

HOW EMPLOYERS SEE CANDIDATES

Figure 13 Employers rate the importance of candidate qualities/skills

Communication skills (verbal and written)	4.7
Honesty/integrity	4.7
Interpersonal skills (relates well to others)	4.5
Strong work ethic	4.5
Teamwork skills (works well with others)	4.5
Analytical skills	4.4
Motivation/Initiative	4.4
Flexibility/adaptability	4.3
Computer skills	4.2
Detail-oriented	4.1
Leadership skills	4.0
Organizational skills	4.0
Self-confidence	3.9
Friendly/outgoing personality	3.8
Tactfulness	3.8
Well-mannered/polite	3.8
GPA (3.0 or better)	3.7
Creativity	3.6
Entrepreneurial skills/risk-taker	3.2
Sense of humor	3.2

(5-point scale, where 1= not important and 5=extremely important)

Who's the Perfect Candidate?

Since the 1999 *Job Outlook* report, communication skills have topped the list of the qualities and skills employers deem important in job candidates, and this year is no exception. (See Figure 13.) The other items that top the list—honesty/integrity, interpersonal skills, a strong work ethic, and teamwork skills—are also not surprises. Over the years, employers have consistently rated these qualities and skills as very important in a candidate.

GPA counts

While employers placed GPA toward the lower end of their wish list, that does not mean GPA doesn't count. In fact, roughly 7 out of 10 employers (69.6 percent) reported that they screen candidates based on GPA. Among those who screen, nearly half (45.4 percent) were manufacturers, another 45.4 percent were service employers, and 9.2 percent were government/nonprofit employers.

Overall, the largest group use a GPA of 3.0 as their cutoff, but cutoffs ranged from 2.0 to as high as 3.5. Some respondents also indicated that the GPA cutoff depends on the student's major and/or the hiring department.

Figure 14 Employers rate the importance of experience

Relevant work experience	4.0
Internship experience	4.0
Any work experience	3.5
Co-op experience	3.4

(5-point scale where 1=not important and 5=extremely important)

STUDENTS WHO RENEGE ON JOB OFFERS

More than half of respondents (56.9 percent) reported that some 2003-04 graduates reneged on job offers extended by their organizations. Among these employers, reneges represented just 5.4 percent of their total offers to 2003-04 graduates.

As the market improves and students have multiple job offers to choose from, what happens when a student accepts an offer and a “better” job offer comes along? Just a handful of respondents (4.7 percent) said they have a specific policy to deal with reneges. Among those few, action is varied. Some said they would not reconsider the student for a position for one year, a few said the student would be written off permanently, and some said they would report it to the career center. Some also said that if reneges were a recurring problem with a campus, they would consider dropping the school as a recruiting source.

Experience counts, too

Also important to employers is a candidate’s work experience. (See Figure 14.) “Relevant” work experience (which could be gained through an internship or co-op experience) can set one candidate apart from the competition, but even unrelated experience can help a candidate make a positive impression. One explanation: Employers look for evidence that candidates have the skills, qualities, and abilities they believe are important. Even unrelated work experience can suggest a strong work ethic, provide some evidence of teamwork abilities, or give employers some reason to look further at the candidate. In fact, some respondents said that, besides work experience, they look for candidate participation in extracurricular activities and campus/community involvement. Again, these activities can serve as indicators that the candidate has important skills and abilities.

What candidates lack

Ironically, the number one skill that employers say they want candidates to have—communication skills—is the very skill they most often say candidates lack. Many respondents reported that college graduates lack good grammar and writing skills, and one noted that graduates have trouble “getting good ideas communicated without saying ‘like’ and ‘you know.’”