



# INFORMATION PACKAGE

on literacy and basic skills in Ontario

for Employment Ontario services





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# FACT SHEET 1

## WHAT IS ADULT EDUCATION?

The goal of adult education is to help adults improve their literacy skills, namely their ability to read and write texts and numbers.<sup>1</sup> It is geared to adults of all ages and can take place in an adult learning centre or elsewhere. Teaching can be done on an individual basis by a trainer, in either small or large groups, or remotely – based on the needs of the community and the capacity of the organization.

The Ontario government's Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) Program supports the acquisition of the knowledge, skills and behaviours that adults need to reach their full potential at home, in school, in the community and at work.

The Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework (OALCF) is the cornerstone of the LBS Program. The framework takes a task-based approach and focuses on transition-based programming. It is organized around six main competencies:

- Find and use information
- Communicate ideas and information
- Understand and use numbers
- Use digital technology
- Manage learning
- Engage with others

The LBS Program, together with the OALCF, helps learners achieve their goal and make the transition towards one of the following five paths:

- Employment (find a job, change one's job or improve one's performance at work)
- Independence (achieve greater independence in one's daily life)
- Apprenticeship training (acquire the prerequisites needed to learn a trade)
- Secondary school credit (finish high school)
- Postsecondary (continue training at the college level or other)

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<sup>1</sup> Definition of literacy from the Canadian Council on Learning. See <http://www.ccl-cca.ca/ccl/Topic/Literacy/WhatisLiteracy.html> (page consulted on March 26, 2014)

# FACT SHEET 2

## WHAT ARE THE LITERACY LEVELS?

The Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework (OALCF) uses three levels to describe the degree of complexity of tasks. These levels are useful for describing the learner's improved capacity to perform these tasks. These three levels are based on the same factors that determine the complexity at levels 1, 2 and 3 in the Government of Canada's essential skills.

The OALCF departs from the essential skills framework in that its primary purpose is to support adult learning. Although the essential skills scale describes five levels of task complexity, the OALCF addresses only the first three levels.

**Level 1** The tasks at Level 1 require, for example, that the learner follow simple instructions; add, subtract, multiply and divide whole numbers; or follow apparent steps to complete tasks on the computer. Examples of tasks at Level 1 include: reading instructions on a cleaning product label, calculating change from a purchase, and logging in to a user account on a computer.

**Level 2** The tasks at Level 2 require, for example, that a learner locate and recognize digital functions and commands, calculate percentages and make low-level inferences from reading a short text. Examples of tasks at Level 2 include: following instructions in a recipe, calculating one's share of a restaurant bill including tip, and sending and receiving an email.

**Level 3** To perform a task at Level 3, the learner must, for example, compare or contrast information between two or more texts, organize and display quantitative information (e.g., tables and graphs), and select appropriate software when required by the task. Examples of tasks at Level 3 include: interpreting a project plan to determine whether adjustments to schedules or activities need to be made, comparing costs and services from several providers to select a cell phone plan, and creating a report using a variety of formatting options, such as inserting a table, a graph and a table of contents.

# FACT SHEET 3

## WHO ARE THE FRANCOPHONE LEARNERS IN ONTARIO?

In Ontario, Francophone learners are people aged 16 years or over living in either urban or rural settings. Many of these men and women work, others are looking for work, and still others want to become more independent or help their families prosper. Some of these learners were born in Canada; others are immigrants.

The definition of Ontario's Francophone population, which was adopted on June 4, 2009, reads as follows:

"Those persons whose mother tongue is French, plus those whose mother tongue is neither French nor English but have a particular knowledge of French as an Official Language and use French at home."<sup>1</sup> Based on data from the mandatory short-form questionnaire for the 2011 census, "...the province is now home to 611,500 Franco-Ontarians... Francophones still represent 4.8% of Ontario's population."<sup>2</sup>

We do not know how many of these Francophones might benefit from literacy training. In Canada, 4% of the population has very poor reading skills and 13% perform at Level 1. These people are only able to perform tasks of limited complexity, such as locating specific information in short texts that contain little or no distracting information.

