Humanities and Social Science majors please apply

Focusing on liberal arts
helps students get jobs
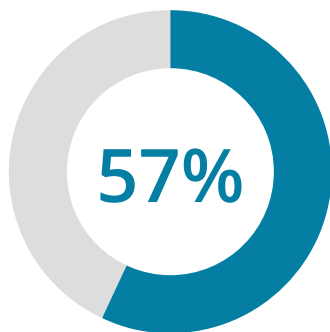
Pearson

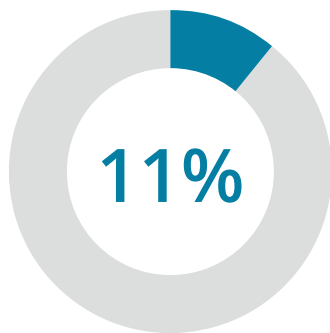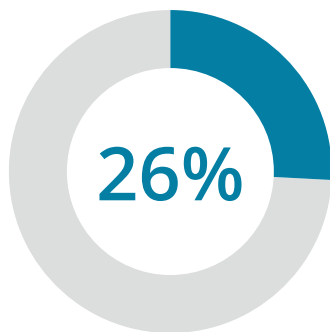# Contents

Introduction

In recent years, higher education has focused heavily on teaching technical skills and the STEM disciplines. However, underplaying the importance of the humanities and social sciences fields may be harming students who are seeking professional employment after graduation.

57%

of business leaders say professional skills (also known as soft skills) are more important than technical (hard) skills when interviewing and hiring a new employee,[1] and many are finding recent graduates underqualified in those critical areas.

11%

In fact, only 11% of **employers believe that colleges are adequately preparing their students** to begin a career path.[2]

26%

And it's not just employers that feel this way; only 26% of working U.S. **college graduates strongly agree that their education is relevant to their work** and day-to-day life.[3]

Students learn in-demand professional skills specifically when completing coursework in the humanities and social sciences. Within these disciplines (which can include sociology, philosophy, psychology, government, English, communication, and more), students are expected to write, synthesize ideas, compare and contrast different systems, understand data, and engage in a depth of learning that will benefit both students — and ultimately — employers.
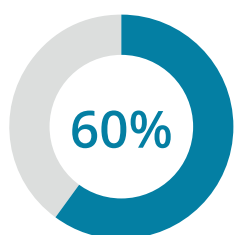
Colleges and universities can help to nurture these soft skills and enable their students to become valued, highly capable members in virtually any vocation by encouraging enrollment in courses that fall under the humanities and social sciences umbrellas. Promoted by these classes, the ability to interact in high-pressure social settings, collaborate, and bring an attitude of growth to the workplace can truly set applicants apart from the pack. Within this ebook, you'll find an abundance of information linking post-graduation success to the fostering of professional skills and discover tools you can use to support your students in their post-education professional journey.
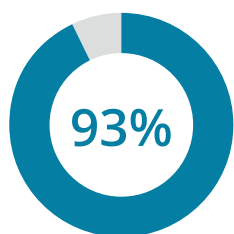
Thinking critically and solving problems

Critical thinking has always been an important skill to have in the workplace. In recent years, the instant availability of endless information has changed the way college students learn. So the ability to dissect, analyze, and apply such information has become more important than ever.
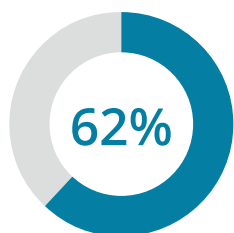
In a forward-thinking survey conducted by the Society for Human Resource Management, **49% of HR professionals surveyed indicated that critical thinking would become more important for entry-level job candidates to possess in the next three to five years.**[4] Many similar surveys have produced similar results pertaining to critical thinking and related skills.

60% of recruiting professionals **identified problem-solving as the most important** "soft" or professional skill for a job candidate to have.[5]

93% of employers reported that the ability to think critically and solve complex problems is **more important than a candidate's undergraduate major.**[6]

62% of managers reported that critical-thinking/problem-solving skills are the **most commonly lacking professional skill in new hires.**[7]

Stephanie Scorziello

USA Today

As the director of national ad ops at *USA Today*, Stephanie Scorziello coaches many new graduates through the ins and outs of a complicated business. The employees who have developed solid critical-thinking skills in college are able to adjust and grow within the company much faster than those who have not.

