



The ACT WorkKeys assessment system measures job skills that are valuable for any occupation—skilled or professional—at any level and in any industry.



The ACT National Career Readiness Certificate™ is an industry-recognized, portable, evidence-based credential that certifies achievement of foundational skills essential for workplace success.

KEY FACTS

Foundational skills

What makes a skill “foundational”?

Foundational skills are the fundamental, portable skills that are essential to conveying and receiving information that is critical to training and workplace success. These skills are *fundamental* in that they serve as a basis—the foundation—for supporting additional operations/tasks and learning. They are *portable* because, rather than being job specific, they can be applied at some level across a wide variety of occupations. Workers who develop these skills have enhanced employability and are more competitive in the job market. Reading a manual, listening to instructions, writing a memo, and working well in a team are all examples of using foundational skills on the job.

- **Foundational skills are important across a wide variety of jobs, both skilled and professional.** For example, the work of both plumbers and physicians requires listening skills. Plumbers listen to their customers' descriptions of plumbing problems to help determine the source of the problem. Physicians listen to their patients describing symptoms to help make the correct medical diagnosis.
- **Foundational skills are also necessary to learn more job-specific knowledge and skills.** This is true across a wide variety of skilled and professional jobs. For example, both plumbers and physicians rely on reading to obtain additional job knowledge and skills. Plumbers read instructions and interpret schematics to learn how to install new drain systems, whereas physicians read research on drug trials to understand the strengths and limitations of new medicines that they prescribe.

What is the relationship between the ACT National Career Readiness Certificate and foundational skills?

The ACT National Career Readiness Certificate (ACT NCRC®) certifies foundational skills measured by the ACT WorkKeys cognitive and noncognitive assessments.

Three ACT WorkKeys assessments—Reading for Information, Applied Mathematics, and Locating Information—measure skills that have been consistently identified as important for success in a broad range of jobs. In fact, based on job skill requirement profiles for thousands of jobs across the country contained in ACT's proprietary database, ACT JobPro®, ACT found that *a large majority of the jobs examined require all three of these foundational skills.*

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What is the relationship between foundational skills and the US Department of Labor’s Industry Competency Models?

ACT’s definition of “foundational” is consistent with the terms used by the US Department of Labor’s Industry Competency Model initiative.

Why do foundational skills concern employers and educators?

America is facing a skills gap: the skills workers possess do not match the skills needed for current and projected jobs.

Employers, industry associations, and the workforce development community all recognize the importance of foundational skills. Increasingly, however, they are encountering a lack of qualified applicants and current employees who possess the necessary foundational skills to perform a job, complete training, and advance within an occupation.

Particularly within manufacturing, business and professional services, financial and insurance services, health care, and entertainment industries, employers report that “significant deficiencies exist” in foundational skills, especially among high school graduates. Therefore, many employers must provide workplace training to remedy foundational skills deficits. Educators must confront the challenge of establishing career pathways that help students develop the foundational skills required by employers—now and in the years to come.

The bottom line is that the importance of foundational skills will only increase. Educators and employers must work together to ensure that American workers are prepared for the jobs of today—and tomorrow—that will keep our nation competitive in the global marketplace.

For a comprehensive view of these issues, click [here](#) to download the ACT report *The Condition of Work Readiness in the United States*.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Essential foundational skills are fundamental, portable skills that are required for success in most jobs. These cognitive and noncognitive skills are measured by ACT WorkKeys assessments, three of which are the basis for earning the ACT NCRC, the nation’s leading employability credential.