

# What is the Essential Skills Research Project?

In the early 1990s, a growing body of international research linked labour market success to a set of teachable, transferable and measurable skills. The Government of Canada contributed to this research by launching the Essential Skills Research Project (ESRP). The ESRP identified nine Essential Skills: reading text, document use, numeracy, writing, oral communication, working with others, thinking skills, computer use and continuous learning.

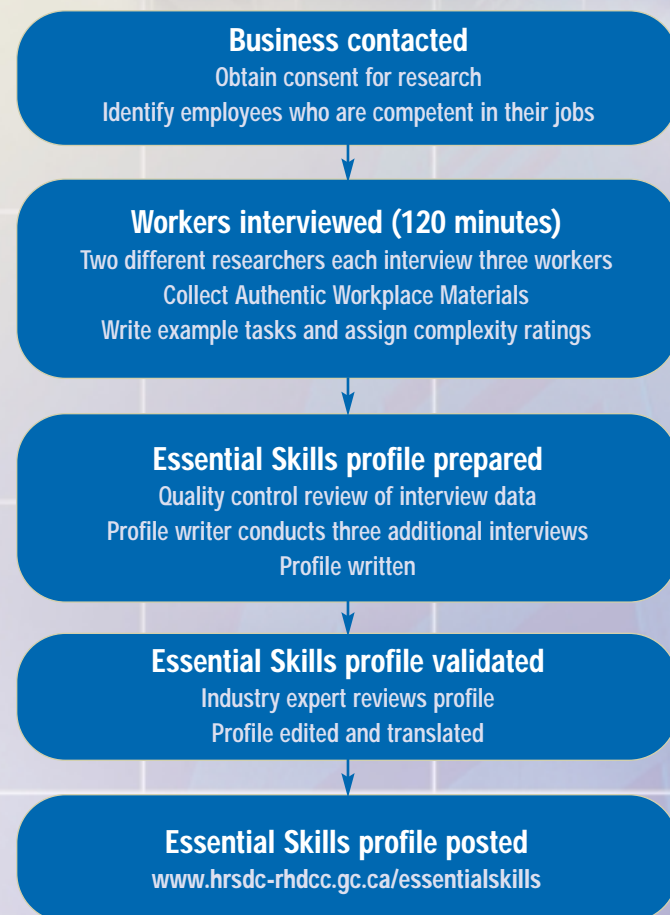
Essential Skills are common to all workplaces and occupations, but take various forms such as writing a phone message or a medical report. How can we describe these differences? What do these skills look like in different jobs? Can we use a common language to describe skills across occupations? How do individuals know if they have the skills needed for a certain job? The ESRP answered these questions by developing a methodology to profile the skill requirements of occupations in the Canadian labour market.

## Methodology

Open interviews are conducted with workers to gather information on how they use Essential Skills on the job. A sufficient number of workers in an occupation—at least nine—are interviewed to provide a sample representing different industries, occupational specializations, business sizes and geographic locations. Researchers then analyse the data to identify common tasks and rate their complexity. The range of data collected and the number of independent quality control reviews ensure that example tasks accurately reflect workplace skill requirements. The result is an Essential Skills profile that illustrates how the nine Essential Skills are used in an occupation. While in the workplace, researchers also gather Authentic Workplace Materials to provide real life examples of how workers use Essential Skills.

## Looking ahead

To date, close to 4,500 interviews have been conducted and nearly 200 Essential Skills profiles have been written for occupations in the *National Occupational Classification* (NOC). The ESRP initially focused on occupations requiring a secondary school diploma or less. Data collection for technical and professional occupations is currently under way, with priority given to occupations in high demand such as engineers, doctors, nurses, pilots, technicians and skilled trades. Most of the 520 occupation groups of the NOC will be completed by 2007.



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