
Using a competency-based approach to work-integrated education

What are competencies?

Competencies are the **knowledge, skills and attributes** that are used at work, school and in other environments. They can involve expertise that individuals already have but don't know how to describe. They can be described in ways that are observable, measurable, transferable and based on performance.

Using a competency-based approach **helps individuals understand their strengths, plan their learning, relate academic and workplace experiences and showcase their abilities** as they apply for jobs and make career decisions.

What type of competencies does UVic Co-op and Career use?

UVic Co-op and Career has identified:

- + **10 core competencies** that are valued across all sectors
- + **4 intercultural competencies** that can be applied in any workplace
- + **program-specific competencies** that students can expect to develop through their academic programs
- + **professional competencies** valued by the professional bodies related to various professions

Learn more about the core and intercultural competencies on the next page. Detailed descriptions of all types of competencies can be found at uvic.ca/coopandcareer/buildskills.

How does UVic Co-op and Career use competencies?

UVic's Co-op Program uses a unique competency assessment process to measure student experiences on the work term.

All co-op students who engage in work terms **set learning objectives** related to 10 core competencies at the beginning of these experiences: Students and their workplace supervisors then **assess students' competency development at the start, middle and end of the work terms**, according to the following scale:

 EXEMPLARY	 DEVELOPING	 NO DEMONSTRATED ACHIEVEMENT
 ACCOMPLISHED	 BEGINNING	

Students also have the opportunity to assess their intercultural, program-specific and professional competencies during their work terms.

10 CORE COMPETENCIES

Co-op and Career's 10 core competencies are closely aligned with the University's 10 primary Learning Outcomes:

CORE COMPETENCIES	ALIGNMENT WITH UVIC LEARNING OUTCOMES
1 PERSONAL MANAGEMENT	Ethical and professional reasoning and action / Intercultural knowledge and sensitivity
2 COMMUNICATION	Effective written, visual and oral communication / Intercultural knowledge and sensitivity
3 MANAGING INFORMATION	Critical evaluation of qualitative and quantitative information / Critical management of Information, including in digital environments / Numerical literacy
4 RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS	Critical, innovative and creative thinking / Critical evaluation of qualitative and quantitative information / Inquiry, analysis and problem solving
5 PROJECT AND TASK MANAGEMENT	Inquiry, analysis and problem solving / Critical, innovative and creative thinking / Critical management of information, including in digital environments / Ethical and professional reasoning and action
6 TEAMWORK	Collaboration and the ability to work in teams / Ethical and professional reasoning and action / Intercultural knowledge and sensitivity
7 COMMITMENT TO QUALITY	Ethical and professional reasoning and action
8 PROFESSIONAL BEHAVIOUR	Ethical and professional reasoning and action / Informed civic engagement and understanding (from local to global)
9 SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY	Informed civic engagement and understanding (from local to global) / Ethical and professional reasoning and action / Intercultural knowledge and sensitivity
10 CONTINUOUS LEARNING	Life-long learning

Co-op students' ability to demonstrate the development of the 10 core competencies in workplace settings, and employers' third party validation of these students' skills, speaks to the impact and quality of UVic programs, as well as to employability outcomes.

FOUR INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCIES

One of UVic's Learning Outcomes does not correlate with Co-op and Career's core competencies, but aligns directly with the unit's set of **intercultural competencies**. UVic identifies Intercultural Knowledge and Sensitivity as a key Learning Outcome, while Co-op and Career divides this into:

- + Intercultural motivation
- + Intercultural knowledge
- + Strategic thinking
- + Appropriate behaviour

UVic strives to develop global-ready graduates who can contribute to local, national and international communities. International co-op work terms, as well as work terms in culturally diverse workplaces here in Canada, help students become strong global citizens.

WHAT MAKES UP A COMPETENCY?

A competency is made up of the following three elements: skill, knowledge and attribute.

What's the difference between skills, knowledge and attributes?

