

# SKILLS AND LANGUAGE FOR WORK



Focused EAL instruction addresses Skills for Success/Essential Skills, pragmatics, and intercultural competence. It is transparently connected to the language and skills needed in the workplace.

# Statements of Best Practice

## *for Skills and Language for Work*

Focused **EAL** instruction addresses **Skills for Success/Essential Skills**, **pragmatics**, and **intercultural competence**. It is transparently connected to the language and skills needed in the workplace.

### 71. Instructional staff have the skills, knowledge, and resources needed to prepare learners for the workplace.

- \_ Instructors develop familiarity with the **Skills for Success/Essential Skills** (ES) framework, ES resources, pragmatics, and intercultural communicative competence. Training opportunities orient instructors to some of the following:
  - \_ The Skills for Success/Essential Skills framework and skills (communication, reading, writing, digital, numeracy, adaptability, collaboration, creativity and innovation, and problem solving)
  - \_ The Canadian Language Benchmarks-Essential Skills comparative framework
  - \_ Resources to help learners do the following (see Resources for the Classroom):
    - \_ Explore workplace options
    - \_ Assess their essential skills and identify skills gaps
    - \_ Develop transferable skills
    - \_ Identify learning objectives and goals
    - \_ Identify authentic language tasks connected to target occupations
    - \_ Practice/perform authentic workplace communication tasks
    - \_ Develop the pragmatic competence needed for success in the Canadian workplace
    - \_ Develop the intercultural communication knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed for success in multicultural workplaces

- \_ Develop vocabulary and language skills related to target occupations
  - \_ Find employment counselling and assistance beyond the classroom
- \_ Instructors model the Skills for Success/Essential Skills, pragmatics, and intercultural competence needed for success in the Canadian workplace.
- \_ Instructors themselves have, or are developing, the occupation-specific workplace skills and knowledge in which they are training learners.

## 72. EAL Instructors deliberately target the development of Skills for Success/Essential Skills (ES) in language instruction.

- \_ Instructors introduce learners to the Skills for Success framework.
- \_ Instructors make the Skills for Success explicit by pointing out how in-class tasks use skills that transfer to the workplace.
- \_ Learners are referred to Skills for Success assessment and learning resources (e.g., Essential Skills mobile app; Essential Skills Quebec; Essential Skills Indicator; Essential Skills Can Do checklists).
- \_ Instructors use ES profiles, NOCs, and OLAs to identify authentic language tasks that are connected to learners' occupations; learners use those same resources to explore workplace options.
- \_ Instructors plan lessons that contextualize Communication, Reading, Writing, and Document Use tasks in the workplace.
- \_ Instructors provide support and modelling to help learners develop the Skills for Success needed to perform workplace tasks.
- \_ Instructors point out the transferability of Skills for Success tasks from one workplace to another.
- \_ Language learning activities include opportunities for learners to develop, practice and demonstrate Adaptability, Collaboration, Creativity and Innovation, and Problem Solving.
- \_ Recognizing that learners may have very different skill levels for numeracy and digital literacy, strategies for multilevel instruction are used when embedding these skills into language lessons, for example:
  - \_ Grouping learners according to different levels and assigning different tasks or providing different amounts of **scaffolding** to each group
  - \_ Designing activities where those with higher skill levels can apply and share their expertise

### 73. Learners develop the pragmatic competence and intercultural communicative competence necessary to develop and maintain effective relationships in the Canadian workplace.

- \_ Learning activities develop learners' ability to make appropriate choices in terms of vocabulary, tone, register, grammar, intonation patterns, etc., given the context, the participants, the intention, and the task.
- \_ Learning activities develop learners' abilities to understand the intention and effect of functional language and politeness strategies, as well as to effectively use these in spoken and written communication (e.g., requests, suggestions, apologies, accepting and declining invitations, compliments, instructions, and explanations, etc.).
- \_ Learning activities provide opportunity for learners to do some of the following:
  - \_ Compare and contrast similarities and differences in values, beliefs, behaviour patterns, expectations, etc., in own culture(s) vs. Canadian workplace culture(s)
  - \_ Reflect on their personal choices regarding the balance to strike between acculturating to a workplace culture and preserving one's own culture
  - \_ Develop attitudes of curiosity, respect for other ways of being, and appreciation for diversity
  - \_ Notice, analyze, explore, reflect on, and engage with instances of intercultural miscommunication and/or discomfort/dissonance in the workplace

