

8 Ideas for Incorporating Soft Skills into Any Classroom

A guide to engaging today's students in soft skill development



Ideas for Incorporating Soft Skills into Any Classroom

Soft skills, or employability skills, are essential for success in any career. This guide is intended to support classroom training and give you ideas for integrating soft skills lessons into your classroom today. In this guide, you'll find ideas for incorporating soft skills into your classes, activities you can use today, and 10 unique posters to facilitate classroom discussions.

Soft Skills:

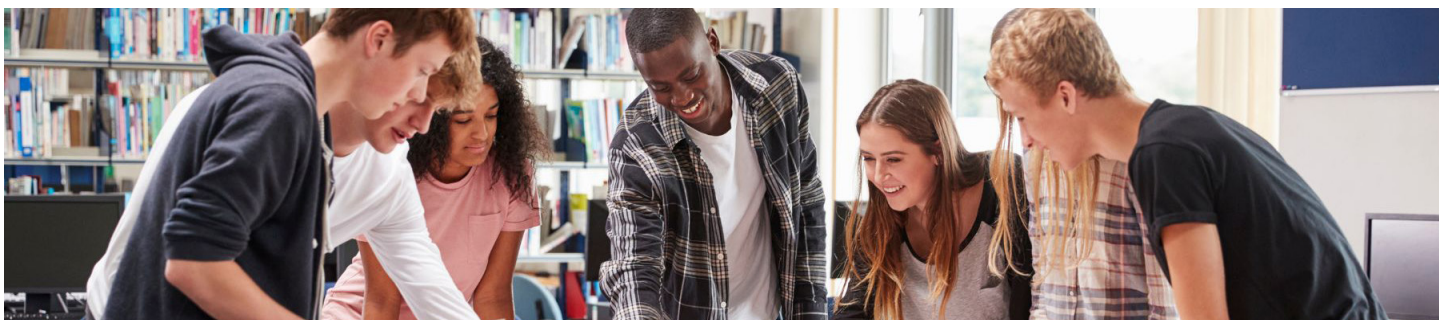
Personal characteristics and interpersonal skills that are beneficial in the workplace.



Importance of Soft Skills

Aside from qualifications, soft skills make students attractive candidates to employers.¹ Unfortunately, almost three in four employers say they have a hard time finding graduates with soft skills.² With careers reliant on soft skills projected to make up two-thirds of all jobs by 2030, it's important to help our future workforce develop these skills.³

1. Ariella, S. (2023, August 30). What Are Soft Skills? 17 Important Soft Skills Examples. Zippia. <https://www.zippia.com/advice/soft-skills/>
2. Flynn, M. (2023, October 5). The Soft Skills "Debate" Is Over. Forbes. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/mariaflynn/2023/05/30/the-soft-skills-debate-is-over/>
3. Lau, Y. (2024, August 12). Soft Skills Are Essential To The Future Of Work. Forbes. <https://www.forbes.com/councils/forbeshumanresourcescouncil/2021/01/20/soft-skills-are-essential-to-the-future-of-work/>



Idea 1: Role-play workplace scenarios

Role play is great for many reasons – it builds confidence, improves problem-solving and communication skills, and of course, it's a great method of student-driven, active learning, which today's students crave.

Tips:

- Be creative: Instead of going off a predetermined dialogue, give your students prompts and allow them to be creative
- Bring in others: Invite teachers, administrators or even community members to participate
- Create classic scenarios: Job interviews, dealing with customer complaints, handling disruptive clients, marketing new products
- Introduce new ideas: Incorporate technology, modern dilemmas, debate

Suggested Activity 1:

1. Set up the room with desks facing each other, so students can debate easily.
2. Ask students questions, such as "You finish your assigned task at work. Do you go home early or do you find other tasks to accomplish?" or "You're presented with several tasks and need to accomplish them all by the end of the day. How do you prioritize?"
3. Have students pick a side to each question and explain their argument.

