

Formation continue

pour adultes et entreprises

essential

Working with
the Community

Practitioner's
guide

skills

CEGEP
DE L'OUTAOUAIS

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TOOL DEVELOPMENT AND INSTRUCTOR GUIDE

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Background

With regards to the Association of Canadian Community Colleges' (ACCC) project Working with the Community, the Direction de la formation continue, Cégep de l'Outaouais, wishes to add to the steps taken by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada by presenting a tool developed in the capacity of "College Leader" in the project category "Landed Immigrants Intervention".

Client selection is based on the expertise gained with this clientele through a practice firm called O'Bois International founded in 1997, harboured at the Cégep de l'Outaouais Campus, dedicated to continuing education and member of the Canadian Practice Firms Network (CPFN).

Although this tool could be developed for various occupational profiles, the version we present is tailored to the occupation of **Accounting and Related Clerks**. This occupation is the common denominator between our Cégep and the experimenter colleges of this project.

Introduction

This tool was conceived to give learners¹ the opportunity to evaluate themselves, as well as to gain and enhance essential skills and work habits needed for work, learning and every day life. This guide applies to a wide range of educators².

This tool consolidates real tasks in the workplace. Thanks to this tool, learners can identify, develop and improve their essential skills. This tool is first and foremost a self-evaluation of **essential skills** and work habits. Although there are nine essential skills, in this project, we have opted to work with three of these skills.

The chosen essential skills are:

- **oral communication:** fundamental skill to successfully integrate the workplace;
- **use of documents** : major skill for anything concerning business procedures manuals, forms, instructions and policies whatever the occupation;
- **Thinking skills:** skill needed at work to better adapt to the cultural difference within a Canadian or Quebec company.

This choice was made after discussions with practice firm practitioners, exchanges with the Canadian Practice Firms Network and discussions with the Cégep de l'Outaouais Francization Consultant.

The chosen skills are also closely linked to the integration of immigrants, their community and their workplace.

An inventory of the tools used by partners, the integration of respective concerns for creating a common tool and the testing possibilities are high potential elements of this project.

¹ Participants and students

² Teachers, practitioners, practical training supervisors

Introduction to Essential Skills

Essential skills are the skills people need for work, learning and life. They are the basis of learning among all other skills and are the cornerstone of continued education. These skills are used in almost all occupations and activities of daily life, by various means and at various levels.

Human Resources and Skills Development Canada lists nine essential skills. As learners, workers and members of the community, we use essential skills daily. The tasks linked to essential skills are real tasks performed in activities of daily living and in the workplace, such as reading a brochure to find out about a physical education class, writing a note to a co-worker, or the road to take to get from one place to another. A person with solid essential skills is like a well rooted tree: its roots allow the person to develop and be protected during difficult times. Also, people with solid essential skills are able to face changes more easily and transfer what they have learned from one context to another. When necessary, they can adapt more easily. This ability makes them less vulnerable to the changes that may occur in their professional or personal life.

Nine Skills

- ✓ Reading Text
- ✓ Writing
- ✓ Document Use
- ✓ Computer Use
- ✓ Working with Others
- ✓ Oral Communication
- ✓ Numeracy
- ✓ Continuous Learning
- ✓ Thinking Skills

Learning these skills helps to fully participate in the Canadian job market, especially for **immigrants**. This also results in a more trouble-free evolution within the business as well as a faster adaptation to changes arising regularly in the workplace.

Essential skills are used to complement technical skills. They allow for better integration of the job market, thus making it possible to maintain a job within a business.

Tasks associated to essential skills have a very definite structure based on well documented and internationally recognized knowledge. When learners explicitly and intentionally use their essential skills, they are able to build on the skills they have, integrate the skills they are developing and know how to use these skills at work and in life, to enhance their education or training.

The methodology surrounding essential skills works according to a recognized international scale – between 1 and 4 or 5 – to describe the complexity of the tasks. Each task associated to essential skills may be analysed with this scale according to their level of use. Each essential skills scale can be used as a common language with which learners, educators, employers and other members of the community can meaningfully discuss the requirements concerning skills and levels of skills.

