

# COMMON GROUND

## ENGLISH IN THE WORKPLACE



**NorQuest** COLLEGE | CENTRE FOR EXCELLENCE IN  
**INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION**

### A HOW-TO GUIDE FOR EMPLOYERS

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# The Centre for Excellence in Intercultural Education

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*Excellence through innovative intercultural solutions*

## **Our mission**

The NorQuest College Centre for Excellence in Intercultural Education transforms communities and organizations through customized, innovative and practical intercultural training grounded in evidence-based research. We achieve this by building strong collaborative partnerships with our clients and stakeholders.

## **Our vision**

We are regionally and nationally recognized as a leader in integrated intercultural solutions for the community and the workplace.

## **Our values**

Our values guide the development and growth of the Centre and align closely with the business model principles of NorQuest College.

### *Leading*

We are responsive to emerging trends and current realities, and generate fresh approaches and opportunities for our clients and stakeholders.

### *Transformative*

Our innovative approach integrates intercultural and language training to build community and organizational capacity through changed behaviour and expanded world views.

### *Practical*

We generate realistic solutions and perspectives that improve the effectiveness and quality of our clients' professional and social lives.

### *Evidence-based*

Our approach produces outcomes through the integration of applied research and customized training.

### *Sustainable*

We offer solutions that last by building community and corporate capacity.

### *Collaborative*

Solutions are meaningful to our clients and stakeholders, and appropriate to their specific situations.

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## NAME THIS COUNTRY...

IT HAS ONE OF THE LOWEST FERTILITY RATES IN THE WORLD...

IT IS FACING AN INCREASING LABOUR SHORTAGE...

BY 2011, IMMIGRATION WILL PROBABLY ACCOUNT FOR ALL ITS NET LABOUR FORCE GROWTH...

BY 2017, 1 IN 5 PEOPLE WILL BE A VISIBLE MINORITY

BY 2017, 1 IN 2 PEOPLE IN THREE MAJOR CITIES WILL BE A VISIBLE MINORITY

BY 2037, IMMIGRATION COULD ACCOUNT FOR THE NATION'S TOTAL POPULATION GROWTH<sup>1</sup>

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If you answered "Canada," You are correct. But, even closer to home, "Alberta's future economic success depends on the province's ability to attract, retain and develop the people and skills essential for a knowledge-based economy."<sup>2</sup>

1. Insights from the 2007 Alberta Settlement Conference, hosted by Citizenship & Immigration Canada and Alberta Employment Immigration & Industry.

2. [www.employment.alberta.ca/document/WIA/WIA-IM\\_IntSkilledImmigrants.pdf](http://www.employment.alberta.ca/document/WIA/WIA-IM_IntSkilledImmigrants.pdf)

Alberta experienced a booming economy as a result of several mega-projects in many sectors. Along with the demographics of an aging population and a low national fertility rate, this boom has resulted in a shortage of labour. The “rush” to fill positions with employees born outside Canada has resulted in workplace challenges concerning language, culture and integration. Consequently, these three issues are directly impacting workplace safety, productivity, and retention rates.

Companies throughout Alberta have realized there is a need to address language and cultural training on the worksite. But how can a company address employee language and cultural adaptation needs in-house when only one or two employees need the training, or a qualified ESL trainer is not available? For rural communities these issues are even more intensified. Community programs that have traditionally handled these learning needs often do not have the experience and resources to effectively address workplace training.

.....THESE ISSUES ARE DIRECTLY IMPACTING  
WORKPLACE SAFETY, PRODUCTIVITY,  
AND RETENTION RATES.

Employees born outside Canada need adequate language skills to participate fully in the workplace. Often there is a significant difference between the language skills needed to do a job and the language skills needed to be a fully functioning employee in the company. Much of the communication in companies is done through

e-mail, notices and meetings. If an employee doesn't have the language skills, she/he cannot access this information. In addition, companies want to increase retention and reduce tensions that may exist within their multicultural workforces; practicality and innovation become vital to finding solutions to workplace challenges. Offering English in the Workplace (EWP) training is one of the most effective and flexible ways to resolve language, cultural, and integration challenges at work.

**In your workplace, have you noticed...**

- misunderstandings between first and second language speakers of English?
- safety issues due to a lack of English skills or understanding of national safety standards?
- mistakes due to lack of clarification of techniques and language?
- misunderstandings due to cultural perspectives resulting in lost productivity?
- lack of teamwork due to different cultural expectations for teams?
- tensions between new and native-born Canadians due to different levels of communicative skill and a clash of cultural values?

Language and cultural problems may be new to your company. If they are not addressed in a timely manner, they can have a significant impact on productivity and the bottom line.



**C**ommon Ground is designed to support Alberta workplaces in setting up and delivering their own EWP training programs. *Common Ground* emphasizes the importance of the employer and employee mutually engaging in learning to develop *common ground* at work, together realizing the importance of workplace communication. The *Common Ground* package consists of two guides (one for employers, one for facilitators) and a learner training manual:

- **English in the Workplace: A How-To Guide for Employers**
- **English in the Workplace: Facilitators Manual**
- **English in the Workplace: Training Manual**

This *Common Ground* “How-To” guide walks you through the process of setting up an English in the Workplace program using five convenient learning settings. These cost-effective settings are designed to work around the constraints of shift schedules and can be blended to create a “one-of-a-kind” model to fit the company’s requirements.

The learning settings can also be used to facilitate intercultural communication between native and non-native speakers. The *Common Ground EWP Training Manual* has ten user-friendly modules for language, culture and integration learning. *Common Ground* is not designed to be an all-encompassing resource but rather to give you the groundwork to create an EWP program specific to the needs of your company. The sooner a newcomer can make progress fitting into the company, the better it is for everyone.

**COMMON GROUND EMPHASIZES THE IMPORTANCE**  
of the employer and employee mutually engaging in learning.



## *Immigrant and Canadian-Born Employees*

Employing workers who come from other cultures and do not speak English fluently can present workplace challenges. These challenges impact the integration and retention of immigrant workers.

Second language speakers need to learn general and occupation-specific English, develop new cultural skills and, more than likely, expand their understanding of safety standards. The most effective place to quickly reduce language and intercultural challenges that limit integration, productivity and safety is right in the workplace — by training both immigrants and Canadian-born employees. Both can benefit from language and intercultural skills which can help simplify communication and reduce common misunderstandings.

Although most people agree that adapting to a new culture is expected of any newcomer, employers are increasingly aware that Alberta's situation is historically and economically unique. Due to the large number of immigrants arriving to meet Alberta's future labour shortage, it is proving more effective to provide training to all employees. And, in urban areas where language and intercultural training has only been provided to immigrants, other employees have voiced concerns about

not receiving the equivalent kind of training.

The Alberta workforce is anything but homogenous. The Canadian-born employee is adjusting to a new mentality at the worksite—one that likely differs from their own. Training Canadian-born employees in intercultural awareness and mentorship will help reduce typical challenges for newcomers entering the working environment.

Canadian-born employees are better able to impart company values and expectations when they gain even basic intercultural skills. Furthermore, it is often difficult to distinguish between “Canadian culture” and “organizational culture” so that immigrants understand workplace expectations. Having to figure out those unwritten rules, as a non-native speaker, often generates misunderstandings. Mutual accommodation (e.g. mutually learning to speak more slowly or using plain language) could occur as a collaborative effort with both new and native-born Canadians.

Canada is not the only country experiencing labour shortages. This phenomenon is occurring in other nations, such as Germany and Australia, and is generating a global competition for the brightest and most qualified immigrants. Language and intercultural training may make the difference in attracting and retaining the skilled employees you need.

# STARTING YOUR OWN “ENGLISH IN THE WORKPLACE” PROGRAM REQUIRES FIVE STEPS...

**STEP 1 START** with the right trainer

**STEP 2 ASSESS** your learners

**STEP 3 DELIVER** the training

**STEP 4 EVALUATE** the results

**STEP 5 CREATE** independent learners

## STEP I: START

### Which Trainer?

#### *Education or Life Experience*

Both education and life experience are essential to teaching English; however, these qualities are difficult to find in one person, let alone finding such a person in every Alberta community. A number of factors can affect the selection of an EWP trainer:

- the pool of qualified and experienced candidates
- the availability of trainers for days or evenings
- the company shift schedules
- the number of learners
- the direct or indirect costs of a trainer

The following options are recommended in order of preference:

#### *Option A*

1. A qualified EWP facilitator with experience teaching language and intercultural awareness specific to the work site
2. An experienced ESL trainer with Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL)/Alberta Teachers of English as a Second Language (ATESL) accreditation and experience teaching adult learners

#### *Option B*

1. A retired teacher or under-employed trainer in the community, who has sufficient life experience to combine language training with company needs, demonstrates intercultural sensitivity, searches out the extensive online ESL resources and engages community networks for support
2. A trusted employee who has sufficient life experience to show intercultural sensitivity and an aptitude to learn quickly, and who will utilize the extensive online ESL resources as well as engage community networks for support

Sufficient preparation time must be given to the trainer to understand the curriculum in the *Common Ground* materials. The preparation time would be added to the scheduled class time per week. At the beginning, preparation time may be extensive as the new teacher becomes familiar with the topics. This time should decrease as familiarity with *Common Ground* increases.

One person alone cannot do facilitation of an English in the Workplace program like *Common Ground*. Having multiple trainers involved in the planning and facilitation of the weekly modules is ideal. Conflicts in schedule, illness and other unplanned circumstances may arise. Having an additional trainer able to smoothly replace the original facilitator (if the circumstance arises) will greatly benefit the learners in the classroom.

## Which Trainer Skill Set? Option A or Option B?

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### Fundamental Skills

All EWP trainers need to demonstrate the following fundamental skills regardless of education or experience:

- willingness to learn (understanding that there is a large body of research behind teaching ESL effectively)
- self-motivation
- ability to work independently
- understanding of the particular workplace and the job the learners are doing
- ability to work with multiple stakeholders
- confidence in speaking to small or large groups
- willingness to take calculated risks (e.g. trying a new process with learners)
- ability to identify with newcomer needs
- knowledge of how to access and select community support services
- fluency in English (an instructor could be someone with English as an additional language)
- computer literacy (needed for research and preparation)

### Option A: ATESL Accredited Trainers

EWP trainers with an educational background in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL), and/or experience teaching adult ESL learners will be able to identify training needs quickly. The following skills should be evident in an interview:

- teaching experience in multi-level adult ESL classes
- knowledge of language and integration challenges for immigrants
- experience developing or using language assessments
- experience developing curriculum specifically designed to meet the language skill gaps of working immigrants
- knowledge of adult learning practices
- “big picture” understanding of immigration issues at the federal, provincial and local levels
- working knowledge of Canadian Language Benchmarks
- intercultural competence
- knowledge of EWP and the needs and constraints of a workplace (scheduling, interruptions, workplace language procedures, etc.)

### Option B: Non-ATESL Accredited Trainers

Trainers with little or no background in TESL should access as many community and online resources as possible prior to and during the assessment, planning and delivery phases. The following skills should still be evident in an interview:

- ability to seek, internalize and reproduce new knowledge
- ability to gather and analyze data to make recommendations
- ability to communicate using plain language
- experience training in a related area such as safety
- confidence in speaking with multiple stakeholders
- intercultural sensitivity
- knowledge of Adult Learning Principles
- understanding that teaching language requires a completely different skill set

## Why Form an Advisory or Teaching Team?

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A team approach is important to the success of the program. Working together as part of a team will be invaluable in helping to build effective management and employee relations. The desire for the success of the program must come from the top of the company. Even while the president of the company may never step foot into the classroom, his or her influence and commitment shape the way employees will view the *Common Ground* course.

