career-ready individuals readily recognize problems in the workplace, understand the nature of the problem, and devise effective plans to solve the problem. They are aware of problems when they occur and take action quickly to address the problem. They thoughtfully investigate the root cause of the problem prior to introducing solutions. They carefully consider the options to solve the problem. Once a solution is agreed upon, they follow through to ensure the problem is solved, whether through their own actions or the actions of others.

10. Plan education and career path aligned to personal goals. Career-ready individuals take personal ownership of their own educational and career goals, and they regularly act on a plan to attain these goals. They understand their own career interests, preferences, goals, and requirements. They have perspective regarding the pathways available to them and the time, effort, experience, and other requirements to pursue each, including a path of entrepreneurship. They recognize the value of each step in the educational and experiential process, and they recognize that nearly all career paths require ongoing education and experience. They seek counselors, mentors, and other experts to assist in the planning and execution of career and personal goals.

## **Standards addressed (continued)**

11. Use technology to enhance productivity. Career-ready individuals find and maximize the productive value of existing and new technology to accomplish workplace tasks and solve workplace problems. They are flexible and adaptive in acquiring and using new technology. They are proficient with ubiquitous technology applications. They understand the inherent risks—personal and organizational—of technology applications, and they take actions to prevent or mitigate these risks.

12. Work productively in teams while using cultural/global competence. Career-ready individuals positively contribute to every team, whether formal or informal. They apply an awareness of cultural differences to avoid barriers to productive and positive interaction. They find ways to increase the engagement and contribution of all team members. They plan and facilitate effective team meetings.