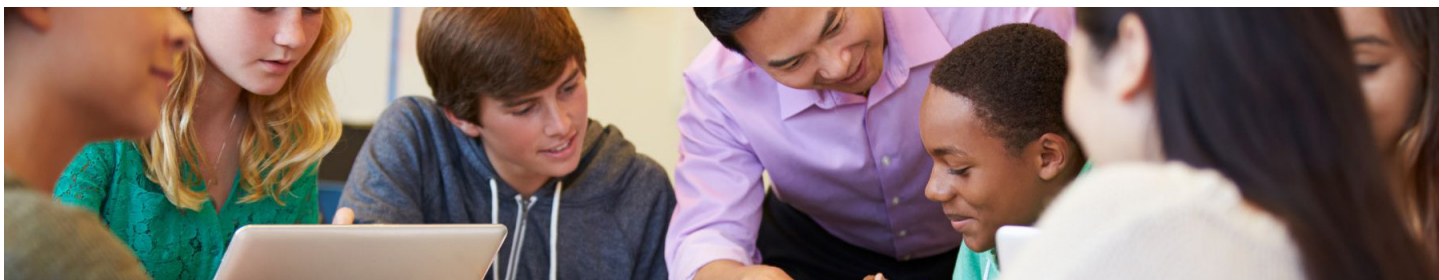
Suggested Activity 2:

You have been employed at a new company for about six months. A co-worker, Susan, has been repeatedly sexually harassing you. You finally decide you've had enough and file a complaint with Human Resources. You meet with the HR Director, Tanner. During your meeting, he does not take any notes and keeps checking his phone. At the end of the conversation, you wonder if he really understood your concern at all.

Discussion Questions:

- Has Tanner shown active listening behavior? What non-verbal cues has he shown the employee about his level of interest?
- What could Tanner do to be a better active listener in the future? Do a short role play between Tanner and the employee, where Tanner uses active listening strategies in the meeting.
- How do you, the employee, feel after your meeting? Do you feel that your concerns were heard?





Idea 2: Regularly assign collaborative work

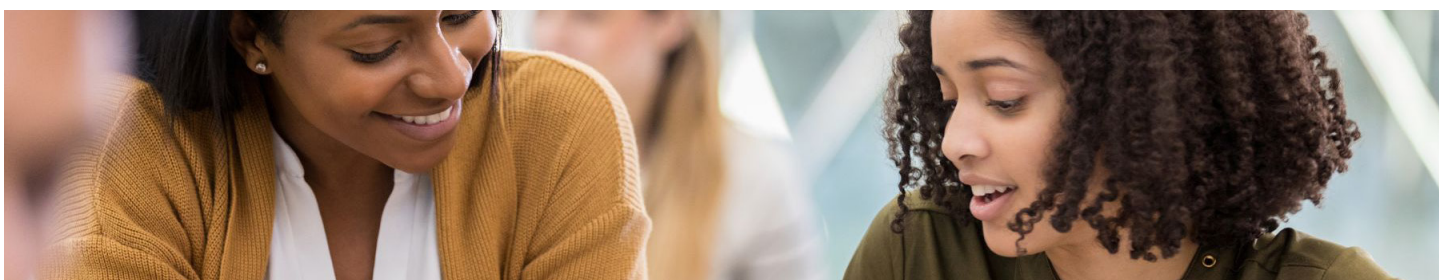
Collaborative work builds cooperation, communication and teamwork skills by forcing students to work with one another to learn content and apply it.

Tips:

- Encourage students to “teach” each other
- Learn more: “Group Work in the College Classroom”
www.youtube.com/watch?v=5a7hP9doTBghttps://5a7hP9doTBg

Suggested Activity:

1. Divide students into small groups.
2. Present them with a problem and a time limit to solve it in. The problem can be workplace-specific, such as a challenge for nursing students to get a cranky, ill patient out of bed when he or she doesn’t want to. Or the problem can be general, like coming up with work-from-home guidelines for a staff of 10 at a local retail store.
3. When the time is up, come together as a class and have students share how their group tried to solve the problem.