When it comes to calculating, 23% of Canadians perform at Level 1 or below. Among these people, 17% are at Level 1, which means they have the skills needed to perform simple one-step mathematical operations, such as counting or sorting.

As for using digital technology, 15% of Canadians fall into the category "Below Level 1." Thirty percent of Canadians perform at Level 1, meaning that they can solve problems that have an explicitly stated goal, and that involve a relatively small number of steps to be completed in a familiar environment.<sup>3</sup>

In summary, many Canadian adults do not have the skills in reading, writing, calculating or digital technology that are required in today's knowledge society. Of the top 50 entry-level jobs identified in a 2011 study, all of them require a competency profile that includes reading, writing, calculating and digital technology use at both levels 1 and 2.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Taken from the Office of Francophone Affairs, *Portrait of the Francophone Community in Ontario*. Online: <http://www.ofa.gov.on.ca/en/franco-definition.html> (page consulted on March 26, 2014)

<sup>2</sup> Taken from the Office of Francophone Affairs, Data based on the Inclusive Definition of Francophone (IDF) from the 2011 Census. Online: <http://www.ofa.gov.on.ca/en/franco-census-2011.html> (page consulted on March 26, 2014)

<sup>3</sup> Statistics Canada (2013). *Skills in Canada: First Results from the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC)*. Online: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-555-x/89-555-x2013001-eng.pdf> (page consulted on March 26, 2014)

<sup>4</sup> Karen McGregor and Carla Douglas (2011). *Essential Skills Profiles: Top 50 Entry-Level Jobs in Canada*. Online: <http://en.copian.ca/library/learning/kls/top50/top50.pdf> (page consulted on March 26, 2014)

# FACT SHEET 4

## WHAT SERVICES DO ADULT LEARNING CENTRES PROVIDE?

### 1. Information and referrals

The goal of the information and referral service is to inform people about the various services offered by the learning centres and by Employment Ontario, in addition to directing them towards other services when necessary.

### 2. Assessment

The assessment allows learning centres to collect information in order to determine which skills the person must improve or acquire in order to reach his or her goals. This assessment ensures that the person receives tailor-made training that fits his or her needs and goals. It is also used to determine whether the person would benefit from other forms of training.

### 3. Development of a learning plan

Once the assessment has been completed, the learner develops a learning plan with his or her trainer. The learning plan sets out the various steps the learner must achieve in order to attain his or her goal and acquire or improve the specific skills.

### 4. Training

The centres provide learners with quality training. The training can be flexible, and may be provided in groups, individually, in a face-to-face format, or online.

### 5. Follow-up

The follow-up enables learning centres to check on the learner's progress three, six and twelve months after he or she has finished training. It also ensures the results of these learners are documented.<sup>1</sup>

The Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) Program supports the acquisition and improvement of the knowledge, skills and behaviours that adults need to reach their full potential. The LBS Program is offered to four cultural groups: Anglophones, Francophones, Aboriginal people, and those who are deaf and hard of hearing. The LBS Program is a free and confidential service provided by community-based organizations, school boards and community colleges.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> These five steps were taken and adapted from *Literacy and Basic Skills, Service Provider Guidelines*, MTCU, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Literacy Network Northwest (2012). *Assessment and Training Referral Guide*. Online: <http://northernliteracy.ca/index.php/en/resource-library/category/38-nwo-information-referral-guide-and-toolkit?download=107:nwo-information-referral-guide-and-toolkit> (page consulted on March 26, 2014)



# FACT SHEET 5

## WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO LEARN IN YOUR MOTHER TONGUE?

Several studies demonstrate that people learn more efficiently when they learn in their mother tongue, even if they are very proficient in another language.

The reason, simply stated, is that language models are etched into the brain in infancy and early childhood. Adults whose mother tongue is French, and especially those who received their primary school education in French, will learn more effectively in French, because they can call on these language models to integrate new knowledge.<sup>1</sup>

For Comeau, it is vital that formal learning be done in one's mother tongue, for those very reasons mentioned above.<sup>2</sup> He adds that: "Throughout the world, all attempts at literacy training in a language other than the learner's mother tongue have been resounding failures."<sup>3</sup> It is important to note that all learning done in one's mother tongue can then be transferred to one's second language.

