

# **What is Workplace Literacy?**

There are many definitions and categories of workplace literacy, although they share some common elements. The following summary is taken from the Conference Board of Canada's website – an excellent resource on workplace literacy. Visit

<http://www.conferenceboard.ca/workplaceliteracy/about-skills.asp>

## **Workplace Basic Skills**

Workplace Basic Skills are the core skills that employees need to do their jobs successfully. These skills are critical to the success of modern business. They are also crucial in public sector workplaces such as hospitals, schools and government offices.

Workplace basic skills include literacy skills and other important skills, attitudes and behaviors that are essential to workplace success and high performance. Gaining basic skills also has a positive impact on employees' attitudes and behaviors. This is often just as valuable to employers as the skill gains themselves.

Workplace basic skills include:

- Understanding and ability to use prose (such as reports, letters, and equipment manuals)
- Communicating effectively
- Understanding and ability to use documents (such as safety instructions, assembly directions, maps)
- Understanding and ability to use numbers by themselves or in charts and tables
- Thinking critically and acting logically to solve problems and make decisions
- Using computers, technology, tools and information systems effectively
- Ability to build and work in teams
- Positive attitude toward change
- Willingness and ability to learn for life

## **International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS)**

Workplace basic skills include the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) definition of literacy skills. IALS, a twenty-country comparative study of adult literacy, highlighted the lack of basic skills in employed people in Canada, the United States, and other highly developed

countries. For employers, this means that many employees at every level in their organizations need help to improve their basic skills in order to do their jobs well.

IALS defines literacy as a particular capacity and mode of behavior: the ability to understand and employ printed information in daily activities, at home, at work and in the community – to achieve one’s goals, and to develop one’s knowledge and potential.

IALS identified three distinct literacy types:

***Prose Literacy*** – the knowledge and skills needed to understand and use information from texts including editorials, news stories, poems and fiction

***Document Literacy*** – the knowledge and skills needed to locate and use information contained in various formats, including job applications, payroll forms, transportation schedules, maps, tables, and graphs

***Quantitative Literacy*** – the ability to work with numbers and conduct quantitative operations, such as balancing a chequebook, figuring out a tip, completing an order form, or determining interest on a loan

## **Employability Skills**

Employability skills, as identified by The Conference Board of Canada in its *Employability Skills 2000+* brochure, are the skills, attitudes and behaviors needed to participate in today’s dynamic world of work:

***Fundamental Skills*** – are skills needed as a base for further development, including:

- Communicate
- Manage information
- Use numbers
- Think and solve problems

***Personal Management Skills*** – are personal skills, attitudes and behaviors that drive one’s potential for growth, including:

- Demonstrate positive attitudes and behaviors
- Be responsible
- Be adaptable
- Learn continuously
- Work safely

***Teamwork Skills*** – are skills and attributes needed to contribute productively, including:

- Work with others
- Participate in projects and tasks

## **Essential Skills**

As identified by Human Resources Development Canada, essential skills are enabling skills that help people perform the tasks required by their occupation and other activities of daily life; provide people with a foundation to learn other skills; and enhance people's ability to adapt to workplace change. They include:

- Reading text
- Document use
- Writing
- Numeracy (math)
- Oral Communication
- Thinking skills (problem solving, decision making, job task planning and organization, significant use of memory and finding information)
- Working with others
- Computer use
- Continuous learning

For more information on Essential Skills, visit: [www15.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca](http://www15.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca)