

# WHAT AI SKILLS SHOULD HIRING EMPLOYERS LOOK FOR? HOW TO DEFINE AND SEEK OUT WORKERS WITH “AI LITERACY”

Insights  
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Businesses are increasingly requiring “AI literacy” from their new hires – especially for positions that have nothing to do with technology. Mentions of AI skills in job postings have nearly tripled since last year, and employees in varied roles are now expected to understand artificial intelligence – or at least know how to use it productively and responsibly. The challenge for employers: there’s no shared definition of “AI literacy.” Some job seekers use ChatGPT to plan vacations or cook dinner. Others are experimenting with AI to automate workflows, analyze data, and make better business decisions. Both are technically AI users, but the gap in practical value is substantial. What AI skills should you be seeking during the hiring process to ensure you are getting the best hire? This Insight will give you a ready-made plan to make your next hire an AI success story.

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# What AI Skills Should Hiring Employers Look For?

How to Define and Seek Out  
Workers with “AI Literacy”

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## What “AI Literacy” Really Means

You can include “AI literacy” as a job requirement on your next posting (and such postings have tripled in 2025), but it will be meaningless unless you have a clear sense of what you’re looking for. You’re probably not seeking someone who knows how to code or holds a tech certification. You’ll be better off hiring someone who understands how AI fits into the job you’re hiring for or is willing to experiment to discover what AI tools can do for them, what they can’t do, and how they can use them effectively without crossing legal or ethical lines.

At its core, AI literacy combines four key competencies:

## Service Focus

AI, Data, and Analytics

Counseling and Advice

## Resource Hubs

AI Governance Hub

What AI Skills Should  
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- **Awareness:** Knowing AI's strengths, weaknesses, and risks, including bias, hallucination, and privacy implications.
- **Application:** Using AI tools to draft content, analyze data, or streamline workflows while maintaining human oversight.
- **Adaptability:** Staying curious, experimenting safely, and learning as tools evolve.
- **Accountability:** Knowing when to question, verify, or override AI output.

Some employers are even formalizing these skills. At software company Zapier, every job now requires employees to demonstrate AI capability. [CEO Wade Foster divides workers into four tiers](#), which can serve as a useful model for other businesses trying to define expectations:

- **Unacceptable:** Skeptical of AI value and resistant to AI tools.
- **Capable:** Uses AI to complete basic tasks (like drafting posts, summarizing text).
- **Adoptive:** Regularly integrates AI into workflows to boost productivity.
- **Transformative:** Reimagines processes using AI, such as designing an internal chatbot that personalizes client outreach.

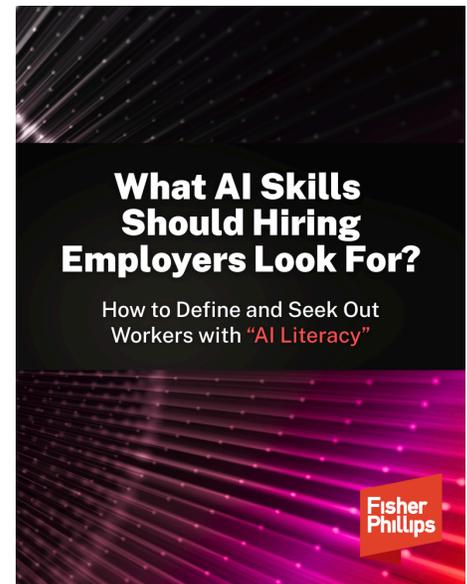
### Employers are Recognizing the Value of AI Skills

The divide between AI users and AI skeptics is widening at a rapid pace. [Axios just reported](#) that demand for AI skills is soaring – up 16% in just three months – even as overall hiring slows. Employers are discovering that “AI-fluent” workers often outperform their peers by leveraging automation to handle routine work, which frees time for strategy, creativity, and relationship-building.

Accordingly, an increasing number of companies are [investigating AI skills](#) during the hiring process:

- Customer service software company HubSpot asks candidates about AI to get a feel for how open they are to

## Seek Out Workers with “AI Literacy”



using it and what they've already done with it, according to Chief People Officer Helen Russell.

- Accounting firm EY Americas requires new hires to demonstrate “familiarity with emerging applications of AI” during the hiring process, says Vice Chair of Talent Ginnie Carlier.
- Consulting firm McKinsey & Company won't necessarily reject a candidate with no AI experience, but Blair Ciesil, co-leader of Global Talent Attraction, says the company sees AI skills as a factor that can help candidates separate themselves from others.

Forward-thinking organizations are going one step further and rewarding AI adoption among existing workers. The Washington Post reports that [health company Everlywell offers bonuses for employees](#) who adopt AI into their work and will check in with staff during annual evaluations to see how it's being used. “Our expectation is that they'll say: 'These are the tools I've been reading about, experimenting with, and what I'd like to do,'" said Julia Cheek, the company's founder and CEO.

### Spotting AI Skills in Candidates Isn't Always Easy

The hardest part of hiring for AI literacy is distinguishing genuine fluency from buzzword regurgitation. [Recent research from recruiting company Greenhouse](#) shows that 32% of candidates admit to having claimed AI experience they don't actually have, often using boilerplate language copied from ChatGPT itself.

To filter out the noise, hiring teams should look for evidence-based indicators:

- **Concrete examples:** Has the candidate used AI to improve real outcomes? Ask for details, including tools, context, and results.
- **Curiosity and learning mindset:** Do they follow AI developments, experiment with new tools, or take relevant courses?
- **Risk awareness:** Can candidates articulate when *not* to trust AI or when human review is essential?

Strong interview questions include:

- “What AI tools or platforms are you using or experimenting with right now?”
- “Describe a time you used AI to solve a problem or save time.”
- “What are the risks or limits of the AI tools you use most often?”
- “How do you fact-check or validate AI output before using it?”
- “What’s a task you *wouldn’t* use AI for?”
- “How do you stay up to date on new AI developments or best practices?”

### **Building an AI-Literate Workforce**

Most applicants won’t show up fully fluent, and a good portion of your existing workforce is in the same boat – and that’s okay. The best strategy is to develop internal AI literacy. Here’s how you can approach it:

- **Define your baseline:** Identify what AI competency means in each role. For some, it’s using AI to summarize research. For others, it’s generating client proposals or automating workflows.
- **Train and test:** Offer structured learning opportunities, from short workshops to self-guided tutorials. Encourage safe experimentation in “sandbox” environments that don’t touch confidential data.
- **Reward innovation:** Recognize and celebrate employees who responsibly use AI to improve efficiency or quality.
- **Balance the equation:** Reinforce human strengths such as creativity, ethical judgment, and communication as essential complements to machine intelligences.

### **What Employers Should Do Now**

**1. Reach common ground.** Work with your leadership team to determine what level of AI capability you want your workers to achieve and demonstrate.

**2. Adjust your job descriptions.** If you’re listing “AI literacy,” specify what that actually means for each role or you may create confusion.

**3. Train your recruiters and managers.** Make sure interviewers can recognize authentic AI experience and avoid being distracted by jargon. Providing them the list of interview questions above is a good starting point.

**4. Integrate AI into onboarding.** Teach new hires your approved tools, data-handling policies, and examples of good (and bad) AI use.

**5. Update your policies.** Create clear rules for confidentiality, intellectual property, and bias avoidance when using AI systems.

**6. Create an internal AI literacy program.** Skill up both your new hires and your existing workforce by investing time and resources into developing a program to help educate them about AI benefits.

**7. Monitor and evolve.** AI capabilities and expectations are changing very rapidly. Revisit your definitions of literacy at least twice a year.

## **Conclusion**

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