

5.2.15: Acquiring Necessary Skills

Learning Objectives

- Explain how to acquire necessary skills, both in and out of class, for your career goals

“Lifelong learning” is a buzz phrase in the twenty-first century because we are awash in new technology and information all the time. Those who know *how to learn*, continuously, are in the best position to keep up and take advantage of these changes. Think of all the information resources around you: colleges and universities, libraries, the Internet, videos, games, books, films—the list goes on.

With these resources at your disposal, how can you best position yourself for lifelong learning and a strong, viable career? Which hard and soft skills are most important? What are employers really looking for?

The following list was inspired by the remarks of Mark Atwood, director of open-source engagement at Hewlett-Packard Enterprise. It contains excellent practical advice.

- **Learn how to write clearly.** After you’ve written something, have people edit it. Then rewrite it, taking into account the feedback you received. Write all the time.
- **Learn how to speak.** Speak clearly on the phone and in person. For more on clear, purposeful speaking, see Module 7: Public Speaking.
- **Be reachable.** Publish your email address on your résumé, website, and social media profiles so that people can contact you. Don’t worry about spam.
- **Learn about computers and computing,** even if you aren’t gearing up for a career in information technology. Learn something entirely new every six to twelve months. This doesn’t have to be expensive, there are free and low-cost resources online.
- **Build relationships within your community.** Use tools like Meetup.com and search for clubs at local schools, libraries, and community centers. Then seek out relevant, interesting people around the country and world. Learn about them and their projects first by searching the Internet. The more you sound well-informed, curious, intelligent, and polite, the more likely you are to get a positive response.
- **Attend conferences and events.** This is a great way to network with people and meet them face-to-face.
- **Find a project and make your mark.** This can include anything from editing a Wikipedia page, to answering questions on a discussion forum on a topic you are passionate about, to volunteering in person for a project related to your career.
- **Collaborate with people** all over the world.
- **Keep your LinkedIn profile and social media profiles up-to-date.** Be findable.
- **Keep learning.** Skills will often beat smarts. Be sure to schedule time for learning and having fun!

Just Get Involved

After you’ve networked with enough people and built up your reputation, your peers can connect you with job openings that may be a good fit for your skills. The video, below, from Monash University in Australia offers the following tips:

1. Get involved in part-time work
2. Get involved in extracurricular activities
3. Get involved with employment and career development

A link to an interactive elements can be found at the bottom of this page.

Have a Formal Learning Plan

Schools and employers offer a wide variety of ways to learn or enhance soft and hard skills. You are in a class now. That demonstrates specific intent toward improving skills in a formal fashion. There are other formal ways to acquire skills:

- Enroll in a credit or non-credit class
 - Many know about four-year colleges with Bachelors degrees and sometimes high costs, but there are also two-year colleges with Associates degrees and lower costs. What many miss out on are the Continuing Education classes taught at colleges or community colleges. These are frequently very affordable and allow the learner to focus on an entry-level skill in a specific area. Most degree programs provide hard skills and some training in the soft skills.

- Find an apprenticeship
 - Apprenticeships can range from highly structured to relatively loosely structured. The employer may bring someone in from the outside or work with internal employees to blend coursework with on-the-job training. Often these programs end in full-time employment or advancement. Apprenticeships directly impact hard skills and some training in the soft skills.
- Apply for an internship
 - Internships are shorter-term working relationships frequently offered in conjunction with credit from a college. While internships may be paid or unpaid, they focus on giving the employee new skills. Some of these arrangements are not well structured, so the employee must reach agreement with the employer about the skills to be earned in exchange for their valuable labor. Internships directly impact hard skills and some training in the soft skills.

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