

Communication

Canada



**Issues and Challenges in Communicating
With Less Literate Canadians**

Final Report
Revised October 2002



Communication
Canada

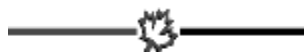
Canada

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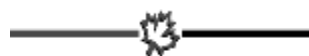


Acknowledgements

This study on government communications with less literate Canadians was initiated and directed by Communication Canada as part of its mandate to improve communications between the Government of Canada and Canadians. For this purpose, Communication Canada works with other government departments and agencies to inform Canadians about the government services available to them. In conducting projects such as this one, Communication Canada strives to promote sustained improvement in government communications as well as to support and to advise government communicators by making available the results of citizen-based research.

This study would not have been possible without the cooperation of Canadians who responded to the survey and who participated in the interviews. We wish to thank them. We would also like to stress the exceptional contribution of many departments and governmental agencies, as well as that of public opinion research companies. We would like to thank everyone who, in one way or another, was involved in this project. In particular, we would like to thank Ms. Marla Waltman Daschko from the National Literacy Secretariat, Mr. Michel Gauthier from Human Resources Development Canada, Mr. Jean Pignal and Ms. Lynn Barr-Telford from Statistics Canada, and Ms. Céline Brisebois, Ms. Faye Linseman and Ms. Karen Suchorab from the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency. Special thanks go to Mr. Martial Ménard who was involved in the early stages of this study. For performing the quantitative and qualitative studies, special thanks also go to Mr. Duncan McKie from Pollara, Mr. Yves Déziel and Mr. Kerry Butt, both from COGEM, and their colleagues.

Finally, it is also important to highlight the collaboration of Ms. Wendy Desbrisay of the Movement for Canadian Literacy, as well as of Ms. Luce Lapierre, from the *Fédération canadienne pour l'alphabétisation en français*, and of their colleagues.



Summary

Since its creation in 1996, Communication Canada has launched various public opinion research and analysis projects related to government communications. Over the course of these projects, many communication challenges facing various segments of Canada's population were identified. Given its awareness of the particular situation of less literate Canadians, Communication Canada undertook, in the spring of 1999, an analysis of the various sources of information concerning this important group within society. At the beginning of 2000, Communication Canada researched aspects of public opinion regarding these Canadians. The main results of the research are presented in this report and were discussed with Government of Canada representatives from the communication sector during a session held in June 2000.

In brief, less literate Canadians represent a major challenge for the government communications community, both in terms of communication approaches for the general public, as well as in terms of the promotion of specific services by various government departments or agencies. The main results, obtained from the national survey of less educated Canadians conducted in February 2000, are as follows.

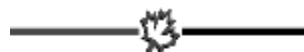
- Unfamiliar with the services and initiatives taken by the Government of Canada, this group wishes to be informed not only about issues they consider priorities (health care, employment and education), but also about matters that are important to them in their everyday lives (health care, hospitals, doctors, aging, pensions, etc.). They are relatively pessimistic about their future and critical of government.
- Television is their main source of information, especially in the evening. Others prefer the radio, especially in the morning. They do not spend much time reading newspapers.
- While they have very little interaction with the Government of Canada, a significant number of them call upon a relative or friend to communicate with the government on their behalf.
- When they do choose to contact the Government of Canada themselves, they prefer direct contact with one of its representatives, mostly by telephone. Not many of them wish to be informed through automated systems (kiosk or telephone) or through the Internet.
- In general, they consider the information they receive to be difficult to understand and they believe that it does not respond to their needs. Many of them believe that they cannot totally rely on the information transmitted.



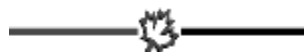
CHARACTERISTICS OF LESS EDUCATED CANADIANS Summary of Findings	
<i>General Considerations</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They are less optimistic, less self-confident and find change difficult. • They are critical of government performance. 	
<i>Information Needs</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They want to be informed, but are not always sure about what. • They have the same priorities as other Canadians, that is, health care, education and unemployment, but they are not familiar with initiatives that have already been taken. • They are more focussed on day-to-day concerns. 	
<i>Perceptions Relating to Government Communications</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They have greater difficulty understanding information and recognizing information sources. • They are ambivalent about whether the information they receive meets their needs. • They are uncertain about whether they can fully rely on the information conveyed. • They contact the Government of Canada less frequently. • They rely heavily on others to obtain information (relatives, friends, professionals). 	
<i>Communications Vehicles</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They watch a lot of television, which is their main source for all kinds of information, especially in the evenings. • They are apprehensive about new developments in information technology, including the Internet. • They want to be informed through government advertising, as much on television as in print. 	

At the qualitative level, less literate Canadians are very sensitive to the way information is made available to them. Participants in the interviews were asked to share their reactions to government advertising and to express their preferences. The main results are presented in the following table. These results should be used with caution, bearing in mind their limitations from a statistical standpoint.

Upon examining these findings, it appears that governments have not fully succeeded in transmitting easy-to-understand information that adequately meets the needs of less literate Canadians. More effort will have to be made to adapt government communications to the particular needs of this major segment of the population, so that they may take full advantage of the services available to them.



EXPECTATIONS REGARDING COMMUNICATIONS	
In its communications, the government gives <i>too much importance</i> to the following elements:	In its communications, the government <i>should give more importance</i> to the following elements:
<i>General Considerations</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scientific explanations; analyses; reports, studies • Themes; key words; generic names of programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal life experiences; practical examples (what is good or bad) • Information that is relevant and useful in their everyday lives
<i>Issues and Challenges</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generalizations; insisting on what may happen in the future • New initiatives; solutions as opposed to results • References to written documents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immediate solutions applicable to real problems; evolving solutions with short-term impact • Demonstrations that solutions correspond to real needs, concerns or aspirations in everyday life (results, in other words) • Precise instructions (steps to follow) to accomplish the tasks they have been asked to do
<i>Format, Presentation</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complex language, technical terms, administrative jargon or acronyms that are difficult to understand • Modern computer graphics techniques; colour writing on white background • The public servant “voice” • The maximum information within the available space (quantity as opposed to quality) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear and simple language; words known and used by many people; clearly displayed information; large print • Black writing on a light/white background; an image with which they can identify is worth a thousand words • Real-life situations; personal testimonials • Easily understandable information (quality as opposed to quantity)



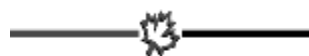


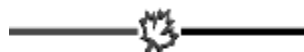
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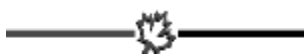
Summary

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1 – Issues Related to Literacy in Canada

Definition of Literacy

Literacy is defined as the ability of individuals to use printed and written information to function in society, reach their objectives, broaden their knowledge and increase their potential.¹ This definition makes reference not only to the level of education, but also to the mode of behaviour requiring regular use of reading and writing skills to accomplish a task. There are some major challenges for government communications in such a context. Written materials are everywhere: information leaflets, forms, Internet sites, advertising and media articles on government activities. In addition, visual information is often based on written texts, so that understanding this information often calls upon the logic of the written word.

The most comprehensive and most recent literacy data, published by Statistics Canada in September 1996, clearly demonstrates how serious these challenges are.²

- **48% of Canadians aged 16 years and over** (10.2 million individuals) **have difficulty understanding and using information** contained in texts such as editorials or articles or in instructions of the type found, for example, on medication. These are called narrative texts.
- 47% of Canadians aged 16 years and over have difficulty extracting and using information presented in various forms, notably on job applications, transportation schedules, road maps, tables and graphs. These are called schematic texts.
- 48% of Canadians aged 16 years and over do not have the knowledge or necessary abilities to perform math problems based on printed documents. For example, they have difficulty calculating a tip or they find it difficult to use information in an ad to calculate the amount of interest on a loan. These are called texts with quantitative content.

Among Canadians who have difficulty extracting, understanding and using the information they receive, there are significant differences, suggesting that even **within these groups, our communications approach should be further targeted** and adapted to intended groups using appropriate communication tools.

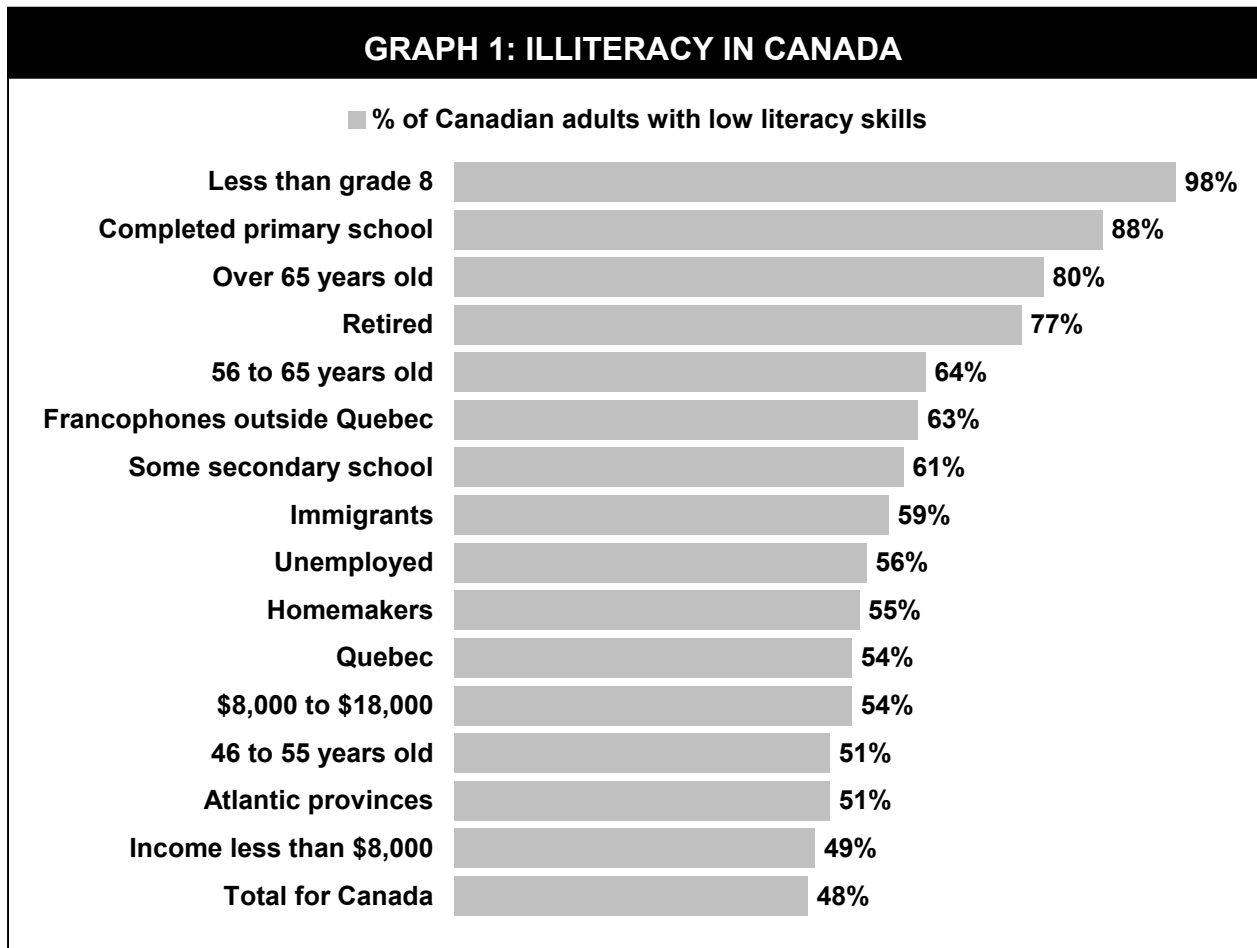
¹ *Reading the Future: A Portrait of Literacy in Canada*, by Statistics Canada, Human Resources Development Canada and the National Literacy Secretariat (September 1996).