## What is the reason for the team?

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### Form a planning team:

- to get the voice of everyone in the company
- to create buy-in at all levels in the company
- to give direct communication to all employees

### Form a facilitation team:

- to support a company-wide effort in the language and intercultural training of the newcomer
- to ensure that every learner benefits from multiple viewpoints

Each facilitator on the team contributes in different ways. A facilitator does not have to be in a classroom: he or she can be on the production floor, behind the counter or even at the fry station. Each viewpoint is valuable and allows the learner to grasp the concepts being demonstrated more easily and clearly.

## Who is on the team?

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A representative (on behalf of each stakeholder in the success of the EWP initiative) should be on the team. The following is a short list of potential stakeholders, depending on the company's size:

- owner or employer
- new Canadians
- EWP trainer
- human resources or training manager
- other managers or supervisors (at least one representative)
- union or employee association representative (if applicable)
- informal cultural leaders
- translator or interpreter (if available)
- other employees (at least one representative)

## What is the role of the team?

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The team members' main role is to champion the training initiative and help shape the team. Next, they help the needs assessment by providing:

- various perspectives on the goals and the steps in the needs assessment
- recommendations for creating a plan to meet the identified needs, based on the assessment data
- answers to questions that co-workers may have about the assessment and program

# STEP 2: ASSESS

## *What is a Needs Assessment?*

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A needs assessment is based on the idea that there is a gap between what exists and what is expected or needed. The workplace needs assessment process is a systematic way of identifying an organization's overall educational needs with a focus on communication skills. It involves a number of steps and activities for getting input from a range of people in the workforce. The process provides knowledge of the total workplace environment and allows the project planners to make recommendations for a short and long term training plan that will help employees better perform in their job functions. Focus should be placed on needs directly associated with the job as opposed to desires.

## *Why Conduct a Needs Assessment?*

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A well-executed assessment will help determine the best way to:

- gain support and commitment from all levels of the workforce by getting a fuller and more accurate picture of the needs and concerns
  - provide information on which to base all other decisions relating to employee education
  - identify the plain language skills and cultural knowledge needed by native-born Canadians to communicate effectively in a multi-cultural organization
  - identify the specific language, work processes, safety requirements and cultural needs for immigrants to communicate effectively in a multi-cultural organization and community
  - recognize any organizational gaps that limit integration
  - provide a basis for creating a solution
- learn about the workplace culture and operations
  - develop a schedule suitable to the operations of the workplace
  - develop and/or implement the assessment tools
  - conduct interviews with managers, supervisors, front-line workers, and office staff
  - collect workplace samples (e.g. documents with authentic, job-specific language, operation manual, standard operating procedures, benefit packages, posters etc.)
  - analyze the findings
  - collect and/or develop the training materials from various online and community sources (e.g. DVDs, CDs of safety material)

## *How Do I Choose an Assessor?*

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Typically, the EWP trainer is hired to perform the needs assessment. However, due to a limited candidate pool, an organization may not have a trainer in place. Consider other possible people within the community or company. The choice depends on the situation.

The assessor's role will be to:

- attend team planning meetings

## *What Are the Phases of a Needs Assessment?*

---

A needs assessment takes time. Time will be needed to analyze completely what is needed at your worksite. There are four different phases involved when creating and implementing a worksite needs assessment. Following the four different phases will allow for a systematic approach to workplace learning.

### *Phase 1: Laying the Groundwork*

#### **1. Identify the issues of the company**

Employees must demonstrate various skills at the worksite such as: communication, adaptability, problem solving, positive attitudes, positive behaviours and working with others. Are there issues in your workplace due to a lack of these skills?

Training is goal and outcome-focused. It is important to choose the most important issues to focus on in class in order to produce the most satisfying results for both the learners and the company. Issues could include: identifying intercultural training for company employees (with an influx of foreign workers), increased safety problems, conflict between workers, an affected bottom line, or changes in the company such as new equipment, new demands, etc.

## 2. Get stakeholders' commitment and organize an advisory committee

The success of an English in the Workplace program can only be achieved if everyone at the worksite shows commitment. At this stage, owners, human resource managers, team leaders and employees must come together to realize the goal. The stakeholders will need to learn about the length of time required for language acquisition (see Watt and Lake's Language Acquisition findings later in this booklet). With this knowledge in mind, discussion can take place among the stakeholders to clarify the language process expectations. The frequency and duration of the process, assessment and the classes can then be discussed.

## 3. Understand the industry

*Common Ground* is a resource that may be taught by someone working within the organization; however, the facilitator (and assessor) of the program may be new to the rules and terminology used at the worksite. The individual(s) conducting a needs assessment will need to understand the core business, workforce demographics, terminology, trends, issues, and research projects and/or significant events that may be used to complement the needs assessment.

## 4. Know your resources

Knowing who and what is available at the worksite and in the community will help in learning about the scope, sequence and design of the needs assessments. There are three resources that will be used throughout.

- Time – How much time is the company able to provide? When are the peak periods of the industry? Look at scheduling on an annual, monthly, weekly and daily basis. What are the constraints in each of these time frames?

- People – Who is available to assist on the *Common Ground* project? What are their individual strengths?
- Money – How will *Common Ground* be funded? What are the estimates on fees and expenses?

## Phase 2: The Needs Assessment Design and Plan

In a perfect world, everyone at the company would participate in the needs assessment; however, available resources may cause the assessor to limit the size of the assessment. A needs assessment will always take more time than expected. Limit the number of interviews to a manageable level.

The second phase of the needs assessment focuses on defining the objectives. Only then can planning take place on how to meet each objective.

### 1. Set specific goals

Having clearly defined objectives for the needs assessments is essential. It is important to decide what are the possible and appropriate outcomes of the *Common Ground* course.

### 2. Develop your assessment tools

There are a number of data collection tools that may be used when conducting a needs assessment. The tool you choose will depend on the type of information you need to gather. Questionnaires, interviews and focus groups are data collection tools. All have advantages and disadvantages, and will be explained later in this document.

## Phase 3: Implementation

Implementing the needs assessment is the most time-consuming phase of this process; however, if you have completed the steps in the first two phases, your work will be greatly lessened. Phase 3 will require the assessor to keep focused on the objective while gathering the required information.

## Phase 4: Interpretation

### 1. Sort the needs assessment findings

The assessor will summarize and sort the data in two ways:

- quantitatively
- qualitatively

**Quantitative data** are reported as numerical values. Quantitative data results typically come from structured questionnaires, surveys or assessment tools. Software programs may be used to record the information.

**Qualitative data** include verbal descriptions, open-ended interview answers, observation and review of workplace documents. Qualitative data results typically come from focus groups, interviews and formal or informal observation. Qualitative data are expressed as observations, judgments or opinions.

### 2. Interpret the needs assessment findings

Once the needs assessment has been completed, the next step is analyzing the results to reveal the study's significance. Well-interpreted data will make it easier to give recommendations.

The needs assessor needs to be aware of common pitfalls when interpreting data. These include: bias, jumping to conclusions and making broad statements with limited information.

#### A) Examine the findings

Examine the findings of your assessment to identify your workplace communication challenges. Are the problems:

- social relationship problems?
- communication breakdowns?
- cultural misunderstandings?
- other unexplained problems?

#### B) Organize the findings

It is essential to organize the information you have discovered. It often helps to visually categorizing the findings into groups using a large piece of paper or a whiteboard. Here are some tips:

- Organize findings into groups: native and non-native speakers, organizational levels, language and intercultural issues
- Look for group patterns – similarities and differences
- Separate urgent and important problems
- Identify possible solutions for the problems
- Look for unexpected findings

You should now be ready to make decisions about the delivery of the EWP and intercultural training.

#### 3. Decide on recommendations

Once the needs assessment findings have been interpreted, discussion should take place with stakeholders. This discussion will help shape the content of the *Common Ground* learning sessions.





## *What Are the Assessment Methods?*

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### *One-on-One Interviews*

Use interviews to look for miscommunication, for language proficiency problems that could affect safety and for challenges in understanding workplace cultural and social interactions. Conduct interviews with all staff, including managers and owners, to help obtain a clear picture of the challenges to all employees. Assessment must move from the operational to the business or corporate levels. It's important to develop rapport and trust. Confidentiality is vital for obtaining accurate feedback.



#### **Strengths**

- opportunity to clarify information given
- easier for a company to release workers one at a time
- privacy encourages open feedback

#### **Challenges**

- time intensive for the researcher
- the newcomers being interviewed may be anxious about the purpose of the assessment and whether the findings may result in disgrace or termination

### *Questionnaires/Surveys (in person)*

Questionnaires, often used to acquire quantitative data, tend to encourage a high response rate. It is important to stress that the questionnaires/ surveys must be done in person during course time or in meetings or the response rate will be low.



#### **Strengths**

- easiest and most cost-effective way to gather information
- allows the learner to remain anonymous
- provides measurable statistical data

#### **Challenges**

- quality and depth of responses can be limited
- language barriers can limit response rates
- no opportunity to clarify answers or check readers' understanding of questions

## Email Surveys

Email surveys allow both stakeholders and learners to take part in the survey. Ensure a deadline is set for returning their comments either online or via inter-office mail. Response rates tend to be low with email surveys.

### Strengths

- extra time to reflect on questions will result in greater insight
- anonymous answers will provide greater and more open feedback

### Challenges

- not everyone may have access to a computer or be “tech savvy”
- the researcher must rely on the promptness of others



## Focus Groups

Focus groups enable the assessor to create new questions as issues arise. However, depending on who is present at a focus group and how much trust exists between participants, the real issues or needs may not surface. Focus groups should be performed by a facilitator and a note-taker.

### Strengths

- less time-intensive than one-on-one interviewing, and may be more cost-effective for the company
- some people are more comfortable in a group setting
- discussion in a group generates thoughts for participants

### Challenges

- may be difficult to allow several workers to attend at the same time
- participants cannot speak anonymously
- a skilled facilitator is required to keep the focus group on track



## Job Shadowing

Following both native and non-native speakers as they work will give a very informed picture of the challenges to all employees. By remaining “invisible,” the assessor keeps interactions authentic and does not get in the way of productivity. Keep in mind that job shadowing doesn’t actually mean invisible. Employees should know that someone will be following them quietly and trying to keep a low profile. Some questions and interactions may also be possible depending on their tasks.

### Strengths

- witness firsthand the challenges experienced by the learner
- receive insight on terminology and lessons that may be taught

### Challenges

- learners may change their routine with a “new” person on the floor
- broad generalizations may be reached which are not authentic



## What Are the Assessment Tools?

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There are five assessment tools that can help in assessing the challenges in the workplace. Since each tool has advantages and disadvantages, choose the ones that work for your organization. Some tools are better for business owners while others are better for hired assessors. Bottom line: choose what works for you.

### Survey Forms

Survey forms gather a lot of information, but they are time-consuming for both the worker completing them and for the assessor collecting information from them.

*(See p. 49 & 51: Employee Self-Evaluation of Language Competency)*

### Workplace Samples

Documents and printed materials (memos, guides, posters, etc.) that contain essential information for newcomers to do their jobs will only be effective if they are readily understandable. These materials should be analyzed to assess how difficult it may be for a second language speaker to access the written information and apply it to their work. Many of these samples should be analyzed for plain language and become materials for the EWP program.

### Workplace Observation

Direct observation allows the assessor to gain a better understanding of the day-to-day activities and the “real world” needs of workers. Observing the workplace as an “outsider” can provide valuable information. The assessor should:

- notice how jobs interrelate, how work flows, how space is used and the formal/informal words used in describing these matters
- spend time documenting job-specific vocabulary and language tasks, and observing the details of work procedures
- look for examples of verbal and non-verbal communication in the workplace

- ask to attend meetings to understand how the workplace operates
- ask if there are employees experiencing difficulty in common workplace tasks

*(See p. 55 & 57: Pre-Program Employer Evaluation of the Learner's English Competency)*

### Video Clips

Recording interviews on videotape and reviewing them later, the assessor can gain important information at the beginning of the program and when assessing improvement at the end. Remember to have the employees understand and sign the release or consent forms.