A skill is about doing something well – your ability to choose and perform the right technique at the right time. It's usually developed through training and practice. For example, you could become a skilled writer by practicing writing in a particular style. You can become skilled at being safe in the workplace by practicing techniques during classroom exercises or labs.

Knowledge is the information that you know, including theories, facts and procedures, and the ability to apply this information in different situations. For example, you could have knowledge about different communication styles. You may know the key steps to plan a program or project and be well versed in strategies for evaluating success. Putting these together takes knowledge.

An attribute is an inherent characteristic or quality and is often expressed through what you think, do and feel. For example, you could be known for staying positive and calm in challenging situations. You may also bring a 'can-do' attitude to your work - able to try new things, ask for new assignments and demonstrate initiative.

Together, these three elements make up a competency.

- + For example, you could develop competency regarding communication by practicing your writing and listening skills, acquiring knowledge about different communication styles and learning techniques that help you keep calm under pressure.
- + Or you might develop competency around workplace safety by taking a natural attribute like attention to detail, and using it to practice safe work techniques (skill development) and then researching new and different methods (gaining knowledge) that can be implemented to increase safety.

Competencies are described in ways that are:

- + Observable
- + Measurable
- + Linked to the workplace, academic environment and other life experiences
- + Transferable
- + Based on performance

WHERE TO DEVELOP COMPETENCIES

Anywhere! Developing competencies isn't limited to the workplace. You can develop and practice your competencies through many different types of experiences, including:

- **Formal education (university or college courses)**
 - **Work experience (paid employment, contracts, volunteer work, co-op work terms, internships and more)**
 - **Training courses (skill development workshops, workplace seminars, certification courses and more)**
 - **Life experiences (travel, recreational activities, interests, hobbies, community involvement, family commitments etc.)**
-

Try these strategies for developing competencies:

- + **Develop your competence in personal management by making a schedule of when your academic assignments are due and identifying strategies to complete them well and on time**
- + **Your volunteer work can help you develop your social responsibility**
- + **A group assignment that's due next week is the perfect chance to practice teamwork by contribution to the overall team outcome**

By applying your competencies in different situations, you'll learn faster and understand yourself even more. Plus, you'll wow employers and others with examples of how you've applied your competencies in diverse scenarios.

HOW TO EXPRESS YOUR COMPETENCIES

Taking time to analyze the competencies you've developed through your experiences (work, education, volunteer and personal pursuits) will help you understand what you have learned, identify gaps in your competency development and plan your next steps. Being able to clearly express your competencies will help you express yourself to others.

Complete the **COMPETENCY ASSESSMENT WORKSHEET** by following these 5 steps:

1. Identify an experience

Choose one experience at a time to work on. You may not want to complete a worksheet for every experience. Instead, pick experiences that have allowed you to develop your competencies. Complete the top of the worksheet with relevant information about the experience.

2. Identify relevant competencies

Think about what you've learned from your experience. Do a quick assessment of the competencies you most strongly developed and demonstrated through this experience. Choose three or more of the 10 core competencies and consider including two or more program-specific, professional or international competencies.

3. Write competency statements

Write a set of statements that describe the competencies you've developed and demonstrated through this experience. Remember that a competency relates to your skills, knowledge and attributes. Competency statements are best expressed in terms of visible behaviours and often begin with an action verb (see the ACTION VERB LIST). Don't be vague—statements like "I'm experienced in sales", "I wrote reports", "I provided customer service", or "I was responsible for handling complaints" could be used by anyone. Instead, give specific examples and give context for your statements.

Here are some sample competency statements:

Communication

Listened effectively to an average of 40 technical support customers a day to better understand their needs and successfully implement solutions.

Research and Analysis

Synthesized findings from 12 research studies on organic blueberry farming to identify best agricultural practices and prepare information sheet distributed to berry farmers in British Columbia.

Project and Task Management

Used customized project management software to coordinate the recruitment and training of 32 new employees over a six-month period.

Teamwork

Collaborated effectively on a cross-functional team of five individuals in the daily operation of a small, independent insurance agency.

