

Module 1

Developing 21st Century Skills

Description: 21st century, student-centered learning differs from traditional, teacher-centered learning in that the two have different approaches to content, instruction, classroom environment, assessment, and technology. The objective of this module is to have you identify key 21st century skills, examine the trend toward creating a 21st century classroom environment, and explore the differences between teacher-centered and student-centered approaches.

Each module begins with a preview.

Exercise 1: Identifying Essential Skills

Step 1

When students graduate from your school system, what is essential for them to know and to be able to do to be successful in the 21st century workplace? Working in a small group, discuss your answers, and record them on the lines that follow.

The facilitator will assign groups with four or five participants. In each group, members should assume the roles of facilitator, recorder, participants, and presenter.

Step 2

Share your list of essential skills with the large group as directed.

Presenters from each group will share a brief list of essential skills. Presenters should listen carefully so that no skills are repeated.

Developing 21st Century Skills

Silently read the remaining content in this step.

In 21st century workplaces, workers

- analyze, transform, and create information
- collaborate with coworkers to solve problems and make decisions
- perform a variety of complex tasks using sophisticated technology

In 21st century homes, families

- are entertained by watching, creating, and participating in a variety of media
- make consumer decisions by looking for information on the Internet
- stay in touch with friends and family members through various technologies

In 21st century communities, citizens

- use the Internet to stay informed about local, national, and global issues
- communicate and persuade others about their opinions using different technologies
- comply with government regulations without leaving their homes

As computers take over routine tasks in the workplace, a far greater proportion of employees are engaged in tasks that require them to be flexible and creative problem solvers. Home life is also more complex in the 21st century as emerging technologies provide almost infinite possibilities for entertainment, leisure-time activities, and participation in community activities.

21st century schools must prepare students to work in today's workplaces, and teachers must stay current with the ways students and families use technology in their daily lives.

In 21st century schools, students

- work on complex, challenging tasks that require them to think deeply about subject matter and manage their own learning
- collaborate with peers, teachers, and experts on meaningful tasks using higher-order thinking
- use technology to make decisions, solve problems, and create new ideas

Developing 21st Century Skills

To help students achieve levels of full participation in their communities, teachers must focus on the 21st century skills¹, listed below, that will help students adapt to changing society and technology:

- **Accountability and Adaptability**—Exercising personal responsibility and flexibility in personal, workplace, and community contexts; setting and meeting high standards and goals for one’s self and others; tolerating ambiguity
- **Communication Skills**—Understanding, managing, and creating effective oral, written, and multimedia communication in a variety of forms and contexts
- **Creativity and Intellectual Curiosity**—Developing, implementing, and communicating new ideas to others; staying open and responsive to new and diverse perspectives
- **Critical Thinking and Systems Thinking**—Exercising sound reasoning in understanding and making complex choices; understanding the interconnections among systems
- **Information and Media Literacy Skills**—Analyzing, accessing, managing, integrating, evaluating, and creating information in a variety of forms and media
- **Interpersonal and Collaborative Skills**—Demonstrating teamwork and leadership; adapting to varied roles and responsibilities; working productively with others; exercising empathy; respecting diverse perspectives
- **Problem Identification, Formulation, and Solution**—Ability to frame, analyze, and solve problems
- **Self-Direction**—Monitoring one’s own understanding and learning needs; locating appropriate resources; transferring learning from one domain to another
- **Social Responsibility**—Acting responsibly with the interests of the larger community in mind; demonstrating ethical behavior in personal, workplace, and community contexts

In summary, as 21st century work-places, homes, and citizens change, schools too much change. Teachers must help students develop the skills needed for success in the 21st century.

¹Source: Partnership for 21st Century Skills (www.21stcenturyskills.org). Used with permission.