

## CURRICULUM RESOURCE

Workplace Skills, Strategies, and Know-How: Self-Advocacy

### OALCF ALIGNMENT

Competency	Task Group	Level
Competency A - Find and Use Information	A1. Read continuous text	2
Competency A - Find and Use Information	A2. Interpret documents	2
Competency B - Communicate Ideas and Information	B1. Interact with others	1
Competency B - Communicate Ideas and Information	B2. Write continuous text	2
Competency B - Communicate Ideas and Information	B3. Complete and create documents	2

### Goal Paths (check all that apply)

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Employment     | <input type="checkbox"/> Postsecondary |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Apprenticeship | <input type="checkbox"/> Independence  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Secondary School Credit   |  |

### Embedded Skills for Success (check all that apply)

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Adaptability   | <input type="checkbox"/> Numeracy           |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Collaboration  | <input type="checkbox"/> Problem Solving    |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Communication  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Reading |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Creativity and innovation | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Writing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Digital                   |   |

**NOTES:** Part ten of an eleven-part series on workplace norms for employed learners.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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**Research & Writing:** Mark Jacquemain



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 [communityliteracyofontario.ca](https://communityliteracyofontario.ca)

 (705) 733-2312

 [info@communityliteracyofontario.ca](mailto:info@communityliteracyofontario.ca)

 @CommunityLiteracyOntario

 @love4literacy

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## WORKPLACE SKILLS, STRATEGIES, AND KNOW-HOW

### Note for practitioners:

This series of **Skills for Success Curriculum Resources** is a beginner's guide to the modern workplace for LBS learners. The goal is to provide essential tools to employed learners, or learners seeking employment, so that they can thrive as employees. This series considers personal development topics ranging from conflict resolution to time management; topics focused on changes in the workplace; and mental health issues like stress management.

The overall focus of the series is on helping employees (or aspiring employees) understand their rights and responsibilities.

These resources are learner-based and activity-focused, with each topic area serving as a mini-lesson, followed by personalized activities. The activities invite learners to respond to lesson material or explore their own ideas on the subject.

The series is divided into eleven sections that can be used separately or in tandem:

- Your Rights in the Workplace
- Adaptability in the Workplace
- Collaboration in the Workplace
- Communication in the Workplace
- Creativity and Innovation in the Workplace
- Problem Solving in the Workplace
- Work-Related Stress
- Time-management
- Conflict Resolution
- Self-Advocacy
- Changes in the Workplace

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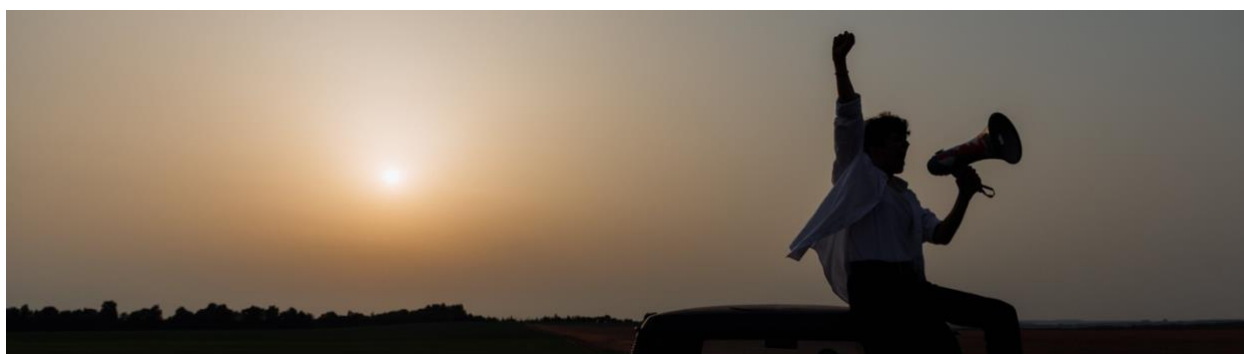
*This is Section Ten, Workplace Skills, Strategies, and Know-How:  
Self-Advocacy*

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# WORKPLACE SKILLS, STRATEGIES , AND KNOW-HOW: Self-Advocacy

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## Overview

Are you currently employed? Are you about to start a new job? There are many things about the modern workplace that you may not know.

This resource series is designed to help you get the most out of your employment.

