

# Work Readiness Inventory™



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## Administrator's Guide

### Introduction

The landscape of the world of work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is undergoing significant changes (Parker, 2008). Dynamic forces that include globalization, outsourcing, downsizing, economic downturn (Miller, 2009), and market uncertainties (Kalita, 2009) are impacting both the workplace and the individual worker (Friedman, 2005; Boyett & Conn, 1991). These times call for flexibility and broadened responsibility, new or updated skills, social support and collaboration, and worker self-determination so that both employer and employee can adapt and succeed in the new millennium (Parker, 2008; Gunn, 2009). Developing an assessment to help measure the readiness of the individual worker to recognize and address the expectations and demands of these new work realities is one of the main purposes of the *Work Readiness Inventory (WRI)*. In addition, it has been reported that readiness assessments contribute in a significant way to the career-planning and decision-making process and lead to more-informed choices when work opportunities are being considered (Sampson, Peterson, Reardon, & Lenz, 2000).

### Purpose and Administration

The *Work Readiness Inventory (WRI)* is designed to help workers identify and then address those work readiness traits that would allow them to better meet the challenges of today's workplace. For workers, this might include adjusting to a new work culture; knowing their skills and their willingness and capacity to learn new ones; getting along with others; having the flexibility to adapt to changes; understanding what they expect of themselves, of others, and of work; keeping physically fit and mentally alert; and having a good work ethic. In plain terms the *WRI* is not only about having what it takes to get a job, but also what it takes to keep it.

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## Characteristics of the *WRI*

The *Work Readiness Inventory* is a brief self-report designed to survey six aspects of readiness: *Responsibility*, *Flexibility*, *Skills*, *Communication*, *Self-View*, and *Health & Safety*. It consists of 36 statements (items) related to readiness. There are six items for each of the six readiness factors. Respondents are asked to read each readiness statement and then record their level of concern by endorsing one of five possible responses on a Likert type interval scale. Response choices are 5 for *very concerned*, 4 for *concerned*, 3 for *somewhat concerned*, 2 for *a little concerned*, and 1 for *not concerned*. Following are operational definitions for the six constructs of the *Work Readiness Inventory*:

*Responsibility*: Responsible workers come to work on time and work until quitting time. They respect tools and equipment, meet quality work standards, control waste and loss, and keep the privacy and confidentiality policies of the organization. They provide a day's work for a day's pay.

*Flexibility*: Flexible workers are able to adapt to the changes and demands of the workplace. They accept that many work situations are fluid and that change in those work environments is a predictable outcome of growth or downsizing, the fluctuation in demands for products or services, and market forces. They realize that they may need to be more mobile and be prepared to adapt to changes in work schedule, duties, job title, work sites, and working hours.

*Skills*: Work-ready individuals know their capabilities and the skill sets that they bring to a new work situation. They are able to identify their strengths and feel qualified to do the work. At the same time, they are willing to acquire new skills as the job demands and participate in employee training and continuing education programs.

*Communication (Interpersonal Relating)*: Work-ready individuals have communication abilities that enable them to interpersonally relate in the workplace. They are able to follow directions, ask for help, and accept feedback and criticism. They also respect and get along with coworkers.

*Self-View (Intrapersonal Relating)*: *Self-View* is related to individuals' intrapersonal processes—their beliefs about themselves and work. Ready workers are aware of their self-statements about adequacy, acceptance, and confidence in themselves and their capabilities—their self-efficacy.

*Health & Safety*: Work-ready individuals maintain personal hygiene and grooming. They keep physically fit and mentally alert. They use proper body mechanics for lifting and bending and follow safety procedures when using tools or operating equipment and machines. When required, they wear proper safety gear or clothing. They also comply with drug-free/smoke-free workplace rules.

## Administration and Scoring

The *Work Readiness Inventory* takes about 15 minutes to administer and score. During the orientation process, the administrator can explain that, as a self-report, respondents determine the level of concern each item statement has in *their own* work readiness, and that the usefulness of the results is dependent upon their honest and forthright responses. The *WRI* can

be administered individually or in groups by following the directions on the inventory form itself. After completing responses to all 36 items, scores for each construct are totaled. Higher scores reflect higher concerns for a given area of work readiness, while lower scores reflect lower readiness concerns. Once higher concern areas are identified, item analysis within those scales helps respondents consider specific aspects of readiness in their job search and career planning.

