Preparing learners for the workplace:
Employability skills and written communication

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IT, AI and the workplace

'The Future of Jobs and Training', Pew Research Center 2017

Machines are eating humans' job talents. And it's not just about jobs that are repetitive and low-skill.

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Characteristics of the workplace

- Physical or digital space (WFH)
- Workplaces are usually social spaces
- Employees need to work together and co-operate
- Clear communication is critical
- Companies and organizations are more likely to be productive and effective if employees get on together well

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Workplace socialization: employees' view

Microsoft survey 2022 – 20,000 employees in 11 countries

76% of employees … would be motivated to go to in [to the office] if they could socialize with coworkers (83%) or rebuild team bonds (83%).

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Workplace skills: employers' view

Employer Skills Survey UK 2015 (amended 2018)

The most common [skill] deemed to be lacking among existing staff were people and personal skills relating to workload management and teamwork.

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Social skills

Soft skills

Interpersonal skills

Employability skills

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Employability skills

- Working collaboratively and getting on
- Personal skills associated with attitude and motivation
- Higher level, critical thinking skills
- Creativity and problem solving

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The Cambridge Employability Skills Framework

- Based on research into employer and employee needs
- Compatible with English language programmes for employees and learners in Higher Education
- Focuses on contexts that involve both speaking and writing

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The Cambridge Employability Skills Framework

COLLABORATION AND TEAMWORK

Employees and HE students develop skills for successful group work, the management of collaborative tasks and projects, and delivering group tasks effectively.

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The Cambridge Employability Skills Framework

COMMUNICATION

Employees and HE students learn to understand others better, present their views clearly and effectively, and adapt communication for different contexts.

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The Cambridge Employability Skills Framework

INNOVATION AND PROBLEM SOLVING

Employees and HE students develop a creative mindset, generate ideas, and solve problems effectively.

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CRITICAL THINKING AND DECISION MAKING

Employees and HE students learn to understand, analyse and evaluate information and arguments in order to make decisions.

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The Cambridge Employability Skills Framework

LEADERSHIP AND GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP

Employees and HE students demonstrate leadership skills, contribute to the success of an organisation, and encourage and support the organisations positive role in addressing global issues.

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The Cambridge Employability Skills Framework

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT

Employees and HE students develop organisational skills to manage time, tasks and information, and learn to manage their ongoing professional development.

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EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Employees and HE students develop self-awareness, learn to manage stressful situations and develop a positive attitude and work ethic, and demonstrate positive relationship skills.

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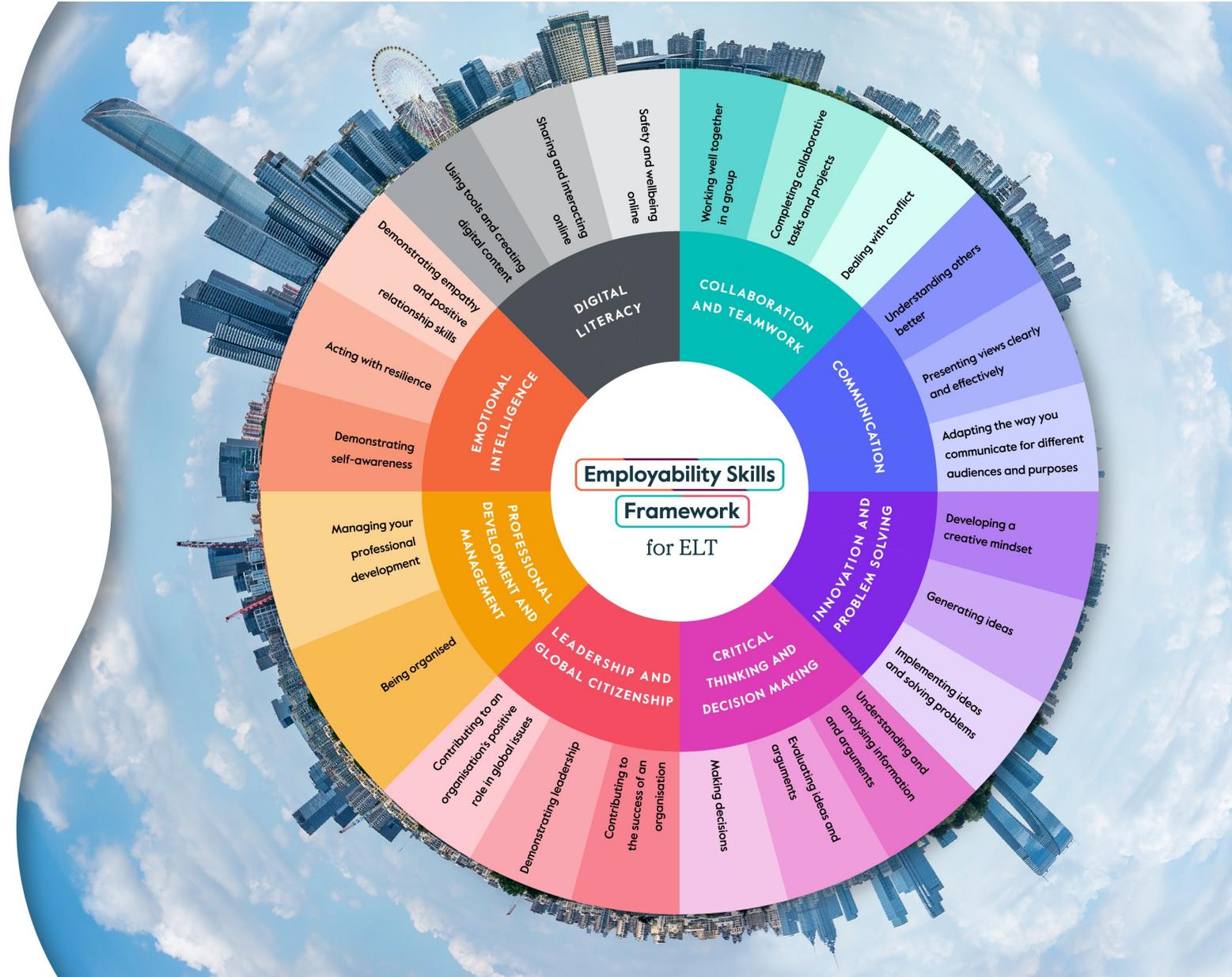# The Cambridge Employability Skills Framework

