

9 Essential Skills

The Government of Canada has identified nine essential skills needed for the workplace. These skills are used in every job to varying degrees and at different levels of complexity. They provide the foundation for learning all other skills and enable people to evolve with their jobs and adapt to workplace change.



1. Reading - The ability to understand reading materials in the form of sentences or paragraphs. We use this skill to scan for information, skim overall meaning, evaluate what we read and integrate information from multiple sources.

Jobs in community advocacy, such as social workers, use reading skills. A social worker may read clinical assessments and medical reports to learn about clients' medical diagnoses, psychiatric conditions and behavioural problems.



2. Document use - The ability to perform tasks that involve a variety of information displays in which words, numbers, symbols and other visual characteristics are given meaning by their spatial relationship. We use this skill when we read and interpret signs, labels, lists, graphs and charts.

In the hospitality industry, line cooks use their document use skills when they read and enter data on the freezer temperature-recording chart or check off items and quantities on delivery checklists.



3. Numeracy - The ability to use numbers and think in quantitative terms. We use this skill when doing numerical estimating, money math, scheduling or budgeting math and analyzing measurements or data.

In the medical field, workers such as nurse aides and orderlies, use numeracy skills in their occupation. A nurse aide may plot patient temperatures on a chart to show deviations from normal ranges.



4. Writing - The ability to write text and documents; it also includes non paper-based writing such as typing on a computer. We use this skill when we organize, record, document, provide information to persuade, request information from others and justify a request.

Labourers in manufacturing jobs, such as in a paper mill plant, use writing skills. They may write changes on worksheets, such as recording the substitution of materials.



5. Oral communication - The ability to use speech to give and exchange thoughts and information. We use this skill to greet people, take messages, reassure, persuade, seek information and resolve conflicts.

In the field of finance, an accountant will use oral communication to speak with customers to follow up on overdue accounts, arrange payments, answer customer enquiries and discuss disagreements about accounts.



6. Working with others - The ability to work with other workers to carry out tasks. We use this skill when we work as a member of a team or jointly with a partner, and when we engage in supervisory or leadership activities.

Working with others is a skill used often by teachers and educators. They speak with parents, psychologists, social workers and speech-language therapists to share information about students and discuss intervention plans.



7. Thinking - The ability to engage in the process of evaluating ideas or information to reach a rational decision. We use this skill when we solve problems, make decisions, think critically and plan and organize job tasks.

Public relations professionals employ their thinking skills to judge the significance of topics in the media to determine whether and how to respond. They consider the risks associated with action and inaction, recent misunderstandings that could resurface, and ramifications and implications for the organization's image.



8. Computer use - The ability to use different kinds of computer applications and other related technical tools. We use this skill when we operate cash registers, use word processing software, send emails and create and modify spreadsheets.

Trade helpers and labourers such as roofers, welders and carpenters need to use computer applications. For example, surveyor helpers use electronic field notebooks to complete topographical surveys, specifying details of sites to create computer-generated diagrams.



9. Continuous learning - The ability to participate in an ongoing process of acquiring skills and knowledge. We use this skill when we learn as part of regular work or from co-workers and when we access training in the workplace or off-site.

Retail associates and salespeople may cross-train with personnel in other stores, sections or other product lines to obtain the big picture. They may take marketing courses or attend supplier seminars to learn more about products.