Presentation of Complexity Rating of Skills

Essential skills levels were established by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC) with respect to essential skills. Skill levels have been attributed to each task associated with an occupation. For each essential skill, less complex tasks are rated level 1. More complex tasks are those rated as level 4 or 5. For example, if a task requires you to follow simple written instructions, such as instructions on a bottle of cleaning solution, you will have to demonstrate level 1 skills relating to reading text. If a task requires you to interpret complex information needing specialized knowledge, such as scientific terminology and concepts, you should demonstrate level 4 for skills relating to reading text.

It is important for the educator to master the complexity ratings for the three essential skills being evaluated with this tool. The following pages will serve as "guidelines" for the complexity ratings, and will help the educator evaluate the learner throughout his training or practical training.

Document use

Reading different types of material such as labels, signs, lists, tables, graphs, forms, diagrams, blueprints and other similar material.

Tasks at skill levels 1 to 5 involve the following:**Level 1**

- Using one document that is simple in content and structure (e.g., sign, label, list)
- Carrying out limited searches for information and/or entering only a few pieces of information
- Using or entering information only in the form in which it is found (e.g., entering it word for word on a list)

Level 2

- Using one or more documents that are of the same type, that are simple in structure, and that contain several pieces of information (e.g., simple tables)
- Using one or two criteria or elements to guide a search for one or more pieces of information
 - Performing limited analysis (e.g., rearranging information in order to make simple comparisons)

Level 3

- Using many documents that may be of different types (e.g., graphs, tables) and that are organized in quite complex ways (e.g., in sections with subheadings)
- Using various criteria to guide a search for information OR using the results of one search as a starting point for other searches
- Analysing, selecting, and integrating information before using it or entering it

Level 4

- Using many documents of different types (e.g., forms, charts, graphs) or a complex document that presents a lot of information
- Using various criteria to locate many pieces of information, developing the criteria if necessary, OR using the results of one search as a starting point for other searches
- Synthesizing information from various sources and evaluating it for accuracy before using it or entering it

Level 5

- Using many documents of different types or a very complex document that presents a lot of information
- Using various criteria to locate many pieces of information, developing the criteria if necessary, OR using the results of one search as a starting point for other searches, developing the search criteria if necessary
- Evaluating information with regard to all aspects of its quality, and drawing conclusions from it

oral Communication



is the ability to use speech to share thoughts and information. Strong **oral communication** skills are essential to being able to present your ideas clearly in a variety of situations such as: explaining procedures to a co-worker; giving directions to a friend; or dealing with customer service to discuss a problem with your phone bill.

Tasks at skill levels 1 to 4 involve the following:

Level 1

- Communicating orally in simple ways (e.g., responding to everyday inquiries, obtaining specific information)
- Dealing with facts involving few details
- Communicating, usually with one person at a time, in an everyday and predictable context using an established format and style

Level 2

- Communicating orally in moderately demanding ways (e.g., exchanging detailed information, reassuring a client, explaining procedures)
- Dealing mostly with facts that are moderately complex and detailed, and also with opinions
- Communicating with one or more people at a time in an everyday and largely predictable context (e.g., in a familiar setting), using a range of formats and styles, and dealing with minor conflicts

Level 3

- Communicating orally in demanding ways (e.g., persuading, counselling)
- Dealing with complex and detailed matters involving facts, concepts, and opinions
- Communicating with one or more people at a time in occasionally unpredictable contexts (e.g., meetings with unfamiliar people), using a wide range of formats and styles, and dealing with conflict when necessary

Level 4

- Communicating orally in very demanding ways (e.g., solving complex problems)
- Dealing with very complex and detailed matters, using language that is conceptual and/or technical
- Communicating with one or more people at a time in quite unpredictable contexts, adapting a wide range of formats and styles to suit the person or group, and dealing with significant conflicts or differing points of view (e.g., leading negotiations)

Thinking Skills**Job Task Planning and Organizing**

refers to the extent to which workers plan and organize their own tasks. It does not refer to involvement in the planning function for the organization in which they work.

