



Introduction to an Essential Skills Needs Assessment



This tool offers career and employment counsellors:

- a step-by-step process for conducting an informal Essential Skills needs assessment
- guidance on supporting clients to make more informed decisions about training and job searches; and
- informal assessment questions for reading, writing and numeracy skills

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What Are Essential Skills?

Essential Skills are the skills needed for learning, work, and life. They provide the foundation for learning all other skills and enable people to grow with their jobs and adapt to changes in the workplace.

Through extensive research, the Government of Canada and other national and international agencies have identified nine Essential Skills. These skills are used in nearly every job in Canada at different levels of complexity.

Nine Essential Skills

Reading

Understanding materials written in sentences or paragraphs (e.g. letters, manuals).



Working with Others

Interacting with others to complete tasks.



Document Use

Finding, understanding or entering information (e.g. text, symbols, numbers) in various types of documents, such as tables or forms.



Thinking

Finding and evaluating information to make rational decisions or to organize work.



Numeracy

Using numbers and thinking in quantitative terms to complete tasks.



Computer Use

Using computers and other forms of technology.



Writing skills

Communicating by arranging words, numbers and symbols on paper or a computer screen.



Continuous Learning

Participating in an ongoing process of improving skills and knowledge.



Oral Communications

Using speech to exchange thoughts and information.



To learn more about Essential Skills and access tools and resources visit
hrsdc.gc.ca/essentialskills

Why Use an Essential Skills Needs Assessment?

An Essential Skills needs assessment provides an opportunity for employment and career counsellors to engage clients in a discussion on how their Essential Skills relate to their interests and goals.

An Essential Skills needs assessment is an informal process that is intended to:

- raise awareness of the importance of Essential Skills in the workplace;
- show practical examples of how these skills are used on the job;
- provide a better understanding of clients' Essential Skill strengths and areas that may require upgrading;
- help clients make more informed decisions about job skills training and job searches; and
- support career and employment counsellors to provide clients with guidance on next steps to achieve their job search and training objectives.

In situations where formal test scores are needed to be compared to other test results or job skill requirements, the use of formal assessment tools may be more suitable.



What's Inside? Overview of the Introduction to an Essential Skills Needs Assessment

The Introduction to an Essential Skills Needs Assessment tool is divided into two sections – the Guide to Conducting an Essential Skills Needs Assessment and the Assessment Modules.

The Guide:

- identifies the purpose of an Essential Skills needs assessment;
- describes to whom a needs assessment is suited, and the kind of information that can be gathered;
- explains how to use the accompanying Essential Skills Assessment Modules for numeracy, writing and reading skills;
- provides a step-by-step process on how to administer an informal Essential Skills needs assessment; and
- outlines how to use the results of the needs assessment process.

The Assessment Modules:

- contain assessment booklets for reading, writing and numeracy for complexity levels 1 and 2 (*to learn more about Essential Skills and their complexity levels, visit hrsdc.gc.ca/essentialskills*);

Each assessment module includes:

- 1) Two client booklets (one for each complexity level) containing a series of assessment questions.
- 2) Corresponding assessors booklets (one for each complexity level) that include detailed responses for all assessment questions and a section to document results and observations.

Assessment questions are based on typical workplace tasks performed in different occupations in Canada. For the purposes of this tool, the terms **assessment question** and **assessment task** will be used interchangeably.



Here is an example of how the Essential Skills needs assessment process can help to support more informed training and employment decisions:

Jack, age 42, has been out of work for several years. He makes an appointment to speak with an employment counsellor about the kind of jobs that he might consider, and whether there are training programs for which he might be eligible.



The counsellor asks Jack to describe his work history and areas of interest. They also discuss what Jack considers as challenges in getting a job.

Together, they complete an intake form which serves as a basis for more discussion about his employment/training history, employment goals and interests.

The counsellor gives Jack the information available about the skills and skill levels required in different occupations. He then describes the Essential Skills and how they are used in the jobs Jack is interested in exploring.

