

CURRICULUM RESOURCE

Professionalism and Communication on the Job Site

OALCF ALIGNMENT

Competency	Task Group	Level
Competency A - Find and Use Information	A1. Read continuous text	2
Competency A - Find and Use Information	A3. Extract information from films, broadcasts and presentations	N/A
Competency B - Communicate Ideas and Information	B1. Interact with others	2
Competency B - Communicate Ideas and Information	B2. Write continuous text	2
Competency F - Engage with Others	N/A	N/A

Goal Paths (check all that apply)

- Employment
- Apprenticeship
- Secondary School Credit
- Postsecondary
- Independence

Embedded Skills for Success (check all that apply)

- Adaptability
- Collaboration
- Communication
- Creativity and innovation
- Digital
- Numeracy
- Problem Solving
- Reading
- Writing

NOTES:

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Professionalism in Masonry

Being a good mason involves more than laying bricks. A mason's reputation is built on both how good their work is and how they act at work.

Masons with good reputations are those who build solid walls and structures and also:

- have a good work ethic
- work well with other people
- communicate clearly
- can handle disagreements
- presents themselves well

Through their actions, these masons are showing **professionalism**.

When you hear the word **professionalism**, what kind of person do you think of? Is it someone who has an important job title or someone who is a leader?

Describe someone you know that shows **professionalism**. What do they do? How do they act? Do you show any of these traits?

Tell a classmate, teacher, or tutor about the person you chose and how they show **professionalism**. Explain what traits you share with this person.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary describes **professionalism** as “the skill, good judgment, and polite behaviour that is expected from a person who is trained to do a job well.”

If you apprentice as a mason, you will be trained to do masonry work well. You will learn to:

- use tools and equipment
- work with clay, concrete, and mortar
- build many kinds of masonry wall systems
- be safe on a work site

How you behave while you learn these things is what will show your **professionalism**.



“It is important to understand that advancement in the field is not based only on the speed and quality of one's work. The capacity to learn, ability to interact well, personal appearance, neatness, organization and behaviour; all of these traits will be observed and judged by colleagues and employers.”

The "Textbook of Canadian Masonry" (second edition)
by the Canadian Masonry Contractor's Association.



Two of the traits of professionalism are included in the **Skills for Success**. These are the nine skills that everyone needs to be successful in work, learning, and life. Watch for the **Skills for Success** logo throughout this resource to find out more!

You can also learn about the **Skills for Success** by visiting this website:
<https://www.canada.ca/en/services/jobs/training/initiatives/skills-success.html>

Now, let's take a closer look at different ways you can show **professionalism**.

Work Ethic

One way of showing professionalism is by having a good work ethic. But what is a work ethic? Let's start by thinking about the word **ethics**. What does that word mean to you?

Share your thoughts with a classmate, teacher, or tutor.

To make it easier to understand, we can use other words to describe **ethics**.

Some people might call them **morals**. They can be rules you follow because of what you think is right and wrong. For example, if you saw someone drop their wallet, and you picked it up and gave it back to them, you may have done that because you think it's the right thing to do. These are your morals.

A mason could show they believe discrimination is wrong by treating everyone on the worksite with the same level of respect. This would show one of their morals, and that they try to behave ethically.

Ethics can also be called **values**. Values are the things or actions that you think are most important in life. For example, if you value quality, you may choose to wait longer to buy something so you can save enough money for a high-quality version instead of settling for a cheaper version.

A mason could show that they value safety by taking longer to begin a job to ensure that the workspace is safe first. This would show one of their values is having a safe workplace.

If ethics are the morals or values we use to help us decide how to act in our lives, then our **work ethics** are the morals and values we can use to decide how to act at work.

Here are some ways you can show a good **work ethic**:

- Show up on time at the start of your day.
- Take breaks when they are scheduled. Return on time when breaks are done.
- Pay attention to your work. Don't be distracted by conversations or your phone.
- Show initiative. Ask what else needs to be done if you do not have something to do.
- Do a good job even if it takes a long time. Don't try to cut corners to make the work go faster.
- Accept feedback from experienced workers and supervisors. Be open to learning new things.
- Take pride in your work and try to do your best.

“It is the responsibility of the Mason to develop and practice safe work habits and to work efficiently at a productive rate. This means always reporting to work on time and keeping up with work schedules such as hours and breaks.”

The "Textbook of Canadian Masonry" (second edition) by the Canadian Masonry Contractor's Association.



Which of these traits of a good work ethic do you have? Pick two and write down an example of when you showed each trait on the job or in your everyday life.

Share your examples with a classmate, teacher, or tutor.

Teamwork

Masons who show professionalism are good at working with other people. They are **team players**! Think of a time when you had to work as part of a team. It could be in school, at work, when playing a sport, or even as part of a family. What team were you part of? What were you trying to do? Why was it important to work together? Write your experiences below.

