



Now and Tomorrow
Excellence in Everything We Do

Skills and Employment
Office of Literacy and Essential Skills

What are Essential Skills?

Essential Skills are the skills that people need for learning, work and life. They are used in the community and the workplace, in different forms and at different levels of complexity. Definitions, typical applications and examples are outlined below to help you understand each Essential Skill.

Essential Skills	Typical Applications	Workplace Examples	Community Examples
<p>Reading Understanding materials written in sentences or paragraphs (e.g. letters, manuals).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scan for information or overall meaning. • Read to understand, learn, critique or evaluate. • Analyze and synthesize information from multiple sources or from complex and lengthy texts. 	<p>An airline sales agent reads notices on a computer screen, such as special handling requirements or weather information.</p>	<p>You may use this skill to understand a lease agreement for a new apartment.</p>
<p>Document Use Finding, understanding or entering information (e.g. text, symbols, numbers) in various types of documents, such as tables or forms.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read signs, labels or lists. • Understand information on graphs or charts. • Enter information in forms. • Create or read schematic drawings. 	<p>A bricklayer interprets blueprints to determine the height, length and thickness of walls.</p>	<p>You may use this skill when referring to a bus schedule to plan an outing.</p>
<p>Numeracy Using numbers and thinking in quantitative terms to complete tasks.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make calculations. • Take measurements. • Perform scheduling, budgeting or accounting activities. • Analyze data. • Make estimations. 	<p>Payroll clerks monitor vacation entitlements to prepare budget and scheduling forecasts.</p>	<p>You may use this skill to calculate deductions on personal tax forms.</p>
<p>Writing Communicating by arranging words, numbers and symbols on paper or a computer screen.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write to organize or record information. • Write to inform or persuade. • Write to request information or justify a request. • Write an analysis or a comparison. 	<p>Human resources professionals write recommendations on issues such as workplace health and safety.</p>	<p>You may use this skill to complete an application for a credit card.</p>
<p>Oral Communication Using speech to exchange thoughts and information.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide or obtain information. • Greet, reassure or persuade people. • Resolve conflicts. • Lead discussions. 	<p>Office clerks take messages and share information by phone and in person.</p>	<p>You may use this skill to explain a food allergy to a server at a restaurant.</p>

Essential Skills	Typical Applications	Workplace Examples	Community Examples
Working with Others Interacting with others to complete tasks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work independently, alongside others. • Work jointly with a partner or helper. • Work as a member of a team. • Participate in supervisory or leadership activities. 	Municipal engineers work with technicians, inspectors, and suppliers to complete construction projects.	You may use this skill when working with volunteers to organize a fundraising activity.
Thinking Finding and evaluating information to make rational decisions or to organize work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and resolve problems. • Make decisions. • Find information. • Plan and organize job tasks. • Use critical thinking. • Use memory. 	Paramedics diagnose a patient's condition based on medical charts and their own observations. They use their judgement to start an appropriate treatment plan.	You may use this skill to research and select courses at your local adult learning centre.
Computer Use Using computers and other forms of technology.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use different forms of technology, such as cash registers or fax machines. • Use word processing software. • Send and receive emails. • Create and modify spreadsheets. • Navigate the Internet. 	Telephone operators use customized software to scan databases for telephone numbers or long distance rates.	You may use this skill when withdrawing or depositing money at an automatic teller machine (ATM).
Continuous Learning Participating in an ongoing process of improving skills and knowledge.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn on the job. • Learn through formal training. • Learn through self-study. • Understand your own learning style. • Know where to find learning resources. 	Retail sales associates improve their skills and knowledge by attending sales training and reading product brochures.	You may use this skill when attending a first aid course at a community centre.

The Office of Literacy and Essential Skills has developed a number of free and easy-to-use resources that can help you

✓ assess Essential Skills

✓ practice and improve Essential Skills

✓ develop Essential Skills training

Literacy and Essential Skills— for LEARNING, WORK and LIFE

To learn more about literacy and essential skills and other related tools, visit
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