In Step 1, respondents rate their level of concern for each item using a 5-point Likert scale. After respondents have completed all 36 items, ask them to record the score from each of the 36 items in the scoring grid provided in Step 2. Respondents record scores by working down each column, recording their response next to the number that corresponds to each of the item numbers. The *WRI* was designed in such a way that items related to each construct are repeated every sixth item. The scoring grid included in Step 2 of the *WRI* contains six columns: 1 through 6, 7 through 12, 13 through 18, 19 through 24, 25 through 30, and 31 through 36. Respondents should first record their responses working down each column. Once respondents have finished recording their scores, they should add each row across from left to right and enter the total for each row in the **Total** column. These totals represent the total scores for each of the six constructs. Respondents can now compare the total scores for each of the six readiness areas with each other. Higher scores indicate higher readiness concerns; lower scores indicate lower readiness concerns.

After totaling their scores, respondents may transfer those totals to the profile, also provided in Step 2. Completing the profile of work readiness traits might help those respondents who prefer a more visual representation of their scores, allowing them to better compare their levels of concern for each construct.

Step 3 provides brief descriptions of the six readiness areas measured by the *WRI*. Respondents are instructed to review these definitions, paying special attention to those for which they scored in the *very concerned* or *concerned* range. Respondents are also directed to review specific items from Step 1 to identify their most-pressing work readiness concerns. Finally, Step 4 provides some space for respondents to set goals or identify steps to take to alleviate their work readiness concerns.

## Interpretation

The profile below is used to demonstrate the interpretation of one respondent's scores. The respondent in the example has transferred each of his six total scores from the **Total** column of the scoring grid to the profile using the **Total Score Range** column as a guide.

Level of Concern	Total Score Range	Responsibility	Flexibility	Skills	Communication	Self-View	Health & Safety
Very Concerned	25–30						
Concerned	19–24			23			
Somewhat Concerned	13–18		17		16	15	
A Little Concerned	7–12	10					9
Not Concerned	6						

Looking at the profile, only one of the respondent's scores fell in the *concerned* range. The score on the *Skills* construct suggests that this job seeker may be unsure about meeting job qualifications. Since he is facing a new work opportunity, he may have *some concerns* about meeting and working and being accepted by others in the workplace. Based on his *a little concerned* responses, he most likely sees himself as healthy and fit and feels he is able to meet the responsibilities that working brings.

In addition to assessing overall areas of work readiness, respondents should also review specific items, especially those items endorsed as *very concerned* (a circled 5 response). What aspects of readiness did these items cover? Was it about getting to work, asking for help, or accepting criticism? Was it about feeling old enough, having enough self-confidence, or being concerned about fitting in? What areas do respondents need to address to make them more job-ready? After respondents have reviewed items marked as *very concerned*, they can look at the *concerned* and even the *somewhat concerned* responses. Once they have specific areas identified, they can address those concerns themselves or seek guidance from their career professional.

Finally, respondents should be encouraged to develop an action plan. Ask respondents to look at Step 4. What areas do they need to address to be more job-ready? Ask them to write down those readiness statements that were identified in the item analysis, i.e., those responses circled with a 5 or 4. In the **My Plan of Action** column, they can record how they will address those concerns. They might be able to address some concerns themselves, for example, finding a reliable way to work, developing a going-to-work routine, getting enough rest, using an alarm clock, choosing a more-healthy life style, or seeking more training. They might also benefit from the help of a career development professional to look at other strategies that could include job readiness groups, job clubs, workshops or training, or additional counseling.

## Development of the *WRI*

### ***WRI* Early Version**

The current *Work Readiness Inventory* brings together some of the earlier research in readiness assessment that proposed the development of readiness measures for use in vocational education and placement (Brady & Wysong, 1976). In this context, vocational readiness or work readiness focused on those personal attributes, worker traits, and coping mechanisms needed to not only land a job, but to keep that job. It was distinguished from readiness focused on basic reading, writing, and arithmetic. A research version of the *Work Readiness Inventory* consisting of 45 items was subsequently developed (Brady & Brewster, 1976). This version of the *WRI* had four constructs: Attendance/Punctuality, Occupational Competence, Peer Relationships, and Supervisor Relationships. A factor analysis study of this early version of the *WRI* (Brewster, 1976) identified item clusters associated not only with the four original factors, but also with additional factors that included three other clusters operationally designated at that time as Attention Span, Organizational Skills, and Perceived Competence. In the most recent version of the *WRI*, Attendance/Punctuality has been incorporated under *Responsibility*, Organizational Skills are included under *Flexibility*, Occupational Competence is now *Skills*, Peer Relationships and Supervisor Relationships have been combined under *Communication*, Perceived Competence is now *Self-View*, and Attention Span is included within *Health & Safety*.