Tasks at skill levels 1 to 4 involve the following:**Level 1**

- Performing tasks that are done in an established order
- Performing tasks that are rarely disrupted
- Performing tasks that do not require coordination with the work of others

Level 2

- Planning and organizing their work within a limited framework
- Performing tasks according to the priority assigned to various categories of tasks by someone else
- Performing tasks that may be disrupted but the day's work plan is not changed
- Coordinating some of their work with the work of others

Level 3

- Planning and organizing their work following general guidelines
- Establishing the order in which their tasks are completed, subject to the supervisor's approval
- Making adjustments to the order in which their tasks are done, or rescheduling tasks or people
- Coordinating and integrating their work with that of others

Level 4

- Planning and organizing their work with complete authority
- Establishing the order in which tasks are completed
- Frequently making adjustments to the order of tasks, rescheduling tasks or people, or setting new priorities
- Creating and maintaining links with the work of others

Thinking Skills**Decision Making**

refers to making a choice among options. Decision making occurs during problem solving, but not all decision making is part of problem solving

Tasks at skill levels 1 to 4 involve the following:**Level 1**

- Making a decision in a situation in which all relevant information is known; in which limited judgement is needed; and in which decisions can be easily reversed
- Following a standard procedure in which exceptions are clearly defined
- Using similar decisions from the past as models

Level 2

- Making a decision in a situation in which most relevant information is known; in which some judgement is needed; in which errors have minor consequences; and in which decisions can be reversed with only some inconvenience and/or expense
- Following a standard procedure in which exceptions require some interpretation
- Using comparable decisions from the past as models

Level 3

- Making a decision in a situation in which some information is uncertain; in which considerable judgement is needed; in which errors have significant consequences but can be corrected; and in which decisions can be reversed only with considerable difficulty
- Following a standard procedure that allows a lot of room for personal interpretation
- Using somewhat similar decisions from the past as models

Level 4

- Making a decision in a situation in which important information is not known; in which excellent judgement is needed; in which errors have significant consequences and either cannot be corrected or can only be corrected at great cost; and in which the decision cannot be reversed or can only be reversed with great difficulty and/or at great expense
- Making the decision in a situation in which there are no established procedures or models of similar decisions to guide decision making

Thinking Skills**Problem Solving**

involves problems that require solutions. Most problems concern mechanical challenges, people or situations.

Tasks at skill levels 1 to 4 involve the following:**Level 1**

- Dealing with simple problems that are easily identified and have a limited number of factors
- Selecting the prescribed solution for a problem
- Checking that the problem has been solved

Level 2

- Dealing with problems that are of moderate difficulty and that have several factors, most of which are clearly defined
- Identifying the problem and selecting the most appropriate solution
- Determining whether the solution was successful

Level 3

- Dealing with difficult problems that have a broad range of factors, some of which are difficult to define
- Selecting the best procedure for identifying the problem, and modifying an existing solution, if necessary
- Determining whether the solution was successful, and identifying the need for any further action

Level 4

- Dealing with very difficult problems that have a broad range of factors, some of which are unpredictable or conflict with other factors
- Designing the procedure for identifying the problem, and providing an original solution
- Identifying criteria for determining whether the solution was successful, and assessing the solution in relation to these criteria

Thinking Skills**Finding Information**

involves using any of a variety of sources including text, people, computerized databases or information systems.

Tasks at skill levels 1 to 4 involve the following:**Level 1**

- Consulting established sources (e.g., telephone book, airline flight schedule, software manual or hotline) that are provided for the worker
- Using information only in the form in which it is obtained (e.g., telephone numbers, flight times, instructions in a word processing package)

Level 2

- Identifying and consulting specific sources that are easily located (e.g., supervisor, co-workers, brochures, websites)
- Selecting information according to established criteria (e.g., compiling a list of books, contacting suppliers to obtain specific information)

Level 3

- Conducting a search for specific information (e.g., locating witnesses to a crime, collecting samples for environmental tests, researching scientific articles)
- Analysing and using the information found (e.g., information from manuals and/or charts, information from injured persons about their medical history and current condition)

Level 4

- Gathering information from several different sources (e.g., technical manuals, maps, government regulations) OR doing original research (e.g., developing a new vaccine)
- Conducting complex analysis and/or synthesis (e.g., analysing information from a variety of sources) in order to develop a solution to a problem

National Occupational Classification (NOC)

Occupations and tasks linked to those used in this tool all stem from the NOC.³

The National Occupational Classification is the nationally accepted reference on occupations in Canada. It organizes over 30 000 job titles into 520 professional group profiles. The NOC is used daily by thousands of people to compile, analyse and communicate information about occupations, and to understand the jobs found throughout Canada's labour market.