² For more details on the results of this study, see Appendix A.

Socio-economic Characteristics

Canadians who have difficulty reading and writing can be found in all demographic and socio-economic groups, without exception. They are present, therefore, to varying degrees, in all client groups. Contrary to popular belief, literacy problems do not affect only the less educated, the poor or the marginalised.

This being said, **the proportion of less literate people is higher** in some population groups (Graph 1). This is the case among **citizens above the age of 56, people with less than a Grade 9 education, retired people, homemakers, the unemployed, low-income individuals, and immigrants**. By province, the proportion of less literate people is higher than the Canadian average in Quebec, the Atlantic region, and among francophones outside Quebec.



Source : *Reading the Future : A Portrait of Literacy in Canada*,
 Statistics Canada, Human Resources Development Canada and the National Literacy Secretariat
 (September 1996)

Description of the Study

Objectives

As part of its mandate to improve communications between the Government of Canada and its citizens, Communication Canada investigated the serious challenges posed by the issue of literacy in Canada. The main objective of the present study is to improve our knowledge of this significant segment of the Canadian population within the context of a communications approach for the general public and the services intended for specific clientele.

Beyond the general context of government communications, we asked less literate Canadians about their information needs. We asked about the ways in which they interact with the Government of Canada, about their assessment of government communications and about their usage and preferences among various vehicles of communication. Finally, based on case studies, we drew out various key elements regarding the content of government communications.

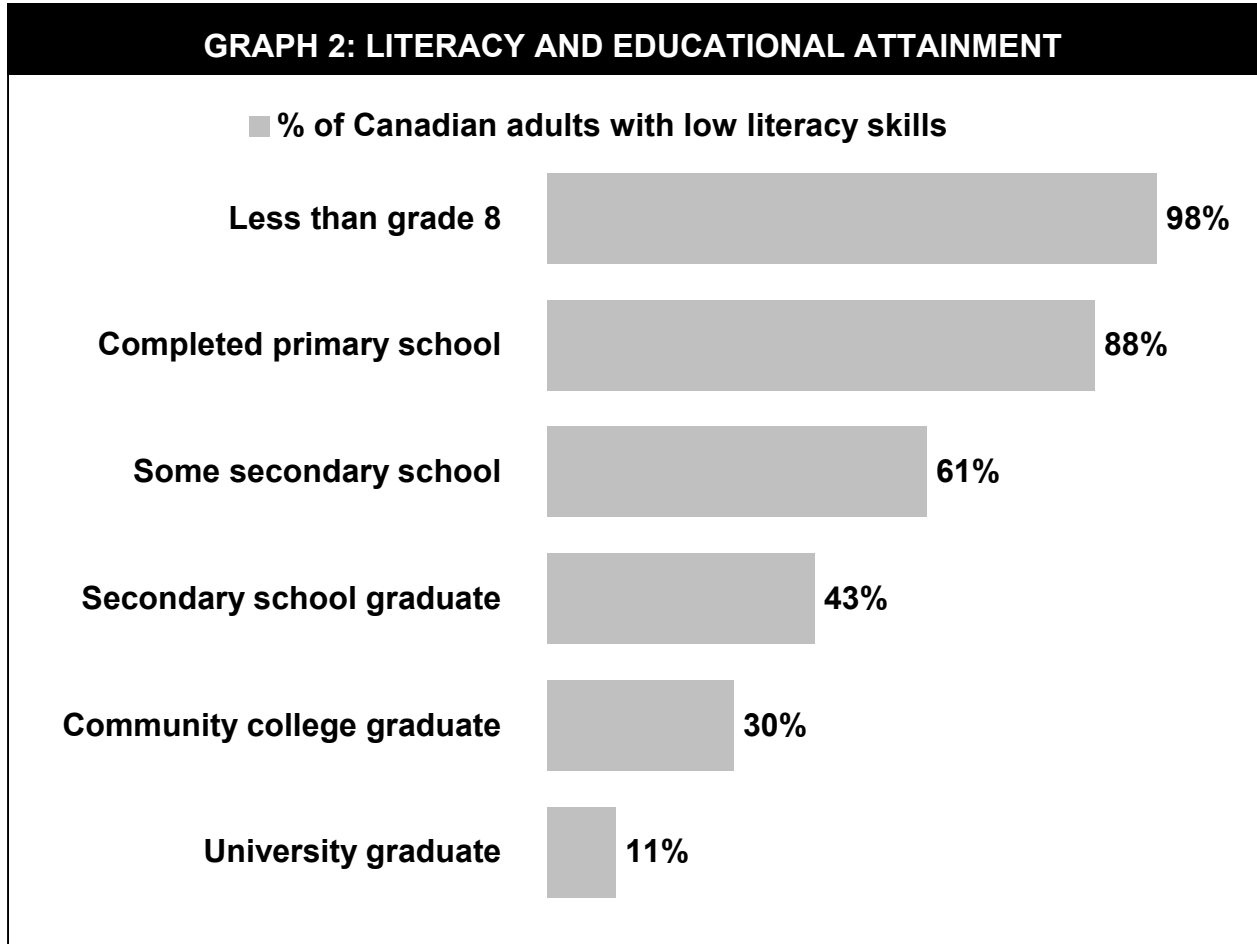
To achieve our objective, we used a variety of quantitative and qualitative analysis tools, as well as several works on the subject, notably the following:

- a **national survey** of 1,003 less educated Canadians, conducted by Pollara between January 7 and February 2, 2000, including a pre-test of the survey with eight discussion groups;
- **quarterly surveys** on government communications conducted each time among 4,000 Canadians, undertaken by Ekos for Communication Canada between October 1998 and February 2000; and
- **individual interviews** with 46 less literate Canadians, conducted by COGEM in May 2000.

National Survey

Given the major difficulties in identifying and reaching less literate people (as defined by Statistics Canada) through a telephone survey, we limited sampling in the national survey to Canadians with less than a Grade 9 education.

As demonstrated in Graph 2, the work by Statistics Canada shows a close connection between one's level of education and one's ability to understand written material. For example, 98% of those who did not complete Grade 8, and 88% of those who only completed Grade 8, have serious reading difficulties.



Source: *Reading the Future: A Portrait of Literacy in Canada*,
 Statistics Canada, Human Resources Development Canada and the National Literacy Secretariat
 (September 1996)

Communication Canada’s national survey³ of less educated Canadians was conducted among 1,003 adult respondents with less than a Grade 9 education (42% of whom did not complete Grade 8, with the remaining 58% having done so). Among all respondents, there was an almost equal proportion of men (49%) and women (51%). Half of the respondents were at least 65 years of age, one third (31%) of them were between 50 and 64 years of age, and one fifth (19%) of them were 49 years of age or less. That the proportion of elderly people is relatively important is borne out in work done by Statistics Canada (September 1996), which shows that 80% of individuals over the age of 65 and 64% of those aged 56 to 65 have low levels of literacy (Graph 1).

With regards to occupation, 23% of respondents were employed, 6% were unemployed or looking for a job, and 2% were studying. The others were retired (56%) (reflecting the large proportion of elderly people), were homemakers (9%), had a disability or were in poor

³ The margin of error for such a sample is +/- 3.1%, 19 times out of 20. The 15-minute survey contained more than 20 questions, which were pre-tested with target population segments and in discussion groups (8 in total: 4 in Montreal and 4 in Halifax).

health (3%). As for their personal situation, more than one third of respondents lived alone (34%) or with a child (4%); others were couples with children (26%), couples without children (27%) or couples living together with another adult (5%). By household income, approximately three quarters of the households had an income below \$40,000, while 6% had an income above \$60,000.

Quarterly Surveys on Government Communications

Since October 1998, Communication Canada has conducted quarterly surveys on government communications. The main results of these studies are available on Communication Canada's Web site (www.communication.gc.ca).

Unless otherwise indicated, the results in the present document were taken from the winter 2000 survey, conducted between February 1 and February 21. Of all survey respondents (more than 4,000 respondents), 160 stated they had less than a Grade 9 education.⁴ The margin of error for such a sub-sample is more than 8%, so the results must be used with caution. In general, we did not use the results that were significantly different from the national average.

Interviews

The interviews made it possible to further examine the results obtained from the quantitative analysis, notably regarding the habits and realities of this population group in both their choice and use of information. These interviews, combined with the results of other recent studies, also made it possible to evaluate the perceptions that less literate Canadians have of certain government advertisements, particularly in terms of information (language, text structure, format and colour).

The interviews targeted citizens enrolled in literacy programs.⁵ It is important to note that these individuals are rarely found in the most illiterate groups and are perhaps less isolated than others.

