

Computer Programmer Skills: The Perfect Balance of Hard & Soft Skills Employers Are Seeking

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Top soft skills for programmers

While mastering the technical programming skills will take some time and effort, don't forget about the other half of the skill equation—soft skills. Luckily, many soft skills come naturally as you've spent most of your life refining them informally. According to our job-postings analysis, here are the most commonly sought after soft skills needed for working in computer programming:*

- Communication skills
- Problem solving
- Teamwork/collaboration
- Research
- Creativity

These may seem simple enough to comply with when perusing “help wanted” ads, but what do these skills mean when applied to a programming career? Let's take a closer look.

Soft Skill #1: Communication

The ability to communicate effectively, both orally and in writing, is a universally desirable skill. Strong communication isn't just the ability to speak in front of a group without stammering, but it's also finding ways to diplomatically convey your message. Programmers can be in a tough spot with this because it isn't always easy explaining a highly-technical subject to an unfamiliar audience.

As you progress in your career, you'll spend even more time interacting with people who may not be as technically proficient, so it's incredibly important to master the art of simplified communication. The KISS method (Keep It Simple, Stupid!) will treat you well—don't get caught up in technical details when a simple summary will do.

Soft Skill #2: Problem solving

This is a skill that goes hand-in-hand with programming. Generally speaking, a programmer's job is to solve problems by creating (and modifying) software tools. This goes for both big-picture problem solving (how can we do this process more efficiently) and for the

details of how to make it actually happen.

As you progress into leadership programming positions, your problem-solving skills will also be needed for team management issues, such as covering absences, budget planning and allocating resources to meet deadlines.

Soft Skill #3: Collaboration

You're not going to make it far in a programming career if you don't work well with others. This doesn't mean you have to be best friends with everyone at work, but you will need to maintain a solid working relationship with your peers. Development processes, like pair programming—where one programmer writes code while another simultaneously reviews it—place a lot of importance on your ability to work constructively alongside others.

Collaboration is tied closely with your ability to communicate. Can you critique others' work tactfully? Can you handle negative feedback about yourself? This can be tricky if you prefer working independently, but it will remain an invaluable and sought-after skill throughout your career.

Soft Skill #4: Research

Programmers tend to be a curious bunch. Not unlike engineers tinkering with the inner workings of electronics, programmers like to dive into code and ask tough questions: *"How can we do this better?" "Why is it set up like this?" "Are we missing something?"*

This curiosity is a great asset as it leads to continuous improvement. But it also requires finding those answers, which is why so many employers look for programmers with top-notch research abilities.

Fortunately, programmers aren't alone in finding answers. The internet is chock-full of resources, and programming communities like [StackOverflow](#) and [Reddit's LearnProgramming forum](#) are great places to pick the brains of other programmers who may have asked similar questions.

Soft Skill #5: Creativity

Given the rigid, mathematically-structured nature of programming, creativity might seem like odd skill for employers to seek out in their candidates. But when you think about it, it makes perfect sense.

Programmers will often run into seemingly-impossible-to-resolve problems while taking on a small piece of an overall project. However, studies show that constraints on what seem possible can lead to more creative, "big picture" thinking.

Some of the best programmers know when to take a step back and start looking for creative ways to solve issues. Don't be afraid to embrace and develop your creative side—look into improvisational activities as [a way to train your creative ability](#).

Becoming a well-rounded programmer

Getting started in computer programming can be a bit intimidating, given the wide variety of skills employers are seeking. But don't let that discourage you—odds are you already possess some of the natural abilities employers seek in candidates.

The next step is to start chipping away at mastering some technical programming skills. It's best to start with the fundamentals and build on from there. Check out our article for some advice on getting started, "[Which Programming Language Should I Learn? Decoding the Basics](#)."