Australian Government

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

AUSTRALIAN CORE SKILLS FRAMEWORK

(A SUMMARY)

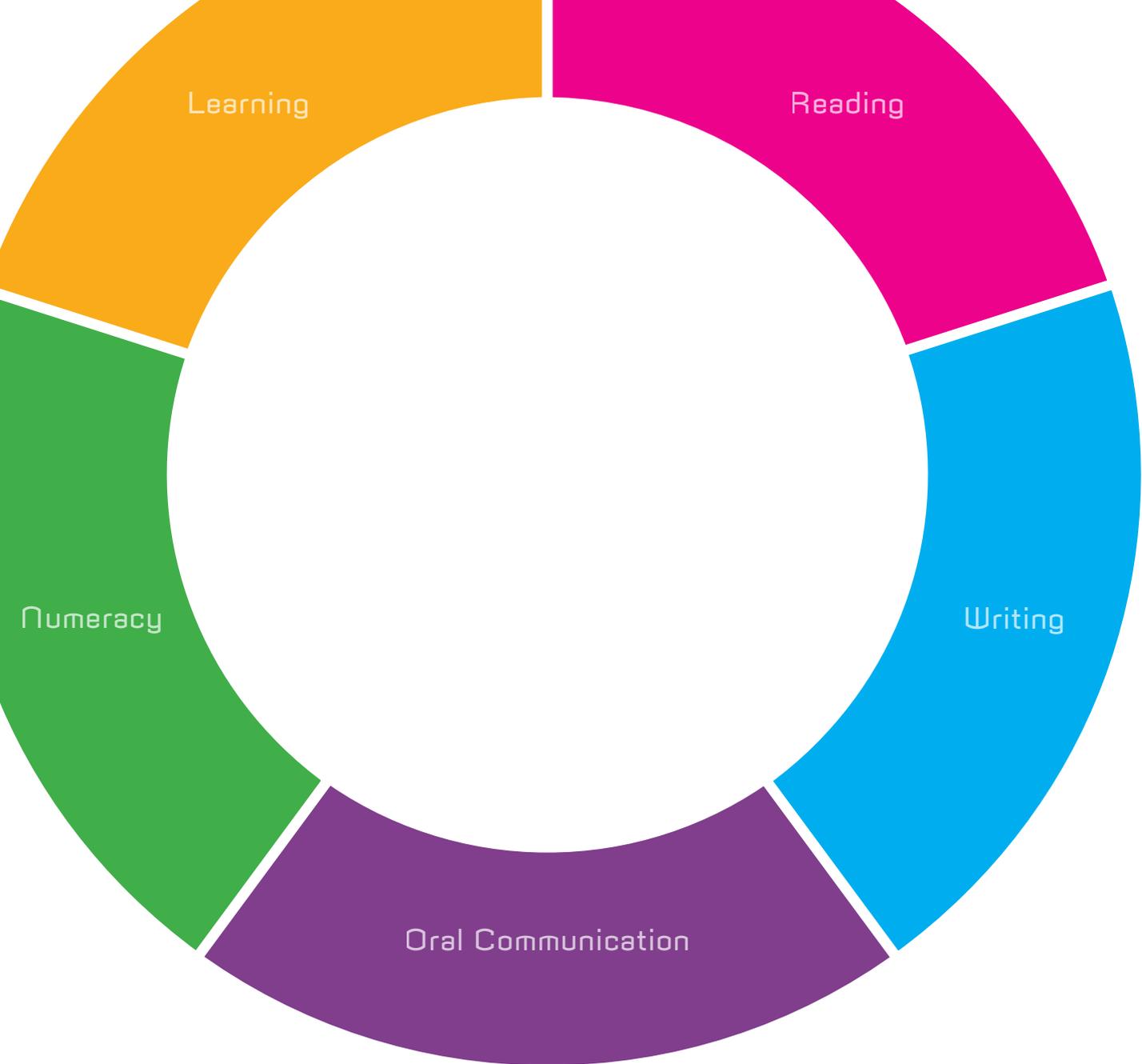5 LEVELS OF PERFORMANCE

6 ASPECTS OF COMMUNICATION

5 CORE SKILLS

LEARNING
READING
WRITING
ORAL COMMUNICATION
NUMERACY

Australian Core Skills Framework

(A SUMMARY)

5 LEVELS OF PERFORMANCE
6 ASPECTS OF COMMUNICATION
5 CORE SKILLS

Learning

Reading

Numeracy

Writing

Oral Communication

What is the Australian Core Skills Framework?

The Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF) describes levels of performance in the 5 core skills of:

> Learning
> Reading
> Writing
> Oral Communication
> Numeracy

These skills are essential for people to participate in our society. People need to communicate effectively in many different ways, for diverse purposes, in a variety of contexts and to think critically about information and ideas.

There is a growing recognition that the challenge is...

> '... not confined to those with poor basic skills, but extends to all people trying to understand new forms of communication and information as they take on different roles in life and work.'

> *(National Centre for Vocational Education Research 2005)*

It is likely that each new role and responsibility we take on will require new or enhanced core skills. Therefore, we need a range of strategies to adapt to changing circumstances and new challenges, including strategies to help us learn.

The Australian Core Skills Framework will provide:

> A consistent national approach to the identification of the core skills requirements in diverse personal, community, work and training contexts

> A common reference point for describing and discussing performance in the 5 core skill areas

The ACSF is based on the National Reporting System (NRS), a mechanism for reporting outcomes of adult English language, literacy and numeracy provision. The NRS has been used by Australian language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) specialists since 1995.

The ACSF is primarily a tool for specialist practitioners. However, this summary has been developed to assist non-specialists to understand the essentials of performance in the core skills in different contexts.

> This summary outlines the key concepts and applications of the ACSF

> The full ACSF is available from Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations at www.acsf.deewr.gov.au

> The ACSF can be used wherever performance in the 5 core skills is described or discussed

Some applications of the ACSF include:

Assessing core skills performance

Specialist LLN practitioners can use the ACSF to describe an individual's performance in the five core skills at any point in time, and then monitor progress over time. The specificity of the ACSF allows practitioners to identify a person's areas of strength and need with some precision, and target training to areas of need.

Describing core skills in the workplace

The ACSF will enable LLN practitioners to identify and discuss core skills issues with others in the workplace. This information should help HR Managers and workplace trainers, for example, when designing communication strategies and developing training for employees at all levels of an organisation.

The ACSF provides a standard approach for describing the 5 core skills as part of workplace competence within training programmes. Training Package developers can use the ACSF to ensure that the core skills are adequately addressed as part of competency standards within training packages.

Mapping core skills to curriculum

The ACSF can be used to map state LLN curricula. It provides a common language to describe adult English language, literacy and numeracy performance across Australia.

Core skills training, funding and referrals

Where government funding is provided for core skills training, LLN practitioners can use the ACSF levels of performance to support applications to government agencies. This will facilitate national equity and accountability, and provide valid statistical feedback on the impact of government funded programmes focusing on core skills development.

The ACSF concepts in this summary document may also be useful for guiding government agencies when they are referring a client for a language, literacy or numeracy assessment.

> The full ACSF is designed to be used by specialist practitioners to describe core skills performance in a range of settings

> The summary document may assist non-specialists in their understanding of the factors that influence core skills development and performance

READING LEVEL 3

3.03	Evaluates and integrates facts and ideas to construct meaning from a range of text types
3.04	Selects and applies a range of reading strategies as appropriate to purpose and text type

SUPPORT	CONTEXT	TEXT	TASK COMPLEXITY
Moderate support Advice and modeling available	Range of familiar contexts Some less familiar/ routine contexts Some specialisation in routine contexts	Routine texts May include some unfamiliar elements and embedded information Includes some specialised vocabulary	Tasks include a number of steps within the one task, e.g. sequencing, applying basic inferencing, extrapolation and integration

PERFORMANCE FEATURES INCLUDE:

3.03	Identifies purpose and audience of texts across a range of familiar, and some unfamiliar, text types and Aspects of Communication
	Comprehends longer texts with limited complexity which require integration of a number of ideas and pieces of information
	Draws on prior knowledge together with knowledge of textual cues and text structures to predict content and meaning
	Separates fact from opinion
	Compares several pieces of information from one or more texts
	Interprets and extrapolates from texts where information is presented in graphic, diagrammatic, formatted or visual formats
	Uses knowledge of text to make inferences, e.g. uses cartoon to infer author's stand on subject
	Identifies explicit and implicit meaning within a text, e.g. opinion piece
	Recognises that an author uses text to serve a particular purpose, e.g. to appeal to or exclude a group
	Recognises that the author selects the structure of a text to serve a particular purpose
	Recognises that words and grammatical choices may carry particular shades of meaning in different contexts

