

Frequent and/or Important: ACT WorkKeys® Skill Criticality Based on Job Profiling

ALICE M. BRAWLEY, KAMA D. DODGE, AND MARY LEFEBVRE

The importance of ACT WorkKeys skills can be examined using a number of definitions that satisfy the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's requirement for skills used in selection procedures to be used by "critical or important work behavior(s)."¹ One such definition of skill importance is skill utilization, or the percentage of job tasks that use the

ACT WorkKeys skill. Figure 1 shows the average skill utilization for each assessment across three task importance levels determined by subject matter experts during the job profiling process.² ACT WorkKeys skills show a wide range of average skill utilization, and these averages significantly differ across levels of task importance for many of the skills.

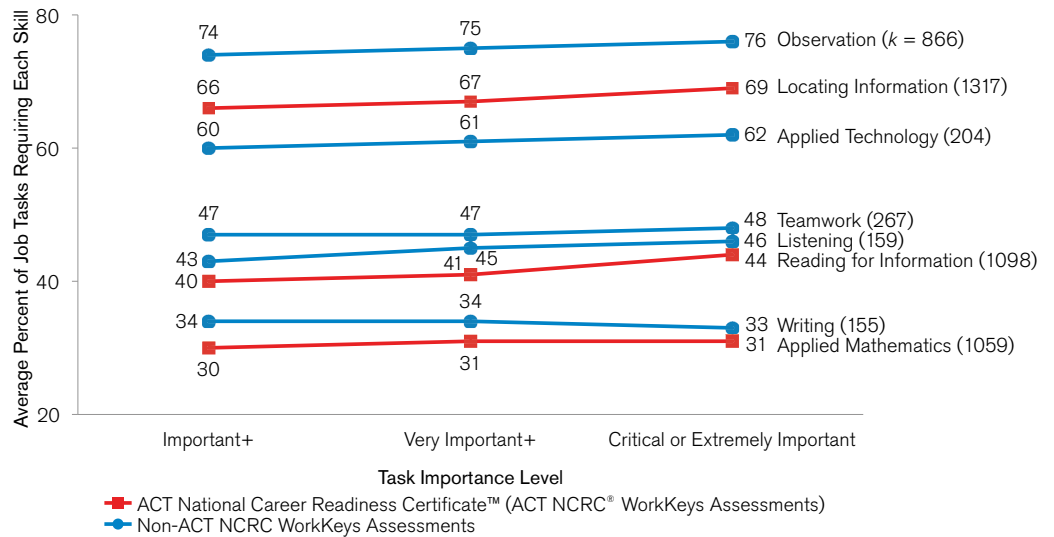


Figure 1. Average skill utilization across levels of task importance³

ACT Technical Briefs provide reliability, validity, and other psychometric analyses on ACT education and workforce development assessments, services, and programs and those of our partners. For more on the ACT test, visit www.act.org.

Alice M. Brawley is a PhD candidate in Industrial-Organizational Psychology at Clemson University. She interned at ACT during the summer of 2015.

Kama D. Dodge is an expert in employee selection and has worked in the industry for six years. She is a PhD candidate in Industrial-Organizational Psychology at the University of Akron.

Mary LeFebvre is a principal research scientist at ACT specializing in workforce research, policy evaluation, and competency supply/demand analysis.

The skill utilization of these job tasks across job profiles show three distinct distributions (Figures 2a-2c). For some skills—such as *Applied Mathematics*—we see the most utilization of the skill by a low percentage of *Critical or Extremely Important* job tasks. For such skills, “skill importance” describes a skill used by only a few critical job tasks. For other skills—such as *Locating Information* or *Observation*—the most skill utilization is in a high percentage of job tasks, indicating importance by virtue of frequent use. Finally, for the remaining skills—e.g., *Reading for Information*—both trends are visible in the job profiling data, indicating additional factors impacting the skill utilization such as job family, job complexity, or job outlook.

Of the additional factors explored, job complexity is particularly useful for explaining the variability in the critical or frequent skill utilization distribution (Figure 2c) for *Reading for Information*. *Reading for Information* skill utilization increases with job complexity, showing that this ACT WorkKeys skill is most relevant in high complexity jobs. This finding is also reflected by internal ACT studies (e.g., Trinity Health Care) (Figure 3).⁴ Overall, the key takeaway is that the meaning of skill importance differs across skills and jobs.

