



Answering your questions: Skill Connect Assessments

1. How will Skill Connect Assessments be used?

Skill Connect Assessments can be used in many ways. We expect assessments to be used in schools for pre & end-of-year testing.

Skill Connect Assessments help candidates prove their technical skills and knowledge to potential employers. They also help local instructors and programs demonstrate the value of their programs, while supporting local industries with a pool of potential employees that have been tested by a system they can trust. They may be used to identify individual educational needs as pre-assessments or to identify proficiency levels at the completion of a program of study.

2. Who are Skill Connect Assessments designed for?

Skill Connect Assessments are designed for career and technical education programs at the secondary and post-secondary levels, in addition to entities conducting workforce development and training efforts to meet assessment and development needs for technical and employability skill attainment.

3. Where do the industry standards come from?

Industry standards are developed by SkillsUSA national competition technical committees. These committees represent diverse, leading organizations that serve their respective industries. Subject matter experts lead technical committees that include industry standards developed by businesses, trade and professional associations and certifying agencies.

The technical committees have been intimately involved in the identification of standards and competencies and the development of questions to appropriately measure technical skills and knowledge.

|

4. I heard these assessments are just based on the contests. How can they really be reliable?

The SkillsUSA Championships: Technical Standards were used as a starting point for the assessments, however, Skill Connect Assessments align with the industry standards and competencies as defined by industry. Industry subject matter experts have helped guide the process, and the standards and competencies have been tested with programs nationwide to assure their reliability. We have worked to map the assessment standards to math and science standards (STEM) that can demonstrate classroom learning achievement.

All Skill Connect Assessments undergo a strict field testing process, managed by a team of psychometricians from Old Dominion University's Occupational and Technical Studies Department. We would be glad to provide more detailed information about the rigor included in the development of each assessment.

- Validation of the Technical Standard
- Construction of the Assessment Matrix
- Validation of the Assessment Matrix
- Assessment Item Development
- Validation of Assessment Items
- Field Testing (Pilot)
- Analysis of Field Test Results
- Deployment

5. How are you ensuring that the Skill Connect Assessments are educationally sound?

The SkillsUSA team has worked with education experts and industry SMEs throughout the development process. Industry-based SMEs are validating competencies, and SkillsUSA is consulting with a psychometrician who will guide item validation and assessment field testing efforts. The process will comply with the Standards for Educational & Psychological Testing published by the American Psychological Association and the National Council of Measurement in Education (1999).

For more information, please review our framework paper available online at www.workforcereadysystem.org/process.

6. What technical areas are served by Skill Connect Assessments?

SkillsUSA is currently developing 46 technical and one employability assessment. The first eight assessments were available March 16, 2009.

- Advertising Design
- Automated Manufacturing Technology (AMT)
- Computer Maintenance Technology
- Cosmetology
- Employability
- Internetworking
- Photography
- Welding

Co-branded with ASE

- Automotive Refinishing
- Automotive Service Technology
- Collision Repair Technology

Release of assessments are dependent upon on volunteer assistance of technical committees and field testing. For a complete up-to-date list of available assessments visit: http://www.workforcereadysystem.org/technical_areas.shtml

7. How do Skill Connect Assessments address varying learning styles?

Each Skill Connect Assessment includes approximately 50 items in a variety of question types. The Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and the premier capabilities of the LearnMate program allow for a variety of question types, ensuring that assessments appeal to auditory, visual and kinesthetic learners. Also, every question will be presented with both text and audio

8. What competencies does each assessment address?

The competencies addressed in each assessment are available through a corresponding blueprint. You can access the blueprints for the assessments that are available for purchase by clicking on the name of the assessment on our website: http://www.workforcereadysystem.org/technical_areas.shtml. Please contact us at info@workforcereadysystem.org to access blueprints for assessments in field-testing.

9. How do soft skills fit into the Work Force Ready System?

Industry leaders who developed the technical assessments indicated that employability skills are important, so some employability questions will

appear in our technical assessments. Furthermore, one Skill Connect Assessment is solely devoted to testing employability skills.

10. How can an online testing system replicate a hands-on assessment?

The assessment questions will test students not only on theoretical knowledge, but also on practical know-how. The goal is to develop assessments in which a student who could not perform the task with his own two hands could not achieve a passing score. SkillsUSA maximizes the use of media to allow us to more closely replicate real-world situations, coming much closer to assessing actual skill than a text-only, paper-based assessment.

11. How frequently will Skill Connect Assessments be updated?

Skill Connect Assessments will be reviewed annually, and updated based on recommendations from the subject matter experts on the SkillsUSA Championships technical committees and feedback from instructors provided through the Work Force Ready System.

12. What is LearnMate, and how does it fit into the System?

LearnMate is a proven, state-of-the-art assessment tool packaged with a robust management system. Developed by intelitek, it is easy-to-use and allows real-time assessment and reporting capability, allowing for immediate grading and feedback – for students, instructors and administrators.

The variety of question types (drag-and-drop, simulations, etc.) possible on the LearnMate system ensure assessments that are accurate for all types of learners. Content and assessments are created and delivered online, allowing access from anywhere, and LearnMate allows mapping and tracking of competency/skills. Certificates can also be easily generated upon successful completion.

For a demonstration of how the assessments work visit us online at www.workforcereadysystem.org and click on the “Demo Our Skill Connect Assessments” window. To access LearnMate, click on “Get Assessments.”