> If you're coming into any organization, it's absolutely critical that you do think critically. Unless you're super specialized, you're probably not coming in with a lot of hard skill value. So your value is going to come from how you're going to benefit the organization in more of a soft skill way. It's super super important to ask questions, think critically, and collaborate. You can't be afraid. You have to be willing to ask questions and work with people.

Jonathan Raymond

Refound

Jonathan Raymond, owner and CEO of leadership training company Refound, also screens potential employees for critical-thinking skills. He needs to make sure that, no matter how excellent their technical skills may be, they can think quickly and make authoritative decisions to solve problems.

> I ask them questions that don't have easy answers. Maybe float a scenario: here's something that happened in our company the other day, how would you have handled it? How would you have approached this situation? These days so much of what you need to be looking for goes beyond their technical skills. They might be good at marketing, they might be a good sales person, but how are they going to work with others?... How do they approach challenges?

Many employers feel that the call for humanities and social science majors with critical-thinking skills will only increase in the upcoming years. The world is seeing an ever-rising increase in automated jobs that are being performed by artificial intelligence, slowly eliminating the necessity for human work in some STEM-centric, technically focused areas. But the ability to put data into a human context, to make real-world sense of results, and use it to solve problems can only be performed by people, specifically those with the critical-thinking skills they developed within their degree.

Communication is key

Communication breakdown is a commonly discussed frustration in the professional world. The most frequently cited cause of communication barriers is directly linked to the introduction of "digital native" employees into the workforce. College students and recent graduates have vastly different communication styles than employees of previous generations, who will serve as their future supervisors, managers, and bosses.

Preferred communication tool for students[8]

- Texting: **35%**
- In-person: **32%**
- Social media: **16%**
- Video-chatting: **10%**
- Talking on the phone: **5%**
- Other: **2%**

Preferred communication tool for professionals[9]

- Email: **86%**
- Other: **14%**

Most companies still rely on email as their primary form of internal communication. Texting and emailing are seemingly similar modes of contact; however, the permeation of emojis and shorthand now used in casual text messaging doesn't always translate well to a professional setting. This may be a difficult communication divide for new graduates to breach.

Antonio Cerna

Brooklyn Botanic Garden

Antonio Cerna, marketing director for the Brooklyn Botanic Garden, has spent much of his tenure working closely with interns and new graduates. While he has noted their impressive capacity for communicating via social media outlets, he has also found one common communication deficiency.
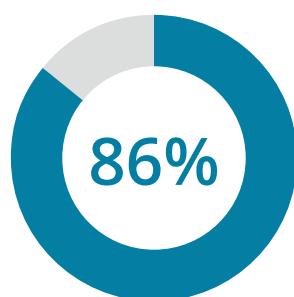
A lot of young graduates that I've interacted with are very proficient in the basic things, which are Word, Excel, and Powerpoint. The area where I felt there was a lot that needed to be learned is email. Corporations and organizations and businesses use email as the number one communication tool, and it also gets used as a project management tool...

I would get emails from young people that didn't have a subject line or were just an attachment. College kids just don't use email. They text each other, they text professors, or they message them on social media apps, so I think that piece of the puzzle is really fascinating, and I felt like that was one area that I was dedicating more time to teaching than I really expected to.

The ability to communicate clearly in person is also an important skill that colleges and universities can help their students develop. **84% of professionals prefer in-person meetings over digital communication, and 85% of those say that this helps them to build stronger, more meaningful relationships.**[10] When students are engaged in humanities and social science courses that encourage them to speak publicly or participate in in-class discussion, the face-to-face communication experience they gain will help them later to enrich these in-person meetings that employers value.

