

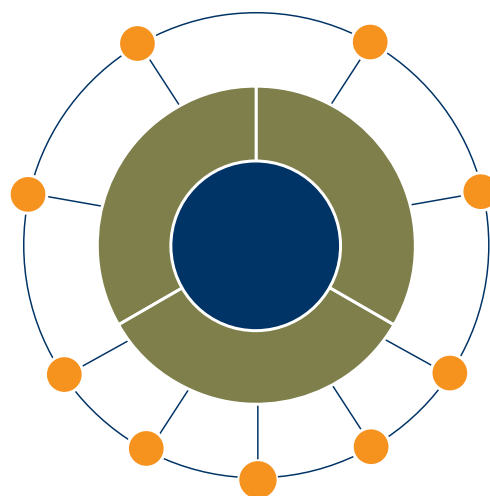
## EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS FRAMEWORK

# Assessment Selection Tool

September 2020

Information gained from employability skills assessments can help educators and workforce training professionals identify and address skill gaps, and inform hiring decisions and reduce on-the-job retraining needs for employers.

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# Introduction

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## ABOUT THIS TOOL

The Employability Skills Framework’s Assessment Selection Tool was adapted using content on the Employability Skills Framework website, developed for the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education, U.S. Department of Education. It guides users through key considerations for selecting an employability skill assessment and provides a template for reviewing assessments against a set of selection criteria.

## WHO USES THIS TOOL?

Taking an informed and deliberate approach to employability skills assessment selection, whether statewide, regional, or local, can increase the value to, and buy-in from, program participants or employees, educators, employers, and other partners and better ensure that the selected assessments meet stakeholders’ needs. State and local administrators can use this tool to understand considerations for how assessment results will be used and approaches for achieving the intended assessment purposes.

## GETTING STARTED

This document outlines key considerations for selecting an employability skill assessment, with the assumption that states and programs have already clearly defined the skills to be assessed (see exhibit 1). Once the employability skills have been identified, the considerations include (1) understanding assessment purposes, (2) understanding common assessment types, and (3) reviewing possible assessments against selection criteria.

### EXHIBIT 1

#### IDENTIFYING EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS TO BE ASSESSED



To select the best assessment, stakeholders should begin by determining what they would like to measure and which employability skills will be assessed. To make this determination, stakeholders can take several steps:

- Identify the skills that have been adopted by the state or local program or that are important to the workplace. Reflect on how clearly the skills are defined and whether they describe specific knowledge and skills that are observable and measurable.
- Identify existing methods or approaches to measuring employability skills and identify any skills that are not being assessed.
- Identify other ways that employability skills are being integrated into instruction and training, such as through career pathways or integrated education and training programs, and being demonstrated, such as through work-based or problem-based learning.

Resources that can help with these steps include the Employability Skills Framework’s Source Matrix and Instruction Planning Tool. Also, many states develop frameworks that define employability skills and that are used across state agencies, including workforce development programs, career and technical education, and even K 12. Contact the state’s [adult education or workforce agency](#) to learn about any state based frameworks.

# Consideration 1: Understanding Assessment Purposes

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Determining the appropriate type of assessment requires a clear understanding of the purpose of the assessment and the intended use of the results. Assessments do not have validity independent of their purpose, but rather have different strengths and weaknesses based on their intended uses. The overall purpose for using data from assessments should drive decisions about what type of assessment to select. The table below provides a summary of common assessment purposes and related factors for assessing employability skills. Note that this is not an exhaustive list of factors and that factors may vary by state or program.<sup>1</sup>

## PURPOSE:

### Individual Diagnosis

During intake to educational or training programs, instructors or administrators assess program participants' initial employability skills. Results inform instructional plans and placements, develop early interventions, and support career planning.

### FACTORS FOR EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS

- **Administration and scoring:** To be useful, diagnostic assessments should provide timely information on participants' knowledge, skills, abilities, and behaviors. Instructors and program staff should be able to administer the assessments and review results quickly during intake.
- **Alignment:** Assessments should be aligned with local employability skill definitions and program content to support decisions about instructional plans and placements, interventions, and career planning.

