

WORKPLACE LITERACY PROGRAM DELIVERY





Laubach Literacy Ontario

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Contents

- Introduction 1
- Learning Outcomes 3
- The Role of Workplace Literacy Training in the LBS field 4
- Connecting the Organizational Needs Assessment to Workplace Literacy Training 7
 - Using an ONA to Prepare Employers for Workplace Literacy Training 7
 - Talking Skills Development with Employees during an ONA 8
- Identify Training Outcomes for Employees and Employers 11
- Authentic Documents 12
 - Brainstorm 12
- Workplace Skills 13
 - Forms of Workplace Literacy Training 14
 - Reading and Writing Skills Training 15
 - Reading 15
 - Writing 16
 - Numeracy Training 17
 - Digital Skills Training 18
 - Soft Skills Training 21
 - Reflect 23
 - Listening and Oral Communication Training 24
 - Types of Communication 25
 - Teamwork Training 26
 - Talking to Employers about Team Building 26
 - Leadership Styles 28
- Case Study: Applied Improvisation 29
 - What is Applied Improv? 29
 - Benefits of Applied Improv 29
 - How to Use Applied Improv 30
 - For More Information 30
- Resources 31
- Connection to Literacy Service Planning (LSP) 32
- Conclusion 33
- Appendices 34
 - Conversation with Employees 34

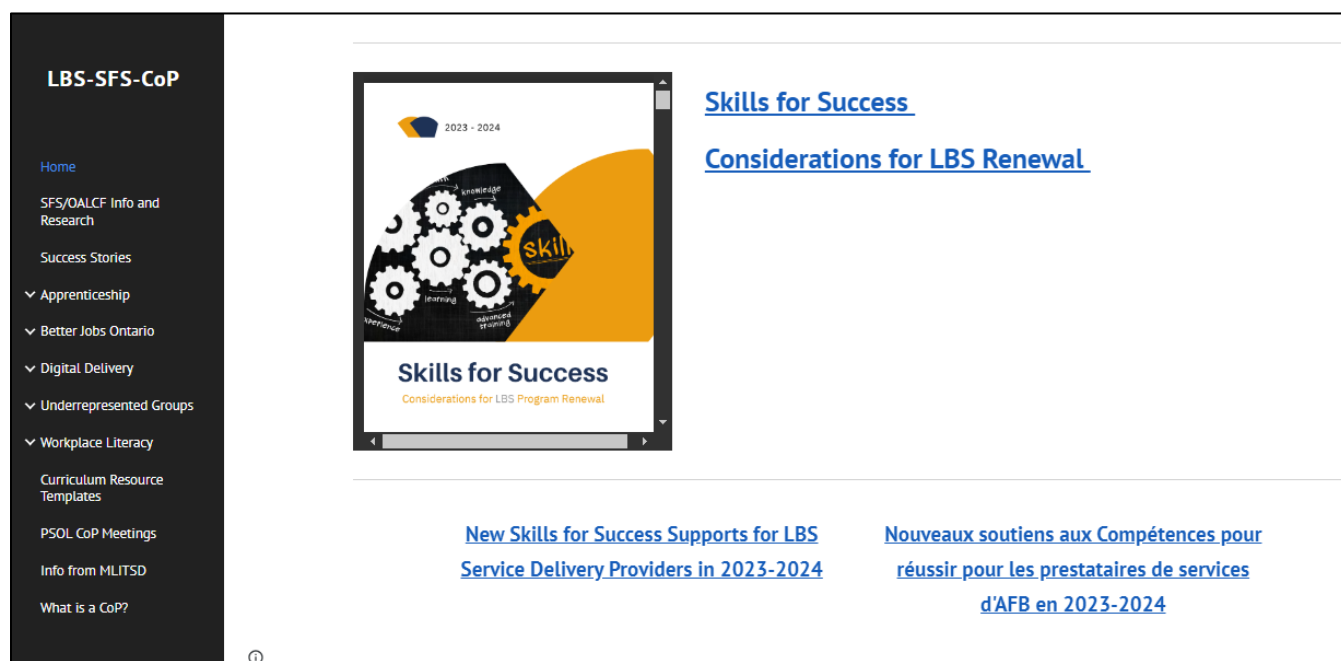
Check Your Computer Skills	39
Check Your Math Skills	42
Check Your Communication Skills	44
For Further Reading.....	48

Introduction

Laubach Literacy Ontario (LLO) is pleased to offer you this module on Workplace Literacy Training. Workplace literacy has a higher profile now in Ontario than perhaps ever before. Ontario is experiencing a constricted labour market which means that there are more jobs available than there are people to fill them. As a result, employers are hiring some individuals who have less than the desired level of skill and so are interested in potentially working with adult literacy agencies to address skills gaps.

Also, the nature of skills needed to perform effectively in the workplace has changed and continues to evolve. Continuous learning is becoming an expectation of, and an asset for, employers and job seekers alike.

As a result, adult literacy agencies are increasingly being drawn into the world of providing workplace literacy. This reality represents a change for many adult literacy agencies that, historically, have welcomed all individuals who came to them to seek service. Workplace literacy though often means that adult literacy agencies seek out partnerships with employers who see upgrading needs among their employees.



The screenshot shows the LBS-SFS-CoP website. On the left is a dark navigation menu with the following items: Home, SFS/OALCF Info and Research, Success Stories, Apprenticeship, Better Jobs Ontario, Digital Delivery, Underrepresented Groups, Workplace Literacy, Curriculum Resource Templates, PSOL CoP Meetings, Info from MLITSD, and What is a CoP?. The main content area features a central graphic titled 'Skills for Success: Considerations for LBS Program Renewal' (2023-2024) with a gear and 'Skill' icon. To the right of the graphic are two blue links: 'Skills for Success Considerations for LBS Renewal' and 'New Skills for Success Supports for LBS Service Delivery Providers in 2023-2024'. Below these links is a French version: 'Nouveaux soutiens aux Compétences pour réussir pour les prestataires de services d'AFB en 2023-2024'.

In 2022/2023, Literacy Link South Central (LLSC) and Literacy Link Eastern Ontario (LLEO) received Skills Development Funding to execute a Workplace Literacy project. Through this project, four [webinars](#) were developed and delivered to the Literacy and Basic Skills field. Topics included:

- Marketing to Employers
- Organizational Needs Assessments
- Workplace Literacy Program Delivery
- Workplace Literacy Evaluation

While these webinars provide a good starting point, we know there is much more to share about workplace literacy in each of the four areas noted above. The goal now is to address each of these topic areas in greater detail and create learning materials/workbooks for LBS agency managers and practitioners.