## Theoretical Foundations of the *WRI*

### *Responsibility*

Responsibility involves personal integrity, honesty, and trustworthiness (Gardner, Csikszentmihalyi, & Damon, 2001). In his pioneering work, Kohlberg (1978) theorized a ladder of stages of judgment that started with externally monitored behaviors to more formal stages when individuals accepted responsibility for their actions regardless of the monitoring of others, that is, a self-imposed responsibility for ethical conduct and doing the right thing (Power, Higgins, & Kohlberg, 1989; Piaget, 1991; Reynolds & Ceranic, 2007). In their *Good Work* study, Gardiner and his colleagues (2001) found that more than two-thirds of workers in industry saw responsibility to the workplace as important. The study further reported that working not only requires workers to assume responsibility for themselves, but also responsibility toward coworkers, toward the workplace (Gardner et al, 2001), and, ultimately, to the fulfillment of workplace purposes (Gardner, 2007). This more-broadened definition of responsibility is seen as a key element necessary for workers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Parker, 2008).

### *Flexibility*

Flexibility is a resilience factor that allows the individual worker to adapt to change and accept new workplace realities (Moorhouse & Caltabiano, 2007). Life-span, life-space career development theory holds that the process of living and working is dynamic and not a static phenomenon, and that the context or life-space in which living and working takes place is also dynamic (Super, 1980). Having the flexibility to adapt to change is now seen as a necessary component of life-span, life-space theory (Savickas, 1997), i.e., flexibility is needed when adjusting to new and changing work roles and work situations. Other theoretical models connect flexibility to a cognitive-behavior process, i.e., thoughts-beliefs lead to behaviors (Hayes, Luoma, Bond, Masuda, & Lillis, 2006). ACT cognitive behavior theory holds that adherence and attachment to a dominant “conceptualized past and feared future” leads to avoidance and inflexibility, and only through a process of experiencing the world more directly—mindfulness, acceptance of the realities, addressing fixed beliefs about realities and the feared future—and then committing to pro-action can flexibility be achieved (Hayes et al, 2006). The *WRI* was designed to survey some of the cognitions and behaviors associated with flexibility and to elicit from respondents the level of concern they might have in adapting to workplace change(s).

### *Skills*

Job-related skills, intellectual assets, and expertise will predominate the knowledge-driven economy of the new millennium (Friedman, 2005). These skills include not only the *micro-skills* specific to a job or profession, but also *macro-skills* such as “learning how to learn” (Parker, 2008). Self Determination Theory identifies *competence* as one of three basic needs and striving to learn and mastery of new skills as necessary for individual well being (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Satisfaction of competence needs promotes optimal functioning and tendencies toward continued growth and mastery (Luyckx, Vansteenkiste, Goossens, & Duriez, 2009). The *WRI* surveys individuals’ willingness to recognize their job-related skills as well as their willingness to acquire new skills and engage in employee training or continuing education.

## *Communication*

The communication theory of Social Exchange (Homans, 1958; Blau 1964) was used to support the inclusion of a measure to address interpersonal relations in the workplace. Social competence has been shown to positively predict performance (Porath & Bateman, 2006). In their study of workplace social exchange relationships, Kambur and Van Dyne (2007) found that high-quality work relationships were related not only to task performance, but also to workers helping supervisors and coworkers. In another study, task support was the type of social support found to be the most predictive of job satisfaction (Harris, Winskowski, & Engdahl, 2007). In addition to performance, the strengths of work relationships have also been related to improved interpersonal citizenship behavior (Bowler & Brass, 2006), and workplace social support has also been found to predict job tenure (Harris et al, 2007).

## *Self-View*

Inclusion of *Self-View* in the *WRI* reflects the important role that self theory has played in the understanding of the individual person and how each person perceives him- or herself in living and working situations (Swamn, Chang-Schneider, & McClarty, 2007). Here *Self-View* is used in a general way to encompass related conceptualizations of self that include self-concept (Roger, 1951), ego strength (Freud, 1935), success identity (Glasser, 1969), self-identity (Erikson, 1968), and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). In the area of career development and vocational psychology, self-concept theory (Super, 1957, 1980) and self-efficacy (Betz, 2004) continue to influence career planning and decision making. Suffice to say that an individual's beliefs about him- or herself and his or her abilities to cope, adapt, and perform in the world of work are important (Betz, 2004). High general self-efficacy has been linked to strong individual performance in organizations (DeRue & Morgenson, 2007), and specific self-efficacy has been related to success in specific domains such as work tasks and work roles (Betz, 2004). Concepts such as *possible self* have also been found useful in helping individuals consider future work situations and work roles (Markus & Nurius, 1986).