⁴ These results may seem low (less than 5% of the sampling). According to Statistics Canada, in 1996, the percentage of Canadians with less than a Grade 9 education was nearly 12%. Experience shows that this population group tends to overestimate its level of education when responding to a survey.

⁵ In this regard, we would like to thank the organizations that received us and organized the interviews, in collaboration with COGEM.

2 – General Context

Perspectives

The results of our various government communications surveys conducted since October 1998 have shown that less educated Canadians are in general **less optimistic and have difficulty adapting to change**. The results from the fall of 1999 reveal the following:

- 56% of less educated respondents said they were optimistic, compared to 77% of the population as a whole, but at the same time, 17% responded that they were pessimistic in comparison to the national average of 9%;
- less educated Canadians are more prone to believe they have lost all control over their economic future (40% versus the national average of 30%); and
- more than 75% of less educated respondents feel that the world around them is changing so quickly they have a hard time keeping up (as opposed to 47% of the population as a whole).

The results confirm those obtained in a study conducted in May 1997 by COGEM⁶ for Revenue Canada (now the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency), which suggest that less literate Canadians **often avoid any new or different situations**.

Perceptions of Governments

According to the results of the national survey of less educated Canadians and the quarterly surveys on government communications, this group is **critical of government performance**.

- Less than one third of less educated Canadians (30%) consider the general performance of the Government of Canada to be good.
- In the quarterly government communications survey conducted during the winter of 2000, 40% of Canadians considered the performance of the Government of Canada to be good. The corresponding percentage was only 35% among less educated respondents. Similar trends were obtained for provincial governments.
- Less educated Canadians are less prone to believe that the Government of Canada is moving in the right direction (47% of such Canadians reported this belief in the government communications survey of the winter of 2000, whereas 56% of all respondents reported feeling that way).

⁶ *Besoins d'information et stratégies des Canadiens ayant un faible niveau d'alphabétisme*, by COGEM for what was then Revenue Canada, May 1997.

During the interviews conducted in May 2000, participants indicated that they make little distinction between the various levels of government. They largely associate government with politicians rather than with available government program and services.

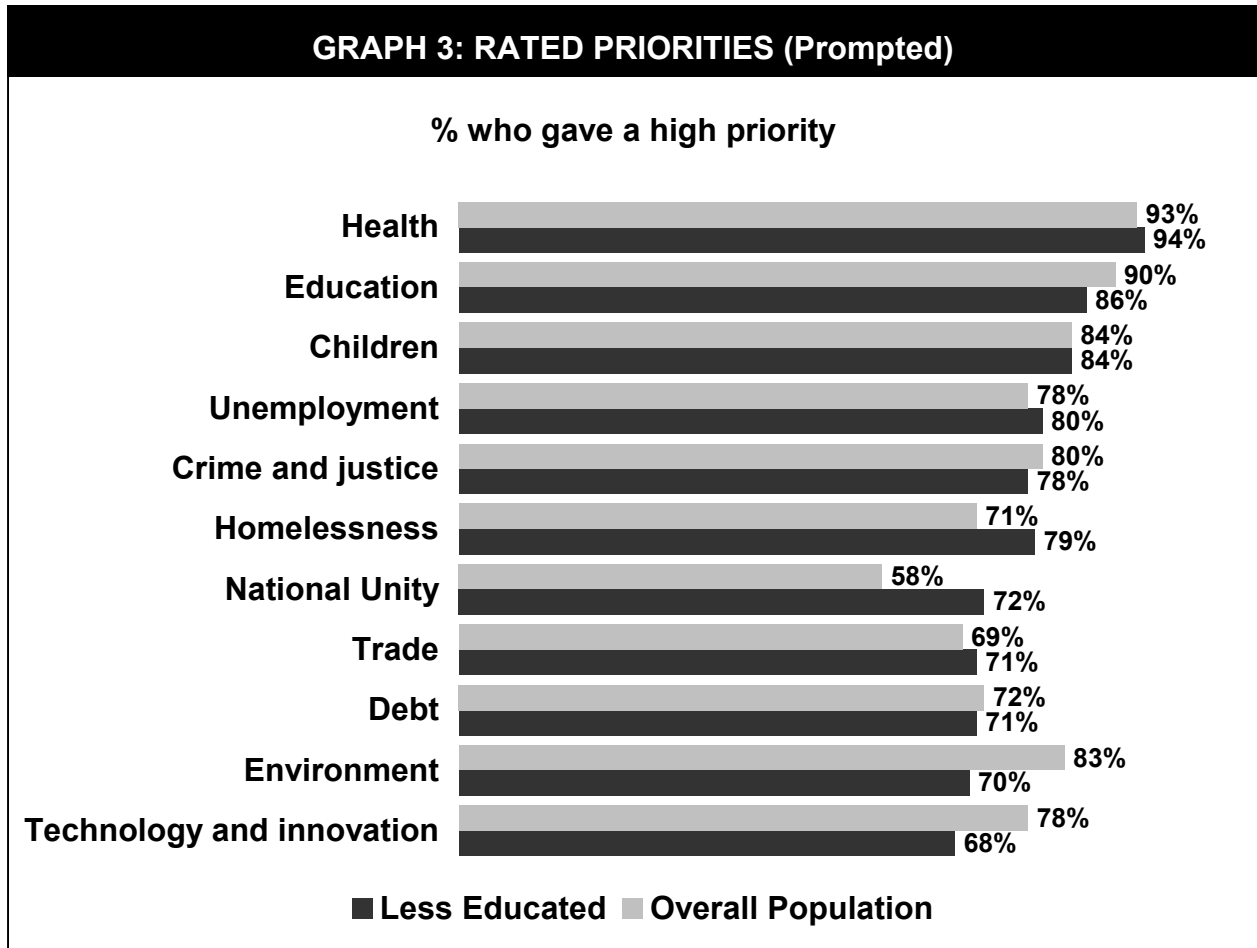
Priorities and Concerns

Investing in the health care system is by far the most important government priority identified by less educated Canadians (Table 1). Ranked second are priorities directly associated with improving the quality of life: unemployment, poverty and taxes.

TABLE 1: GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES	
<i>“When you think about the problems facing Canada today, what do you think the Government of Canada’s priority should be?”</i>	As a percentage of the total number of respondents
Investing in the health care system	18%
Reducing unemployment/Creating jobs	9%
Reducing poverty	7%
Reducing taxes	5%
Immigration	4%
National unity	3%
Reducing the public debt	3%
Investing in education	3%
Ensuring the well-being of Canadians	2%
Helping the homeless	2%
Others	19%
Don’t know/No answer	25%
Total	100%

Source: *National Survey of Less Educated Canadians*,
Communication Canada, February 2000.

All Canadians essentially share the same order of priorities (Graph 3).⁷ However, a higher proportion of less educated individuals are of the opinion that the Government of Canada should give a **high priority to national unity and homelessness**, reflecting perhaps a higher level of uncertainty regarding their own future and that of the country. On the other hand, a smaller number of less educated Canadians feel that the Government of Canada should give high priority to the environment and to technology and innovation, issues that appear to preoccupy them less.



Source: *Quarterly Survey on Government Communications*, Communication Canada, Winter 2000.

⁷ These results are different from the previous ones in that Canadians were asked about a given set of priorities for the next five years. Table 1 refers to an unprompted question (with only one answer) on today's priorities.

3 – Information Requirements

Needs

Less educated Canadians **want to be informed by the Government of Canada** (Table 2), not only about issues that are a priority for them (health care, education and employment) but also about situations and concerns that are relevant to their everyday lives (health care, hospital issues, doctors, pensions, aging, GST, seniors' issues, government spending and social programs, to name but a few). These results, which focus on everyday life, were corroborated by the interviews conducted in May 2000.

TABLE 2: INFORMATION NEEDS	
<i>“What particular subjects would you like to receive information about from the Government of Canada?” (unprompted)</i>	As a percentage of the total number of respondents
Health care system/Hospital issues/Doctors	11%
Pensions/Old Age/Disability/Widow	9%
Taxes/Income tax/GST	9%
Seniors issues	6%
Government spending/Budget/Deficit	5%
Education	3%
Employment/Unemployment	3%
Social programs/Poverty/Homelessness/Well-being	3%
Nothing/Receive enough	14%
Don't know/No answer	36%
Total	100%

Source: *National Survey of Less Educated Canadians*,
Communication Canada, February 2000.

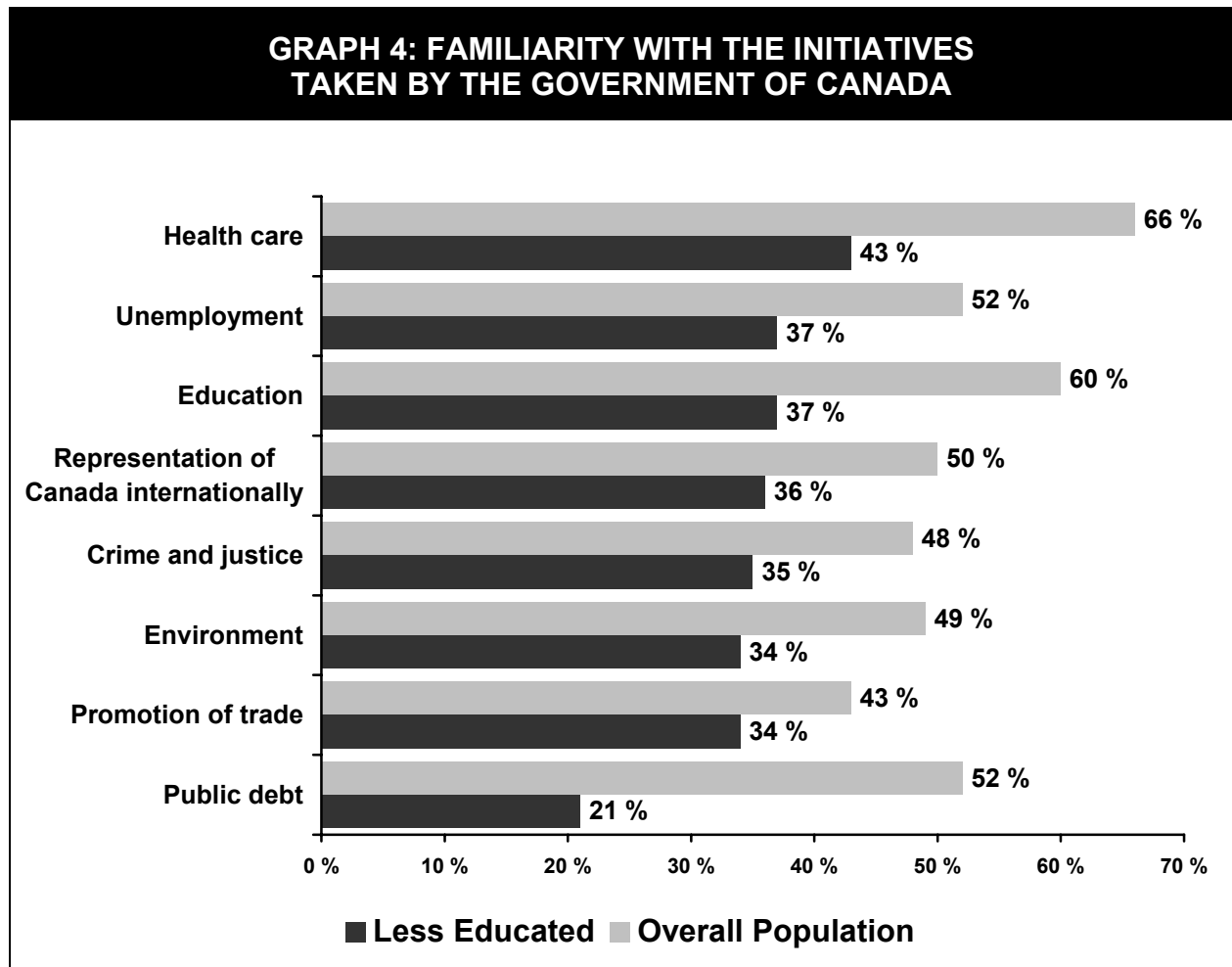
It should be noted in the previous table that just over one respondent in ten receives enough information from the Government of Canada. **More than one out of three, however, do not know or cannot identify their needs in terms of information.** In this regard, during the interviews, participants expressed little interest in taking the steps necessary to be informed. For many of them, that is the government's responsibility.

« *Quand ils changent une loi sur l'allocation, le chômage, les autres affaires comme ça, ils devraient l'expliquer, envoyer une lettre, le dire à la TV...* »

“They know where I am, if they want to tell me anything.”

Familiarity with Government Initiatives

Less educated Canadians are **much less familiar with the initiatives taken by the Government of Canada** (Graph 4) in various priority areas. This is especially true of issues that concern them the most (health care, education and employment).



Source: *Quarterly Survey on Government Communications*, Communication Canada, Fall 1999.

Interaction with the Government of Canada

The national survey of less educated Canadians showed that only one respondent in four had communicated with the Government of Canada within the last year.⁸ Interviews conducted in May 2000 indicated that less literate Canadians are **not very enthusiastic about the prospect of contacting government and perceived that doing so would be difficult.**

Asked about the means used to contact the Government of Canada, **a very clear majority used the telephone** (Table 3). Less than half visited a government office in person. About one third used the mail. Very few respondents communicated via the Internet or used an automated information booth in a public place.

TABLE 3: POINTS OF CONTACT WITH THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA	
<i>“Did you contact the Government of Canada by...?”</i>	Percentage of the respondents who answered “Yes”
Telephone	81%
Visiting a government office	41%
Mail	30%
Internet	5%
Automated information booth in public place	5%

Source: National Survey of Less Educated Canadians, Communication Canada, February 2000.

These findings are all the more important in light of a topic that arose repeatedly during the focus groups held as part of the survey questionnaire design phase.⁹ In these groups, numerous participants voiced their frustration with using the telephone. During the interviews held in May 2000, a few participants said they were especially frustrated with frequent transfers from one service to another, long periods of time spent waiting on hold and no knowledge as to with whom they were speaking. The quarterly surveys on government communications have demonstrated the close links that exist between the quality of service delivery and Canadians’ assessments of government performance. The service-performance correlation is evident for the population as a whole.

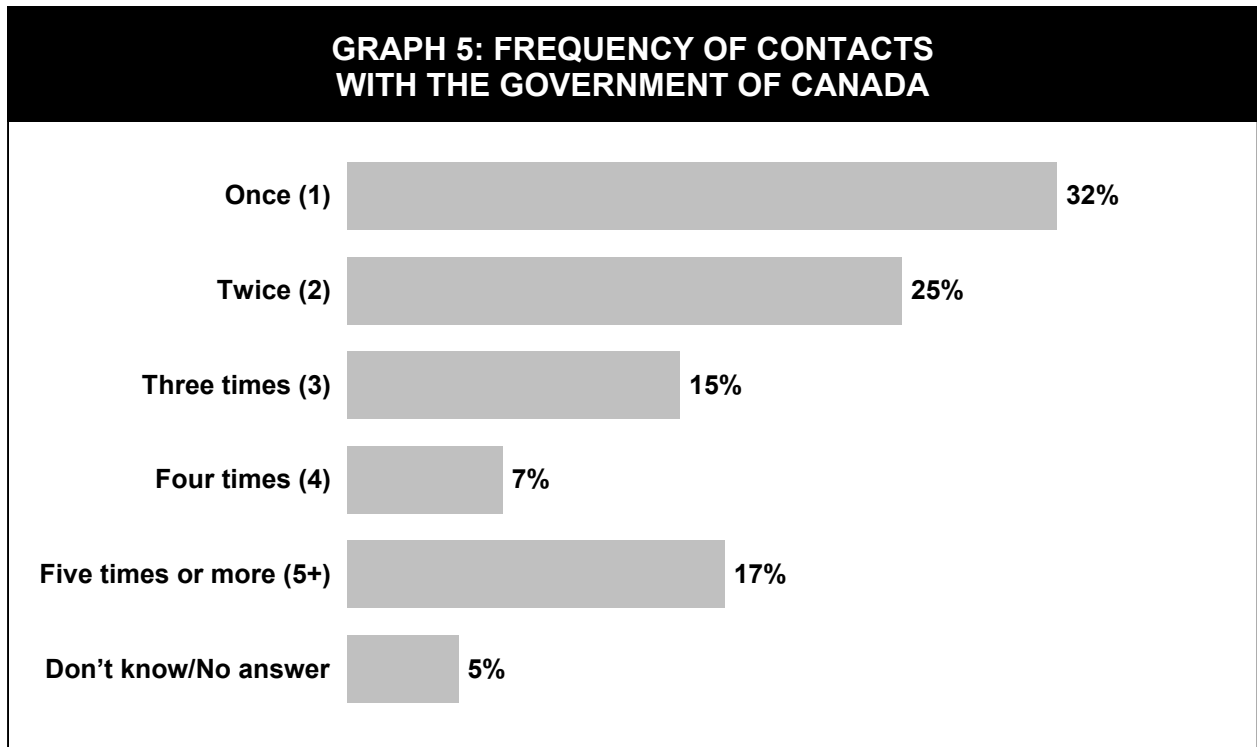
⁸ This result is slightly lower than the corresponding number for the population as a whole (36%) obtained in the Quarterly Survey on Government Communications in the winter of 2000.

⁹ The focus groups were conducted by Patterson, Langlois Consultants Inc. in September 1999.

The results also suggest that these Canadians **prefer direct contact with a representative**. A very clear majority of both respondents who communicated by telephone (90%) and respondents who visited an office (92%) spoke to or met an agent. Moreover, a very clear majority of participants replied that the way they chose to obtain information **permitted them to obtain the desired information** (90% of those who visited a government office, 86% of those who used the telephone and 79% of those who used the mail).¹⁰

More than half of the respondents (57%) said they had communicated once or twice with the government (Graph 5). Interviewed on their use of the telephone, certain participants indicated that they called repeatedly to confirm the information obtained the first time or to obtain a desired answer. A few will go so far as to take note of the agent’s name in the hope of always communicating with the same person. This is the case regardless of the nature of information sought or the level of government responsible. The same is true for their visits to a government office or information desk, preferably the one to which they usually go.

“Je choisis la personne qui va m’aider. Je sais à qui demander et à qui je ne demanderai pas.”



Source: *National Survey of Less Educated Canadians*, Communication Canada, February 2000.

¹⁰ The results for information obtained via the Internet or from automated information booths are not statistically significant because of the **very small number** of individuals who communicated in this way.

Future Preferences

When faced with the hypothetical need to communicate with the Government of Canada the next day, for whatever reason, 69% of respondents in the national survey of less educated Canadians indicated that they would use the telephone, 12% would visit a government office¹¹ and 11% would use the mail. Very few respondents said they would communicate with the Government of Canada using the Internet (2%) or an automated information booth (1%).

Regarding the Internet, the results from the quarterly government communications survey of the winter of 2000 showed that **85% of the less educated respondents had not used the Internet, at home or elsewhere, within the previous three months, compared to only 38% of the population as a whole.** The results of the quarterly surveys on government communications show that this education gap is more significant than gaps engendered by other variables (such as sex, age or having a rural versus urban residence). Nonetheless, the number of less educated Internet users has climbed significantly in Canada since May 1999, just as it has among the population as a whole.

Relay of Information

Among those who did not communicate with the Government of Canada (76% of respondents), about 10% indicated that someone else communicated with the Government of Canada on their behalf (Table 4). This person was very often a family member (52%): either a child, their spouse or another member of the family. About one third made use of a professional, such as an accountant or a lawyer. About one in ten respondents asked a friend to help them.

¹¹ Some participants in the interviews, especially in rural communities, indicated that they would not visit a government office because of the distance involved.

TABLE 4: LIST OF PERSONS WHO COMMUNICATE WITH THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA ON BEHALF OF LESS EDUCATED CANADIANS	
<i>“Who usually does that for you?”</i>	As a percentage of the number of respondents
Accountant	24%
Child	20%
Other family member	17%
Spouse	15%
Friend	9%
Lawyer	4%
Other	11%
Total	100%

Source: *National Survey of Less Educated Canadians*, Communication Canada, February 2000.

