

## Care Skillsbase

# Skills Checks: Full Guide

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# 1. Introduction

## What are Skills Checks?

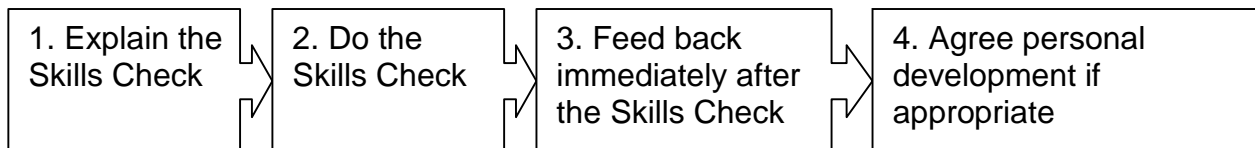
Skills Checks help you decide if a member of staff has the communication and number skills needed to work safely and meet quality standards. They are short (about 15 minutes for the activity plus 15 minutes for feedback) and simple to administer.

Each Skills Check:

- focuses on a specific skill (spoken communication, reading, writing or number skills)
- offers the member of staff useful learning about care work, including how important it is to apply skills effectively
- gives you a good sense of the person's general ability in the skill area being checked.

Each Skills Check includes the activity, and feedback and personal development forms. Where appropriate, additional guidance and answers are also provided.

This is how the process works with the member of staff:



## Your aim as an interviewer

Your aims are to learn about the person's skills and ensure that completing the Skills Check is a positive experience by being respectful and offering constructive feedback.

## Who can be an interviewer?

The interviewer is likely to be a manager, trainer or supervisor but the choice is up to you and your organisation. To interview effectively, you need good interpersonal skills and a clear understanding of the person's job and the skills required.

Interviewers do not need any specialist knowledge or training. All the necessary guidance is contained in these notes and on the Skills Checks themselves where needed.

## 2. Before the Skills Check

### The outcome you are seeking

Ask yourself what outcome you are seeking:

- Which skill do I wish to focus on and why?  
For example: writing to check spelling and legibility of handwriting.
- What do I hope to learn?  
For example: is this person's spelling and handwriting at the level required for written communication and record-keeping in our organisation?
- Where and how must the person apply this skill in their job?  
For example: short entries in the Communications Book, notes to service users and colleagues, incident/accident forms.

### Suitability of the Skills Check

Ensure the Skills Check is suitable for the member of staff and your organisation:

- Is the topic appropriate?
- Do the questions offer the right level of difficulty?
- Is there anything that goes against policy in your organisation?

Be sure you understand how the Skills Check works so that you can explain the instructions and answer the person's questions. For each Skills Check question, decide what you think would be a good answer. (Answers are provided for Skills Checks involving number skills.)

When you schedule the Skills Check appointment be sure to:

- arrange a time that is convenient for you both
- set aside enough time
- book a suitable room (somewhere private and quiet).

For information on which standards (including Common Induction Standards and Health and Social Care NVQ 2) a Skills Check relates to, see the Check Skills area of the Care Skillsbase website at [www.scie-careskillsbase.org.uk](http://www.scie-careskillsbase.org.uk)

## Taking notes

You and the person doing the Skills Check may want to make notes, so have pen and paper at hand at the start.

Things to note include specific examples of effective and ineffective communication or problem-solving and anything you think the person should know about how things are done in your organisation.

You will find notes particularly helpful for spoken communication Skills Checks where the activities are verbal.

When filing the person's Skills Check, you may wish to attach any notes they made.

## 3. During the Skills Check

Every Skills Check is based on an activity sheet that offers information about care work. The Skills Check asks the member of staff to respond using communication and/or number skills.

Remember your aims are to learn about the person's skills and ensure that completing the Skills Check is a positive experience.

### At the start of the Skills Check

Welcome the person by saying: *"We're going spend 15 minutes doing a Skills Check together. It's about understanding your job and the skills it requires. At the end we'll have a chat to see what you thought and work out if any training might be useful. We'll keep a record of the Skills Check and any actions we agree on your training file."*

Show the person the different parts of the Skills Check (activity and forms). Ask if the person has any questions or concerns, and address them as necessary.

Show the person your note paper and say: *"If I think of anything useful for you during our conversation, I'll make a note of it to remind me to mention it afterwards. If you would like paper to make notes, let me know."*

Give the person their copy of the Skills Check activity sheet and ask them to write their name and today's date on it. What you do next depends on the skill you are checking.

### **Spoken communication Skills Checks**

Use these to help you hold a short discussion about a work-related topic. Use the discussion to decide how effectively the person uses spoken communication. Start by asking the person to look at the activity sheet.

Show interest during the discussion. This will encourage the person to talk and help to make the experience meaningful and enjoyable.

Don't take up time giving your own views.

Encourage the person with short questions such as: *"What do you mean?"*, *"In what sense?"*

Give the person time to think, even if that means sitting in silence.

Ask for concrete examples of how the activity relates to their job. Don't interrupt or correct.

If you disagree with something said, just say: *"Really? That's interesting."* Correct any misunderstandings afterwards.

When you have heard enough on one topic say: *"Thanks, that's interesting. Let's move on to the next part."* When you reach the end say: *"Thanks, that's been interesting for me. What did you think of the Skills Check? How relevant is it to your job?"*

### **Reading, writing and number Skills Checks**

These are more formal than the spoken communication Skills Checks. They include discussion but only after the member of staff has completed a reading, writing or problem-solving task on their own.