When you have a job, there are several important questions you should ask:

- What are my rights?
- How can I advocate for myself?
- How should I expect to be treated on the job?
- What are the expectations at a modern workplace?
- What has changed at workplaces over the last few years?
- How can be my best at:
  - conflict resolution
  - time-management
  - communication

You may also face other challenges on the job. Do you have concerns about:

- stress on the job
- mental health at your workplace

This resource series will consider these topics and more. Participate in the lessons and activities. You will learn to get the most out of the modern workplace.



## Introduction

Self-advocacy is important in the workplace. It means speaking up for yourself. It means taking steps to be sure your work and abilities are appreciated. It involves communicating your goals, needs, and successes.

There are many benefits to self-advocacy. Self-advocacy helps you:

- build confidence in your role
- avoid confusion and miscommunication
- stay motivated at work
- use your strengths
- make connections among co-workers
- be rewarded for your efforts
- gain growth opportunities in the company



**Let's discuss!**

Soon we will learn more about self-advocacy. First let's talk about **your** situation. Check the boxes that apply to you:

- ☐ I struggle to speak up for myself.
- ☐ My needs are often ignored.
- ☐ My successes are often overlooked.
- ☐ I want to learn how to advocate for myself.



Are you in a different situation? Discuss with your teacher or partner.



### Your Goals!

It's time to think about your **goals**:

1. Are you currently looking for work? Yes ☐ No ☐
2. If so, what sort of work interests you? Discuss with your teacher and partner.
3. How do you think improving your **self advocacy** might help you at work?



### Optional Task!

Do this now or when you have more time:

- Make a list of five jobs that interest you.
- Now re-write the list.
- Put the job you'd like most at the top.
- Then put the job you'd like second-most. And so on.
- Do any of these jobs have **growth opportunities** like becoming a supervisor or manager?
  - Advance your career! **Self advocacy** is a great way to take advantage of growth opportunities.

## Self-Reflection

### Self-Reflection

Becoming a strong self-advocate requires a little **self-reflection**. Be realistic about where you are in your career. Imagine where you want to be in the future.

#### 1. Work on Your Mindset

We can get stuck when we have the wrong mindset. Sometimes we can get frustrated at work. This can lead to feelings of helplessness.

To be a good self-advocate, we must try to stay positive. We must have a growth-mindset and look for ways to make the situation better. This can begin with you.

a) Start by remembering past successes. Recall a time when:

- you overcame a challenge
- things improved
- you surprised yourself
- you did better than expected

b) Try to think of the challenge before you as a opportunity. Imagine:

- how good you will feel if you succeed
- how impressed your managers will be
- how it will prepare you for new challenges and responsibilities

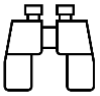
c) Try to “fake it till you make it.” Trust that you will succeed until you do. This is like a mental trick: stay positive and be confident. You will get results!

The goal is to develop a **growth mindset**. A growth mindset will help you think positively and hopefully. It will help you be more open to challenges.

Watch the video to learn more about growth mindset. Then answer the questions below.



1. What is the difference between a growth mindset and a fixed mindset?
2. List some advantages of a growth mindset.



**Example:** Read the example and then answer the following questions.

At a warehouse there have been some changes to how the warehouse is organized. A worker named J doesn't like the new changes. They are annoyed that they have to learn new things. They are confused with the new system and frustrated that it is slowing them down. The negative feelings make the work seem even harder. They begin to feel helpless and work even slower.

1. How could J have changed their mindset to approach the challenge differently?
2. How do you respond to new challenges? Discuss with your teacher or partner.
3. Could you improve your mindset when dealing with challenges? How? Discuss with your teacher or partner.

Sometimes, changing your mindset begins with understanding your needs and making sure they are met.

If you have a job, start by considering where you're at. Ask yourself some questions:

- Are you happy with your job?
- What would you like to improve about your job?
- Do you feel that your needs are met at work?
- Do you feel that your successes are appreciated?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?



### **New Task!**

Discuss these questions with your teacher or partner. Try to explain your feelings.



## 2. Outline Your Goals

The next step is to determine what your goals are at work. Goals could be big or small. They could include:

- getting more support from co-workers
- getting more support from management
- getting more recognition from co-workers or management
- establishing better boundaries
- making more use of your best skills
- switching roles to something you're more interested in
- getting a raise
- taking on a leadership role

Thinking about your goals isn't enough. When you know your goals, **write them down!**



### New Task!

Write your career goals below. Discuss these goals with your teacher or partner.