3.04	Identifies some explicit questions to be answered by reading
	Selects from a range of strategies to aid comprehension, e.g. self corrects, reads aloud, reads ahead, underlines, makes notes in margin
	Uses a range of textual cues such as headings, paragraphing and punctuation to predict content and as an aid to comprehension
	Skims and scans to locate content
	Uses a range of word identification strategies, including phonic and visual letter patterns, syllabification, word origins
	Comprehends some complex and compound sentences
	Comprehends dependent clauses introduced by words such as although, when, if, while
	Recognises devices used to refer to words or phrases used in previous clauses/sentences
	Recognises introductory phrases which indicate that an opinion or a fact is being offered
	Recognises and comprehends common idioms
	Comprehends some specialised terminology in routine texts
	Uses a range of support resources to determine meaning of unknown words

The ACSF describes **5 levels of performance** in each of the core skills. A key feature is that it takes into account the factors that influence a person's performance:

> The degree and nature of **support** available
> The familiarity with the **context**
> The complexity of **text**, including written, diagrammatic, visual and oral
> The complexity of the **task**

Appendix 1 shows how these variables change across the 5 levels

At each level within a core skill there are statements, called **Indicators**, that describe achievement at this level.

Learning, Reading, Writing, and Oral Communication have 2 indicators at each level. Numeracy has 3.

At each level within a core skill, a set of **Performance Features** provides more specific information about the Indicators.

At each level, the ACSF groups Sample Activities according to 6 interrelated **Aspects of Communication** representing the different contexts in which we might use the core skills:

> Personal communication (expressing identity)
> Cooperative communication (interacting in groups)
> Procedural communication (performing tasks)
> Technical communication (using tools and technology)
> Systems communication (interacting in organisations)
> Public communication (interacting with the wider community)

See appendix 2 for examples of what a person is able to do at each of the 5 levels in each of the core skills

The ACSF recognises that a person may be operating at different levels within the 5 core skills. This can be captured visually in what is called a **'spiky profile.'[1]**

Using the ACSF, an individual's performance across the five core skills can be benchmarked and a spiky profile constructed. This provides valuable information about an individual's areas of strength and specifically identifies any areas where further training could be beneficial.

Scenario 1: Pinpointing strengths and learning needs

Samantha's overall spiky profile (Fig 1) shows that her ACSF levels of performance vary across the 5 core skills.

> Samantha has recently joined a community group that is advocating the expansion of child care services in her local area. Although her overall Oral Communication level is at ACSF level 4, she feels that she would like to develop her skills so that she can speak up with confidence at public meetings, and form part of the team that will make submissions at local council meetings.