This module will expand upon Workplace Literacy Program Delivery.



Learning Outcomes

There is a lot to cover in a resource on workplace literacy training. At the end of this module, we would like you to:

- Understand the role of Workplace Literacy Training in the LBS field
- Connect the Organizational Needs Assessment (ONA) to Workplace Literacy Training
- Understand how to use an ONA to prepare employees for Workplace Literacy Training
- Identify training outcomes for employees and employers
- Appreciate the value of authentic workplace documents and how to incorporate them into developing and delivering Workplace Literacy Training
- Identify the categories of Workplace Literacy Training
- Recognize the different forms of Workplace skills
- Know where to access Workplace Literacy resources
- Understand how to use Literacy Service Planning meetings to discuss Workplace Literacy



The Role of Workplace Literacy Training in the LBS Field

In late 2022 until the end of fiscal 2024, as part of Skills for Success funding the LBS field had an opportunity to explore Workplace Literacy Training in tandem with conducting Organizational Needs Assessments (ONAs) with employers. For many LBS agencies, Workplace Literacy was relatively new. They had most certainly engaged in workforce literacy – preparing adult learners for employment or for better types of jobs – as that is a core part of what almost every LBS agency does to prepare adult learners for the employment goal path, but delivering adult literacy programming onsite at an employer’s place of business was very different.

In the module on Organization Needs Assessments (ONAs), we charted the differences between Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) and workplace literacy training.

LBS Training	Workplace Literacy Training
Goals set by Learner related to 5 goal paths identified by the funder (MLITSD)	Goals set by Employer
Learners identified/referred	Employees identified/referred
Learners assessed initially	Employees assessed initially
Learners trained	Employees trained
Learners assessed ongoingly	Employees assessed ongoingly
Learners assessed at end of training	Employees assessed at end of training
Report to MLITSD	Report to Employer
Evaluation of learner/LBS service provider	Evaluation of employee/training provider



LBS agencies could choose whether or not they wanted to offer training to one or more employers. While there was no pressure to do so, there was (and remains) an opportunity for those LBS agencies that have the capacity to meet employer needs. We assume that since you are reading this module on Workplace Literacy Program Delivery that you are considering the possibility of developing and/or delivering a workplace literacy program.

There are many reasons a company would undertake a workplace literacy program. Across Ontario, the labour market has been feeling the effects of too many jobs and not enough people. In a tight labour market, firms will hire workers with fewer skills because they need to fill vacancies. When many newcomers enter the workforce, companies will likely have employees who need to improve their oral and written communication skills. A company may also offer reading and numeracy training to workers with a disrupted education or those who require a refresher course to ensure competency on the job.

The reasons for pursuing training will vary based on company production needs but will also reflect the organizational culture. Some firms with a large cohort of newcomers may want to connect with community programs to ensure their employees have access to educational programs the firm cannot offer onsite.

At the heart of workplace training is company culture. When approaching an employer to offer educational services, it is helpful to ask yourself some questions:

1. What is the current state of the labour market in my region? Is it “tight” so jobs are less plentiful?
2. What type of workforce does the employer have? Is it highly skilled or do employees need reading and numeracy skills?
3. Is the workforce predominantly made of citizens or newcomers?
4. Is the workplace highly digitized?
5. What are the shifts? Do they have a 24-hour production schedule?
6. Will the employer have onsite facilities to deliver training, or will they need an offsite location?
7. Is the workforce a good fit for workplace literacy training?
8. Where are the employees living? Are they near the employer, or are many commuting from more distant communities?

***Take a moment:** Do you see yourself and your agency addressing this list? And if you do, what type of employer might you approach first? Could it be a manufacturer, a retail chain, or a childcare provider? Might you choose a different type of employer? As you answer this question, consider where your organization's strengths lie and what kind of workplace appeals to you.*

If you are considering entering the field of workplace literacy training, there are several items to consider before approaching employers. These items include your capacity to deliver training and the community partnerships you can leverage.

- What size company do you feel you could serve (how many employees)?
- Do you have a connection within the company, or will you need to “cold call” the employer?
- Do you possess assessment tools appropriate for a workplace, or will you need to develop new ones?
- How many instructors could you hire to deliver training?
- Would you rely on existing curricular resources, or would you need to develop new ones?
- Do you have community partners prepared to assist in your training delivery?
- What type of community support services could you leverage if needed?

As you approach workplace literacy training, consider these items and how you will serve *two* clients: the employer *and* their employees.

Connecting the Organizational Needs Assessment to Workplace Literacy Training

The Organizational Needs Assessment (ONA) is an excellent resource for preparing to deliver workplace literacy training.

If you are designing and conducting an ONA to guide your work with an employer, we recommend using this Workplace Literacy Program Delivery module to help you prepare the kinds of questions that will get employers and their staff talking about:

- Training they want
- Responsibilities they have
- The workplace culture they have
- The workplace culture they want
- What success at work looks like

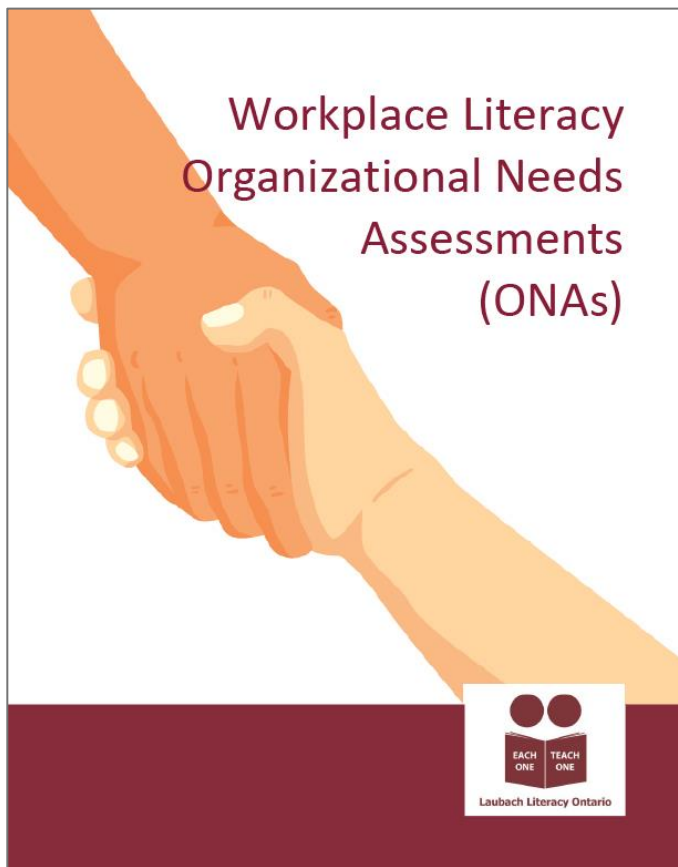
If you begin your ONA with these questions in mind, you will set realistic expectations with the employer and their employees. You will also deliver targeted training that responds to expressed and demonstrated needs.

