



# What Does it Mean to Be Professional?

**Session Time:** Four, 50-minute sessions

## DESIRED RESULTS

### ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDINGS

Professionalism promotes and supports positive business environments (physical and virtual) and relationships.

Regardless of which career one chooses, elements of professionalism such as integrity, diligence, maturity, and excellence should always be strived for.

### ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

1. What does professionalism look like in different work environments?
2. How do I conduct myself in a professional manner?

### LEARNING GOALS

#### Students Will Know

- Important traits of personal professionalism, including integrity, diligence, maturity, and excellence.
- Professionalism is not specific to certain jobs but should instead be pursued regardless of one's career goals.
- How they can integrate aspects of professionalism into their lives.

#### Students Will Be Able To

- *Identify* appropriate behaviors for interacting with supervisors, customers, and coworkers. [DOK-L1]
- *Analyze* interactions that occur in different workplace scenarios and make observations about how professionalism could be improved. [DOK-L3]
- *Create* a professional code of conduct to adhere to in the workplace. [DOK-L4]

## ASSESSMENT EVIDENCE

#### Warm-up

Students will think-pair-share to discuss personal experiences of unprofessional and professional behavior.

#### Formative Assessment

Students will create a poster illustrating the six traits of professionalism.

#### Summative Assessment

Students will work in groups to create a Professionalism PSA. They will perform the skit and submit the script as an activity.

## LESSON PREPARATION

## MATERIALS/RESOURCES

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- [What Does It Mean to Be Professional? Presentation](#)
- [What Does It Mean to Be Professional? Student Activity 1](#)
- [What Does It Mean to Be Professional? Student Activity 2](#)
- [What Does It Mean to Be Professional? Student Activity 3](#)
- [What Does It Mean to Be Professional? Student Activity 4](#)
- [What Does It Mean to Be Professional? Rubric](#)

## LESSON SUMMARY

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Lesson 1: Making Introductions Count: Resumes and Interviews

### **Lesson 2: What Does It Mean to Be Professional?**

Lesson 3: Effective Communication

Lesson 4: Managing Time

Lesson 5: How Can I Help You?

Lesson 6: Tools of the Trade

Lesson 7: Tell Me About Your Experience

The lesson will begin with a Think-Pair-Share as the Warm-Up to encourage students to reflect and discuss their experiences with both unprofessional and professional behavior. Note that it will probably be easier to recall negative experiences of unprofessional behavior. Unfortunately, we tend not to notice when workers do their jobs professionally because they match our expectations, and our experience is smooth and uneventful. It can take some analysis to consider what exact behaviors are the positive ones that we call “professional”.

Next, students are introduced to the Aviators Model Code of Conduct, a tool created by the Aviators Code Initiative to advance aviation safety and professionalism. In aviation, safety is always the most important consideration of professionalism. This makes sense because unprofessional behavior can often lead to injury or even death. After analyzing the Aviators Model Code of Conduct, students create their own Code of Conduct in [Student Activity 1](#) to guide their behavior.

In the second session, students delve more deeply into the specific behavioral traits that comprise the idea of Professionalism. They use the NBAA framework, illustrated as a six-part pie chart. Students are introduced to inspirational examples and quotes from famous aviators to exemplify each trait. At the end of the session, in [Student Activity 2](#), they use words and images to decorate their own version of the pie chart, as a Professionalism Poster. In this way, they will identify the behaviors and process the ideas to create a visual reminder that speaks to them.

In the third session, students form small groups, ideally six groups per class. Each group is to focus on one of the six traits of professionalism and analyze what behaviors are most important. The group chooses a particular behavior under that trait that they wish to encourage for a hypothetical workplace of a regional airport. In [Student Activity 3](#), they write a script that portrays negative or positive versions of that behavior to create a Public Service Announcement (PSA). They may include a motto or slogan to encourage good behavior. The PSA is either practiced for performance in front of the class or filmed for video presentation.

Finally, in the last session, each student group either performs or presents their Professionalism PSA. To keep the audience engaged, students may be asked to complete [Student Activity 4](#), analyzing the content and effectiveness of each presentation.

## BACKGROUND

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Perhaps the most important work skill that students can develop is professionalism. This one word can incorporate a wide variety of meanings. Professionalism includes how we behave in the workplace, how we dress, and how we speak to our coworkers, supervisors, and customers. It includes the effort we put into our work and our internal attitudes about our work. It also includes how we see our own identity in relation to our career.

