



## Essentially Yours:

Training in the  
Essential Skills

### What's Next?

#### Getting Ready to Use the Essential Skills

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As we present our second installment of the Essentially Yours: Training in the Essential Skills bulletin, we hope that you are already experiencing a greater understanding of Essential Skills (ES). In our first bulletin we introduced the nine Essential Skills and their definitions, a brief history of the Essential Skills Research Project, the ES website, and Essential Skills Profiles.

One of our goals in this second installment is to provide further clarification of Essential Skills methodology so that adult literacy practitioners can become more comfortable and confident when working with ES tools and resources. We will also offer suggestions for ways in which Essential Skills can be used for assessment purposes and helping learners to set their goals.

As briefly introduced in the first bulletin, National Occupational Classification (NOC) titles provide the framework for the ES Profiles, illustrating the types of duties required by specific jobs, as well as general prerequisites for employment. By exploring the NOC matrix further, it will become clear how practitioners can use the profiles to help learners recognize skills they already have, skills they could develop, as well as occupations they might consider pursuing.

We will continue to highlight profiles that provide examples of Essential Skills and related tasks that transfer easily between the demands of work and daily life. We will also introduce authentic learning materials that have been developed to support ES training, and begin to make suggestions for using the ES definitions and complexity levels to adapt or prepare authentic learning materials of your own.

Finally, we repeat our invitation to share ES strategies, tips, and successes. Please contact Mary-Ann Stark, [fourreds@sympatico.ca](mailto:fourreds@sympatico.ca) for this opportunity to enlighten others.

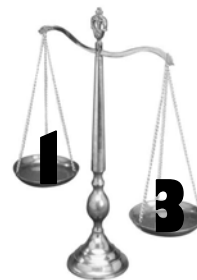
#### INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Simplifying the Complexity Levels	2/3
Dive in!—Continuing to Surf the ES Site	4/5
ES Profiles—How to use the NOC matrix like a pro!	6/7
ES Resources	8
Essential Skills in Action	8

# Simplifying the Complexity Levels

## Finding the Balance Between the ES, IALS, and LBS Scales

The Essential Skills complexity levels are a tool used to rate the difficulty of a particular task. With the exception of Oral Communication, Thinking Skills, and Continuous Learning, the Essential Skills are divided into five levels of complexity. It is not the Essential Skill itself that is rated, but the demands that the required task makes upon the person to complete it. Consider the following examples:



### Reading Text:

Reading material that is in the form of sentences or paragraphs

A complexity level 1 task under the Essential Skill of Reading Text requires that a person “read relatively short texts to **locate** a single piece of information.

*e.g.* A guest service attendant scans labels on luggage tags for the name of the owner

A Reading Text complexity level 3 task requires that a person choose and **integrate** information from various sources or from several parts of a single text.

*e.g.* A baker reads about taste and flavor trends, blending techniques, decorating tips, and industry highlights, and uses the information to enhance his/her baking knowledge.

Note that the Essential Skill does not change; however, the second task presents increasing challenges that require more complex application of the skill.

HRSDC’s Essential Skills Research Project team defined the five ES complexity levels by basing them on the 500-point scale used in the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS). For example, ES Level 1 refers to tasks rated 0–225 on the IALS continuum, or those that indicate very basic literacy skills. At the high end of the ES scale, Level 5 compares to IALS 376-500, or tasks which require significantly more time and prior knowledge to interpret dense and complex texts and make high-level inferences.

Literacy practitioners in community-based literacy agencies might consider referring to occupational profiles where tasks fall under ES Levels 1 and 2, as tasks higher up the continuum may pose too great a challenge for beginning learners.

## Simplifying the Complexity Levels - Continued...

It is important to understand that ES complexity levels do not directly match LBS levels; however, it is possible to create some comparisons. The Ontario Literacy Coalition commented in their 2005 response to the Association of Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology's (ACAAT) *Pathways to Prosperity* consultations <http://www.on.literacy.ca/action/pwp.pdf> that LBS levels 1 through 3 “roughly correspond” to IALS level 1. While there is yet to be a validated articulation, the OLC's reference provides a good working guide. Therefore, it may be safe to say that LBS level 1 through 3 learners are likely capable of completing tasks rated level 1 on the ES complexity scale, since the ES and IALS scales are comparable.