## *Health & Safety*

The health and safety of workers is a global concern. The International Labor Office (ILO) estimates that annually there are 337 million job-related accidents and 2 million individuals suffering from work-related diseases worldwide (ILO, 2008). In some cases, occupational health-and-safety (OHS) practices are in place and worker compliance is lax; in other situations, OHS practices are lacking or inadequate (ILO, 2008). The Office of Applied Studies at the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) reported in a study, updated in 2008, that approximately 1.6 million full-time workers were both illicit drug users and alcohol users (SAMHSA, 2008). Tardiness, absenteeism, leaving work early, hangovers, sleeping on the job, feeling sick, poor work quality, doing less work, lost/poor performance, arguing with coworkers, accidents, productivity losses, workplace crime, and job loss have all been linked to the substance abuse patterns of workers (SAMHSA, 1999; National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism [NIAAA], 1999). Individuals' beliefs about their own capabilities to behave and perform at a given level is a basic tenet of Self-Efficacy Theory (Bandura, 1982). Health-Specific Self-Efficacy applies this theory to health-and-safety capabilities such as nutrition, physical exercise, smoking cessation, and alcohol resistance, and studies cited suggest that perceived self-efficacy is a predictor of health-and-safety behaviors (Schwarzer & Renner, 2009; Baldwin et al., 2006). Positive health-related social control has also been found to influence health-promoting behaviors (Tucker, Orlando, Elliott, & Klien, 2006). The *WRI* was

designed, therefore, to elicit responses about a worker's willingness to choose and practice health-and-safety behaviors and his or her willingness to follow workplace policies and prohibitions regarding health and safety.

## Psychometric Properties of the *WRI*

### Content Validity

"Content validity is the degree to which a test measures an intended content area; it is determined by expert judgment, and requires both item validity and sampling validity." (Gay & Airasian, 2000). To establish the item-to-construct fit, a content validity study was initiated. Three judges—expert in either career counseling, rehabilitation counseling, or counseling psychology—were independently asked to review a *WRI* item pool (Houser, 2009). They were then asked independently to match each item to one of the six *WRI* constructs. Results of the study found complete agreement (Fleiss' kappa,  $\kappa = 1$ ) among the three expert judges (Fleiss, 1971). Thus complete item-to-construct fit was achieved and the criterion for item validity was met. In addition, the content validity of the *WRI* was further supported through establishing the theoretical foundation and career-counseling efficacy for each construct (see "Theoretical Foundations of the *WRI*" above). Sampling validity was achieved by selecting six items for each of the six constructs, resulting in a final *WRI* of 36 items.

### Concurrent Criterion Validity

#### *Study 1*

Concurrent validity is the ability of a test to produce results in keeping with some criterion within the same time frame (Selitiz, Wrightsman, & Cook, 1976). In a concurrent validity study conducted in November and December of 2008, a sample of working adults ( $n = 65$ ) was given the *Work Readiness Inventory*. In addition, a Job Longevity Index (JLI) was calculated for each participant. The JLI is defined as

$$JLI = \frac{Nx}{Ny} * 100$$

where  $Nx$  represents the longest number of years worked for the same employer,  $Ny$  represents the total number of years worked in a lifetime; and 100 is a constant.

JLI scores for these working adults were then compared to their scores on each of the six *WRI* scales. As hypothesized, high work-readiness concerns were negatively correlated with high JLI scores on all six scales (mean Pearson  $r = -.21$ ). (See Table 1.) Predictably the data showed a trend toward experienced workers reporting fewer work-readiness concerns on all *WRI* measures.