Despite the complexity of the idea, a clear framework has been developed by the National Business Aviation Association (see <https://nbaa.org/aircraft-operations/safety/professionalism-in-business-aviation/personal-professionalism/>), and we use that framework in this lesson to focus on six main traits: Character, Attitude, Engagement, Competency in Vocational Skill, Respectful Image and Manner, and Continuous Improvement. These encompass all the major aspects of professionalism.

By teaching our students to conduct themselves in a professional manner, we provide multiple benefits to them: They can take pride in their work no matter where the job exists in a corporate hierarchy; they have the best chance to advance their career and attain better jobs; and they are more likely to have pleasant, respectful interactions with their coworkers and customers. All of us in society benefit from the competency, safety, and respect of a job done well.

## MISCONCEPTIONS

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Students may believe that professionalism only applies to interactions with other people. For example, providing good service to customers or getting along well with team members might make one seem more professional. While these are both important aspects of professionalism, it should be emphasized that professionalism is broader than this—it can be thought of as one’s personal approach to work. For example, approaching a job with diligence and working to excel in one’s performance are goals that should be pursued even if no one else is around. Consider how important this is for an engineer or mechanic. Their professionalism and attention to detail keep people safe when they do the job correctly, every time.

When it comes to dress and appearance, students may envision professional appearance as being formal and even expensive, like a business suit or other professional attire. It is important to emphasize that professionalism doesn’t have to require a lot of money and that being professional is about showing respect for the requirements of each job and situation. Someone who is clean, neat, and dressed for the work will always look professional, even if they can’t afford a fancy, name-brand suit (which would not be appropriate for many positions anyway). “Professional dress” will also look very different for an aircraft mechanic versus a customer service representative. “Professional manner” will need to match the work context as well. For instance, for most jobs, a polite and soft-spoken manner is appropriate, but someone who is in the military, or an emergency worker may need to sometimes shout commands. Each professional should strive to treat coworkers and customers with kindness and respect while still getting the job done effectively.

Students may be understandably skeptical of advice to be professional, especially when they experience low-paid entry-level jobs. The truth is that some employers do not truly reward good employees the way they should; they may even treat them as expendable. However, like a sense of personal morality and ethics, taking pride in one’s professionalism is a strategy that tends to pay off in the long run; furthermore, even the lowest-level aviation jobs may be crucial to ensuring customer safety. Being consistently professional should be a source of pride and a sign of personal integrity. Professionalism also builds resilience. By taking a professional attitude, one’s career identity travels with them; it isn’t tied to any particular job. Even the worst job can be a chance to develop professional skills (and vivid stories!) that can eventually lead to a more rewarding position.

## DIFFERENTIATION

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Students may have widely different experiences with work and workplace norms. Some students will have had part-time jobs or helped their parents run a family business. Other students will have little experience beyond helping with a few household chores. Some students may have accompanied their parents to work in a white-collar office on a Take Your Child to Work Day. But other students’ experiences of workplaces may be limited to school, home, the grocery store, and the doctor’s office. In fact, the workplace of some students’ parents may be their home if they have work-from-home jobs or caregiving and homemaking responsibilities.

Because of this, students may have little understanding of different workplace norms. To support this understanding in the **ENGAGE** and **EXPLAIN** sections, give examples of what is expected in different workplaces and what “professionalism” looks like in each one. Consider the different expectations and requirements in terms of dress, speech, cell phone use, computer use, lunch and restroom breaks, work hours, scheduling, and taking vacations. In fact, workplace expectations vary dramatically for different workers, even within the same company.

If time permits, short video clips from movies can be a fun way to illustrate these differences. To encourage student interaction in the **EXTEND** section, clips from TV shows like *The Office* can be used to illustrate awkward professional moments, faux pas, and conflicts. But be sure to vet all videos ahead of time and think about how to guide student discussion on difficult topics. (Be sure to point out that even the heroes in movies and on TV do not necessarily exemplify appropriate professional behavior for real life!)

To help provide more personal experience with workplaces, you might encourage parents to participate in their employers’ Take Your Child to Work Day, which is generally in April. By communicating the benefits to parents and smoothing the student’s absence with other teachers, you can encourage a memorable and meaningful experience for your students.

## LEARNING PLAN

### ENGAGE

Teacher Material: [What Does It Mean to Be Professional? Presentation](#)

#### Session 1

**Slides 1-3:** Introduce the topic and learning objectives of the lesson.

**Slides 4-7:** Conduct the Warm-Up. Ask students to work with a partner for this Think-Pair-Share activity.

#### Warm-Up

**Slide 4:** Think about the places you go in your daily life: businesses like restaurants, grocery stores, or department stores; government offices like the library, post office, or DMV; medical offices like your doctor or dentist.