*(See p. 58: Pre-Program Video Clear Speech Assessment)*

### Intercultural Checklists

An intercultural checklist is intended to determine general intercultural awareness and to isolate misunderstandings. Culture is very complex and cannot be simplified to only talking about food and dress. People's behaviours reflect the core values they were taught in childhood. There is a checklist in the appendices that may help identify some intercultural challenges. However, unlike language needs, intercultural issues can take longer to assess.

*(See p. 50: Pre-Program Learner's Intercultural Awareness)*

## How Are Employees Informed About the Assessment Process?

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Before the needs assessment process begins, make sure all workers understand the training plan, its intent and the expectations. Getting worker “buy-in” is vital for cooperation and success. Workers must also be assured of confidentiality or the process will be jeopardized.

*Suggestion:* employers should develop a communication plan regarding the training. You can tell the employees about the upcoming assessment through supervisors at team or shift meetings. Or, you could send an email or letter to inform workers and invite them to participate voluntarily. You can also use posters, bulletins or newsletters.

## How Long Does It Take for Adult Immigrants to Learn Enough English to Meet Their Needs?

Language is critical for the successful social and occupational integration of immigrants into the Alberta workforce. It is not possible to have successful integration without sufficient language proficiency – although it is important to keep in mind that the newcomer to your company is not guaranteed successful integration even with language proficiency. (Language proficiency refers to the use of language in the successful completion of tasks in relevant, everyday situations.)

It is important to remember that an EWP program will not provide the “cure” for all language needs. A company simply can not provide the number of hours an employee needs to learn the English language and move higher on the Canadian Language Benchmark (CLB) scale. CLB scores indicate the level of English language proficiency that a newcomer has based on a series of assessments in listening, speaking, reading and writing. The CLB is recognized as the official Canadian standard for describing, measuring and recognizing the language proficiency of adult immigrants and prospective immigrants in both English and French. The CLB provides a common reference for the entire immigrant-serving community.

Dr. David Watt and Diedre Lake (2004) conducted a study that looked at the question “How long does it take adult immigrants to learn enough English to meet their needs?” In their study, Watt and Lake found the following:

- Neither the number of languages a newcomer speaks nor the similarity between the native language and English has a significant impact on how fast English is learned.
- Learners do not advance at an even pace throughout Canadian Language Benchmark levels.

The main factor in learning a new language is found in the newcomer’s previous educational attainment. The number of years of education the employee has will play a vital role in how quickly they will learn the new language.

### 0 to 7 years of education

Newcomers to your company who have an elementary level of education will struggle with language acquisition. In comparison to others with more years of education, they will make smaller gains over 250 hours of instruction. The research of Watt and Lake shows that moving from Benchmark 2 to Benchmark 3 will take 320 hours of classroom instruction; however, moving from Benchmark 3 to Benchmark 4 will take 611 hours.

### 8 to 12 years of education

Newcomers who have a high school education are expected to progress at a moderate rate. Progression between the CLB levels will appear more evenly paced when compared to those with 0 – 7 years of education. Moving from Benchmarks 3 to 4 takes 341 hours; from 4 to 5 takes 300 hours; and from 5 to 6 takes 320 hours. It will take an estimated 2200 hours to move from Benchmark 1 to Benchmark 7. Watt and Lake estimate that it will take 1871 hours to move from Benchmark 1 to Benchmark 5.

### 13 to 16 years of education

Newcomers with a post-secondary education will progress at a moderate rate. A stable rate of progress is displayed benchmark to benchmark as it will take 283 hours to move from Benchmarks 3 to 4; 297 hours from Benchmarks 4 to 5; 356 hours from Benchmarks 5 to 6; and 412 hours from Benchmarks 6 to 7. From the study, it is estimated that to move from Benchmark 1 to Benchmark 7 will take 2017 hours of instruction.

### Over 17 years of education

Newcomers with a graduate-level education will progress at an accelerated rate. With 250 hours of instruction, their benchmark rates will rise the fastest. Moving from Benchmarks 3 to 4 will take 280 hours; from Benchmarks 4 to 5 will take 300 hours; from Benchmarks 5 to 6 will take 341 hours; and from Benchmarks 6 to 7 will take 380 hours. It is estimated that to move from Benchmark 1 to Benchmark 7 will take 1791 hours.

Keep in mind that these numbers are only estimates. A newcomer to your company may achieve these levels at a faster or slower rate. The statistics listed here show only the average time it takes for adult immigrants to learn enough English to meet their needs.

The majority of immigrants in the study believed it would take four years to learn enough English to meet their needs and they felt complete integration into Canadian society would take three to five years. Integration was defined as working in meaningful jobs, having Canadian friends and colleagues and having a sense of belonging.

Watt, D.L.E. & Lake, D.M. (2004). *Benchmarking Adult Rates of Second Language Acquisition & Integration: How long and how fast?* Edmonton, AB: Alberta Learning, Language Training Programs and Citizenship and Immigration Canada



## STEP 3: DELIVER

### *Five Learning Settings*

Learning can take place at any time and at any location in the workplace. However, to ensure your training goals are met, organized times and places are recommended. This guide outlines five effective learning settings for on-site training: Class Time Links, Shift Talks, Self-study Centre, Tutor Talks and Coach's Hand. Use one or all of them as often or as seldom as necessary. Of course, the more learning settings used the greater likelihood of improvement in workplace communication.

*Suggestion:* Choose the Class Time Links introductory session and then choose from any of the other learning settings to support the Class Time Links.



## Choose From Five Learning Settings



### **Class Time Links**

*Why choose this setting model?*

This is the main learning setting in which the 10 modules can be discussed within the larger group. The 10 modules are discussed in further detail in the *Common Ground* Training Manual. Lunchtime is one suggestion, but any large group meeting time could work. The class could be held before, in the middle of, or after regular work hours for an agreed-upon period of time.

This group setting allows for feedback from the previous sessions to foster the interlinking of ideas—that’s why it’s called Class Time Links—to create clear communication for all employees.



### **Shift Talks**

*Why choose this setting model?*

Shift Talks uses five-minute blocks of time, conveniently at the beginning of a shift. It fits in and is flexible for the workplace and can include all workers. A supervisor or senior worker leads the discussions that include safety terms, themes or practical demonstrations, areas of challenge in language, culture or job skills, or emerging needs or misunderstandings.



### **Coach’s Hand**

*Why choose this setting model?*

Coach’s Hand provides immediate help, useful explanations by a coach/mentor, or ways to help others. It facilitates opportunities to form relationships that improve trust and, thus, communication. Experienced workers could be partnered as “buddies” with new Canadians. It also gives opportunities to make connections with the culture and language of the workplace. For example, a coach might get involved when a new Canadian is upset about a new work routine, change or some other misunderstanding.



### **Tutor Talks**

*Why choose this setting model?*

Tutor Talks occur in small groups and improve the workers’ communication more quickly than large groups do. You can meet at regular times such as lunch hours, coffee breaks, or after work (15- to 30-minute meetings). Tutor Talks could even take place in a field location or on an assembly line. They could include critical information or demonstrations on how learning concepts relate to workplace situations. For example, a tutor could meet with a couple of workers to learn how to clarify information or directions on the work floor.



### **Self-Study Centre**

*Why choose this setting model?*

This model gives learners a chance to review materials before or after the sessions. A Self-Study Centre could be a cafeteria space or vacant room that can be used for independent study and reflection. It could offer a computer with headphones, internet or access to other resources such as free government publications or DVDs.

## How Do I Choose the Content?

The accompanying *Common Ground Training Manual* provides resources for program facilitators at the worksite. The ten modules based on safety, pronunciation clarity, intercultural awareness, idioms and conversation how-to's have been developed from research on Alberta industry needs.

The needs assessment will provide data to support what will be taught at the worksite. Typically, an English in the Workplace program will run from 30 to 40 hours. The 10 modules provide the facilitator with background information and activity suggestions that far exceed the 30- to 40-hour time commitment. Choosing the appropriate content for classroom and worksite lessons is essential as not all five training topics can be effectively covered in the time given.

It is recommended that each topic be discussed in a large group setting (Class Time Links/Shift Talks) using the training materials and other relevant resources. The topic

is further practiced and personalized by employees at the workplace in “learning settings” (Tutor Talks/Coach's Hand/Self-Study Centre).

The newcomers to your company will benefit greatly from a company-driven, workplace-specific training program.

It should be noted that although a great amount of time and expense is being spent on the permanent and/or temporary foreign worker in your company – the newcomer should not be the only one experiencing new learning. The course is named *Common Ground* for a reason. This is an opportunity for the Canadian-born employee and the foreign-born employee to learn from each other. Every culture has its strengths and the workplace can only benefit when all are working to their capabilities.

Suggestions on how to provide training for Canadian-born employees appears later in this guide.





## STEP 4: EVALUATE

### Why Evaluate Common Ground During and After the Program?

Evaluation is central to all types of training and should involve all stakeholders. When done effectively, it can increase training effectiveness by providing valuable information about the impact of the EWP training. Evaluation can also highlight areas that need improvement. It must be consistent with the original assessment methods, tools and stakeholders.

*Common Ground* works best with an evaluation process in the middle of the course in addition to the evaluation that will take place at the end. The mid-course evaluation will help in making sure the facilitator and the company are on the right track for meeting the learning objectives.

Evaluation will also help in deciding whether improvements could be made if *Common Ground* is taught again at the worksite. Senior management will want to use the evaluation as basis for deciding whether to fund and support future EWP projects. The evaluation process provides valuable insight for both the company and the facilitator.

Evaluation summaries must be as concise as possible.  
The format of the evaluation summary will depend upon the types of questions asked.

It is important to hold a final project team meeting after the evaluation has been completed. The meeting can be used:

- to decide the next steps to take
- to thank the company/stakeholders for their support of the *Common Ground* project
- to celebrate a significant and successful accomplishment

### Which Evaluation Method Should I Use?

Use the same methods that were used to assess the learners at the beginning of the program.  
These evaluation methods included:

- one-on-one interviews
- email surveys
- focus groups
- questionnaires
- job shadowing

## Which Evaluation Tools Should I Use?

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Use the same evaluation tools that were used to assess the learners at the beginning of the program. These evaluation tools included:

- survey forms
- workplace observation
- English language checklists
- intercultural checklists
- evaluation questionnaires
- workplace samples
- video clips
- surveys

## What Questions Can Be Used to Evaluate Success?

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The project leader of the course will need to come up with questions to help in evaluating the success of *Common Ground*. There are three question formats that can be used to yield short or lengthy answers. There are pros and cons to each type of question. The question formats are:

- closed questions – answers are ‘Yes’ or ‘No’
- open questions – answers will give more detail; however, it will take more time to summarize the evaluations
- rating questions – use a scale with one end being “strongly disagree” and the other end “strongly agree”

The questions cover four “P’s”:

**P**articipant   **P**roject team   **P**roduct   **P**rocess

Here are examples of evaluation questions. The assessor will need to be able to rephrase and restructure some of these questions so the learner can understand them.

### Participant

- Did you feel comfortable in the classroom? Why or why not?
- Was the information you learned in class helpful in doing your job? Why or why not?

- Specifically, what did you learn in the class that you have used most to communicate more effectively with the Canadian-born employees at work?
- Has anyone commented on your communication skills since the training? If yes, please provide brief details.
- What do you remember most clearly from the *Common Ground* course?