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<sup>1</sup> The information in this section was adapted from multiple sources listed in the references.

**PURPOSE:**

## Supporting Instructional Improvement (Formative Assessment)

Instructors can use information gathered from assessments to adjust instruction to align with participant needs, and participants can track mastery of their employability skills. Typically, assessment is integrated into classroom practice. For example, teachers and participants set goals for developing employability skills, use assessments to monitor progress, engage in self-reflection, and individualize instruction.

### FACTORS FOR EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS

- **Administration and scoring:** Assessments that support instructional improvement need to be easy to administer and provide timely information to support instructional changes and encourage self-reflection for participants.
- **Alignment:** Assessments must be aligned to the employability skills taught in the program to provide useful data.
- **Sensitivity to short-term changes in employability skills:** Assessments must be able to show changes in participants' employability skills over short periods of time.

**PURPOSE:**

## Credentialing and Documenting Skills

Participants take assessments to gain credentials or otherwise document that they have knowledge, skills, and abilities valued by employers.

### FACTORS FOR EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS

- **Alignment:** To have value for participants, credentials and associated assessments should be aligned to the skills valued by employers.
- **Cost:** Who is paying for the assessment? The program, employer, or individual? Regardless of funder, the assessment cost should be justified by the long-term value of the credential to the participant.

**PURPOSE:**

## Program Evaluation, Review, and Approval

Assessments can be used in program evaluation to provide data on program outcomes to funders, partners, state agencies, and other stakeholders. Administrators and policymakers use these data to monitor implementation, drive decisions on program improvement and scaling, and compare results among different programs.

### FACTORS FOR EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS

- **Administration and scoring:** Assessments should allow for standardization of administration and scoring to facilitate comparisons across programs.
- **Alignment:** In addition to aligning with local curricula, assessments should align with program-level goals and state-level standards and frameworks for employability skills development.
- **Reporting:** If funders, partners, or state agencies require reporting on progress, assessments should produce quantitative data that can easily be aggregated and reported.

**PURPOSE:**

## Accountability

Many states are including measures of college and career readiness in accountability systems. Accountability systems attempt to drive improvements in participant performance by publicly reporting or attaching funding incentives to school or program performance as demonstrated by assessments.

### FACTORS FOR EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS

- **Administration and scoring:** Assessments should allow for standardization of administration and scoring across different programs to be used for funding decisions or public reporting.
- **Alignment:** Large-scale assessments should align with state-level frameworks and standards as well as local curricula.
- **Reporting:** Assessments should produce quantitative data that can be aggregated and reported.

# Consideration 2: Understanding Common Assessment Approaches

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There may not be one single tool that perfectly assesses the wide range of applied knowledge, effective relationships, and workplace skills identified in the Employability Skills Framework. Therefore, determining the appropriate assessment method involves understanding the benefits and challenges of different assessment approaches, including how an assessment is administered and scored and the item types to ensure that the assessment effectively measures the knowledge, skills, or behaviors intended. The following information briefly describes common assessment approaches, including possible benefits and limitations. An example is included to illustrate each approach, but approaches may have multiple uses.<sup>2</sup>

## APPROACH:

### Questionnaires

Questionnaires include both individual self-report measures and teacher reports, with which program participants rate themselves on employability skills and behaviors or teachers rate participants based on their observations of participant behaviors. For example, participants could be given a series of statements about different approaches to collaborating with colleagues and asked to rate them on a scale from “very much like me” to “not like me at all.”

**Example use:** Individual diagnosis, such as part of the intake process to understand participants’ current employability skills

#### POSSIBLE BENEFITS

- Easy to administer and score
- Inexpensive
- Can be predictive of academic and personal outcomes

#### POSSIBLE LIMITATIONS

- Potential for bias in teacher and participant responses
- Potential for misinterpretations of participant behavior
- Potential for misunderstanding of questionnaire prompts, especially among participants with low literacy skills

<sup>2</sup> The information in this section was adapted from multiple sources listed in the references.