(See also Instruction: Best Practice #50 in [Instruction](#), as well as the [Instruction](#) Resources for the Classroom on Intercultural Communication, and [Instruction](#) References and PD Resources, further reading on Speaking, Writing, and Pragmatics)

### 74. Language programs designed specifically to train learners for the workplace (e.g., English in the Workplace; English for Specific Purposes; Language for Employment Training, Safety, and PPE; and bridging programs to professional training) reflect labour market needs, provide clear pathways, and are transparently connected to the language and skills needed in the targeted workplace(s).

- \_ Workplace-focused courses reflect and respond to labour market needs as identified by the following:
  - \_ The Government of Canada
  - \_ Alberta Works and other provincial or territorial employment standards
  - \_ City/municipality employment needs updates
  - \_ Professional/trades organizations

- \_ Educational faculties (e.g., for bridging programs)
- \_ Learner pathways to achieving learning and employment-related goals are clear and specific.
- \_ Curriculum developers make and maintain authentic connections with workplaces to understand the stakes and identify authentic tasks.
- \_ Curriculum outcomes and materials/tasks are based on assessment of the language and essential skills needed for success in the target workplace.
- \_ Learners have the opportunity to identify essential skills and language gaps, and to develop goals to meet those gaps.
- \_ Occupational and language training supports learners in achieving their individual goals towards successful employability.
- \_ Task-based activities reflect the language and skills required in the target workplace, for instance, through the following:
  - \_ Opportunities to learn *and use* work-related vocabulary
  - \_ Customized lesson plans on specific work-based training
  - \_ Use of authentic workplace documents (e.g., incident reports, emails, application forms); materials (e.g., WHMIS and SDA toolkits); and equipment (e.g., cash registers, weighing scales, computer, trades tools)
  - \_ Occupation-specific role-plays and simulations
- \_ Learners have the opportunity to experience authentic workplaces (e.g., through field trips, work placements, volunteer opportunities, and/or virtual tours).
- \_ Learners encounter people in their targeted occupations (e.g., through resource sharing, guest speakers, informational interviews, field trips, career mentoring, job shadowing, and volunteer experience).
- \_ When possible, learners have the opportunity to gain recognized workplace training and/or credentials (e.g., WHMIS, first aid & CPR, workplace safety, MS Excel, professional certificates, etc.) in a supported language environment.
- \_ The program provides the following training supports as needed:
  - \_ Appropriate learning spaces for specific training needs (e.g., trades laboratory, kitchen space, etc.)
  - \_ Relevant equipment, training materials, and supplies such as:
    - \_ Cash register machines
    - \_ Portable kitchen cart/storage
    - \_ Training supplies storage
    - \_ Cubby bin/stackable bins
    - \_ Diaper changing tables
    - \_ Housekeeping and cleaning tools

# Vignettes

## *for Skills and Language for Work*

*This section includes descriptions of what the Best Practices might look like when applied in a variety of contexts.*

### Vignette 1: Language and Skills for Success in an Employment Training

I teach in a Language for Employment training program for CLB 3–4 learners going into a variety of occupations. As students prepare for employment readiness, I help learners develop and improve the essential skills they will need in the workplace. I want my learners to be engaged and to participate in their own learning. Here are some of the different activities we do in class:

- \_ Students use [Essential Skills Can Do Checklists](#) to identify goals related to the 9 essential skills (oral communication, numeracy, reading, thinking, document use, working with others, writing, digital technology, and continuous learning).
- \_ I integrate the following government-funded resources into my lessons:
  - \_ ABC UPSkills for Work Resources on Motivation, Teamwork, Attitude, Accountability, Responsibility, and Adaptability
  - \_ Workforce Participation Workbook 1 CLB 3 to 5
  - \_ AWES Video Series (YouTube)
- \_ I plan a variety of vocabulary development activities to help students learn and use vocabulary related to employment in general, as well as vocabulary for the occupations they are interested in (e.g., the trades).
- \_ I make sure that in-class communication tasks simulate authentic interactions in the workplace (e.g., interactions that might happen when using a cash register, leaving a voicemail, interacting in the kitchen, using a computer or tablet; reading and completing forms; reading manuals, and other work-related materials).