### Project Team

- Were the project team meetings appropriate in length, scheduling and productivity?
- What did you like or dislike about being a part of the project team? If you were to continue in the next phase of this project, what changes would you recommend?
- Did you feel that your comments and concerns were acknowledged?

### Product

- What objectives were achieved by the end of the *Common Ground* course?
- What was learned from the post-assessment comments?
- How will this information shape training of *Common Ground* in the future?
- How can the recommendations given by the project team and participants be used in the future?

### Process

- What part of the process worked well?
- How can the process be improved for future EWP classes?
- Was disruption of work minimized? How might disruption be lessened?
- Were the employees in the class treated with respect?

# STEP 5: CREATE

## *How Do I Create Independent Learners?*

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One of your goals should be to help your employees become independent in their learning of English. Here are some ideas to pass on:

- Join a local ESL class.
- Learn from English tapes or CDs from the library.
- Practice English at ESL internet sites.
- Read as much as possible in English.
- Find a conversation buddy to practice with.
- Learn from the radio, television and newspaper.
- Speak only English for at least 10 minutes daily.

### *Smaller Business Consideration*

Smaller businesses often cannot go it alone with their EWP needs. Partnerships with other businesses allow the costs to be shared, participation to be broader and future initiatives to be sustained. Partnerships produce a win-win situation.

## *How Do I Succeed in Hiring and Retaining New Canadians?*

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- Begin and end with a strong leadership commitment.
- State your commitment clearly by communicating from the top leadership to employees at all levels throughout the company. Newsletters are a good means of doing this.
- Maintain diversity through the company's use of learning and development, rewards and recognition, and a supportive work environment.
- Involve senior managers/owners directly in planning and conducting recruitment activities.

## *Company Goals for Full Integration*

- Encourage a workplace culture that does not create barriers to the full integration of new Canadians in the workplace.
- Build plain English into all your interactions and documentation.
- Provide the time and social occasions for new employees to build relationships.
- Provide appropriate awards and recognition for newcomers who succeed at a task or attain a milestone.
- Create a culture of recognition when an employee reaches an individual accomplishment.
- Continue to provide intercultural training for all employees.
- Recognize success in formal and informal ways (certificates, cultural days or meals).

### *Company Commitment to Training*

- Recruit, hire, and train new Canadians.
- Utilize new skill sets to expand your workforce options.
- Promote workers into long-term career positions, through long-term commitment to training.
- Continue education of intercultural understanding.

## How Do I Provide Training for Canadian-Born Employees?

Employers will need to find a way to bridge the cultural and language divide as more foreign-born workers stream into the workforce. While many foreign-born workers have readily integrated into the workforce, others are more challenged in overcoming cultural and language differences. These differences impact the workplace. Solutions can be found by using the *Common Ground* program.

Creating *Common Ground* in the workplace can only happen if there is a common understanding among all employees – foreign and non-foreign born. In order to have success with *Common Ground*, the company must provide training to the Canadian employees on how to work with newcomers. This training can involve the Canadian-born sharing their knowledge in a coach/tutor setting.

Training can be provided in a classroom or staff meeting for the Canadian-born employee as well. The intercultural information found in the *Common Ground* Training Manual modules may be used to teach staff members about the similarities and differences between Canadian culture and other cultures around the world.

Employees who are not foreign-born may have a number of challenges working with those from another culture. These challenges include:

- a need to communicate clearly in plain language
- a need to understand Canadian workplace culture, especially “unwritten rules of behaviour”
- a need to understand other cultures

Listed below are suggestions to help Canadian-born employees in their learning.

### 1. Intercultural Training

Using a “Shift Talks” model, ask a newcomer who has good communication skills to talk about approaches to safety in his/her country, cultural differences in workplace relationships, attitudes toward time, greetings, gender interactions, food or family, or education for children. You could even ask someone to teach a simple greeting in his/her native language.

Bring in a cultural broker through one of the many community associations to deliver a workshop on a specific culture or need.

Recruit an intercultural trainer from a post-secondary institute or settlement agency to deliver a half- or full-day workshop.

### 2. Plain English Training

Listen to the levels of English used in the workplace. Using plain language can lead to improved safety and better communication. Plain language reduces the need to explain and clarify documents, or to return forms that have mistakes because the instructions are unclear. Write signs in plain language and include pictures. Refer to the signs during orientation and in later training meetings. (See p. 45—Collect Printed Materials)

- Recruit an English as a Second Language (ESL) trainer from a post-secondary institute or settlement agency to deliver a workshop on communicating with non-native speakers.

### 3. Preparing the Staff

Delivering EWP is not a one-way street; the company needs to secure other supports for success. Give an orientation workshop on intercultural communication at the onset of a staff meeting with owners or senior management present to ensure a “top-down” and “roots-up” strategy. Prepare your staff for changes of a positive nature.

## THE GOLDEN RULE OF INTERCULTURAL MISUNDERSTANDING:

When something negative happens, don't react!  
Respond, with investigation and curiosity.

## *How do you communicate across language barriers?*

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Many newcomers to Alberta do not speak English at a high level of proficiency. Some do not speak it at all. Here are a few things to keep in mind when you are talking with second language speakers.

- Beginners usually mentally translate a question, then formulate an answer, then translate the answer back into English. This can take a long time and a great deal of concentration for the second language learner.
- Answers may be in the grammatical structure of the speaker's first language; however, the word order and grammar may not work in English. This may result in a period of silence and, since many North Americans are uncomfortable with silence, they may start speaking before they have received a complete answer. This can make a second-language learner feel self-conscious and uncomfortable.
- Slow answers are sometimes incorrectly interpreted as a lack of knowledge.

### **Other variables that hinder communication include:**

- accents
- restricted vocabulary
- background noise
- silence

### **Common language difficulties of the second-language learner include:**

- using the wrong word endings (e.g. plurals, verb tenses)
- mispronouncing words
- confusing pronouns
- stressing the wrong words or syllables
- intonation
- speaking in a pitch or rhythm that sounds unusual

## *How can Canadian-born employees apply strategies in the workplace?*

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Suggest to your Canadian-born employees that they:

- slow down and pause so the receiver can process each segment of a message and allow it to sink in. Then summarize the whole message.
- repeat their message using different words when they are not being understood. Words that seem similar in two different languages can have very different meanings.
- try to put themselves in the other person's shoes. Have they ever been in a situation where they couldn't speak the language?
- develop a consistent meeting format so that people know how and in what way they are expected to participate.
- use breaks during meetings so workers can turn to each other to confirm understanding.

## *Are there any suggestions for managers and supervisors regarding cultural norms and values?*

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### **1. Sense of self and space**

- Make an effort to say good morning and goodbye to each employee every day.
- Introduce new employees to the co-workers formally, taking the individual around to meet each new colleague.
- Be careful about using first names, especially with older workers.
- Ask people how they prefer to be addressed. Use and pronounce their names properly.
- Guard against being overly familiar with workers.
- Learn to listen and create an atmosphere of trust where you can learn about each others' needs.
- Since most cultures are more formal than Canadian culture, you are safest if you err on the side of formality.

## 2. Communication and language

- When there is a language barrier, assume confusion. Don't take a nod or "yes" to mean the individual understands or agrees. Watch for real signs of understanding such as immediately beginning the task and doing it correctly.
- Consider that smiles and laughter may indicate discomfort or embarrassment. See if you can identify what is causing the discomfort.
- Avoid smiling when giving directions or when having serious work-related discussions with an employee born outside of Canada, especially when giving feedback or when conducting performance reviews.
- Watch for subtle clues that may be giving information you might otherwise miss.
- Listen to expressions of frustration – they may be telling you about a work-group complaint. For example, hints about family members moving in might indicate a desire for a raise or time off.

## 3. Dress and appearance

- Before reacting to a person's appearance, stop to consider if their appearance may have meaning attached to it.
- Teach individuals the norms in your organization regarding dress and grooming.
- Consider uniforms as a way to eliminate difference and build *common ground*.

## 4. Food and eating habits

- When planning catered meals or snacks for meetings, include a variety of foods so there will be something edible and acceptable for all.
- Avoid serving food that might be offensive to some staff members.
- When choosing restaurants for business meetings, keep individual dietary restrictions and preferences in mind.
- Provide well-ventilated or outdoor eating areas for staff where odours can be more easily dissipated.

## 5. Time and time consciousness

- Recognize that differences in time consciousness are cultural and are not necessarily a sign of laziness.
- Allow time in your schedule for the development of relationships.
- Make it a point to spend some time with each employee each week.
- Explain the reason for deadlines in your schedule.
- Explain the importance of promptness, in assessment of performance and in work habits.

## 6. Relationships

- Recognize that family responsibility and loyalty to kin is very important to many workers. Take this into consideration when identifying rewards and motivators for staff.
- Allow employees time to discuss important decisions with family members before they give you a final answer.
- Recognize the informal leadership older employees may hold in the work unit. Consult with them and seek their cooperation.
- Show respect to older employees by addressing them first and giving them formal authority where appropriate. Recognize that, as the boss, you may be seen as "the head of the work family." Employees may come to seek your advice about problems both in and out of work.

## 7. Values and norms

- Consider giving rewards and feedback to the whole group rather than to individuals.
- Structure tasks to require teamwork rather than individual actions.
- Give workers time to think and formulate responses to requests.
- Consider the face-saving potential of any actions you are planning. Seek ways to achieve your objectives while avoiding situations that could appear to diminish the status of the employee(s).

## 8. Beliefs and attitudes

- Find out what religious holidays staff members celebrate. Keep those in mind when planning work-group activities, holiday celebrations and individual schedules.
- Avoid scheduling meeting or training programs on any religious holidays.
- Take advantage of the fact that employees want different holidays, days off and vacation times (e.g. some people would be willing to work on Sundays or on Christmas Day).
- Help newcomers understand the reasons for shared decision-making and the need for suggestions and input from employees.
- Educate employees about discrimination and racism.

## 9. Mental processes and learning styles

- Explain cause-and-effect relationships when getting staff involved in problem solving.
- Ask staff members what they suggest be done about the problems and complaints they express.
- Use problem-solving methods such as brainstorming that capitalize on intuition rather than logical analysis.
- Ask troubleshooting questions such as “What would happen if . . . ?” in order to get staff to think about possible consequences.

## 10. Work habits and practices

- Get to know your employees and find out what role work plays in their lives. Find out what gives them satisfaction in their jobs.
- Be sensitive to employees’ perceptions about the status of certain kinds of work.
- Talk with employees and find out what is rewarding to them.
- Understand that taking initiative and making independent decisions may be difficult for some employees. Take time to coach them in this direction.

*Gardenswartz, L. & Rowe, A. (1998). Managing Diversity: A Complete Desk Reference and Planning Guide, Revised Edition. McGraw Hill.*



## *How can Canadian-born employees help improve communication across language barriers?*

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### **When you are speaking...**

- Speak clearly and slowly.
- Repeat important ideas using different words to explain the same concept.
- Use simple sentences.
- Use active verbs.
- Avoid using colloquialisms and slang.

### **Be aware of non-verbal messages...**

- Use as many visuals as possible such as graphs, pictures, tables, and slides.
- Use appropriate facial and hand gestures to emphasize the meaning of words.
- Demonstrate or act out what you want to say whenever possible.
- Pause more often. Leave a slightly longer gap between sentences.
- Provide written summaries of your verbal presentation.

### **Take care to make accurate interpretations...**

- When the other person is silent – wait! Do not jump in to fill the silence. The other person may just be thinking more slowly in English, or translating mentally.
- Do not equate poor grammar and mispronunciation with lack of intelligence.
- Assume difference, not similarity.

