Defining the knowledge, skills, and abilities

The competencies it takes to do the job.
When you use competencies to describe a position to be filled, you identify exactly what you need an employee to have to effectively complete the tasks of a job.

How do skills-based practices help improve your business?

Talent acquisition and development are fundamental to business success, and clearly defining what your people do and don’t have to be able to do allows you to shape your hiring and development process for the better.

By breaking down positions by competencies, you’ll see the position you’re looking to fill in a new way and you’ll identify the talent your company needs to succeed. You’ll know the skills gaps in your company and can react appropriately.

You’ll also be able to predict future needs and react to changes that come with new technology, while upskilling your workforce to adapt to a rapidly changing economy. You need a workforce that fits your needs, so defining the skills your employees need to accomplish your business goals is more important than ever.
Why should you use competencies?

By using competencies, you get better clarity on what the business actually needs and increase the likelihood that you’ll put the right people in the right position.

You’ll be able to:

- **Identify skills gaps** across the company by aligning your company’s objectives with the skills needed to achieve them.
- **Create job descriptions** and postings designed to fit what you need by describing the skills a candidate needs. By removing credentials, you’ll find more qualified talent.
- **Evaluate candidates** based on their capacity to do the job, and avoid assumptions based on credentials or years of experience.
- **Create growth opportunities** and career paths for employees by designing tailored training programs that increase employee engagement and retention while allowing your business to respond to its long-term talent needs.

The top ten roles in two of the top industries.

Get competency data for each at [Skillful.com](https://www.skillful.com).

**Information Technology:**

1. Software Developers
2. Computer Systems Analysts
3. Computer User Support Specialists
4. Business Intelligence Analysts
5. Network Systems Administrators
6. Database Administrators
7. Computer Systems Engineers
8. Information Security Analysts
9. Computer Network Architects
10. Software Quality Assurance Engineers and Testers

**Advanced Manufacturing:**

1. Quality Control Inspectors
2. Machinists
3. Computer-Controlled Tool Operators
4. Logistics Analysts
5. Electric and Electronics Repairers
6. Industrial Engineering Technicians
7. CAD Drafters
8. Manufacturing Production Technicians
9. CNC Programmers
10. First-Line Supervisors of Production and Operating Workers
Occupational vs. Foundational: Does the difference matter?

As you define the competencies you need for each position, it’s important to fully explore the two primary types of competencies and understand the differences between them. This clarity will ensure you’re thinking about each role—as well as each employee or candidate—holistically.

**OCCUPATIONAL**

Occupational competencies are specific to the industry or job. Think of these as the technical or “hard” skills—or technical know-how—it takes to perform narrowly defined tasks and duties. A software developer’s ability to code or a nurse’s ability to identify which drugs interact with one another are both great examples of occupational competencies.

Identifying occupational competencies helps every part of the employment process—from recruiting to onboarding to on-the-job training. When screening candidates, look for occupational skills within their past experiences in your industry, and remember these skills are often best assessed through a demonstration or real-life example rather than typical interview questions. Candidates can talk about coding new software or operating a 3D printer, for example, but getting them to show their skills in practice is the only way to see if they have what it takes.

**FOUNDATIONAL**

Foundational competencies are professional knowledge and skills that are transferable from one job to another and across industries. Some refer to these as “soft skills,” but that language implies they are less important than technical abilities—and nothing could be further from the truth. The ability to communicate effectively, for example, is an occupational skill for a reporter, but a critical foundational skill for anyone leading teams, working in collaborative environments, etc.

Identifying foundational competencies is critical in the recruiting process, because training new hires in these skills is difficult during onboarding. For example, can you teach someone good communication skills in a few weeks or months? It’s possible, but extraordinarily difficult and resource-intensive.

Additionally, these skills are transferable, so they can be gained and honed through experience across different industries and roles. Determining foundational competencies, such as a person’s clarity in verbal communication, can be evaluated through conversation, so behavioral interviews as well as demonstrations may deliver better, more accurate information.
How to identify the competencies for the job.

When you define competencies for your job, think about the primary tasks a new hire will need to do or current employee does for the job. Then define the skills that person will need to perform those tasks successfully.

1. Define the job duties of those in the same position OR duties that need to get done in the future.

2. Connect the duties to the knowledge or skills someone must possess in order to achieve their tasks. Leverage O*net data for your position.

3. Define what each competency means to each specific position in terms of knowledge, skill, and ability.

4. Confirm these competencies and descriptions with those currently successful in the role and their managers.

Examples:

Be specific on what foundational competencies means for your job.

If you’re looking for someone to manage a team of 12, that person needs to have skills in project management, coordination, judgment, and decision-making. And remember that managing a team in-person or remotely changes the dynamic and, therefore, the competencies required. Be very clear what the competency is as well as the context in which the competency will be used on the job.

Don’t be too specific on occupational competencies.

There is also a danger of getting too specific in your description. For instance, if you’re hiring someone for tech-support, do you look for specific knowledge and skillsets that match the technology your company uses? Do you really need someone who has experience using your specific CRM, project management, and AV systems? Instead, consider whether experience in a variety of platforms is enough to learn your platform during the onboarding process. Being too specific will exclude many qualified candidates.
What you can you do next?

If you are hiring for occupations in information technology or advanced manufacturing, download the relevant occupational deep dives on skillful.com/employers in the planning section. These resources will provide competency data for the jobs you are hiring.

If you are hiring for other roles, start with gathering up your existing job descriptions and following the four steps detailed on page 4 to start identifying the competencies for your roles.

Once you have competency data, download the 'Job Posting Process Guide’ at Skillful.com to make the change to skills-based hiring.

Visit skillful.com to see how simple it is.