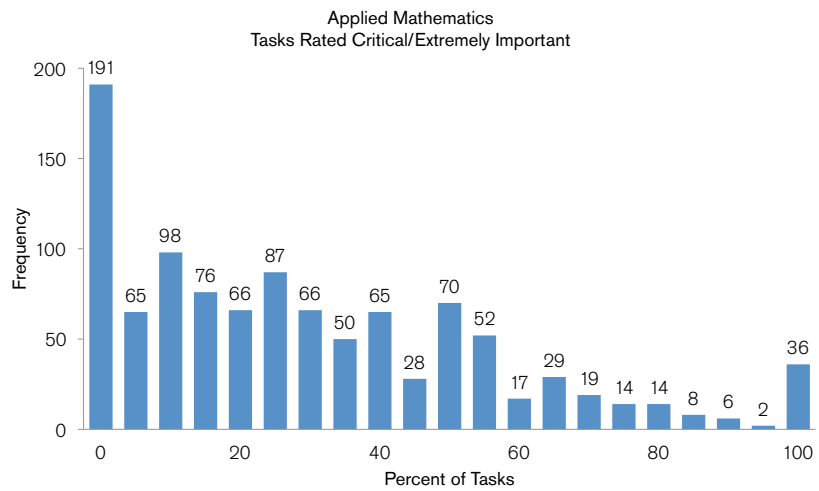


Figure 2a. Critical skill utilization distribution

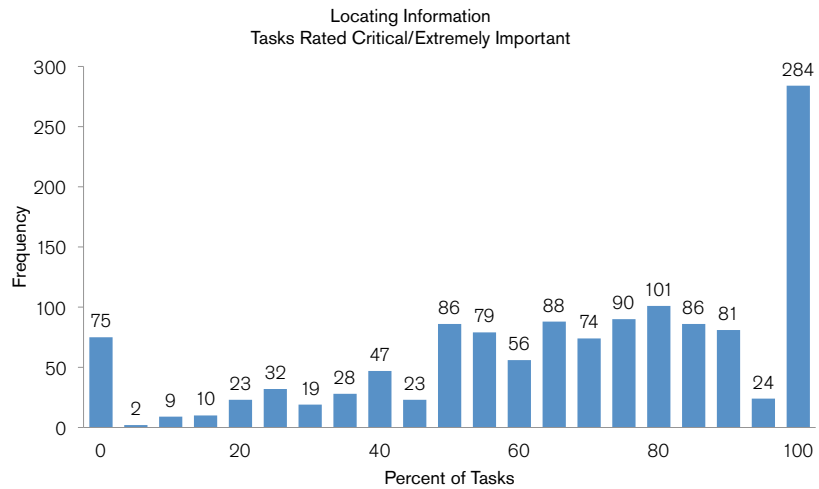


Figure 2b. Frequent skill utilization distribution

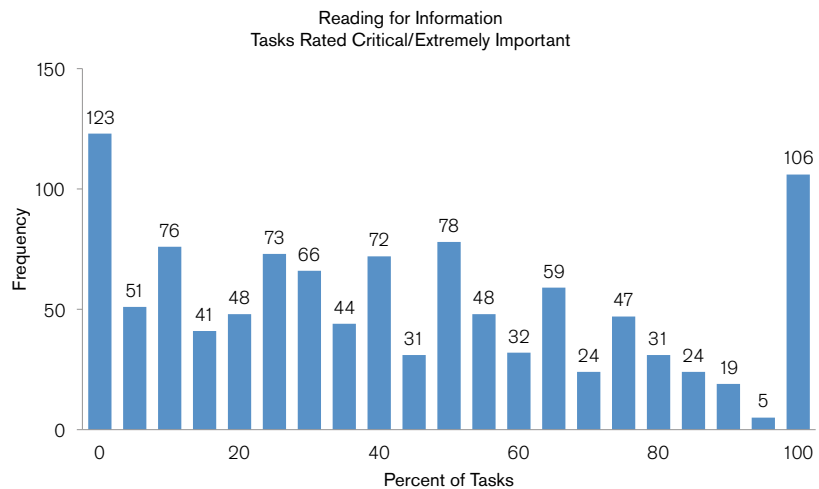


Figure 2c. Critical or frequent skill utilization distribution

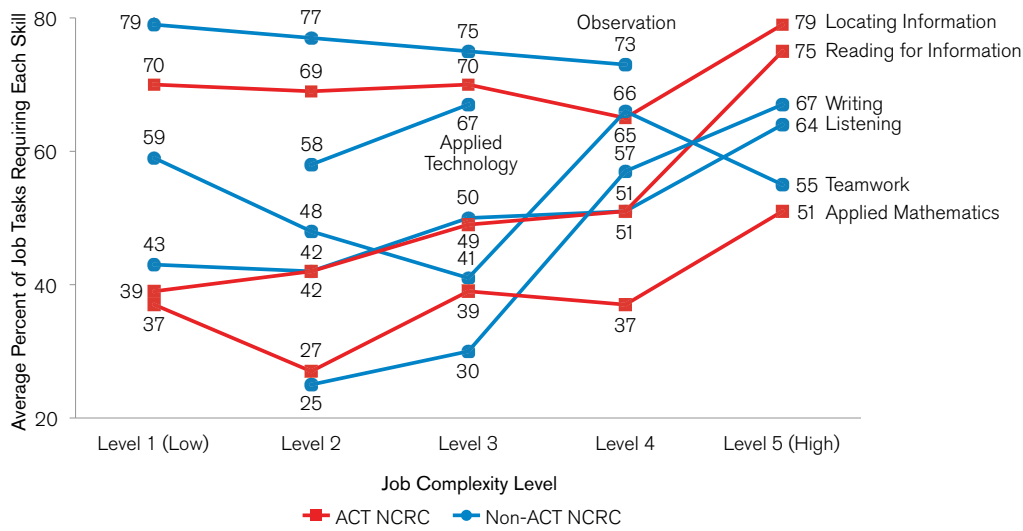


Figure 3. Average skill utilization across levels of job complexity⁵

Notes

1 Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), US Department of Labor. (2000, revised). *Uniform Guidelines on Employee Selection Procedures (1978)*. Federal Register 43, 38290–38315 (August 25, 1978). Codified in 29 CFR 1607.

2 All analyses are based on 1,352 job profiles conducted by ACT between 2010 (when skills were first linked to job tasks) and 2013.

3 Figures 1 and 3 combine *Observation* and *Workplace Observation*, *Writing* and *Business Writing*, and *Listening* and *Listening for Understanding*.

4 ACT. (in press). *A Summary of ACT WorkKeys Validation Research*. Iowa City, IA: ACT.

5 Job complexity is an O*NET descriptor assigned on the basis of the amount of training and preparation required to enter a job. For more information on O*NET descriptors, see www.onetonline.org.