

Curriculum Resource

Setting Your Priorities

Adults in Literacy and Basic Skills programs have competing priorities based on their individual circumstances. The need to prioritize situations at home, work and socially can be difficult. Understanding how to set priorities is an important skill in the busy lives of adults. CLO’s Setting Your Priorities resource explains why priorities are important and how problem-solving skills can support you as you set priorities.

This resource has been developed to support adult learners with Level 1 skills as they work towards their individual goals of work, further education and training, apprenticeship, or independence. It has links to both the Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework and the Skills for Success model.

OALCF Alignment

Competency	Task Group	Level
Competency B - Communicate Ideas and Information	B1. Interact with others	1
Competency B - Communicate Ideas and Information	B2. Write continuous text	1
Competency B - Communicate Ideas and Information	B3. Complete and create documents	1
Competency B - Communicate Ideas and Information	B3. Complete and create documents	2
Competency C - Understand and Use Numbers	C4. Manage data	1

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: B3.1b and B3.2a

There is also C2.1 and E.1 but we ran out of lines in this chart.

COMMUNITY LITERACY OF ONTARIO

Setting Your Priorities

Introduction

Community Literacy of Ontario (CLO) is pleased to share our **Setting Your Priorities** resource. To help meet the needs of underrepresented groups, CLO has been funded by the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development to develop seven curriculum resources that meet the needs of underrepresented learners, introduce the Government of Canada's **Skills for Success** model, and align with the **Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework**.

Adult learners in Ontario's Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) programs typically face multiple challenges besides low levels of literacy. From CLO's perspective, underrepresented learners are the adult learners in LBS programs who face additional barriers that make thriving in Ontario more difficult. Factors include but are not limited to:

- Poverty
- Disabilities
- Mental health issues
- Age-related challenges
- Learners who are Indigenous persons, visible minorities, or immigrants
- Gender inequality
- Sexual orientation discrimination
- Other socio-economic inequities

Adults in Literacy and Basic Skills programs have competing priorities based on their individual circumstances. The need to prioritize situations at home, work and socially can be difficult. Understanding how to set priorities is an important skill in the busy lives of adults. CLO's **Setting Your Priorities** resource explains why priorities are important and how problem-solving skills can support you as you set priorities.

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independence. It has links to both the Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework and the Skills for Success model.

In May 2021, the Government of Canada introduced an update to its Essential Skills model. The updated model has been renamed **Skills for Success**. Information about the Skills for Success (SFS) model is available on the [SFS website](#).

While developing our resources, CLO looked at the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation's (SRDC) research on the Skills for Success model. Literacy practitioners will be interested in the SRDC's [Skills for Success Implementation Guidance Final Report](#) as it supports implementation of the individual skills in the model. The SRDC's research report to support the launch of [Skills for Success: Structure evidence and recommendations – Final Report](#) is also recommended reading.

For Practitioners – More on the Skills for Success

While there are **nine Skills for Success**, in this resource CLO focusses, in part, on entry level skill components of **Problem Solving**. The information in this section is from the [Skills for Success website](#).

Problem Solving

Problem solving is your ability to identify, analyze, propose solutions and make decisions. Problem solving helps you to address issues, monitor success and learn from the experience.

Problem Solving: Entry Level Proficiency

You can make decisions or solve problems when there are limited or familiar variables, all of the information is provided, and the stakes are low with few consequences. You can use your general knowledge and skills to process information, do simple or routine troubleshooting if needed, identify the decision or solution, and confirm the issue is resolved.

Why is Problem Solving Important?

While problem solving seems simple, there are many factors that influence your choices. The way that you use information to make your decisions and approach problems is impacted by competing priorities and circumstances. Strong problem-solving abilities will help you make informed decisions and support you as you solve problems that arise at home, work and socially.

Practitioners can read about the definitions, components and proficiency levels for the **nine Skills for Success** on the Government of Canada's website. For more information about the proficiencies, you can also read the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation's (SRDC) [*Skills for Success Implementation Guidance Final Report*](#)



Setting Your Priorities is designed for Level 1 learners in Ontario's Literacy and Basic Skills program.

Literacy practitioners can verbally share the content with learners with Level 1 skills. Learners with higher skill levels could use this resource independently.

Setting Your Priorities

Setting Your Priorities contains four sections:

1. Why Priorities Are Important?
2. How to Set Priorities
3. Priority Setting in Action
4. Supporting Activity

Section 1 – Why Priorities Are Important?