Customer Service

Built customer relationships and satisfaction through acquiring strong paint product knowledge, having an interest in the proposed use for the products and providing helpful tips and recommendations.

4. Reflect on your learning

Review your competency statements and think about what you've learned. Which competencies did you develop the most? Where are the gaps in your competency development? Which competencies do you feel most confident and motivated to use? Which are you most interested in developing further? What other thoughts do you have about this experience?

5. Communicate your competencies to others

Use your competency statements as you develop content for your résumés and cover letters. Also use them as 'briefing notes' to help you prepare for interviews, informational meetings, performance reviews and other conversations with people in your professional network.

COMPETENCY ASSESSMENT WORKSHEET

Refer to the competency descriptions found in the core competencies, program-specific, professional and cross-cultural competencies sections at uvic.ca/coopandcareer/buildskills and then use this worksheet to assess yourself.

Some of us tend to be overly generous or overly critical when rating ourselves. Ask someone who knows you well to review your self-assessment. This may help you get a clearer picture of your current competency level.

Competency name:

LEVEL	Exemplary	Accomplished	Developing	Beginning	No demonstrated achievement
YOUR RATING:					

Answer the following questions related to your competency development:

Where and how have your experiences demonstrated competence?

Why have you chosen your competency rating?

What are your competency gaps?

How will you address these gaps in the future?

HOW TO ASSESS YOUR COMPETENCIES

You can assess your competencies before, during and after your work, school and life experiences to:

- Document your experience
- Assess your proficiencies
- Describe your competencies

Want a second opinion? Ask a Co-op and Career staff member or a workplace supervisor to help you evaluate your progress.

How to complete the competency assessment

Read the following instructions and review the sample on page two. Next, complete the competency assessment worksheet.

1. Consider some of the work, school and life experiences you've had to date. Think about the competencies you developed through these experiences.
2. Review the definition and behavioural examples of the competency you'd like to assess. You can find definitions of the **core competencies, program-specific competencies, cross-cultural competencies and professional competencies** at www.uvic.ca/coopandcareer/competencykit.
3. Complete the competency assessment worksheet to assess your competency development. Use the following scale to rate your level of achievement as it occurs in the workplace, classroom or daily life, then explain your evaluation in the space provided:
 - + No demonstrated achievement: You are aware of information, ideas and situations related to this competency but have not yet had an opportunity to practice it.
 - + Beginning: You've just started to find opportunities to work on this competency. You make initial assessments of what is expected of your role. Your understanding of the impact of your actions is limited. Your actions meet some performance expectations but you know that you could improve.
 - + Developing: You've demonstrated this competency and think about how to develop it further. You engage in conversations with others about how you can best contribute and how this competency is important. Your actions usually meet the expectations of yourself and others. You look for opportunities to apply this competency in other areas of your life.
 - + Accomplishing: You've reached your overall goals and often think about opportunities to use and practice this competency. You consistently meet the expectations of yourself and others. You consider your learning and appreciate the significance of this competency in relationship to your experiences. You demonstrate high quality work that has a positive impact.
 - + Exemplary: You have an overall mastery of this competency. You understand and demonstrate it in all areas of your life. You are considered to be a role model by others and regularly exceed expectations. Your work is of a very high or exceptional quality and has significant impact.
4. Once you've chosen a rating, include two to three examples of how and when you've demonstrated competence.

SAMPLE ASSESSMENT

Competency name: Personal management

- + Acts with honesty, integrity and personal ethics
- + Recognizes personal efforts and the efforts of others
- + Acknowledges diverse opinions and accepts differences
- + Manages personal health and emotional well being
- + Takes responsibility and demonstrates resiliency and accountability for self
- + Plans and manages personal time, finances and other resources
- + Assesses, weighs and manages risk in the face of uncertainty
- + Recognizes strengths and areas for improvement
- + Adapts to new environments and cultures
- + Recognizes impact on others and demonstrates adaptability to and management of change.