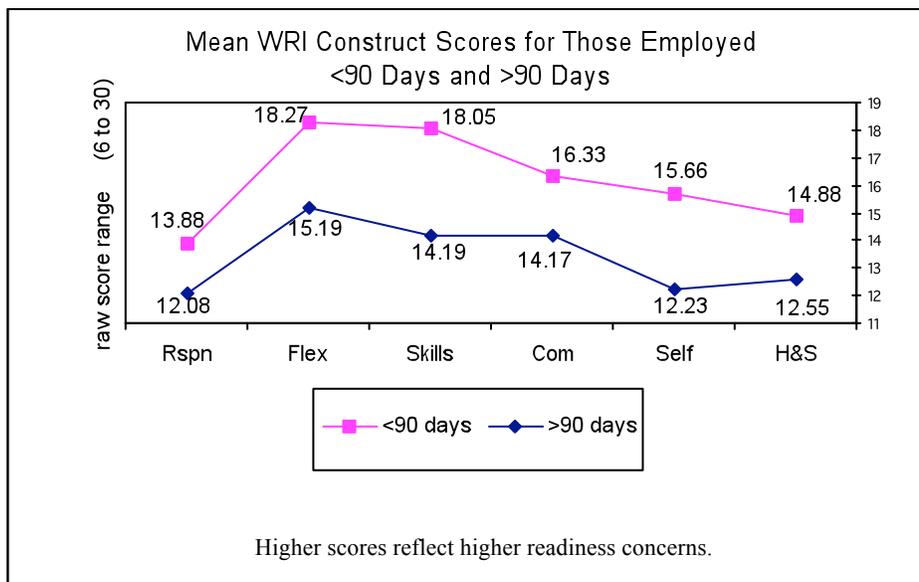
Work Readiness Measure	Job Longevity Measure	Pearson <i>r</i>
Responsibility	Job Longevity Index	-.18
Flexibility	Job Longevity Index	-.19
Skills	Job Longevity Index	-.23
Communication	Job Longevity Index	-.19
Self-View	Job Longevity Index	-.30
Health & Safety	Job Longevity Index	-.18

## Study 2

It was hypothesized in another criterion-related validity study that those workers who had experienced a job loss within the first 90 days of employment (<90 days) would have a higher number of concerns regarding their work readiness than those workers who had completed a 90-day probationary work period (>90 days). From the sample of working adults ( $n = 65$ ), 18 participants who had reported a past job loss within the first 90 days of their employment and the other 43 participants who did *not* have such a loss made up two samples in the study. The mean scores were determined for each of the six *WRI* measures for both sample groups. When their mean scores were compared measure-to-measure, the mean scores for the less-than-90 days (<90 days) sample group were higher, ranging from 7.5% to 16.1% ( $m = 11.6%$ ) higher, than the >90 days sample mean scores. (See Table 2.) Higher scores reflected higher readiness concerns for the <90 days workers. The trend reflected in these results lends support to the criterion validity of the *WRI*. (See Figure 1.)

Work Readiness Measure	<90 Days Mean Scores	>90 Days Mean Scores	% of Difference for <90 Day Work
Responsibility	13.88	12.08	+7.5
Flexibility	18.27	15.19	+12.9
Skills	18.05	14.19	+16.1
Communication	16.33	14.17	+9.0
Self-View	15.66	12.23	+14.3
Health & Safety	14.88	12.55	+9.7

Furthermore, the early-job-loss sample obtained significantly higher scores for *Flexibility* ( $t = 2.35, p = .023, df = 45$ ) and *Self-View* ( $t = 2.56, p = .015, df = 35$ ), indicating that on the *WRI* they reported more concerns about adapting to new work situations and perceived themselves as more lacking in self-confidence and self-efficacy than the sample of workers who had not experienced early job loss.



### Study 3

The discriminant strength of the *WRI* was tested in another criterion-related validity study completed in May 2009. A sample of high school seniors ( $n = 33$ ) who had been enrolled in a yearlong formal career/life planning program participated in the study. The career/life planning curriculum included career exploration, employability skills, communications, relationships, self-motivation, and health and wellness. The high school seniors were given the *WRI*. Their scores were compared to the *WRI* scores of a sample of working adults ( $n = 65$ ). The research question was asked, “Will the high school seniors who had completed a career/life planning curriculum have increased work readiness as evidenced by their obtaining *WRI* scores lower than those of the sample of working adults?” Findings revealed that the high school seniors scored significantly lower than the working adults on all *WRI* measures, suggesting that the high school seniors were more work ready, with the program having likely contributed to their work readiness. (See Table 3.) Results not only demonstrated the discriminant power of the *WRI*, but also the efficacy for its use in evaluating formal career/life planning curricula.

Work Readiness Measure	High School Seniors		Working Adults		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>df</i>
	<i>mean</i>	<i>sd</i>	<i>mean</i>	<i>sd</i>			
Responsibility	9.21	2.85	12.58	7.75	3.12	.002*	89
Flexibility	11.67	3.62	15.95	5.65	4.54	.0001*	90
Skills	10.42	3.27	15.26	8.16	4.17	.0001*	92
Communication	10.48	2.86	14.77	7.12	4.23	.0001*	92
Self-View	10.73	4.01	13.18	5.32	2.55	.013*	82
Health & Safety	8.91	3.28	13.20	8.44	3.60	.001*	91

\*Statistically significant difference.

