Identifying Your Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities

In order for you to successfully answer an employer’s interview questions, you should be able to comfortably and with confidence talk about your knowledge, skills, and abilities. These are the tools you can use to create a great first impression.

Knowledge - Skills - Abilities

- **Knowledge** is something you have gained from education, training, or experience. It is information you have in your head.

- A **Skill** is something you can do to perform a specific task well, e.g. typing 90 words per minute.

- An **Ability** is a special talent or even a personality trait you possess, such as being mechanically inclined.

**What are your skills?** Even if you have the necessary skills to perform the job, a prospective employer won’t know it unless you can convincingly talk about your ability to use these skills. Communicating about one’s skills is one of the most challenging topics for job seekers to express in an interview.

But when you think about it, you *know* you have plenty of skills! Some of them you excel at and others you don’t. Zero in on them! Your job search will go more smoothly and ultimately result in a better “match” if you can identify a combination of skills that you possess.

**Job-Specific Skills:**
These are skills you use to perform a particular task. They can be gained by specialized training and education or experience on the job. You can also develop them through volunteer work, hobbies, and in your home environment. For example, a contractor needs to know how to use the tools of the trade and have the ability to perform specific tasks such as installing hardwood floors, framing a house, building steps, etc.

*Examples of job-specific skills include: typing, forklifting, auto repair, bookkeeping, and graphic design.*
Transferable Skills:
Transferable skills are skills that are not job specific or unique to a particular task. You can transfer these skills from one career to another. Transferable skills usually involve doing something with people, data, or things and can be ranked based on their complexity. More complex skills involve greater initiative, creativity, and problem solving. The more complex the skills, the fewer people will have them. The end result is that the job seeker with these select skills will earn better-than-average compensation. Examples of transferable skills include: supervising, analyzing, organizing, planning, and problem-solving.

“Summary of Qualifications” or “ Desired Position”

Once you’ve identified what your transferable skills and job-specific skills are, you can start developing a stronger sense of the type of job you want and what you feel most qualified for. Start planning a résumé by using one of the following approaches:

1) Write a statement that summarizes all the skills you have already proved you possess through past experience. This “summary” shows your versatility in performing any number of tasks required for a number of jobs. In other words, your flexibility doesn’t limit your search (see our “Résumé and Cover Letter Tool Kit” for samples of this).

OR:

2) You can write “Position Desired: _______,” simply stating the specific job you are looking for such as “Carpenter,” “Beautician,” etc. It’s a practical, decisive statement that demonstrates you know exactly what you’re looking for. The limitation of this approach is that if other jobs at the company are available, the employer may not know that you are interested in them and pass you by.

Either approach you take, remember this: You are a unique individual with your own combination of skills. Remember to emphasize your special combination of skills in your résumé, application and interview. Don’t worry if your skills aren’t always better than everybody else’s. We all possess talents to varying degrees, and there’s always going to be somebody who can perform the same skill with just a tad more ability. So what?! Feel good about yourself. Be proud of the skills you have.