Idea 3: Practice giving and receiving feedback

Critical thinking and problem-solving skills are some of the most in-demand soft skills recruiters are looking for today. Peer-to-peer feedback can be an effective way to help students develop those skills – plus, it increases student engagement and helps them see the relevancy of what they’re doing.

Tips:

- Set expectations: Feedback is about helping, not judging
- Use a feedback rubric to fine-tune the process and encourage specific suggestions
- Keep it anonymous to provide comfort
- Moderate and review feedback from students to ensure it remains fair and helpful
- Start small, with a short assignment like an introduction to an essay or assessment worksheet

Suggested Activity:

1. Collect the rough drafts of a writing assignment.
2. Pass out the drafts randomly to different students.
3. Provide a rubric for grading the assignment.
4. Have students review the drafts and make notes based on the rubric.
5. Pass the drafts back to the original students and have them edit the drafts based on the feedback.





Idea 4: Make intentional assignment tweaks

These days, demand is growing for employees who can adapt to an ever-changing workplace, who are open to new ideas, and who don't panic when things don't go according to plan. How can you encourage these traits in your students? Intentional assignment tweaks is one way. Intentional assignment tweaks, or changes half-way through an assignment, can help your students learn how to be flexible and adapt to change.

Tips:

- Plan assignment tweaks that you could easily implement
- Observe students as they react to these kinds of changes
- Offer encouragement as they learn to adapt

Easy assignment tweaks

Observe students

Offer encouragement



Suggested Activity:

1. Create a pre-planned project for students.
2. At the last minute, change one key aspect of the assignment so students have to learn to adapt
3. to change.
4. After the assignments are submitted, start an open discussion with the students about flexibility and how they dealt with changes at the last minute, relating the conversation to time management and explain how that can help in unexpected situations.





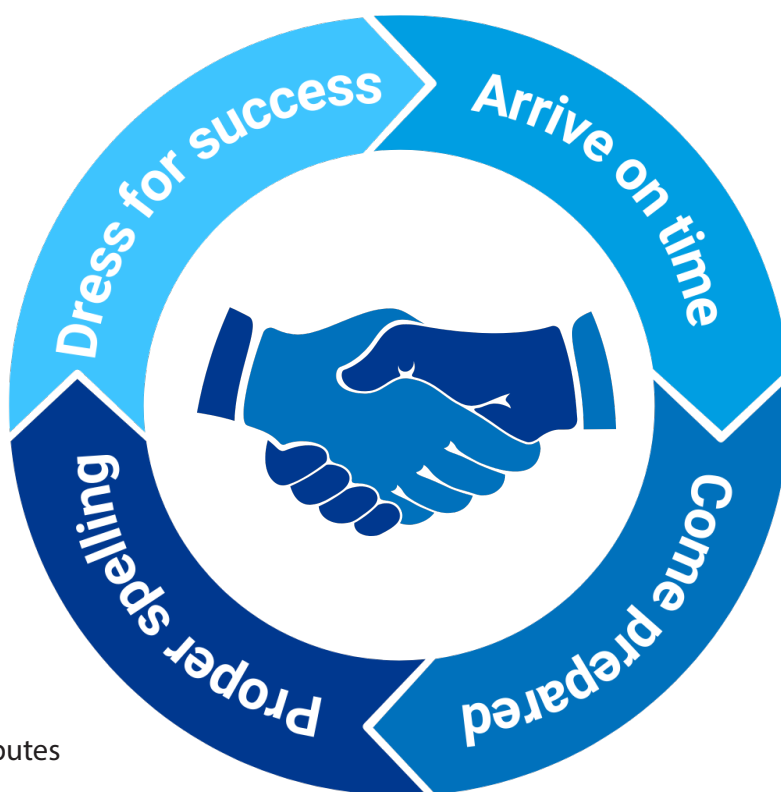
Idea 5: Instill Professionalism in Your Classroom

If your students struggle to communicate and don't understand the value of showing up on time, you may want to start demanding professionalism in your classroom. School is a great place to start developing those skills, especially if students do not experience those requirements anywhere else.