- \_ I highlight the transferability of essential and soft skills from one workplace to another. For instance, counting money is relevant in both food service and retail. Similarly, basic customer service skills (greetings, friendliness, politeness strategies, eye contact) are relevant across the trades as well as in food service and retail.
- \_ Students take part in a weekly skills review and reflection so that they can track improvement in their essential skills, as well as identify gaps and weaknesses to continue to work on. Based on this, students outline an action plan to address the areas they need to work on.
- \_ I invite company partners and former students who are now in the workforce as resource speakers in class.
- \_ When possible, I plan field trips to companies/workplaces to provide a real-world context for the essential skills and soft skills that they are working on.

## Vignette 2: Developing Transferable Job Skills in LINC

I was aware that many of the learners in my CLB 5 LINC class were hoping to enter a bridging program or get a job as soon as possible. To help my learners develop skills that would transfer to the workplace, I did the following:

- \_ Just prior to teaching the class, I took a look at the new [Canadian Language Benchmarks – Essential Skills Comparative Framework](#) document for CLB 5. I made a list of workplace-focused ES sample tasks for Communication, Reading, Writing (and Document Use). I kept these sample tasks in mind when designing language tasks for the settlement themes in my course. When we carried out tasks (e.g., reading a bus/train schedule and maps, menu, or product label; purchasing items and getting/giving change), we talked about which Essential Skill they were using and how that skill could transfer to different workplaces.
- \_ Based on learner interest, we chose “Employment” as one of the LINC themes to address. I chose to use pieces of a couple of the [LINC Works CLB 5 modules](#) for that theme. It included lesson plans, Quizlets, handouts, videos, audios, and even ready-made PBLA tasks. My learners filled out job application forms, read and wrote emails, left voicemails, role-played a conversation with an employment counsellor about goals, and did a mock interview. They reflected on how they had done, using self-assessment rubrics.
- \_ I wanted learners to explore different occupations, so I designed some activities around the [Easy Reading Job Profiles](#). Learners each focused on one profile and took on the role of an employer on a job panel. I also introduced learners to the [Essential Skills Profiles](#). They each printed off the profile of a job that they were interested in. They used a green highlighter to check off tasks that they could already do, and a yellow highlighter to identify tasks to work on. Based on this activity, I introduced learners to a few Essential

Skills tools and resources that they could use independently to assess and practice their essential skills: [Essential Skills Indicator](#) and the [Measure Up](#) website.

- I also wanted my learners to understand the importance of soft skills in the workplace. Groups each chose one soft skill from the [UPSkills for Work](#) website. Each group used the Activities resources to plan a presentation on that soft skill. Some of the learners even took the Stress Management online course on their own time.
- To foster intercultural awareness, each week we watched a video of a cross-cultural miscommunication in the workplace (I chose from the [OWLs videos](#) and the [Critical Incidents for Intercultural Communication in the Workplace](#) videos). For each video, we brainstormed a variety of reasons for the discomfort, including both positive and negative interpretations. We discussed what differences in values/expectations might be causing the issue. And we brainstormed for different ways to respond in that situation.

## Vignette 3: Occupation-Specific Tutoring

I sometimes tutor learners at a variety of language levels who need to improve their language skills to work more effectively in specific occupations (e.g., a meteorologist, a warehouse manager, and a health care aide). Here is a description of how I decide what to focus on, and what I do when we are working on a speaking task:

- I begin with an analysis of the specific communication tasks that are required in that occupation. Generally, I use the [Essential Skills Profile \(ESP\)](#) that is closest to my learner's occupation as the basis of an initial needs assessment and goal setting session. ES Profiles categorize workplace tasks into the 9 essential skills categories, and rank the tasks according to complexity level. If there happens to be an [Occupational Language Analysis \(OLA\)](#) for the learner's occupation, I might use that instead. OLAs organize workplace tasks according to the Canadian Language Benchmarks categories and give each task a CLB level. We talk about the tasks that my learner can already do, and we identify tasks that they are struggling with and wish to focus on. If possible, I also visit their workplace, and we identify contexts where communication takes place, as well as authentic materials and items that they may need to read or write. With some learners, I have snapped pictures of items that we can label for vocabulary practice.
- When we have identified a speaking task to focus on, we brainstorm together for some of the functional language that is important in that interaction (e.g., common phrases used in weather forecasts; common ways to ask someone to do something; common phrases to use when convincing a reluctant client to do something). We will generate authentic sentences using those phrases, writing them down and recording them. We will talk about the impact of the different wordings. For instance, what makes a request more pushy or