But another advantage in pairing your ONA with this module is it will enable you to get the employer thinking about needs and goals they might not have considered before.

***Reflect:** If you were beginning an ONA today, would you consider reading this Workplace Literacy Training Guide first? Why/why not?*

Using an ONA to Prepare Employers for Workplace Literacy Training

Many employers will not know a lot about workplace literacy training. They may only think that such training may improve their employees' performance. While you are conducting an ONA, you can share additional information about workplace literacy training to ensure that your LBS agency AND the employer are on the same page.



You may wish to discuss terminology with the employer. While we are quite comfortable for the most part as LBS staff talking about “literacy,” it’s important to note that the word “literacy” is not necessarily perceived as a positive word by the rest of the population. We suggest talking about “skills development,” “skills refreshers” or “upgrading workplace skills.” Hopefully, the use of these terms will make employees more interested in attending the training that arises from the ONA.

We have talked about the importance of managing employer expectations in other parts of our Workplace Literacy series of modules, but it’s important enough to mention again here. For many employers, training is short and sweet because time employees spend in training is time that they are not spending doing the job that their employer is paying them to do. But building skills can take time –

especially if you’re working with people who have holes or challenges in their foundational skills or individuals for whom English is not their first language. So, during the ONA, we recommend that you gently reinforce that upgrading skills or skills development takes time. Having said this, it’s also possible to break up training into segments. A 24-hour targeted training program could be delivered as a series of three 8-hour sessions. The benefit of suggesting training be offered this way is that it’s not as daunting for employers (or employees) to commit to. And you have the added opportunity of demonstrating the benefits of the first 8-hour program to create enthusiasm for employees to want to participate in the second and third programs (and hopefully for the employer to support employee participation by paying for some or all of their time to attend).

Talking Skills Development with Employees during an ONA

Creating employee buy-in can be difficult but it’s especially challenging if employees are mandated to take training. The plus side of this mandatory participation is that you’re going to have participants. The downside, of course, and one that most LBS agencies know too well, is that people who don’t want to participate in training not only don’t learn as well, but they can also be disruptive. So, it’s a win-win if employees see value in the training being offered.

Since the basis of self-motivation is personal, a good approach to encouraging self-direction and self-motivation is discovering what each employee wants from their job. A constructive way to approach these conversations is to focus on skills. Discover what employees need to know to succeed at their jobs, and what they want to know to set new professional and personal goals for themselves.

You can make this part of the Organizational Needs Analysis (ONA) process. By talking to employers about your need to interview their staff about motivation and goals, you can get additional insights into the workplace culture.

If you don't have the chance to do a full ONA with an employer and therefore don't have the opportunity to talk to employees about what they want and need, try to be creative. Maybe you don't have to talk to every employee. Is it possible to do a focus group with a group of 6-8 employees? Any information you can get about employee goals and needs that you can integrate into your Workplace Literacy training will mean your time has been well spent.



Learning Conversations

One way to learn more about what employees want and need is to conduct “Learning Conversations” with employees to learn more about each person’s history and relationship to learning. Consultative approaches are valuable because they show employees that their employer and you (as the deliverer of the training) want to know what employees think and how they feel about potential training.

Developing a Learning Conversation package can mean meeting employees to discuss what type of skills training or “professional development” they want. Conversations can last 30-45 minutes and explore individual learning styles, the employee’s perceptions of their learning challenges, and personal and professional development goals. It is valuable to provide employees with a summary report reviewing the conversation and suggesting potential next steps to help each person pursue their goals. A report can support the training process and offer people paths toward additional learning opportunities and connect them to community educational services – especially if the type of training that employee needs the most is not offered at the workplace. For a skills conversation script, see the Appendices.

Identify Training Outcomes for Employees and Employers

As you get ready to offer workplace literacy training, we suggest you take the time to be explicit about the training outcomes you will be addressing. You may or may not have conducted an ONA. If you have, then translating what you hear from employers and employees into training outcomes is the next logical step. If you don't conduct a full-fledged ONA with an employer, you will at least need to have a discussion or two with staff from the workplace at the management or ownership level to determine what it is you will be delivering.

In both cases – with or without an official ONA – it's worth taking the time to identify training outcomes. Why? For several reasons. First, to ensure that what you are going to deliver matches the needs that have been identified by the company you're working with. As with the word "literacy," the way that terms are used can differ depending on if you work in the educational sector or if you work in a sector outside of education. An employer may say, for example, "I need employees to be trained to get along so that they don't run to their supervisors or to HR with every little problem." For the employer, this is a legitimate ask. As an LBS agency, you will need to "unpack" this request into its component parts.

Training employees to get along with each other can translate into specific training outcomes, such as:

- Oral communication skills
- Written communication skills
- Observation skills
- Conflict resolution skills
- Awareness of learning and communication styles
- Problem-solving skills

By being explicit about the skills you intend to build your instruction around, the learning becomes more intentional and everyone – your LBS staff, the employer and employees – are clear on what will be addressed in the training.

Authentic Documents

One of the best things you can do as you prepare to deliver workplace literacy training is to ask the employer for authentic workplace documents.

Well-prepared employers know what kind of training they want, so they will be open to your request to review workplace documents to prepare targeted training that fits into existing workplace tasks, procedures, and responsibilities.

Workplace documents are essential to making your training more effective and, therefore, more meaningful to the workplaces you serve.

Brainstorm

Can you come up with a list of workplace documents you would ask for if you were preparing training for a manufacturer? How about a retail store?

Workplace Skills

Workplaces demand a range of skills from their employees, and those skills change because of shifts in markets, technologies, automation, and demographic and market trends within the labour market itself. We will explore some approaches to workplace skills training in this section.

As you review this section, take a moment to pause and consider your own experiences talking to employers and employees or recall conversations you have been a part of during Literacy Service Planning (LSP) meetings. Your insight, experience, and perspective matter a lot!

Document your thoughts here:



Forms of Workplace Literacy Training

Forms of workplace literacy training vary depending on the needs of the employer and staff members. The goal behind any training program is to ensure that the participants emerge feeling more confident in their skills and believe that the training they received will lead to improved job performance and occupational confidence. That confidence can translate into increased job satisfaction and a sense that the employer is willing to support employee growth and professional development, leading to increased workplace satisfaction.