> Further analysis of Samantha's Oral Communication skills using the ACSF Aspects of Communication (Fig 2) confirms that Samantha would benefit from some training in the *systems* and *public* Aspects.
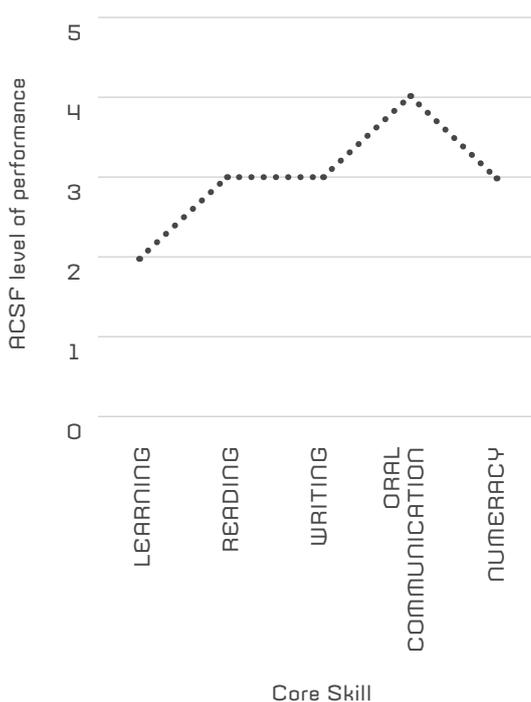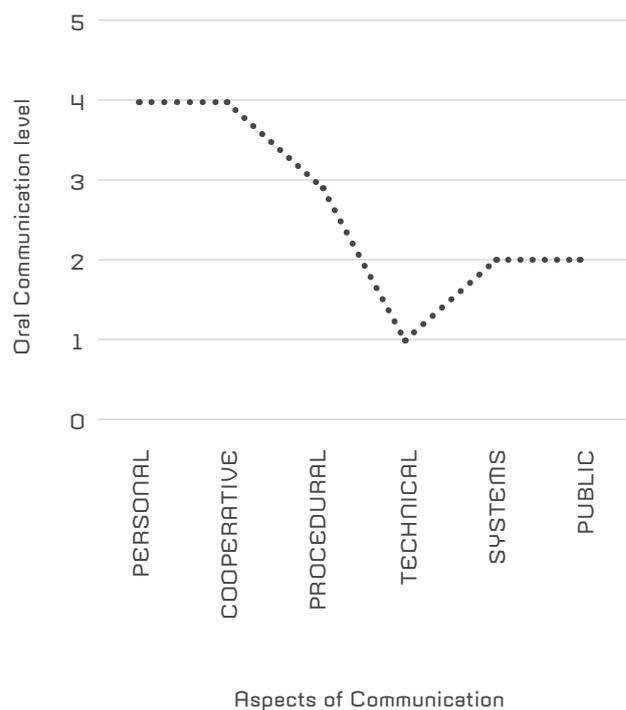
Fig 1.

Fig 2.

[1] *Bateson, G., Nov 2001 "Basic Skills, Change and Success", Birmingham Disability Employment Partnership Conference*

Scenario 2: Helping a person meet the core skills requirements of a training program

> Jim has worked for many years as a personal carer in an aged care facility. His workplace has enrolled him in Certificate III in Aged Care so that he can develop his skills in line with industry requirements. The spiky profile compares his current level of competence across the core skills with those required to undertake the Certificate III. His trainer arranges for Jim to receive additional core skills training to ensure that he will be able to manage the course requirements.

●●● Current level of competence

█ ACSF level required
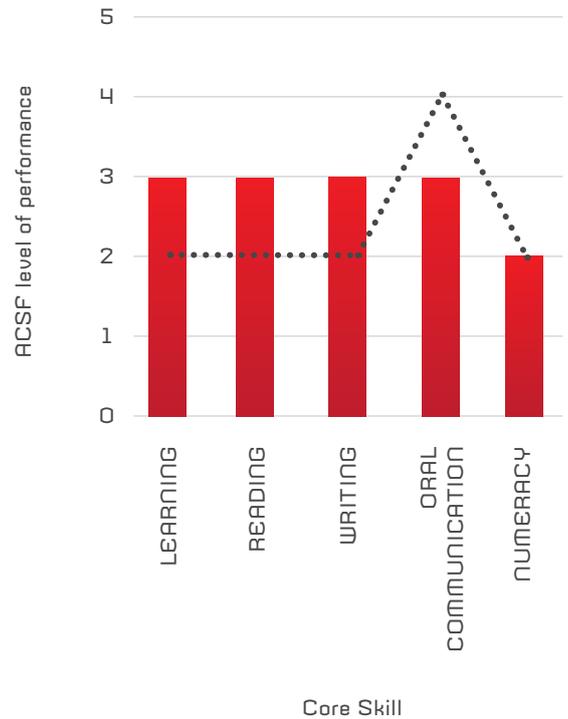
Scenario 3: Helping meet the core skill requirements of a new job

> Carol has been offered the opportunity to undertake training to prepare for a supervisory position. She has enrolled in Certificate IV in Business - Frontline Management. A LLN specialist used the ACSF to compare the core skills required for this Certificate with Carol's current skills. The spiky profile shows that Carol would benefit from developing her Reading, Writing and Oral Communication skills and the LLN specialist will work with the workplace trainer to integrate targetted core skill development with the Certificate IV training.