## Communicate to Advocate

### Communicate to Advocate

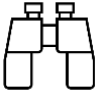
Now you know what you need or want from work. The next step is to **speak up** for yourself. The key is to know **when** and **how** to do so.

#### 1. When to Communicate to Advocate

It can be hard to find the right moment to communicate important matters. But you should address things promptly. Here are some tips:

- Communicate urgent matters right away. Urgent matters include:
  - dangerous situations
  - costly mistakes
  - bullying or harrassment
- Seek out help when you are **struggling**. Are you facing physical or mental challenges? Let your manager know and get support.
- Seek out help when you are **confused** or need guidance. This may not be an urgent matter. But you should address it quickly.
- Ask for **advice** when you start new tasks or roles. New roles can be hard. Get guidance from co-workers and management before you begin.
- Ask for **feedback** regularly. Check in with your manager every few months. Ask how you are doing. Ask about ways that you might improve.





**Example:** Read the example and then answer the following questions.

A worker at the NoFrills is named M. M has always been a cashier. Their manager has asked them to learn to do restocking work. M is excited about the new opportunity. They receive some training and begin their new role.

But they find it is more difficult than they thought. They are confused about where to find certain products in the warehouse. They are making mistakes and working too slowly.

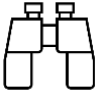
They worry that their manager will be angry. So they do not tell anyone they are struggling. Instead, they continue to make mistakes. Their manager finds out about these mistakes and is not pleased.

1. Did M use good communication skills?      Yes ☐ No ☐
2. What could M have done differently? When should they have communicated with a co-worker or manager?
3. What might have changed if they communicated promptly?

## 2. How to Communicate to Advocate

Now you know some situations in which you should advocate for yourself. The next step is learning **how** to communicate effectively. Here are some tips:

- Be **clear** and **direct**. It's important for your manager to clearly understand the issues. Remember to:
  - speak slowly and clearly
  - speak at a loud enough volume
  - make eye contact
- Speak with **confidence**. Some people get nervous when speaking to bosses. Some people feel ashamed when asking for support. Try not to:
  - speak too fast
  - mumble
  - bow your head
- Try **not to be emotional**. Some situations that require self-advocacy can be upsetting. Try to:
  - take a deep breath through the nose before speaking
  - smile
  - keep your arms uncrossed (crossed arms can make you seem angry)
- Be **professional**. Remember that you are in a work environment. Even urgent matters should be communicated professionally. Try to:
  - be polite (don't swear)
  - keep a positive manner
  - wait your turn (don't interrupt)



**Example:** Read the example and then answer the following questions.

An employee starts a new job as a warehouse worker. On their first day of work, they are confused about their duties. They make many mistakes. But they get nervous speaking to bosses. And they are embarrassed. So they don't ask for guidance from bosses or co-workers. The boss is not pleased with all the mistakes.



**Reflect!**

It's time to reflect on what you have learned:

1. Consider the list of tips on the previous page. How could the warehouse worker have communicated better?
2. What might have changed if they communicated better?
3. Do you get nervous speaking to bosses?
4. Imagine having to speak with a boss. What steps will you take to adapt and speak with more confidence?
5. Discuss with your teacher or partner.



1. What are the five steps to asking for feedback?
2. Practice asking for feedback with your teacher or partner. Did you:
  - ☐ speak slowly and clearly?
  - ☐ speak at a loud enough volume?
  - ☐ make eye contact?
  - ☐ speak politely and professionally?
  - ☐ keep a positive manner?
  - ☐ say thank you afterward?

## Keep Track of Your Accomplishments

Sometimes self-advocacy is about **growth** in your role. Self-advocacy is important to career advancement.

There are different ways to self-advocate for career advancement. One key tip is to keep track of your accomplishments. **Write down** your successes big and small.

Did you:

- help a customer through a difficult situation?
- give support to a co-worker?
- complete a difficult order or sale?
- have a unique achievement?
- succeed at a new task?

Record your accomplishments. They will be available if you are seeking a raise or a new role.



### New Task!

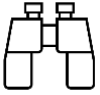
For one week practice recording your accomplishments at work. Discuss these successes with your teacher or partner.