LEVEL	Exemplary	Accomplished	Developing	Beginning	No demonstrated achievement
YOUR RATING:				X	

Answer the following questions related to your competency development:

Where and how have your experiences demonstrated competence?

- + I make an effort to complement other staff members when they do something helpful or positive in the coffee shop where I work.
- + I've drafted a study plan for next semester to better organize my study time and use strategies to keep on target.
- + I've made a personal commitment to complete this assessment to better understand the competencies I need to work on for my future success.
- + I chose an elective course that exposed me to new ideas.

Why have you chosen your competency rating?

- + I'm not always consistent in acknowledging good work on the part of co-workers and don't always respond in a receptive manner when they voice their opinions/perspectives.
- + I've made study plans before but don't always follow them or hold myself accountable.
- + I haven't completed a plan to develop the competencies I need to work on.
- + I recognize that I could identify new opportunities to develop this competency.

What are your competency gaps?

- + I have to work hard to keep my personal life from impacting my daily work.
- + I don't always take the time to listen to my co-workers when problem solving.
- + I am reluctant to try new things and/or ask for help.

How will you address these gaps in the future?

- + I will join a sports team to learn about a new sport and to develop leadership skills.
- + I will develop a new strategy to help me separate my personal life from my daily work, by asking for feedback from friends and colleagues.
- + When my coworkers give me suggestions, I could work harder at listening and accept that they have different ways of doing things.
- + I can work at acknowledging the efforts of my younger siblings towards daily chores.

COMPETENCY STATEMENT WORKSHEET

Put together competency statements about a particular work or life experience (see HOW TO EXPRESS YOUR COMPETENCIES for instructions). Organize your experiences into separate categories, including work, education, training, volunteer experience, etc. Be original when you write your competency statements by choosing action verbs from the ACTION VERB LIST.

1. Identify an experience

Work experience type (circle one):

Work Education Training Volunteer Other

Your role: _____

Organization and location: _____

2. Identify relevant competencies

Check off three or more relevant competencies that you've strongly demonstrated and developed through this experience.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Personal Management	<input type="checkbox"/>	Teamwork
<input type="checkbox"/>	Communication	<input type="checkbox"/>	Commitment to Quality
<input type="checkbox"/>	Managing Information	<input type="checkbox"/>	Professional Behaviour
<input type="checkbox"/>	Research and Analysis	<input type="checkbox"/>	Social Responsibility
<input type="checkbox"/>	Project, Task and Organizational Skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	Continuous Learning

Identify two or more relevant program-specific, cross-cultural or professional competencies.

+ _____

+ _____

+ _____

+ _____

3. Write competency statements

Describe what you did, what you learned and what you accomplished (use action verbs):

+

+

+

+

+

4. Reflect on your learning

Review your competency statements and think about what you've learned. Which competencies did you develop the most? Where are the gaps in your competency development? Which competencies do you feel most confident and motivated to use? Which are you most interested in developing further? What other thoughts do you have about this experience?

+

+

+

+

+

ACTION VERB LIST

Use this list of action verbs, organized according to the 10 core competencies, to write strong competency statements. Note that some verbs appear under more than one competency and that this is not a complete list of all verbs you may want to use.

PERSONAL MANAGEMENT

Arranged	Defined	Listened	Prioritized	Reviewed
Assessed	Developed	Observed	Recommended	Strengthened
Attained	Interpreted	Participated	Resolved	Supported
Clarified	Influenced	Planned	Responded	Verified

COMMUNICATION

Adapted	Condensed	Directed	Informed	Motivated	Solicited
Addressed	Consulted	Discussed	Integrated	Negotiated	Specified
Advertised	Contacted	Drafted	Interpreted	Outlined	Spoke
Arbitrated	Conveyed	Edited	Interviewed	Persuaded	Summarized
Articulated	Convinced	Elicited	Lectured	Presented	Synthesized
Authored	Counselled	Encouraged	Listened	Proposed	Taught
Clarified	Corresponded	Explained	Marketed	Publicized	Trained
Collaborated	Created	Expressed	Mediated	Reported	Tutored
Communicated	Customized	Formulated	Moderated	Responded	Translated
Composed	Developed	Guided	Modified	Revised	Wrote

