

What are Essential Skills?

Essential Skills are the skills people need for work, learning and life. They provide the foundation for learning all other skills and are the cornerstone of lifelong learning.

Through extensive research, the Government of Canada and other national and international agencies have identified and validated nine Essential Skills. These skills are used in virtually all occupations and throughout daily life in different forms and at different levels of complexity.

For example, writing skills are required in a broad range of occupations. Some workers write simple forms while others write complex monthly reports. Although the specific form and complexity level may vary

for the workers, the Essential Skill “writing” is necessary to succeed in their occupations.

Essential Skills and Workplace Literacy Initiative

Launched on April 1, 2003, the Essential Skills and Workplace Literacy Initiative helps to ensure Canadians have the right skills for changing work and life demands. Its goal is to enhance the skill levels of Canadians who are entering –or are already in- the workforce. The initiative does this by increasing awareness and understanding of Essential Skills, supporting the development of tools and applications, building on existing research, and working with other Government of Canada programs.

Essential Skills Tools

An increasing number of Canadians are recognizing the importance of lifelong learning and workplace skills training as they are closely linked to productivity, adaptability and innovation. The Government of Canada has been working with businesses, labor groups, governments, educators and other stakeholders from across the country to develop a wide range of tools and applications that promote innovative approaches to assessing and developing skills. The ongoing development of these tools is helping employers and workers understand training requirements as well as improving the ability of Canadians to acquire and update the skills they need to succeed in the workplace.

Nine Essential Skills

- *Reading Text*
- *Document Use*
- *Numeracy*
- *Writing*
- *Oral Communication*
- *Working with Others*
- *Thinking Skills*
- *Computer Use*
- *Continuous Learning*

Defining Essential Skills

Essential Skills are the foundational skills required to successfully participate in the Canadian labor market. Definitions, typical applications and actual workplace examples are outlined below to help readers understand each Essential Skill.

Essential Skill	Typical Applications	Workplace Example
<p>Reading Text Reading materials in the form of sentences or paragraphs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scan for information • Skim for overall meaning • Read a full text to understand, learn, critique or evaluate • Integrate and synthesize information from multiple sources or from complex and lengthy texts 	<p>An airline sales and service agent reads notices on a computer screen, such as special handling requirements for a specific flight or weather information that will affect flight times.</p>
<p>Document Use Tasks that involve a variety of information displays in which words, numbers, symbols and other visual characteristics (e.g., lines, colors or shapes) are given meaning by their spatial arrangement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read signs, labels or lists • Interpret information on graphs or charts • Enter information on forms • Read or create schematic drawings • Read or create assembly drawings 	<p>A bricklayer interprets blueprints to establish the height, length and thickness of walls, and the materials to be used.</p>
<p>Numeracy Using numbers and thinking in quantitative terms to complete tasks</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Numerical estimation • Numerical calculation • Money Math • Scheduling or budgeting and accounting math • Measurement and calculation math • Data analysis math 	<p>Payroll clerks monitor departmental budgets and vacation entitlements to prepare budgets and scheduling forecasts.</p>
<p>Writing Writing text and writing in documents, such as filling in forms, and nonpaper-based writing such as typing on a computer</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organize, record or document • Inform or persuade • Request information or justify a request • Present an analysis or a comparison 	<p>Human resources professionals write policy papers to provide recommendations on a wide variety of human resource matters such as workplace health and safety.</p>
<p>Oral Communication Using speech to give and</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greet people and take messages 	<p>General office clerks take messages and</p>

exchange thoughts and information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reassure, comfort or persuade • Seek or obtain information • Resolve conflicts • Facilitate or lead a group 	relay information, by phone or in person, to other workers
Working with Others Employees working with others to carry out their tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work independently • Work jointly with a partner or helper • Work as a member of a team • Participate in supervisory or leadership activities 	A municipal engineer works collaboratively with other departments, as well as with technicians, inspectors, suppliers and others to complete construction projects.
Thinking Skills The process of evaluating ideas or information to reach a rational decision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problem solving • Decision making • Critical thinking • Job task planning and organizing • Significant use of memory • Finding information 	Paramedics make a working diagnosis of a patient's condition based on notes, patient charts and their own observations. If information on the charts is inconsistent with their observations, they use their judgment to initiate an appropriate treatment plan.
Computer Use Using different kinds of computer applications and other related technical tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operate a computerized cash register • Use word processing software to produce letters or memos • Send e-mails with attachments to multiple users • Create and modify spreadsheets for data entry 	Telephone information operators use customized software to scan several databases for telephone numbers and long distance rates.
Continuous Learning Workers participating in an ongoing process of acquiring skills and knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As part of regular work activity • From co-workers • Through training offered in the workplace • Through • off-site training 	Retail sales associates upgrade their product knowledge by communicating with suppliers and manufacturers as well as by viewing videos on product lines.