Canadian Language Benchmarks/ Essential Skills | **Niveaux de compétence linguistique canadiens/ Compétences essentielles**

Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks

On the Job

ESL and Essential Skills for Work

Document Use

Contents

Document Use

Document Use: Thinking *Inside* the Box

Document Use is one of the most important skills in the workplace, but one of the most overlooked skills when it comes to preparing people for work! Documents are everywhere – they convey safety information and important warnings to staff, record daily routines, list items, track expenses, and on and on. People have to fill them in on a regular basis at work and at home, but many people (not just second language learners) still struggle to be accurate and complete. Why? Because, identifying the underpinning structure of documents may not have been clear in previous learning. This is one skill that, with some training, learners can become quite proficient at quite quickly.

Document Use refers to tasks that involve a variety of information displays in which words, numbers, icons and other visual characteristics (e.g., line, colour, shape) are given meaning by their spatial arrangement. For example, graphs, lists, tables, blueprints, schematics, drawings, signs and labels are documents used in the world of work. Documents found in both print and non-print media (for example, computer screen or microfiche documents, equipment gauges, clocks and flags) fall under this category.

Note: If a document includes a paragraph of text such as on a label or a completed form, it is also included in Reading Text. Documents requiring the entry of words, phrases, sentences and paragraphs are also included in Writing.

Document Use is not listed as one of the skills in the CLB but it is addressed to some degree in both the Reading and Writing benchmark descriptions. Tasks involving documents in the workplace often require employees to read, to interpret and to write entries according to standard practices. At the very least, workers might have to read,

to interpret and act based on the information they read in the document. Log book entries for example, might record the levels of chemicals used on a job. As the levels change, safety issues might arise. Accurate log entries and proper understanding of these logs can have life or death consequences in a plant or factory.

As teachers, we may need to learn about how documents are structured ourselves. Documents can be categorized into three main types:

- List structures

- Entry forms

- Visual documents

As an example; think about a simple entry form. When the box says NAME it really means "What is your name? Put your name in this box." That is an easy and familiar example, but consider the many ambiguous sections on forms that leave native speakers (not to mention our learners) scratching our heads wondering what information is required. The good news is that these structures do have some common standards and bear similarities that, once recognized, can help learners to predict how to interpret visual cues and respond to prompts.

The complexity of Document Use is determined by the following factors:

- The complexity of the document itself: structure, number of documents, document type

- The complexity of finding and entering information

- The complexity of the information use; content knowledge prerequisites

- The thinking process needed to complete the task; how much previous knowledge is needed to attempt this task

Sample Document Use Tasks: Cashiers

Document Use is considered one of the most important Essential Skills for Cashiers. The following sample tasks are drawn from the Essentials Skills Profile for Cashiers (NOC # 6611):

- read price tags, bills, cash register displays or account statements to determine the amount due (ES 1; CLB 3,4,5)

- consult lists, such as lists of product names and their prices, list of people who have written NSF cheques, lists of exchange rates or pounds to kilogram conversion charts (ES 2; CLB 6)

- consult work schedules and enter the times they begin and end their daily shifts (ES 2; CLB 6)

- read computer lists of information about sales by category to be able to balance the payments and charges. They may use up to ten documents at a time. (ES 3; CLB 7,8,9)

Teaching Idea #1 – A Skill-Building Formula

Here is a step-by-step formula to build Essential Skills into your lesson plans, and into the skills repertoires of your students. This formula is presented for Document Use, but could easily be applied to Reading Text as well.

Step 1 — Present the structure. Review the structure of the document or text highlighting titles, subtitles, legends, glossaries, tables of contents, etc; break it down into its smallest components if necessary. For example, take a complex table or information display and break it into its component lists. Take a newspaper and break it into sections, pages, titles, subtitles, advertisements and articles.

Step 2 — Determine the skills. What skills are needed to complete the task? The task now becomes what does the learner do first to move toward finding the required information, instead of jumping right to the answer. The strategy is developed through the process of getting the answer and not by just getting an answer.