Forms of workplace literacy training can include:

- **Reading and Writing Skills Training:** These are standard features of LBS training.
- **Numeracy Skills Training:** It's surprising how many employers also need their employees to be more confident in their numeracy skills!
- **Digital Skills Training:** These skills are increasingly needed due to workplace automation.
- **Soft Skills Training:** Soft Skills are increasingly emphasized in the new Skills for Success.

Workplace literacy training occurs in different forms or ways. One of the interesting aspects of working with employers is that no two employers seem to want or need the same types of training. And even when there are commonalities in the types of skills training that employers want, the way(s) in which the training needs to be delivered can vary considerably.

Here are some of the more common forms of Workplace Literacy delivery:

- **In-house Group Training:** Training delivered at the worksite to groups of employees.
- **Offsite Training:** Training conducted individually or with groups at an offsite location – possibly at an LBS agency.
- **One-on-One Training:** Personalized training between the instructor and individual employees.
- **Online Training:** Online training isn't for everyone, but for some employers with multiple shifts, this might be the best way to get employees the training they need. Of course, you may also have to assess employees' digital literacy skills first and ensure that employees will have access to the technological equipment they will need.
- **Hybrid Training:** You may find that you will need to employ more than one form of Workplace Literacy delivery to fully meet the needs of an employer.

Reading and Writing Skills Training

Reading and writing cover a broad range of skills. When discussing their application to the workplace, the needs of employers and employees will depend not only on the industry, but also on the underlying needs of workforce communities.

In some instances, an employer will hire staff who are newcomers to Canada and whose ability to communicate in spoken and written English is limited. However, limitations in written English are not limited to newcomers. These limitations impact many LBS learners as well. During the needs assessment process, the assessors need to learn as much about the nature of these communication needs as possible. It is also an opportunity for the assessor – and the organization they represent – to connect employees to existing learning support within their community, as discussed in the “Learning Conversations” section.

Reading and writing skills training can take many forms, which we will explore in industrial and retail settings. Trainers may find these conditions apply to other workplaces and can use them as they see fit.

Reading

In factory work, employees often need to be able to:

- Read Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)
- Follow instruction manuals
- Read manuals and diagrams to operate/repair machinery
- Follow safety guidelines
- Read blueprints and schematics
- Read measurements, specifications, or checklists for quality control purposes (Bing Chat, Jan. 18)

In retail work, employees need to read and comprehend:

- Product information to answer customer questions accurately
- Packaging and promotional details
- Product manuals
- Company policies and procedures
- Training materials (to complete training and train others)
- Sales reports (Bing Chat, Jan. 18)

In any occupational setting, employees will have different relationships with reading. Some may enjoy reading for pleasure but be less accustomed to processing technical information. Other employees may not read at all or have never worked in a setting that required a demonstration of higher-level reading skills. Organizational Needs Assessments (ONAs) are necessary to learn more about employee relationships with reading.

It is worth mentioning that there are different ways to talk with employees about reading. Not everyone who reads will consider themselves “a reader.” A person who likes to work with their hands might do a fair amount of reading to learn how to repair machines and equipment (and build their own) but not see themselves as a reader because of past experiences in school or associations of being a reader with being “bookish.” But people will often read to learn more on topics they care about, sports they enjoy, or games they play. Try to get employees to discuss reading and what aspects they enjoy or find challenging.

Writing

In factory work, employees use writing skills for:

1. **Documentation:** Workers document completed tasks, record readings on a machine, and note irregularities or maintenance needs. Documentation demands writing that is concise and clear.
2. **Safety Procedures:** Workers use writing to contribute to safety manuals and emergency procedures.
3. **Communication with Colleagues:** Writing emails to colleagues and supervisors about workplace issues is essential to ensure solid performance on the floor. (Bing Chat, Jan. 18)

In retail work, employees use writing for:

1. **Product Descriptions:** Employees produce product descriptions for online listings and promotional materials. Since product descriptions are a form of sales and marketing, employees must write accurately and persuasively.
2. **Customer Communication:** Employees often respond to customer needs using email and online chats. Good writing skills are essential to providing clear and helpful customer service.
3. **Internal Communication:** Employees need to write sales reports for management and generate staff memos to ensure teams function effectively. (Bing Chat, Jan. 18)

Employees can perceive writing skills (like reading) as an “academic” topic. If an employee does not see themselves in that light, they might undervalue or not be aware of their existing skill set.

Numeracy Training

In factory work, numeracy examples include:

1. **Measurement and Conversion:** Employees must measure materials and convert between imperial and metric units of measurement.
2. **Production Planning:** Employees will use arithmetic functions to calculate the size of batches of products and parts produced within a given time unit or shift length.
3. **Quality Control:** Employees use arithmetic to calculate error rates in production and determine whether they fall within limits acceptable to company policy.
4. **Inventory Management:** Employees use arithmetic to track inventory and predict how much and when additional materials are required. (Bing Chat, Jan. 18)

In retail work, employees may use numeracy for:

1. **Pricing:** Arithmetic helps calculate pricing, discounts, and factoring in sales taxes.
2. **Inventory Management:** Employees will use arithmetic to track inventory, calculate inventory costs, and determine when to order additional inventory.
3. **Analyze Sales:** Arithmetic enables employees to analyze sales data, determine profit margins, and track their sales over time.
4. **Cash Handling:** Employees use arithmetic to make change, count cash, and balance the cash register each day (Microsoft Copilot, Jan. 18).

*Reflect: Do you feel prepared to deliver skills training in these areas?
Is there any area where you and your team feel strongest/weakest?*

Take a moment to reflect on the forms of skills training you are currently delivering. Where do you feel successful and why?

Digital Skills Training

Digital skills training in the workplace is topical because of automation, especially in the form of artificial intelligence (AI). Since the arrival of ChatGPT in November 2022, AI in the workplace is a widely discussed topic in the media. Journalists have raised many questions about how AI will impact the workplace including:

- What percentage of the existing jobs could be replaced by automation?
- Will lower-income workers feel the impact of AI disproportionately?
- What types of “occupational transitions” could AI generate?
- Will AI shift employers toward a more “skills-based hiring” strategy?
- Will employers invest in professional development for employees based on learning to use AI?
(Generative AI: How Will It Affect Future Jobs and Workflows? 2023)

Of course, not all digital skills training must involve using artificial intelligence.

In Canada, the Ministry of Innovation, Science, and Economic Development (ISED) sponsors the Digital Literacy Exchange Project (DLEP), a digital education initiative designed to help Canadians adapt to changes driven by digital technology. Since “[i]nnovation and technological progress are creating tremendous change,” the government recognizes the increasing importance of Canadians possessing digital skills for use at home, work, and in school.