**Think of a time you experienced unprofessional behavior.**

*What did that look like? What happened?*

*How did it make you feel as a customer?*

*What should have been done differently?*

**Now think of a time you experienced professional behavior.**

*How was this experience different?*

*What did the employee do that was “professional”?*

*How does that affect your feelings toward the business?*

*Share your experiences with a partner.*

**Slide 5:** After students have had a chance to discuss with their partners, invite them to share out the traits they identified as characteristic of “unprofessional” or “professional” behavior. Use the blank chart on the slide (or create one on the board) to fill in answers as students suggest them.

**Slides 6–7:** These slides summarize typical responses about what constitutes unprofessional and professional behavior across a variety of settings.

Unprofessional behavior can be:

- Rude or hostile
- Incompetent
- Lazy
- Careless or sloppy
- Flaky and unreliable
- And sometimes dangerous!

Be sure to emphasize this last point. When it comes to aviation, any kind of unprofessional behavior can lead quickly to dangerous situations.

In contrast, professional behavior is:

- Polite and respectful
- Done correctly, with expertise
- Diligent and hardworking
- Careful and precise
- Reliable and on time
- Aimed at keeping people safe and comfortable

[DOK-L1; *identify*]

**Slide 8:** The word professional has come up a lot in this lesson, but what exactly does it mean? As a noun, it's straightforward: a professional is someone with a profession—that is, someone who does work for money. But what does professional mean as an adjective? Have students complete another Think-Pair-Share activity to brainstorm what professional means when describing behavior. Ask volunteers to share their ideas and try to come up with a class definition of professional. Record this definition on the board and refer to it throughout the lesson; challenge students to revise it as they learn more about *professional behavior* and *professionalism*.



#### Teaching Tips

Consider looking up the adjective *professional* in a few dictionaries and comparing those definitions with the class's definition. (Do not share official definitions with students until after they have brainstormed their own ideas so as not to predispose students to a particular meaning.)

**Slides 9–10:** Emphasize that professional behavior is highly situation-dependent. A professional's expected dress, speaking style, and behavior will vary widely between workplaces. This may come as a surprise to students who picture a “professional” only as someone in a formal business suit. This point is exemplified on Slide 9 by photos of women of four professions: customer service, the military, an ambulance-driving EMT, and an aircraft maintenance worker.

After viewing the photos, students should discuss the following questions as a class.



### Questions

How does the appropriate clothing vary for the four professions?

*The customer service rep wears a suit and heels, but the other three wear more practical clothing to allow greater mobility. The maintenance worker also needs more safety equipment like a hard hat, vest, and hearing protection.*

How might the speaking style vary for the four professions?

*The customer service rep needs to speak calmly and politely. The soldier might be more assertive—yelling might even be a necessary part of her job, especially if she is training soldiers or leading them into combat. The EMT needs to speak clearly and bluntly to ensure people understand her instructions and follow them quickly—lives might be at stake.*

Do the three “action-oriented” workers still need to be professional?

*Absolutely! The meaning of “professional” changes based on what is appropriate for each profession.*

Can we describe general ways of being professional that apply to all four professions?

*Answers will vary. Sample response: Speech should always be “respectful,” even if it’s clear and loud. Dress should always be chosen appropriately with the job and setting in mind.*

## EXPLORE

**Teacher Materials:** [What Does It Mean to Be Professional? Presentation](#)

**Student Material:** [What Does It Mean to Be Professional? Student Activity 1](#)

**Slide 11:** Of all the different aspects of professionalism, in aviation, safety is always paramount. By their nature, aircraft can pose a danger to the workers and customers inside them, as well as to innocent people on the ground. Because of this, workers in aviation are held to an especially high standard of behavior.