According to the study conducted for Revenue Canada (now the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency) in May 1997, the practice of relying on a third person is particularly common among less literate individuals who experience a new or different situation. Others simply avoid such situations. Interviews conducted in May 2000 indicated that less educated persons operate on the basis of their immediate network, where the relationship of trust is already tried and true. **In such a context, it is also important to inform the intermediary.**¹² Reliance on family and friends, who are generally aware of their family member’s or friend’s literacy problems, is most pronounced among the less literate participants. For those who are frequent television viewers, particularly among francophones, the network of trust extends to television show hosts they can count on.

« Lui, il est franc, il dit ce qu’il pense. Il a une sagesse et il défend les personnes... »

« Il parle comme le monde ordinaire. Quand il dit et explique quelque chose, on comprend ce qu’il veut dire. On a l’impression qu’il parle des vraies affaires, les affaires qui touchent le monde. »

¹² In a study published by the Canadian Adult Education Institute in 1997, entitled *Des services publics pour toute la population*, the chair of the *Régie des rentes du Québec* pointed out that in cases where the individuals who are asked to help do not understand either, it should not be surprising that these citizens lose confidence in the government.

4 – Evaluation of Government Communications

Various components of government communications (relevance, adequacy, ease of understanding, reliability and recognition) were evaluated. The results of the quarterly surveys on government communications suggest that, in comparison with the population as a whole, less educated citizens generally have **more difficulty understanding information and recognizing its origin**. They are also **more uncertain as to the relevance of the information in relation to their needs**.

Relevance

A significant proportion of less educated Canadians are ambivalent regarding the relevance of the information transmitted, with a large number responding that the information meets their needs *more or less* (Table 5). For about one in three respondents, the information meets their needs *not at all* or *not really*. One in five respondents appears to be satisfied with the information, either *a lot* or *totally*.

TABLE 5: RELEVANCE OF GOVERNMENT INFORMATION	
<i>“In general, do you think that the information the Government of Canada gives meets your needs totally, a lot, more or less, not really or not at all?”</i>	As a percentage of the total
Totally	8%
A lot	9%
More or less	42%
Not really	20%
Not at all	10%
Don’t know/No answer	11%
Total	100%

Source: *National Survey of Less Educated Canadians*,
Communication Canada, February 2000.

When asked in the interviews about what “meeting their needs” could actually mean, participants highlighted the importance of communicating government initiatives based on concrete results and solutions dealing with issues related to their personal life experiences (such as hospital waiting lists, the high costs of medication, insufficient social security benefits and job discrimination). Certain participants emphasized that some government information sought to placate them rather than respond to their everyday problems.

« *Oui, oui la santé, les emplois, l’entrepreneurship, tout va bien, on s’en occupe.* »

Some pointed out that the information provided was simply out of touch with what they were seeing or hearing around them. For others, the information was too general and provided only the general thrust of the objective in question.

“*They never say how it’s going to affect me and my kids.*”

Adequacy

The opinions of less educated Canadians on this issue are divided (Table 6). While 43% find that the Government of Canada gives *enough* or *a lot* of information about programs and services that are of interest to them, 44% find that it gives them *not enough* or *none*.

TABLE 6: ADEQUACY OF GOVERNMENT INFORMATION	
<i>“According to you, is the Government of Canada giving you too much, a lot, enough, not enough or no information about the programs and services of interest to you?”</i>	As a percentage of the total
Too much	0%
A lot	2%
Enough	41%
Not enough	36%
None	8%
Don’t know/No answer	13%
Total	100%

Source: *National Survey of Less Educated Canadians*, Communication Canada, February 2000.

During the interviews, some participants indicated having already heard of a subject that interested them (during a television newscast, for example), but said that no information was subsequently transmitted to them. Others simply stated:

« *On reçoit rien du gouvernement, à part des comptes.* »

“I see other people get stuff from the government, but I never hear anything about it.”

Ease of Understanding

More than four respondents out of ten find that information provided by the Government of Canada is *difficult* or *very difficult* to understand (Table 7). Nearly one respondent out of five finds that information provided by the Government of Canada is *somewhat easy* to understand. About one third of respondents find that the information from the Government of Canada is *easy* or *very easy* to understand.

TABLE 7: UNDERSTANDING OF GOVERNMENT INFORMATION	
<i>“In general, do you think the information that the Government of Canada gives is very easy, easy, somewhat easy, difficult or very difficult to understand?”</i>	As a percentage of the total
Very easy	4%
Easy	26%
Somewhat easy	19%
Difficult	32%
Very difficult	11%
Don’t know/No answer	8%
Total	100%

Source: *National Survey of Less Educated Canadians*, Communication Canada, February 2000.

The results of interviews suggest that the information was difficult to understand not only in terms of the vocabulary and the meaning of words, but also in terms of extracting relevant information or using it.

« *Quand je reçois des informations, je ne sais pas toujours quoi faire, c’est compliqué.* »

“Talk is cheap; they have to show me.”

Reliability

More than one third of respondents believe that they can *more or less* rely on the information provided by the Government of Canada (Table 8). While one third, when asked if they think they can rely on the information, said *not really* or *not at all*, one respondent out of five believed that the information from the Government of Canada is *very* or *totally* reliable.

TABLE 8: RELIABILITY OF GOVERNMENT INFORMATION	
<i>“Do you think that you can rely totally, very, more or less, not really or not at all on the information that the Government of Canada gives?”</i>	As a percentage of the total
Totally	7%
Very	12%
More or less	36%
Not really	21%
Not at all	12%
Don’t know/No answer	12%
Total	100%

Source: National Survey of Less Educated Canadians, Communication Canada, February 2000.

In this regard, the participants in the interviews pointed out that they do not rely on information concerning them until actual proof is given. This generally means they do so when an immediate advantage presents itself (for example, an increase in family allowances). Others indicated that they rely more on information when it refers to real cases or real life experiences similar to their own situation. Drawing similarities with individual life experiences makes information not only easier to understand, but also increases a document’s credibility.

« Si j’ai des doutes, je veux des preuves à l’appui. »

“If my neighborhood benefits, well, that’s ok, then.”

Recognition

A significant number of less educated Canadians have difficulty knowing if an advertisement or a publication comes from the Government of Canada (Table 9). While four out of ten respondents *usually*, *often* or *always* know when an advertisement or a publication comes from the Government of Canada, the same proportion says they *rarely* or *never know*.

TABLE 9: RECOGNITION OF GOVERNMENT INFORMATION	
<i>“Do you always, often, usually, rarely or never know when an advertisement or a publication comes from the Government of Canada?”</i>	As a percentage of the total
Always	12%
Often	10%
Usually	22%
Rarely	23%
Never	20%
Don’t know/No answer	13%
Total	100%

Source: National Survey of Less Educated Canadians, Communication Canada, February 2000.

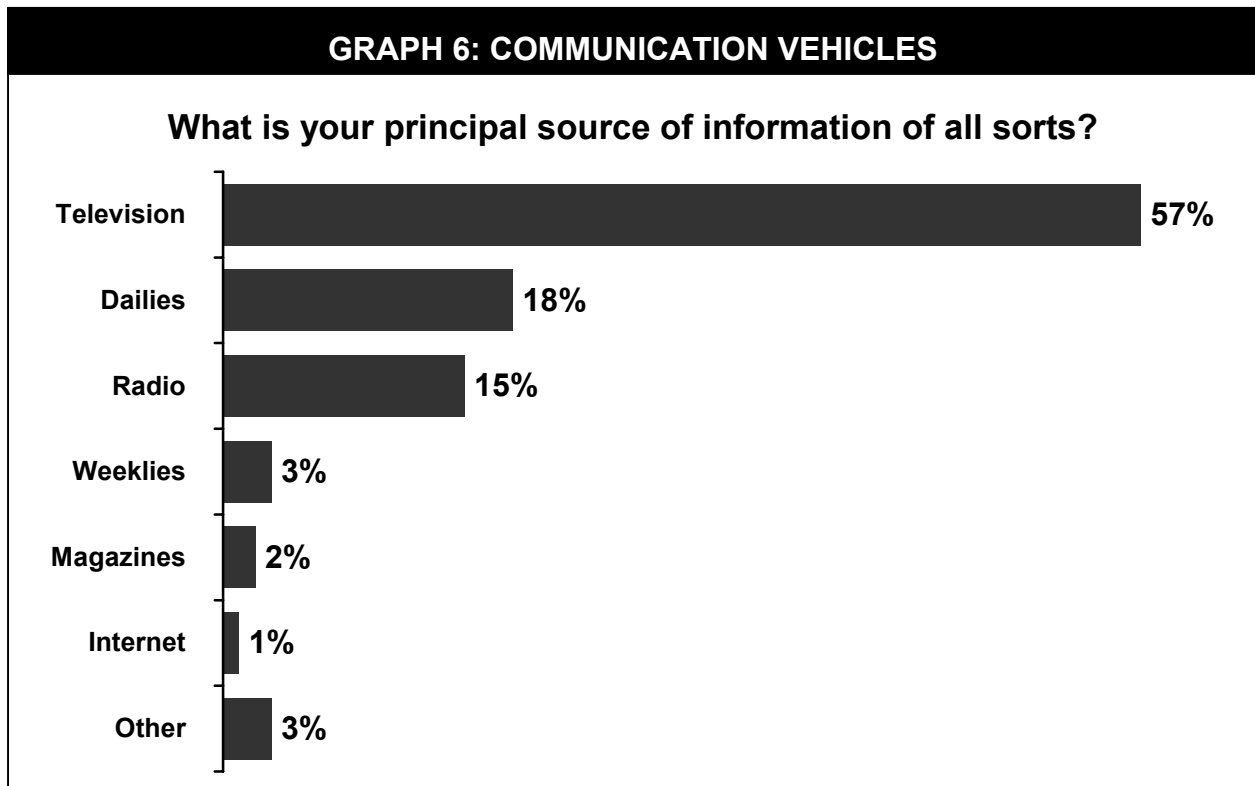
At the interviews, however, some participants rapidly identified the origin of the material presented, due notably to the Government of Canada logo and the 1 800 O-Canada phone number.

