# Computer Skills You'll Need in the Workplace—and How to Show Them Off on a Job Search

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As technology becomes more and more ubiquitous, employers are increasingly looking to hire workers with computer skills—regardless of what job they're being hired to do. No matter what industry or setting you work in, you likely need computer skills to complete your tasks —and find a job in the first place. (If you're looking for roles to apply for, you can search for open jobs on The Muse.)

# What Are Computer Skills?

Computer skills are the knowledge and abilities you need to complete tasks on a desktop, laptop, tablet, mobile phone, or any related device or equipment. They're a subset of [technical skills](#) that are critical in today's work world as we move toward a more digital-first society, says Muse career coach [Barb Girson](#).

"There was a time when computer skills meant finding your way to the internet or sending and receiving an email," Girson says, but now we use computer skills for a broad range of important tasks that used to be done by hand or on paper.

Of course, if you're in IT or programming and you're creating technology systems, you'll certainly need computer skills. But they're also required for accountants who will need to use accounting and payroll software and file taxes, for example. Almost any job in an office, healthcare, or school environment—as well as many other settings—now requires you to use a computer in some capacity. Even jobs traditionally thought of as "blue collar"—like warehouse or manufacturing-line work—now "require comfort with computers for timekeeping, HR, and other company communication," says Muse career coach [Anne M. Kelly](#).

There are two broad categories of computer skills:

- **Hardware skills** are the ability to operate computers and related equipment, whether that's turning on your desktop, hooking it up to a network or printer, or replacing or repairing parts. Most jobs will require that you can operate a computer and can easily learn how to use other equipment. However, more advanced hardware skills like repairs, network configuration, and cybersecurity evaluations will generally be most important for IT and related job functions.
- **Software skills** are the ability to complete tasks using computer programs or the internet. This could mean sending email, giving PowerPoint presentations, collaborating on Google Docs, setting up and

attending video meetings, creating graphics, or completing more advanced tasks such as coding or database administration.

# Types of Computer Skills

What computer skills you need will depend on your job, your team, the company you work for, and the industry you work in. For example, marketing strategists will likely need to be familiar with data analysis programs. And no matter what your job function, you might need to be comfortable with project management software like Asana or Trello if your team or company uses one of these programs.

Here are a few common types of computer skills (keep in mind that they may overlap—and this list is not exhaustive):

## Office Suites

Office suites are groups of programs used to complete many work tasks. They generally include word processing, spreadsheet, presentation, email, calendar, and storage software. Increasingly, they also include a video meeting program.

There are a few commonly used office suites, including:

- **Microsoft Office** including Excel, OneDrive, OneNote, Outlook, PowerPoint, Teams, and Word
- **Google Workspace** including Calendar, Chat, Docs, Drive, Meet, Sheets, and Slides
- **Apple iWork** including Keynote, Numbers, and Pages

Knowing the basics of these programs is so fundamental to many jobs that most employers will assume you know how to use them on some level. "It's just a

normal part of a job now," Kelly says. The good news is that a lot of the skills from one of these suites will carry over to another. So if you can't shell out the high fees for Microsoft Office, you can use the free Google Workspace to familiarize yourself with the basics of these programs.

## Presentation Tools

Many jobs require you to give presentations to others on your work, whether that's sharing the results of a project, campaign, or initiative; pitching a new proposal to colleagues or clients; or training teammates on a new process or technology. The software you use to create presentations is often found in office suites. However, you might also include visual elements such as data visualizations, graphics, or videos from other programs or software.

Some of the most common presentation tools are:

- Apple Keynote
- Canva
- Data visualization tools such as Microsoft Excel, Tableau, Google Charts, and Infogram
- Google Slides
- Microsoft PowerPoint
- Prezi

## Spreadsheets

Like presentation software, the programs needed to create and manipulate spreadsheets are often found in office suites. Depending on your career and job, you may need to use spreadsheets for any number of tasks, including to track progress, sales, clients, inventory, or other items; create macros to automate common tasks; analyze, track, store, and visualize data; or create schedules, maps

and other charts. However, for any position, you'll want to [know the basics](#) like how to read and update a spreadsheet, sort data, or create simple formulas.