The counsellor asks Jack whether he would like to try out a few tasks similar to those carried out on the job. Jack decides he would like to try out the reading and numeracy tasks. When he is finished, the counsellor goes through the assessments with him, pointing out correct answers and explaining why some answers are not considered correct.



Jack begins to see that Essential Skills are really an important part of every job and that he could benefit from brushing up on his own skills. He and the counsellor discuss skills upgrading and training options for adults in his community.

Jack leaves with a good sense of how he can work towards his goal of getting a job and the services that he can access to help him do so.

SECTION 1: A Guide to Conducting an Informal Essential Skills Needs Assessment

What are the Steps for an Effective Needs Assessment Process?

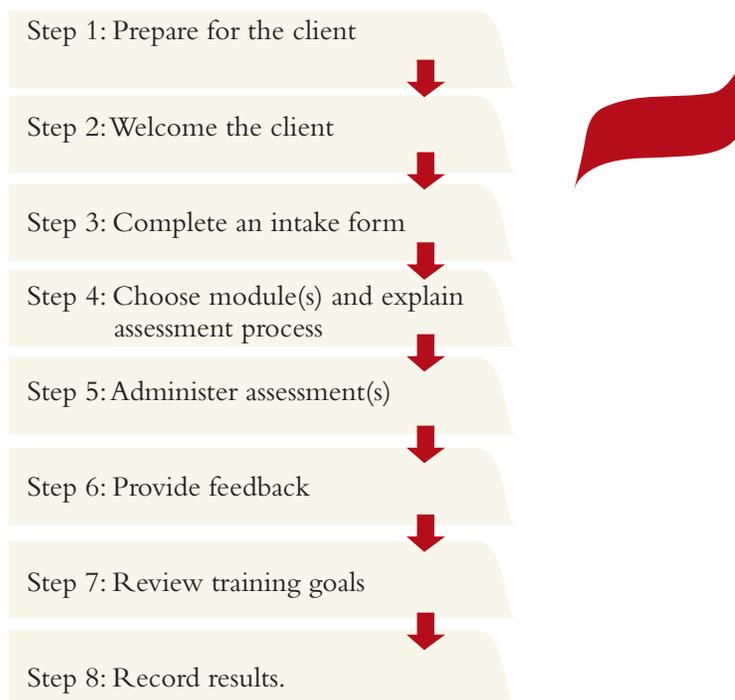
Before undertaking an informal Essential Skills needs assessment, it is important to read through the entire Guide and become familiar with the assessment questions for each of the modules.

Helpful Tips

Here are a few activities that can help you effectively deliver an Essential Skills needs assessment:

- *Learn more about Essential skills and their complexity levels, and familiarize yourself with available Essential Skills tools and resources.*
- *Learn more about the Essential Skills, adult education and literacy programs available in your community, including those offered through employment and training programs, literacy networks, colleges, school boards, unions and associations.*
- *Build or expand your network within the adult learning community to help gather information and resources to share with clients.*

The following steps are important in carrying out a needs assessment process



Step 1 – Prepare for the Client

Find an assessment area that is comfortable, private and where interruptions are at a minimum.

Make sure you have all necessary materials on hand including:

- the Guide;
- a client intake form (see sample intake form provided in Appendix A);
- the relevant assessment module(s), including both client and assessor booklet(s);
- a calculator for the Level 2 numeracy booklet; and
- a pencil and eraser.

Step 2 – Welcome the Client

Introduce the process:

Explain the purpose of the needs assessment and how your role is to help the client:

- understand how Essential Skills are used in the workplace;
- learn more about the Essential Skills employers are looking for;
- recognize Essential Skills strengths and areas that may require upgrading
- identify options to improve the Essential Skills needed to be successful at work.



Ice-breaker questions can help to ease into a needs assessment process – here are a few suggestions:

What brought you here today?

Tell me a bit about the work you have done in the past that you enjoyed. It doesn't have to be paid work – you can describe a volunteer experience.

What type of work can you see yourself doing that you would find enjoyable?

