

How to Run an Essential Skills Competition

Helpful Tips and Activity Ideas



Preparing for the Competition

The information contained in this guide is based on the Essential Skills Competition organized by HRSDC's Office of Literacy and Essential Skills, held on September 23rd, 2011. The suggested games and scoring rubrics are indeed *suggestions* and can be modified or changed to suite the needs of different organizations and individuals.

Here are some helpful tips to help you organize and prepare for your own Essential Skills Competition:

- Depending on the number of participants, a large room should be set up with 9 station locations – each representing one of the 9 essential skills – and each with at least one table.
- One facilitator should be assigned to each station (so 9 station facilitators in total). They will be in charge of explaining the particular station challenge to participants as well as giving a description of the primary essential skill(s) being tested. In addition, facilitators will be responsible for recording the team's score for that station.
- Depending on the number of teams participating, a “shotgun” approach to starting the competition can be done. In this case, each team begins at the same time, but each at different stations.
- This particular skills competition logistically works best when played with 9 teams of 4 people.
- For the games suggested, it is recommended that each station last approximately 9 minutes.
- It is recommended that a short description of the primary essential skill(s) being “tested” be communicated by each station facilitator to the participants prior to starting the actual game.
- In order to keep transitions between stations as smooth as possible, it is recommended that 1 Master of Ceremonies be appointed to keep the time and signal to participants when they must change stations (ie: after 9 minutes).
- It is beneficial to have a “runner” (or two) present during the skills challenge to relieve station facilitators should they need to take a break or to help solve any logistic challenges that may arise.

Examples of Station Games

Instructions, Materials and Sample
Scoring Rubrics



got skills?

Activity 1: Riddle Me This (Reading)

Instructions:

- Each team will be given two separate riddles.
- The objective is to successfully solve each riddle in the given timeframe.

Materials Needed:

- Two riddles
- Pens
- Scrap paper

Suggested Riddles:

Riddle 1: You're seated in a room facing two other people. In order to determine who's the smartest, all of you are blindfolded and told that a coloured dot will be painted on your forehead. The dot will be either red or blue, and the only rule is that at least one person must have a blue dot. There could be one, two, or even three blue dots. Each person will be able to see the dots on the other two people, but not on their own forehead. Once someone determines the colour of the dot on their forehead they must raise their hand. The blindfolds are removed and you see one red dot and one blue dot. After one minute the others have yet to raise their hands, therefore you raise yours.

What colour is the dot on your forehead, and how did you know?

ANSWER: *It has to be blue, because if your dot was red, then the person you see with the blue dot would have seen two red dots and would have immediately raised his/her hand.)*

Riddle 2: This is an unusual paragraph. I'm curious how quickly you can find out what is so unusual about it. It looks so plain you would think nothing was wrong with it. In fact, nothing is wrong with it! It is unusual though. Study it, and think about it, but you still may not find anything odd. But if you work at it a bit, you might find out. Try to do so without any coaching!

ANSWER: *There are no "e"s.*

**Riddle Me This
SAMPLE SCORING RUBRIC**

TEAM NAME: _____

Task to be completed	(Insert checkmark in column if completed)
Correct answer to riddle 1 ("dots") = 5 points	
Correct answer to riddle 2 ("unusual paragraph") = 7 points	

TOTAL POINTS: /12

Activity 2: A Poetic Pause (Writing)

Instructions:

- Each team will be asked to write a particular style of poem - a Rubai (easily applicable in both English and French)
- The theme of the poem must revolve around essential skills (Key words and phrases related to essential skills can be provided to participants in a 'cheat sheet' format to help them craft their poem).
- See scoring rubric for additional details.

Primary Essential Skill: Writing

Secondary Essential Skill(s): Thinking, Oral Communication, Working with Others, Reading, Continuous Learning

Materials Needed:

- Pens/pencils
- Instructions on type of poem to be written- Rubai
- Example of a Rubai poem

Example of a Rubai poem:
Essential skills, there are nine
If you have them all, you are fine
If you find you are lacking, then
Your work may be considered borderline

**A Poetic Pause
SAMPLE SCORING RUBRIC**

TEAM NAME/NOM D'ÉQUIPE:

Task to be completed	(Insert checkmark in column if completed)
Lines 1, 2 and 4 rhyme = 3 points	
The poem is about essential skills = 3 points	
Each additional stanza = 1 point each	

TOTAL POINTS/POINTS TOTAL:

Activity 3: Map Attack (Document Use)

Instructions:

- Each team will be asked to locate 10 key areas on the map provided (e.g. a particular body of water, street, etc.)
- The objective of this challenge is to correctly identify as many areas as possible on the map within the given time frame.
- For each correctly labelled location on the map, the team will receive 1 point.

