

# Workplace Learning

## A Guide to Getting Started





## A Message from the Literacy Coalition of New Brunswick

The Literacy Coalition of New Brunswick (LCNB) is a not-for-profit organization that provides leadership in advancing literacy, lifelong learning and essential skills for all citizens of the province through partnerships and collaboration with government, educational institutions, business, labour, community organizations and individuals.

In recent years, we have expanded our activities to address our province's unemployment rates, identify skills challenges and help New Brunswickers succeed in the labour market through innovative programs, services and partnerships. In developing a more skilled workforce, everyone wins. Employees are better prepared to adapt to workplace change and evolve with their jobs, and employers have a more skilled workforce, improved workplace efficiencies and increased productivity and competitiveness.

We encourage employers, unions and the business and labour sectors to develop a learning culture within the workplace. We have the tools, resources and research-based best practices to help assess workplace needs and match the most relevant learning programs.

In this booklet, we outline how to begin developing a workplace learning culture through assessment, training and evaluation. We also present case studies of employers and employees who have participated in workplace learning programs and share their challenges, strategies and outcomes.

As you read this, consider how your workplace could benefit from workplace learning. After all, this is about improving your own productivity and ultimately benefitting New Brunswick's economy. Please reach out to us for support, resources and referrals. We look forward to hearing from you.

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# Essential Skills in the Workplace

Literacy and Essential Skills are needed for learning, work and life. In the workplace, they are used in every job, provide the foundation for learning all other skills, and help people to adapt to workplace change.

*(Employment and Social Development Canada, ESDC)*

Essential Skills	Examples
<b>1. Reading Text</b> Reading and understanding written materials	Reading safety manuals and employee handbooks
<b>2. Writing</b> Writing text on paper and typing text on computers, cellphones and other devices	Writing emails, letters and reports to co-workers, supervisors and customers, and documenting information
<b>3. Numeracy</b> Using and understanding numbers; thinking in quantitative terms	Performing calculations, taking measurements and creating staff and work schedules
<b>4. Document Use</b> Using and understanding information displays in which words, numbers, icons, charts and other visual materials are used	Understanding product or packaging labels, using a checklist, completing timesheets, and recognizing workplace symbols such as WHMIS
<b>5. Oral Communication</b> Using speech to exchange thoughts and information	Explaining procedures, asking questions to obtain information, and speaking clearly with co-workers, supervisors and customers
<b>6. Computer Use</b> Successfully using computers and technology	Using email to send and receive information and completing work activities with company software
<b>7. Working with Others</b> Working with others to accomplish tasks efficiently	Scheduling and coordinating work with others, meeting team deadlines and asking for help or advice when needed
<b>8. Thinking Skills</b> Using a thought process for problem solving, decision making, critical thinking, planning and memory	Researching product and service information, evaluating advantages and disadvantages of a situation and making a decision
<b>9. Continuous Learning</b> Participating in ongoing processes of acquiring new skills and knowledge throughout life	Finding and using learning materials, participating in training courses, asking for feedback and learning from others

*(Adapted from Employment and Social Development Canada, ESDC)*

## Getting Started: An Overview

These steps will help you assess your workplace and decide on the need for Essential Skills training. Essential Skills training can be integrated into many work activities.

### STEP 1:

#### ASSESS ESSENTIAL SKILLS

Gather information about your workplace to determine if Essential Skills gaps are affecting your organization.

### STEP 2:

#### MAKE DECISIONS ON TRAINING

Decide what you would like to achieve through training and select training methods to help your employees develop their skills.

### STEP 3:

#### IMPLEMENT TRAINING

Develop an in-house training program or hire a trainer and create a learning plan for your employees.

### STEP 4:

#### GAIN SUPPORT

Provide awareness about Essential Skills and the benefits of skills training to your management team and employees.

### STEP 5:

#### EVALUATE THE TRAINING

Determine how the training has impacted your employees, their skills and performance and the organization.

*(Adapted from Taking Action, A Guide to Integrating Essential Skills Training into the Workplace, HRSDC 2009)*



## Assess Essential Skills

The role of an organizational training needs assessment is to guide an employer in deciding which skills need improvement.

By gathering information about your workplace, you will better understand the skill level of your employees and the skills needed to perform their jobs.