more polite, and what tone do they personally want to aim for? The learner will practice the functional language, focusing on word stress, intonation, and sentence stress. If the learner has trouble with dropping final sounds, for instance, we might work on linking or *-ed/-s* endings. Then we do a lot of role-playing, switching roles around, and evaluating interactions based on rubrics that we generate (What makes a good weather forecast? What makes a good voicemail message?). Often the learner will record me and will shadow my speech on their own time, again focusing on word stress, sentence stress, and intonation.

## Vignette 4: Reflecting on an Uncomfortable Conversation

In my LINC CLB 3–4 class, students participated in a “Show and Tell” demonstration on how they keep themselves fit and healthy. After each presentation, they asked each other questions to learn more about the different health practices. During one of these Q&A sessions, one student mentioned that students from specific parts of the world have strong body odour and sweat a lot because of the food they eat. There was a minute of uncomfortable silence. I jumped in and told the class that the statement was offensive because it stereotyped particular groups. Then we went on to talk about the importance of hygiene and eliminating body odour in the workplace. However, I was left feeling uncomfortable about the whole exchange and wondering whether I actually ended up perpetuating a racist system. I also felt that I might have alienated the student who asked the question, rather than engaging her in a discussion. The incident also sparked my curiosity about whether our sensitivity to the scents/smells of other ethnic groups stems from racism, and I found an enlightening article titled [Grease and Sweat: Race and Smell in Eighteenth-Century English Culture](#) that caused me to look at the whole issue in a different light. Issues and comments related to scents/smells do pop up regularly, and this is how I plan to manage it next time:

- \_ Sometime near the beginning of every class, we will talk about expectations for respectful communication. I will mention that the following are not allowed: terms and jokes that demean others; stereotypes based on race and ethnicity (as well as language, sexual orientation, gender identity, and age, etc.); bullying, etc. We will talk about examples of stereotypes and bullying, and practice calling them out. My goal is that when students feel stereotyped, they have language to call it out. We will practice this frequently as we identify stereotypes in materials they encounter. I am hoping that they will feel comfortable calling me and each other out when they hear stereotypes or micro-aggressions.
- \_ Scents/smells are indeed an issue that can raise barriers for my learners in the workplace—I’ve known people who have lost their jobs or experienced difficulty in their

workplace because of this issue. At the same time, attitudes towards scents/smells vary much across cultures and can be racist. I do not want to assume that “our way” (in Canada) is “the only way” when it comes to scents/smells. When we broach the topic of scents/smells, I plan to ask learners questions such as “What are your favorite scents/smells?”, “What scents/smells do you miss since you’ve come to Canada?”, “What have you noticed in Canada about attitudes towards particular scents/smells?”, and “How similar or different is this from attitudes in other countries that you’ve lived in?” The goal would be to elicit the idea that many in Canada are very scent/smell/odour-averse (after all, we ban odorous foods and even perfumes and perfumed lotions from many workplaces, and we have a plethora of products designed to hide odours). At the same time, the goal would be to acknowledge that this is only one of many ways of being in the world.

- With regard to helping learners manage body odours when they enter the workplace, I might flip the power structure in the classroom and describe my own (or my teenager’s) battle with body odour. I may have learners role-play giving advice (e.g., to an athletic teen or to my younger self) about products and hygiene habits to manage body odour in situations such as during an in-person job interview or starting their first job.

# References and PD Resources

## *for Skills and Language for Work*

*This section includes resources that informed this document and resources (academic articles, websites, videos, tutorials, courses, etc.) for professional development and further learning on this topic.*

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# Resources for the Classroom

## *for Skills and Language for Work*

*This section includes resources (lesson plans, curriculum, readings, videos, podcasts, online tools, etc.) to use in class.*

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