As the DLEP website states:

While 91% of Canadians aged 15 and older use the Internet (Canadian Internet Use Survey 2018), there are still groups who are new to using the Internet or who haven't fully discovered the benefits of being online. These groups include seniors, individuals who have not completed high school, Indigenous people, individuals who do not speak English or French at home, persons with disabilities, newcomers to Canada, low-income individuals, and people living in northern, rural, and remote communities.

Learning these skills and understanding digital technologies will not only reduce barriers to accessing valuable information and resources but also open up opportunities for all Canadians to succeed (Canada, 2023).

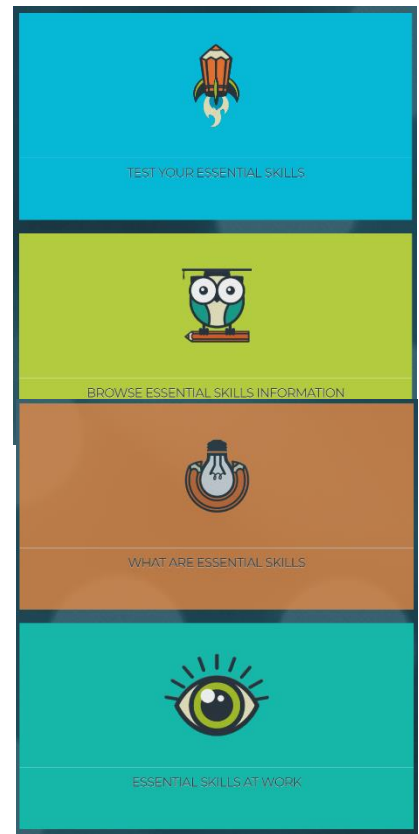
There is a wide range of digital skills for Canadians to learn and master, though not all of them are directly relevant to employment. It is up to the assessor to meet with employers and employees to learn the nature of work at the workplace they are assessing and determine how it interfaces with emerging digital technologies in the workplace.

Digital skills assessment tools are available online, but a good developer will be able to take from existing resources and create a new one tailored to the specific digital/work needs of the employer/employees.

Some existing digital skills assessment tools available online include:

1. Computer Skills Self-Assessment Checklist (focused on Microsoft products)
<https://www.dcrs.ca/assets/media/2020/11/Downloadable-Computer-Skills-Self-Assessment-Checklist.pdf>
2. [Skills for Success \(S4S\) Mobile App](#) – The app applies to all 9 Essential Skills including digital.
3. Literacy Link South Central Digital Modules Resource
<https://www.llsc.on.ca/digital-literacy-modules>. Each of the 35 topic-based modules contains a self-assessment allowing learners to take stock of their existing skills. The resource also includes a:
 - Digital Curriculum Glossary
 - LLSC Digital Curriculum Interactive
 - CESBA Digital Literacy (LBS) Curriculum- Interactive
 - CESBA Digital Literacy (LBS) Practitioner’s Guide- Interactive

LBS agencies will have digital skills self-assessment tools they use and might be willing to share.



Reflect: *Digital skills training intimidates some instructors. Does it make you uncomfortable?*

Take a moment to reflect on your own digital skills. What aspects of your digital skills are you confident teaching others?

Soft Skills Training

Soft skills were part of the nine original Essential Skills. However, when the Essential Skills were redefined recently, the federal government increased the emphasis on soft skills. Trade unions like the Laborers International Union of North America (LIUNA) have incorporated soft skills assessment tools into their Construction Craft Worker (CCW) pre-apprenticeship program.

Justin Marques, Operations Team Apprenticeship Coordinator for LiUNA local 1059 said of soft skills:

Soft skills play a crucial role in the construction industry, just as they do in any other field. While technical skills are essential for completing construction projects successfully, soft skills are equally important for fostering effective communication, collaboration, and overall project success. Effective communication ensures that everyone is on the same page, which helps prevent misunderstandings and errors. The ability to work well with others, understand different perspectives, and contribute positively to a team is crucial for project success. Effective time management skills are crucial for scheduling tasks, allocating resources, and ensuring that the project progresses according to the established timeline.



Building workforce skills at scale to thrive during—and after—the COVID-19 crisis

April 2021 Survey

Soft skills training has become more common in recent years because, to cite a 2021 McKinsey survey, “skills like leadership and management became a much bigger priority for most companies, jumping ten percentage points year over year, from 40% to 50%” (Castrillon, 2022). McKinsey found that, during the COVID-19 pandemic, companies “made a significant shift toward skill building” (*Building Workforce Skills at Scale to Thrive During and After the COVID-19 Crisis*, 2021).

As ABC Life Literacy noted:

Canada’s record low unemployment rate and high number of job vacancies are changing how companies hire. What was important to Canadian employers in the past – such as direct job-related experience and specific qualifications – is becoming less crucial. Nowadays, employers are looking at a candidate’s soft skills to determine suitability for a position (Communications, 2022).

Many employers prefer to contract with third parties to develop and deliver soft skills training to their staff. Soft skills are “more difficult to define and teach” than “hard skills” because they are not solely task-based but apply to human interactions broadly. Employers often have specific soft skills they want to cultivate in their employees, especially in a world of work that is both in-person and remote.

Developing soft skills like strong communication and emotional intelligence (EQ) have always been essential, but they are even more crucial in today's hybrid work environment, where there is such a wide range of where and how employees are working (Teaching Soft Skills Is More Important Than Ever in Today's Hybrid Work: Here's How to Do It, 2022).

Soft skills training programs can encompass a range of skills. At the University of Victoria, the Micro-certificate in Soft Skills Training focuses on skills like communication, creativity, productive conflict resolution, self-awareness, social intelligence, problem solving, and process management (Lecours, 2024).

Literacy Link South Central uses a soft skills assessment tool that tests for:

- Organization
- Dependability
- Adaptability
- Communication
- Teamwork
- Detail Oriented
- Problem Solving
- Attitude

Employers will know which skills they value most, and it is valuable to meet with employees and offer them a soft skills assessment where you can discuss their perceptions of these skills, why they think soft skills matter, and which skill areas they want to improve.

Reflect

Take a moment to reflect on the forms of soft skills training you have delivered. Which of these skills do you think is most important to employers?

Listening and Oral Communication Training

Being an effective listener at work has become essential in the modern workplace. Ontario is diversifying rapidly, and the changing provincial demographics impact the workplace. Between 2022 and 2046, the forecast is for the province to grow by 6.6 million people and “Net migration is projected to account for 85 per cent of all population growth in the province over the 2022–2046 period, with natural increase accounting for the remaining 15 per cent” (*Ontario Population Projections, 2023*).

