

Skills for  
Work  
**At Work**

BOOK

**2**

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# Contents

Introduction .....	4
Unit 1: Verbal communication .....	9
Unit 2: Written communication .....	28
Unit 3: Personal organisation .....	44
Unit 4: Creativity and initiative.....	60
Unit 5: Problem-solving.....	80
Unit 6: Teamwork.....	92
Unit 7: Technological literacy .....	104
Appendix .....	119

SAMPLE

# Introduction

*Skills for Work Book 2: At Work* is the second in a series of three books designed to provide teachers with an up-to-date, practical resource to help them teach young people who are making the transition from school either into a training setting or directly into the workforce. In Book 1, students learnt about the general living skills which are essential for being able to manage independently in an adult work environment. They developed skills related to personal organisation, healthcare, household management, money management, and clothing and personal presentation. Book 2 assumes that students have already mastered at least some of these life skills, and are now ready to begin learning about skills which relate more closely to workplaces and working. There is a strong focus in this book on employability skills, which have become an important element in preparing students for the world of work.

## What are employability skills?

Put simply, employability skills are the skills and personal qualities or attributes that are needed in the workforce, in addition to technical, hands-on skills. Employability skills recognise the fact that it is not enough for a young person to be able to do the job in a physical sense; they also must be able to interact effectively with others, use their initiative to solve everyday problems, and display a whole host of other skills and competencies which contribute to their ability to do their job well. Many countries around the world have developed variations on the Employability Skills Framework which was developed by the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Business Council of Australia in 2002.

The basic framework of employability skills and attributes is as follows:

### Skill areas

- Communication
- Team work
- Problem-solving
- Initiative and enterprise
- Planning and organising
- Self-management
- Learning
- Technology

### Attributes

- Loyalty
- Commitment
- Honesty and integrity
- Enthusiasm
- Reliability
- Personal presentation
- Common sense

- Positive self-esteem
- A sense of humour
- A balanced attitude to work and home life
- An ability to deal with pressure
- Motivation
- Adaptability

One of the important things to realise about employability skills is that they represent, to a certain extent at least, the employer's perspective, and so they have as their primary focus the employment of young people in the workforce. Some teachers may have concerns about the philosophical basis behind this perspective, and may see employability skills as detracting from a more traditional viewpoint of meeting the needs of the whole student. Others may see employability skills simply as a pragmatic approach which helps young people prepare for the world of work, where many of them will ultimately spend many years of their lives. Whatever your standpoint, it is likely that employability skills will be around for a few years yet.

### **What is in Book 2?**

Within this book you will find practical activities and photocopyable worksheets which can be used as part of a classroom program in a variety of educational settings. The material has been designed to meet the needs of students of varying ability levels who may be completing courses in a mainstream, TAFE or other specialist setting. The content has therefore been kept quite broad, in order to meet the needs of a number of different curricula, rather than focusing on just one specific teaching program. The book has been designed to be used as part of a series, with each one building on the skills which were developed in the preceding book. The concept behind *Skills for Work* is that students are gradually moving from a point where they are just beginning to think about the world which lies outside the school gates to a position where they are confident in their abilities to function effectively in whatever situation they choose for themselves once they leave school.

The original Employability Skills Framework has been adapted slightly to better suit the needs of teachers who are working with young people in a school or TAFE setting. Some of the skill areas have been combined for the sake of simplicity of presentation, while others have been expanded in order to recognise the large number of competencies which need to be taught in a single area, particularly in the area of communication skills. The personal attributes have not been included as a separate chapter, because to do so would have been too restrictive and limiting for teachers, many of whom are already extremely capable when it comes to encouraging the personal attributes which are so essential to daily life as well as employment. If you asked a group of teachers a question like 'How do you teach honesty and integrity to a group of 15-year-olds', you would probably receive a wide variety of answers. For some, it is simply something that comes through role modelling and good examples, while for others it is something which is taught indirectly using a whole-school approach. Still others would probably tell you that it is not possible to directly teach such personal qualities; it is something that is a function of a student's home life, school life, friendships and a host of other factors.

