

# **Literacy and Essential Skills Awareness Guide**

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## Credits

The following Regional Literacy Networks in Eastern Ontario developed the *Literacy and Essential Skills Awareness Guide*:

Literacy Ontario Central South (LOCS)  
Ottawa Community Coalition for Literacy (OCCL)  
Literacy Link Eastern Ontario (LLEO)

The networks would like to thank the Employment Service Providers across the eastern region of Ontario that allowed us the opportunity to meet with them and review any needs assessment currently being used with adults seeking services.

The networks would like to thank the team from Centre Moi j'apprends for translation and adaptation services provided to this project.

LOCS, OCCL and LLEO gratefully acknowledge the funding provided by Employment Ontario to research and develop this product.

Cette publication est disponible en français.

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## **Literacy and Essential Skills Awareness Guide**

The *Literacy and Essential Skills Awareness Guide* provides tips to assist you to identify clients who need to improve their Literacy and Essential Skills. Some clients will have to upgrade these skills in order to be successful in completing the terms of the Back/Return to Work Action Plan. We have included questions you can ask clients in order to find out more about their educational background and literacy skills as well as information to guide your interpretation of their responses.

The *Guide* also identifies the adult regional literacy network in your area. The network can provide information, referral services and, in some cases, literacy assessments for clients you think may benefit from Literacy and Essential Skills programming.

## **What are the signs your client may need Literacy and Essential Skills training?**

Many adults will not reveal they have a literacy problem, and in some cases they don't recognize that they have a need. Literacy is more than being able to read or write. It also includes oral communication, computer skills, problem solving and working with others.

Very few adults (less than 1%) are not able to read or write. However, 42% of Canadian adults do not have the literacy skills to fully cope in today's technological and information-based society. Many adults have developed great coping strategies over the years and are quite adept at hiding their problem.

It is important to know that an adult's literacy level may not correlate with educational attainment. This means that someone who has a Grade 12 diploma doesn't necessarily have adequate literacy skills that correspond with that grade level. As mentioned, many adults with low levels of literacy do not recognize they have a problem or that literacy challenges are preventing them from achieving their goals. For more information, please see *Literacy and Essential Skills Survey in Renfrew County* in the Appendix at the end of this *Guide*.

### What to watch for

- ✓ tendency to fidget
- ✓ quick eye movements when reading
- ✓ slower than normal writing speed
- ✓ a finger used as a guide on the page when reading
- ✓ habit of mouthing the words when reading silently
- ✓ difficulty filling out forms
- ✓ misuse of upper and lower case letters
- ✓ use of illustrations or other aids to 'guess' words and meaning

### What to listen for

- ✓ "I don't have time to fill these papers out now. Can I take them home?"
- ✓ "I'll read it later."
- ✓ "My spelling is not very good."
- ✓ "I'll remember, just tell me."
- ✓ "I forgot my glasses."
- ✓ "The lighting is very poor in here. If I tell you the answers, could you fill in the form?"

### Other signs

- ✓ appears to lack motivation
- ✓ makes little or no eye contact
- ✓ is slow to follow instructions
- ✓ is consistently late or very early for appointments
- ✓ never writes down appointments or takes any kind of notes

## Finding out if your client can benefit from Literacy and Essential Skills services

If you have concerns, try asking your client some of the questions below. Have a conversation with your client. This is not a test!

We have included some information to guide your interpretation of your client's responses. Some answers may indicate there may be other issues the client needs to deal with. Also, the overall responses (rather than one response) should be considered when deciding if the client would benefit from Literacy and Essential Skills training.

**NOTE:** We have provided a *Report Form* (Appendix 3) for recording your client's responses and your comments.

It is important to note that a client may continue to work with you while upgrading at a Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) agency. In some cases, a client must complete the training in the LBS agency as a first step to achieving a long-term goal (e.g. Second Career).

**NOTE:** When a client's mother tongue is not English or French, it may be more appropriate to refer the client to an English-as-a-Second-Language or a French-as-a-Second-Language program.

## Questions

### 1) What was the last grade of school you completed?

| Answer                            | Recommendation   |
|-----------------------------------|------------------|
| Grade 8 or less                   | May refer to LBS |
| Grade 9 to 12                     | May refer to LBS |
| Upgrading                         | May refer to LBS |
| GED*                              | May refer to LBS |
| Post Secondary (did not complete) | May refer to LBS |

\* Some employers, colleges and universities do not accept the GED.

#### a) At what school? (Name, City, Province, etc.)

This question is asked because not all schools are alike and they change over time. You want to try to find out what type of school your client attended – a vocational or technical high school, some kind of special education program or a small rural school that may have had limited resources. These are just a few possibilities that could indicate you should refer your client to a Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) agency for skills upgrading prior to entering training or looking for employment.

#### b) When?

You may refer a client to an LBS agency to refresh and upgrade skills who has been out of high school five or more years, and did not graduate.