DIGITAL LITERACY

Employees and HE students learn to effectively use digital and online tools, follow safe online practices, and behave appropriately with others online.

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Employability Skills
Framework
for ELT

Employability Skills Framework for ELT

DIGITAL LITERACY
- Using tools and creating digital content
- Sharing and interacting online
- Safety and wellbeing online

COLLABORATION AND TEAMWORK
- Working well together in a group
- Completing collaborative tasks and projects
- Dealing with conflict

COMMUNICATION
- Understanding others better
- Presenting views clearly and effectively
- Adapting the way you communicate for different audiences and purposes

INNOVATION AND PROBLEM SOLVING
- Developing a creative mindset
- Generating ideas
- Implementing ideas and solving problems

CRITICAL THINKING AND DECISION MAKING
- Understanding and analysing information and arguments
- Evaluating ideas and arguments
- Making decisions

LEADERSHIP AND GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP
- Contributing to an organisation's positive role in global issues
- Demonstrating leadership
- Contributing to the success of an organisation

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT
- Managing your professional development
- Being organised

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE
- Demonstrating empathy and positive relationship skills
- Acting with resilience
- Demonstrating self-awareness

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COMMUNICATION

Presenting your views clearly and effectively

Structuring information in spoken and written texts clearly

Speaking with confidence and fluency

Writing clearly and convincingly

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Writing in the workplace

Increased focus on written communication in the workplace?

Teaching Business English Ellis & Johnson (1994) – passing reference to written texts and writing skills

Introducing Business English Nickerson & Planken (2016) – four chapters out of 12 focus on writing

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Writing in the workplace

Why might it have increased?

• Information technology and the advent of digital workspaces
• Way of managing time
• Increase in accountability – 'the paper trail'

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Writing in the workplace

The ways we write, the genres we create, the authorial identities we assume, the forms of our finished products and the ways we engage with readers have been transformed by new technologies.

(Hyland 2019, 137)

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The Cambridge Employability Skills Framework and writing skills

Structuring information in written texts clearly

- Genre awareness of workplace texts
- Ensuring texts are coherent and cohesive
- Organizing texts appropriately so they are clear

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The Cambridge Employability Skills Framework and writing skills

Writing clearly and convincingly

- Awareness of audience
- Adopting an appropriate register
- Adopting a suitable style
- Appropriate use of grammar and vocabulary

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Coherence activity

Structuring information in written texts clearly

- Students identify missing information from a business invitation email.
- They then write their own invitation to an event.
- Pairs swap invitations and respond to each other.

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Coherence activity

Missing information

- No opening salutation (*Dear*…)
- No address for or time of the event
- No email address for RSVP
- No closing salutation
- The message would benefit from more description of the new facility

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Audience / style activity

Writing clearly and convincingly

- Students use notes to write a recommendation for a proposal/report.
- Half the class write for senior managers, and the other half write for their peers.
- They consider appropriate language to include in their text according to the audience they are writing for.
- In pairs, students compare their drafts and language use.
- Students check their drafts against example models.

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Audience / style activity

Notes for recommendation

considered all freight options → move towards sending goods by rail – bit more expensive, but road transport costs increase – also the green option

two agreements with lorry companies – first due for renewal next March – the other six months later → give both companies 6 months' notice of move to rail

lorry companies maybe offer discounts → say 'no' – discounts won't last & slows down move to rail

give customers plenty of advance warning – need to make changes to their distribution routes

v. important to announce change – public relations & advertising campaign – way to reach new customers

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Audience / style activity

Recommendation phrases

we think (that)	it is our recommendation	it would make sense to
we should	it'd help to	we believe that
it is essential to/that	we need to	it'd be a very good idea to
it is advisable to/that	we strongly recommend that	we ought to

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General principles 1

Genre-based approach

- Provide clear and specific contextualization of writing activities
- Develop awareness of the nature and extent of the audience of a text
- Highlight the role of the writer in relation to the audience

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General principles 2

Methodology

• Provide models and examples
• Highlight features of style and register
• Develop grammatical and lexical range

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Large Language Models (LLMs) and writing skills

- Do we still need to teach writing skills?