It is particularly important to arrange a quiet room (with a table or desk) at a time when the person is able to concentrate. If possible leave them alone to complete the Skills Check but let them know you are nearby.

Tell the person they should spend about ten minutes on the Skills Check and that you will let them know when the time is up. Tell them not to worry if they don't finish. Ask them to let you know if they finish sooner.

If you do sit in, bring some work to get on with quietly. Don't talk to the person while they are completing the Skills Check, take phone calls or distract them in any way.

Don't offer help with the answers. If the person seeks help, say: *"Just do what you can. There will be a chance at the end to discuss things."* That way you will be able to see what the person is able to do on their own.

When the person has finished, ask: *"What did you think of the Skills Check? How relevant is it to your job?"* Then ask them to show you how they got on. Now you can help them with anything they did not understand.

Ask the person to explain their answers. For number Skills Checks, show the answer sheet (see section 4 below).

Give as much positive feedback as you can and, wherever possible, ask the person to relate the Skills Check to their own work. When you have finished reviewing the answers say: *"Thanks and well done."*

### **What to do if a member of staff has difficulty reading a Skills Check**

This depends on what skill you are checking:

#### ***Spoken communication***

You are interested in the person's spoken skills so read the Skills Check to them if they are having difficulty.

#### ***Reading***

Say: *"Let's do this together. Show me what you can read. I will read anything that you find difficult."* Let the person do the questions but give help if they ask for it.

Try to establish the nature of the reading difficulty. Do they find all words equally difficult? Do they struggle only with unfamiliar words? How well do they answer the

questions once they understand them? Do they understand the key words and concepts that you helped them to read? Let this inform your feedback after the Skills Check.

### ***Writing and number***

Help the person to read and understand the Skills Check. Do not help them with the writing or number tasks as those are the skills you want to check. Let them show you what they can do on their own first.

## **4. After the Skills Check**

### **Skills Check answers**

Answer sheets are provided for problem-solving Skills Checks.

Spoken and written communications Skills Checks do not have answer sheets. There may be no wrong answer or more than one right answer. A person may give the right answer for the wrong reasons or the wrong answer for the right reason. The best way to judge is to discuss why they answered the way they did.

### **Interpreting a Skills Check**

Your aim is to decide if the member of staff has used communication and number skills effectively and shown understanding of the key words and ideas used. Base your view on the needs of the person's job. Ask yourself: On the evidence of the Skills Check, does this person have the communication and number skills required to work safely and meet quality standards?

The options are 'No', 'Partly' or 'Yes'. Whatever your answer, monitor the person over the next few weeks to build up a fuller picture of their ability.

For more guidance on how to follow up a Skills Check, refer to Manage Skills at [www.scie-careskillsbase.org.uk](http://www.scie-careskillsbase.org.uk)

### **Giving feedback**

The feedback form has four parts: Interviewer's view, Interviewer's reasons, Next steps and Signatures. Use the form to:

- help you decide how well the member of staff coped
- explain what you think to the person
- agree any action to help the member of staff develop.

Show the person the form and say: *“Now, let’s think about the skills you need in this job.”*

Fill in the details at the top (date, names and job titles).

Explain that: *“The feedback form asks for my view on your skills.”* Complete the *Interviewer’s view* section.

Complete the Interviewer’s reasons, explaining as you go.

Ask the person if they agree with your view. If they disagree, ask why. If you think the person is right, amend the form. If you don’t, explain why and try to reach agreement. If this is not possible explain that you are making a note of the difference of view and move on. Don’t get drawn into a long discussion or argument.

The Next steps section offers three options for further action:

- a. monitoring, feedback and support from a supervisor
- b. personal development to improve understanding of key social care words and ideas
- c. skills development.

Choose a. even if you think the person has demonstrated good knowledge and skills. (Everyone deserves good supervision.) Choose b. and/or c. if you think personal development is needed. Explain your decision and say that the feedback form will go into the person’s training file.

Ask the person to sign the form. If they do not want to, ask why and make a note of the reason on the form. Ask them to sign again. If the person still refuses, make a note on the form, explain what you have done and give them a copy.

If you chose only option a. in Next steps then the Skills Check session is complete. If you chose steps b. and/or c. move on to the Personal development form.

## Completing the Personal development form

If you agreed that it would be useful to develop the person's skills, you may wish to plan one or more development actions (e.g. shadowing a more experienced colleague). Use the Personal development form for this, either immediately after feedback or at a later date.

The form has eight sections. It starts with date and personal details and leads on to:

- Learning aim  
The knowledge and skills you wish to develop.
- How will the learning happen?  
How you plan to develop the skills (e.g. coaching and mentoring).
- What support and resources will be needed to make the learning successful?  
Help the person will need (e.g. release for training).
- When will the learning happen?  
A learning timetable including deadline.
- How will we know the learning has been successful?  
What the person will be able to do as result.
- Progress review date  
When you and the member of staff will check their progress.
- Signatures  
Ask the person to sign the form, say it will go in their training file and give them a copy.

Thank the member of staff for their time and co-operation.

## More questions?

See Using Skillsbase at [www.scie-careskillsbase.org.uk](http://www.scie-careskillsbase.org.uk)

**We welcome suggestions to improve these guidance notes. Please use the contact form on our website at [www.scie-careskillsbase.org.uk](http://www.scie-careskillsbase.org.uk)**