To emphasize the point, you might share the story of the 2008 crash of an F/A-18 Hornet fighter jet in San Diego. Although the pilot suffered only mild injuries, the plane destroyed two houses in the neighborhood near Miramar Air Base. One house was unoccupied, but in the other house, a grandmother, mother, toddler, and baby were all killed. The father returned home to discover that his wife, children, and mother-in-law had perished in the crash. Despite this, he did not blame the pilot, who was only a student, but instead won a lawsuit against the U.S. government alleging a history of inappropriate maintenance and procedures. The Marine Corps investigation concluded that poor decisions at multiple levels were responsible for the crash. Despite mechanics identifying problems with the engine, maintenance was deferred, and the jet continued to be flown for months. Although air traffic controllers ordered the pilot to land in the nearest spot on North Island, several officers instead directed him to land at Miramar, which was further away and put neighborhoods at risk. The report also criticized the pilot for not questioning the order to land in Miramar and emphasizing the seriousness of the emergency to his superiors. As a result of the crash, four officers were fired, nine other Marines were disciplined, maintenance procedures were changed, and the incident is taught as a counterexample in Naval Flight School.

**Slide 12:** Introduce students to the Aviators Model Code of Conduct (AMCC), a tool created by the Aviators Code Initiative to advance aviation safety and professionalism. The latest revision, Version 3.0, was released in 2022.

You can read the entire AMCC here:

- <https://www.secureav.com/AMCC-v3.pdf>

You can download an abridged version (printable as a single two-sided page) here:

- <https://www.secureav.com/AMCC-v3-Abridged.pdf>

The code covers the responsibilities and best practices of aviators in a variety of areas, including best practices for interacting with passengers, attaining proficiency in flying, and ensuring security. Note how each section of the code begins with a list of core principles and then provides a checklist of actions (“Sample Recommended Practices”) that align with those principles. While this code is for pilots specifically, there are codes of conduct for many different careers—some are formalized in writing and others are not. It is important to point out to students that many workplaces have implicit, unspoken but expected codes of conduct.



### Teaching Tips

In fact, the Aviators Code Initiative has developed model codes of conduct for a dozen aviation professions, including aviation maintenance technicians, flight instructors, helicopter operators, and UAS (drone) pilots. Students can access all these codes here:

- <https://www.secureav.com/>

Open the link to the AMCC (or print out and distribute page 4). As a class, review the first section: General Responsibilities of Aviators. Consider asking individual students to read each lettered item (a-h) out loud. Then discuss the following questions as a class.



### Questions

1. How would you briefly sum up this section of the Aviators Model Code of Conduct?

*Sample response: “Keep everyone safe!”*

2. You might be part of extracurricular activities, like a sports team, a robot team, or perhaps something like a Knowledge Bowl team. Sometimes, we call good behavior “sportsmanlike” behavior. Does your sport or activity have a code of conduct for encouraging this kind of behavior?

*Answers will vary. For example: In FIRST robotics teams, the code includes the idea of “coopertition,” which describes how people can compete to win while still being kind, friendly, and respectful to their rival teams.*

**Slides 13–14:** Ask the students to consider how their own behavior affects others. Even if they don't have a job yet, their behavior affects their family, teachers, and classmates. In [Student Activity 1](#), they will create their own personal Code of Conduct that will describe the traits they will strive to embody.

Leave Slide 14 up on the board while students work on their own personal Code of Conduct in [What Does It Mean to Be Professional? Student Activity 1](#). Explain that students will be expected to follow their Code of Conduct for the remainder of the course.



#### Teaching Tips

If time permits, ask for volunteers to share their respective Code of Conduct with the class. If one is particularly appropriate to use in the classroom, consider asking students to vote on whether to adopt it for the classroom Code of Conduct. Alternatively, you could combine several to create a new Classroom Code of Conduct—though to ensure buy-in, it is still important to allow students to vote on whether to adopt it.

## EXPLAIN

**Teacher Materials:** [What Does It Mean to Be Professional? Presentation](#)

**Student Material:** [What Does It Mean to Be Professional? Student Activity 2](#)

### Session 2

**Slide 15:** Begin Session 2 with a brief summary of the previous session, in which students read the Aviator's Code of Conduct (which the slide recaps) and created their own personalized Code of Conduct.

**Slide 16:** Moving forward with the Explain section, we delve more deeply into the different aspects of professionalism. The National Business Aviation Association (NBAA) has created an excellent framework for this discussion, found here:

- <https://nbaa.org/aircraft-operations/safety/professionalism-in-business-aviation/personal-professionalism/>

This framework divides the concept of professionalism into six main traits:

1. Character
2. Attitude
3. Engagement
4. Competency in Vocational Skill
5. Image
6. Continuous Improvement

In the following slides, we use examples to explore each of these traits in detail.

Explain to the students that they will be using a blank pie chart to create their own Professionalism Poster. (A blank chart is provided in [What Does It Mean to Be a Professional? Student Activity 2](#), but students may use their own paper instead if they prefer.) They will be using words and images to decorate each pie piece to make the six traits most clear and meaningful to them. Suggest that they take notes as you discuss each of the six traits; you will collect the posters as a Formative Assessment at the end of the session.