### 1. How are employees performing?

Observe employees and their performance, and obtain feedback from managers, trainers, supervisors and employees to determine:

- ☐ Job tasks that are difficult for employees to complete
- ☐ Job-specific tasks that need to be improved

### 2. What skills are needed for different jobs?

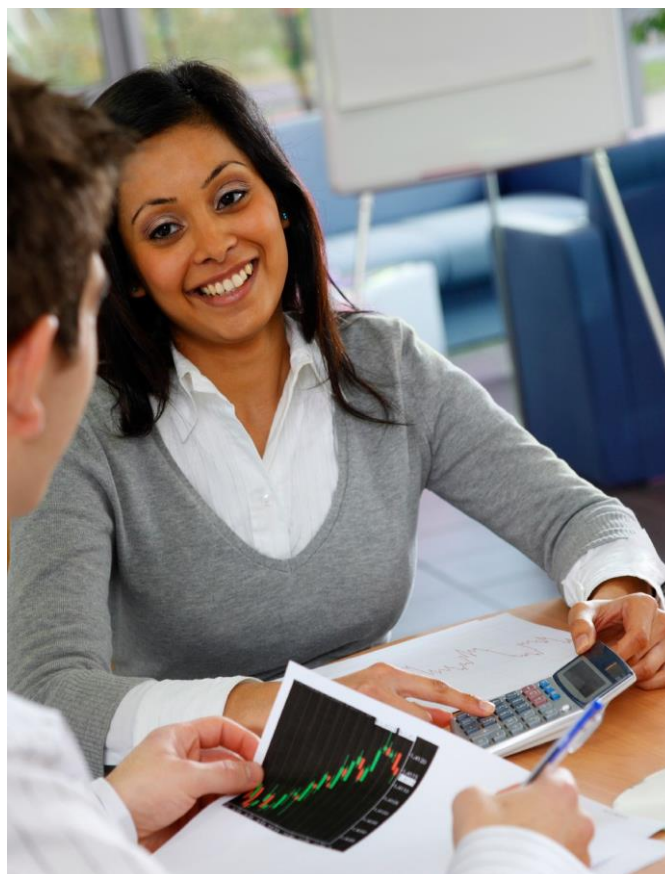
Review job descriptions, responsibilities and tasks for each occupation and obtain feedback from others in the workplace to determine:

- ☐ Essential Skills needed to perform job duties
- ☐ Skill level and complexity

### 3. What skills need to be developed?

Review the information gathered about your employees' performance and the skills needed for the job to identify:

- ☐ Skills gaps that are affecting performance
- ☐ Employees needing skills improvement



### Tools and Resources:

Assessment tools and resources help employers and employees learn more about skill levels, identify strengths and areas for upgrading and determine where additional training is needed. **Visit the Essential Skills website at [www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/jobs/les/tools](http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/jobs/les/tools).**

### Essential Skills Profiles

Profiles are available for different occupations and can be used to assess Essential Skills and identify training needs.

**For more information, visit [www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/jobs/les/profiles](http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/jobs/les/profiles).**

*(Adapted from Taking Action, A Guide to Integrating Essential Skills Training into the Workplace, HRSDC 2009)*

## STEP 12:

# Make Decisions on Training

An organization needs to determine if training is really needed; whether it's relevant, will address a business need and will solve an organizational issue.

### 1. What does your organization want to achieve through training?

- ☐ Increased productivity and competitiveness
- ☐ Improved workplace health and safety practices and records
- ☐ Reduced staff turnover and absenteeism
- ☐ Improved employee motivation and performance
- ☐ Enhanced employee and customer relations
- ☐ Increased quality of work

### 2. Which of the Essential Skills are training priorities?

Consider factors such as budget, staff availability, training options and future business plans.

### 3. What types of training will you offer in the workplace?

Ask the following questions:

- ☐ How many employees require training?
- ☐ When do employees need to begin training?
- ☐ Can training be scheduled during working hours? On-site? Off-site?
- ☐ Can employees use job site materials and equipment in training?
- ☐ Can you include Essential Skills training in existing classroom training (i.e. safety training)?
- ☐ Do employees have access to computers and are they comfortable using them?
- ☐ How will employees receive feedback?

*(Adapted from Taking Action, A Guide to Integrating Essential Skills Training into the Workplace, HRSDC 2009)*



## Methods of Training

Using more than one training method may be the most effective way to help employees develop their skills.

### Classroom Training

Training takes place in a classroom, on-site or off-site.

### E-learning

Online training that is self-paced or facilitated by a trainer.

### On-the-job Training

Supervisor or co-worker demonstrates how to perform a skill, task or procedure.

