

## More than 100 skills in communicating

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How many skills are there that are communication skills? One response is four: reading, writing, listening and speaking. While these are the foundations of literacy, there are many specific skills and behaviours that make up the complexities of communicating. Plus it becomes difficult to separate communication skills from interpersonal skills – how we relate to others. Much of what we do when communicating is about getting along with people or responding to their behaviour.

Job descriptions list skills as separate items, even though they are inter-related. As well as communication and interpersonal skills, there's teamwork, customer service and stakeholder management. None of these can be performed well without social skills, meaning the combined ability to communicate with, and relate, to people.

Few, if any, jobs are devoid of communication and interpersonal skills. Even a sole person keeping watch on an isolated fire tower needs to communicate their observations accurately and in a timely manner.

Communicating is much more than just sharing information. Many occupations are based substantially on the use of sophisticated social skills: nursing, teaching, pharmacy, law, training, retail, aged care, to name a few. Demonstrating these skills takes dedicated training and years of practice, backed by knowledge and research.

Communication skills are often labelled as 'soft', 'generic' and 'non-technical'. These terms are an insult to the complexities and demands of communicating, and are inaccurate. In many contexts, specialist knowledge and practical skills are needed to perform well. In the report *Preparing for the Best and Worst of Times*, the authors write that 'the skills needed for things like problem solving, collaboration and communication are best acquired in the context of mastering specific domains of expertise – academic and/or vocational.' (1) They argue that the application of skills like problem solving, is often domain specific. For example: 'A highly skilled 'problem solving' coordinator of a preschool kindergarten has little to contribute to an oil rig facing an uncontrolled fire...' (2) Focusing on developing general capability in the abstract is of limited utility. (3) It's time to recognise that problem solving often cannot be done without social skills, and both sets of skills require specialist knowledge.

Communication is an umbrella term. To illustrate the range of skills, behaviours and qualities that relate to this term, I list below more than 100 items. I've written these skills in the present continuous e.g. negotiating, rather than as nouns e.g. negotiation, so as to emphasise the action element of the verb. Some skills have been built into professions, such as marketing, editing, teaching.

Research shows employers request communication skills above all other skills. Research also indicates that employment growth areas are those requiring communication and interpersonal skills. Developing social skills is essential regardless of age and occupation.

(1) *Preparing for the best and worst of times*, 8 May 2018

John Buchanan, Rose Ryan, Michael Anderson, Rafael Calvo, Nick Glozier, Sandra Peter  
Department of Education (NSW), p. 41

[https://education.nsw.gov.au/our-priorities/innovate-for-the-future/education-for-a-changing-world/research-findings/future-frontiers-analytical-report-preparing-for-the-best-and-worst-of-times/Future-Frontiers\\_University-of-Sydney-report.pdf](https://education.nsw.gov.au/our-priorities/innovate-for-the-future/education-for-a-changing-world/research-findings/future-frontiers-analytical-report-preparing-for-the-best-and-worst-of-times/Future-Frontiers_University-of-Sydney-report.pdf)

(2) *ibid.* p. 25

(3) *ibid.* p. 32

(4) The Foundation for Young Australians' report *The New Work Smarts* suggests that future workers will spend less time on routine tasks and more time with people and getting value from technology. A report to Queensland TAFE explored what skills the national economy will need in the future. The findings are 'consistent with other research which suggests that interaction and social skills will have growing importance in future work.' [p. 20]

<https://www.fya.org.au/report/the-new-work-smarts/>

<https://tafeqld.edu.au/assets/oneweb/PDF/about-us/reports-submissions-applied-research/vet-era.pdf>

## Communication Skills

acting	directing	mediating
advising	drafting	mentoring
advocating	editing	minuting
asserting	educating	negotiating
brainstorming	emceeing	networking
briefing	empathising	persuading
brokering	empowering	presenting
chairing	encouraging	proofreading
challenging	endorsing	questioning
championing	explaining	rapport-building
clarifying	facilitating	reading non-verbal
classifying	giving/receiving feedback	behaviour
coaching	handling aggression	reflecting
collaborating	handling anger	representing
complimenting	handling complaints	reprimanding
consulting	influencing	resolving conflict
conversing	informing	selling
cooperating	instructing	showing/reading emotions
coordinating	interceding	speculating
copy-editing	interpreting	storytelling
counselling	interrogating	structuring
crafting	interviewing	suggesting
creating	introducing	surveying
curating	lecturing	sympathising
customising	liaising	teaching
debating	listening	training
delegating	lobbying	translating
describing	managing relationships	understanding
developing trust	marketing	

**Forms of writing**

advertising  
books  
brochures  
complaint letters  
emails  
feature articles  
inquiries  
instructions  
job applications  
manuals  
media releases  
minutes  
memorandums  
news stories

notices  
referee reports  
research reports  
resumes  
sales letters  
speeches  
technical writing  
social media writing  
specialist writing  
submissions  
web writing

**Qualities**

accurate

civil  
complete  
correct  
courteous  
diplomatic  
empathic  
engaging  
evidence-based  
friendly  
informative  
literate  
professional  
respectful  
tactful  
timely

**About Dr Ann Villiers**

Dr Ann Villiers is Australia's only *Mental Nutritionist*<sup>®</sup>, specialising in mind and language sense-making practices. Her books and articles are nationally recognised for demystifying selection criteria and explaining government recruitment processes. Learn more by visiting [www.selectioncriteria.com.au](http://www.selectioncriteria.com.au).