

Essential Skills

Essential skills are the skills needed for the workplace. They include: literacy skills (reading, writing, document use and numeracy), computer skills, thinking skills, oral communication skills, interpersonal skills (working with others) and continuous learning skills.

The Government of Canada and various other national and international agencies have identified these skills as being essential for the workplace. They are used in nearly every job in varying combinations and differing levels of complexity. They are the foundation for learning on the job and enable people to adapt and evolve as their work changes and evolves.

Definitions of Essential Skills:

(taken from Human Resources and Skills Development Canada <http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/workplaceskills/LES/definitions/definitions.shtml>)

Reading

Reading refers to reading material that is in the form of sentences or paragraphs. It generally involves reading notes, letters, memos, manuals, specifications, regulations, books, reports or journals. Reading includes:

- forms and labels if they contain at least one paragraph
- print and non-print media (for example, text on computer screens and microfiche)
- paragraph-length text in charts, tables and graphs

Writing

Writing includes:

- writing texts and writing in documents (for example, filling in forms)
- non-paper-based writing (for example, typing on a computer)

Document Use

Document Use refers to tasks that involve a variety of information displays in which words, numbers, icons and other visual characteristics (such as line, colour, and shape) are given meaning by their spatial arrangement. For example, graphs, lists, tables, blueprints, schematics, drawings, signs and labels are documents used in the world of work. Document Use includes:

- print and non-print media (for example, computer screen or microfiche documents, equipment gauges, clocks and flags)
- reading/interpreting and writing/completing/producing of documents-these two uses of documents often occur simultaneously as part of the same task, e.g., completing a form, checking off items on a list of tasks, plotting information on a graph, and entering information on an activity schedule

Numeracy

Numeracy refers to the workers' use of numbers and their being required to think in quantitative terms.

Computer Use

Computer Use indicates the variety and complexity of computer use within the occupational group

Thinking

Thinking differentiates between six different types of interconnected cognitive functions:

- problem solving;
- decision making;
- critical thinking;
- job task planning and organizing;
- significant use of memory; and
- finding information.

Oral Communication

Oral Communication pertains primarily to the use of speech to give and exchange thoughts and information by workers in an occupational group.

Working with Others

Working with Others examines the extent to which employees work with others to carry out their tasks. Do they have to work co-operatively with others? Do they have to have the self-discipline to meet work targets while working alone?

Workers may work independently most of the time, but work with partners in certain circumstances. For example, Longshoremen work independently when operating forklifts in the yards but work with partners to load cargo into the hold of a ship.

Continuous Learning

Continuous Learning examines the requirement for workers to participate in an ongoing process of acquiring skills and knowledge. Continuous Learning is based on the idea that more and more jobs require continuous upgrading, and that all workers must continue learning in order to keep or to grow with their jobs. If this is true, then the following will become Essential Skills:

- knowing how to learn;
- understanding one's own learning style; and
- knowing how to gain access to a variety of materials, resources and learning opportunities.