The NOC provides a standardized framework for organizing the world of work in a coherent system. It is used to collect and organize occupational statistics and to provide labour market information. The structure and content of the NOC is also implemented in a number of major services and products throughout the private and public sectors.

The NOC is updated in partnership with Statistics Canada according to five-year Census cycles. It is based on extensive occupational research and consultations conducted across the country, reflecting the evolution of the Canadian labour market.

³ NOC (National Occupational Classification) for more information, visit the site <http://www5.rhdcc.gc.ca/CNP/English/CNP/2006/IndexProfessions.aspx>

How to Use this Tool?

Assessing the learner's essential skills is a six step process:

1. **Presentation:** The practitioner must explain the concept and the use of essential skills in the workplace. This simply means demonstrating how they are the basis for learning all other skills and the cornerstone of continuing education. Furthermore, the practitioner must present an occupational description (*page 5 in the Participant Handbook*) based on the NOC which depicts the level of complexity for each essential skill. The following table is an example of an occupational description based on the NOC.

NOC Code: 1431	Accounting and Related Clerks				
Essential Skills	Competency Rating				
Use of Documents	1	2	3	4	5
Oral Communication	1	2	3	4	
Thinking Skills					
• Job Task Planning and Organizing	1	2	3	4	
• Decision Making	1	2	3	4	
• Problem Solving	1	2	3	4	
• Finding Information	1	2	3	4	

2. **Self-evaluation Pre-training.** Allows the learner, with the help of his practitioner, to evaluate his essential skills. Throughout the self-evaluation, we provide learners with a certain number of tasks and ask them to indicate their level of knowledge and to provide proof of their skills in this area. Each task is linked to a skill and to a level of complexity.

This step is crucial for both the learner and the practitioner as it provides the opportunity to discover the skills on which the learner will have to work! This tool is designed to give learners the opportunity to position themselves against real occupational tasks and past experiences.

3. **Self-evaluation Diagnostic:** Upon reading the self-evaluation, the practitioner's role consists in evaluating the degree of proficiency with regard to the task's complexity rating. Then, one by one, the practitioner must read the examples provided by the learner. He must validate the participant's skills in this area by checking the box "Agree" or "Disagree". The participant must get a note of 80% of the boxes checked "Agree" in the same complexity rating for the practitioner to award the level. For example, if the skill "Use of documents" has five level 2 tasks, the participant must get at least four "Agree" results for the practitioner to award him or her the level 2.



Here, the practitioner must master and understand the different complexity ratings for each essential skill. To do this, please refer to page 7 of this document.

4. **Scorecard:** At the end of the self-evaluation, the learners' results are presented by means of a "scorecard". The self-evaluation scorecard displays the learners' personal results and offers him or her the choice of comparing these results to the occupational skills.

Why must we accumulate 80% to succeed?

To pass the self-evaluations on essential skills, one must get a note of 80% — not 60 % (i.e.: MELS). A note of 80% better reflects employers' expectations in the workplace where an employee not having reached the 80% expectations might have difficulty to progress or even to keep his or her job.

To "pass" an exam, one must usually answer correctly 60% of the questions, which means that 40% of the answers could be wrong. In most jobs, a rate of error of 40% would probably result in financial loss for the business and a short career for the worker. International standards have set the measure of "skills" at 80%, which means there is a strong possibility that tasks with the same level of difficulty would be carried out correctly.

5. **Development Plan:** This section allows participants, with the help of the practitioner, to identify the skills that need to be honed, and set training and upgrading goals that allow them to reach the desired level of skills.

The practitioner may help participants identifying the courses or possible training and development they will have during training or practical training which will enable them to upgrade their essential skills. Furthermore, a list of Internet sites concerning essential skills is also available (page 57 in the Participant's Handbook).

6. **Self-evaluation *Post-training*:** This section is identical to the Self-evaluation *Pre-training*. It must be done at the end of the training or practical training. Steps 3 and 4 are also the same for this self-evaluation. The goal is to observe the evolution of the skills. The scorecard will indicate the participant's **final profile**.



The practitioner's work is as important as that of the participant for this tool because learning these skills helps to fully participate in the Canadian job market, especially for immigrants. This also results in a more trouble-free evolution within the business as well as faster adaptation to changes arising regularly in the workplace.