## Complexity Levels Further Explored

For each ES profile, job-related tasks have been identified through interviews with actual workers in that occupation, and examples are provided to show the range of complexity of required tasks. Many of the tasks have also been rated according to whether they are typical and/or most complex.

A typical task is one which is required by virtually all workers in the identified occupation, and one which may occur frequently. Most complex tasks are those identified by some or all workers as being the most difficult of the required on-the-job duties. This rating is influenced by the actual difficulty of the task, the frequency in which the task is performed, and the worker's familiarity with the task. A task may be rated as both typical and most complex.

It should be noted that with reference to most complex tasks, the ratings are often presented as a range, as the complexity of required tasks vary within most occupational groups. For example, if the rating is 2 to 4, it means that all of the jobs within the occupational group involve complexity level 2 tasks, and that some of the jobs include complexity level 4 tasks.

This is useful information for learners who are interested in a particular occupational group that includes some tasks beyond their identified level of proficiency. If the learner is able to perform most of the tasks required, those tasks rated as being most complex could be added to the learner's training plan as targets for further skill development..

# Dive In!

## Continuing to Surf the ES Site

A key goal of the Essential Skills initiative is to encourage the use and development of authentic workplace materials in the classroom. There are many benefits to real life learning in adult literacy programs, and accessing workplace materials from the ES site can help literacy practitioners provide meaningful, individualized activities to interest and motivate learners.



## The Website



- Understanding Essential Skills
- Essential Skills and Workplace Literacy Initiative
- Essential Skills Profiles
- **Authentic Workplace Materials**
- How Can I Use This Site?
- Tools and Applications
- Workplace Resources
- FAQs

### Focus on Authentic Workplace Materials

The collection of authentic workplace materials that appears on the ES website is representative of the variety of forms, charts, manuals, and other documents that workers actually use on the job. While the majority of materials employ the skills associated with Reading Text, Document Use, and Writing, there are several that provide opportunities to develop other skills such as Oral Communication and Numeracy. Again, even though the website focus is on the workplace, the materials lend themselves to being used for activities that enhance other areas of learners' lives where similar skills are required. For example, the sample menu provided for Dietary Technician offers opportunity for learners to challenge and develop more than one Essential Skill. The menu includes Canada's Food Guide recommendations, which learners could reference to determine and track wise choices for daily or weekly meal planning.

By working with a variety of authentic materials, learners with varied goals have an opportunity to benefit from the challenge of mastering an array of skills. They may also develop awareness of goals and objectives, transferable skills, and possible career options.

All materials on the Essential Skills website are available for public use, and are presented in tandem with ideas for how they could be utilized.

## Authentic Workplace Materials - Continued...

Be sure to investigate the *Analysis*, *User Tips*, and the *User Guide Companion to the Authentic Workplace Materials* links for further information and instruction on using or adapting materials to suit your needs.

Unlike textbooks or worksheets, workplace materials generally support the concept of *reading to do*. Exposing learners to text and documents that ask them to respond with action, provides a valuable hands-on experience that best reflects the demands made by everyday items, such as road signs, labels, notices, etc.



### APPLICATION FOR REGISTRATION AND SPECIAL BALLOT

For Canadian citizens residing IN or OUTSIDE Canada  
(See sections 222, 223, 232 and 233 of the *Canada Elections Act*)

