

## 8 Employability Skills That Prepare High Schoolers for the 21st Century Workforce



The goal is to provide students with hands-on, technical training that prepares them for the rapidly evolving 21st-century workforce.

While technical skills and subject-specific knowledge are important to employers, employability skills are essential to students' professional development. Employability skills are the core, transferrable skills that are needed in nearly every job—such as conflict resolution, communication, and professional etiquette.

**“Employability skills are as critical to getting a job as anything students could learn in the classroom,” said Dave Curry, Milton Hershey School Director of Career and Technical Education. “Teaching these skills in the classroom and providing authentic work experiences where they can implement what they learned is very important to their development.”**

To prepare high school students to succeed in the workforce after graduation, take a look at some of these foundational employability skills.



## **Core Employability Skills**

When students learn how to conduct themselves in the 21st-century workforce, they will be equipped to succeed in a broad range of careers—not just their field of interest. Start by teaching some of these core employability skills:

- Conflict resolution
- Accepting criticism
- Working with a team
- Workplace etiquette
- Proper use of workplace electronics
- Interviewing skills
- Résumé writing
- Workplace communication

## **How to Develop Employability Skill Lessons**

As students develop their employability skills, it's helpful to provide them with opportunities to apply their knowledge in real-world settings. Whether it's guest speakers, internship and co-op programs, or mock phone calls to local professionals, the following ideas can help students understand the importance of an employability skillset.

## **Skills-Based Competitions**



**HOW TO TEACH  
EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS**

**SKILLS-BASED COMPETITIONS:**

Encourage students to participate in local competitions that focus on career preparation. When they test their skills in real-world environments, students become passionate about getting better and develop an appreciation for hard work.

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Encourage students to participate in local or nationwide competitions, such as SkillsUSA, that focus on career exposure and preparation. When students test their skills in real-world, high-pressure environments, they become passionate about getting better and develop an appreciation for hard work.

## Active Listening



**HOW TO TEACH  
EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS**

**ACTIVE LISTENING ACTIVITY:**

Ask students to sit with their backs to each other. One student will give directions and guide their peers step by step to create a drawing. Without looking at the drawing, students will learn how to actively listen and give effective directions.

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Ask students to sit with their backs to each other. One student will give directions and guide their peers step by step to create a drawing. Without looking at the drawing, students will learn how to actively listen and give clear, effective directions.

## Role Playing



**HOW TO TEACH  
EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS**

**ROLE PLAY EXERCISE:**

Create cards that list various scenarios and comments. After choosing a card, students must model specific behavior to appropriately respond to the card's positive or negative comments while the class evaluates their response.

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Create cards that list different scenarios and comments. After choosing a card, students must model specific behavior to appropriately respond to the card's positive or negative comments while the rest of the class evaluates whether their response was effective.

## Mock Phone Calls



**HOW TO TEACH  
EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS**

**MOCK PHONE CALLS:**

Work with a local company for a cold-calling activity. Help students make mock phone calls to employees with the goal of closing the sale. The professionals can then provide feedback on students' communication skills and sales techniques.

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Work with a local company that is willing to participate in a cold-calling activity. Then, assign students the task of making mock phone calls to the company's employees with the goal of closing the sale. Afterward, the professionals can provide feedback on students' communication skills and teach them about sales techniques. Students will not only learn the fine balance of communicating and listening, but they also will learn how to research and prepare for a presentation.

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To be successful in the 21st-century workforce, students need more than technical skills. They need to know how to be empathetic leaders, savvy communicators, and effective collaborators.

These employability skills span every classroom and every career field, making them an essential component in our lives.