13. What makes the Skill Connect Assessments different from other available assessments?

Interactive – The use of animations and interactivity, the variety of question types and the use of learning principles will allow the Skill Connect Assessments to assess a broader range of competencies and to assess them more fully than text-only multiple choice items typically found in end-of-program skill-based assessments.

Industry-driven – Assessments developed by industry experts evaluate standards and criterion on an annual basis, ensuring the assessments are relevant to current industry needs.

Responsive – The system provides instant results to candidates, allowing students and instructors to target areas of improvement. Also, through the Skill Connect Excelerator, instructors will be able to provide feedback about the assessments.

Diverse – Skill Connect Assessments will be available in 46 unique technical areas and evaluate technical, academic and employability competencies

Affordable – Because SkillsUSA is committed to serving career and technical education, assessments were designed with your budgets in mind.

14. What will Skill Connect Assessments cost?

The Skill Connect Assessments were designed to be affordable. A discount is extended to SkillsUSA members, however, anyone may take an assessment. Students may certainly test in multiple areas. Students may sign up for SkillsUSA membership at any time during the year to take advantage of the discounted pricing. For our pricing options visit: <http://www.workforcereadysystem.org/pricing.shtml>

15. Should a student fail the first time, is retesting an option?

Yes, a student may choose to retake any assessment. Every test will be unique, drawing from a robust bank of test questions. The system not only outlines the competencies tested, but how a student performs on each competency. The price of a retest is the same as the original assessment.

16. Could businesses sponsor testing for needy schools?

Absolutely. In fact, Skill Connect Assessments were created through a grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation called Champions for Change. The other part of that grant is to seed SkillsUSA chapters in vulnerable communities

and needy schools. These programs will often serve as pilot sites for the assessments.

17. Can instructors view the assessments prior to purchasing them for students?

Yes, we are offering instructors a complimentary preview of 1 assessment per course for a limited time. You may sign-up for your complimentary preview at:
<http://www.skillsusa-register.org/WorkForceReady/WF1SelectSchool.aspx>.

18. What is the baseline for passing the assessments? Does it vary by assessment?

The baseline for passing assessments is determined by the technical committee of industry representatives for each assessment area. A score between 70 and 80 is a common baseline for most assessments. Each assessment may have a different baseline for passing, as determined by the respective industry representatives.

19. What if I'm already using an industry credentialing program?

Our Skill Connect Assessments serve as an onramp for these programs, such as CompTIA and AWS. Just think of it like the PSAT, preparing you for what's ahead as a authentic guage of your strengths and areas improvement.

Candidates receiving the cut score or higher of any Skill Connect Assessment will receive a certificate of completion. This certificate will identify the competencies tested. It is not, however, intended to override or serve as an equivalent to industry certifications available today.

20. How would I explain the value of the Skill Connect Assessment to my administrator who will only fund assessments that lead to a certification?

Many (at least 1/3) of technical areas served by these assessments do not have any existing certification in place. As accountability becomes more important, especially due to Perkins legislation, a reliable measure of technical attainment is valuable for your students and your program.

21. Do Skill Connect Assessments meet Perkins IV funding qualification for technical attainment accountability?

SkillsUSA has received significant anecdotal feedback from administrators, state and national leaders that the Skill Connect Assessment will meet Perkins IV funding qualification.

22. What are the computer requirements to support Skill Connect Assessments?

The following are the minimum required system specifications to run Skill Connect Assessments on an end user's computer:

- Operating system
- PC: Windows XP or Vista
- Macintosh: Mac OS X (Tiger or Leopard)
- Broadband Internet access (DSL/Cable/T1)
- 1 GHz processor
- 512 MB RAM
- Sound card (or onboard sound)
- Video card (or onboard video) capable of a minimum of 800x600 resolution with 24-bit color

(For optimum display, we recommend a Video card capable of 1024x768 resolution with 32 bit color, and that the system be configured to these settings.)

23. Do all of my students have to take the assessments at the same time?

No, as long as proctoring is provided at all times.

24. How do I become a proctor?

Register to become a proctor on our website at <http://www.skillsusa-register.org/WorkForceReady/WF3ProctorInfo.aspx>. Once you register you will receive an email with an attached agreement document.

25. Can a teacher be a proctor?

A school may elect to sign up several instructors as proctors and administer the assessment for each other's students as long as that person is not an

instructor in the area of study of the assessment being administered. A Proctor can be any professional within that school. **NOTE:** Only during field testing will SkillsUSA will allow the program instructor to proctor their own assessment.

26. How do I get assistance when something isn't working?

SkillsUSA will provide a troubleshooting guide. You will also be provided technical assistance contact information to reach out for help.

Testimonials from Field Testing

- “I like the idea of a national end of course assessment for CTE programs. It would be nice if CTE had a one-stop shopping place to go to that the state approved for end of course assessments. I like the national approach because they are endorsed by national groups like AWS.”
 - *John Wunch, St. Clair RESA, Michigan*
- “If this test was recognized by the VA dept of Ed, that would be great. The additional graphics of the test is very impressive when compared to other products.”
 - *Eddie Baker, Wise County Career-Technical School, VA*
- “The assessment process itself was excellent, the test was easy and intuitive to navigate. Well Done!”
 - *Greg Beachey, Elkhart Area Career Center , IN*