Describe your ideal job.

What are your hopes and dreams for a career?

Step 3 – Complete an Intake Form

Provide the client with an intake form and ask him/her to complete it. If you do not have your own intake form, you can use the one supplied in Appendix A of the Guide. Offer your support should the client require assistance or clarification to fill in the information.

An intake form is a tool used at an initial meeting/consultation session to help gather detailed information on a client's education, training and employment history, goals and interests.

While the client completes the form, you may want to review your materials (so as not to make the client uncomfortable or feel rushed). When the client is done, review the form together and fill in any sections the client may have skipped or had difficulty answering. As you review the intake form with the client, take the opportunity to gather additional information about the client's education and employment history, career or training goals, and any challenges that may impact achieving those goals.

Step 4 – Select appropriate assessment module(s) and explain the needs assessment process

Choose module(s) and explain assessment process:

Use the information gathered through the intake form and work with the client to decide:

- whether he/she should proceed with the assessment module(s),
- which skills the client would be interested in assessing – the client should decide how many modules he/she would like to complete; and
- a timeline to complete the modules.

It is important that clients be actively involved in deciding how to proceed with the assessment interview.

Describe the purpose of the needs assessment process:

- Explain that the purpose of the assessments is to familiarize the client with how Essential Skills are used in the workplace.
- Explain that the assessment questions were developed using typical workplace situations and materials from a wide range of occupations.
- State that the assessment is voluntary.
- Be clear that this is an informal assessment that helps to provide a better understanding of their skill strengths and areas that may require upgrading.
- Explain that there is no pass or fail mark. The results are intended to help the client make decisions on the types of training that would best meet his/her employment needs.

Outline the assessment format:

Each assessment booklet contains detailed client instructions, however, it is recommended that counsellors re-state the following key points:

- Re-state that the client can choose which modules he/she would like to complete.
- Explain that the assessment is a question-and-answer format, and describe how to record answers.
- Mention that questions start with easier tasks and progress to more difficult ones.
- Explain that the client is free to ask questions, can re-read questions or can choose to skip a question and return to it later.
- Tell the client that there is no time limit for completing the assessment.
- Explain that after the tasks are completed, there will be time to discuss the responses.

Timeline:

- Each assessment booklet (example Numeracy Level 1) can take between 15 and 40 minutes to complete, depending on the amount of assistance a client may require.
- An additional 20 to 40 minutes is required for the assessor (counsellor) to discuss the assessment results with the client.
- A good practice is to ask clients to set aside two hours to complete the entire assessment process.
- Monitor each client's progress to determine how many booklets can reasonably be completed in one session – a second session may be necessary.

Step 5 – Administer Assessment(s)

Each module for each skill contains:

- **Two client booklets** – one for level 1 and one for level 2; and
 - **Two corresponding assessor booklets** – to be used by the counsellor to view the answers, enter the client's results, and facilitate dialogue with the client on the assessment results.
1. **Administer one assessment booklet at a time.** This will avoid having the client become overwhelmed. Ask the client whether he/she would prefer to discuss the results after each booklet or after having completed all the assessments.
 2. **Have the client complete the questions and record his/her responses on the answer sheet.** If a client has difficulty reading or comprehending the instructions or questions from the **numeracy** and **writing modules**, you can offer your assistance by reading the question out loud or by providing clarification. Counsellors may read the instruction page for the **reading booklets**, however, the client should be encouraged to read and complete the reading questions **independently** in order to gain a more accurate understanding of his/her reading and comprehension levels.

Let the client complete as many questions as possible independently, before offering your assistance. This gives the client an opportunity to demonstrate what he/she can do, which is critical for building confidence in his/her own abilities.

3. **Watch for signs of discomfort** such as difficulty with reading and comprehension or understanding the question/task – these are indications that the client may have reached his/her skill limit. If this occurs, remind the client that it is fine to skip questions and go back to it later. Remind the client that it is fine to skip questions, and to go back and check answers.

Additional Considerations in Administering Assessments

When should I review answers with the client?