### Mentoring

A more experienced employee works with another employee to develop new skills.

### Self-Study

Without direct supervision, an employee learns on their own or through a workplace initiative.

## Implement Training

Develop an in-house training program or hire a trainer and prepare a learning plan to decide:

- ☐ Who will participate in the training?
- ☐ How and when will the training take place?
- ☐ How much will the training cost?
- ☐ How will the new skills be integrated into the workplace?

Help employees to improve and practise the Essential Skills by:

- ☐ Using authentic and relevant workplace materials for training
- ☐ Ensuring workplace materials are clear and easy to use
- ☐ Tracking progress and providing feedback for employees

### STEP 4:

## Gain Support

For training to be successful, it is important to obtain support from employees, managers and other stakeholders.

Key factors for gaining support include:

- ☐ Establishing a project team
- ☐ Engaging employees in the decision-making process
- ☐ Tracking results and impact of the training on employees and the organization
- ☐ Promoting the achievements, results and benefits of workplace skills development



*(Adapted from Taking Action, A Guide to Integrating Essential Skills Training into the Workplace, HRSDC 2009)*

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## STEP 5:

### Evaluate Training

Determine how the training has impacted your employees, their skills and performance and the organization. You can gather this information through surveys, interviews, observations and assessments.

#### Evaluation Questions:

- Did the employees find the training useful? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Somewhat
- Which areas of training need improvement? \_\_\_\_\_
- How do the employees plan to use the training? \_\_\_\_\_
- How did the employees' knowledge improve? \_\_\_\_\_
- How are the new skills being used in job tasks? \_\_\_\_\_
- What skills have improved as a result of training? \_\_\_\_\_
- How did the training affect job performance? \_\_\_\_\_
- How has the training impacted the workplace in ways such as increased sales or improved customer service? \_\_\_\_\_

*(Adapted from Taking Action, A Guide to Integrating Essential Skills Training into the Workplace, HRSDC 2009)*



# THE WORKPLACE ESSENTIAL SKILLS (WES) PROGRAM

Training for today's challenges and tomorrow's opportunities.

The Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour has collaborated with business, industry, community and labour organizations to deliver Workplace Essential Skills (WES) training to employed individuals and job seekers throughout the province. The program is offered in the public and private sectors, in both official languages.

The WES training maximizes the skills and resources of New Brunswickers to ensure the competitive edge, innovation and efficiency needed to lead business into a prosperous future.

The WES team works with employers to identify labour-force gaps and assist with workforce recruitment, retention and adaptation. Specific to the needs of the employer and the employees, the WES team designs and delivers Essential Skills training that:

- makes use of real work scenarios, authentic workplace materials and documents;
- applies newly learned skills with immediate, visible results;
- offers flexible day/evening hours of on-site training to meet workplace demands.

No matter where your business/organization is located in New Brunswick, there is a WES team ready to:

- conduct workplace training needs assessments.
- create Essential Skills Profiles for occupations in the workplace.
- develop and deliver quality training and resources.
- offer continued support throughout the training process.
- measure how well training objectives and employers' expectations are being met.

Employers are exploring WES training for current and future employees. The following case studies highlight the success of New Brunswick businesses and organizations that have participated in workplace Essential Skills training.

For more information, please contact:

**[www.gnb.ca/training](http://www.gnb.ca/training)**

## CASE STUDY:

# Maisons Suprêmes (Tracadie-Sheila, NB)

Workplace Essential Skills (WES) Acadian Peninsula

### The Challenge

Modular home building company Maisons Suprêmes employs 140 people with schooling ranging from primary to post-secondary. With goals to expand, the company recognized the importance of offering training to employees. Management identified some gaps in the team leaders' task execution in terms of certain skills like oral communication, teamwork, reading, writing and math.

### The Goal

Maisons Suprêmes wanted to empower and engage team leaders with improved competencies, communication skills and confidence. It wanted to strengthen the learning culture and adapt to meet the requirements of the workplace.

### The Strategy

Workplace Essential Skills (WES) program

### The Delivery

- ☑ A project team was established comprised of the production director, an HR representative and the Acadian Peninsula WES team.
- ☑ Skills gaps were identified through the creation of employee profiles.
- ☑ Training was offered on-site according to the "Skills Approach".
- ☑ Learning activities reflected the specific skills needed.
- ☑ 14 team leaders participated on a volunteer basis.
- ☑ Training took place during work hours 6 hours a day, 4 days a week: a total of 178 hours of training.