### **Ensure comprehension...**

- Do not assume that other people understand; assume they do not.
- Check comprehension. Do not simply ask people if they understand. Let them explain what they understood by paraphrasing what they think was communicated.

- Paraphrase what you have heard to confirm mutual understanding.

### **Create a welcoming environment...**

- Verbally and non-verbally encourage second-language speakers to speak aloud.
- Consider a variety of meeting formats to encourage marginal and passive speakers to contribute.
- Do not embarrass novice speakers.

## *What are some interesting questions a Canadian-born employee can ask a newcomer to Canada?*

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Find out interesting facts about another culture by asking colleagues who were not born in Canada questions about their background. Explore what is different about...

- working in their country
- buying a house
- smiling
- raising kids
- greetings

What are the typical ways you/we express . . .

- politeness
- men/women roles
- gestures/ body language
- taking initiative
- teamwork
- job responsibilities
- communication styles
- individual or group responses
- humour
- prioritizing

How does one act when . . .

- giving and receiving instructions
- building relationships
- losing face
- saying the truth
- building friendships
- solving problems
- agreeing or disagreeing
- persuading
- receiving praise
- resolving conflict/differences
- giving feedback

## *How do I build a cultural profile?*

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A cultural profile provides an overview of life and customs in the employee's country of origin. The purpose of a cultural profile is to help the Canadian-born employee assist the newcomer in adapting quickly to life in Canada. The cultural profile will provide the Canadian-born employee an appreciation of the challenges that the newcomer faces.

The following questions can help employees learn more about themselves OR the questions can be used with a Canadian or foreign-born partner to discuss each other's backgrounds. The learners may even be asked to speculate how they think their friends from other cultures might answer the questions below. This activity is intended to motivate the facilitator's and learners' awareness of their own cultural values and orientations.

### **Family**

- What does "family" mean to you?
- Whom do you include when you talk about your family?

### **Community**

- What does "community" mean to you?
- Were you brought up in a community of people from your ethnic background?

- Do you now live in a community of people from your ethnic background?

### **Work**

- Why did you choose the work you are doing now?
- Is this work similar to the work of your parents or grandparents?
- What do you consider to be rewarding work?
- What do you value at work?
- How do you view authority at work?
- How are you expected to dress for work?

### **Customs**

- What language do you use with your family, at work or in your social environment?
- What occasions or festivals do you celebrate?
- What foods do you like to eat?
- Have you always eaten these foods?
- Does your culture have special forms of address or titles for people who are older, have higher status or special professions?

### **Sense of space**

- How do you like to be greeted?
- How close or distant do you like people to stand when next to you?
- What gestures and body language do you find challenging and confusing?
- What does eye contact mean to you?
- How do you define privacy? What kind of questions do you consider being an invasion of privacy?

### **Time**

- What does time mean for you?
- What is "late" for you?
- What do you do if you are late? How do you react if someone else is late?



## CRITICAL INCIDENTS

Critical incidents are tools for increasing our awareness and understanding of human attitudes, expectations, behaviours and interactions. They will allow participants to engage in meaningful discussion of commonly misunderstood attitudes and behaviours.

Below are descriptions of incidents that have resulted in misunderstandings, problems or conflicts due to cultural differences. These descriptions only set the stage for the stories – they do not explain the cultural differences. The cultural differences are meant to be discovered or revealed as part of a class discussion.

Canadian-born and international-born workers need opportunities to reflect on real life-situations to develop intercultural competence. Discussion can facilitate a deeper understanding of how our cultural identities influence our reactions.

All intercultural relations and cross-cultural exchanges are complex. The incidents used in this section may be used in any of the five learning settings or in an organized staff meeting. It is important to have the Canadian-born employee take part in this process as the critical incidents may ring true with experiences they have had, and talking about the difficulties in a positive supportive environment will help alleviate future misunderstandings.

When presenting the critical incidents, remember that an individual's stage of cultural development may make him/her more or less willing or able to recognize the culture differences illustrated. He/she may be unable to see those differences except in the polarized way of right/wrong and good/bad.

Facilitators of the critical incidents exercise must keep in mind the degree of trust required in a group to be able to explore issues and allow people to participate according to their comfort level.

Following each example are sample questions that may be used to probe for understanding.

## *Critical Incident #1: Just Speak Up!*

The foreman of a construction crew tells his workers to “speak up” when they are in the truck, moving from site to site. The radio in the truck is set to a very high volume and the workers can’t be heard asking questions about jobsite instructions. This frustrates the foreman.

As a result of the foreman’s visible frustration, the workers become even more withdrawn and their speaking volume becomes even quieter. In addition, they feel a lack of confidence in their understanding of their job duties from site to site.

- What is the context? What is happening? What are the issues? Summarize.
- Can you relate to any of the characters or events? In what way?
- What were the expectations of the characters in the story?
- What can everyone learn from the situation so the incident does not take place again?

## *Critical Incident #2: Changing Accent, Changing Identity*

Natalie moved to Alberta five years ago from St. John’s, Newfoundland. Newfoundlanders have accents that are often difficult for people from Canada to understand. (They speak quickly and have an Irish influence in their spoken English). Given some time, Natalie’s accent slowly changed to more of an Alberta accent and it is very difficult to detect that she is a Newfoundlander unless you get her talking about Newfoundland or her childhood. Natalie doesn’t feel as if she has lost her Newfoundland identity by changing her accent. In fact, she thinks and feels that she is an even more dynamic person.

- Do you think that Natalie has lost her identity? Why or why not?
- What do you think Natalie’s Newfoundland friends would say if they heard her speaking with an Alberta accent?
- Natalie was born in Canada . . . Would your answers to the first two questions be different if Natalie was not from Newfoundland but, rather, the Philippines?

## *Critical Incident #3: Being Understood is Not Being Me*

Greg, originally from South Africa, moved to Canada 10 years ago. His wife is from Korea. Before moving to Canada, Greg lived in England for five years. He didn’t have much trouble with his accent in England, but when he moved to Canada he discovered that many people struggled to understand him. He thought that if he changed his accent to sound more “Canadian,” people would laugh at him and then he would feel even more like an outsider. Over time, however, Greg decided that the frustration of not being understood was worse than the effort it would take to change his accent, even though he thought he would lose his identity by changing his accent.

- Have you been frustrated in the same way as Greg?
- Do you ever wonder what Canadians think of your language abilities?
- Are there any changes you have made to the way you act (including speaking and writing) that you feel take away from your identity?



## ***Critical Incident #4: Fitting In as a Minority***

Salim moved to Edmonton when he was 24. After graduating from University in India with an engineering degree, he felt that moving to a new country would be a fresh start with many interesting opportunities. He had heard that the Indian community in Edmonton was large and knew he would be well supported since he had family friends living there. Salim was, however, shocked when he was told by his first employer in Edmonton that he needed to take intercultural training and English language classes. “I’ve studied English all my life,” he thought. “Why would I need classes now?”

His company explained that his English, although grammatically accurate, was not clear when he spoke. Many Canadian co-workers were struggling to understand him. Reluctantly, he went to the classes. After a few classes, Salim’s instructor asked him why he was not making adjustments to his accent the way they had practiced in class. “Teacher, when I go to the grocery store, I am a minority. When I come to work and report to my project manager in a meeting of 20 people, I am a minority. Now you want me to change my accent to speak more ‘Canadian?’ I don’t think I can. All of my friends from India speak the same way I do in English. If I change then I will also be a minority in my group of friends at work and in the community. Where will I belong?”

- What issues are concerning Salim? Is he right to have these concerns?
- What would be the appropriate response by the manager to Salim’s concerns?
- Is it more important for Salim to change his speaking style or to hold on to his similarities to other people from his culture?

## ***Critical Incident #5: Line Up for Service***

Recently, a popular chain of restaurants in Camrose hired workers from the Philippines. Customers have started complaining about the service because the servers will begin to take their order and then respond to other interruptions or stop to help other workers before they finish taking the customer’s order or payment.

- Is this a food service or a cultural issue?
- What should the next step be for the company?
- What should the next step be for the servers from the Philippines?
- What are the negative judgments being made by customers?

## ***Critical Incident #6: There is a Time and Place***

Asye went to a downtown office to pick up some documents. When she arrived, she went to the front desk and talked to the receptionist. The receptionist was very helpful and seemed to go out of her way to make sure Asye got what she needed.

Asye was very happy with the service and thought about how different the service was from her own country. Half an hour later, Asye realized she had one more question; however, the receptionist was not at her desk. Asye saw her in the hallway, so she rushed out to catch her. Instead of helping Asye, the woman told her she was on her break and that Asye would have to wait until she got back. Asye was surprised by the receptionist’s response.

- What mistake did Asye make?
- What does ‘space’ mean in Canada?
- What are the Canadian norms that took place in the story?

## ***Critical Incident #7: Doing a Good Job***

Manuel is a welder and the quality of his work is the best. Yet, one morning his supervisor tells him that his expressions of frustration whenever he is asked to pick up the pace are causing concern. Manuel explains that the quality of his work is very important to him. He doesn't think it is fair to expect him to do a job in less time. He also states that by rushing jobs some of the welded engine parts will end up being returned. The supervisor says that this is part of the way things work, which is why there is a warranty on the parts in the first place.

- Why is Manuel upset with his supervisor's suggestion?
- What do Manuel and the supervisor need to learn from each other so this disagreement does not happen again?

## ***Critical Incident #8: Time Off for Family***

Raj arrives 10 minutes late for a project status meeting. The other 10 project participants, including a long-standing client, are present and all have their coffee and doughnuts. The meeting has been under way for five minutes. Raj makes a quick apology and scrambles to find a chair.

A few minutes after the team leader, Tony, sees Raj is settled in, he asks Raj to give an update on his part of the project. Raj begins by apologizing again and explains that a member of his ethnic community passed away and he had to attend the funeral that morning. Tony says, "Not to worry. Next time just put in for the morning off before you go." Raj rushes through his project update and at the end of the meeting avoids eye contact with Tony, but makes it clear through his demeanor and silence that he is upset about something.

A colleague asks Tony what is up with Raj. Tony shrugs his shoulders and says, "I have no idea. It is not like someone in his family died. He'll get over it. Life goes on."

- Why was Raj upset at the meeting?
- What should Tony know about Raj's culture that would alleviate misunderstanding in the future?
- What should Raj do differently if the situation happens again?

## ***Critical Incident #9: Tell Me What You Really Think***

Parchila and Nelly work for a manufacturing company. They attend a meeting with two Canadians to give a presentation in the hopes of getting an important contract. After Parchila's presentation, one Canadian man says he has a small suggestion about the deadlines and cost analysis.

Later, in the car, Parchila says how excited he is about how much interest the Canadians showed. Nelly looks at him and says, "Are you crazy? They are not interested in working with us."

- Why did Parchila and Nelly look at the same situation differently?
- How does direct and indirect communication affect how a situation is viewed?

## ***Critical Incident #10: Not For Me to Say***

A transport company has hired a number of temporary foreign workers, all from the same country. It is the weekly staff meeting and Hashim, the youngest of the workers, never says anything. Even when encouraged to talk about his ideas, he says very little. The supervisor doesn't understand why Hashim doesn't want to be part of the team. He has watched Hashim work and knows that he must have some good ideas.

- What does the supervisor need to know about Hashim's culture?
- How can the supervisor get Hashim to talk about his ideas out loud when Hashim comes from a culture in which family name/social class/age gives you automatic status?



## CUSTOMIZING *COMMON GROUND*

*Common Ground* is designed to be a customized English in the Workplace program. This means that it is useful to do a preliminary needs assessment to identify what employees and supervisors feel is important to include in the course. Needs assessment surveys are included in the *Common Ground* package, and are written at a Canadian Language Benchmark (CLB) of 4. If you have employees at a lower level, they might need help understanding and filling out the survey.