The workforce will witness a demographic shift as younger workers, who have different cultural mores than their parents and elders in matters of authority, leadership, and representation, enter the workplace in increased numbers (Katz, 2019). Additionally, Canada is experiencing a rapid demographic shift due to immigration. Statistics Canada reports that “one in four people (23.0%) counted during the 2021 Census are or have been a landed immigrant or permanent resident in Canada. This was the highest proportion since Confederation . . . and the largest proportion among G7 countries” (Government of Canada, Statistics Canada, 2022). Cultivating listening skills among supervisory staff and among workers in this changing landscape is a priority.



In a tight labour market, the ability of employers (and supervisors) to listen to their staff assumes an added importance. When a company lacks a feedback program, and employees do not feel heard, they become more likely to quit their jobs, leading to higher turnover rates, which can prove expensive to employers (*State of Employee Feedback 2021 | AllVoices*, 2021). When the workforce is diverse, and employees become accustomed to communicating primarily through devices like phones rather than face-to-face, listening attentively with sensitivity and empathy becomes critical. In this changing demography, it is wise for companies to invest in listening training (White, 2022).

Listening is critical in the workplace because it enables the listener to determine if their questions and instructions are understood. The first step to becoming an effective listener is learning not to interrupt; attentive listening ties into skillful oral communication because it emphasizes the importance of paying careful attention to what others say and evaluating their body language. An effective communicator understands that during a conversation, there are many non-verbal signs and cues they must observe and respond to when talking (and listening) to others (White, 2022).

When a colleague or supervisee is not a native English speaker (or is learning English), listening skills become even more relevant. Supervisors and colleagues of English language learners need to learn methods to help them interpret what they are hearing. Working with non-English speakers is an excellent way to illustrate the connection between effective listening and developing excellent oral communication skills. To be an attentive listener, staff members need to learn how to speak clearly and concisely and be patient when their listener does not understand something they have said.

Working with colleagues who take longer to understand what is being said demands staff demonstrate patience but also practice inclusive speech and encourage the participation of anyone who might be reluctant to contribute to meetings (and social gatherings) because of their limited spoken English skills (*What Are Effective Communication Strategies for Non-native English Speaking Team Members?* 2023).

Below, we examine four types of communication and how they impact the workplace.

Types of Communication

- **Written communication:** As mentioned, writing is pivotal in many jobs, including drafting emails, writing reports, producing memos, and public relations and sales. Staff must know how to convey information clearly and concisely and master a workplace-appropriate tone.
- **Verbal communication:** Tone matters in verbal communication. How staff speak to each other can be the difference between effective team building and a workplace culture where employees feel ignored or disrespected. Verbal communication applies to formal and informal conversations and interactions; a supervisor or employee's ability to handle work-specific and social interactions can be the difference between a healthy/unhealthy work environment.
- **Non-verbal communication:** Nonverbal communication is often subtle: "The messages you communicate to others can also take place non-verbally—through your body language, eye contact, and overall demeanor. You can cultivate strong non-verbal communication by using appropriate facial

expressions, nodding, and making good eye contact. Really, verbal communication and body language must be in sync to convey a message clearly” (Staff, 2023).

- **Visual communication:** Clear visual communication is crucial for ensuring a workplace where employees feel heard and understand the employer’s expectations. The Government of Ontario requires workplaces to abide by accessibility guidelines, which means they must remove “anything that prevents a person with a disability from fully participating in all aspects of society because of his or her disability, including a physical barrier, an architectural barrier, an information or communications barrier, an attitudinal barrier, a technological barrier, a policy or a practice” (AODA.ca, 2024b). LBS programs can help employers develop accessible visual communications because most LBS practitioners are versed in Clear Writing and Plain Language guidelines (*Clear Writing – Adult Basic Education Association, 2024; Learning Networks of Ontario, 2019*).

Teamwork Training

Teamwork training builds upon sophisticated listening, oral, and written communication skills.

While there are many approaches to building an effective workplace dynamic and inter and intra group relations, excellent written and verbal communication and attentive listening remain at the heart of any teambuilding effort. As Janice Malloy writes in the Harvard Business Publishing blog, “leaders must understand the building blocks that boost group effort, including listening well, practicing empathy, and getting comfortable with giving and receiving feedback” (Molloy, 2022).

Effective teamwork relies heavily on soft skills, which can enhance an individual’s ability to communicate effectively through speech and writing since the communicator will better understand the tone they should use with their audience. When workplaces invest in the skills of their employees, it can also help reduce the likelihood (and persistence) of misunderstanding within teams.

As you read or skim this section, we recommend taking a moment to consider your experiences building teams or onboarding an existing one. Again, your insight, experience, and perspective count most.

Talking to Employers about Team Building

Workplace literacy training, especially when working with supervisors and managers, often deals with team building. In a tight labour market, employers want to retain employees, so they are concerned about maintaining high morale and ensuring their business is a desirable place to work.

However, workplace culture is something employers and employees might view differently. When talking to employers, try to speak their language and show an interest in learning from them what they are looking for with training. The terminology used in LBS may not be appropriate for workplaces; for example, we recommend avoiding the word “literacy” as many people outside the LBS field do not understand what it means. Employers might take offense at the word because they assume you are criticizing their workforce.

It helps to review the terms and phrases you use before meeting with employers. For example, “skills required for their workplace” could refer to technical or “hard” skills used for specialized machinery. But “skills” can also refer to the broader array of Essential Skills, not just technical duties at work. Additionally, describing workplace training as "professional development" and offering "skills training programs" to employees can be a more persuasive approach to selling your approach to training.

It can also help to research a company and its industry before meeting with an employer. You can use company websites to learn about their products and services. Another method is to subscribe to their newsletter or read their quarterly reports. You can also pull Essential Skills career profiles from the Canada Job Bank: <https://www.jobbank.gc.ca/essentialskills>.

Another strategy for talking with employers is allowing them to lead the conversation. By coming “well briefed” to the meeting, you can ask thoughtful, informed questions that will encourage the employer to speak to you about how they see training improving production and workplace satisfaction. It will also encourage employers to discuss how they see their company as both an industry leader and as a member of their local community through their relationship with their workforce.

How do you feel? Are you prepared to approach an employer at this point? Why/why not? If you are prepared, how do you think you would begin your conversation?

Take a moment to think about how you would start your conversation with an employer. What might you say? You can use the lines below to jot down ideas.

Leadership Styles

When workplace trainers approach leadership training, there are many different forms of leadership to consider.