A priority is something that is more important than another. A priority comes or happens before others.

Setting priorities means deciding what things are more important than others. Setting priorities is important! For example,

- What would happen if the Hospital Emergency Department didn't set priorities? Hospital staff quickly "triage" people as they come in. This helps them to decide who is a high priority for medical care. By setting priorities, hospital staff help people in the greatest need first.

Here is why setting priorities can help you.

Setting priorities can help you to feel less overwhelmed

- Overwhelmed means something in your life feels too difficult or impossible to do.
- Without setting priorities, **everything** can feel like it's a priority. But it's impossible to do everything all at once. You can feel very overwhelmed.
- To feel less overwhelmed, focus on the most important things first. That can help your life feel more manageable.



Most of us spend too much time on what is urgent and not enough time on what is important.”

Stephen Covey

Setting priorities helps you focus on what is most important to you

- By setting priorities, you focus on the things that are the most important. You’ll be moving forward towards your most important goals and needs.
- If you don’t set priorities, you may work on things that are less important.

Setting priorities helps you to manage your time better

- When you know what’s most important, it’s easier to manage time. You can more easily say “no” to what isn’t as important.
- Both your time and energy are important and limited. Priority setting can help you use both wisely!

Setting priorities can reduce stress

- Having too much work or too many problems can cause stress. It can make you worried and unhappy. It can make you tense and your body ache.
- By setting priorities, you can organize your “to do” list. You can see all that you need to do and in what order. You can then tackle things one at a time. Maybe some tasks can be done by someone else. You might even see that some tasks are not needed.



Something to Think About...

Can you think of two ways that setting priorities would help you?

Share your thoughts with another learner or practitioner.

Section 2 – How to Set Priorities

Here are four steps to help you set priorities.

1. Create a list of all the tasks you need to do

- Think about all the tasks you need to do.
- Then, create a list of these tasks.
- You can create one big list for all the tasks, or you can put the tasks into groups. Here are some example groups:
 - *Things I need to do at home*
 - *Things I need to do at school*
 - *Things I need to do at work*
 - *Other things I need to do*
- You can create this list on paper, on a computer or on your cell phone.

2. Decide what's most and least important

- Next, look at the tasks on your list and rank them.
- Then, decide which of your tasks are the most important. Here is one helpful way to do that.

First decide whether each of your tasks is:

Very important

Somewhat important

Not as important

Next decide when you need to do it. Here are some example times:

I need to do it right away

I can do it in a week or two

I can do it much later

Looking at your tasks by importance and timing shows your top priorities. Your priorities are tasks that are:

#1

It's very important
and it must be done
right away

#2

It's somewhat
important and it must
be done right away

#3

It's very important
but I can do it in a
week or two

Example of Step 2 – Deciding what's most and least important

Bert is very busy. He works long hours in construction from Monday to Friday. He also has three tasks he needs to do. Bert only has weekends to do the tasks. He needs to set priorities.

Here are Bert's tasks:

- Bert's snowblower isn't working and he needs to get it fixed
- Bert needs to pick up his wife at the hospital today
- Bert needs to buy new safety work boots for his job

Bert has reviewed and set his priorities by deciding what is most important and what needs to be done first followed by what needs to be done next in order of priority.

- **Top priority** – Bert will pick up his wife at the hospital today. This task is very important, and he must do it right away.
- **Second priority** – Next, Bert will fix his snowblower. This task is only somewhat important because he can shovel. But Bert should do it right away because a big snowstorm is coming.
- **Third priority** – Bert needs to buy new safety work boots. This task is very important, as he needs the boots at work. There is a sale on boots next week. So, the task can wait for a week. Bert will buy boots next week when they are on sale.

3. Set a realistic date and time for each priority

You have set your priorities, Now, it is time to decide when to do each task. Here are some steps to take.

- What are the tasks you have to do? Write them down.
- When do you need to do each task? Write the day that it must be done.
- How much time will it take? Think about how long you need to do each task. Be realistic and make sure you give yourself enough time. Write the time it will take beside the task.
- What time of day should you do it? Often, you have more than one task in a day. You will need to set a time for each priority. You can ask yourself some questions to help.
- Here are some examples:
 - Is there a specific time when you need to do the task? For example, a doctor appointment or a time to be at work.
 - Is there something you don't like to do? This could be your first task to get it over with.
 - What time of day do you have the most energy? You could do the most physical or difficult tasks then.
 - Do you like to do tasks first thing in the morning? Do you like to do tasks after school or work?
 - Do you like to finish tasks before you start anything else? Do you like to break things up into steps or chunks?
 - Do you like to do tasks in the evening after the kids are in bed?