Common spreadsheet programs include:

- Apple Numbers
- Google Sheets
- Microsoft Excel

## Communication Tools

One of the most common uses for computers in the workplace is communication. Depending on your workplace and department culture, you may need computer-specific [communication skills](#) for everything from emailing people outside your company to attending meetings and checking in with coworkers. You might use:

- **Chat** (for example, Slack, Google Chat, Microsoft Teams, Discord, Facebook Workplace Chat)
- **Email** (for example, Gmail, Outlook, Apple Mail)
- **Project management tools** (see below)
- **Video conferencing** (for example, Zoom, Google Meet, Microsoft Teams, Skype, RingCentral, BlueJeans)

## Collaboration and Project Management Tools

At their core, companies are groups of people working together to achieve common goals. So computer skills that help you collaborate with others are extremely important. There are programs specifically designed to help people

work together on documents, presentations, spreadsheets, and other work products. Project management software allows teams and companies to track all the moving pieces of a project and see who is doing what and when.

Some of these tools are:

- Airtable
- Asana
- Google Workspace
- Jira
- Microsoft Teams
- Salesforce
- Storage and file sharing programs such as Dropbox, Google Drive, AWS Cloud, iCloud
- Trello

## Programming Skills and Coding Languages

Programming skills and coding languages are used to create software, websites, apps, and other computer, tablet, phone, or internet features. These skills are primarily needed by people who work as [software engineers](#), web developers, or similar.

However, other jobs that come into contact with coding languages or produce work that goes onto their company's website or app—for example, designers, writers and editors, marketers, and video producers—might benefit from learning some basic coding skills. As an editor, I've found understanding basic HTML (which I literally learned changing the colors of my Myspace profile) and knowing how to look up useful snippets of code helpful many times when I would've otherwise had to wait for other colleagues or departments to get involved with a relatively minor issue.

Some programming skills and coding languages are:

- API creation
- Application scaling
- Back-end framework
- CSS
- Database administration
- HTML
- Java
- JavaScript
- Python
- Ruby
- SQL
- Web development

## Job-Specific Skills

Some computer skills are widely [transferable](#) between roles and jobs, Girson says. For example, "MS Office Suite and email are baseline for almost any job." However many other computer skills are used for more job-specific tasks. Even common tools like Excel and email can be used in more complex ways by certain professionals like data analysts or email marketing managers.

Here are a few commonly used skills and tools for certain careers:

- **Accounting:** Sage 50 Accounting, QuickBooks, NetSuite
- **Content:** Adobe Suite, content management systems (CMS), Google Analytics and Search Console, Final Cut Pro

- **Data:** Google Sheets, IBM Cognos Impromptu, Looker, MATLAB, Microsoft Excel, Tableau
- **Design:** Adobe Creative Suite (Illustrator, InDesign, Photoshop), AutoCAD, Canva, Microsoft Visio
- **Marketing:** Google Ads, Google Analytics, MailChimp, search engine optimization (SEO) and marketing (SEM), social media management (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, TikTok)
- **Recruiting:** Sourcing tools (for example, LinkedIn Recruiter), applicant tracking systems (ATSs) such as Taleo, Lever, or Greenhouse
- **Sales:** Salesforce, HubSpot

# How to Improve Your Computer Skills

You can gain new computer skills or hone the ones you already have both at work and outside of it. Plus, technology is constantly changing so "there is no reason for us not to keep learning and growing and staying digitally current," Girson says.

Here are a few tips:

- **Take a class:** Many computer skills can be learned through online classes on [popular education platforms](#) like Coursera, LinkedIn Learning, and Udemy—often for free or at a low cost. You can also consider taking a college or university course online or on campus. For some computer skills, like coding and data science, there are [bootcamps](#) dedicated to preparing people for careers in these fields.
- **Go to the source:** If you're looking to learn more about a specific program or technology, your first stop should often be the website of the company that makes it. There are typically free tutorials, FAQ pages, or even training and courses offered directly by the creator of the software.

- **Find free tutorials on YouTube or similar platforms:** One other advantage to the digital age? Almost anyone can share information they've learned with the world. If you need to learn how to perform a specific task on a computer, there are usually one or more YouTube videos that will guide you through it step by step. Follow along with the tutorial each time you use your new skill until you have it down. There are also many dedicated online forums where you can post tech questions for other users to answer.
- **Ask for help:** If you know someone (either in your personal or professional life) who's good at the skill you want to improve or learn, you can ask them for help. You might ask them to help guide you through something small or see if you can watch them complete a computer task. Or you can ask them how they learned their skills or what resources they can point you to.

# How to Present Computer Skills in Your Job Search

Your source of truth when deciding what skills to highlight in your application materials is always the job description. Read it closely. Then, reread it and note the skills mentioned. If you have experience with these computer skills, they belong on your resume. The ones that are especially important to the job might also belong in your cover letter and interview answers.

