

Skills for Success @ Work

Coaching tips for Essential Skills in your workplace

How to use this document

The aim of this document is to provide you with the Essential Skills background information for your orientation that will help you explain to your new hires what you want them to do and how you want them to do it in your workplace.

To use this information most effectively, remember to focus on what your workers need to know and be able to do in order to meet the required performance. Then, you will want to customize the information to fit your workplace and your needs.

This is intended as an overview of Essential Skills. More information can be found on the Government of Canada's website by Googling HRSDC *and* Essential Skills or visit Workplace Education Manitoba's website at www.wem.mb.ca

Essential Skills: What are they?

The 21st century needs a workforce that is efficient, effective and adaptable, while workers need the skills required to perform successfully at work.

We all use more than just our technical or personal management skills and knowledge to carry out our daily tasks at work. We also need to ask questions to make sure we understand instructions. We fill out forms and we solve problems. We work on teams, make estimates on the time it will take to complete a task and we all have to stay safe at work.

All of these rely on skills that are not technical or personal management skills. They all fall under a set of skills known as the Essential Skills.

A survey of employers found that there are nine skills critical to success in today's workplace. All nine are used in different combinations in different applications in every occupation. They are the foundation skills we use to carry out our work tasks and they're the building blocks we use to learn new ones. They are the Essential Skills.

Skills for Success @ Work

Coaching tips for Essential Skills in your workplace

People use Essential Skills in different ways in different workplaces. However, all of the Essential Skills are used in some way in every workplace. Here are a few examples of the way Essential Skills might be used in your workplace:

The 9 Essential Skills: At Work	
Reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading and understanding workplace documents such as notes in log books, work instructions, health and safety bulletins and Standard Operating Procedures manuals
Document use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowing and identifying safety and other work-related signs, icons, codes and symbols • Using information from lists, schedules, graphs, touch screens, schedules, diagrams and technical drawings • Recording numbers and filling in information needed for checklists, forms, log books, etc.
Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicating in writing using correct grammar, punctuation and spelling in a style that is appropriate for the purpose of the message and the audience it's aimed at
Numeracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making numerical calculations • Using measuring tools and equipment to take accurate measurements • Analyzing numerical data to identify potential quality problems • Creating and monitoring schedules and budgets • Estimating size, weight, quantities, time for tasks, etc.
Oral communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening to instructions and explanations and asking for clarification if needed • Communicating with others to coordinate work tasks, share information and discuss issues • Participating in team meetings
Thinking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Following a logical process to come up with a practical solution • Making logical, appropriate and timely decisions • Monitoring work situations, anticipating potential problems and acting proactively to stay safe at work • Organizing and prioritizing tasks to use time efficiently and effectively • Remembering standard work processes and procedures • Finding needed information using a variety of sources
Working with others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working independently but also working collaboratively as a team member • Communicating with others to keep discussions moving forward in a positive results-oriented manner
Digital technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Navigating through multiple computer screens to find needed information • Using new technologies introduced into the workplace to complete workplace tasks
Continuous learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning at work - both formally and informally - in order to be able to perform work successfully and adapt to change

Essential Skills: Why should you care?

Why should you care about Essential Skills? Because when workers have the Essential Skills they need to do their work, employers report:

- Enhanced communication and teamwork
- Reduced error rates
- Improved health and safety records
- Higher worker motivation and engagement
- Healthier growth potential
- Faster reaction times when managing change
- A more skilled and adaptable workforce
- Increased efficiency and productivity

Essential Skills: How can you include them?

Always use an Essential Skills lens.

When we say use an Essential Skills lens, we mean view each task according to the Essential Skills required to perform it. Or, if there's a performance issue to be solved: which Essential Skills might be involved and would need to be addressed. Remember that when a person changes jobs in a company, or when there is a change in process or technology: the Essential Skills required also change.

Use the language of Essential Skills.

Essential Skills language provides clear and concrete terms that will help your workers understand the required performance.

Don't make assumptions.

There's nothing common about common sense. What people refer to when they talk about common sense is actually processes and information understood by those already doing the work. Use Essential Skills as the starting point to building a solid foundation for new hires learning what they need to learn. The first step is ensuring they have the Essential Skills knowledge and skills to be able to do that.

Remember to consider the group you're speaking to and the work they are doing in your workplace.

It is important to customize your message to your audience and use actual workplace documents and examples. Be aware that some individuals will require additional information to fill in missing pieces. As well, newcomers to Canada may need additional explanations, examples, time and support.

For example: Workers are expected to record numbers and fill in information needed for checklists, forms, log books, etc.