Materials Needed:

- A map of a designated city or area (ex. Montreal)
- Small numbered sticky tabs for team members to place on the map to mark each area.

Map Attack SAMPLE SCORING RUBRIC

TEAM NAME: _____

Task to be completed	(Insert checkmark in column if completed)
Successfully identified location #1 (4th Line Rd, LAN U-V59) = 1 point	
• Successfully identified location #2 (Agnew Rd, RFC N52) = 1 point	
• Successfully identified location #3 (Fairfax Rd, LGR B60) = 1 point	
• Successfully identified location #4 (Good Rd, FRO Y54) = 1 point	
• Successfully identified location #5 (McLean Rd, SDG S69) = 1 point	
• Successfully identified location #6 (Latulippe Rd, SDG Q72) = 1 point	
• Successfully identified location #7 (Cuckoos Nest Rd, LAN U60) = 1 point	
• Successfully identified location #8 (John Shaw Rd, OTW Q59) = 1 point	
• Successfully identified location #9 (Hoople 7th Rd, SDG U68) = 1 point	
• Successfully identified location #10 (Debruce Rd, LGR Z62) = 1 point	

TOTAL POINTS: _____

Activity 4: Estimation Station (Numeracy)

Instructions:

- The team will be shown 3 different objects (e.g. a plate, a martini glass and a vase) filled with 3 different types of smaller objects (e.g. playing cards, candy, toothpicks) and will be asked to estimate how many items are in each object.
- Prior to estimating, the team will be shown a smaller sample quantity of the smaller objects within the larger objects (e.g. 25 toothpicks in a glass vase).
- Points will be awarded according to how close each team's guess is to the actual number of smaller objects.
- No touching of the objects is permitted.

Materials Needed:

- Object 1: 2-3 decks of playing cards and 2 plates or bowls in which to place them
- Object 2: 2 Martini glasses and small candy of your choice
- Object 3: 2 vases or mason jars and toothpicks

For this station, it is important that the facilitator explain how/why estimation is part of the numeracy skill. For a detailed description of numeracy and its component parts, please [click here](#).

**Estimation Station
SAMPLE SCORING RUBRIC**

TEAM NAME:

Task to be completed	0-15 Items off = 5 points	16-30 items off = 3 points	31-50 items off = 2 points	51-100 off= 1 point
Estimate # of Playing Cards				
Estimate # Candies				
Estimate # of toothpicks				

TOTAL POINTS: /15 + /5 (bonus points if exact guess) = /20

Activity 5: Snap and Load (Computer Use)

Description:

- Each team will be asked to take a picture of an individual using a digital camera.
- Each team will then be asked to create a ‘poster’/manipulated image with using the program “Paint” (e.g. the team may chose to add a moustache or hat to the individual in the picture).
- The team must correctly save the picture on the laptop desktop in the marked folder using the team’s name as the file title.
- The pictures will be assigned points based on meeting the identified criteria in the scoring rubric.

Primary Essential Skill: Computer Use

Secondary Essential Skill(s): Continuous Learning, Working with Others

Materials Needed:

- Laptop computer
- Digital camera
- Microsoft Paint

**Snap and Load
SAMPLE SCORING RUBRIC**

TEAM NAME: _____

Task to be completed	(Insert checkmark in column if completed)
Picture taken of director-level or higher = 2 points	
Picture incorporates one or more of the nine essential skills = 2 points	
Picture successfully uploaded onto laptop = 2 points	
Picture successfully named and saved in designated folder on laptop = 2 points	
Picture successfully edited using Photoshop software = 2 points	
2 BONUS POINTS → All nine essential skills are incorporated into picture	

POINTS: / 10 + BONUS POINTS: /2 = TOTAL POINTS: /12

Activity 6: Essential Skills Taboo (Thinking)

Instructions:

- The classic game of taboo: one team member must attempt to describe the word on the card without using any of the “do not mention” words.
- Each team will be given a total a 5 minutes of game time.
- The goal is for each team to correctly guess as many words as possible in the given timeframe.
- Each correct word guess will be awarded 1 point.
- If the selected word proves to be too difficult, each team member has the opportunity to ‘pass’ on a word up to a total of 3 times during the game.