Step 3 — Create a flow chart. Use a flow chart to reinforce the strategies or skills from step 2.

Step 4 — Practice, Practice, Practice. Use sample tasks from all the sources listed in the appendix of this manual or collect your own. Consider two factors in lesson planning:

1. Work tasks are rarely done in complete isolation. Rarely at work does one have to write a test in isolation, for example. More often, work is done cooperatively to some degree. Encourage learners to work in groups or pairs, to seek assistance from each other or the instructor and to be jointly responsible for the outcome.

2. Workplace documents are rarely perfect. Make the learning transferable by comparing the structure of one document to another. Discuss ambiguous documents. Ambiguity or imperfection in documents adds complexity.

Step 5 — Evaluate the learning. Ask learners to think about what the steps were that they took to complete the task. What steps allowed them to improve speed and accuracy? Order the steps carefully with learners taking the lead. What steps were not so effective? At this point you can rework the flow chart to add the new learning.

The goal is to teach learners to be able to think their way through a variety of unknown documents and texts. Recognizing the similarities of structures between two or more documents is a skill that can be taught and practiced in the classroom so when this occurs in the workplace, learners will be prepared. Lessons can be framed with a brief overview of the document's structure, highlighting the type and use, spiralling this into a discussion of how this helps to interpret the meaning, and followed up with a meta-cognitive discussion on what strategies were used to determine the answer. Ensuring learners step back and think about the thought process required is a critical part of Essential Skill development.

Building the Basics	

CLB 1- 4 Strategies

In the Canadian Language Benchmarks framework, Document Use can involve a combination of both reading and writing. In Stage 1 of the Reading Benchmarks, one of the four descriptors, Business and Service Texts lends itself to the use of authentic workplace documents and to the teaching of the form and structure of a document. Examples of tasks for this section at CLB 1 are: Read a cash-register sales receipt: check the total amount, date and place. Show on an application form which information is required in which section; provide required information. Locate items on simplified maps and diagrams. Match signs with words. This is the first step!

Tasks such as filling out simple application forms and bank slips are considered as CLB 3 and are rated at Essential Skills Complexity Level 1. Using the authentic document as the basis for vocabulary building and practice adds relevance for the adult learner.

Working with Lists

The list is the foundation for many other more complex documents. Some things you might need to know:

- Two or more lists make a table.

- A list within a table is known as an "embedded" or "nested" list.

- A list of items across the top row of a table that refer to a list in a column makes an "intersecting list".

The grammar used in making lists can be quite consistent. For example, a shopping list is a list of nouns; the "To Do" list is a list of simple present tense verbs and idiomatic verbs (look for, clean up, turn off, shop for) and a list like you might find in a résumé may consist of past tense verbs. Teaching the skill of list creation and use can integrate grammar, time management and organizational skills.

Teaching Idea #2 – Dressing for Work

	In some work environments safety or health regulations dictate what clothing items employees must wear. For example, employees might be required to wear special boots, hard hats, elasticized cuffs on shirts, eye wear or hair nets. Jobs where much of the work is performed out of doors would require workers to have variations of seasonal wear, too. As each workplace and each industry are different, it is useful for learners to discuss some of these items. The following are some ideas of activities to do with your students related to Document Use:

- Have learners list all of the clothing items they need for work. Brainstorm this list through a discussion of what learners, who work presently or have worked in the past, have had to wear to comply with

safety or health regulations. Connect these lists to specific occupations, for example, listing all the clothing a garbage collector would need (especially in winter), or all the clothing a person working in the produce department at the grocery store might need, etc.

- Discuss how hygiene and worker safety are factors in health regulations for such industries as food processing, health care, and grocery retail. In some cases, a worker may be expected to wear a hair net, special gloves, a uniform, or a face mask. In some companies, the dress code may explicitly list the appropriateness of items like: body piercings, tattoos, or facial hair and how the company views they should be handled or displayed. Some traditional clothing may also be seen as a safety issue.

