

## Tips for building Essential Skills into training and day-to-day learning opportunities

This section provides tips to help you build Essential Skills (ES) into workplace training (formal) and other day-to-day learning opportunities (informal). They can be used by anyone who provides workplace training. The strategies are suggestions and you are encouraged to modify them or develop your own. You may find it beneficial to contact an Essential Skills advisor for guidance and support.

In this section you will find:

- What are ES?
- Why build ES into training?
- What does building ES into training mean?
- Checklist for identifying required ES for training
- Strategies for building ES into training

### 1. What are Essential Skills?

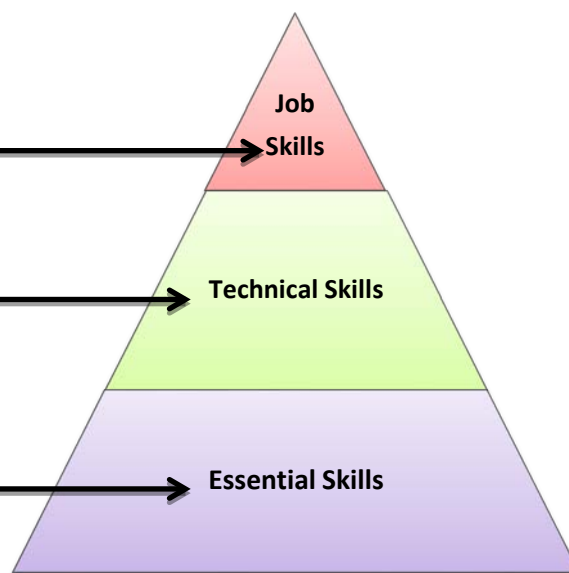
Essential Skills (ES) are the foundation skills needed at work, at school and at home. They provide the foundation for learning new skills and adapting to change. Below is a pyramid that shows the relationship between Essential Skills, technical and job skills.

Employees who struggle with certain Essential Skills may have difficulties with completing workplace tasks and learning skills. For example, some drivers may have difficulties learning new regulations and procedures by reading and calculating weights loads without job aids such as calculation samples and review time during training.

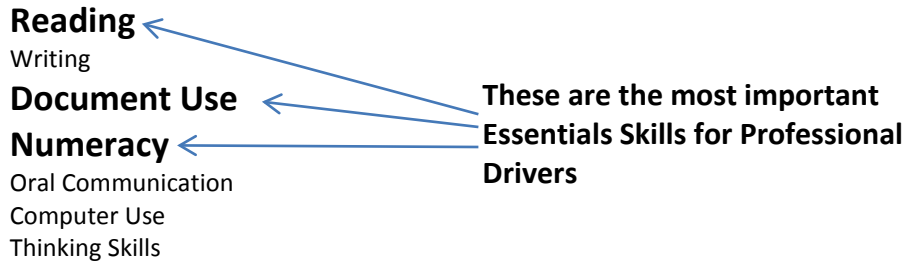
**Job or workplace specific skills**  
are employer and position specific.

**Technical Skills**  
are occupation specific.

**Essential Skills (ES)**  
are the foundation skills for learning. ES are transferable.



The government of Canada has identified Essential Skills such as:



## 2. Why build Essential Skills into training and other day-today learning opportunities?

Both technical and essential skills are used to learn and to transfer new skills into the workplace. This often means using essential skills such as reading, document use, numeracy, writing, computers, etc. in ways that may be unfamiliar. Employees' essential skills levels will vary. For example, some may be good at solving problems, but may have weak reading and numeracy skills.

With an opportunity to review or learn these Essential Skills as part of training employees are able to:

- get the most out of training
- get training that sticks
- transfer training to the workplace

If employees learn and remember and apply the training, it worked. If they don't, you just might be wasting time and money. It is worth getting it right.

Essential Skills	Area of Difficulty
<p><b>Reading</b></p> <p>Employees unfamiliar with and not accustomed to using particular workplace reading materials can find it difficult to:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• locate single and multiple pieces of information</li> <li>• identify relevant and irrelevant information</li> <li>• recall and apply information they have just read</li> <li>• summarize in their own words what they have just read</li> <li>• apply information to workplace tasks</li> </ul>
<p><b>Document Use</b></p> <p>Employees unfamiliar with and not accustomed to using various types</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• understand and use tables, charts, diagrams, schematics, flowcharts and drawings</li> <li>• identify the purpose of documents</li> <li>• identify relevant and irrelevant information</li> </ul>

of documents can find it difficult to:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• apply the information to workplace tasks</li> </ul>
<p><b>Numeracy</b></p> <p>Employees unfamiliar with or not accustomed to completing various workplace math tasks can find it difficult to:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• use correct formulas</li> <li>• locate the numbers needed to make calculations</li> <li>• use a sequence of steps to get an answer</li> <li>• translate a problem into a set of mathematical operations</li> <li>• decide where to start in a process</li> <li>• transfer what they learned solving one problem to another similar problem</li> <li>• see relationships between formulas</li> </ul>