The focus of this book is on providing teachers with a useful resource which can be used as part of a wider classroom program, or as a stand-alone book for teaching the skills needed by young people as they move into the workforce. The activities are general in nature, and so are particularly relevant for students who have not yet made a decision on the career areas which interest them for the future. The book aims to help students develop skills which are readily transferable from one workplace to another, and which will serve them well as they first begin to look at the world of employment. It is suitable for use with students who have undertaken some work experience or who are working part time, as well as with those who have no actual experience of work and workplaces. There is plenty of scope for teachers to add their own personal elements to the activities, and to adapt them for use by particular student groups. The book is not age specific, although the language used and the topics discussed would be suited ideally to middle and senior students who are aged between 14 and 17 years. The sections contained within Book 2 of Skills for Work are:

- Verbal communication
- Written communication
- Personal organisation
- Creativity and initiative
- Problem-solving
- Teamwork
- Technological literacy
- Appendix – assessment sheets, online resources, sample resume

Each unit starts with a list of activity ideas which are written as short prompts to start teachers thinking about short and longer duration activities which can be organised and delivered quickly and easily in most classroom settings. There is an emphasis on the language and literacy skills that are essential in each unit, and many of the sections contain word lists which can be photocopied for students to use as practice word sheets. There are a range of photocopiable worksheets and information handouts in each chapter, as well as suggested strategies to guide students through developing skills in many of the areas. At the end of each chapter is a wordfind or crossword which can be used to reinforce concepts and language which have been introduced in class. In the last section of the book is a list of suggested online resources which can be useful for obtaining further information on particular topics, or for using in an online teaching environment. This section also contains an assessment tool which can be used for record-keeping purposes with a group of students, and a suggested list of competency indicators for employability skills.

Whether you are using this book as part of the *Skills for Work* series, or using it as a single resource for teaching employability skills, I am sure you will find it a useful resource to support your own thinking, beliefs and ideas on teaching in this important area.

**For the student – one little bag jam packed with all the skills, qualities and attitudes you will need to get through any situation**



As you make the transition to the world of work, you may experience a range of emotions and thoughts about the future and what it holds for you. You may feel unsure and insecure, or you may have thoughts about wishing you had studied harder or prepared yourself better for exams. You may find yourself looking forwards with a mixture of excitement, nervousness and anticipation. All these thoughts and feelings are quite common and quite normal. You are leaving somewhere that has been familiar to you for many years, and has probably offered a great deal of security and safety. You are moving into unfamiliar territory, with only your little kit bag of skills, qualities and attitudes to guide you through the next phase of your life.

***In your bag ...***

Regardless of how you did in exams or whether or not you finished a certificate at the end of your schooling, you will always have a little bag by your side. In this bag you will find all the information and resources you will ever need for surviving and doing well in the workforce. This bag is issued to everyone, and it cannot be taken away from you. In your bag you will find the following:

- a set of skills that will transfer from one workplace to another
- a range of personal qualities which combine perfectly to make you the unique individual that you are
- attitudes and values which will help you to judge to right course of action for you in every situation

No matter who you are, or where the future takes you, you will always have this bag by your side. Feel free to dip into it whenever you need to, for it will get you out of most tight situations. No one else can take anything out of your kit bag without you giving them permission, so guard it with care and think carefully before you give anything in your bag away.

You can add to the contents of your bag easily – simply learn a new skill, or think a little about how you approach a situation, or practise a bit harder on adding to the positive personal qualities you already own. Whenever you do this, you will be adding to the contents of your skills bag, even if you do not realise it at the time. You can help others to add to their bags also; simply provide a small dose of praise and encouragement if someone is looking a bit down, and offer a friendly ear when you think it might be needed.

## **For the parent / caregiver ...**

Watching your young person move from the safety and security of school into the relative unknown of the workforce can be a difficult and confronting time. It reminds us that we are saying goodbye to the young person in a school uniform whom we have loved and nurtured for so many years. They no longer need us to help them to get organised in the mornings, or to pick them up after school at night. They are becoming young adults, with all the rights and responsibilities which that label brings. But we are not really saying goodbye to anything more than just a stage of their lives. They are not going anywhere except forwards and into adulthood.

