

How to Help Adult Learners Develop Basic Skills and Other Career Tools

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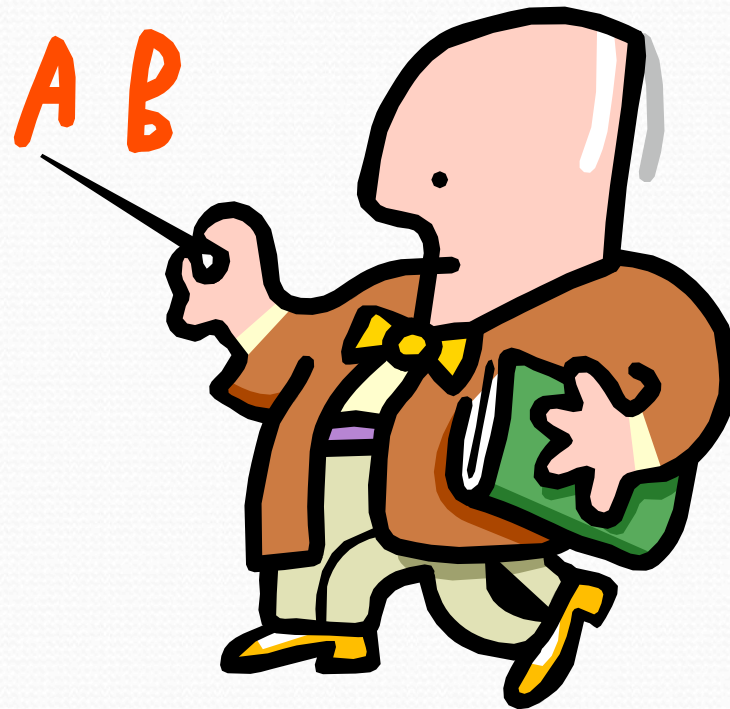
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Discussion questions

1. What are the basic skills and other “career tools” that adults need?
2. What are guidelines for effective instruction?
3. What instructional activities can you use?
4. Where can you get useful resources on this topic?

Question 1

What are the basic skills and other “career tools” that U.S. workers need to attain, retain, succeed in, and advance in rewarding employment in the U.S?

Workers need a broader mix of basic skills including . . .

- communication, (i.e., oral and written communications),
- decision-making (e.g., problem-solving),
- interpersonal (e.g., teamwork),
- lifelong learning skills (e.g., ability to deal with changing workplaces and job opportunities),
- beginning-level computer skills.

(See “Equipped for the Future” web site.)

In addition to basic skills, successful workers need:

- particular forms of technical knowledge;
- ability to navigate workplace “cultures”;
- self-efficacy (willingness to take on new challenges);
- credentials (e.g., a high school or post-secondary diploma/certificate, immigration papers, clean criminal record, driver’s license);
- a plan for the future;
- support networks (e.g., family, agencies, supervisors) to provide guidance and practical supports (childcare, transportation, housing).

Worker now use these career tools to . . .

- Get a job: Prepare for, find, apply for, and take on new jobs.
- Retain, succeed in, and advance in employment: Respond to the demands of jobs in retail/customer services, healthcare, construction, manufacturing, transportation...
- Operate their own businesses.
- Manage personal responsibilities (transportation, childcare, eldercare, housing, personal health and finances).

Workforce populations facing special challenges

- Dropouts (including youth disconnected from education and employment);
- Immigrants and refugees;
- Ex-offenders;
- Older adults (45 to 65);
- Learning disabled.



Question 2

What are guidelines for effective instruction?

Guidelines (adapted from EFF)

- Focus instruction on content that is purposeful (meaningful, important, motivating) for learners.
- Contextualize instruction by teaching skills as they are used by learners in work, family, or civic roles.
- Build on what learners already know.

(cont'd.)

Guidelines *(cont'd.)*

- Make instruction “transparent” by making it clear to learners why they are being asked to engage in particular learning activities. Use assessment to help learners continually monitor and improve their learning.
- Provide multiple opportunities and incentives for learners to master skills (through practice, reflection, fine-tuning of strategies). Don't be superficial. Be sure that learners master all components of standard.

Question 3

What instructional activities can you use?

- Career planning
- Job and document analysis
- Writing activities

Career planning activities

Why

Adults (whether employed or not) need to be able to:

- set relevant career goals and
- have a plan to guide their career advancement. *(cont'd.)*

Career planning activities

How: Use a systematic approach (with help of computers) to help learners:

- Identify their strengths and challenges related to career advancement;
- Explore career options;
- Set short and longer-term career goals;
- Understand relevant education they can engage in;
- Identify steps they can take to move ahead;
- Develop a resume and job interview skills . . .

Job and document analysis activities

Why: These activities can help learners:

- better understand the responsibilities of jobs
- develop portable basic skills (e.g., technical reading and writing, vocabulary, research, critical thinking. . .)
- Prepare for a job interview or workplace test.

(cont'd)

Job analysis activities

How: Work with learner to:

- Analyze the purposes, tasks, tools, skill requirements, benefits, limitations of a desired job;
- Do this through brainstorming (drawing on learner's prior knowledge), interviewing experts, reading company documents, or reviewing web sites (e.g., O*NET, www.bls.gov)
- Fill in a worksheet with this information. This can be added to learner's personal resource collection or portfolio.

Document analysis activities

How: Work with learner to:

- Read through a relevant workplace document to analyze its purposes, vocabulary, format, etc.
- Re-write the document in the learner's own words;
- Give the learner a quiz to assess her/his comprehension.

Writing for and about work

Why

- Many learners are required to perform writing tasks (including computer-based writing) on their jobs;
- Writing skills are needed to succeed on the GED, college admissions tests, and many job-related exams. These are stepping stones to better jobs

Writing tasks done by job seekers

How: Work with learners to identify and practice writing tasks they need to perform to get a job such as:

- Providing personal information on forms.
- Preparing resumes, letters of interest, and thank you letters.
- Having a “script” and taking notes when communicating with potential employers by phone or in face-to-face interviews.

Writing tasks performed in the workplace

How: Work with learners to identify and practice workplace writing tasks such as:

- Providing personal information required by HR/personnel departments (to receive pay, benefits, etc.)
- Communicating with co-workers (e.g., about tasks to be done, telephone messages, social events).

(cont'd.)

Writing tasks performed in the workplace (*cont'd.*)

- Recording information on forms about production, safety, incidents, inventories, etc.
- Recording workplace procedures (e.g., lab reports, job manuals).
- Developing workplace knowledge by taking notes at work (in meetings, training, observations ...)
- Writing to customers and suppliers.
- Advocating for themselves and/or co-workers.

Useful resources

- Equipped for the Future: <http://eff.cls.utk.edu>
- Career awareness curriculum: www.collegetransition.org/careerawareness.html
- Workplace basic education: http://www.ncsall.net/fileadmin/resources/fob/2004/fob_7b.pdf
- Approaches to adult basic education: <http://www.ncsall.net/?id=190>
- Project-based learning: www.ncsall.net/?id=31