### The Results

- Team leaders acquired confidence, communication and leadership skills in addition to improved product knowledge.
- Maisons Suprêmes experienced increased productivity, a reduction in absenteeism, improved adaptability to change and greater employee engagement.



## CASE STUDY:

# Assumption Life

## The 70/20/10 Rule of Learning

### The Challenge

In 2001, insurance company Assumption Life was struggling with unmotivated employees who were receiving training that lacked relevance to necessary skills. Although the HR department had a training budget of \$20,000 to \$50,000 a year, it was not seeing a significant ROI.

### The Goal

Assumption Life wanted to ensure a training program would produce an ROI for both the company and the learner by keeping costs down and having employees learn from each other rather than paying for external training. This would make learning part of a person's job and tied to their performance objectives.

### The Strategy

The company initiated the 70/20/10 Rule of Learning:

- 70%: informal, on-the-job learning
- 20%: focused learning, coaching/mentoring
- 10%: external training

### The Delivery

- ☑ Employee competencies were assessed.
- ☑ Learner profiles were developed for each position in the company.
- ☑ Learning was made part of a person's job and tied to their performance objectives.
- ☑ Coaching and mentoring offered modeling, practice and exposure.
- ☑ Software was purchased to develop e-learning modules for specific skills needed by employees.
- ☑ Follow-up was conducted to analyze success of skills training.
- ☑ Employee satisfaction surveys were recorded.

### The Results

- Employees acquired relevant skills.
- In 2011, the employee turnover rate dropped to less than 5%.
- Annual employee satisfaction surveys on training and development showed improved ratings.
- Assumption Life was named one of the 100 Best Places to Work in Canada (2010) and the 5th Best Place to Work in Atlantic Canada.

*"It would be nice to train everyone, but you have to justify it. It has to be tied directly to core competencies, and then to the position and then finally to performance."*

– Rachelle Gagnon,  
Director of Human Resources



## Programs and Services:

Please contact these organizations for more information on Literacy and Essential Skills in the workplace.

### LITERACY COALITION OF NEW BRUNSWICK

The Literacy Coalition of New Brunswick provides Literacy and Essential Skills tools and resources for the workplace, as well as a referral service for programs and support.

1-800-563-2211  
lcnb@nb.literacy.ca  
www.nb.literacy.ca

### CONSEIL POUR LE DÉVELOPPEMENT DE L'ALPHABÉTISME ET DES COMPÉTENCES DES ADULTES DU NOUVEAU-BRUNSWICK

If you would like to know more about Francophone programs in New Brunswick please contact le Conseil pour le développement de l'alphabétisme et des compétences des adultes du Nouveau-Brunswick (CODAC-NB).

1-866-473-4404  
info@codacnb.ca  
www.codacnb.ca

### LAUBACH LITERACY NEW BRUNSWICK

Laubach Literacy New Brunswick (LLNB) offers literacy and numeracy training in communities throughout the province. Volunteer tutors work with adults in need of basic literacy skills.

(506) 384-6371  
laubachliteracy@nb.aibn.com  
www.llnb.ca

### WORKPLACE ESSENTIAL SKILLS

The Workplace Essential Skills (WES) Program provides customized Essential Skills training in the public and private sectors, in both official languages throughout the province.

1-877-444-0510  
www.gnb.ca/training

## RESOURCES:

### EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT CANADA (ESDC)

www.hrsdc.gc.ca

ESDC offers a variety of free, easy-to-use customizable tools to support workplace learning. These resources can help you to learn more about Essential Skills, assess an individual's or organization's learning needs, and support skills development on the job and in the workplace.

### TEST OF WORKPLACE ESSENTIAL SKILLS (TOWES)

www.towes.com

What is TOWES? The Test of Workplace Essential Skills offers assessments, curriculum and training support for organizations and individuals looking to assess and improve Essential Skills. TOWES assesses Reading Text, Document Use and Numeracy.

### COPIAN

www.copian.ca

COPIAN provides information and knowledge-sharing services to the Literacy and Essential Skills field connecting people to information, tools, resources, and expertise.

### THE CANADIAN SOCIETY FOR TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT (CSTD)

www.cstd.ca

CSTD is a national, professional association focused on training, learning and performance in the workplace. The goal of CSTD is to drive excellence in workplace learning and development, impacting business success. It provides research, case studies, professional certification, and workplace resources and tools for training and development of professionals.

## NOTES

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