#### **Slide 17: Professionalism Trait #1: Character**



The NBAA site describes Character as comprising integrity, honesty, truthfulness, forthrightness, responsibility, diligence, ethics, and mentoring. A quote that encapsulates this trait is by Sarah Feinberg: “Doing the right thing is the right thing, no matter what the outcome is.”

Point out to students that there may come a time in their work life when they must choose between their integrity and their career advancement—their job itself may even be threatened unless they compromise on character. Unfortunately, many people are punished for their honesty and high integrity when these virtues conflict with an organization’s profitability—but they are rewarded by keeping their reputation and their self-respect intact.

In Sarah Feinberg’s case, she initially suffered for revealing her company’s misdeeds, but she was rewarded handsomely in the end. Working as a financial analyst for Booz Allen, a company that holds billions of dollars in U.S. government military contracts, she discovered corrupt misappropriation of funds. For months she tried to fix the problem from within, but when her superiors refused, she sued the company as a whistleblower. (A whistleblower is someone who reports wrongdoing at their workplace; the law is supposed to protect them from retaliation.) When she won the suit, she was awarded a portion of the settlement, amounting to 40 million dollars!

Summing up her experience, Feinberg said: “I’ve got three kids, and I tell them, ‘Doing the right thing is the right thing, no matter what the outcome is.’ There’s very few times in this life where you’ll actually be rewarded for doing the right thing, but this is one of those unique situations.”

#### **Slide 18: Professionalism Trait #2: Attitude**

The NBAA site describes Attitude as comprising responsibility, determination, and initiative, along with a service mentality and willingness to be a team player.

A quote that exemplifies good attitude is by Mike Rowe, the host of the TV show Dirty Jobs: “This is the thing about work ethic that’s easy to forget. It’s not just about determination and persistence and discipline. It’s not just about holding your nose and getting through it, or sucking it up or never quitting. It’s also about finding a way to genuinely enjoy the task at hand.”

Mike Rowe believes that work ethic is an important ideal and that vocational education has been neglected. So, he created a scholarship foundation with 12 pledges relating to work ethic and professionalism. This video shows Mike explaining the importance of attitude in a relatable way with frank humor (warning: video includes a flatulence joke!):

- “Pledge 7” (Length 4:18)  
[https://youtu.be/61qwr6Gg\\_ol](https://youtu.be/61qwr6Gg_ol)

#### **Slide 19: Professionalism Trait #3: Engagement**

The NBAA site describes Engagement as comprising performance, improvement, participation, volunteering, feedback, and partnership. Maybe the best way to think about this trait is that an engaged worker takes pride in being part of their industry and profession. They go beyond the minimum requirements of the job itself.

A quote that relates to Engagement is by astronaut Chris Hadfield, who said: “Every single day you’re the result of what you did on the days prior.” In this video, he explains how this idea of improving every day can relate to one’s aviation career as well. While his overall dream goal was to be an astronaut, he made a series of career moves that led steadily to that goal, and each was a worthwhile and enjoyable job. By being fully engaged with each job along the way, he built his career to eventually get his dream job.

- “Chris Hadfield on how you can achieve your goals” (Length 2:22)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eGrzo4lvXyg>

#### **Slides 20–21: Professionalism Trait #4: Competency in Vocational Skill**

The NBAA site describes Competency in Vocational Skill with these words: skill, expertise, training, performance, personal effectiveness, and good communication.

Perhaps no one better exemplifies vocational competency than Captain Chesley “Sully” Sullenberger, known for the 2009 “Miracle on the Hudson” in which he landed an airliner safely on the Hudson River after a dual engine failure. He said, “Realistic optimism is a sense of self-confidence based on experience, knowledge, and proven skills.” He describes this philosophy further on his own website, here:

- <https://www.sullysullenberger.com/navigating-crisis-beyond-the-cockpit/>

Another quote that speaks to the importance of Competency is by Florence Lowe “Pancho” Barnes, who supposedly said: “I may not be famous or blonde, but I’m one terrific pilot.” Students may enjoy learning more about the irreverent Pancho Barnes. She was a fun-loving, brash character who lived life to the fullest. At the time (1920s and 30s), few would have called her “professional” (she told vulgar jokes and ran a pilot’s retreat called the Happy Bottom Riding Club). But thanks to her amazing flying skills and good-natured enthusiasm for the profession, she earned the friendship and respect of aviation greats like Chuck Yeager and Buzz Aldrin.