The education system has changed over the years. A Grade 12 completed 20 years ago may be very different from one completed two years ago. In some cases, you may refer a client to an LBS agency to develop new skills (e.g. computer).

A client may not have used a particular skill over the past several years (e.g. measurement) but may be required to use it in a new job or training opportunity. It would be appropriate for you to refer this client to an LBS agency to refresh this skill.

**c) Do you feel you have the skills of your last grade completed?**

Your client may feel some skills have weakened because they have not been used for several years. You may refer your client to a Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) agency to refresh these skills in order to be better prepared for a new job or further training.

**2) What subjects did you enjoy and do well in at school? What subjects were difficult for you?**

The subjects that were enjoyable and successful for your client (as well as those that presented problems) can likely be identified. The former may indicate building blocks for further training and the latter areas that require attention in order for your client to succeed. You may refer your client to an LBS agency to assist with realistic goal setting and refresh skills in subjects not used for a number of years. The client may have less difficulty with these subjects if the LBS agency provides the training in a different format. The agency can also help the client to understand why the subjects are relevant.

**3) Were you ever tested for learning disabilities? If you were, do you remember anything about the results?**

This question gives the client the opportunity to disclose any learning disabilities and how they affected school performance. You may also get information from your client about the test results and strategies used to cope with the learning disability. You may refer your client to an LBS agency for further assessments and training.

**4) Did you ever miss school for long periods of time because of illness, suspension, etc?**

This question gives the client the opportunity to talk about the reasons for educational gaps. It also allows the client to explain why school was not completed or took a long time. You may find out about the circumstances or behaviour that made success at school

difficult for your client. You may feel that now is a better time for your client to work on education in an adult setting through an LBS agency.

**5) How do you feel about your reading, writing and math skills?**

This question is non-threatening (as opposed to “Can you read and write well?”) and gives the client the opportunity to talk about their feelings about these skills. Sometimes a client will recognize which skills are strong and which need further development but may not be aware of the need to upgrade some skills in order to move forward. You may refer the client to an LBS agency to further develop reading, writing and math skills, especially those that directly relate to education and employment goals.

**6) Do you have a computer at home? If you do, how do you use it?**

This question gives the client the opportunity to talk about comfort with a computer and how it is used. The client may also identify other computer skills to develop in order to meet their goal. You may refer your client to an LBS program to learn basic computer skills as well as reading, writing and math.

**7) Do you have a driver’s licence?**

This question gives the client the opportunity to demonstrate the ability to study and prepare for written and practical tests. It also will confirm whether your client has a skill that many employers require. You may refer a client without a driver’s licence to an LBS agency to learn how to study and prepare for the written test.

**8) Do you have any other licences or certificates that are up-to-date? (CPR, Smart Serve, etc.)**

This question gives the client the opportunity to talk about other types of training taken successfully and the certificates employers may require. If the client has taken other forms of training, this shows a willingness and ability to learn new skills outside of the traditional education system. When licenses or certificates are required to meet a goal, you may refer your client to an LBS agency to prepare for the examination.

**a) Where did you take the training? When?**

These questions give the client the opportunity to identify both where and when the training took place. You may refer your client to an LBS agency to prepare for re-certification when licences or certificates need to be renewed.

## Regional Literacy Networks

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**Level One:  
4.7 Million Canadian  
Consumers**



**ВАХФИПО**  
ЧАТОИОЖ: ГАО ЖДТ  
ПХУ **GAS** ИУ ЕПТ НДГ  
ЧЗДО ФЗИУ РТИ  
ГХВФ **IS MIXED** ЧИФЗ

- ◆ These 22% of consumers have very low reading skills.
- ◆ They may recognize only a familiar word or two in a simple text.
- ◆ They may not be able to use printed information to make decisions, such as understanding from a label the correct amount of medicine to give a child.
- ◆ Shopping and other everyday tasks such as paying utility bills can be difficult or impossible.
- ◆ Many use smart ways and excellent memories to cope with life's situations, for example, passing a driver's test.

**Level Two:  
Nearly 5.5 Million  
Canadian Consumers**



**CAUTION**  
WARNING: DAN GER OUS  
GAS IS FOR MED WHEN  
THIS PRO DUCT IS MIX ED  
WITH ACID

- ◆ These 26% of consumers can only deal with reading material that is written in plain language and is laid out clearly.
- ◆ They find new reading tasks difficult and long paragraphs of solid print discouraging.
- ◆ Many may not be able to fill out a job application form or a bank deposit slip.
- ◆ They believe they can read well but tend not to read unless necessary.

**Levels Three, Four and  
Five: 11.3 Million  
Canadian Consumers**



**CAUTION**  
WARNING: DANGEROUS  
GAS IS FORMED WHEN  
THIS PRODUCT IS MIXED  
WITH ACID

- ◆ These 53% of consumers have sufficient reading and arithmetic skills to meet most everyday demands. However, technical jargon in manuals and documents could frustrate them.
- ◆ These consumers can however:
  - ◆ use the Yellow Pages™
  - ◆ write to a manufacturer for information
  - ◆ understand basic nutrition and health information
- ◆ 33% of all consumers fall into Level Three, a minimum literacy level to understand the information and benefits found in the Canadian marketplace.
- ◆ The remaining 20% of consumers are found in Levels Four and Five and have the skills to understand challenging printed materials.