In our experience, employers interested in leadership training want to train their staff to become supervisors and managers. Or they may already have promoted employees to supervisory or manager status and have learned that while these employees were very proficient in working front-line or “on the floor,” they lack some important soft skills that are critical for effective leadership. As you approach leadership training, we recommend studying the workplace culture while you conduct your Organizational Needs Assessment (ONA). If you go into the ONA process with leadership styles and workplace culture in mind, you can ask some excellent questions about what type of leader the employer wants to see emerge from their staff.

Every employer will prefer a different style of leadership in their workplace. It is up to the LBS training provider to learn about the workplace culture during the ONA process and decide about the leadership training appropriate to each workplace. It is also important to remember that the leadership style appropriate to management is not necessarily appropriate to what is happening “on the workshop floor.” As assessors and trainers gain experience conducting ONAs and delivering workplace training, they will become adept at determining which leadership styles are appropriate to each facet of the workplace.



Case Study: Applied Improvisation

What is Applied Improv?

You may have seen the popular TV show “Whose Line is it Anyway?” in which talented performers are put into scenarios by the show’s host and audience and they have to play out scenes with no preparation or guidance. The performers use techniques known as improvisation. Applied improvisation draws lessons from the entertainment industry and applies them in other settings to enable participants to explore and improve their leadership, management, and interpersonal capabilities.

So, how could applied improv be used in a Workplace Literacy program? Let’s look at the potential benefits.

Benefits of Applied Improv

Quick thinking – Just as performers have to think on their feet, employees who take applied improv training will learn strategies to brainstorm options quickly.

Positivity – One of the key principles of improv is to make your partners in the scene look good. You never say “No” to something that your partner introduces. Exposing employees to applied improv promotes positivity and the concept of supporting fellow employees.

Fail forward – Often, when we make mistakes, we are ashamed. In improv, there is no concept of failure. Instead, you maneuver and adapt. Applied improv can encourage these techniques in the workplace. Instead of focusing on mistakes, employees can focus more on solutions.

Active listening – To participate in improv, you must be very aware of your fellow performers, and you must listen very attentively. You can’t just be along for the ride. Applied improv reinforces the importance of active listening in the workplace.

Teamwork – Learning applied improv strategies will help employees work together collaboratively and increase communication.

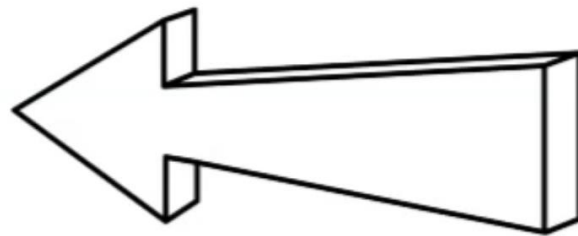
Resources

From the Fall of 2022 until the end of the fiscal year 2023-2024, LBS benefitted from an unprecedented amount of resource development in each of the five areas of priority specified by MLITSD. One of the five areas was Workplace Literacy. As a result, LBS agencies and support organizations now have even more Workplace Literacy resources to draw from to support their work with employers.

The [Literacy Resources and Discussion Forum](#) is a site that has been used for many years by LBS practitioners. Rather than create a new site to house new Skills for Success resources, the Literacy Resources and Discussion Forum was expanded. The goal was to establish a one-stop shop for Skills for Success resources. You can go to this site and search for resources related to delivering Workplace Literacy.



The resources have been divided into categories.



Another site that we recommend is the [Skills for Success Community of Practice](#) site. Here you will find information about all five Skills for Success initiatives, including Workplace Literacy. If you click on “Workplace Literacy” at the left side of the home page, and then “Workplace Literacy Curriculum Resources Promo Materials,” you will find numerous resources and other links you can follow to benefit from the research and development work over the past several years.

Also, under the Workplace Literacy heading at the left side of the home page, you can click on “Other Resources,” and you will find additional resources in the form of PowerPoint slides, webinars and other resources developed by LBS agencies and networks to support your work.

Connection to Literacy Service Planning (LSP)

If you decide that you want to begin or to continue your work in the area of Workplace Literacy, we encourage you not to do so in isolation. Other local LBS agencies and your regional literacy network can be sources of support. There may be needs identified by an employer you're working with that you struggle to meet. In such cases, you may wish to work with another LBS agency in your community. Some employers are very large and as the labour market continues to make it challenging for employers to find the talent they need, LBS agencies may find it advantageous to collaborate with one another.



Conclusion

If you have never conducted workplace literacy training before, it can feel overwhelming to get started. However, your preparation as an LBS professional has given you the skills to be impactful trainers and curriculum designers.

In a way, when you meet with employers to discover their needs and learn the type of training they want, you can use all of the verbal skills, sensitivities and nuance you have picked up interviewing and assessing adult learners. This was our experience at Literacy Link South Central.

Today is a great time to approach employers. They know they need to invest in their workers and want to ensure that their employees spread the word that they are a place where staff can build their skills, rise within the ranks, and feel supported by management.

LBS programs have a proven record of helping adults succeed, and you can bring this expertise and experience to your conversation with employers. They will be pleased by how much you already know about workplace skills training.



Appendices

Conversation with Employees

The following is a script that you may wish to use if having one-on-one conversations with employees as part of your workplace literacy training offerings.

Thank you for taking the time to meet with us. We are talking to staff about the skills they use on the job so we can design professional development training in those areas.

We also want to know if you are interested in improving your reading, writing, math, and/or digital skills to make your job easier, to help boost your career, or because you feel this skills training will help you outside of work.

We designed the following questions to learn what we can do to build a professional development course that each participant can use to expand their skills on the job and at home.

How did you learn about job opportunities at _____?
Was it word of mouth, a job posting online, or a friend or neighbour?

1. Are you interested in learning how professional development training can advance your career?
2. If they answered **yes**, ask the following:
 - a. What skills do you think you will need?
 - b. What will you do to get these skills?
3. We are now going to complete a short digital skills assessment. This assessment is to discover how comfortable you are using digital devices like computers, tablets, and cellphones. I will ask a series of questions, and I want you to answer with “Yes,” “A little,” or “Not yet.” If you have any additional comments, let me know.

7. On a scale of 1-5, with 5 being very strong and 1 being very weak, how do you rank your writing skills?

1

2

3

4

5

Why?

8. When you were in school, did you have (or notice) any special learning needs (for example: did you have an IEP or work with a resource teacher)? If so, what grade were you in?

9. Have you ever thought about returning to school for any reason? If you have, for what?

10. Please rank the following professional development training options in order of priority:

- Oral communication

- Math skills

- Reading comprehension

- Report writing

- Digital skills training

- Financial skills training

11. Why did you put them in this order?

Check Your Computer Skills

Here is a chart you may find helpful to gauge employee computer skills.

The following chart includes computer skills commonly used in the workplace.