Depending on the individual, you may need to debrief once an entire booklet has been completed or after each assessment question. Keep in mind that regular requests for clarification on a question may indicate that the client is unable to proceed any further. If you think this might be the case, ask the client if he/she would like to continue or stop, or re-schedule for another time.

What do I record in the “results and observations section” in the assessor booklet?

Use the “results and observations section” following each question to record whether the client successfully completed the task. Additional space is provided to record your own observations about how the client arrived at the answer, strategies used, and whether it was challenging for him/her. An alternate Essential Skills Needs Assessment Summary table has been included in *Appendix B* to allow each assessor to record all the results in one place. Using the summary table allows you to re-use the assessor booklet for other clients. The summary table is only an example - you may decide to design your own method for documenting the results of the needs assessment.

How do I score the assessment booklets?

Clients do not receive a score indicating that they have passed or failed. The assessment results are intended to encourage conversation and reflection about the clients’ skills and abilities, and provide an opportunity to reflect on skills they wish to improve.

Do I give a copy of the feedback form to the client?

The feedback form is intended to support the counsellor and other intermediaries in providing the best advice to the client. As the needs assessment process is not a formal evaluation tied to a score, it is recommended that the feedback form not be given to the client.

Who can use the assessment results?

The results and observations can be shared with other intermediaries such as adult educators and skills trainers that can support the employment and training needs/goals of the client. **Written consent must be obtained from the client before sharing any of the assessment results.**

Step 6 – Provide Feedback

It is critical to review the assessment results with your client. Remind the client that the assessment is meant to help develop an effective training plan and support job searches. Before discussing the answers, you might ask:

- How did you feel about the questions?
- Was there anything that surprised you in the questions? How so?
- Which questions were easier and which were more difficult? Can you explain why?

Review responses:

- Review the client's responses question by question, focusing on what was done well. Beginning with a discussion of the client's strengths will help to build confidence.
- Discuss the questions that the client found difficult. Remind the client that the assessment questions are not only designed to show strengths but also to identify skill areas that may require upgrading. This information becomes very useful when making training and employment decisions.

How you communicate results and training opportunities can influence a client's decisions about future learning activities. It is important to highlight skills strengths to build confidence.

Step 7 – Review Training Goals

Review the client's career/training goals from the initial intake questions and see how the assessment results may impact those goals.

- Reinforce the point that the areas identified as difficult could be managed through skills upgrading or targeted training. Upgrading could help the client to prepare and ease into training for a specific career.
- Ask the client about interest in improving his/her Essential Skills. Explain that Essential Skills upgrading would help to develop skills that could make training and job searches easier and support greater success at work.
- Ask what might prevent the client from attending training. This question is important as it identifies barriers such as time and cost. It may also help to determine what training programs might work best.

Adults learn more effectively when interested in the subject that is being taught and when the learning environment is supportive.

Share information about programs and services available in the community:

At this stage, the client may be interested in pursuing his/her training options and developing a plan of action. You can now present the client with information about the programs and services available in the community. Remember, you can use an intake form (see sample intake form provided in Appendix A) as a tool to record results and agreed upon next steps.

- Share information about different Essential Skills programs, adult skills upgrading and training programs in the community.
- Provide details about program approaches, e.g. describe whether the program allows learners to work at their own pace, if they set their own learning goals and curriculum, and if they would use real tasks and materials in training.
- Talk about the different teaching environments e.g. whether programming is provided in a large group, small group, in a one-to-one fashion, or online and whether the client would have flexibility in setting a learning schedule.
- Discuss start and end dates.
- Outline time commitment and any costs.
- Provide information about how to apply or register for programs. You can provide contact information so that the client can make his/her own arrangements or you could offer to make the arrangements on the client's behalf.
- Describe how progress will be monitored, e.g. tests, self-evaluation, informal assessment.

Close the meeting:

- Thank the client for participating in the process and congratulate him/her on their efforts.
- Ask the client if he/she has any questions.
- Encourage the client to call you if there are questions or if more information about adult skills upgrading and training programs is needed.