Use real examples of the workplace documentation to be filled in. Explain the purpose and structure of the document, the technical language used and how it should be filled in. Describe the bigger picture - where a document comes from and where it goes so that an individual can see where they fit into the process.

Start with the end in mind: paint a clear picture of the required performance.

Communicate your expectations for what you want your workers to do. People need to be able to 'see' what makes up a successful end result in order to be able to work toward what you are asking them to do. Include practical examples, show correct as well as incorrect, and always use examples that fit the actual conditions of your workplace. Set expectations for transferring what has been learned to on-going everyday work.

For example: Workers are expected to listen to instructions and explanations and ask for clarification if needed, communicate with others to coordinate work tasks, share information and discuss issues and participate in team meetings.

Talk about what *clear, complete and concise* looks like in your workplace. Share stories and give concrete examples of workers communicating effectively. Describe the consequences of communication problems. Explain that it is appropriate to ask questions - develop a list of questions you would want to be asked on key topics. Define what an explanation should include (and not include).

Model and explain the thinking that you would use while performing a workplace task – not only the what and the how, but also the why.

Talk through the steps that are to be followed and the impact of *not* following these correct steps. Debrief with the group, encouraging questions and comments. Reinforce what people have learned by providing opportunities for practice, reflection and feedback.

For example: Workers are expected to monitor work situations, anticipate potential problems and act proactively to stay safe at work

Identify a number of typical workplace problems to be solved – easy, moderately difficult and more challenging. Think out loud: model and explain the thinking you would follow and the questions you would ask yourself in order to solve these problems.

Support on-going learning.

Create job aids, such as visual steps, flow charts and checklists. Workers can refer to them while on the job when they need to.

For example: Workers are expected to make logical, appropriate and timely decisions. Create and share a flow chart documenting the thought process for making a decision related to equipment failure.

Finally, let them know that additional Essential Skills help is available.

For more information on about the Workplace Essential Skills Training Centres (WEST), they can go to Workplace Education Manitoba's website at www.wem.mb.ca.

The 9 Essential Skills @ Work

Reading @ Work	Reading and understanding written information in the many different types of workplace documents, e.g., work instructions, emails, health and safety bulletins and policy and procedure manuals.
Document Use @ Work	Finding and using the information you need, putting in information where it is needed are called document use. Icons, labels, lists, tables, forms, graphs, signs, maps, gauges, images, schedules, touch screens and technical drawings are examples of documents or information displays used in a workplace.
Numeracy @ Work	Using numbers and thinking mathematically to measure and make calculations, to estimate, to work with money, to analyze trends and to create schedules and budgets.
Writing @ Work	Using the written word to create a clear message.
Oral Communication @ Work	Talking with others to give and exchange information and ideas, such as asking questions, giving directions, making presentations, explaining and persuading.
Working with Others @ Work	Leading, coordinating or collaborating with others on work activities.
Thinking @ Work	Thinking Skills include: problem solving, job task planning and organizing, finding information, critical thinking, significant use of memory and decision-making. Using a thinking process to solve problems, organize and plan, find needed information, be logical, remember things and make decisions.
Digital Technology @ Work	Using information and communication technology.
Continuous Learning @ Work	Applying strategies which support workplace learning and the ability to adapt to change.

Strategies for Problem Solvers @ Work

Every workplace needs good problem-solvers who take timely and appropriate action.

Every day - no matter what our job is - we have to solve problems at work. Problems can be big or small. Some are simple to fix while others require more thinking, time and people to come up with the right solution.

Every workplace needs good problem-solvers who take timely and appropriate action.

Good problem solvers:

- Know that the first step in solving any problem is saying there IS a problem
- Are solution-oriented and confident that a workable solution can be found by using a smart process
- Satisfy themselves that they have accurately defined the problem and that it's the right problem
- Focus on long-term practical solutions
- Gather and consider all the relevant facts and their relationship to each other and to the problem
- Can explain their thinking in a way that is clear, accurate, logical and complete
- Don't jump to conclusions
- Avoid guessing and are careful in their reasoning
- Involve others when required
- Work through the problem methodically and thoroughly from beginning to end
- Don't rely on what worked in the past for what will work in the future
- Break a complex problem into smaller pieces, to be worked through step-by-step
- Evaluate possible solutions for their reasonableness
- Check and re-check
- Understand that moving toward a resolution will require reflection and critical thinking and may involve some disagreement and discomfort
- Confirm they have solved the right problem in a workable and appropriate way

If you would like to learn more about problem solving strategies you can use in your workplace, go to:

http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/workplaceskills/LES/pdfs/learning/problem_solved_employees.pdf