### INCLUDED IN THIS SECTION:

Pre-*Common Ground* Focus Group Questions for: Employee | Company  
The *Common Ground* Facilitator Readiness Survey  
Employee Census  
How to Collect Printed Materials from the worksite  
Plain Language Guidelines  
How to Revise Printed Materials

## Focus Group Questions: Employee

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**A pre-Common Ground focus group should be held with the employees before the class begins. Gaining insight into what the employee feels he/she needs to learn will add to the value of the class.**

1. What is the name of your home country? \_\_\_\_\_
2. How long have you been in Canada? \_\_\_\_\_ Years \_\_\_\_\_ Months
3. What is your first language? \_\_\_\_\_
4. How long have you studied or learned English? \_\_\_\_\_ Years \_\_\_\_\_ Months
5. What is your resident Status?  Temporary  Permanent
6. How much time do you use English each day?  
At Home: \_\_\_\_\_ Hours \_\_\_\_\_ Minutes  
At Work: \_\_\_\_\_ Hours \_\_\_\_\_ Minutes
7. What is your job?  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. What do you like about living in Canada?  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. What do you find difficult about living in Canada?  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. Why do you want to improve your English?  
\_\_\_\_\_
11. What specifically would you like to improve?  
\_\_\_\_\_
12. Take me through an average day. What are the things you do?  
\_\_\_\_\_
13. What material do you need to do your job?  
\_\_\_\_\_
14. Take me through an incident where someone was injured. What did you do?  
\_\_\_\_\_
15. What do your managers say to you so you know you have done a good job?  
\_\_\_\_\_
16. What do your managers say to you so you know you have done a poor job?  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Focus Group Questions: Company

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A focus group is a small group discussion within the organization. The management team members selected to be part of the company focus group will convene to discuss and give opinions on what is needed in the English in the Workplace program.

Listed here are questions to be asked and discussed at the focus group before training begins. The list is not exhaustive; however, the questions listed are a good start.

1. What are your goals in offering *Common Ground* at the worksite?

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2. What workplace challenges has your organization faced since hiring the permanent/temporary foreign worker? (i.e. safety, communication, intercultural awareness)

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3. How is communication between employer and employee currently conducted? (Written/ Oral/ Native translation/ Direct Translation)

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4. How has language affected the newcomer's interaction with Canadian-born employees?

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5. What jobs are performed onsite by workers with limited language skills?

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6. What skills are required for those jobs?

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7. What are some specific examples of language or intercultural challenges facing your employees? (i.e. vocabulary/ giving instructions/making requests)

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8. Has there been a loss of time, productivity and cost due to communication challenges? If yes, please explain.

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9. What (if any) action has the company taken in the past to address communication challenges? What were the results?

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10. Are there particular topics you want to be addressed in the classroom? Will space be available for classes on site?

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11. How frequently will classes be held?

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12. Will classes be held on company time, employees' time, or both?

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13. What type of equipment is available onsite for the facilitator to use?

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14. Will incentives be given to the employees taking and completing the *Common Ground* course?  
If yes, what are the incentives? (i.e. Certificates of achievement, meals, recognition in company newsletter)

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15. What do you perceive to be the role of the facilitator in this initiative?

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16. Will attendance be mandatory or voluntary?

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17. Take me through a meeting in which you tell someone they are doing a good job. What words are used? What body language is given?

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18. Take me through a meeting in which you tell someone they are in need of improvement. What words are used? What body language is given?

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19. What top 10 words does somebody who has never worked here before and who hasn't worked in the industry need to know when he or she begins working here?

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20. What are some of the characteristics of a worker who does his or her job well?

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21. How do you know when your employees understand the directions/instructions you have given them?

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22. What would be the best skill for your employees to do better, that will improve their efforts on the job? (read, write, speak, listen)

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23. What are the top 3 things that you would like to see changed in your foreign-born workers once *Common Ground* training commences?

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24. What are the top 3 things you would like to see changed in your Canadian-born employees?

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## Facilitator Readiness

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The questionnaire is to learn more about you as a Facilitator and what you would like to learn about before, during and after your instruction of *Common Ground*. The information you provide will guide the focus of further development you may wish to continue with.

**1. Are you aware of the workplace culture you will be encountering at the worksite?** Yes  No

Examples:

- Work shifts
- Company's Mission Statement
- Relationships between employer and employee
- Products/Services offered by company
- Employees jobs
- Company's expectation of workers

Is professional development required? Yes  No

What further information do you need to learn to be successful?

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When will you complete readiness table(s)? Immediately  Ongoing  Long Term

**2. Are you aware of labour and management issues that may affect learning?** Yes  No

Examples:

- The Role of the Union
- The issue of Profitability for the company
- Local Economics
- Competition and changes in the labour market (locally, provincially, federally)

Is professional development required? Yes  No

What further information do you need to learn to be successful?

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When will you complete readiness table(s)? Immediately  Ongoing  Long Term

**3. Are you sensitive to the demands and responsibilities of the Permanent/Temporary worker in the workplace?** Yes  No

Examples:

- Work Shifts and Work Environment
- Production deadlines
- Work-related learning needs
- Quality Control Issues

Is professional development required? Yes  No

What further information do you need to learn to be successful?

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When will you complete readiness table(s)? Immediately  Ongoing  Long Term

4. Are you aware of issues surrounding workplace safety and security? Yes  No

Examples:

- Recent Employee injuries
- Company recently received industry-related award or recognition
- Lack of English proficiency as a safety issue
- Company under investigation for workplace accident or incident

Is professional development required? Yes  No

What further information do you need to learn to be successful?

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---

When will you complete readiness table(s)? Immediately  Ongoing  Long Term

5. Are you able to recognize the difference between employer and employee's expectations and needs? with *Common Ground*? Yes  No

Examples:

- Work Shifts
- Employees' jobs
- Company's mission statement
- Other:
- Relationship between employer and employee
- Products/services offered by company
- Company's expectation of workers

Is professional development required? Yes  No

What further information do you need to learn to be successful?

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When will you complete readiness table(s)? Immediately  Ongoing  Long Term

## Resources

6. Can you use a variety of resources to enhance the workplace instruction of *Common Ground*? Yes  No

Examples:

- Know how to present *Common Ground* materials in a functional, work place-related context
- Know how to adapt the background information in a way suitable for ESL learners
- Know how to use pre-existing materials from the worksite

Is professional development required? Yes  No

What further information do you need to learn to be successful?

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When will you complete readiness table(s)? Immediately  Ongoing  Long Term



What further information do you need to learn to be successful?

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When will you complete readiness table(s)?                      Immediately                       Ongoing                       Long Term

**12. Can you provide varied opportunities for the learner to apply new knowledge at the worksite?**

Yes                       No

Examples:

- Vocabulary lists and dialogues are based on work-related needs
- Classes are ended with tasks/assignments employees can practice at their work stations

What further information do you need to learn to be successful?

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When will you complete readiness table(s)?                      Immediately                       Ongoing                       Long Term

*Collaboration with Others*

**13. Are you able to interact well with management and frontline supervisors?**

Yes                       No

Examples:

- Visited the worksite and met the employer and other stakeholders
- Understand the language of the employer                      • Attended meetings of the company

Is professional development required?

Yes                       No

What further information do you need to learn to be successful?

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When will you complete readiness table(s)?                      Immediately                       Ongoing                       Long Term

**14. Are you able to participate as a team member in a corporate setting?**

Yes                       No

Examples:

- Can understand the pressure put on workers by challenges in the workplace
- Can understand the importance of the company's mission statement and goals
- Can understand the need for balance between the employers' and employees' needs

Is professional development required?

Yes                       No

What further information do you need to learn to be successful?

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When will you complete readiness table(s)?                      Immediately                       Ongoing                       Long Term

## Assessment and Evaluation

**15. Are you able to assess skills and knowledge held by employees in non-traditional settings?** Yes  No

Examples:

- Ability to identify job-related language skills
- Have interviewed employers and frontline supervisors to determine language needs of the employee
- Have conducted interview and survey assessments for workplace skill levels

Is professional development required? Yes  No

What further information do you need to learn to be successful?

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When will you complete readiness table(s)? Immediately  Ongoing  Long Term

**16. Are you able to identify gaps in skills and knowledge and in turn provide appropriate instruction?** Yes  No

Is professional development required? Yes  No

What further information do you need to learn to be successful?

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When will you complete readiness table(s)? Immediately  Ongoing  Long Term

**17. Are you aware of confidentiality issues related to employer/employee communications (FOIP)?** Yes  No

Is professional development required? Yes  No

What further information do you need to learn to be successful?

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When will you complete readiness table(s)? Immediately  Ongoing  Long Term

*Thank you for taking the time to complete the questionnaire.*

# Participant Census

Company: \_\_\_\_\_

Start Date: \_\_\_\_\_ End Date: \_\_\_\_\_

#	First Name	Last Name	Gender		Age	Job Title	Length of Service (Months)	
			M	F				
1								
2								
3								
4								
5								
6								
7								
8								
9								
10								

# Participant Census

Company: \_\_\_\_\_

Start Date: \_\_\_\_\_ End Date: \_\_\_\_\_

#	First Name	Last Name	Gender		Age	Job Title	Length of Service (Months)	
			M	F				
11								
12								
13								
14								
15								
16								
17								
18								
19								
20								

## Collect Printed Materials

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Locate printed workplace materials so you can analyze the difficulty involved in understanding the materials.

What is the goal of collecting all these samples? It will give you a better understanding of the day-to-day activities and the “real world” needs of your workers. Analyze your workplace written materials to see if second-language workers can handle them as is, or if you should revise them.

### Plain Language Guidelines

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- Make the topic/idea clear.
- Rewrite sentences in subject-verb-object word order.
- Introduce new vocabulary in context; give a definition.
- Use nouns instead of pronouns, even though it may sound repetitive.
- Rewrite paragraphs into charts, graphs, and other diagrams whenever possible.
- Provide background material.
- Eliminate irrelevant material. Include only essential information.
- Include a table of contents when possible.
- Present ideas in a logical order (often this is chronological).
- Divide material into short sections, using headings.
- Place the most important information at the beginning.
- Use only words that are short, simple and clear. Use common words with no jargon.
- Define technical terms or leave them out.
- Identify acronyms (e.g. EI = employment insurance).
- Write short sentences—twenty words or less; each sentence should have just one idea.
- Keep the tone positive. Write, “Policies are valid...,” not “No policy is valid unless...”
- Use a writing style that is active, not passive. Write, “The group decided...,” not “A decision was made by the group...”
- Keep paragraphs short; ensure the idea in one paragraph connects to the idea in the next.
- Present instructions in the order in which they should be carried out.
- Use point form or lists if appropriate.
- Leave white space between paragraphs and sections.
- Ensure margins are at least one inch; the left margin is justified, the right is ragged.
- Use a 12-point font or larger—at least the size of this text.
- Use boxes or other design features to help people find important information.
- Incorporate photos, graphs or other design features to break up the text and make information clearer.

## Revised Printed Materials

Locate printed workplace materials so you can analyze the difficulty involved in understanding the materials.

Possible printed materials in the workplace:

Sample workplace printed materials:	Written in plain English?
Site maps and plans	<input type="checkbox"/>
Advertising, brochures, posters	<input type="checkbox"/>
Employee handbooks/orientations	<input type="checkbox"/>
Health and safety manuals	<input type="checkbox"/>
Training manuals	<input type="checkbox"/>
Signs	<input type="checkbox"/>
Payroll slips	<input type="checkbox"/>
Emails, forms, memos	<input type="checkbox"/>
Instructions for operating equipment	<input type="checkbox"/>
Procedures	<input type="checkbox"/>
Code books, menus, etc.	<input type="checkbox"/>





## EMPLOYEES ASSESSING THEMSELVES

The assessments ask employees born outside Canada to identify their own EWP training needs. The facilitator, employee or the company will decide which assessments would be best for the employees to fill out.