Suggested Activity 1:

1. Every day, make sure your students know they're expected to:
 - Arrive on time
 - Come prepared
 - Use proper spelling and punctuation
 - Dress for success

Note: We know you might not be able to do every one of these items every day. The idea is to mimic a work environment, and get your students used to those professional habits.



Suggested Activity 2:

1. Begin by introducing the definition of the term "professionalism" to the class. Professionalism integrates several attributes which, together, serve to identify and define a professional.
2. Then, ask your students what they think the attributes of a professional are. Most of the characteristics of a professional can be summarized as how you act, look, and think.
3. Ask students to share the attributes they identified in the previous step, and provide some thought-provoking questions to facilitate discussion, such as:
 - Are professionalism and leadership the same thing?
 - Are there characteristics that you would consider professional, but not typical of a leader? Why or why not?



Idea 6: Consider Honesty and Integrity

Having honesty and integrity in the workplace is one of the most important qualities of great leadership. Leaders know that honesty and integrity are the foundations of leadership. Students should learn what honesty and integrity mean and how to apply these skills in their work and personal lives.

Suggested Activity 1:

1. Print and distribute the following Honesty and Integrity Self-assessment (on the following page).
2. Give students 5-10 minutes to answer all the questions and score themselves. This is for their eyes only. It gives students a chance to reflect on their own honesty and integrity to see if they have any opportunities for improvement.

Suggested Activity 2:

1. Explain that the question of honesty and integrity is all around us in the media every day. Whether they see stories on social media, on television, or in print, there are stories every day that raise questions of integrity. In this activity, students look for and analyze news stories that raise questions of integrity.
2. Have each student choose a news story and complete the questions below, allowing 15 minutes for students to locate a story and answer the questions.
 - What source is your story from? Is it reliable? How do you know?
 - How did the individual(s) in the story show a lack of integrity or honesty?
 - What could the individual(s) in the story have done differently for a better outcome? Why?
3. Call the class back together and have each student briefly share a summary of their story answering questions 2 and 3. Is there anything anyone would have answered differently for the stories shared?



Instructions: Take this personal evaluation and answer each question honestly by placing an 'X' in the appropriate column.

Question	I am this way often.	I am this way sometimes.	I am never this way.
I live up to the highest ethical standards.			
I am true to my best self.			
My colleagues would say that my behavior is consistent with my beliefs and values.			
I always try to do what is right, even if it is difficult or costly.			
I tell the truth unless there is a strong moral reason to keep it to myself.			
Friends and family know that I will be truthful with them.			
I do not compromise my values by giving in to temptation.			
I will not stretch the truth to make myself look better than I really am.			
I do not pretend to be something or someone I am not just to be more popular.			
If I see something that isn't 'right', I say something.			
If I witness someone making a bad decision, I say something.			
I can clearly state the values and beliefs that guide my actions.			
I cannot sit by silently, while the big elephant in the room is ignored.			
I have an honest, hard conversation with team members, rather than participating in gossip about a team member.			
My friends and family would describe me as an honest person.			
I am able to give constructive criticism in a respectful manner.			
I will confront someone if I see that person doing something that isn't right.			
I will challenge my manager or supervisor, if they are doing something that isn't ethical.			
If I found out my employer was doing something illegal or unethical, I would report it.			
When someone tells me something confidential, I do not tell anyone else.			
If a situation occurs which results in breaking a promise, I will consult with those involved.			
I will keep my word.			
I follow through when I promise to do something.			
I do not tolerate inappropriate or hurtful behavior by others.			
Total: Count up the X's within each column and place on the line. Multiply the responses with the noted multiplier.	___ x 3	___ x 2	___ x 1
Grand total (add all 3 columns together)	_____ points		

72-55 points: You have honesty and integrity, even when it is not easy! Keep it up!

54-36 points: You are honest and have integrity but not consistently. Find ways to be more consistent, if possible.

35-24 points: There is room for improvement in your honesty and integrity. You've done a great job being honest with yourself here. Now continue to look for ways to practice these skills.