### 3. What does building Essential Skills into training mean?

Building Essential Skills into training and other learning opportunities doesn't happen by accident, stealth or osmosis. Integrated Essential Skills involves the planned, deliberate teaching of relevant Essential Skills alongside the skills required for the other training. In doing so, you assist employees in becoming independent learners who can use the Essential Skills they learn in a variety of ways.

Building Essential Skills into training means:

- anticipating the factors that make tasks more or less complex
- identifying the Essentials Skills underlying workplace and training tasks
- structuring activities to build Essential Skills levels
- providing consistent strategies for learning

### 4. Building Essential Skills into training

#### Step 1: Identify the Essential Skills required for workplace tasks and training

As you plan your training and learning activities, it is important to be aware that some employees come with varying essential skills levels. This does not mean that they lack ability to engage and learn. It does mean that they need help to review and learn some Essential Skills.

The first step is to identify the underlying essential skills used to complete training or workplace tasks. This helps you to determine what essential skills to teach and review.

For example:

- Numeracy tasks: drivers need to use formulae, conversion calculations, and perform calculations using decimals, fractions, rates and ratios to calculate loads and determine load distribution.
- Reading tasks: drivers need to read procedure manuals, codebooks, and operating manuals. They need to know how to navigate these documents to select relevant material and interpret dense and sometimes complex information.

Use the checklist below to identify where and how Essential Skills are used. This allows you to target where to build in opportunities to review and learn Essential Skills during training.

### **Checklist: Essential Skills required for tasks and training**

Which of the following essential skills do employees need for the workplace or training task?

#### **Reading on the job**

- Memos
- Safety information
- Manuals
- Policies and procedures
- Reports
- Others: describe

#### **Document Use (understanding and using documents)**

- Forms (e.g. bill of lading, )
- Checklists (e.g. vehicle inspections)
- Logbook
- Tables and schedules (e.g. weight charts and tables)
- Graphs or charts
- Diagrams, schematics and drawings
- How information is grouped or classified
- Understand symbols, pictures
- Extract relevant information

#### **Numeracy**

- Report numbers accurately
- Round numbers up and down

- Use decimals and percentages
- Perform calculations using addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division
- Use fractions
- Use proportions and ratios
- Use negative numbers
- Approximate, round, estimate
- Identify formats for presenting data (e.g. graph, bar chart, pictogram)
- Extract information presented in rows, columns, lists, blocks, symbols
- Know units of measurement and calculate their value
  - Time
  - Length
  - Height
  - Distance
  - Weight
  - Volume
  - Perimeter
  - Capacity
  - Mass
  - Temperature
  - Volume
- Identify measuring instruments and timing devices and their uses
- Interpret numbers and calibrations on measuring instruments and timing devices
- Check and record units of measure
- Measure using metric, imperial, analogue, digital systems
- Convert between measurement systems

**Use digital technology**

- Word processing
- Email
- Internet
- Entering data
- Satellite technology
- Onboard recorder

- E-logs
- Others: describe

## Step 2: Strategies for building Essential Skills into training

Training and learning activities and workplace tasks often combine several essential skills at the same time. Keep this in mind. Now that you have identified the types of materials and Essential Skills used during training, use the strategies below to help employees review and learn these skills. The strategies have been broken down into 4 areas:

- Overall strategies to build Essential Skills
- Strategies to build document use skills
- Strategies to build reading skills
- Strategies to build numeracy skills

### a) Overall strategies to build Essential Skills during training and other learning opportunities

#### Before training

- ✓ Review material for accessibility and revise if necessary using clear language principles.
- ✓ Develop Essential Skills support materials to make key texts and handouts more accessible to everyone.
- ✓ Create word lists or glossaries of training and task-related terminology for future reference.
- ✓ Provide templates and samples of key writing, document use and numeracy tasks used during training.
- ✓ Provide summaries of the main points of talks to help those who have difficulties with note-taking.
- ✓ Provide samples of numerical operations to practise the particular calculating, estimating or measuring skills required during the course and for the job.
- ✓ Use pictures, props, and examples relevant to the task and workplace.