4. Review and revise

- Look at your list of priorities regularly and review it.
- Check off items on your list when you have done them. Most people feel very happy when they get to check things off their list!
- Redo your list of priorities when things change.



Something to Think About...

Can you think of a task you need to do that is important and urgent?
Share your thoughts with another learner or practitioner.



To change your life, you need to change your priorities.”

Mark Twain

Section 3 – Priority Setting in Action

To see priority setting in action, let's go through a scenario to see how Meera set her priorities.

Meera lives in Barrie with her husband and a teenager daughter. She is a PSW (Personal Support Worker). She also volunteers at the Food Bank. Meera is a busy person. She has many things to do. Meera is starting to feel stressed.

Here is how Meera set her priorities.

1. Create a list of all the tasks

- Meera thought about all the tasks she needed to do.
- On her computer, Meera made a list of all her tasks.
 - *Look at the grocery bills and plan ways to reduce them*
 - *Meet her friend for coffee*
 - *Pay bills that are due*
 - *Attend a training event at work that could lead to a better job*

2. Decide what's most and least important

Then Meera arranged her tasks by how important they are.

- Meera decided that her “very important” tasks are:
 - *Pay bills that are due*
 - *Attend a training event at work that could lead to a better job*
- Meera decided that her “somewhat important” task is:
 - *Look at the grocery bills and plan ways to reduce them*
- Meera decided that her “not as important” task is:
 - *Meet her friend for coffee*

Very
important

Somewhat
important

Not as
important

3. Set a realistic date and time for each priority

Next, Meera thought about when she should do each task. Should she do that task right away? Could it wait for a week or two, or even longer? Meera decided that:

- Tasks that she needed to do “right away” are:
 - *Pay bills that are due*
 - *Look at the grocery bills and plan ways to reduce them.*
- A task that she can do “in a week or two” is:
 - *Attend a training event at work that could lead to a better job*
- A task that can “wait for a while” is:
 - *Meet her friend for coffee*

Right away

In a week or two

It can wait for a while

Now Meera knows her priorities!

Very important task that she must do right away

- **Priority #1** – *Pay several bills that are due*

Somewhat important task that she must do right away

- **Priority #2** – *Look at the grocery bills and plan ways to reduce them.*

Very important task but do it in a week or two

- **Priority #3** – *Take training at work so she can get a promotion*

Meera’s other task is not as important. It can wait until she has more time.

4. Set a realistic date and time for each priority

- Meera figured out how much time each task would take. Then she set a specific date for each priority.
- Meera planned what time of day to do each priority. For example:
 - Meera dislikes paying bills. She will do that first thing in the morning. She wants to get that task over early!
 - Meera wants the whole family to help reduce the grocery bills. The family will do their planning next Saturday.

5. Review and revise

- In two weeks, Meera reviews her list of priorities.
- Meera has completed Priorities 1 and 2. She can remove them from her list.
- Priority 3 is now at the top. Meera considers if that is still her top priority. She decides it is still important. She sets a date and time to do that task. Meera will take the training next Wednesday from 9am to 4pm.

Meera still hopes to have coffee with her friend, but she is really too busy now. Meera will wait and meet with her friend in a month or two when she has more time.



Something to Think About...

Do you think Meera did a good job setting priorities? Why or why not?

Share your thoughts with another learner or practitioner.

Section 4 – Supporting Activity – Unexpected Events

The following activity incorporates elements of the Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework's (OALCF) Competencies with Level 1 and 2 Tasks and Indicators. While the activity also contains other Skills for Success, in this resource we are focussing on [Problem Solving](#).

Detailed information about the components and proficiency levels for all of the **nine Skills for Success** is available on the Government of Canada's [Skills for Success website](#).

Instructions for Practitioners

After sharing the content from this resource with the learner(s), you can ask them to complete the following activity. This activity is suitable for an individual learner or for a small group of learners.

The OALCF Competency, Task Group and Level indicators, and Skills for Success components and proficiencies can be used to discuss performance, determine skill progression and identify some possible next steps to further develop learner proficiency.