A failure to communicate effectively and efficiently extends far beyond personal preferences. This is perhaps why employers seek out candidates who can communicate in a timely manner and can articulate their thoughts clearly.
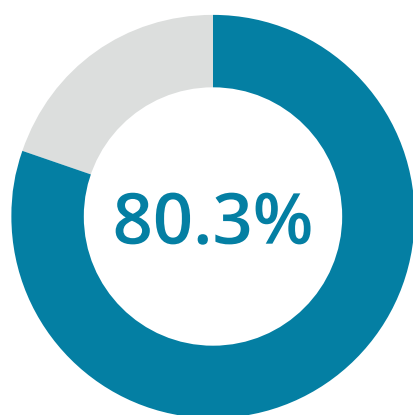
86% of senior executives, managers, and junior staff at US companies reported **experiencing communication breakdowns** that led to losses in productivity and missed project deadlines.
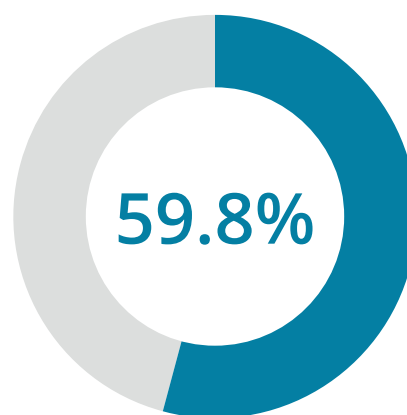
If college students are supported throughout their education by tools that teach them how to communicate successfully across generational differences, they can reduce this statistic and better support their employers.

Writing skills are a necessity

In order for communication skills to be considered complete, job applicants often need to possess a strong command of written language as well. Writing skills are consistently in high demand across all kinds of jobs, including occupations that are not typically thought of as requiring literary talent.
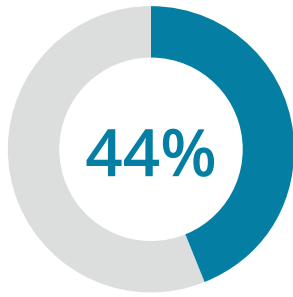
80.3%

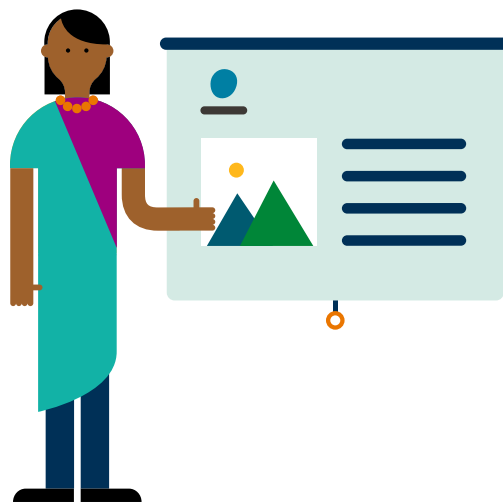of employers are looking for writing skills.

59.8%

of employers are looking for technical skills.[12]

A study by Burning Glass Technologies found that **writing is the third-most-requested professional skill** across 25 million job postings in a variety of fields. Even STEM-centric jobs required basic writing skills: for example, it's the second-most-requested professional skill for engineering and IT occupations.[13] However, many employers find graduates lacking in this area.

44% of managers feel **writing proficiency is the skill most lacking** among recent college graduates.[14]

Providing students with more writing opportunities and constructive guidance within their humanities and social science classes can prepare them to become valued, articulate team members and leaders. Virtually every humanities and social science course requires students to engage in frequent writing assignments that also require a high degree of critical thinking to complete. The combination of these elements will benefit graduates as they enter the workforce and are faced with writing tasks, such as writing performance goals, composing marketing plans, or proposing changes to current processes, that necessitate professional-level writing skills.

The facts are clear. The demand for humanities and social science majors, or students who took many elective courses within these majors, is great within the workplace. The opportunities are also surprisingly lucrative. By the time liberal arts majors with advanced degrees reach the "peak earning ages," 56–60, they earn on average $2,000 more per year than those with advanced professional degrees in law or medicine.[16]

Employers want college graduates with already developed professional skills, and they won't necessarily take chances on candidates who cannot exhibit an aptitude for critical thinking, communication, and writing skills.

Bridging the skill gap can occur long before students graduate and begin their job search. Institutions can invest in their graduates' futures by encouraging them to learn and demonstrate these vital professional skills in an academic setting prior to graduation.

Sources:

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Learn more about how Revel can support your students.

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