- LLMs: good *formal* language competence, less competence with *functional* language that engage with social contexts (Mahowald 2023)

- Problems with factual accuracy

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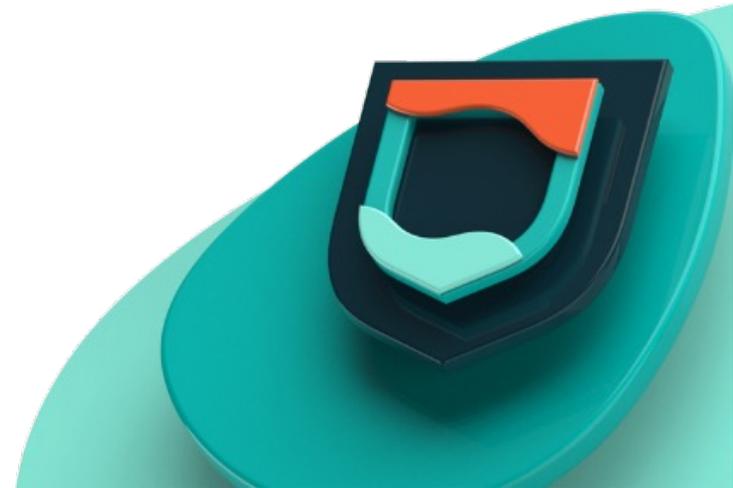
Large Language Models (LLMs) and writing skills

- Useful for pro forma genres in the workplace

- Workplace texts often context specific e.g. writing to someone you report to: language choices need to be more considered (register, style)

- Effective written texts in the workplace – high level of *functional* language competence – communication and critical thinking skills

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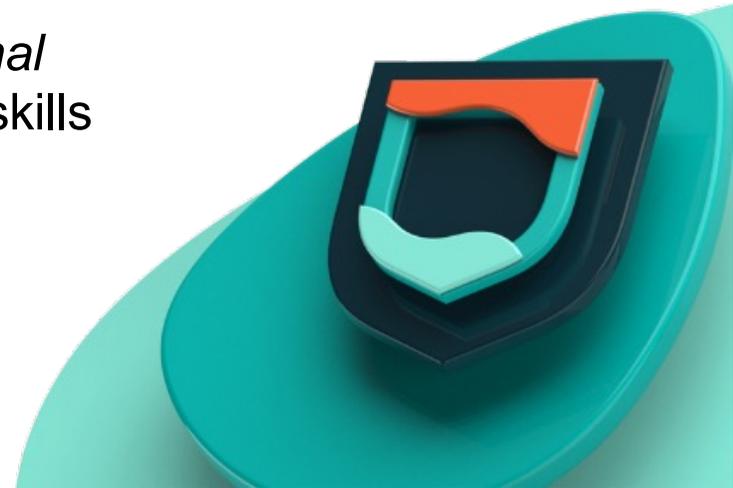
Large Language Models (LLMs) and writing skills

- A new form of 'cultural technology' (Gopnik)

- Engage in a constructive way

- Encourage students to bring to bear critical thinking and communication skills

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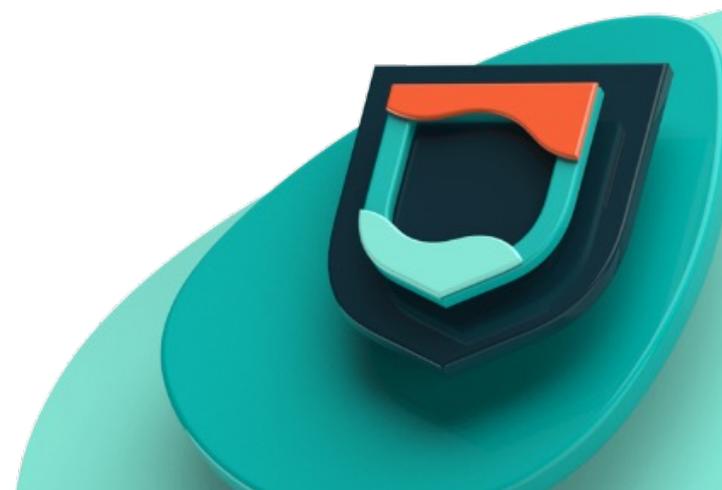
Recap

- Employability Skills help workers navigate the workplace more effectively.
- Employability Skills involve a range of competencies that meet 21st century workplace needs.
- Competence in written communication is important for most workplaces.
- Learners need good awareness of written genres, coherence and audience.
- Engage with LLMs constructively but critically.

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References and useful links

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Thank you

Any questions?

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