**APPROACH:****Multiple Choice**

On multiple-choice tests—also called selected response items—participants identify the correct answer from among a selection of possible responses. For example, participants might be asked to identify behaviors associated with an employability skill from a list of sample behaviors.

**Example use:** State-wide reporting on participants' knowledge of employability skills

**POSSIBLE BENEFITS**

- High levels of reliability
- Easy to administer, score, and report
- Provides for a standard, consistent measure across programs

**POSSIBLE LIMITATIONS**

- Can be difficult to assess conceptual understanding, deeper learning, and higher-order critical thinking
- Provides information on participant knowledge of employability skills, not their ability to apply these skills or use them in different contexts

**APPROACH:****Situational Judgment Tests**

Situational judgment tests, a form of multiple-choice assessments, present participants with scenarios and ask them to select how they would respond from a list of options. For example, participants might be given a scenario in which an employee has a conflict with a supervisor and asked to identify the most appropriate strategy for resolving the issue.

**Example use:** Program evaluation, to show evidence of participants' employability skills

**POSSIBLE BENEFITS**

- Can be used for hard-to-measure skills, such as collaboration and communication
- Situations can be tailored to match contexts that participants may encounter

**POSSIBLE LIMITATIONS**

- Takes longer to complete than traditional multiple-choice questions
- Potential for bias in participant responses (i.e., participants responding in a way they think instructors or employers would want them to respond)
- Potential for misunderstanding of written scenarios, especially among participants with low literacy skills

**APPROACH:****Open Response**

In open or constructed response items, participants write an essay, paragraph, or a sentence in response to a workplace prompt. For example, a participant might be asked to write a sample memo to a supervisor describing how a potential workplace issue might be addressed.

**Example use:** Diagnostic assessment of participants' employability skills, such as communication

**POSSIBLE BENEFITS**

- Can be designed to measure a range of different competencies
- Can be integrated with academic subjects, such as writing

**POSSIBLE LIMITATIONS**

- Can be time consuming for participants to complete
- Often scored by human raters, which can be an expensive process that involves lengthy training to provide consistency in scoring

**APPROACH:****Portfolios**

In a portfolio assessment approach, participants collect class and work products, which are scored by instructors using rubrics with defined criteria. For example, portfolio contents might include resumes, evaluations from supervisors, and classroom or work-based writing samples, such as emails to a supervisor or response to a customer.

**Example use:** Documenting participants' employability skills for potential employers

**POSSIBLE BENEFITS**

- Allows participants to demonstrate a wide variety of employability skills, including hard-to-measure skills, such as professionalism and responsibility
- Allows participants to demonstrate real-world applications of employability skills in relevant contexts

**POSSIBLE LIMITATIONS**

- Scored by human raters, which can be an expensive process that involves lengthy training to provide consistency in scoring
- Can be difficult to standardize and implement portfolio assessments on a large scale



**APPROACH:****Performance Assessments**

Performance assessments engage participants in real-life, authentic situations and ask them to complete tasks that demonstrate their knowledge, skills, and abilities. This approach may also include digital performance tasks involving simulations, games, and digital avatars. For example, participants might interact with a customer through role-play in the classroom or in a digital simulation or video game to complete a task.

**Example use:** To monitor participants' progress and provide data to inform instruction

**POSSIBLE BENEFITS**

- Technology allows for automated scoring of digital performance tasks
- Provides information on participants' abilities to use employability skills or apply them in different contexts

**POSSIBLE LIMITATIONS**

- Can be time consuming for participant to complete
- Cost of technology or equipment
- Simulation- or game-based performance tasks require new measurement methods that, in many cases, are still being developed and require further research and refinement

# Consideration 3: Reviewing Assessment Selection Criteria

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Selecting an employability skills assessment requires careful review of practical, technical, and content issues related to assessment design and implementation. The template below provides a set of assessment selection criteria that can be used when reviewing potential assessments. To use the template, review the selection criteria in the left column and determine which criteria are of highest priority to your state or program. In the right column, make note of how potential assessments address the criteria based on the available assessment documentation. If needed, contact the assessment developer for more detailed technical information.

## SELECTION CRITERIA

## ASSESSMENT INFORMATION

### ASSESSMENT TYPE

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#### Target population

Who are the intended target populations for the assessment?