Step 8 – Record Results

Using the appropriate assessor booklet, complete the “Results and Observations” section following each task, or use the alternate Essential Skills Needs Assessment Summary table (see Appendix B). Add any pertinent comments that the client made while debriefing the results of the assessments, e.g., areas of confidence with tasks, areas where the client was hesitant or unsure of his/her abilities. These observations can be helpful when discussing training objectives, such as skills upgrading programs. The needs assessment results can be photocopied and provided to other intermediaries with the consent of the client.

Here is a completed sample of the “results and observations section” from an assessor booklet :

Numeracy Task	Simple operation	Indicate the tasks demonstrated by checking-off the boxes.
Occupation	NOC 6611 - Cashiers	
Numeracy Application	Money Math <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Makes change by subtraction <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Understands dollars and cents <input type="checkbox"/> Places decimals correctly	Indicate if the question was successfully completed and whether assistance was required.
Did the client successfully complete the task?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Did not attempt <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Required Assistance Comments: <i>Client had difficulty understanding the question but was able to successfully complete the task after clarification was provided.</i>	
Additional Observations	<i>Client placed the decimal in the wrong spot after subtracting.</i>	Record comments and observations about the approach the client used to respond to tasks, and the skills demonstrated.
Record client's strengths and areas that may require upgrading observed during the assessment (e.g. client took a long time to respond to questions, or found certain types of tasks easy).		

Identifies the type of task for a particular Essential Skill.

The National Occupational Code (NOC) which denotes the occupation from which the Essential Skills task was taken.

Record client's strengths and areas that may require upgrading observed during the assessment (e.g. client took a long time to respond to questions, or found certain types of tasks easy).

Record comments and observations about the approach the client used to respond to tasks, and the skills demonstrated.

This is an authentic Client intake form and has been reproduced in this publication with the permission of the “Essential Skills for Aboriginal Futures” (ESAF) team located in New Westminster, British Columbia. This is an example only, you may use your own intake form or design another that better suits your purposes.

Student Number: _____

Application

Section A – PERSONAL IDENTIFICATION				
Last Name:		First Name:		
Home Address:				
				Postal Code:
Telephone #:		Message #:		
Cell:		E-mail Address:		
Client reference #:	Date of Birth: dd-mm-yyyy - -		Gender: Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female <input type="checkbox"/>	
Status: <input type="checkbox"/> Registered Indian <input type="checkbox"/> Non-Status <input type="checkbox"/> Inuit <input type="checkbox"/> Metis <input type="checkbox"/>				
Marital Status: <input type="checkbox"/> Single <input type="checkbox"/> Married <input type="checkbox"/> Common Law <input type="checkbox"/> Divorced <input type="checkbox"/> Widow <input type="checkbox"/>				
Emergency Contact: Name			Phone Number:	
What is your source of income?	Full Time Work: <input type="checkbox"/>	Part-Time Work: <input type="checkbox"/>	Social Assistance: <input type="checkbox"/>	
Other:	Pension: <input type="checkbox"/>	No Income: <input type="checkbox"/>	Student Loan: <input type="checkbox"/>	
Section B – EDUCATION & TRAINING				
Highest Grade Completed:		Year Completed:	Province:	
Best Subject:		Most Challenging Subject:		
Diploma or Certificate yes <input type="checkbox"/> no <input type="checkbox"/>				
Additional Information:				
Section C – EMPLOYMENT HISTORY				
Work History: List your last three jobs starting with the most recent.				
Employer	Position Held	Start Date	End Date	Reason for Leaving
Section D – GOALS/COMMITMENT				
Are you currently employed? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>		Your position/title:		
What are your top 2 employment goals:				
Are you seeking: full-time work <input type="checkbox"/> or part time work <input type="checkbox"/>				
Are you willing and able to commit to the full time training program:			Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	
Are you willing to commit to completing the assignments of the program:			Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	
Are you willing and able to commit to the employment being offered:			Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	