The intention is to fill out the assessments anonymously so that employers, workplace trainers and EWP facilitators can see what skills and training needs their employees have. No employee will feel singled out for training and more will fill out the assessments honestly.

The best way to gauge learner progress is to conduct both pre-program assessment and post-program assessment. Prior to training have each employee fill out the following surveys. After training is completed, have them re-assess themselves using the same surveys. This will provide input for direct comparison into each employee's progress.

### INCLUDED IN THIS SECTION:

Pre-Program and Post-Program Assessment (Learner): Safety | Pronunciation Clarity |  
Intercultural Awareness | Conversation How-To's

## Safety: Learner

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Around the world there are different ideas regarding safety. In Alberta, your safety is protected by government rules that all worksites must follow. These rules may be different from the rules you followed in your home country.

The most important safety skill is being able to communicate potential dangers.

Give honest answers to the statements listed below so that we can help you the most. There is no right or wrong answer to the statements.

**Employee:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**What the Descriptors Mean:**

*Agree:* “I can do this **every** time”

*Slightly Agree:* “I can **sometimes** do this”

*Neutral:* “I **do not know**. I have never done this in Canada”

*Slightly Disagree:* “I find it **difficult** to do this”

*Disagree:* “I have **never had success** with this”

**Please use an X to indicate your answers.**

I can...	Agree	Slightly Agree	Neutral	Slightly disagree	Disagree
report injuries and accidents					
communicate potential hazards at work					
describe and use Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)					
respond to fire safety issues					
define and use WHMIS and MSDS					
respond to emergencies					
explain and practice electrical safety					
identify safety issues when working alone					
understand employer and employee responsibilities					

## Pronunciation Clarity: Learner

There are different ways you can make your speech clear to coworkers and supervisors. Speaking clearly will help others understand what you are saying. Communicating in English involves proper pronunciation of English words with proper speed, volume, pausing and other things. These are the elements (parts) of correct pronunciation.

The most important part of your pronunciation clarity is being able to communicate clearly with a coworker or a supervisor.

Give honest answers to the statements listed below so we can help you the most. There is no right or wrong answer to the statements.

**Employee:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

### What the Descriptors Mean:

*Agree:* "I can do this **every** time"

*Slightly Agree:* "I can **sometimes** do this"

*Neutral:* "I **do not know**. I have never done this in Canada"

*Slightly Disagree:* "I find it **difficult** to do this"

*Disagree:* "I have **never had success** with this"

**Please use an X to indicate your answers.**

I can...	Agree	Slightly Agree	Neutral	Slightly disagree	Disagree
understand why speed is important for clarity (clear speech)					
pause at the right place in conversation					
pronounce multi-syllable words clearly					
stress important words in a sentence					
pronounce stop consonants (b, d, g, p, t, k)					
limit or try to reduce interjections (um, ah, er)					
speak concisely (directly)					
communicate with proper volume and enunciation (sounds in each word, especially at the end of words)					
talk on the telephone with confidence					

## Intercultural Awareness: Learner

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Someone from a different culture may do things differently from you. Intercultural Awareness is when you notice different behaviours and can understand why it is important for that person to act the way they do.

It also means that you can adapt your behaviour and communication to fit in with your co-workers and supervisors in Canada.

Give honest answers to the statements listed below so that we can help you the most. There is no right or wrong answer to the statements.

**Employee:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**What the Descriptors Mean:**

*Agree:* "I can do this **every** time"

*Slightly Agree:* "I can **sometimes** do this"

*Neutral:* "I **do not know**. I have never done this in Canada"

*Slightly Disagree:* "I find it **difficult** to do this"

*Disagree:* "I have **never had success** with this"

**Please use an X to indicate your answers.**

I can...	Agree	Slightly Agree	Neutral	Slightly disagree	Disagree
define culture (tell what culture is)					
describe culture shock					
understand the concept of time					
participate in small talk					
compare direct or indirect communication					
identify behaviour that is expected at the workplace					
explain why conflict can happen at the workplace					
communicate effectively with supervisor/employer					
work as part of a multicultural team					

## Conversation How-To's: Learner

In every culture, there is a right way to behave in a conversation. If you know how to appropriately and politely have a conversation at the worksite, it will help your relationship with co-workers and supervisors.

Give honest answers to the statements listed below so that we can help you the most. There is no right or wrong answer to the statements.

**Employee:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

### What the Descriptors Mean:

*Agree:* "I can do this **every** time"

*Slightly Agree:* "I can **sometimes** do this"

*Neutral:* "I **do not know**. I have never done this in Canada"

*Slightly Disagree:* "I find it **difficult** to do this"

*Disagree:* "I have **never had success** with this"

**Please use an X to indicate your answers.**

I can...	Agree	Slightly Agree	Neutral	Slightly disagree	Disagree
interrupt a conversation					
make a request					
clarify instructions or directions					
make an apology or an excuse					
make a suggestion					
ask for an opinion or give an opinion					
agree or disagree with a coworker/ supervisor					
make a complaint to a supervisor					
handle a conflict					





## EMPLOYERS ASSESSING EMPLOYEES

The assessment asks you as the employer to assess the skills training needs of your employees born outside of Canada. As with employees, employers should also fill out these surveys both prior to and after training is completed to provide basis for comparison and indicators of progress.

You do not have to use every assessment. Fill out only the assessments that your employees are also filling out. This will make it easier to compare where gaps are in employees' skills from all points of view.

### INCLUDED IN THIS SECTION:

Pre-Program and Post-Program Assessment (Employer): Safety | Pronunciation Clarity | Intercultural Awareness | Conversation How-To's | Video

## Safety: Company

---

Around the world there are different ideas regarding safety. In Alberta, worker safety is protected by government rules that all worksites must follow. These rules may be different from the rules employees followed in their home countries.

The most important safety skill is being able to communicate potential dangers.

Give honest answers to the statements listed below so you can help the employee the most. There is no right or wrong answer to the statements.

**Employee:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**What the Descriptors Mean:**

*Agree:* “The employee can do this **every** time”

*Slightly Disagree:* “The employee finds it **difficult** to do this”

*Slightly Agree:* “The employee can **sometimes** do this”

*Disagree:* “The employee has **never had success** with this”

*Neutral:* “I **do not know**. The employee has never done this at work.”

**Please use an X to indicate your answers.**

The employee can...	Agree	Slightly Agree	Neutral	Slightly disagree	Disagree
report injuries and accidents					
communicate potential hazards at work					
describe and use Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)					
respond to Fire Safety issues					
define and use WHMIS and MSDS					
respond to emergencies					
explain and practice Electrical Safety					
identify safety issues when working alone					
understand Employer and employee responsibilities					

## Pronunciation Clarity: Company

---

There are different ways the employee can make speech clear to coworkers and supervisors. If the employee can speak clearly it will help others understand what the employee is saying. Communicating in English involves proper pronunciation of English words with proper speed, volume, pausing and other things. These are the elements (parts) of correct pronunciation.

The most important part of pronunciation clarity is being able to communicate clearly with a coworker or a supervisor.

Give honest answers to the statements listed below so you can help the employee the most. There is no right or wrong answer to the statements.

**Employee:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

### What the Descriptors Mean:

*Agree:* “The employee can do this **every** time”

*Slightly Disagree:* “The employee finds it **difficult** to do this”

*Slightly Agree:* “The employee can **sometimes** do this”

*Disagree:* “The employee has **never had success** with this”

*Neutral:* “I **do not know**. The employee has never done this at work.”

**Please use an X to indicate your answers.**

The employee can...	Agree	Slightly Agree	Neutral	Slightly disagree	Disagree
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pause at the right place in conversation					
pronounce multi-syllable words clearly					
stress important words in a sentence					
pronounce Stop Consonants (b, d, g, p, t, k)					
limit or try to reduce Interjections (um, ah, er)					
speak concisely (directly)					
communicate with proper volume and enunciation (sounds in each word, especially at the end of words)					
talk on the telephone with confidence					

## Intercultural Awareness: Company

---

Someone from a different culture may do things differently. *Intercultural Awareness* is when a person notices different behaviours in others and can understand why it is important for them to act the way they do.

It also means that employees can adapt their behaviour and communication to fit in with their co-workers and supervisors in Canada.

Give honest answers to the statements listed below so you can help the employee the most. There is no right or wrong answer to the statements.

**Employee:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**What the Descriptors Mean:**

*Agree:* “The employee can do this **every** time”

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*Slightly Agree:* “The employee can **sometimes** do this”

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*Neutral:* “I **do not know**. The employee has never done this at work.”

**Please use an X to indicate your answers.**

The employee can...	Agree	Slightly Agree	Neutral	Slightly disagree	Disagree
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describe culture shock					
understand the concept of time					
participate in small talk					
compare direct or indirect communication					
identify behaviour that is expected at the workplace					
explain why conflict can happen at the workplace					
communicate effectively with supervisor/employer					
work as part of a multicultural team					

## Conversation How-To's: Company

---

In every culture, there is a right way to behave in a conversation. If employees know how to appropriately and politely have a conversation at the worksite, it will help build stronger relationships with co-workers and supervisors.

Give honest answers to the statements listed below so you can help the employee the most. There is no right or wrong answer to the statements.

**Employee:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

### What the Descriptors Mean:

*Agree:* “The employee can do this **every** time”

*Slightly Disagree:* “The employee finds it **difficult** to do this”

*Slightly Agree:* “The employee can **sometimes** do this”

*Disagree:* “The employee has **never had success** with this”

*Neutral:* “I **do not know**. The employee has never done this at work.”

**Please use an X to indicate your answers.**

The employee can...	Agree	Slightly Agree	Neutral	Slightly disagree	Disagree
interrupt a conversation					
make a request					
clarify instructions or directions					
make an apology or an excuse					
make a suggestion					
ask for an opinion or give an opinion					
agree or disagree with a coworker/ supervisor					
make a complaint to a supervisor					
handle a conflict					

## Video – Pronunciation Clarity

Use the Pronunciation Clarity Guidelines to state the difficulty level your learner has after reviewing him/her on video.

**Employee:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Evaluator:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**What the Descriptors Mean:** Refer to the following page for what the descriptors mean with each category.

**Please use an X to indicate your answers.**

	Appropriate (3)	Developing (2)	Needs Improvement (1)
1. Pause			
2. Speed			
3. Volume			
4. Sentence stress			
5. Multi-syllable clarity			
6. Stop consonants			
7. Enunciation			

Comments

### Pause

- 3 Sounds natural; can always understand speaker
- 2 Awkward; can't always understand speaker
- 1 Pauses are long; happen often; speaker is difficult to understand

### Speed

- 3 Sounds natural; is comfortable to listen to speaker
- 2 Speech is too slow or fast; sometimes can't understand speaker
- 1 Speech is so slow or fast that can't understand speaker

### Volume

- 3 Volume level is appropriate to the situation
- 2 Speaker is often too quiet to hear easily or too loud to listen to comfortably

- 1 Speaker is too quiet to hear or too loud to listen to comfortably so can't understand speaker

### Sentence Stress

- 3 Words stressed in a sentence sound natural; the speaker is easy to understand
- 2 Words stressed in a sentence sound unnatural; the speaker can be difficult to understand
- 1 Words stressed in a sentence sound very unnatural; the speaker cannot be understood

### Multi-syllable Clarity

- 3 Speaker pronounces multi-syllable words clearly; the speaker is easy to understand
- 2 Speaker mispronounces or misses syllables in words; the speaker can be difficult to understand

- 1 Speaker mispronounces or misses many syllables; the speaker cannot be understood

### Stop Consonants

- 3 Stop consonants are pronounced clearly; the speaker is easy to understand
- 2 Stop consonants are mispronounced or are missing; the speaker can be difficult to understand
- 1 Stop consonants are often mispronounced or missing; the speaker cannot be understood

### Pronunciation

- 3 Clear and easy to understand
- 2 Sometimes clear; speaker can be difficult to understand
- 1 Poor; speaker cannot be understood



## CUSTOMIZING COMMON GROUND

*Common Ground* is designed to be a customized English in the Workplace program. This means that it is useful to do a post needs assessment to identify what employees and supervisors feel was important in their class and what should be included in the future learning opportunities they will receive. Needs assessment surveys are included in the *Common Ground* package, and are written at a Canadian Language Benchmark (CLB) of 4. If you have employees at a lower level, they might need help understanding and filling out the survey.