●●● Current level of competence

█ ACSF level required
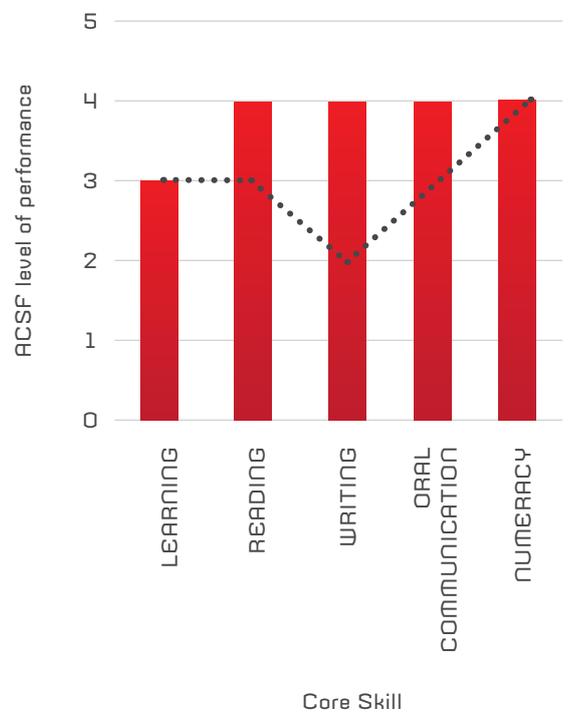
> The 5 levels of the ACSF cannot be neatly aligned to the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) as the skills required to perform a task vary according to context and will depend on type of workplace, size, organisational structures, products and services and individual roles and responsibilities.

The Employability Skills Framework was developed by the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) and the Business Council of Australia (BCA). It encapsulates a set of generic skills identified as being critical, not only to gaining and maintaining employment, but to operating effectively in personal and community contexts.

The Employability Skills Framework identifies eight skills clusters, each of which is made up of a set of facets.

Is there a connection between the ACSF and Employability skills?

There are areas of overlap between the Employability skills and the five core skills of the ACSF. These can be seen most clearly at facet level.

For example, a broad range of facets are grouped within the Communication Employability skill, some of which align directly with the ACSF core skills themselves. Facets within other Employability skills are partially captured by the ACSF core skills, while the ACSF core skill of Learning incorporates the three Employability skills of *Self management, Learning skills* and *Planning* and *organising* and is also reflected in *Initiative and enterprise skills* and *Team work skills*.

Table 1 provides examples of how the ACSF core skills relate to facets of the eight Employability skills.

The ACSF has the potential to spell out what Employability skills facets such as 'writing to the needs of an audience' or 'using numeracy effectively' actually mean in a specific context. However, it is important to note that the ACSF only provides detailed insights into some facets of each Employability skills cluster and therefore cannot be used to rate an individual's level of performance in any of the actual Employability skills.

EMPLOYABILITY SKILL & FACET(S)	THE ACSF CORE SKILL
Communication skills	
Listening and understanding	Oral Communication
Writing to the needs of the audience	Writing
Reading independently	Reading
Using numeracy effectively	Numeracy
Team work skills	
Coaching, mentoring and giving feedback	Oral Communication
Problem solving	
Testing assumptions taking the context of data and circumstances into account	Numeracy
Initiative and enterprise skills	
Adapting to new situations	Learning
Planning and organising skills	
Collecting, analysing and organising information	Learning, Reading, Oral Communication
Self management skills	
Articulating own ideas and vision	Learning, Oral Communication, Writing
Learning skills	
Managing own learning	Learning
Technology skills	
Using IT to organise data	Numeracy

Table 1 Employability Skills and the ACSF

Levels of performance and factors affecting performance

A person's competence in any of the core skills is influenced by a number of variables. These include the amount of support given, the context, the features and content of the text and the complexity of the task. The following table provides detail of how these variables change across the levels of performance.