EC 78610  
(03/06)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Please fill out ALL sections of this application that apply to you.</li> <li>• PRINT clearly using blue or black ink in the spaces provided.</li> <li>• Attach all necessary documents.</li> </ul>		Electoral district code (of the address in box 9)		FOR OFFICE USE ONLY	
NAME AND PRESENT MAILING ADDRESS (where you wish the ballot to be sent)					
1 Family name		Given name			
Middle name(s)		2 Gender M <input type="checkbox"/> F <input type="checkbox"/>	3 Date of birth (dd/mm/yyyy)		4 Language preference English <input type="checkbox"/> French <input type="checkbox"/>
5 Mailing address (number and street, post office box) where you wish the ballot to be sent					Apt./Unit
City, town, village or municipality			Province, territory, state or district		
Country		Postal code or zip code		6 E-mail address	
7 Telephone numbers, including area code (or country and city code if outside Canada/U.S.) Home: _____ Business: _____			8 Fax number, including area code (or country and city code)		
CANADIAN ADDRESS FOR VOTING PURPOSES (this address determines the electoral district where your vote is counted)					
9 Number and street, or lot, concession, township, range, etc. Do <b>NOT</b> indicate a mailing address, such as rural route (RR), post office (PO) box or General Delivery (GD).					Apt./Unit
City, town, village or municipality		Province or territory		Postal code	

This example illustrates the type of document an administrative clerk (NOC 1441) working for Elections Canada might process, helping voters to complete it, or proofreading to ensure all necessary information has been included. Filling in forms or applications is a task that most LBS learners will be familiar with or able to tackle with training. The Reading and Writing demands for this form are rated at level 1 on the complexity scale, as the text is relatively short, the instructions are simple, and there is less than a paragraph of writing required to complete the task. Practitioners could use this form during an assessment, or incorporate it into an activity or demonstration.



# Essential Skills Profiles

## How to Use the NOC Matrix Like a Pro!

As introduced in our first bulletin, Essential Skills profiles were developed using the National Occupational Classification (NOC) matrix. Understanding the matrix will help you identify relevant occupations when searching the ES profiles, where occupations are listed according to their NOC four-digit code. The NOC code categorizes occupations according to skill type, skill level, and major and minor groups.

Within the NOC matrix, there are 10 skill type categories, ranging from business and finance to management occupations, and four skill levels, identified as Skill Level A through D. Management occupations, including legislators and senior management, exist under the Major Group 00, and do not fall within the regular A through D skill level column. As stated in the first bulletin, it is likely LBS practitioners will deal with occupations that fall within the C and D skill range, which currently includes 10 major and 45 minor groups.

It is worthwhile taking the time to explore the NOC site by going to <http://www23.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/2001/e/generic/welcome.shtml>. Access the *Index of Titles* link to search for jobs that may appeal to your learners. For example, if you were to type *cleaner* into the keyword search box, NOC 6661, the occupational code for Light Duty Cleaner, would appear. Follow that link to reveal a brief description of the occupation, as well as example titles, main duties, and employment requirements.

Practitioners and learners can also access the NOC website by following the National Occupational Classification link on the Essential Skills Profiles main page to perform searches and gather information about the types of duties within a particular occupational group. For example, NOC 8612, Landscaping and Grounds Maintenance Labourers, lists the following samples of main duties:

- Spread top soil, lay sod, and plant flowers, grass, shrubs and trees
- Cut grass, rake, fertilize and water lawns, weed gardens, prune shrubs and trees
- Operate and maintain power mowers, tractors, snow blowers, chainsaws, electric clippers, pruning saws, and other landscape maintenance equipment
- Spray and dust trees, shrubs, lawns and gardens to control insects and disease
- Perform other manual duties to clean and maintain landscaping

## How to Use the NOC Matrix— Continued...

Learners can study the listed duties to confirm their interest in the occupation, and to determine if they have the necessary skills.