## Collaborate to Advocate

### Collaborate to Advocate

One of the best ways to self-advocate is to develop good relationships at work. People who respect and trust you will have your back. Here are some tips for developing good relationships and **collaboration** skills:

- Be a **good listener**. Listening is the best way to connect with others. Try to:
  - stay focused and avoid distractions
  - avoid interrupting the speaker
  - watch for non-verbal cues like smiling and frowning
  - show that you understand by giving a thumbs up
- Be **polite** and **respectful**. People have different opinions and values. You don't have to agree. But be polite and respectful of the ideas of others.
- Be **trustworthy** and **reliable**. This way, you earn trust yourself. Being reliable means:
  - being on time
  - doing your fair share of the work
  - doing what you say and telling the truth
- Be **helpful** and **supportive**. When you are there for others, they will be there for you. Notice when people need help. Be generous with your support.
- Show **empathy**. Sometimes co-workers are struggling or having a bad day. Put yourself in their shoes. Try to show forgiveness.



**Example:** Read the example and then answer the following questions.

A cashier at Canadian Tire wants a supervisor position. But they do not have good relationships with co-workers. They are always distracted when spoken to. They are often late for their shift. They can be rude about co-workers' ideas. They are not quick to offer help when co-workers need it. The manager does not give them a supervisor position.



**Reflect!**

It's time to reflect on what you have learned:

1. Consider the list of collaboration skills on the previous page.
2. How could the cashier have used these to develop better co-worker relationships?
3. Are you a good collaborator? What are your strengths and weaknesses?
4. Discuss with your teacher or partner.

## Adapt to Advocate

### Adapt to Advocate

Adapting is a key part of growth. If you want to grow, you must be willing to change.

Want to see change in your role at work? Here are some tips:

- **Receive feedback and *act on it*.** Listen carefully to the feedback you receive and:
    - be sure you understand it
    - ask questions if you don't
    - be willing to adapt
    - plan how you will implement the changes
    - act!
  - **Find motivation.** Focus on the parts of your job that you enjoy. Work on learning new things and improving. When you stay motivated you will have more success.
  - **Believe in yourself.** Self-motivation is all about believing in yourself. Remember to record your accomplishments. Don't take advice as criticism. Take it as a way to get better.
  - **Learn your rights.** Sometimes the change needs to come from the workplace itself. Are your needs being met? Are you being treated equitably? Learn your rights and speak up for yourself.
- See the next page for some resources.

Here are some resources to help you understand your rights in the workplace:

- 211 Ontario connects you to social services and community supports that you need:
  - Call **211** or toll free at **1-877-330-3213**
- Is your boss not addressing a serious matter? You can file a complaint with the **Ontario Government**: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/filing-workplace-health-and-safety-complaint>
- **Employment Ontario** offers career-related counselling and guidance: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/employment-ontario>
- The **Government of Ontario** website has the full guide to workers' rights: <https://www.ontario.ca/document/your-guide-employment-standards-act-0>
- Settlement.org offers services and support to help you understand your rights at work: <https://settlement.org/ontario/employment/my-rights-at-work/basic-working-conditions/what-are-my-rights-as-a-worker-in-ontario/>

**New Task!**

Do this when you have time.

1. Arrange a meeting with a manager at work to ask for feedback.

2. Record your manager's feedback.

3. Think about what steps you will take to adopt the feedback.

4. In a few weeks, think about how you have adapted to the feedback.

5. Have you improved? What areas still need to work?

6. Discuss with your teacher or partner.

- Getting feedback is great. Adapting to it helps you grow. But you don't need to accept feedback in the form of bullying or harassment. Bullying or harassment is never okay. If you feel you are being bullied or harassed, **seek help** at once.

## Skills For Success

### Skills for Success and Self-Advocacy

The **Skills for Success** (SFS) are the everyday skills Canadians need for work, learning and life. Several SFS are required to improve your self-advocacy:

- **Communication.** Good communication at work helps you:
  - advocate for your needs, goals, and plans
  - develop good relationships with co-workers
  - gain confidence in your role
- **Collaboration.** Collaboration helps to strengthen work relationships. Good relationships are central to self-advocacy.
- **Adaptability.** Adaptability is how you grow and expand your skill-set. Adapt and advocate for yourself with your actions.



What are your strongest SFS? Which do you most need to work on?  
Discuss with your teacher or partner.

#### Reflect!

Learn more about the Skills for Success here:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/services/jobs/training/initiatives/skills-success.html>

- Also see the other resources in this series: **Workplace Skills, Strategies, and Know-How**