Please put a (✓) in the column that best describes your skills.

Computer Skill	I can do this	I would like to do this better
<p>The Physical Machine:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I know the names of the different parts of a computer, and I can describe what they do • I know how to turn on, log in, and shut down a computer • I know how to use a mouse 		
<p>The User Interface:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I know what Windows is • I know how to use Windows (single and double-click, drag and drop, etc.) • I know how to use the Start Menu and the Quick Launch Toolbar • I know the terms “icon, menu, select, minimize, maximize, drag, and scroll” 		
<p>Basic Utilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I know how to use the computer calculator • I can set the computer clock • I can find and change the computer preferences • I can adjust the sound on the computer • I can put in CDs • I know how to use a memory stick 		
<p>Typing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can type using all ten fingers • I think I can type 20 words per minute 		

Computer Skill	I can do this	I would like to do this better
<p>Microsoft Word:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can enter text by using the keyboard • I know what the cursor is and what it does • I can move through text by using the arrow keys • I know the difference between the Delete Key and the Backspace Key • I know about the “Undo” function and when and how to use it • I can highlight text by using the mouse • I can cut and paste • I can check Spelling and Grammar • I can save a document and use the “Save As” function • I know how to find files within Word and on my computer • I know how to open a document once I’ve found it • I know how to create a new document 		
<p>Microsoft Word (more advanced):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can work with fonts and I can change the type or size of the font • I can make text bold, italics, underlined, or coloured • I can change the margins of a document 		
<p>Email:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I know how to access email using my login and password • I know how to open and close emails, reply to them, and delete them • I know how to print email • I know how to compose and send email • I know how to attach files • I know how to open files in an email and save them on my computer • I know about email etiquette 		

Computer Skill	I can do this	I would like to do this better
<p>Internet:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can recognize and launch a browser • I know how to enter a web address in the address bar • I know how to search for something on the internet • I can navigate web pages and websites • I can print a web page 		



Check Your Math Skills

Here is a chart you may find helpful to gauge employee math skills. It includes math skills commonly used in the skilled trades.

Please put a (✓) in the column that best describes your skills. Math Skills	I can do this	I'd like to do this better
Whole Numbers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read and write numbers • Add, subtract, multiply, or divide whole numbers 		
Fractions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read and write fractions • Add, subtract, multiply, or divide fractions (e.g. doubling a recipe involving $\frac{1}{2}$, $\frac{2}{3}$, and $\frac{3}{4}$ cups, etc.) 		
Decimals: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read and write decimals • Add, subtract, multiply, or divide decimals 		
Percentage: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read and write percentages • Calculate a percent of a number (e.g. calculate tax and apply discounts when preparing an invoice for customers) 		
Equivalent Numbers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convert between fractions and decimals or percentages (e.g. converting a test score from a fraction to a percent) 		
Measurement Conversions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use measuring devices • Perform measurement conversions (e.g. converting from feet to meters, or inches to centimeters) 		

Please put a (✓) in the column that best describes your skills. Math Skills	I can do this	I'd like to do this better
Summary Calculations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Calculate averages, ratios, and other percentages (e.g. calculating the ratio of cement, lime and sand when making mortar) 		
Graphing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading and interpretation (e.g. illustrating monthly sales on a bar graph) 		
Charts, Timetables, Schedules, Maps: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading timetables and schedules (e.g. checking the weekly staffing schedule to determine what hours you are expected to work) Calculating distances on a map Creating spreadsheets and charts 		
Geometry: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Basic shapes, perimeter, area (e.g. calculating the area of a room to determine how much drywall to purchase) 		
Budgeting and Accounting: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Balancing expenses against income Determining the cost of materials needed to complete a project 		

Check Your Communication Skills

Here is a chart you may find helpful to gauge employee communication skills.

The following chart includes communication skills commonly used in the workplace.

Please put a (✓) in the column that best describes your skills.

Communication Skill: Reading	I can do this	I'd like to do this better
Read email: e.g. to confirm the date and time of a meeting		
Read forms: e.g. a completed purchasing form		
Read labels to follow recommended directions: e.g. a medicine bottle or a prescription		
Read notes, letters, memos: e.g. the minutes of a staff meeting to review discussions and decisions		
Read a few sentences to locate several pieces of information: e.g. an incident report to summarize the sequence of events of an incident		
Read to compare and contrast information: e.g. comparing the job descriptions for two positions which are very similar		

Communication Skill: Document Use	I can do this	I'd like to do this better
<p>Read signs, labels, or lists: e.g. road signs</p>		
<p>Complete forms by marking check boxes, entering numbers, or words: e.g. a job application</p>		
<p>Read, create and/or enter information on tables and schedules: e.g. enter a customer's purchase on an invoice form</p>		
<p>Work with graphs to obtain and interpret information: e.g. compare trends in jobs to see what jobs have the best future</p>		
<p>Read assembly drawings: e.g. how to put a bookshelf together</p>		

Communication Skill: Writing	I can do this	I'd like to do this better
<p>Write to look after personal matters: e.g. a cheque or a letter to a family member</p>		
<p>Write to remember: e.g. a "to do" list of tasks that need to be completed</p>		
<p>Write to organize, remind, or inform (less than a paragraph): e.g. a memo to the supervisor confirming vacation dates for the summer</p>		

Communication Skill: Writing	I can do this	I'd like to do this better
<p>Write a text that is a paragraph or longer: e.g. a cover letter</p>		
<p>Write to inform, explain, request information, or express opinion: e.g. a letter to the editor of the local paper about an article you read and don't agree with</p>		



Communication Skill: Working with Others	I can do this	I'd like to do this better
<p>Participate in brief conversations to exchange information with one other person: e.g. give directions to help someone find a location</p>		
<p>Discuss, explain, or exchange information and opinions with one or more people: e.g. participate in a team meeting, asking questions, sharing your opinion, and listening to the input of others</p>		
<p>Start and maintain conversations with a group of people on a range of topics: e.g. openly and willingly share knowledge and opinions with a group of people you may not know well</p>		
<p>Work well in a team: e.g. actively contribute to a group project, doing what you've said while offering to help others on the team</p>		
<p>Identify and accept responsibilities: e.g. recognize what needs to be done at home or at work, and do it</p>		
<p>Accomplish tasks: e.g. set realistic short- and long-term goals, manage timelines, meet deadlines, and ask for help when needed</p>		
<p>Respond to directions and feedback: e.g. follow instructions, listen to constructive feedback without getting upset, and change how you do things</p>		
<p>Recognize and resolve conflict: e.g. listen to and respect different points of view, be tolerant and flexible, and work towards resolving conflict</p>		

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