Application

Section E – CHALLENGES TO EMPLOYMENT		
Please check which of the following may interfere with your ability to find and or keep a job?		
Difficulty with English <input type="checkbox"/>	Transportation <input type="checkbox"/>	Drug/Alcohol Problems <input type="checkbox"/>
Learning Disability <input type="checkbox"/>	Physical Disability <input type="checkbox"/>	Lack of Job Search Skills <input type="checkbox"/>
Legal Issues <input type="checkbox"/>	Family Member Health <input type="checkbox"/>	Family Issues <input type="checkbox"/>
Limited Work Experience <input type="checkbox"/>	Education <input type="checkbox"/>	Child Care <input type="checkbox"/>
Housing <input type="checkbox"/>	Other <input type="checkbox"/>	
Section F – Where/how did you hear about this program?		
Case Manager <input type="checkbox"/>	Poster <input type="checkbox"/>	Brochure <input type="checkbox"/>
Friend or Relative <input type="checkbox"/>	Website <input type="checkbox"/>	Other <input type="checkbox"/>
Section G – FOR OFFICE USE ONLY		
Referred by:	ES Assessment Interview using (identify booklets(s) level and domain (i.e. reading, writing, numeracy))	
Reason for administering the ES Assessment Interview		
Intake Results/Comments:		

Client Signature: _____ Date: _____

ESAF Staff Signature: _____ Date: _____

I, _____, authorize my counsellor to share results of the Essential Skills assessment interview to anyone who is willing to assist me with my employment and training goals.

ESSENTIAL SKILLS NEEDS ASSESSMENT SUMMARY

*Use this **Essential Skills Needs Assessment Summary** table to conveniently record all the results in one place. The Summary can be shared with other intermediaries such as adult educators and skills trainers that can support the employment and training needs of the client. Written consent **must** be obtained from the client before sharing any of the assessment results.*

Booklet: _____ **Level:** _____

Date of Assessment: _____

Location of Assessment: _____

Assessor Name: _____

Candidate Name: _____

Question 1	
Did the client complete the task successfully?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Did not attempt <input type="checkbox"/> Required assistance
Observations:	

Question 2	
Did the client complete the task successfully?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Did not attempt <input type="checkbox"/> Required assistance
Observations:	

Question 3

Did the client complete the task successfully?

Yes No Did not attempt Required assistance

Observations:

Question 4

Did the client complete the task successfully?

Yes No Did not attempt Required assistance

Observations:

Question 5

Did the client complete the task successfully?

Yes No Did not attempt Required assistance

Observations:

Question 6

Did the client complete the task successfully? Yes No Did not attempt Required assistance

Observations:

Question 7

Did the client complete the task successfully? Yes No Did not attempt Required assistance

Observations:

Question 8

Did the client complete the task successfully? Yes No Did not attempt Required assistance

Observations:

Question 9	
Did the client complete the task successfully?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Did not attempt <input type="checkbox"/> Required assistance
Observations:	

Question 10	
Did the client complete the task successfully?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Did not attempt <input type="checkbox"/> Required assistance
Observations:	

I, _____, authorize my counsellor to share results of the Essential Skills needs assessment with anyone who is willing to assist me with my employment and training goals.

These results were collected through an informal Essential Skills Needs Assessment process and do not provide formal assessment scores. They are intended to be used to support employment and career counsellors to engage clients in a discussion about training objectives, such as skills upgrading programs. For more information, please refer to the Introduction to an Essential Skills Needs Assessment tool available at hrsdc.gc.ca/essentialskills.

SECTION 2: ASSESSMENT MODULES

Reading Modules

Level 1: Assessor Booklet
Level 1: Client Booklet

Level 2: Assessor Booklet
Level 2: Client Booklet

Writing Modules

Level 1: Assessor Booklet
Level 1: Client Booklet

Level 2: Assessor Booklet
Level 2: Client Booklet

Numeracy Modules

Level 1: Assessor Booklet
Level 1: Client Booklet

Level 2: Assessor Booklet
Level 2: Client Booklet