5 – Vehicles of Communication

Uses

More than half of less educated Canadians (57%) identified **television as their principal source of information of all sorts**, including information about the Government of Canada (Graph 6). Far behind are dailies¹³ and radio, in proportions of 18% and 15% respectively. Women, low-income households (less than \$20,000), rural residents and residents of the Atlantic provinces chose the radio as their principal source of information ahead of dailies. For a very small minority of respondents, weekly newspapers (3%), magazines (2%) and the Internet (1%) constitute the principal sources of information.

In comparison to the population as a whole (according to a quarterly survey conducted in the fall of 1999), less educated people **rely less on newspapers and depend more on television and radio.**



Source: *National Survey of Less Educated Canadians*, Communication Canada, February 2000.

¹³ Their reading of newspapers remains relatively superficial.

TABLE 10: PRINCIPAL SOURCES OF INFORMATION BY REGION				
	Western Provinces	Ontario	Quebec	Atlantic Provinces
Television	54%	53%	69%	49%
Dailies	17%	21%	13%	19%
Radio	15%	16%	12%	23%
Weeklies	5%	2%	2%	4%
Magazines	2%	3%	2%	2%
All five sources mentioned above	1%	1%	1%	0%
Friends and/or family	1%	1%	0%	0%
Internet	1%	1%	0%	1%
Books	1%	0%	0%	0%
Don't know/No answer	3%	2%	1%	2%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: National Survey of Less Educated Canadians, Communication Canada, February 2000.

By region (Table 10), less educated Canadians in Quebec use television the most as a primary source of information. Residents of the Atlantic provinces use television the least. It is also in Quebec that less educated Canadians make less use of the written media as a primary source of information (17% compared to 23% for the country as a whole). Similar trends by province were obtained for the population as a whole in the quarterly surveys on government communications.

Less educated francophones rely more on television (66% as opposed to 51% for anglophones). Less educated women (63%) depend more on television as their primary source of information than do men (51%). Participants interviewed stated that televised newscasts were their principal source of information. Documentaries and public affairs programs were also considered informative.

There is also a significant relationship between the income level and the principal source of information for less educated Canadians (Table 11). The higher the family's income, the less they depend on television as a principal source of information and the more they use other sources, such as dailies, community newspapers and magazines.

TABLE 11: PRINCIPAL SOURCES OF INFORMATION BY LEVEL OF ANNUAL HOUSEHOLD INCOME			
	\$20,000 or less	Between \$20,000 and \$39,000	\$40,000 or more
Television	60%	56%	46%
Radio	17%	14%	14%
Dailies	14%	21%	26%
Weeklies, magazines and other sources	6%	6%	14%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Source: *National Survey of Less Educated Canadians*,
Communication Canada, February 2000.

Preferences

When asked about the pertinence of the Government of Canada using various means of communication to provide information (Table 12), a significant proportion of less educated Canadians indicated that they **agree with advertising on television (75%) and in the written media (76% for flyers sent by mail; 70% for advertising in weeklies; and 68% for advertising in dailies)**.

Regarding the mail, some participants in the interviews indicated that they preferred to receive information directly addressed to them. If the mail is evidently from the government (logo or name of government), it is automatically considered important. Some even added that when they consider this information to be relevant to them, they usually go in person to a government office to verify the accuracy of the information.¹⁴

« Quand c'est adressé, je fais plus attention, c'est pour moi. »

“When I see the (Canada) flag, I stop, that's important.”

¹⁴ In this regard, certain participants indicated always going to the same office, whose address they know, without making a distinction about the origin of the information.

Respondents aged 50 or more, as well as those from the Atlantic provinces, are more willing than others to obtain government information through radio advertisements. There are also more respondents from the Atlantic provinces who appreciate the concept of advertising in dailies, automated telephone services, and information booths at fairs and exhibitions. Displays in public places are better at attracting the interest of those employed.

TABLE 12: PREFERENCES IN TERMS OF VEHICLES OF COMMUNICATION	
<i>“How would you like the Government of Canada to give you information on the programs and services that interest you?”</i>	Percentage of those who answered “Yes”
Publications or flyers sent by mail	76%
Advertising on television	75%
Advertising in community newspapers	70%
Advertising in daily newspapers	68%
Radio advertising	61%
Government offices near your home	57%
Displays in public places	55%
Information booths at fairs and exhibitions	44%
Advertising in magazines	40%
Automated telephone service	34%
Automated information booths in public places	32%
Internet	19%

Source: National Survey of Less Educated Canadians, Communication Canada, February 2000.

Only a small percentage of less educated Canadians wish to be informed via the Internet, automated booths or automated telephone services. The interviews showed that answering systems frustrate less literate people and further depersonalize the relationship of trust they seek to establish. Respondents are not so much against the idea of using new technologies themselves, but they feel uneasy or frightened when faced with “*a machine*.” They are afraid they would be unable to use it effectively and fail to obtain the desired information.

Some interviewees also find that television and radio ad campaigns are starting points (for example, the announcement of a new initiative) rather than arrival points in terms of the information they search for on an issue. Others believe that ad campaigns should be a means to obtain a quick answer to a simple question (for example, whether something is good or not).

Participants expressed a clear preference for advertising that is tailored to their individual needs and life experiences. They prefer messages using children or animals, or ones involving humorous scenarios. The participants expressed their frustrations with ads that, for informational purposes, attempt to transmit too much information in too little time (for example, viewers do not always have enough time to take down the telephone number in television ads). In contrast, some noted that you could count on an ad being repeated often enough to write down the information or to better understand it.

“You have to watch them over and over, before you know what they are selling.”

Television

Tuning In

Overall, respondents devote 3.6 hours a day to watching television, with more than two thirds spending 3 hours or more per day (16% are watching 6 hours or more per day). In comparison with the quarterly survey on government communications conducted in the winter of 1999, this is **more than the average for the population as a whole**.

TABLE 13: NUMBER OF HOURS PER DAY SPENT WATCHING TELEVISION	
	As a percentage of the total
None	3%
Less than one hour	2%
Between 1 and 1.5 hour	11%
Between 2 and 2.5 hours	20%
Between 3 and 3.5 hours	20%
Between 4 and 4.5 hours	16%
Between 5 and 5.5 hours	10%
6 hours or more	16%
Don't know/No answer	2%
Total	100%

Source: National Survey of Less Educated Canadians, Communication Canada, February 2000.

Among less educated Canadians who watch television, a strong majority (97%) watch mostly during the evening. About half of them (47%) watch television in the afternoon, and more than one third (37%) in the morning. Women are more likely than men to watch television in the morning and afternoon. Less educated Canadians from the Atlantic provinces watch television less in the morning than those from the rest of Canada.

When asked about tuning in to the local community channel, less educated Canadians replied that they devote little time to it, with about one hour a day being the average (Table 14). Four out of ten do not watch this channel at all.

**TABLE 14: NUMBER OF HOURS PER DAY
SPENT WATCHING THE LOCAL COMMUNITY CHANNEL**

	As a percentage of the total
None	41%
Less than one hour	10%
Between 1 and 1.5 hour	17%
Between 2 and 2.5 hours	9%
Between 3 and 3.5 hours	4%
Between 4 and 4.5 hours	2%
5 hours or more	3%
Don't know/No answer	14%
Total	100%

Source: *National Survey of Less Educated Canadians*,
Communication Canada, February 2000.

Other Considerations

Work by Statistics Canada (September 1996) regarding literacy showed a close link between reading skills and time spent watching television. The latter can be considered a substitute for newspapers among people unable to obtain the needed information from printed materials.

During the interviews, participants indicated that they generally watch television attentively. Some participants do so in the company of a family member or a friend. Other participants pointed out that they occasionally discuss the content of television programs with their friends or relatives, not only for the sake of simply having a discussion, but also to verify their understanding of the broadcast information.

« Quand j'entends quelque chose..., je vais vérifier souvent l'information auprès de mon amie, je lui demande si elle a entendu ça. »

“If I hear something, I run to tell my friend in case she doesn't know.”

Daily and Weekly Newspapers

Less educated Canadians **spend an average of 45 minutes a day reading dailies, which is relatively less time than they spend watching television** (Table 15).¹⁵ They spend even less time reading weeklies and magazines. In fact, 32% do not read dailies, 47% do not read weeklies and 57% do not read magazines.

TABLE 15: NUMBER OF HOURS PER DAY SPENT READING NEWSPAPERS AND MAGAZINES			
	Dailies	Weeklies	Magazines
None	32%	47%	57%
Less than one hour	24%	25%	14%
Between 1 and 1.5 hours	26%	14%	13%
Between 2 and 2.5 hours	9%	3%	8% (2 hrs. or more)
3 hours or more	3%	2%	—
Don't know/No answer	6%	9%	9%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Source: National Survey of Less Educated Canadians, Communication Canada, February 2000.

The literacy studies conducted by Statistics Canada (September 1996) showed significant differences in the way less literate Canadians read a newspaper, as compared to the rest of the population. Respondents with a higher degree of literacy are more likely to read certain sections than those with a lower degree of literacy, namely editorials, national and international news, literary and cinema columns, and financial news. The differences are not as great when it comes to reading the classifieds, sports, comic strips, television schedules, horoscopes and practical advice.

¹⁵ Pollara, which conducted the survey, considered that this level might be over-estimated considering the large number of other sources of information.

Participants in the interviews pointed out that they first flip through the pages of a newspaper (headlines and photographs). If a subject interests them they begin reading, but do not complete the entire article unless it truly pertains to their particular situation or interests. They are especially interested in local and community activities and do not linger over ads, unless they attract their attention or are of particular interest to them.

« Je regarde ce qui est écrit en gros et je lis ce qui m'intéresse. »

“I always scan the headlines.”

Radio

Tuning In

Less educated Canadians **spend less time listening to the radio than watching television**. They spend on average 2.4 hours a day listening to the radio (Table 16). It should be noted that half of the respondents listen to the radio 1.5 hours or less a day.

Among those who listen to the radio, 82% do so mostly in the morning, while 46% listen in during the afternoon, 38% in the evening, and 35% on their way to or from work. Men and respondents whose annual income is more than \$40,000 are more likely to listen to the radio while commuting to and from work.