MANAGING INFORMATION

Administered	Assessed	Computed	Forecasted	Netted	Qualified
Adjusted	Audited	Conserved	Input	Organized	Reconciled
Allocated	Balanced	Corrected	Integrated	Planned	Reduced
Analyzed	Budgeted	Determined	Managed	Prepared	Researched
Appraised	Calculated	Developed	Marketed	Programmed	Retrieved
Assembled	Compiled	Estimated	Measured	Projected	Utilized

RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS

Adapted	Conducted	Evaluated	Inspected	Organized	Studied
Analyzed	Critiqued	Examined	Integrated	Recorded	Summarized
Applied	Detected	Experimented	Interviewed	Researched	Surveyed
Collected	Debugged	Explored	Invented	Reviewed	Tested
Compared	Determined	Extracted	Investigated	Revised	
Conceptualized	Diagnosed	Formulated	Measured	Searched	
Condensed	Established	Gathered	Modified	Solved	

COMMITMENT TO QUALITY

Achieved	Consolidated	Developed	Evaluated	Integrated	Remodeled
Administered	Contracted	Directed	Generated	Managed	Repaired
Analyzed	Controlled	Eliminated	Improved	Merged	Restored
Approved	Converted	Emphasized	Incorporated	Modeled	Resolved
Assigned	Created	Enforced	Increased	Motivated	Solved
Attained	Customized	Enhanced	Initiated	Organized	
Authorized	Delegated	Established	Inspected	Overhauled	
Conceptualized	Designed	Executed	Instituted	Oversaw	

PROJECT AND TASK MANAGEMENT

Adapted	Conceptualized	Generated	Monitored	Reorganized	Revised
Applied	Coordinated	Guided	Obtained	Restored	Revitalized
Approved	Corresponded	Incorporated	Operated	Reviewed	Solved
Arranged	Customized	Initiated	Organized	Scheduled	Standardized
Assembled	Designed	Inspected	Prepared	Selected	Updated
Built	Directed	Instituted	Processed	Shaped	Validated
Chaired	Distributed	Integrated	Planned	Streamlined	Verified
Classified	Established	Led	Prioritized	Strengthened	
Coded	Evaluated	Managed	Produced	Supervised	
Compiled	Executed	Maintained	Programmed	Remodeled	
Computed	Facilitated	Modified	Recommended	Reviewed	

TEAMWORK

Adapted	Collaborated	Ensured	Incorporated	Participated
Arranged	Contributed	Expedited	Interacted	Recruited
Assessed	Cooperated	Facilitated	Involved	Revitalized
Assisted	Created	Helped	Joined	Supported

PROFESSIONAL BEHAVIOUR

Adapted	Clarified	Demonstrated	Familiarized	Organized	Resolved
Advocated	Coached	Diagnosed	Furthered	Prevented	Responded
Aided	Collaborated	Educated	Guided	Promoted	Secured
Answered	Conducted	Encouraged	Helped	Provided	Supplied
Arranged	Contributed	Ensured	Intervened	Referred	Supervised
Assessed	Cooperated	Established	Led	Rehabilitated	Supported
Assisted	Coordinated	Expedited	Modeled	Reinforced	Volunteered
Chaired	Counselled	Facilitated	Motivated	Represented	

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Adapted	Collaborated	Ensured	Modeled	Referred	Secured
Advocated	Cooperated	Established	Motivated	Rehabilitated	Supplied
Aided	Counselled	Facilitated	Organized	Reinforced	Supervised
Assessed	Demonstrated	Furthered	Prevented	Represented	Supported
Clarified	Educated	Guided	Promoted	Resolved	Volunteered
Coached	Encouraged	Intervened	Provided	Responded	

CONTINUOUS LEARNING

Adapted	Demonstrated	Learned	Responded	Updated
Assessed	Developed	Pursued	Sought	
Corrected	Identified	Progressed	Studied	