- Discuss appropriate dress for various workplaces and ask students to observe people at various workplaces and then to prepare a chart. This also offers an opportunity to discuss in class vocabulary learners may hear in the workplace like "dress-down Fridays", "dressy casual", "appropriate business attire". An extension activity might be to ask students to research workplaces where they might have a job interview in order to dress appropriately for that particular workplace. Remind learners that each company will have its own culture.

- Like the television show, knowing what not to wear[1] is a challenge for many workers going into a new workplace. Another way to research appropriate forms of dress would be to invite business or Human Resources professionals to the class to discuss what they look for when hiring and interviewing people. In this kind of a forum, it would be appropriate to ask their advice about specific types of dress associated with certain cultures or beliefs. This type of forum could also be done by inviting former students who are working to come and discuss dress codes at their workplaces.

- Make this list into a checklist and have the learners create an inventory of their own wardrobes. These checklists can be personalized so they reflect either the occupations learners already have or the ones they would like to get. To adapt this activity to a CLB 5 to 8, learners could read the Essential Skills Profile[2] for the occupation of their choice, get an idea of job duties and then they could guess as to the required clothing they may be required to wear. OR, if their language proficiency is high, they could read applicable health and safety regulations to help create their lists.

---

[1] The Learning Channel in the U.S. and the B.B.C. in Britain have popular weekly shows entitled, "What Not To Wear", where individuals are nominated (often by co-workers or friends who feel they dress inappropriately for their lifestyles) to have a fashion and appearance makeover.

[2] You can find Essential Skill Profiles at this link: http://srv600.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/esrp/english/general/home_e.shtml

- Determine the items they still need to purchase for work and use the Yellow Pages. This also teaches, reviews, and reinforces previous learning about alphabetized lists, directories and indexes.

- Generate vocabulary for the categories of companies where you might buy clothing using the Yellow Pages, dictionaries, newspapers, previous group knowledge and a thesaurus. New retail vocabulary such as 'specialty', 'safety', 'consignment' , or 'second hand' could be introduced here, as well as brainstorming ways about shopping for work clothes when on a limited income. [3] Find definitions as required. Make a list of the places you would visit to buy the items.

- One idea for an extension activity would be to make a field trip to a local store. Using a map, make a list of directions to get to the store. You might even be able to integrate bus or subway schedules into this plan. For a higher level class you might want to start this activity with a budgeting activity, such as: each learner is given a hypothetical amount of money and they are to itemize what they would buy with it. Find the real cost of those items. Develop a spreadsheet to tabulate the amounts. Factor in applicable taxes and even budget for future clothing purchases. If you have time you could even talk about credit cards, paying interest and how that reduces your buying power.

---

[3] Discuss good consignment shops as an option that budget-conscious Canadians sometimes consider when looking for fashionable, good quality clothing at reasonable prices. Many consignment shops specialize in Designer labels.

Teaching Idea #3 – Creating Tables

The following is an example of an activity that would be done to research companies and employment in a region. This requires developing a list and building on it until it could be a table with many columns and rows.

1. As a group, brainstorm a list of occupations that your learners are interested in.

2. Make the list into a table by adding companies where you would do that job. For example, if learners list the occupation "engineer", then refer to the Yellow Pages to create a list of Engineering Companies. Or, if they listed another occupation such as "meat cutter", brainstorm a general category where a meat cutter might work such as in a grocery store and look that up in the Yellow Pages and list.

Note: The more steps it takes to produce the list, the more complex the activity.

3. For a higher level class, a third column could be added to include company websites drawn from the research.

4. A follow-up activity is to ask the learner to make a list of all the places she can look to find a job. Include company websites, professional and other associations and unions in your list. Have the learners work in groups to compile another list of all the companies that are advertising for the jobs they are interested in (practicing the Essential Skill of Finding Information in the process).