Idea 7: Integrate Soft Skills Programs into Your Classes

Realityworks offers comprehensive products and programs for teaching employability, leadership, and entrepreneurship. We strive to make these programs engaging for students and easy for instructors to implement. The programs are full of hands-on activities and real-world applications to teach students a variety of in-demand soft skills.



RealCareer™ Employability Skills Program

Teach students 20 soft skills, from communication and interpersonal skills to time management and responsibility. *Online option also available.*



Leadership Soft Skills Program

Use this comprehensive program to teach 18 leadership soft skills, including conflict management, honesty, team building, and positivity. *Online option also available.*



Contemporary Entrepreneurship Program

Create a two- to three-week unit on entrepreneurship skills with this ready-to-use program. *Online option also available.*



Middle School Employability Skills Program

Easy to implement and designed for younger learners, this program uses hands-on activities and real-world applications to teach middle school students 20 soft skills prioritized by middle school teachers.

SOFT SKILLS TRAINING TOOLS

To learn more visit www.realityworks.com/product-category/soft-skills-training



Idea 8: Incorporate soft skills discussion posters into your classroom

The right poster content can jump-start engaging discussions on soft skills and why they're so important. Use these five posters discuss specific skills that are important in today's workplace, and help your students gain a better understanding of the skills they'll need to succeed.

Tips:

- Plan assignment tweaks that you could easily implement
- Observe students as they react to these kinds of changes
- Offer encouragement as they learn to adapt

Suggested Activity 1:

1. Print the posters out and hang them up around your classroom or office.
2. Put students into five small groups and station each group at one of the posters.
3. Encourage students to discuss the questions on the bottom of each poster within their group.

Suggested Activity 2:

1. Print the posters out and give one to each student.
2. Direct the students to answer the discussion questions individually, on a separate sheet of paper.
3. Come together as a class to discuss what the students wrote.



FLEXIBILITY

Being ready to adapt to new or different situations



Discussion Questions:

- Why is it important to be flexible in the workplace?
- Describe a time when you had to be flexible recently.

PROBLEM-SOLVING

Coming up with alternative solutions, including identifying and addressing complex challenges in a variety of contexts



Discussion Questions:

- How does problem solving benefit the workplace?
- Describe a problem you faced recently and how you solved it.
- What could you do to improve your problem-solving skills?

TEAMWORK

Working with others toward a shared goal



Discussion Questions:

- Why is teamwork important in the workplace?
- Describe a time when you had to work in a team recently.
- How does a good team member behave? How does a bad one behave?

COMMUNICATION

Conveying messages in a clear, compelling way and understanding the needs of others



Discussion Questions:

- What does effective communication look like?
- Why and when do we need effective communication?
- Describe a situation in which you saw good communication.
- Describe a situation in which you saw bad communication.

TIME MANAGEMENT

Dividing time between many activities



Discussion Questions:

- Why is time management important?
- Describe an experience in which you successfully managed your time recently.
- Describe an experience in which you could have managed your time better. Explain.

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Recognizing and understanding your emotions and those of others



Discussion Questions:

- Why is emotional intelligence particularly important in today's collaborative work environments?
- How might emotional intelligence aid in conflict management?

CRITICAL THINKING

Approaching problems and challenges with a strategic and analytical mindset



Discussion Questions:

- Why is critical thinking important?
- What are some examples of critical thinking skills?

ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Creating a business and taking on its risks in hopes of making a profit



Discussion Questions:

- What are the traits of a successful entrepreneur?
- Have you ever thought about starting your own business?
- Do you know anyone who has started a business? If so, what was the company?

TRUSTWORTHINESS

Being depended on as honest or truthful



Discussion Questions:

- Think of someone you trust. Why do you trust that person? What is it about them that makes them trustworthy?
- Why is it important for leaders to be trustworthy?
- How can you build trust?

PROFESSIONALISM

Displaying the conduct and qualities of
a professional person



Discussion Questions:

- What are the traits of a professional?
- Are professionalism and leadership the same thing?
- How can you dress for success?