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#### Common users

What types of programs, agencies, or other entities typically use the assessment?

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#### Purpose

What is the assessment's purpose? It might include the following:

- Individual diagnosis
  - Supporting instructional improvement
  - Credentialing and documenting skills
  - Program evaluation, review, and approval
  - Accountability
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#### Item types and response modes

- Open response (e.g., essay or short answer)
  - Portfolio (e.g., examples of work)
  - Performance task
  - Multiple choice
  - Self-report or teacher questionnaire
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## SELECTION CRITERIA

## ASSESSMENT INFORMATION

**CONTENT**

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**Definition of employability skills**

How are employability skills defined in the assessment documentation? Does that definition align with relevant state or local definitions?

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**Knowledge, skills, and behaviors targeted**

What knowledge, skills, and behaviors, and any content areas, does the assessment cover? Does the assessment cover a wide variety of employability skills or focus on applied academics?

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**TECHNICAL QUALITY**

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**Evidence of validity**

Validity refers to how well the assessment measures the knowledge, skills, and behaviors it is intended to measure.

What evidence of validity is found in the assessment documentation? This might include the following:

- Evidence of alignment to targeted knowledge, skills, and behaviors
  - Evidence of alignment to labor market and employer needs
  - Scaling studies to define how the assessment is scored
  - Studies to show linkages to other assessments or measures (e.g., instructor judgments of proficiency)
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**Evidence of reliability**

Reliability is a measure of the consistency of assessments results. For example, whether scores are consistent across different testing contexts and scorers.

What evidence of reliability is found in the assessment documentation? This might include the following:

- Analysis of consistency of scores over time
  - Analysis of variability of results among different groups and contexts
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## SELECTION CRITERIA

## ASSESSMENT INFORMATION

**Evidence of fairness**

Fairness means that an assessment is free from bias, ensuring that test-takers are able to demonstrate their degree of proficiency without the interference of unrelated external factors that may affect their performance. A fair assessment is not biased toward or against a particular population, nor will it employ regional or other stereotypes. Fairness factors include age, culture, socioeconomic status, race, and gender.

What evidence of fairness is found in the assessment documentation? This might include the following:

- Bias reviews
- Analysis to determine if assessment results differ among groups
- Availability in different languages
- Accommodations and supports available for English language learners and participants with disabilities

**ADMINISTRATION****Administration method**

How is the assessment administered?

- Large group, small group, or individual
- Online, paper and pencil, oral, computer based, or observation based

**Technical requirements**

What are the software, internet, or space requirements for administering the assessment? Can participants use their own devices to take the assessment or is a dedicated computer lab or testing center needed?

**Assessment duration**

How long does it take to administer the assessment?

**Administration staffing requirements**

What are the training or certification requirements to administer and/or score the assessment?

**Timing of the administration**

Is the assessment administered at the beginning, end, or throughout the instructional cycle?

**Security and confidentiality requirements or procedures**

- What are the security and confidentiality requirements?

## SELECTION CRITERIA

## ASSESSMENT INFORMATION

**SCORING AND RESULTS**

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**Scoring process**

Are the assessment results scored by a machine, an instructor, or the assessment company?

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**Scoring timing**

How long does it take to score the assessment?

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**Format of results**

How are the results made available?

- Online interactive dashboards
  - Printable results
  - Locally produced reports
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**ACCOMMODATIONS**

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**List of available accommodations**

What accommodations are available for participants with disabilities and other special needs?

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**SUPPORTING MATERIALS**

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**Availability of supporting documentation**

What type of supporting documentation is available?

- Instructor directions
  - Scoring guides or rubrics
  - Samples of performance at different levels
  - Checklists
  - Other
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**Connection to instructional resources**

What, if any, instructional resources accompany the assessment?

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SELECTION CRITERIA

ASSESSMENT INFORMATION

**COSTS**

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**Cost of assessments**

How much does it cost to buy and score the assessment and purchase any associated technology?

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**Other implied costs**

What other costs are associated with administering the assessment (i.e., staff time)?

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