### **Slides 22–23: Professionalism Trait #5: Image**

The NBAA site describes this trait simply as “Image,” but a better framing might be “Respectful Image and Manner.” From the word “Image” alone, students might infer that dressing nicely for a job is a superficial or trivial consideration. It might seem old-fashioned and fuddy-duddy—the kind of thing that only uptight older people care about.

But if we analyze what professional dress is really all about, we realize that it is more about respect. How we dress shows respect for our job, our organization, and our customers. Dressing appropriately puts people at ease and shows that we are taking our responsibility to them seriously. Would you want your heart surgeon to come in wearing his golf outfit? Would you trust your future to a lawyer who wore her workout clothes to court? Conversely, how would you feel if a plumber or electrician showed up for a job in a suit and tie? Those clothes would make it difficult for them to comfortably investigate the problem—fixing a clogged toilet can be messy! Our clothing is just one way that we can nonverbally communicate our focus, expertise, and attention to detail.

Likewise, our speech and manner show appropriate respect—or not. Our tone of voice, use of formal or informal language, and body language all send signals to our coworkers and customers. Part of being respectful is being flexible and “reading” the people around us. The right thing to do or say may depend on the situation. We also will have to interact with a wide variety of people in our jobs. Our bosses, coworkers, and customers will likely differ from ourselves. They may be older or younger, more or less educated, from different countries, states, or ethnic backgrounds. They may differ in their gender identity or their political leanings. Nevertheless, they all deserve to be treated with respect. We should strive to avoid stereotyped assumptions and treat everyone as an individual.

This type of respectful workplace behavior is so important that many workplaces will ask employees to participate in special training to avoid any sexism, racism, or harassment in their interactions. It is important to recognize that behaviors that might be acceptable in other settings, like flirting or crude jokes, may be perceived as sexual harassment or animus in the workplace.

The NBAA site describes this trait as composed of maturity (including dressing appropriately), etiquette (treating others as you would want to be treated), loyalty, respect, discretion, and excellence.

A quote that relates to Respectful Image and Manner is the traditional saying “Dress for the job you want, not the job you have.” This is an interesting saying to provoke discussion. If you want to be an astronaut, should you dress like an astronaut even while you are waiting tables? Perhaps the saying can be improved by changing it to “Behave for the job you want, not the job you have.” In other words, act with the maturity and expertise that show that you are ready to take on the responsibilities of the next step up the ladder. (But you can leave the space suit at home!)

### **Slides 24–25: Professionalism Trait #6: Continuous Improvement**

The NBAA site describes Continuous Improvement with these words: culture (i.e., safety culture), management, education, debriefing (evaluations of your performance to find new ways to improve), and resiliency. People committed to continuous improvement view setbacks as learning opportunities.

A quote that exemplifies this trait is by famed aerobatics pilot Patty Wagstaff, who said, “A true aviator really sees aviation as a whole, constantly improving but while still being humble, and realizing that you can never know everything there is to know.” All this talk about professionalism may make students feel that professionalism = perfectionism. But in fact, being a professional also requires us to be humble and admit when we are in over our heads. Simon Sinek is not an aviator, but he is an expert on behavior in the workplace. He points out, “Saying ‘I don’t know’ means someone can help us.” He eloquently describes the importance of vulnerability in this video.

- “Emotional Professionalism” (Length 2:30)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HvhYV3bTgUg>



### Teaching Tips

If you have time, you might share with the students an inspiring story of Continuous Improvement, as portrayed in the 2016 film *Hidden Figures*. This scene has extra relevance for modern students, who will be entering the workforce at a time of unprecedented automation and job replacement by Artificial Intelligence. Having a good career will likely require flexibility and willingness to adapt and develop new skills.

At the time of the 1960s space race, Dorothy Vaughan was a “computer” for NASA—meaning a person who computed the mathematical calculations necessary for rocket launches and landings. When NASA got the first digital computers by IBM, her team was in danger of losing their positions. So, she taught herself and her team the early programming language FORTRAN, thus saving their jobs and putting themselves at the forefront of the new computer age.

The entire movie *Hidden Figures* (and the book that inspired it) has many lessons about career development, resilience, and professionalism. Consider encouraging your students to watch or read it, or maybe offer extra credit for a brief review of it.