Tasks 1 - 4 also incorporate various skill components and elements of Entry Level proficiency (Skills for Success) from the skill of Problem Solving.

Problem Solving: Entry Level Proficiency

You can make decisions or solve problems when there are limited or familiar variables, all of the information is provided, and the stakes are low with few consequences. You can use your general knowledge and skills to process information, do simple or routine troubleshooting if needed, identify the decision or solution, and confirm the issue is resolved.

ACTIVITY

A blank sheet of paper and pen are required for this activity. A copy of the Problem Solving Components Chart will also be required for the final task.

Task 1 – Identify challenges

Ask the learner(s) to think about what happens when unexpected or unplanned things occur. Explain that often, priorities need to shift or change because of changes in plans. This need to shift, adapt or make new priorities can happen any time.

For this activity, ask learners to think about the following scenario. Learner(s) can share the challenges associated with this scenario with the practitioner or another learner.

It is a winter evening, and you have just been told that you have to vacate the building tomorrow for 6 hours while a pest control company is onsite. You have been asked to clear everything off the floor of your room and move furniture away from the walls.

This task incorporates elements of the following OALCF Competency:

Competency B: Communicate Ideas and Information

- Task Group: Interact with others (B1)
 - B1.1 Participate in brief interactions to exchange information with one other person

Task 2 – Identify required actions

Ask the learner(s) to write a list of **three** actions that need to happen to respond to one or more of the challenges that they identified.

Competency B: Communicate Ideas and Information

- Task Group: Complete and create documents (B3)
 - B3.1b Create very simple documents to display and organize a limited amount of information

Task 3 – Identify timing of actions

Ask the learner(s) to write today or tomorrow beside the actions that they wrote to show when these actions need to happen.

This task incorporates elements of the following OALCF Competencies:

Competency B: Communicate Ideas and Information

- Task Group: Write continuous text (B2)
 - B2.1 Write brief texts to convey simple ideas and factual information

Competency C: Understand and Use Numbers

- Task Group: Manage Time (C2)
 - C2.1 Measure time and make simple comparisons and calculations

Task 4 – Identify priority of actions

Ask the learner(s) to put a number from one to three beside the actions that they wrote to show the priority order of these actions.

This task incorporates elements of the following OALCF Competency:

Competency C: Understand and Use Numbers

- Task Group: Manage Data (C4)
 - C4.1 Make simple comparisons and calculations

Task 5 – Review actions and priority order

Ask the learner(s) to review their list to ensure that they don't want to change anything. Changes can be made, if needed.

This task incorporates elements of the following OALCF Competency:

Competency E: Manage Learning

- Task Group: No Task Group
 - E.1 Set short-term goals, begin to use limited learning strategies, and begin to monitor own learning

Task 6 – Problem Solving Components Chart

This chart encourages self-reflection and reinforces some of the Problem Solving skill components used in the first five tasks.

Practitioner assistance may be required to support the learner(s) with lower skill levels as they complete the chart.

This chart can be adapted to reflect the Problem Solving skill components to suit individual learner’s goals and skill levels. The full components list is available on the [Skills for Success website](#).

The wording of the skill components has been simplified in the following chart to better meet the needs of adults in Literacy and Basic Skills programs.

Ask the learner(s) to complete the Problem Solving Chart using checkmarks to show how they used Problem Solving when they identified the soft skill for improvement and how volunteering could help with that improvement.

Practitioner instructions to learner(s):

Earlier, we discussed the importance of setting priorities. In our activity, you identified challenges that happened because of short notice for pest control. You used problem solving to help determine the priority of actions that you needed to take in response to these challenges.

The questions in this chart are about ways you might have used problem solving to complete the activity.

Place a checkmark beside each question to show how you used problem solving in the activity.

When you thought about pest control coming the next day, did you...	A lot	A little	Not at all
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify challenges? 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Think about actions that need to happen in response to one or more of the challenges? 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make a list of actions to address the challenge(s)? 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decide when the actions need to happen? 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use the timing of the action items to help set their priority order? 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review your priority actions to see if any changes need to be made? 			

This chart incorporates elements of the following OALCF Competencies and Task Groups:

Competency B: Communicate Ideas and Information

- Task Group: Complete and create documents (B3)
 - B3.2 a Use layout to determine where to make entries in simple documents

Competency E: Manage Learning

- Task Group: No Task Group
 - E.1 Set short-term goals, begin to use limited learning strategies, and begin to monitor own learning

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