

Transferable Skills

Helpful tips and pointers from the ICAS Professional Development team.

April 2021



Like with anything to do with Careers, there are terms which pop up time and time again. Transferable skills is one of these terms. So, what do we mean when we talk about transferrable skills?

What are transferable skills?

Take a moment to think about your role, think about **how** you do your job not **what** you do. Now think of a job you don't do, maybe it is something your partner, a parent or friend does. If you had to do their job tomorrow, what skills would you have that you could take with you? You wouldn't necessarily have the technical knowledge, but you would have a range of skills that would mean you were able to do the job, communication, teamwork, collaboration to name a few.

If you are looking for a practical walk through of this idea and examples of putting this in practice then take a look at the [squiggly career podcast](#) – the series offers some great general career tips, but this particular podcast will walk you through how to apply the above scenario and work out some of your strongest transferable skills.

If you don't have time to listen to the podcast, then take a couple of minutes now and think about what skills you would take with you to a job tomorrow that is outside of your current work situation. How would you navigate a day in a workplace that is alien to you and what would you be able to offer with the skills you have? This could be anything, a few of the commonly talked about transferable skills are communication, teamwork, adaptability, leadership, time management and problem solving. Take some time to think about your transferable skills and write down what you think they are.

Hopefully now you have a better idea of what your skills might be from the above scenario it is time to think about how you can apply this to your own career and ways in which you might be able to develop these skills.

How to improve your transferable skills

In reality, the scope and scale of transferable skills is huge – there is so much wrapped up in 'communication', this could be to do with meetings, presentations, conversations, listening, speaking, writing, emailing, creating content – the list goes on. Harvard university has a breakdown of larger transferable skills which [you can find here](#). With the list you have already created, take a moment to identify some of the smaller skills within the bigger transferable skills that you would want to develop.

So, if you identified that one of your skills was analysis, have a look at the breakdown of this skill and see where there may be gaps in your skills, for example you may be strong at investigating clues, but you might not be as good at using technology for data analysis. If this was the case, you would want to breakdown the skill and see where you would be able improve.

When we are thinking about developing our skills it's good to think about what we are actually focusing on. As another example, if you take communication, specifically verbal communication and break it down and you decide that presenting is the element of verbal communication that you want to work on. First think about your current presentation skills and see where there are any gaps or areas you think on self-reflection that you want to improve e.g. if you feel that you rely too much on slides or you read the content rather than present the idea you have out loud at a meeting. This might also be a good time to ask a trusted colleague or a line manager about developing this skill and if they have any observations that might help you moving forwards.

Now you have identified the specific area in which you feel you have a weakness you can work on steps to improve this. If you have been to a presentation by a colleague where you found it particularly engaging why not ask them about their process, how they present and things that they have found useful in developing this skill. Take notes when you go to other presentations or listen to people speak in

meetings, attend webinars and get a feel for the way presentations are given. There will be small things that you feel you are able to adopt and then these are things you can then weave into your own presentations and will help you to improve. Asking for feedback is a great way to get an outside perspective and to see where you are making improvements.

If you think you need a more formal course then there are lots out there which might help you – Future Learn offers free courses and has a suite of online training named [digital skills](#) which has a range of short courses that **include Communication and Interpersonal Skills at Work** and **Presenting Your Work with Impact**. ICAS also partners with BPP who have paid for formal [Professional Development online live courses](#) such as **Influencing Skills** and **Writing Skills for Professionals** as well as a range of [self-paced learning opportunities](#).

Whichever way you decide to develop your mini skill, make sure this is something that you are able to track your progress and see when improvements are made. Try to think of a way to measure this, it might be through feedback or personal reflection but make sure you build this into your development plan so you can see where you started and what your progress looks like.

Working on developing your transferrable skills like this won't be an instant process, giving yourself a timeline for when you want to improve on these and what success looks like will allow you to make this part of your ongoing learning and professional development.

Apply these skills to job applications and interviews

As transferrable skills come up time and time again in job applications and interviews it is really worth putting some time into thinking about where you think your current skills are, what the gaps are in the breakdown of this specific skill and then where you want to improve. We all have a bank of transferable skills, and we all have a need to keep improving these.

So now you have a plan to get your skills up to date and make improvements on those you have identified, how do you add these into your CV? Remember when you are writing your CV you want to be able to illustrate points, saying you are good at something isn't the same as showing how you demonstrate these.

So, you don't want to say, "I have strong communications skills", this doesn't tell the person reading your CV anything and is likely to be the same as what many other people have said. Why not try something along the lines of "I have a wide variety of communications experience, particularly focused on content creation, having authored several blog posts for colleagues to keep them up to date on the progress of my project team". This gives a real-life working example of your transferrable skill, if you can try to give it even more context and attach a number or outcome. "I have a wide variety of communications experience, particularly focused on content creation, having authored several blog posts for colleagues to keep them up to date on the work of my project team. This has increased staff engagement, on average 70% of colleagues have been clicked through and read the blog series."

Make sure when you are giving examples of these skills or anything that you have done that you are comfortable talking about these in an interview setting and that you are being accurate with the information you are presenting. It is always better to be honest when stating your skills and experience, not only as this is a truthful representation but also it is easy for someone interviewing to spot when you are not being authentic.

Keep going

Like everything, developing your transferable skills will be an ongoing process, you will never stop learning and picking up new skills or improving on the ones you have. View your skills as a part of your lifelong learning journey, they will be with you for your whole career and will help you as you move roles, teams, companies, line managers etc. Every stage of your career will require you to have these skills so make sure to invest time in yourself!

Some of the resources outlined below can help you when you are thinking about your transferable skills and potentially moving roles or updating your CV with your new work experience.

Resources

Amazing If – <https://www.amazingif.com/>

Squiggly Careers Podcast – <https://www.amazingif.com/listen/>

Functional transferable skills inventory –

http://gseacademic.harvard.edu/~instruct/CSO/articulate/SkillsFinder_PDFs/Functional%20Transferable%20Skills%20Inventory.pdf

Future Learn – <https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/collections/digital-skills-workplace>

BPP – <https://www.icas.com/members/professional-development/training-courses-and-inhouse-training/leadership-And-management-skills>

Future proofing skills – <https://www.icas.com/thought-leadership/technology/day-of-the-data-futureproofing-skills-will-be-essential>

CV & cover letter writing – <https://www.icas.com/members/professional-development/career-development-support/cv-tips>

Future career planning – <https://www.icas.com/members/professional-development/career-development-support/career-development-time-to-invest-in-yourself>

How to prepare for an interview – <https://www.icas.com/members/professional-development/how-to-prepare-for-an-interview-whats-your-greatest-weakness>

Disclaimer:

This help sheet is designed to assist members with an important issue of general application and is not intended to be a definitive statement covering all aspects of this area. No responsibility for any person acting or refraining to act as a result of any material in this help sheet can be accepted by ICAS.



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