

Baseline Skills: How Your Classwork is Practice For Your Professional Life

Most of us think of job readiness in terms of *specific credentials* – the right certificate or discipline area will get us that job we want. But the truth is that every *single college course* you make it through improves your ability to survive and thrive in a professional work place. You don't need to get an "A", you don't need to be a star pupil.

In fact, classes where you struggle the most are often the courses where you practice the skills needed for success in the workplace because you put your nose to the grindstone, get help and do what's asked of you. Very often successful people report *repeated* failures before they "get it right". This is true for organizations, individuals, and school. So, let's take a look at why that could be true.

To set the stage, let's take a closer look at the three most common ways employers and academia describe thinking:

- **Analytical Thinking:** Determining a conclusion or solution based on an information set which is usually used to create options for next steps in some process
- **Creative Thinking:** Creating a new solution based on analysis of an information set which usually includes how things were done in the past and how they don't apply now
- **Critical Thinking:** Evaluating the pros and cons from analysis of an information set which is usually used to make a decision on next actions

Now, let's look at the most common elements of how you execute your college work and see how that translates into essential job skills.

Coursework	How It Trains For Professional Work	Skill Name
Class Participation	Any workplace is filled with <i>discussions</i> . At the core of those discussions are fundamental values of communicating in a learning environment: listening, articulating details in an organized fashion, persuading, taking notes for later, brainstorming new solutions when old solutions don't follow and detailing status for where you are on a project, as one uses group time to change plans and presenting ideas.	<i>Collaboration Communication Critical Thinking Oral Communication Teamwork</i>
Exams <i>deciphering, calculating, evaluating and relaying facts, supporting opinions</i>	Every time you apply knowledge you've gleaned to a situation you are unfamiliar with, you are using <i>thinking skills to determine</i> either <i>a course of action or to explain</i> whatever you've been asked about. In the work environment, no one takes official "exams", per say, but the requirement to write out your plans and explanations permeates work. Every day you are asked to look at a current situation and either apply what you've been trained for that situation or tailor what you've been trained on quickly. Very often, you are asked to document your steps and rationale after you've completed that task. Doesn't that sound like an exam? Well, it is! It is the workplace equivalent of exams!	<i>Analytical Thinking Creative Thinking Critical Thinking Organizational Skills Problem Solving Work Independently Time Management</i>
Papers and Essays	Your <i>written communication</i> in papers and exams is always prefaced with you planning out a response to conditions for that essay or paper. This written communication is only effective when you plan out what you want to say, which could very well include discussions and advice from other people (instructor, advisor, team members!).	<i>Analytical Thinking Communication Creative Thinking Critical Thinking Work Independently</i>

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Presentations	Translating written ideas to a public forum where you address an audience is one of the most common ways people engage in the workplace. Sometimes, you may not have a formal "presentation", but you walk through the presentation steps every time you are required to address a group, even if it is as simple as giving a status in a meeting.	Communication Critical Thinking Planning Presentation Skills Time Management
Projects	You will lead, be involved in, and execute all or in part many projects over the life of your career arc. Projects tie the fundamentals of collaboration all together in a single focus with defined outcomes. They will involve planning and change management, time management, communication in multiple ways, all of the three thinking types.	Creative Thinking Critical Thinking Organizational Skills Project Management Time Management
Team Assignments	One of the most difficult-to-find skills employers consistently report is teamwork. Collaboration is as essential as it is rare. But every time you work in a group format, whether small group discussion, team projects or papers, or any situation where you are required to discuss with others and find, as a group, a way forward on an assignment, you are practicing this skill set.	Analytical Thinking Collaboration Communication Creative Thinking Critical Thinking Organizational Skills Project Planning Supervisory Skills Time Management
Getting help <i>study groups, tutoring, office hours</i>	Every time you actually reach out and get help, you are doing what every professional needs to do in new situations: find mentors and teachers who know what you need to learn. And the better you are at inviting people to help you, the more successful you will be in any work place. Think about it: doesn't it feel good when someone asks your opinion? Doesn't it feel good when someone says, "would you be willing to share how you do this?" Now this isn't the same thing as: "do this for me, I can't" or "let me take up all your time with my questions". The heart of getting help is noticing what's convenient and easy for someone to help you with and keeping it easy for the person helping you. You can do that, you do that when you study with classmates, when you seek out tutoring, and when you attend office hours of your instructors.	Analytic Thinking Collaboration Communication Critical Thinking Time Management

Sources:

Transferable Skill Set From College to Work:

- <https://www.livecareer.com/quintessential/transferable-skills-set>
- https://www.utoledo.edu/success/career/pdfs/transferable_skills_checklist.pdf

Employer Requested Skills Typically Learned in College, aka "Baseline Skills":

- <http://burning-glass.com/graphic-whats-the-most-important-baseline-skill-it-depends/>

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