Defining Essential Skills

Essential Skills are the foundational skills required to successfully participate in the Canadian labour market. Definitions, typical applications and actual workplace examples are outlined below to help readers understand each Essential Skill.

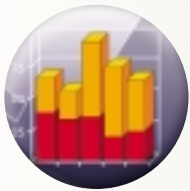| Essential Skill	Typical Applications	Workplace Example
Reading Text Reading materials in the form of sentences or paragraphs	• Scan for information • Skim for overall meaning • Read a full text to understand, learn, critique or evaluate • Integrate and synthesize information from multiple sources or from complex and lengthy texts	An airline sales and service agent reads notices on a computer screen, such as special handling requirements for a specific flight or weather information that will affect flight times.
Document Use Tasks that involve a variety of information displays in which words, numbers, symbols and other visual characteristics (e.g., lines, colours or shapes) are given meaning by their spatial arrangement	• Read signs, labels or lists • Interpret information on graphs or charts • Enter information on forms • Read or create schematic drawings • Read or create assembly drawings	A bricklayer interprets blueprints to establish the height, length and thickness of walls, and the materials to be used.

Numeracy
Using numbers and thinking in quantitative terms to complete tasks
	• Numerical estimation
	• Numerical calculation
	  • Money math
	  • Scheduling or budgeting and accounting math
	  • Measurement and calculation math
	  • Data analysis math
		Payroll clerks monitor departmental budgets and vacation entitlements to prepare budgets and scheduling forecasts.
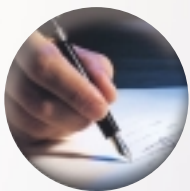
Writing Writing text and writing in documents, such as filling in forms, and non-paper-based writing such as typing on a computer	• Organize, record or document • Inform or persuade • Request information or justify a request • Present an analysis or a comparison	Human resources professionals write policy papers to provide recommendations on a wide variety of human resource matters such as workplace health and safety.

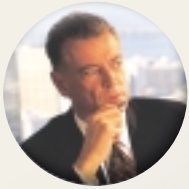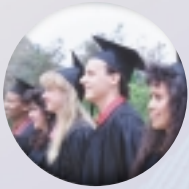| Essential Skill	Typical Applications	Workplace Example
Oral Communication Using speech to give and exchange thoughts and information	• Greet people or take messages • Reassure, comfort or persuade • Seek or obtain information • Resolve conflicts • Facilitate or lead a group	General office clerks take messages and relay information, by phone or in person, to other workers.
Working with Others Employees working with others to carry out their tasks	• Work independently • Work jointly with a partner or helper • Work as a member of a team • Participate in supervisory or leadership activities	A municipal engineer works collaboratively with other departments, as well as with technicians, inspectors, suppliers and others to complete construction projects.
Thinking Skills The process of evaluating ideas or information to reach a rational decision	• Problem solving • Decision making • Critical thinking • Job task planning and organizing • Significant use of memory • Finding information	Paramedics make a working diagnosis of a patient's condition based on notes, patient charts and their own observations. If information on the charts is inconsistent with their observations, they use their judgement to initiate an appropriate treatment plan.
Computer Use Using different kinds of computer applications and other related technical tools	• Operate a computerized cash register • Use word processing software to produce letters or memos • Send e-mails with attachments to multiple users • Create and modify spreadsheets for data entry	Telephone information operators use customized software to scan several databases for telephone numbers and long distance rates.
Continuous Learning Workers participating in an ongoing process of acquiring skills and knowledge	• As part of regular work activity • From co-workers • Through training offered in the workplace • Through off-site training	Retail sales associates upgrade their product knowledge by communicating with suppliers and manufacturers as well as by viewing videos on product lines.