To learn how to decode the four-digit NOC codes, follow the *Matrix* link on the NOC website. The decoding formula is as follows:

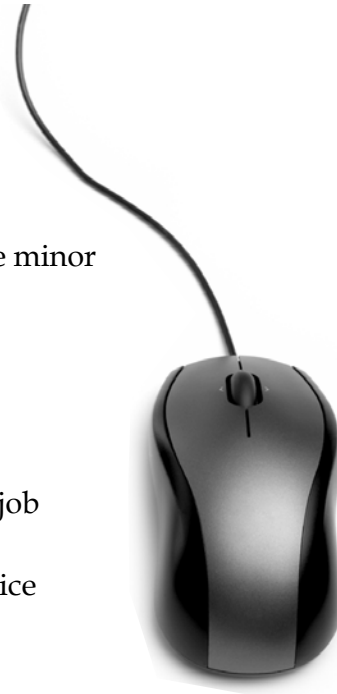
- The first digit represents the skill type or type of work performed
- The second digit represents the skill level (A, B, C, D)
- The first two digits combined represent the major group
- The first three digits combined represent the minor group
- The final digit is added to identify the specific job within the minor group

Using NOC 6661 as an example:

- **(6)**661 represents Sales and Service occupations
- 6**(6)**61 represents skill level D, or occupations where on-the-job training is usually provided.
- **(66)**61 represents the major group, Elemental Sales and Service Occupations
- **(666)**1 represents the minor group, Cleaners
- **6661** is the precise code for Light Duty Cleaners

Being familiar with the major and minor occupational groups is particularly helpful when searching the ES Profiles (on the Essential Skills website) by NOC code.

Learners who are interested in entry level positions in any of the occupational groups, would use the matrix to locate the job type they prefer (e.g. “3” for health occupations) and the compatible skill level (skill level C is represented by “4”). For a more concise search, one needs only to enter “34” (representing major group 34, Assisting Occupations in Support of Health Services) into the search box. This type of focused search provides fewer results making the process less cumbersome or intimidating.



## Essential Skills in Action

Prince Edward Learning Centre in Picton offers Essential Skills training for eight entry-level jobs to prepare learners for the workforce, using Literacy Network Northeast's Connecting to Workplaces curriculum. They also offer a weekly Social Learning class that develops ES through common, everyday tasks such as cooking, computers, and team work projects. "We think in terms of Essential Skills when planning our programs," says Executive Director, Linda Conley. "It's affirming when learners realize all the other skills they use when they're reading and writing."



### Calling all Essential Skills Sleuths!

Karen McGregor, trainer, profiler, and assessor with Kingston Literacy, joins her partner in crime, Lisa Brash, in presenting the E.S.I. Workshop. In a playful spin on the popular CBS series, C.S.I., Karen and Lisa drop adult literacy practitioners into the middle of a murder scene and direct them to find evidence of Essential Skills use in the victim's office. Clues include a laptop displaying an Excel spreadsheet, a suspicious "love" letter, and a magazine article for expectant moms. The workshop has been presented eight times across the province and has been a hit. Talk about putting the mystery *in*, to take the mystery *out* of Essential Skills training!

## Essential Skills Resources

### Making Essential Skills WORK for You.

Laubach Literacy Ontario's Essential Skills workbook is an excellent resource to use for skills assessment, development, and practice. Hard copies are available or download the pdf at [www.laubach-on.ca/Trainingpost/makeswork.html](http://www.laubach-on.ca/Trainingpost/makeswork.html). Activities focus on Oral Communication and Thinking Skills, ES levels 1 and 2; however, other Essential Skills used are identified where applicable. Learners with independence goals will find Chapters 3 and 4 particularly useful as Time Management and Problem Solving are important Essential Skills used in every day life. Practitioners can easily adapt the instructions and worksheets.

### Ontario Skills Passport <http://skills.edu.gov.on.ca/OSPWeb/jsp/login.jsp>

Tried and true. The Ontario Skills Passport (OSP) Resource page is part of the Ministry of Education's Ontario Skills Passport site. Access the resource page through the OSP Toolbox link and follow the OSP Resources link (it takes a few clicks). This resource page provides extra support for training in Essential Skills and work habits. It offers tips and tools for introducing learners to how Essential Skills are used in their daily lives. Materials include a variety of activities and worksheets with plenty of ideas for using them. You can visit the OPS Resource page directly at [www.osca.ca/osp/osp.htm](http://www.osca.ca/osp/osp.htm).

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