Share your experience of being part of a team with a classmate, teacher, or tutor.



Masons who are **team players**, who share responsibilities with other workers and get the job done, are sought out by employers. These are the masons that employers want to hire for their next job.

Here are some other ways a mason can demonstrate that they are a **team player**:

- Be open to other people's ideas and listen to their suggestions.
- Offer to help other people on the job.
- Look for new ways the team can work together and share them.
- Treat everyone with respect.
- Think of one person's success as the team's success.
- Show a positive attitude.
- Lead by example. Be someone other workers look up to.
- Encourage others to do their best work.



Did you know that Collaboration is one of the nine **Skills for Success**? Collaboration means working with other people – it’s the same as **teamwork**!

Activity: Watch a short video by the Canadian government to learn what they have to say about this skill. As you watch the video, fill in the blanks below. Pause and rewind the video as many times as you want until you find all of the answers.

Video link: https://youtu.be/MB4Vc_xY360

At work, we often have to collaborate closely with others, including those who have different _____, experience, or who have different _____.

Collaboration is a skill that helps us _____ to each other, build strong relationships, and understand how to contribute to a _____.

We have a greater chance for success when we _____ to get the job done.

Skills for Success can help you become a strong team member and build the _____ skills you need to succeed at work and in life.



“Becoming a good team player leads to a more productive, pleasant, and safe work environment. It takes very little time and energy to cooperate with coworkers and other trades people to offer useful advice when needed or to lend a hand.”

The "Textbook of Canadian Masonry" (second edition) by the Canadian Masonry Contractor's Association.

Communication Skills

The way you communicate with other people is a good way to show professionalism. Think about someone you know who is a great **communicator**. They could be a friend, co-worker, or even someone you've seen on TV. Describe below what makes them so good at communicating.

Tell a classmate, teacher, or tutor about the person you chose and what makes them a great **communicator**.



Did you know that **Communication** is one of the nine **Skills for Success**? Here is what the Canadian government has to say about this skill:

Strong communication skills help you share information in a way that others can clearly understand. You also need strong communication skills to listen to, pay attention to, and understand others. In all jobs, communication skills are important for developing good working relationships with co-workers and clients, including those from different backgrounds and cultures.



Reflect: Do you think you're a good communicator?

Communication isn't just talking or writing. It includes:



Speaking. This is also called verbal communication. It includes your choice of words and your tone of voice.

Listening. This is a very important part of communication. To be a good listener you need to hear what other people say and think about what they mean.



Body language. Your body language says a lot. It includes the posture, hand gestures, and facial expressions you use when you speak or listen.

Observing. Just as other people will watch your body language, you can learn a lot by watching theirs.



Writing. We write in many forms, sometimes using a pen and paper, other times using a keyboard or digital device. Good writing includes spelling words correctly, using good grammar, and putting words together in a way that's clear and easy to understand.

Reading. Being able to read emails and notes from coworkers, follow written instructions, and understand documents and forms is an important part of communication.



“Developing good verbal communication skills is important to learning and advancing in the trade. Attention should be paid to basic interpersonal skills, such as giving and receiving instructions, asking for clarification, properly wording questions and effectively delegating (that is, giving duties) to others.”

The "Textbook of Canadian Masonry" (second edition)
by the Canadian Masonry Contractor's Association.



Resolving Conflict

When workers disagree, it can lead to conflict on the job site. It can be very easy to feel angry or hurt and lash out at other people when conflict happens. Being able to control your reactions and **resolve conflicts** is part of professionalism.

Disagreements happen everywhere – at work, school, and home. We can even find ourselves in conflict with people we've never met who share different opinions online. Think about a time you disagreed with someone else, and it ended peacefully. What **resolved the conflict**? Share your experiences below.

Share what helped you **resolve this conflict** with a classmate, teacher, or tutor.



“Masons can encounter a number of difficulties on the job site. In some poorly managed construction sites, the climate among workers creates a difficult work environment.”

“In most cases, there are people in authority on the job site to whom concerns and incidents can be reported. Depending on the circumstances this may be the foreperson, site supervisor, safety representative, or office staff.”

The "Textbook of Canadian Masonry" (second edition)
by the Canadian Masonry Contractor's Association.

There are several steps you can follow* to help resolve a conflict with someone else.

1. Take a step back and think. When you have a difference of opinion with someone else, it does not mean you are right and they are wrong, but it is very easy to feel that way and lash out with anger. Take a step back from the conflict so you can calm down and think about whether you need to change your mind or behaviour to resolve it.



2. Reach out to the other person. Contact the person you're in conflict with and ask if you can find a time to discuss the problem. Doing this sooner rather than later can help resolve the problem quickly so it doesn't get even bigger.