### INCLUDED IN THIS SECTION:

Post-*Common Ground* Focus Group Questions for: Employee | Company  
Facilitator Exit Surveys for: Employee | Company | Facilitator

## Focus Group Questions - Employee

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1. Have you noticed improvement after taking the *Common Ground* Course, e.g. less asking for repetition during telephone communication? If yes, please provide brief details of an example.

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2. Has anyone commented on your communication since the training? If yes, please provide brief details of an example.

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3. What do you remember most from the communication training you completed? What has “stuck with you?”

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4. Has the communication training contributed to reducing friction between yourself and other employees? If yes, please provide brief details of an example.

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5. Were you pleased with the communication training workshops? Why?

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6. Has the *Common Ground* training contributed to your improved job-performance?

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7. Please provide an example if possible in terms of time saved, increased productivity, improved quality etc.

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8. Think over the last year. Has the training improved your integration (fit/tech skills/interpersonal skills/attitude etc.) into your organization? If possible, please provide an example.

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9. Please provide a detailed example of a situation where you have applied your intercultural and communication training to your workplace.

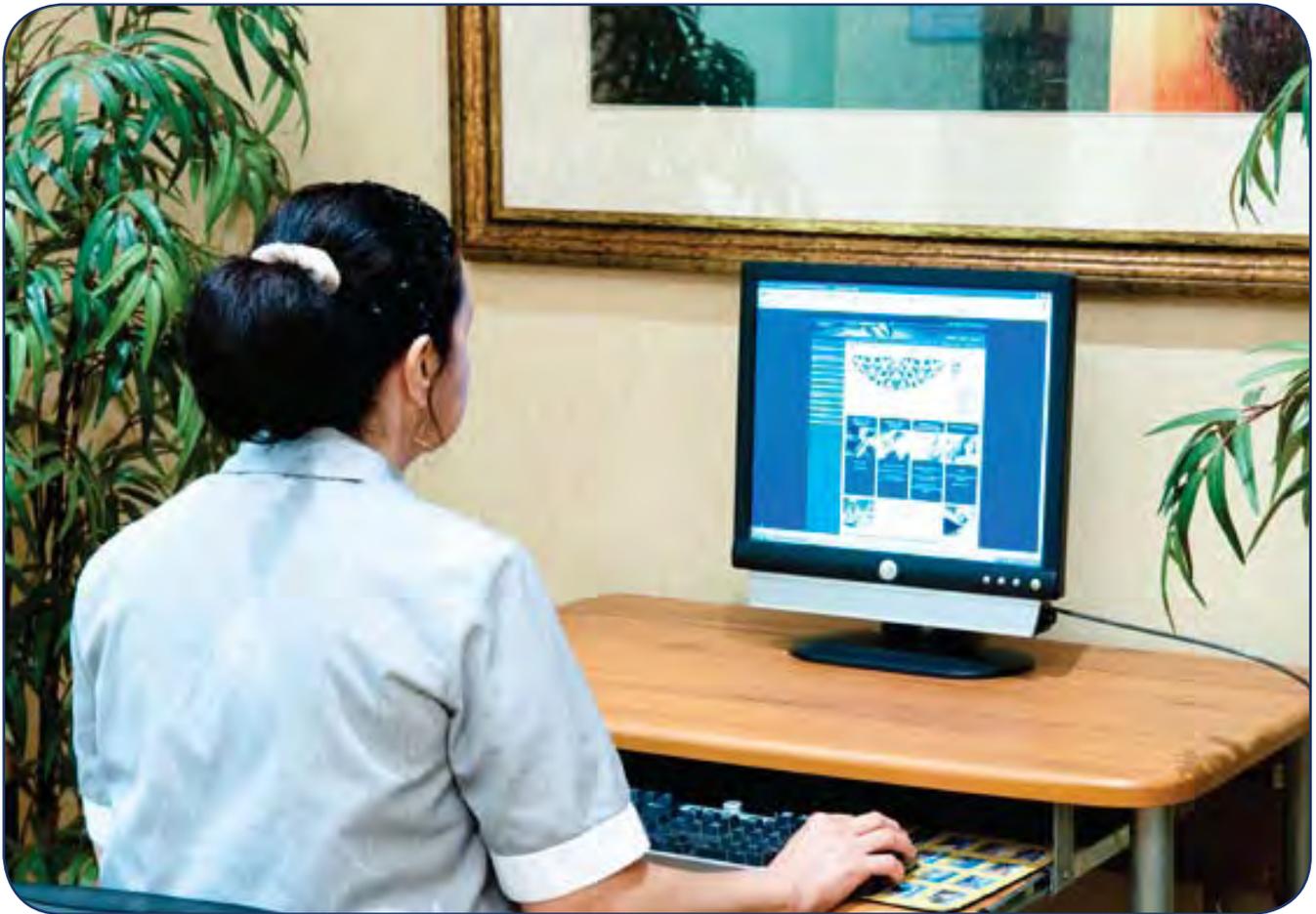
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10. Has the intercultural training contributed to improved job performance? Please provide an example if possible in terms of time saved, increased productivity, improved quality etc.

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## Focus Group Questions - Company

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1. Have you noticed an increase in how much you can understand the employees since they took the *Common Ground* Course, e.g. less asking for repetition during telephone communication? If yes, please provide brief details of an example.

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2. Has anyone commented on their communication since the training? If yes, please provide brief details of an example.

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3. What do you believe the employees remember most from the training they completed? What has “stuck with them?”

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4. Has the *Common Ground* training contributed to reducing friction between your employees? With the Canadian-born employees? With each other? If yes, please provide brief details of an example.

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5. Were you pleased with the *Common Ground* workshops? Why?

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6. Has the communication training contributed to improved job-performance?

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7. Please provide an example if possible in terms of time saved, increased productivity, improved quality etc.

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8. Think over the past while since training commenced. Has the training improved employee integration (fit/tech skills/interpersonal skills/attitude etc.) into your organization? If possible, please provide an example.

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9. Please provide a detailed example of a situation where an employee has applied the intercultural and communication training to your workplace.

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10. Has the intercultural training contributed to improved job-performance? Please provide an example if possible in terms of time saved, increased productivity, improved quality etc.

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## Focus Group Questions - Facilitator

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1. Have you noticed an increase in how much listeners understand each other since you taught the *Common Ground* Course, e.g. less asking for repetition during telephone communication? If yes, please provide brief details of an example.

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2. Has anyone commented on the employees' communication since the training? If yes, please provide brief details of an example.

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3. What do you remember most from the *Common Ground* training you taught? What has "stuck with you?"

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4. Has the *Common Ground* training contributed to reducing friction between employees? Hierarchy? If yes, please provide brief details of an example.

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5. Were you pleased with the *Common Ground* workshops? Why?

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6. Please provide a detailed example of a situation where an employee applied your intercultural and communication training to the workplace.

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7. Summarize EWP instruction in one word.

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8. What are the greatest obstacles to a foreign-trained professional and their full participation in the class?

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9. What was your most challenging moment/scenario in the classroom? How would you handle the same situation now?

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10. Apart from meeting curriculum outcomes, what might be the top two goals for a *Common Ground* instructor?

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11. What did you learn about *Common Ground* instruction that you wish you had known at the beginning?

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12. What is the most challenging outcome for an instructor to meet?

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13. What previous life/career experiences did you bring to your *Common Ground* instruction?

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14. What will you miss least about *Common Ground* instruction?

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15. What from this experience would you say is transferable to a new career?

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16. What is the fastest way of developing trust with second language learners at the workplace?

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# Exit Survey - Employee

**Company Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Common Ground Facilitator:** \_\_\_\_\_

This survey will provide your company with ideas about how to improve their program. Your feedback is valuable, so please try to answer all of the questions. Please **do not write your name** on the evaluation form.

## Section 1

Please use a 'x' to indicate your answers in the boxes.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The Facilitator was well prepared and organized.					
I've learned practical tools I can use in my workplace.					
I am satisfied with the workshops.					
I feel like I "fit in" the Canadian workplace.					
I feel more comfortable in conversations with my co-workers.					
I feel more confident in dealing with language and/or cultural challenges at work.					
This workshop has helped me speak and listen more easily in the workplace.					
I am using clear speech skills in my workplace.					
I understand how cultural differences can affect some workplace behaviour.					
I understand more about communication style in the Canadian workplace.					
I would like to take future workshops so I can improve my skills.					

## Section 2

**Your written comments are greatly appreciated.**

What was the most important thing you learned in the workshops? Please explain.

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What could have made the workshop(s) better?

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Additional Comments:

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# Exit Survey - Employer

**Company Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Common Ground Facilitator:** \_\_\_\_\_

This survey will help you evaluate your program and identify potential improvements. Your feedback is valuable, so please try to answer all of the questions. Please **do not write your name** on the evaluation form.

## Section 1

Please use a 'x' to indicate your answers in the boxes.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The Facilitator was well prepared and organized.					
The employees learned practical tools they can use in the workplace.					
I am satisfied with the workshops.					
The workshops will make the employees integration into the Canadian workplace easier.					
The employees feel more comfortable in conversations with their colleagues.					
The employees feel more confident in dealing with language and/or cultural challenges at work.					
This workshop has helped the employees communicate more effectively in the workplace.					
The employees are using clear speech skills in the workplace.					
The employees have a greater understanding of cultural differences that can affect workplace behaviour.					
The employees have a better understanding of communication style and how it can be interpreted.					
I would like the employees to participate in future workshops so they can improve and broaden their skills.					

## Section 2

**Your written comments are greatly appreciated.**

What concept or tool do you feel will have the greatest impact on employees' future success in the company?  
Please explain.

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What do you feel could have made the workshop(s) better?

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Additional Comments:

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## Exit Survey - Facilitator

Company Name: \_\_\_\_\_

This survey will provide your company with ideas about how to improve their program. Your feedback is valuable, so please try to answer all of the questions. Please **do not write your name** on the evaluation form.

### Section 1

Please use a 'x' to indicate your answers in the boxes.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I had time to be well prepared and organized.					
I have witnessed the employees using the practical tools they learned in class at the worksite.					
I am satisfied with the workshops.					
I am satisfied with the <i>Common Ground</i> materials.					
I know the employees are more comfortable interacting in conversations with their colleagues.					
I believe the employees are more confident in dealing with language and/or cultural challenges at work.					
I believe the employees have the tools to communicate more effectively in the workplace.					
I have witnessed the employees using clear speech skills in the workplace.					
I believe the employees have a greater understanding of cultural differences that can affect workplace behaviour.					
I know the employees have a better understanding of communication style and how it can be interpreted.					
I would like the employees to participate in future workshops so they can improve and broaden their skills.					

## Section 2

**Your written comments are greatly appreciated.**

What concept or tool do you feel will have the greatest impact on employees' future success in the company?  
Please explain.

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What do you feel could have made the workshop(s) better?

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Additional Comments:

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