

Literacy at Work:

*Information for Employers about
Reading, Writing, and Math Skills*



Find out what you can do to help
your employees and your business!

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Learning Disabilities and Whole Life Learning

Professional Development for Adult Literacy Educators



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Why this information is important to you

There are increasing demands on reading, writing and math skills in today's job market.

Some of your employees may have problems meeting these demands. Luckily, there is help available to you and your employees.

By helping your employees improve their reading, writing, and math skills, you will:

- build better relationships with your staff
- improve morale in the workplace
- increase employee satisfaction and loyalty
- reduce stress and increase productivity
- improve your company's public image



 **Helping a current employee upgrade may be less expensive in the long run than training a new employee.**

Literacy in the workplace

48% of Canadians have below-average reading and writing skills.¹

This means that there are likely members of your workforce who find reading and writing difficult. Adults with weak literacy skills often look for jobs in trades, foodservice, and manual labour. Shame and stigma may stop them from getting help, and they may have found ways to hide their difficulties.

People with poor skills can be excellent employees.

They often have:

- a good memory and excellent speaking skills
- keen observation skills – read body language well
- an ability to see things in three dimensions
- a talent for hands-on tasks



What are the impacts of low literacy?

Low literacy has been linked to:

- unemployment and underemployment
- low socio-economic status
- poor health
- mental health concerns such as depression
- substance abuse
- reduced life expectancy

 **Helping your employees upgrade their skills can also help to improve other areas of their lives.**

¹International Adult Literacy Survey, 1998

Taking the right approach

Recognize clues that someone may have weak literacy skills.

Your employees may fear that you will discover their weaknesses. They may try to hide them by:

- finding reasons (ex. calling in sick) to miss training or in-services
- taking home forms or reports that you ask them to complete, rather than doing them at work
- refusing advancement or promotion, even if they seem capable

Talk to your staff about their reading, writing and math skills.

- Talk about workplace reading, writing and math skills at staff meetings:
 - Share how you'd like to improve your own skills, or what you think you could improve
 - Explain the minimum requirements of the job and what supports you can offer to help people attain them
 - Offer mentorship, tutoring and other supports to ALL staff members
- During one-on-one meetings, ask open ended questions:
 - How are you finding the paperwork?
 - Do you need help with anything?
 - Is there anything holding you back on the job?

Support employees who want to upgrade.

- Find out about upgrading programs in your area (see next page)
- Allow for time away from work, or flex time if courses are during work hours
- Consider offering space at the workplace for on-site learning
- Offer financial support (cover some course costs, provide a small loan or wage advance) for course fees
- Other funding options may be available. See the next page for contact information.



An investment in your staff now will pay huge dividends to your company or business in the future.

Contact Information

Where to Find Workplace Essential Skills Support in BC

Tutors, mentors, upgrading programs, and on-the-job training are available!

In the North Okanagan:

The Junction Literacy Centre

Phone: 250 275 3117

Email: admin@junctionliteracy.ca

Web: www.junctionliteracy.ca

Okanagan College

Phone: 250 545 7291, ext. 2311

Email: cmccann@okanagan.bc.ca

Web: <http://www.okanagan.bc.ca>

Outside the North Okanagan:

Literacy BC

Phone: 1 888 READ 234 (1 888 732 3234)

Email: info@literacy.bc.ca

Web: <http://directory.literacybc.ca>