	SUPPORT	CONTEXT	TEXT	TASK COMPLEXITY
1	Full support Works alongside expert/mentor Prompting and modelling provided	Highly familiar contexts Concrete and immediate Very restricted range of contexts	Short and simple Highly explicit purpose Limited, highly familiar vocabulary	Concrete tasks of one or two processes, e.g. locating, recognising
2	High level support May work with expert/mentor Modelling available and accessible if requested	Familiar and predictable contexts Limited range of contexts	Simple familiar texts with clear purpose Familiar vocabulary	Explicit tasks involving a limited number of familiar processes, e.g. identifying, interpreting
3	Moderate support Advice and modelling available	Range of familiar contexts Some less familiar/routine contexts Some specialisation in routine contexts	Routine texts May include some unfamiliar elements and embedded information Includes some specialised vocabulary	Tasks include a number of steps within the one task, e.g. sequencing, basic inferencing, extrapolation and integration
4	Minimal support, as requested Establishing own support resources	Range of contexts including some that are unfamiliar and/or unpredictable Some specialisation in non-routine contexts	Complex texts Embedded information Includes specialised vocabulary Includes abstraction and symbolism	Complex task analysis involving application of a number of processes, e.g. extracting, comparing and interpreting information
5	Little or no support Initiates support from own established resources	Broad range of contexts Adaptability within and across contexts Specialisation in one or more contexts	Highly complex texts Highly embedded information Includes highly specialised language	Sophisticated task analysis including interpretation, analysis, reflection, synthesis, evaluation and recommendation

FIVE LEVELS OF PERFORMANCE

7

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These are some examples of the skills a person may have in each of the 5 core skills at the 5 levels of performance in the ACSF.

	LEVEL 1	LEVEL 2
LEARNING	Identifies and approaches a more experienced worker for assistance Takes required materials to training/class Keeps list of frequently used words	Discusses learning goals with supervisor and identifies possible strategies to achieve Arranges child care so can attend training course Uses key words and search engine to find information e.g. the oldest/biggest building in world
READING	Recognises very short explicit pictorial texts, e.g. recognises safety symbols found on chemical containers Reads and follows simple, familiar work timetable or schedule of activities specific to own job Reads simple diagrams, e.g. hand drawn map of local area to locate public facilities such as schools, hospitals, bus stops	Follows touch screen instructions to search for information, e.g. locates specific shop in large shopping complex Locates specific information from a short text, e.g. a table of employee benefits, a pay slip, employment documentation, own job description, work update from staff memo Reads dials and scales on machinery/equipment, e.g. automatic weigher on packaging machine, temperature dials, counters, franking machine, sewing machine tension, air pressure gauge
WRITING	Writes routine, familiar workplace-specific vocabulary and abbreviations Types own personal details into a computer-assisted learning program Uses calendar to record information related to community or public dates, e.g. class term dates, culturally significant celebrations	Creates a short report, e.g. describes previous English classes or other training course Writes a list of tasks to be completed by other members of the group, e.g. roster, action plan Writes a brief message for a fellow worker e.g. shift changeover note
ORAL COMMUNICATION	Makes and responds to simple enquiries relevant to personal needs, e.g. asks about a training program advertised on the notice board; asks directions to toilets Listens to suggestions and participates in a negotiated group activity, e.g. comes to an agreement about a meeting place for a workplace function, class excursion, family picnic Expresses opinion in a short spoken exchange, e.g. indicates possible cause for machine failure	Makes a telephone call and responds appropriately to questions which require basic personal details, e.g. makes an appointment at the community health centre Listens to short, explicit instruction to learn new procedures needed to complete a task, e.g. to use a piece of machinery in the workplace, use a computer program Participates in a face-to-face oral exchange, e.g. job interview, enquires about training opportunities, time of delivery / pick up
NUMERACY	Estimates lengths of familiar objects using metric units, e.g. a person's height, lengths of fabric or lengths of wood used in everyday work Identifies and compares familiar items, their quantities, sizes and costs, e.g. checks weight and/or length of product against job ticket Uses calendar to record information related to community, workplace or public dates, e.g. class term dates, RDOs, culturally significant celebrations	Calculates cost of two items and estimates change due after making a payment Records numbers or quantities of materials distributed or sales figures and data onto spreadsheet or familiar workplace computers or hand held devices Accesses and compares information contained in two-column tables, e.g. calculates postage and fees for certified mail