Successful learning also depends on:

- the use that learners can make of their language in everyday life;
- the effective teaching of their language and the transmission of their culture (Wagner and Grenier, 1991).<sup>4</sup>

"Language and personality are one and the same. Language is one of the most important components of identity."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Coalition pour l'alphabétisation et la formation de base en Ontario, *Mémoire présenté au ministère de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités dans le cadre de l'examen de l'éducation des adultes*, Ottawa, 2004, p. 6. Internal document.

<sup>2</sup> Y. Comeau, *Alpha en milieu de travail. Étude de l'expérience du Centre d'alphabétisation de Prescott (CAP) avec des travailleurs franco-ontariens*, Hawkesbury, Centre d'alphabétisation de Prescott in collaboration with Université Laval, 1996, p. 67. Online: <http://www.cafa-rcat.on.ca/PDF/alpha%20en%20milieu%20de%20travail.pdf> (page consulted on March 26, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>4</sup> S. Wagner and P. Grenier, *Analphabétisme de minorité et alphabétisation d'affirmation nationale, à propos de l'Ontario français*, Toronto, Ministry of Education, 1991.

<sup>5</sup> S. Bergeron, "Apprendre à lire dans sa langue," *Le Bulletin de la FCAF*, Vol. 7, No. 2, Fall 2001, pp. 14-15.

# FACT SHEET 6

## HOW TO RECOGNIZE PEOPLE WHO HAVE TROUBLE READING AND WRITING?

### Characteristics

Some people compensate for their difficulty reading and writing using a sometimes remarkable sense of observation, their ability to memorize and resourcefulness. These people are found in all age groups and come from all walks of life. Here are a few signs that a person may have difficulty reading or writing:

### Telltale signs

- They say they have forgotten or lost their glasses or that their eyes hurt, so they cannot read.
- They say they cannot write because their arm or their hand hurts.
- When handed a brochure, they stick it in their pocket or purse without even glancing at it, saying that they will read it later.
- They never take note of their appointments.
- They memorize lists of tasks to be accomplished instead of writing them down.
- They always have some good reason for avoiding tasks that require reading and writing.
- They take notes in the form of simple sketches (for example, they draw the dollar sign to remember to bring money with them).
- They rely entirely on their memory when taking a message.
- They are reluctant to fill out forms; they prefer taking them home to read and to fill out.
- They ask for help in filling out documents, saying that they did not understand the question.
- They say that their spouse “takes care of that.”
- They never volunteer for any task that requires reading and writing.
- They seem uncooperative with a professional, because they disregard notes that this person has written (e.g. notes that a teacher has written on a child’s progress report).
- They forget or do not take documentation that they have been given.
- They ask for explanations, even though everything is written on the document they have in hand.

### Be careful

It is important not to jump to conclusions. These behaviours are indicators, not formal proof. A person may, on occasion, display one or some of these behaviours and yet be able to read and write. However, if you have observed several of these behaviours repeatedly with the same person, then you probably have reasonable grounds to conclude that he or she has difficulty reading and writing.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Centraide Montréal, *Intervenir en para-alphabétisation*, Montreal, 1990.

# FACT SHEET 7

## DID YOU KNOW?

The issue of low literacy skills has consequences for the overall economy, notably the following:

- impedes the development of business and the economy;
- impedes the use of new technologies and modernization;
- decreases productivity and earnings;
- diminishes the quality of products;
- increases the number of workplace accidents and the costs;
- increases the cost of training workers;
- increases equipment breakage and losses;
- increases the costs of workplace health and safety.<sup>1</sup>

On an individual level, having higher level skills has a direct impact on a person's employment prospects. For example, the median hourly wage of workers performing at literacy level 4 or 5 is 60% higher than that of workers performing at level 1 or below. People with low literacy skills are also more than twice as likely to be unemployed.<sup>2</sup>

### **A few characteristics of less educated people<sup>3</sup>**

- More likely to report poor health;
- More likely to believe that they have little impact on political processes;
- Participate little, or not at all, in associative or volunteer activities;
- Less likely to trust others.