5. To find the target job, follow the same process. Go to the Yellow Pages. Make a checklist. Make the list into a table with addresses and phone numbers. Plot the locations on a map. Pick places you want to visit. Find the bus schedule. Go to the companies. With every layer, the complexity level increases, but with group and instructor support it is do-able.

6. A follow up activity could be to role play a dialogue if you were to go into the company and ask for an application form or drop off a resume (integrating practice in Oral Communication).

Instructional Design Idea		
	Classroom Idea	**Link to the Workplace**
This list of classroom management activities helps teachers to model classroom activities to relevant workplace tasks and expectations in North America.	1. List the daily lesson plan on board as a checklist. Check off as each item is completed.	- models daily scheduling, list making and job task planning
	2. Post attendance and have students sign in (teacher supervised) and have them complete an absenteeism form when they are away.	- Simulates a time sheet, and absence form or a request for leave form found in the workplace
	3. Have learners complete an Out of Classroom form, when learners are not on site	- Having learners complete these, instead of the instructor, simulates the workplace.
	4. Implement and reinforce the use of a day timer or organizer. When assignments are missed then the day timer usage can be reviewed.	- Practices Job Task Planning and Organizing in addition to Document Use
	5. Create a contract for the class outlining expected behaviour and have them sign it. The terms of this contract can be negotiated in the classroom.	- Simulates contract negotiation and then fulfilment of the terms of a contract by reinforcing the behaviour that was outlined in the agreement.
	6. Post sign up sheets for presentations, group work, special classes, etc. (Often these are completed incorrectly and this leads to a teachable moment.)	- Simulates sign up sheets for a variety of corporate initiatives such as United Way, Corporate Challenge and even pot luck lunches.
	7. Develop a midterm and final performance report, using computerized spread sheet, that lists all assignments completed, grades, timeliness etc. and use it as to emphasize deadlines, tracking activities, organizational skills and expectations in the workplace. Did you miss any assignments? Why? If not, what strategies did you use to ensure that you would not forget? Include goal setting in the format so learners take responsibility for their own learning.	- Simulates the Performance Appraisal system that exists in many workplaces. These activities include the Essential Skills of Document Use, Job Task Planning and Organizing, Working with Others and Oral Communication.· - Practices the task of multitasking and Job Task Planning and Organizing in addition to prioritizing of workloads
	8. A class with an advanced language level may effectively learn from the pressure of more deadlines. Have the learners produce a plan with strategies for dealing with overlapping timelines. Then debrief about multitasking and stress and coping strategies.	

Glossary of Terms

Complexity

Many essential skills have been given two types of ratings for complexity - a) the range of complexity of typical tasks for the occupation, and b) the range of complexity of the most complex tasks for the occupation.

Typical - a task which is "typical" occurs frequently in the job or occurs less frequently, but nevertheless is required by virtually all incumbents. Most Complex - a task considered "most complex" was identified as such by the workers interviewed. Factors affecting whether a worker identified a task as "most complex" include the difficulty of the task, how frequently the task is performed and the worker's familiarity with the task.

Document Use

Document Use refers to tasks that involve a variety of information displays in which words, numbers, icons and other visual characteristics (eg., line, colour, shape) are given meaning by their spatial arrangement. For example, graphs, lists, tables, blueprints, schematics, drawings, signs and labels are documents used in the world of work.

Essential Skills Profile

There are over 200 occupational profiles. These profiles can help you learn more about the skills you need for the job you want, highlighting each of the nine Essential Skills. The profiles can be used to help you:

- learn more about the skills you need in various occupations;

- develop workplace training programs, learning plans, or job descriptions;

- investigate career options, and;

- create educational tools to enhance skills development.

Flow chart

Flowcharts are schematic representations of a sequence of operations, as in a manufacturing process or computer program. Also called flow diagram, flow sheet.

Index