LEVEL 3	LEVEL 4	LEVEL 5
Participates in Quality Improvement processes in the workplace, considering the priorities and commitments of self and other members	Actively seeks feedback from others as a way of improving performance (e.g. approaches peers, manager, customers)	Critically reflects on extended research project, describes difficulties encountered, considers ways to improve performance and transfers insights to a new context
Develops and uses personal organisation systems such as files, notebooks, folders and checklists	Uses a range of formal techniques to collaborate effectively with others to complete a multi-layered research task	Implements systematic action learning process to support learning during team project
Negotiates Professional Development plan aligned with personal and workplace needs, and takes responsibility for organising the formal training component	Keeps record of new technical terms or procedures encountered through independent study	Evaluates workplace learning culture and pathways in relation to own need for further training and development
Reads and responds to notices posted on chat rooms	Gathers information for research from a variety of sources and critically analyses and reviews these, e.g. newspapers, journal articles, internet sites, blogs	Critically evaluates information on possible management courses as part of own Performance Appraisal Review
Reads and follows information presented in technical drawings, manuals and work instructions, patterns e.g. specifications for job, construction plans	Reads a complex diagram and text to identify components and procedures for dealing with a technical fault or breakdown	Follows a complex flow chart in order to identify and distil relevant information, e.g. tracks source of non-compliance through workplace process
Uses 'help' facility on software programme to find out how to format a text, e.g. brief report, contribution to workplace or community newsletter, emails to colleagues or to place orders, spreadsheets	Demonstrates understanding of text describing complex interrelationships of events, e.g. reads and reviews a report detailing a problem and steps taken to address it	Identifies, analyses and evaluates information from a wide variety of sources, e.g. undertakes a task analysis in order to design and develop a training program for implementation in the workplace
Completes Performance Appraisal Review form and identifies personal goals	Writes clear and detailed instructions organised sequentially for members of a group in order to complete an activity, e.g. writes Standard Operating Procedure for a process involving several work stations, develops detailed flow chart to guide community development project	Writes an organisational plan based on task analysis, survey of participants, and financial information
Writes clear sequenced instructions for routine/everyday context, e.g. prepares workplace timetable for start up and shut down procedures		Writes a position paper or report based on analysis of data and consultations conducted with a range of stakeholders e.g. external and internal customer feedback on quality of service
Uses Email for day to day communication e.g. to work colleague, to teacher, to friend	Prepares data for team/group using graphs to compare production output over a period of time, and including suggested recommendations for improving production targets	Designs a survey to accurately ascertain customer satisfaction levels and presents a process to evaluate responses
	Uses software to prepare a report or presentation, e.g. PowerPoint, Flash	
Gives clear sequenced instructions of several steps, e.g. how to use a photocopier/CD player/, log on/log off computer	Presents issue/agenda item in a class or workplace meeting, and furthers group understanding of relevant ideas through constructive engagement in subsequent discussion	Listens and provides evaluative feedback at a training session on new procedures
Participates in an oral exchange requiring some negotiation, e.g. responds to specific enquiries, complaints, problems with clients or customers	Compares the procedures used to complete tasks in discussions with colleagues / group members	Explains technological concepts or scientific phenomena to an audience or work group unfamiliar with the concepts involved, using aids such as machine / equipment parts, photos, diagrams and scaled models
Listens to and notes specific information from an announcement such as emergency evacuation procedures	Actively participates in group discussion of new technology and subsequent changes to work, study, personal routines	Negotiates outcomes in discussions which embrace a range of potentially conflicting perspectives within an organisation, e.g. changes to work practices; formulation of mission statement
Works in a group to undertake a simple survey and documents the results including at least one everyday or routine graph, e.g. a workplace survey of worker's OH&S knowledge	Works in a team to plan and develop an operating budget for a task/project/activity including income/revenue from different sources, (e.g. Government funding, membership fees, sales) and expenses (e.g. staffing, materials, marketing, overheads, travel, training, IT support)	Researches and investigates statistical data gathered through individual research or experimentation, organises data into groups in a frequency table, represents data graphically, calculates and records measures of central tendency and spread and analyses and discusses the results including their relevance and impact on the topic of research/investigation
Uses appropriate technological devices to measure and record data and report and act on results, e.g. blood pressure machine, micrometer, temperature gauge	Uses a job or task description or set of instructions for making up a mixture based on ratios and selects, measures and makes up the mixture to any required amount correctly and according to OH&S constraints (e.g. chemical spray, or industrial recipes)	Given particular financial constraints and personal/family requirements, investigates and analyses the options for where to best rent or buy a home or holiday house based on location, prices and availability and make recommendations including cost comparisons
Identifies and explains uses and application of shape in different contexts, e.g. use of 2D and 3D shapes in house or building construction	Interprets and uses ratios and scales to read and discuss the design and dimensions on the plan of a property in order to allocate working space and furniture, e.g. a building/workplace, a sports building/facility	

9
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