Children and young adults always need parents or caregivers to help them and guide them through each phase of their lives. It does not matter whether they are learning about how to write their own names or how to add up a column of numbers, most young people will do better if they know that there is someone there who is there just for them. Parents and caregivers may not be able to offer as much in terms of the practical, technical skills that young people need to master for their future endeavours, unless they happen to have a young person who is moving into the same profession as their own.

But what parents and caregivers can offer is life experience, and that is just as important as any technical skills.

Young people do not and cannot be expected to understand what the world of work is like. Their experiences of work are limited, and they do not yet have the experience and hindsight that a few years and some failures and successes give to all of us. You have probably discovered many times already to your cost that young people do not respond well to statements like 'You wouldn't know what work is like. Just take my word for it – I've worked for 30 years, I should know what it's all about.' Your young person is not you, and the world of work they are moving into is not the same as the one you entered. Young people need to be able to face their own challenges and make their own mistakes, knowing that parents or caregivers will be there to help, support and guide them.

This book is all about helping young people to learn a little about the skills they need to cope and do well in the workforce in whichever field they choose for themselves. But a book can only ever be a beginning – real life learning comes from getting out there and living. Doing well at work will happen most often when young people operate as part of a caring and supportive family team, which values and celebrates successes and helps and listens when times get tough.

Be there for your young person as they enter this next challenging stage of their lives. You will probably find yourself rewarded with a new adult friend who can offer you much that your young teenager had not yet learnt to do.

# UNIT 1: Verbal communication

Verbal communication is an important element in work and life performance. It often plays a major role in our relationships with other people, and determines how well we manage to get along in small and larger groups. We all need to use verbal communication to get our thoughts, ideas and emotions across to other people. How we do this, and the words and expressions we choose to express ourselves, reflects how well we have learnt to communicate verbally.

When talking to young people about verbal communication, it is useful to think about the following areas:

- **Body language** – How thoughts and words are reflected in body language and use of gestures. Discuss how students can identify whether the body language being presented matches with the verbal message.
- **Facial expression** – Another indicator of feeling and emotion, facial expressions tell us about how the person is feeling as they are speaking.
- **Tone/speed/volume of speech** – All these factors vary depending on the type of conversation and the emotions being experienced by the speaker. A fast, quiet voice can indicate nervousness, while a clear, easily heard voice can show that a person is feeling confident.
- **Phone skills** – The phone is used in most workplaces for a variety of purposes. It is vital that young people are confident about using the phone to make and receive calls, and that they are able to use clear speech and concise questions and statements to give and receive information.
- **Questioning** – Asking questions can help to obtain more information about a person or situation. Students need to be able to ask clear questions, listen to the answers and respond to them effectively.
- **Difficult workmates and customers** – Dealing with people who are showing difficult behaviour adds an extra dimension to verbal communication skills. Students need to be able to deal with basic situations themselves, without feeling distraught or intimidated. They should also have the confidence to hand a situation on to a more experienced worker when they are feeling out of their depth.
- **Cultural differences** – Discuss how communication styles and habits vary from one culture to another, and the implications that these differences have for a workplace situation. Make students aware of the need to be culturally sensitive to the variations they may observe between people from cultures different to their own.