Note: Increased work readiness for the sample of high school seniors in a career/life planning curriculum is evidenced by their significantly lower *WRI* mean scores.

## Internal-Consistency Reliability

### Study 1

A split-half reliability study to measure internal consistency and stability for each of the six *WRI* constructs was conducted in January 2009 with a sample of adults ( $n = 65$ ) who ranged in age from 19 to 70 years ( $m = 35.4$  years). The average number of years employed for the participants in this study was 18.4 years ( $sd = 13.9$  years). Study findings yielded a median Spearman-Brown correlation coefficient of  $r = .94$  ( $p < .001$ ) for all six *WRI* constructs. (See Table 4.)

Work Readiness Measure	Spearman-Brown $r =$	$p <$
Responsibility	.94	.001*
Flexibility	.82	.001*
Skills	.95	.001*
Communication	.93	.001*
Self-View	.73	.001*
Health & Safety	.96	.001*

\* Statistically significant

### Study 2

In February 2009, internal consistency was again assessed in a second split-half reliability study. The study was conducted with a volunteer sample ( $n = 15$ ) of university undergraduates representing several midwestern states. Study findings for the six readiness measures yielded a mean Spearman-Brown coefficient of  $r = .82$  ( $p < .001$ ). (See Table 5.)

Work Readiness Measure	Spearman-Brown $r =$	$p <$
Responsibility	.78	.001*
Flexibility	.77	.01*
Skills	.91	.001*
Communication	.86	.001*
Self-View	.75**	.01*
Health & Safety	.82	.001*

\* Statistically significant

\*\*Grubbs (1969, 1972) test to detect outliers used

### Study 3

A third study to measure internal consistency was conducted in April 2009 with another sample ( $n = 13$ ) of undergraduate college students, this time from the Eastern Great Lakes area. This reliability study yielded a mean Spearman-Brown coefficient of  $r = .89$  ( $p < .001$ ) for all six readiness measures of the *WRI*. (See Table 6.)

Work Readiness Measure	Spearman-Brown $r =$	$p <$
Responsibility	.90	.001*
Flexibility	.74	.01*
Skills	.93	.001*
Communication	.87	.001*
Self-View	.82	.001*
Health & Safety	.94	.001*

\* Statistically significant

### Test-Retest Reliability

Two test-retest reliability studies have been conducted to date. Test-retest reliability measures a test's stability over time. The first test-retest reliability study was conducted with the midwestern states university undergraduate sample during February and March of 2009. Study results found a median Pearson  $r = .80$  ( $p < .001$ ) for the six scales. The eastern Great Lakes college undergraduate sample participated in a test-retest study in March and April of 2009. Findings from this second study revealed a median Pearson  $r = .87$  ( $p < .001$ ) for all six readiness measures. (See Table 7.)

Work Readiness Measure	Study 1 Feb–Mar 09		Study 2 Mar–Apr 09	
	Pearson $r =$	$p <$	Pearson $r =$	$p <$
Responsibility	.84	.001*	.88	.001*
Flexibility	.70	.01*	.85	.001*
Skills	.80	.01*	.84	.01*
Communication	.74	.01*	.92	.001*
Self-View	.80	.01*	.78	.01*
Health & Safety	.80	.01*	.98	.001*

\* Statistically significant ( $n = 20$ )

## Standard Error of Measurement

The standard error of measurement is the amount of the variance in a given score, or how often one can expect errors of a given size in an individual's test score (Gay & Airasian, 2000). Because the *Work Readiness Inventory* uses a Likert interval scale, responses are weighted 1 through 5. Each construct is made up of six items; therefore, the range of raw scores for any given construct would be 6 to 30. Table 8 shows the standard error of measurement (SEm) values for all six *WRI* constructs. They are based on the five reliability studies completed to date.

Work Readiness Measure	Standard Error of Measurement
Responsibility	1.78
Flexibility	2.38
Skills	2.35
Communication	1.96
Self-View	2.14
Health & Safety	1.14

*Based on five reliability studies, n = 113*

## Conclusions

Findings from these studies provide strong support for the content validity, concurrent validity, internal consistency, stability, and reliability of the *Work Readiness Inventory*.

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