**Slide 26:** Complete the Formative Assessment.

### Formative Assessment

Students have the remainder of the session to complete [What Does It Mean to Be a Professional? Student Activity 1](#). Provide them with the link to the NBAA website describing the six traits of personal professionalism:

- <https://nbaa.org/aircraft-operations/safety/professionalism-in-business-aviation/personal-professionalism/>

The activity contains a pie chart divided into six slices, one per trait. Students should create a Professionalism Poster by adding words and images that make each trait clear, memorable, and meaningful to them. Students may use the blank chart in the activity, or they may create their own on a larger sheet of paper or poster board.

[DOK-L1; *identify*]

## EXTEND

Teacher Material: [What Does It Mean to Be Professional? Presentation](#)

Student Materials: [What Does It Mean to Be Professional? Student Activity 3](#), [What Does It Mean to Be Professional? Rubric](#)

### Session 3

In the Extend section, students will have a chance to show what they have learned about professionalism as they create a Professionalism PSA (Public Service Announcement). In this skit or short video, each group will highlight their interpretation of one of the six traits of professionalism: Character, Attitude, Engagement, Competency in Vocational Skill, Respectful Image and Manner, or Continuous Improvement. (To support student comprehension, the activity will refer to “Respectful Image and Manner,” as it is clearer and more precise than the NBAA’s term, “Image.”) The activity is framed as a PSA designed to motivate and train employees at a large regional airport to demonstrate professional behavior.

By asking students to focus on a trait, write a script, and then role-play appropriate and inappropriate behavior, we help clarify and cement the concepts for the group and for their audience.

**Slides 27:** Begin Session 3 with a brief summary of the previous session, in which the class discussed the six traits of Professionalism as described on the National Business Aviation Association (NBAA) website: Character, Attitude, Engagement, Competency in Vocational Skill, Image (better framed as “Respectful Image and Manner”), and Continuous Improvement.

**Slides 28–29:** Before starting the PSA project, take some time to “get real” in a discussion with your students. It’s easy to talk about professionalism in a theoretical way, before it really counts. But when we adults think back to our first jobs, many of us had pretty bad experiences! It’s extra hard to be professional when you are the lowest-ranked employee.

Acknowledge that in their first jobs, students may find that they:

- work long hours
- do not really enjoy being with coworkers
- do not always enjoy the job
- deal with difficult customers
- make mistakes
- are criticized by the boss (sometimes unfairly)
- may not be paid very well

Explain to the students that it takes real strength of character to keep it together and always be professional! It can be a true challenge and they should take pride in developing professional skills. Even when these skills do not make initial jobs more enjoyable, they set up employees to find better jobs—and be better at them.

**Slide 30:** To introduce the final project, discuss the challenge of leaders who want to promote professionalism. Especially in a large organization, it may be tricky to inspire all the different employees to be motivated about being professional and to understand what that entails.



#### Teaching Tips

To help illustrate these points, you might share the story of the Apollo 13 mission. Both the astronauts and the people on the ground had to stay professional to rescue the mission from what could have been a tragic disaster. The National Air and Space Museum has an engaging website, including videos with people involved in the mission, here:

- <https://airandspace.si.edu/explore/stories/apollo-missions/apollo-13>

Or you might use the example from the book and movie *Hidden Figures*. Part of the space mission's success was due to leaders at NASA who improved opportunities for African American women workers. When everyone feels that they have opportunities to contribute and be appreciated and promoted, the whole organization benefits. Students can read more about these inspiring women here:

- <https://www.nasa.gov/modernfigures>

Remind students that spreading the word about professionalism does us all a favor. We have better experiences as customers and coworkers when people are professional. And the more professional a person is, the more hireable they are!



### Questions

You may be in charge of a team of employees someday. How can you inspire them to stay professional, even under the pressure of stressful situations?

*Answers will vary. Sample response: You could offer incentives for well-behaved employees. You could make them feel like they are all part of a team doing important work. You could ensure that they know that being professional will allow them all a chance to move up the ladder to better jobs.*

**Slides 31-32:** Direct students to form six groups for the Summative Assessment; each group should have roughly the same number of members. Provide each student with a copy of [What Does It Mean to Be a Professional? Student Activity 3](#), and review the following context for the activity:

**Imagine that you are the managers of a large regional airport.**

- You have hundreds of employees, including pilots, stewards, air traffic controllers, mechanics, customer service reps, restaurant cooks, store clerks, and cleaning and janitorial staff.
- Their professionalism determines the quality of the customer experience, the health of the employees' work environment, and everyone's safety—not to mention the airport's profits!