TABLE 16: NUMBER OF HOURS PER DAY SPENT LISTENING TO THE RADIO	
	As a percentage of the total
None	18%
Less than one hour	12%
Between 1 and 1.5 hour	21%
Between 2 and 2.5 hours	17%
Between 3 and 3.5 hours	7%
Between 4 and 4.5 hours	6%
Between 5 and 5.5 hours	5%
6 hours or more	11%
Don't know/No answer	3%
Total	100%

Source: *National Survey of Less Educated Canadians*,
Communication Canada, February 2000.

Other Considerations

When asked about a recent government advertisement, which was in the form of an information capsule, certain participants in the interviews quickly associated this form of communication (by radio) with reading text and, by extension, the related difficulties they generally face when presented with written materials. Indeed, participants found the information difficult to understand, too scientific and oriented towards trying to transmit knowledge rather than precise instructions on how to use a product. The information was also considered to be too general, and possibly of use later.

The participants, especially among francophones, also indicated a strong preference for live radio programs in which hosts discuss issues among themselves, and to which the public is invited to call. The radio is often associated with a presence in the home, a kind of security. Many people said they do not stop and take the time to listen to the radio per se. They can do several things and listen to it at the same time.

« J'écoute la radio toute la nuit, elle est ouverte même quand je dors. »

“I always have it on when I'm doing things around the house.”

6 – Other Observations

The results presented below were obtained in interviews conducted by COGEM for Communication Canada, in May 2000, with 45 less literate Canadians. It should be noted that the following results come from perceptions expressed by participants regarding the material they were given (three types of information: a television ad, printed material and a radio capsule). In fact, few interview participants could clearly say what would constitute effective communication for them, other than the end result (providing information that meets their needs). Ensuring the relevance and ease of understanding of the information is a challenge more for communicators than for the citizen.

Clear and Simple Language

The use of clear and simple language does not just mean the use of simple words that correspond to a given level of education, but **to a vernacular used and recognized** by participants. Certain participants reacted very strongly and negatively to language that is “*too scientific*,” technical or bureaucratic. Others reacted negatively to names of programs that “*were as long as my arm, as if someone wanted to make sure that nobody would understand them.*” Moreover, a few participants would have liked to have some words in the presented material explained to them.

In general, the confusion created by the language used and the complexity of the information transmitted resulted not only in the distortion of the message but, in some cases, the rejection of the message in its entirety by the intended audience (in the belief that the message was not intended for them). The interviews suggested that when citizens do not understand, they tend to think the government is not listening to them. By not transmitting useful information, the message is perceived as being arrogant, far removed from the real needs and interests of the participants.

Other Attributes

Apart from addressing the issue of language, the interviews with less literate Canadians made it possible to examine other attributes (text layout and structure, font size, spacing, colour, sound and image quality). It is important to note that studies conducted for Revenue Canada (now the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency) in May 1997 showed not only the necessity of presenting clear and simple information, but also of doing so in a way whereby individuals could accomplish the task they were asked to perform (for example, to fill out a form).

Participants in the interviews experienced **serious difficulty breaking down the information that was given** in order to take advantage of it. *“It is great that the government has lots of programs, but how can I benefit from them?”* Moreover, the information that they received referred more to the results of scientific studies and statistical reports. What participants sought, conversely, was information that they could use in their everyday lives. However, they did express **satisfaction with the organized structure of some information, which responded to their needs** (regarding, for example, financial help, job search and community work).

It became clear that elements such as font size, spacing and colour can all make the information provided easier to understand. Some participants reacted negatively to small print and to providing too much information in a relatively limited space. They said they liked soft colours and low tones that contrast with the text in written material.

Some participants said they were irritated by the narrator’s voice in the audio material. They associated such a voice with a civil servant, someone who is distant from them and outside their circle of relationship of trust. With respect to television advertising, they indicated being sensitive to images, especially when associated with children (a theme of particular importance to them). This was despite the fact that participants expressed concerns when a story is removed from their personal experience and that of the people around them. Images (the primary message) account for a significant part of advertising recall, even before written or oral information (the secondary message).

An Example: Canada Child Tax Benefit Application

The Canada Customs and Revenue Agency (CCRA, formerly Revenue Canada) provided, as an example, the form it used for the child tax benefit program. This form is particularly interesting as a complementary element to the present study. CCRA wanted to examine the characteristics of the form and the tasks needed to fill it out. The results (see below) were used to modify the form (Table 17).

- Too much information on the old form made it ambiguous and confusing.
- Narrative texts made the old form hard to understand, so the new form uses short information segments.

TABLE 17: Canada Child Tax Benefit Application (Before)


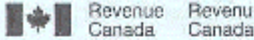
	Revenue Canada / Revenu Canada	Information protected when completed.
<h3 style="margin: 0;">CHILD TAX BENEFIT APPLICATION</h3>		
Complete every section of this application that applies to you. Before completing this application, read the <i>Information Sheet for the Child Tax Benefit Application</i> included in this package. The information sheet also has more specific explanations for the sections on this application that are marked with an asterisk (*).		
Before you can receive the Child Tax Benefit, you and your spouse have to have filed income tax returns.		
For departmental use only		
Section A — Information About You (In most cases, the female parent should complete this section.) *		
First name and middle initial	Last name	Social insurance number
Mailing address: Apt. or unit no. Street City Province or territory Country Postal code		
Home address (if different from above)		Home telephone number () ()
		Work telephone number () ()
Has your address changed since you last contacted Revenue Canada? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No If yes, on what date did you move? Year Month Day		
Last name at birth (if different from above)		Date of birth Year Month Day Sex <input type="checkbox"/> F <input type="checkbox"/> M Language of correspondence <input type="checkbox"/> English <input type="checkbox"/> French
What is your current marital status? * 1 <input type="checkbox"/> Married 2 <input type="checkbox"/> Common-law 3 <input type="checkbox"/> Widowed 4 <input type="checkbox"/> Divorced 5 <input type="checkbox"/> Separated (90 days or more) 6 <input type="checkbox"/> Single		
If you are not single, provide the date your current marital status began: * Year Month Day		
If you are married or living common-law, have you had periods of separation (90 days or more) from your current spouse in past years? * <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		
If you are a Canadian citizen, provide the date you became a Canadian citizen: Since birth <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No Year Month Day		
If you became a Canadian citizen within the last 12 months, or if you are not a Canadian citizen, refer to Section D on page 3.		
Have you been absent from Canada in the past two years? (exclude vacations) * <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		
If you answered yes, provide:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the latest date you left Canada Year Month Day • the latest date you returned to Canada Year Month Day • the last Canadian province or territory in which you lived before you left Canada • your world income in Section E – Statement of World Income 		
Section B — Information About Your Spouse (Complete this section about your spouse if you are married, living common-law, or have been separated for less than 90 days.)		
First name and middle initial	Last name	Social insurance number
Mailing address (if different from applicant's above): Apt. or unit no. Street City		
Province or territory Country Postal code		Home telephone number () ()
		Work telephone number () ()
Has your spouse's address changed since your spouse last contacted Revenue Canada? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No If yes, on what date did your spouse move? Year Month Day		
Last name at birth (if different from above)		Date of birth Year Month Day Sex <input type="checkbox"/> F <input type="checkbox"/> M Language of correspondence <input type="checkbox"/> English <input type="checkbox"/> French
If your spouse is a Canadian citizen, provide the date your spouse became a Canadian citizen: Since birth <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No Year Month Day		
If your spouse became a Canadian citizen within the last 12 months, or if your spouse is not a Canadian citizen, refer to Section D on page 3.		
Has your spouse been absent from Canada in the past two years? (exclude vacations) <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		
If you answered yes, provide:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the latest date your spouse left Canada Year Month Day • the latest date your spouse returned to Canada Year Month Day • the last Canadian province or territory in which your spouse lived before your spouse left Canada • your spouse's world income in Section E – Statement of World Income 		
RC66 E (97) (Ce formulaire existe aussi en français.) 3733		



TABLE 17 (cont'd): Canada Child Tax Benefit Application (After)



CANADA CHILD TAX BENEFIT APPLICATION

The Canada Child Tax Benefit (CCTB) is a tax-free monthly payment provided to qualified families to help them with the cost of raising children under age 18. You can find more information about the CCTB in the pamphlet called *Your Canada Child Tax Benefit*, included in your CCTB package.

You have to complete this application form to apply for the CCTB. You may also have to complete one or more of the schedules included in your package. Your application will tell you when you need to complete a schedule.

This application is also used to calculate benefits and credits under certain related provincial and territorial child benefit and credit programs that Revenue Canada administers.

You and your spouse each have to file an income tax and benefit return each year, to start receiving or to continue receiving the CCTB, even if you have no income to report.

For departmental use only

Part 1 – Information about you (Generally, this part relates to the mother.)

<p>First name and initials _____</p> <p>Last name _____</p> <p>Last name at birth (if different from last name above) _____</p> <p>Mailing address:</p> <p>Street (including apt. or unit no.) _____ City _____</p> <p>Province or territory _____ Country _____ Postal code _____</p> <p>Home address (if different from above):</p> <p>Street (including apt. or unit no.) _____ City _____</p> <p>Province or territory _____ Country _____ Postal code _____</p>	<p>Social insurance number _____</p> <p>Date of birth</p> <p>Year _____ Month _____ Day _____</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Female <input type="checkbox"/> Male</p> <p>Language of correspondence</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> English <input type="checkbox"/> Français</p> <p>Telephone no. (at home) _____ Area code _____</p> <p>Telephone no. (at work) _____ Area code _____</p> <p>Year _____ Month _____ Day _____</p>
--	--

If you moved to this address within the last 12 months, enter the date you moved. _____

If the move was from a different province or territory, enter the name of your previous province or territory. _____

Are you a Canadian citizen?

Yes If yes, and you became a Canadian citizen within the last 12 months, complete Schedule 2, and see the note below. If yes, and you became a Canadian citizen more than 12 months ago, see the note below.

No If no, complete Schedule 3, and see the note below.

Note: Complete and attach these schedules if they apply to you.

- Complete Schedules 3 and 5 if, within the last 2 years, you have become a new or a returning resident of Canada.
- Complete Schedules 4 and 5 if you were previously a resident of Canada, you left Canada to live in another country, and you have returned to reside in Canada within the last 2 years.