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<sup>1</sup> A.-F. Bélanger, H. Brousseau, L. Foley and J. Jobidon (2000), *L'alphabétisation et les maladies mentales: deux réalités à conjuguer*. Online: <http://www.bdaa.ca/biblio/recherche/ebyon00/cover.htm> (page consulted on March 26, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> *OECD Skills Outlook 2013, First Results from the Survey of Adult Skills*. Online: [http://skills.oecd.org/OECD\\_Skills\\_Outlook\\_2013.pdf](http://skills.oecd.org/OECD_Skills_Outlook_2013.pdf) (page consulted on March 26, 2014)

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

# FACT SHEET 8

## HOW TO DEAL WITH PEOPLE WHO HAVE TROUBLE READING AND WRITING?

Here is some advice to help you better deal with people who may have difficulty reading and writing:

- Do not ask whether they have difficulty writing.
- Be diplomatic and respectful.<sup>1</sup>
- Listen to them and strive to understand their needs.
- Simplify communications and make sure they have understood the message.
- Simplify communications within the organization.
- Improve one's own writing skills and use a clear and simple language.
- Avoid using technical jargon when speaking to them.
- Use the most general vocabulary possible.
- Use short sentences.
- Avoid using a colloquial language.
- Use the active voice rather than the passive voice.
- Give them a chance to ask questions.
- Speak more slowly and clearly.
- Offer to explain the information provided, and rephrase the explanation if necessary.
- Be patient, accessible and courteous when dealing with them.
- Remember that the manner in which you help them may be either harmful or helpful.
- Apply best practices.
- Be prepared to continue learning.
- Focus on the person.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The first two points are taken and adapted from *Intervenir en para-alphabétisation*, Centraide Montréal, Montreal, 1990.

<sup>2</sup> Taken and adapted from *L'alphabétisme : Pour mieux lire nos clients*, Canada Customs and Revenue Agency, Training and Learning Directorate. Online: <http://grandsorganismes.gouv.qc.ca/upload/cego/editor/asset/R%C3%A9pertoire%20-%20Simplification%20des%20communications/Sensibiliser%20et%20former/L'alphan%C3%A9tisation%20pour%20mieux%20lire%20nos%20clients.pdf> (page consulted on March 26, 2014).

# FACT SHEET 9

## OBSERVATION SHEET<sup>1</sup>

If you think your client could benefit from training or improving his or her essential skills and literacy level, use this observation sheet. It is important that you ask the questions casually, so that the person does not feel he or she is being tested. Try to collect as much information as possible during your conversation. Ask the remaining questions when necessary.

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Client's name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Employment counsellor:** \_\_\_\_\_

Questions	Answers	Comments
1. What was the last grade of school you completed? (e.g.: high school, university, college) a) What diploma or what year? (Bachelor's, certificate, 10 <sup>th</sup> grade, etc.) b) Name of the school c) Last year of studies		
2. What subjects did you enjoy and do well in at school? What subjects were difficult for you?		
3. Were you ever tested for learning disabilities? If you were, what were the results?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	
4. Did you ever miss school for long periods of time?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	
5. How would you describe your reading, writing or math skills?	I need to improve <input type="checkbox"/> I am comfortable <input type="checkbox"/>	
6. Do you have a computer at home? If you do, why do you use it? What tasks do you perform on your computer?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	
7. Do you have a driver's licence? What category?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	
8. Do you have any other licences or certificates that are up to date? (CPR, Smart Serve, etc.) Where did you take the training? When?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	

<sup>1</sup> Literacy Network Northwest (2012). *Assessment and Training Referral Guide*. Online: <http://northernliteracy.ca/index.php/en/resource-library/category/38-nwo-information-referral-guide-and-toolkit?download=107:nwo-information-referral-guide-and-toolkit> (page consulted on March 26, 2014)



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