**How can you use the format of a public service announcement (PSA) to motivate and train all your employees to demonstrate professional behavior?**

Remind students that a PSA is like a commercial to remind people of good advice. Groups should complete the following steps (also listed in [Student Activity 3](#)) to create their PSA about professionalism:

1. Form a group and get your assigned Professionalism trait.
2. Choose a specific behavior to inspire in others (consider a slogan or motto).
3. Write a script showing why that behavior is good—or why lacking that behavior is bad!
4. Give everyone a role to play.
5. Practice acting out the skit to perform for the class during the final session.

Assign each group one of the six professionalism traits: Character, Attitude, Engagement, Competency in Vocational Skill, Respectful Image and Manner, or Continuous Improvement. Groups have the remainder of the session to work on their PSAs, using [Student Activity 3](#) for recording their plan and the script they will follow; the activity also has a

snippet of sample script for students to use as a model. Also share the [What Does It Mean to Be Professional Rubric](#) so students understand how you will be assessing their work.



### Teaching Tips

Consider giving groups the option of recording their skit rather than performing it live for the class. Not every group member is required to perform, but everyone does need to participate equitably.

## EVALUATE

**Teacher Materials:** [What Does It Mean to Be Professional? Presentation](#), [What Does It Mean to Be Professional? Rubric](#)

**Student Materials:** [What Does It Mean to Be Professional? Student Activity 3](#), [What Does It Mean to Be Professional? Student Activity 4](#)

### Session 4

**Slide 33:** Conduct the Summative Assessment.

#### Summative Assessment

In the previous session, students worked in groups to create a Professionalism PSA. In this session, the students will present their PSAs and analyze those of their classmates.

Invite each student group to present its Professionalism PSA in front of the class. To keep the audience engaged and paying attention, consider assigning [What Does It Mean to Be Professional? Student Activity 4](#), in which students take notes and analyze each presentation.

When a group finishes its presentation, collect its members' copies of [What Does It Mean to Be Professional? Student Activity 3](#). Assess each student's work using [What Does It Mean to Be Professional? Rubric](#).

[DOK-L3; *analyze*; DOK-L4; *create*]



### Teaching Tips

Following each group's presentation, consider eliciting constructive criticism from the class. Students can comment on the clarity of the message and offer possible tips or ideas for improvement. Not only does this allow students to practice professionalism, but it also gives them practice listening to constructive criticism. This is a skill that will be important when they enter an actual workplace environment.

You might give a brief lesson on the TAG method of giving constructive feedback before opening the floor:

T = Tell them something you liked

A = Ask a question

G = Give a suggestion on how to improve

## STANDARDS ALIGNMENT

### STATE OF KENTUCKY CTE STANDARDS

- **ES.H.17.f:** Adapt speech, using both verbal and nonverbal skills, to a variety of situations, demonstrating command of formal English when appropriate.
- **C.H.10:** Assess the relationship between personal behavior and employability (e.g., academic achievement, industry certifications, extracurricular activities, community involvement, driving record, impact of online behavior).
- **C.H.11:** Identify and follow agreed-upon work skills (e.g., attendance, respect, preparedness, quality of work, time-management) that are necessary for both the classroom and workplace.

## REFERENCES

- Aviators Model Code of Conduct (Version 3.0)  
<https://www.secureav.com/AMCC-v3.pdf>
- National Business Aviation Association: Six Traits of Personal Professionalism  
<https://nbaa.org/aircraft-operations/safety/professionalism-in-business-aviation/personal-professionalism/>
- The Miracle on the Hudson, from #PassItOn  
<https://www.passiton.com/inspirational-sayings-billboards/38-preparation>
- Navigating Crisis Beyond the Cockpit, by Sully Sullenberger  
<https://www.sullysullenberger.com/navigating-crisis-beyond-the-cockpit/>
- Video: Pancho Barnes: Aviatrix, Organizer, Legend.  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XF\\_eINo\\_nZo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XF_eINo_nZo)
- More about Pancho Barnes  
<https://panchobarnes.com/about/>
- Mike Rowe on Having a Good Attitude  
[https://youtu.be/61qwr6Gg\\_ol](https://youtu.be/61qwr6Gg_ol)
- Chris Hadfield on how you can achieve your goals  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eGrzo4lvXyg>
- Simon Sinek on Emotional Professionalism  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HvhYV3bTgUg>
- The Story of Apollo 13  
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- The Story of the Women in Hidden Figures  
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