3. Talk with the person away from the work site. Trying to resolve a conflict in front of coworkers or friends can be awkward. Unless you want someone who isn't involved in the conflict to be present to help lead the conversation (a mediator), try to find a place you can speak privately.



4. Think about body language. Remember that a big part of communication is body language. Keep your body language positive by keeping your arms uncrossed, maintaining eye contact, and keeping a neutral expression on your face.

5. Choose your words carefully. Telling someone you're in conflict with everything they've done wrong can make them feel defensive immediately. Instead, tell them how you feel, and how the conflict is affecting you.



6. Find the problem. Often, conflicts can look like they are about one thing but are actually about something else altogether. Someone accusing others of slacking off may actually be angry at their supervisor for not managing the team's workload well. Ask questions to find out what is really going on.

* Adapted from How to Resolve Conflict in the Workplace (With Strategies). (2022, October). Indeed.com. Retrieved June 30, 2023, from <https://ca.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/resolve-conflict-workplace>

7. Listen. When the other person is talking, it's important to use your communication skills by listening and thinking about what they say. Try to understand them to see the reason behind their actions or point of view.



8. Find a way to fix it. Once you and the other person have talked about the conflict, you can start working towards a solution. Sometimes a sincere apology and a promise not to repeat the conflict is enough. For larger conflicts, one or both people may need to agree to change their behaviour to avoid conflict in the future. Be prepared that both you and the other person may have work to do.

9. Plan your next steps. If the fix isn't as simple as an apology, come up with a plan for what to do next. It could be making a verbal agreement with the other person and deciding what should happen if that agreement is broken. It may mean involving someone else to ensure the issue doesn't happen again. If you've involved a mediator, they can help you with this step.



Pick two of these steps that you think would work best to resolve a conflict. Write them below.



Reflect: How would following these steps have resolved a conflict you've experienced?

Personal Presentation

The way you behave is an important part of professionalism. Your **clothing and personal hygiene** are part of professionalism too. These things tell people a story about who you are and what is important to you. What story do you want your **personal appearance** to tell?

What do you want people to think when they look at you? Write your ideas below.

Share what you want people to think of your **personal appearance** with a classmate, teacher, or tutor.

“The saying “Dress for Success” applies not only to executives. While working with construction materials and mortar can be messy, this is not an excuse to wear dirty ripped cast-offs and to forgo basic personal hygiene and grooming. Masons should invest in functional and appropriate work apparel and keep it as clean as the job allows.”



The "Textbook of Canadian Masonry" (second edition) by the Canadian Masonry Contractor's Association.

Clothes, hairstyles, or makeup can be used to show individuality and creativity in some places. In others, such as at work, we must **present ourselves** in a way that reflects professionalism.

For example, if a worker arrives at a job site with poor personal hygiene, wearing torn pants and a t-shirt with an offensive saying on it, it tells a story. What story might this worker's **appearance** be telling? Write your ideas below. You do not need to share them.

There could be a good explanation. Perhaps the worker got in an accident and could not go home after work the day before. They may be showing their professionalism by showing up for work even though they could not go home, clean up, change, and brush their teeth first.

Without a good explanation, their employer will likely think the worker does not care what people think of them. That can be a direct reflection of the quality of their work. Would an employer expect a worker who can't go to the trouble of brushing their teeth and washing their hair to take the time to build a foundation wall with care?



It is also a matter of safety, especially if a worker's poor **personal presentation** extends to their personal protective equipment (PPE). For example, improperly worn safety harnesses or undone safety boots can be very dangerous on a work site. Also, work gloves must be kept in good condition because direct skin contact with mortar can cause dermatitis or burns.

Personal presentation is about so much more than what your appearance tells other people about you. It's about professionalism and the safety of yourself and others on the job.



Reflect: Are you ready to present yourself professionally on the job?

Conclusion

This resource looked at the importance of **professionalism** in the masonry trade.

Check off what you learned about professionalism below.

- The things you can do to show a good work ethic.
- How important it is to work well with a team.
- Different forms of communication, including verbal, written, and body language.
- How to handle disagreements and resolve conflicts.
- Why how you present yourself is important.

Tip: If you didn't fill in one of the checkboxes, go back to that section and read it again. Ask a classmate, teacher, or tutor to share what they know about that element of professionalism.

Next Steps

For more information about becoming a brick and stone mason in Ontario, you can complete the other resources in this series:

- Tools of the Masonry Trade
- Masonry Math 1: Measurements and Calculations
- Masonry Math 2: The Next Step in Numbers

You can also visit these helpful websites:

- A description of the Brick and Stone Mason trade from Skilled Trades Ontario:
<https://www.skilledtradesontario.ca/trade-information/brick-and-stone-mason/>
- The Canadian Masonry Contractors Association:
<https://canadianmasonrycontractors.com/>