# Activity ideas

- 1 Set your students a 'Can you talk underwater?' challenge. Divide the group into pairs and ask one person to be the 'talker' and one the 'timer'. Give a signal for the timers to start their watches, and for the talkers to begin talking on any topic they choose. The timers have to raise their hands when their talker pauses for longer than five seconds on their chosen topic, or if they repeat information. The winner is the person who can talk for the longest continuous period of time. Be warned – the result will probably be bedlam, but it is lots of fun to do as a warm up or at the end of term!
- 2 Role play dealing with a difficult customer in a workplace situation. Act out possible solutions and statements that can be used to resolve issues in a workplace. Stop the action at any point where students appear lost, confused or distressed, and be prepared for some students to find this activity difficult. Do not force students to participate directly, but offer roles such as making comments and suggestions.
- 3 Write topic headings for a conversation that could be used in a new workplace with people you have just met. Write an initial greeting on the board and then ask students to generate topic 'threads' that link logically to each other. This process will help students understand how conversations flow naturally from one topic to another, and how to keep a conversation moving.
- 4 Write a list of conversation topics and ask students to divide them into 'appropriate for a workplace' and 'not appropriate for a workplace'.
- 5 Demonstrate a variety of body language poses and ask students to nominate the emotion or thoughts that they think go with each one. An extension of this activity is to send students out to observe body language in action, but remember to provide appropriate warnings about situations where it may not be appropriate to watch others!
- 6 Ask students to practise the language which is used in a range of workplaces. Practise greetings, handling requests for information, and general customer service statements. Some workplace examples to try out might include:
  - front reception counter of a gym or recreation centre
  - waiting on tables in a café or restaurant
  - answering the phone in a call centre for an insurance company
  - information counter in a large shopping centre
- 7 Brainstorm a list of excuses that people might use if they were late to work. Ask students to imagine that they are the employer – what response would they give to each of the excuses?
- 8 Discuss verbal harassment in the workplace, and how it can be resolved. Talk about types of harassment, such as sexual, abusive language or unwanted sexual advances. What laws protect workers from verbal harassment from colleagues or customers, and how can these laws be accessed if they are needed? What policies do workplaces have in place to protect their staff? Is it OK to complain about a colleague or is it just part of the job.

- 9 Give students a set of cards with topics such as 'bullying', 'harassment' and 'discrimination' written on them. Ask small groups of students to do some research on the topics and then to present what they learn back to the rest of the group. Alternatively, ask the groups to prepare a fact sheet of dot points that could be compiled into a booklet for everyone in the class.
- 10 Role play dealing with a difficult work colleague, using a prepared script for students to read aloud (if they are comfortable doing so). Ask students who are not involved in the role play to observe the changes in body language and behaviour which occur as the situation becomes more heated and difficult.
- 11 Give students verbal messages which become gradually more complex in nature and involve an increasing number of pieces of information. Ask students to remember as much of the message as possible and then to repeat it back to you. Talk about strategies to assist memory and recall of verbal information such as chunking similar pieces of information together, and using written notes or pictures as memory aids. Discuss workplace applications of strategies which help aid auditory memory and recall of information. Examples might include repeating a person's name when you have just been introduced to them in a workplace, or suggesting that a workplace use name tags for staff.
- 12 Practise giving students a pretend phone message that they must record on a page of a phone message pad, and then read the details back. Discuss how messages are taken in a workplace, and issues which may arise if messages are not recorded correctly. Introduce more complex situations such as callers who give more than one phone number, or callers who are angry or difficult to deal with.
- 13 Play a memory challenge game where students must listen to a series of words and then write down as many as they can remember, in any order. This is a good activity to play at the end of the day, or as a 'filler' activity before the end of a class.

# Communicating assertively

## About assertiveness

Being assertive is a way of talking and behaving which gets your message across to someone else clearly and directly, so that it is readily understood. People who are assertive often use quite strong body language and speech. They face towards the other person and meet their gaze. (This is called making eye contact.) They participate actively in a conversation and they ask and answer questions. Their voice is strong and clear, but they do not yell. Their conversations are carefully thought out and they usually know in advance what they are trying to achieve. They keep their emotions in check and they leave the conversation if they feel as if they are getting out of control.

Draw a cartoon  
of an assertive  
person



## Some tips for being assertive:

1. Think about what you want to get out of a conversation.
2. Make eye contact.
3. Be pleasant and considerate.
4. State clearly what you expect or think.
5. Use 'I' statements if you can (e.g. 'I don't like it when you borrow my clothes and then put them back in my cupboard without washing them.')
6. Control your voice so that it is clear but not too loud.
7. Speak slowly and clearly.
8. Ask questions simply and honestly.
9. Check that your message has been understood by the other person, and that you understand them correctly.
10. Walk away if you are having trouble managing your emotions – you can always come back to the conversation later on.

## Conversations at work

Part of fitting in at a new workplace is about being able to talk to people about more than just work. Certainly, conversations about your job are important and should be a major part of your first few weeks in a new workplace. But it is also important that you take the time to talk to your new workmates and get to know a bit about them. This will help you to fit into your workplace and will make going to work more enjoyable for you and everyone around you.

Make a list of at least five questions you could ask someone about each of these conversation areas.

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