Materials Needed:

- 1 Taboo game
- 1 Moderator (to ensure “do not mention” words are not used)

**Essential Skills Taboo
SAMPLE SCORING RUBRIC**

TEAM NAME/NOM D'ÉQUIPE:

Tasks to be completed	(Insert checkmark in column if completed)
For every correct guess, assign 1 point	

TOTAL POINTS/POINTS TOTAL:

Activity 7: Overcoming Obstacles (Oral Communication)

Instructions:

- 3 team members are blindfolded and 1 team member is giving them verbal directions to successfully navigate a series of obstacles/challenges (1 obstacle at a time)
- The blindfolded team members must each successfully complete their assigned obstacle in the given timeframe of the station (ie: 9 minutes total).
- For details on the 3 obstacles, see the attached PowerPoint slides.

Materials Needed:

- 3 small tables
- 10 plastic cups in two different colors (7 of one color, 3 of another)
- 2 sturdy cups and a small basin to protect overflow of water
- Black pen or marker
- Bulls eye
- Water
- Instructional Diagrams (see attached PowerPoint slides)

**Overcoming Obstacles
SAMPLE SCORING RUBRIC**

TEAM NAME: _____

Task to be completed	Points Scored
Water transferred between cups - 1 pt. if water is transferred correctly - 2 pts if no spills Total possible pts: 3	
"X" marked in bulls eye without touching any or border - 1 pt if x is in bulls eye - 2 pt if x is not touching any lines Total possible pts: 3	
Cups stacked without falling in correct color sequence. - 1 pt level 1 - 1 pt level 2 - 1 pt level 3 - 1 pt level 4 Total possible points : 4	

TOTAL POINTS: /10

*** See PowerPoint slides for additional information and instructions on each obstacle***

Activity 8: Minute to Win It (Working with Others)

Instructions:

- The objective of this game is for contestants to work together to unscramble and reassemble two (2) separate puzzles cut out from cereal boxes.
- Each puzzle must be assembled in a designated puzzle area (can be made using masking tape) without any overlap or squares touching the border of the puzzle area.
- The cereal box puzzle pieces should be the same shape to add to the difficulty.
- Each puzzle must be completed in 1 minute or less.
- Awarded points decrease with the number of attempts to complete the two puzzles in 1 minute.

Materials Needed:

- Cut-outs of two cereal box (apx. 16-20 pieces each)
- Masking tape to mark borders of puzzle area
- Timer

**Minute to Win It
SAMPLE SCORING RUBRIC**

TEAM NAME: _____

*** To be completed for each puzzle ***

Task to be completed	(Insert checkmark in column if completed)
Solve puzzle without overlapping puzzle pieces and border of designated puzzle area = 2 points	
Complete puzzle within one minute (first try) = 6 points	
Complete puzzle on second try = 4 points	
Complete puzzle on third try = 2 points	

TOTAL POINTS: /8

Activity 9: So You Think You Can Dance? (Continuous Learning)

Instructions:

- The objective of this game is to learn and successfully complete as many newly learned dance moves in the shortest period of time.
- The instructor will instruct one salsa dance step at a time and ask the team to perform each of these steps in accumulation. Each step will only be shown twice.
- Each team will have the opportunity to learn and perform up to 3 salsa steps.
- The more dance steps the team can perform to the instructors' satisfaction, the higher their score (points are cumulative).

Materials Needed:

- Salsa dancing instructor
- CD player
- Salsa
- Boas or other costume items for "flair"

**So You Think You Can Dance?
SAMPLE SCORING RUBRIC**

TEAM NAME: _____

* NOTE- POINTS **ARE** CUMULATIVE

Task to be completed	(Insert checkmark in column if completed) Note: Points are cumulative
Attempted steps= 1 point	
Step #1 = 2 points	
Step #2 = 3 points	
Step #3 = 5 points	

TOTAL POINTS: /11