Literacy and Essential Skills Awareness Guide

| <b>Literacy and Essential Skills Survey in Renfrew County</b> |                        |  |   |                 |  |                     |                |                 |                      |                   |
|---|------------------------|--|---|-----------------|--|---------------------|----------------|-----------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| <b>Age</b>  | <b>Education Level</b> | <b>Are your skills still at that level</b><br><b>1 2 3 4 5</b><br><small>1 - Forgot everything<br/>5 - Know more now</small> | <b>LBS Levels</b><br><b>*note - not measured, above LBS</b> |                 | <b>Would like to learn or improve skills</b> |                     |                |                 |                      |                   |
|   |                        |  | <b>Literacy</b>   | <b>Numeracy</b> | <b>Reading Text</b>                          | <b>Document Use</b> | <b>Writing</b> | <b>Numeracy</b> | <b>Personal Mgmt</b> | <b>Technology</b> |
| 16-24   | HS                     | 5  | LBS 1 -2  | LBS 1 -2        |  | ✓                   |                |                 |                      |                   |
| 16-24   | HS                     | 4  | *   | LBS 3 -4        | ✓  | ✓                   | ✓              | ✓               | ✓                    | ✓                 |
| 16-24   | HS, some College       | 5  | LBS 3 -4  | LBS 1 -2        |  |                     | ✓              |                 |                      |                   |
| 25-44   | Gr. 11                 | 3  | OBS   | OBS             |  |                     | ✓              | ✓               |                      | ✓                 |
| 25-44   | HS                     | 4  | LBS 3 -4  | LBS 1 -2        | ✓  | ✓                   | ✓              | ✓               |                      |                   |
| 25-44   | HS, some College       | 2  | *   | LBS 3 -4        |  | ✓                   | ✓              | ✓               |                      |                   |
| 25-44   | GED                    | 3  | 5/OBS   | LBS 3 -4        | ✓  | ✓                   | ✓              | ✓               | ✓                    | ✓                 |
| 25-44   | Gr. 11                 | 3  | LBS 3 -4  | LBS 1 -2        | ✓  | ✓                   | ✓              | ✓               |                      | ✓                 |
| 25-44   | Post Secondary         | 3  | *   | *               |  |                     | ✓              | ✓               |                      |                   |
| 25-44   | Post Secondary         | 1  | *   | LBS 3 -4        | ✓  | ✓                   | ✓              | ✓               |                      |                   |
| 25-44   | GED                    | 3  | LBS 3-4   | LBS 3 -4        |  | ✓                   |                |                 |                      | ✓                 |
| 25-44   | Gr.11                  | 4  | LBS 1-2   | LBS 1 -2        | ✓  | ✓                   | ✓              | ✓               | ✓                    |                   |
| 25-44   | HS                     | 3  | LBS 3-4   | LBS 1 -2        | ✓  | ✓                   | ✓              | ✓               |                      | ✓                 |
| 45-54   | HS/College             | 5  | LBS 3 -4  | LBS 3 -4        |  |                     |                |                 |                      |                   |
| 45-54   | HS                     | 4  | OBS   | LBS 1 -2        | ✓  | ✓                   | ✓              | ✓               | ✓                    | ✓                 |
| 45-54   | HS, some College       | 5  | *   | LBS 3 -4        | ✓  | ✓                   | ✓              | ✓               |                      | ✓                 |

**HS – High School**

**This clearly illustrates that educational attainment is not equal to having the skills needed to be successful in returning to the workforce or to further education.**

## Report Form

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Client's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Client's Goal: \_\_\_\_\_

Employment Counsellor: \_\_\_\_\_

| Question   | Response   | Comments |
|--|--|----------|
| 1. What was the last grade of school you completed?<br>a.) At what school?<br>b.) When?<br>c.) Do you feel you have the skills of your last grade completed? |  |          |
| 2. What subjects did you enjoy and do well in at school?   |  |          |
| 3. What subjects were difficult for you?   |  |          |
| 4. Were you ever tested for learning disabilities? If you were, do you remember anything about the results?  | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>                               |          |
| 5. Did you ever miss school for long periods of time because of illness, suspension, etc?  | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>                               |          |
| 6. How do you feel about your reading, writing and math skills?  | I need to improve <input type="checkbox"/><br>I'm comfortable <input type="checkbox"/> |          |
| 7. Do you have a computer at home? If you do, how do you use it?   | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>                               |          |
| 8. Do you have a driver's licence?   | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>                               |          |
| 9. Do you have any other licences or certificates that are up-to-date? (CPR, Smart Serve, etc.)<br>a.) Where did you take the training? When?                | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>                               |          |