#### During training

- ✓ Organize information into logical chunks. Start with an introduction; move to more general then to specific details.
- ✓ Use various teaching strategies and materials such as:
  - PowerPoint
  - Small group work
  - Videos

- Flipcharts
- Pictures and samples
- ✓ Follow any “presentation” with a small group discussion and activities. Encourage participants to ask questions.
- ✓ As an alternative to a written test, use ongoing assessment activities throughout the training.
- ✓ Use hands-on activities to increase participants’ familiarity with technical terms and activities.
- ✓ Regularly check in with participants to see how they’re doing.
- ✓ Include visual cues to help participants understand the content and vocabulary.
- ✓ Use words and terms consistently throughout the training. Avoid jargon, acronyms, and abbreviations as much as possible. If you MUST use them, explain them.
- ✓ Clearly introduce each key or technical term. Provide a reference sheet as part of the training package.
- ✓ Do not assume that participants have good reading skills in their first language or in English.
- ✓ Introduce handouts to help employees understand how to use them (e.g. review the structure—Table of Contents, glossary, and so on).
- ✓ Develop and use clear language materials.
- ✓ Provide instructions for computer operations. Don’t assume all professional drivers are comfortable with all of the computer programs they need to use.

## **b) Strategies to build Document use skills into training activities**

Document use is a distinct type of reading task. When using documents, employees will need to locate and understand information or data, but also know how to navigate through tables, graphs, drawings, schematics, and diagrams. Use document use and reading strategies to help them find the information they need.

- Familiarize employees with each document used during training. Discuss the purpose and information it provides.
- Review the structure of the document. The way a document is designed helps people find the information they need. Walk employees through the content and design features such as:
  - ✓ Titles
  - ✓ Headings and subheadings (where and how information is placed)

- ✓ Colours
  - ✓ Font size and style (italics, bold, caps)
  - ✓ Underlining
  - ✓ Boxes
  - ✓ Visual cues: charts, picture, diagrams
  - ✓ Bullets or number lists (number for each heading)
  - ✓ White space
- Explain and demonstrate how information on different documents such as tables, schematics, diagrams and drawings is related.
  - Explain symbols and icons.
  - Review specific vocabulary, technical terms, and abbreviations.
  - Develop and distribute sample templates for documents.
  - Have employees practice using documents the way they will in the workplace.

### c) Strategies to build reading skills into training activities

- Review training and workplace materials (procedures, regulations, manuals, etc.) with employees to help them understand the structure and relevance of the materials.
  - ✓ Explain the structure of the material such as table of contents, paragraph headings, glossaries, appendices, and indexes.
  - ✓ Have employees practice locating information using the table of contents and the index in codebooks, regulations and manuals.
  - ✓ Ask employees to predict what information they will find based on section headings.
  - ✓ Have employees work in groups to practice locating information from several parts of a text or several sources.
  - ✓ As a group, record terms and definitions and post on the wall throughout the training. Provide reference sheets as part of the training package.
  - ✓ Demonstrate and have employees practice highlighting key words, main points, and other important information.
  - ✓ Supplement text with visuals. Procedures can be conveyed quickly with images, diagrams, or flowcharts.
- Explain to employees why they are reading.
  - ✓ Explain what they should learn.
  - ✓ Give a focus to the reading (e.g., hand out questions to answer while reading).



- ✓ Identify and highlight key words in sections to identify important information. Have employees practice this before reading the whole text.
- Have employees use the information they just read.
  - ✓ In groups or pairs ask employees to summarize the information they just read or hand out questions for employees to answer.
  - ✓ Use workplace examples to discuss where and how the information is used and ask for additional ideas from the group.

**d) Strategies to build numeracy skills into training**

- Break down a task into steps and explain each step.
- Provide examples of the math operations and formulae used to complete a task, such as calculations for calculating the volume and weight of a load.
- Provide examples of how to set up and solve numeracy problems related to workplace tasks. Include answer keys, which describe the steps involved.
- Working in pairs or small groups, have participants practice the math operation using workplace tasks.
- Organize sample questions from simple to complex – point out the relationship between math operations to the workplace or learning tasks.
- Create cheat sheets for common formulae and foundation math skills, such as:
  - ✓ ratios
  - ✓ rates
  - ✓ percentages
  - ✓ fractions, and
  - ✓ decimals
  - ✓ conversions between metric and imperial measurements