RC66 E (99)
(Ce formulaire existe aussi en français.)
3733

Canada

- The old form used coloured text on a white background, which is hard to read. The new form makes better use of use of colours and contrasts.
 - In this respect, a study¹⁶ showed that the level of comprehension diminishes radically with the use of colours. More than 75% of readers questioned in this study found that very intense colours (such as red) are difficult to read, since the lines can be confused and readers lose concentration.
 - A great majority preferred black and white.
- Small font size overloaded the old form, making it hard to read and understand.
 - As a result of studies conducted in 1991 by the National Literacy Secretariat, the Communications Branch of what was then Revenue Canada¹⁷ recommended a minimum 10 point font size for the general population and 12 point for seniors.
 - For persons who have difficulty reading, it is preferable to use an even larger font size (14 point).

¹⁶ “For Comprehension, Use Any Color As Long As It’s Black,” *PR Report*, vol. 39, September 1996.

¹⁷ *Simple and Clear Language*, Communications Branch, Revenue Canada (now Canada Customs and Revenue Agency), February 1997.

7 – Conclusion

In conclusion, less literate people have more difficulty than other Canadians understanding information provided by the Government of Canada. Less literate Canadians are also more likely to look upon government information as not meeting to their needs. They have difficulty extracting, understanding and using the information they receive. This situation influences various aspects of their everyday lives: they are more critical of government and more pessimistic about their future and that of the country; they contact governmental authorities less frequently; they know little about initiatives taken by the government; and they depend more on people close to them to find out what is happening. Furthermore, a large number simply do not know the topics about which they could be more informed. That they would not know is hardly surprising, considering that they are unaware that a service exists. It is up to the Government of Canada to make the effort to inform them. Their needs will not be met without a proactive approach on the part of the government to end their isolation.

The interviews conducted across the country cast a new qualitative light on the daily communication problems that less literate Canadians face.

- They favour, and are more receptive to, various forms of government information.
- They seek information that attracts them, meaning information about issues that affect them daily. Personal testimonials add credibility to the information they receive.
- They want to be addressed in language that they can understand and in a direct, practical manner focussed results.
- They seek information that not only reflects their individual life experiences, but that also fits in with their lifestyles.
- They are frequent television viewers, especially in the evening, and they are radio listeners in the morning.
- They prefer direct contact in person or by telephone, if possible always with the same person.
- They want a single point of contact who is reliable and who empathizes with their concerns.
- They are more interested in receiving information by mail that is personally addressed to them.

It is clear that the Government of Canada has not succeeded in providing information that meets their needs, that is easy to understand and that is appropriate. As such, the Government of Canada will have to go to greater lengths to adapt its communications to the particular needs of this important segment of the population so that they too can benefit from the services that are available to them.

Appendix – A

International Adult Literacy Survey

In terms of statistics on adult literacy in Canada, the best source is unquestionably the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS)¹⁸ conducted by Statistics Canada in 1994 and sponsored by the National Literacy Secretariat and the Applied Research Branch of Human Resources Development Canada. The study was managed by Statistics Canada in cooperation with the OECD, Eurostat and UNESCO. The results of the Canadian component were published in September 1996.

The Canadian report on the IALS results paints a detailed statistical portrait of literacy in Canada and sheds light on the advantages and consequences of literacy in our society.

Socio-demographic Profile

From the outset, it is important to point out that it is impossible to characterize Canadians with low-literacy skills. They are men and women of all ages and backgrounds, from all levels of society and all regions of Canada.

Having said that, the IALS made it possible to identify some of the socio-demographic characteristics of this group of individuals in Canada. For example, generally speaking, there are larger numbers of adults with high skill levels in Western Canada, and larger numbers with low skill levels in the Atlantic region. Moreover, literacy levels tend to be lower among certain groups of people, such as those with less education, older Canadians and immigrants.

General Statistics

The survey found that 4.7 million Canadian adults, or 22% of Canadian adults, have **very low** literacy skills; in other words, their skills are at level 1.¹⁹ Individuals in this category are difficult and sometimes even impossible to reach using printed material (newspapers, magazines, books, advertising, brochures, written instructions, dosages on medicine bottles, etc.). Moreover, they need help to perform other tasks and operations that require reading and/or writing.

In addition, 5.5 million Canadian adults, or 26% of them, have **low** literacy skills; in other words, their skills are at level 2. Individuals in this category are poor readers and are comfortable only when given simply written texts dealing with a single topic or idea. Many people in this category also need help to perform other tasks involving reading and/or writing.

As a group, Canadian adults who *have no, very few or few* literacy skills make up 48% of the adult population in Canada, which is 10.2 million people.

¹⁸ Conducted in eight countries including Canada, the 1994 IALS was the first multi-country and multi-language assessment of adult literacy.

¹⁹ Levels 1 and 2 correspond to the lowest literacy levels on a scale of 1 to 5. The only way to determine an individual's level is by using tests that accurately measure his or her skills in terms of prose literacy, document literacy and quantitative literacy.

Literacy and Educational Attainment

Literacy and the level of academic training are closely linked. A low level of educational attainment generally leads to poor reading and writing skills, as shown in Table A.1.

The vast majority of Canadians with less than a Grade 8 education are at level 1. Among those who only completed some secondary schooling, a strong majority (61%) are at levels 1 and 2. As for secondary school graduates, 43% are at levels 1 and 2.

Having said that, according to Statistics Canada, “Education does not ‘fix’ literacy forever.” In fact, 20% of Canadians have low literacy skills even though they have a high level of education. At the same time, 16% have high literacy skills even though they have a low level of education.

TABLE A.1 : DISTRIBUTION OF LITERACY BY LEVEL OF EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT					
	% of Canadian adults by literacy level				
Highest level of education	1	2	1+2	3	4/5
Less than Grade 8	89	9	98	—	—
Completed primary school	59	29	88	12	—
Some secondary school	25	36	61	32	7
Secondary school graduate	12	31	43	40	18
Community college graduate	7	23	30	45	25
University graduate	—	11	11	33	56

Source: Statistics Canada, IALS, Catalogue no. 89-551-XPE, 1996.

Literacy and Regional Distribution in Canada

There is considerable variation in Canadians' literacy skills and that variation differs by region. Generally, there are larger numbers of adults with high skill levels in the Western provinces, and larger numbers with low skill levels in the East, as indicated in Table A.2.

TABLE A.2: DISTRIBUTION OF LITERACY SKILLS BY REGION AND SELECTED PROVINCES OF CANADA					
	% of Canadian adults by literacy level				
Regions of Canada	1	2	1+2	3	4/5
Atlantic provinces²⁰	25	26	51	35	15
Quebec	28	26	54	39	8
Ontario	19	28	47	28	25
Western provinces²¹	18	24	42	34	25
CANADA	22	26	48	33	20

Source: Statistics Canada, IALS, Catalogue no. 89-551-XPE, 1996.

Literacy and Age

In general, larger proportions of older Canadians have low literacy skills (see Table A.3), especially those without any secondary schooling.

Thirty eight percent of Canadians aged 56 to 65 and 53% of those 65 and older are at level 1. Compared to other age groups, fewer Canadians aged 56 and older are at levels 4 and 5. At the same time, the youngest three age groups (those aged 16 to 45) have a relatively small proportion at level 1, reflecting their generally high educational attainment.

²⁰ These provinces are Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland.

²¹ These provinces are British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

TABLE A.3: DISTRIBUTION OF LITERACY BY AGE					
	% of Canadian adults by literacy level				
Age group	1	2	1+2	3	4/5
16 to 25	11	26	37	44	20
26 to 35	12	29	41	33	26
36 to 45	13	19	32	37	31
46 to 55	21	30	51	31	18
56 to 65	38	26	64	28	8
Over 65	53	27	80	19	—

Source: Statistics Canada, IALS, Catalogue no. 89-551-XPE, 1996.

Literacy and First Language

More Canadians whose first language is French have low literacy skills than Canadians whose first language is English (see Table A.4). In fact, 54% of all francophones in Canada have low literacy skills. The breakdown is 52% of francophones in Quebec and 63% of francophones outside Quebec.

TABLE A.4: DISTRIBUTION OF LITERACY BY RESPONDENT'S FIRST LANGUAGE					
	% of Canadian adults by literacy level				
First language	1	2	1+2	3	124
English	19	26	45	31	24
French	28	26	54	38	9
• In Quebec	27	25	52	39	9
• Outside Quebec	33	30	63	25	—

Source: Statistics Canada, IALS, Catalogue no. 89-551-XPE, 1996.

Literacy and Immigration

The proportion of immigrants with low literacy skills is larger than the proportion of those born in Canada. Fifty-nine percent of Canadian immigrants are at level 1 or 2, compared to 45% of people born in Canada (see Table A.5). No other country studied has as large a proportion of immigrants at level 4 or 5 as Canada. According to Statistics Canada, this phenomenon reflects the traditional Canadian policy of selecting skilled immigrants. Having said that, large numbers of immigrants are at level 1, reflecting the fact that Canada has accepted large numbers of immigrants on humanitarian grounds.

TABLE A.5: DISTRIBUTION OF LITERACY BY IMMIGRANT STATUS					
	% of Canadians adults by literacy level				
Born in Canada?	1	2	1+2	3	4/5
Yes	18	27	45	37	19
No	36	23	59	19	22

Source: Statistics Canada, IALS, Catalogue no. 89-551-XPE, 1996.

Literacy and Employment

The majority of Canadians read mostly at work; in this, Canada is no different from other countries. Therefore, individuals who are unemployed are less likely to read than those who are at work or in school. This lack of reading practice is a problem for many unemployed people, as Table A.6 shows. About three times as many unemployed Canadians are at level 1, compared to those who are employed.

TABLE A.6: DISTRIBUTION OF LITERACY BY EMPLOYMENT STATUS					
	% of Canadian adults by literacy level				
Current employment status	1	2	1+2	3	4/5
Employed	12	25	37	37	26
Unemployed	33	23	56	36	9
Students	12	23	35	40	26
Retired	49	28	77	19	5
Homemakers	27	28	55	28	18
Other, out of labour force	43	35	78	19	—

Source: Statistics Canada, IALS, Catalogue no. 89-551-XPE, 1996.

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