Since many computer skills, such as email, are seen as "givens," listing something like "[Proficient in Microsoft Office](#)" on your resume isn't just unnecessary, it can make you look out of touch or even [open you up to age discrimination](#). And remember, the programs within office suites have a number of functions. Employers are far more interested in your specific abilities within these programs than knowing you have a basic familiarity with them. If you're not sure what skills to put forward, Girson suggests only including computer skills you know you'll use on the job or are in the job description.

Once you know which computer skills you want to emphasize to employers, here's how you include them:

# On Your Resume

Your resume is often the first impression a prospective employer will have of you. And when a "resume is angled and crafted effectively, the response will be, 'Let's interview this person as they sound perfect for the job,'" Girson says. So you should tailor your resume for every job you apply to—i.e., rework and reword your resume so that it highlights the specific skills, experiences, and qualifications listed in the job description.

One of the first places a recruiter or hiring manager's eyes will go on your resume is your skills section, which should quickly reveal whether you have all the key skills needed to perform a job well—so make sure your relevant computer skills are there. If you want to make them even easier to spot, you can divide your skills section into categories like "technical skills" or even more specific partitions like "coding languages".

Here's an example skills section for a digital marketer:

**SKILLS**

**Marketing:** copywriting, search engine optimization (SEO), data analytics

**Marketing Tools:** TweetDeck, Google AdWords, Facebook Insights, MailChimp

**Analysis Tools:** Google Analytics and Search Console, Tableau, Looker, Microsoft Excel (including creating macros, formulas, data visualizations, and PivotTables and performing VLOOKUPs and linear regressions)

But you shouldn't *just* list the computer skills you found in the job description in your skills section. You also need to show anyone reading your resume *how* you've used these skills and how successful you were with them—most commonly by writing strong, quantified bullet points that highlight your achievements.

Here's a bullet point that highlights some of a financial analyst's computer skills:

■ *Analyzed department budgets using Excel PivotTables and XNPV and XIRR functions as well as Vena forecasting to propose budget cuts and created Tableau visualizations to present to management, resulting in 10% spending reduction across the company without any layoffs.*

You can also mention especially important computer skills in a [resume summary](#), and if you're an entry-level candidate, you can talk about computer skills you've used for your classes in your [education section](#). If you have a certificate or [certification](#) in a relevant or highly sought after technology, that belongs on your resume as well.

Whenever possible, you should try to use the same words that the job description did to describe your skills, Girson says. Many companies use [applicant tracking systems](#) (ATSs) to search submitted resumes for relevant keywords—often from the job description. So, for example, if you have experience with WordPress content management systems (CMSs) and the job description is looking for someone with WordPress experience, don't just say you've used a CMS. However, if you have experience using a different CMS, you should still include that on your application materials. For example you might say something like "Uploaded images using Drupal content management system (CMS)."

## In a Cover Letter

Cover letters allow you to inject a bit more life and personality than a resume, and you can use them to tell a story or stories about your most important computer skills. For example, you might write:

*"I was especially excited to see that your team uses Airtable. At my current job, I led our company-wide transition to Airtable, putting together all the bases, constructing views for each team so they could easily see only the info they needed, and even training all my colleagues. After just a few months, we estimated that Airtable had saved the company over 200 hours that would've been spent sending emails back and trying to locate all the pieces of a project."*

## On LinkedIn

"In today's job market, LinkedIn is the place to be seen and heard," Girson says. Many recruiters use LinkedIn to source candidates, plus the platform can help you grow your network. The "Skills & Endorsements" section of your LinkedIn Profile might seem like the obvious spot to list your computer skills. And while you should include them there (and get endorsements from past colleagues if you can!), recruiters are more likely to see your skills if you work them into your headline, summary, and most recent job experiences at the top of the page.

## In Your Interviews

If you've made it to the interview stage, you've already shown a prospective employer at least some of the skills they want to see. But don't stop there. As you prepare to answer common interview questions, look for opportunities to mention what technologies and computer skills you've used. And "mention them by name," Kelly says. For example, "I scheduled a Teams meeting and opened a new channel for the project," or, "I like to keep my meeting notes in Google Drive," Kelly says.

If you're answering a behavioral interview question—any question that asks about how you approached a situation in the past—you can take the opportunity to sprinkle in mentions of key computer skills to show your interviewer how you've used them to solve problems and meet goals.

## Throughout the Hiring Process

As work becomes increasingly technology-driven, so does the hiring process. You'll almost definitely be communicating with recruiters and hiring managers via email or LinkedIn. You may also need to use scheduling software or participate in a video interview. For some jobs, you'll even have an interview presentation to give. All of these are opportunities to show off your computer skills.

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