

Key considerations

Background

Workplace communication skills, underpinned by language, literacy and numeracy, are increasingly valued in all occupations and industries due to the greater complexity of interactions between workers and suppliers, colleagues and clients. Computerisation has increased productivity and changed many aspects of the production process. While technical skills are still required, most occupations need workers to have higher levels of problem-solving or cognitive skills, and higher levels of interpersonal or communication skills.

Workplace communication is also recognised as an important component of industry training. The construction and property services industries have a large number of workers from access and equity groups such as Indigenous and CALD (culturally and linguistically diverse) backgrounds, as well as a large number of enterprises in rural and remote locations. LLN skill levels have been identified as important issues affecting mobility and equity in vocational education and training (VET) participation, as well as employee retention and career progression in the industries.

There are some key considerations for analysing core skills which relate directly to LLN and workplace communication. These considerations include what LLN in the workplace means, how adults learn best, and the relationship between LLN skills, the AQF and AQTF and RTO responsibilities in this context.

Language, literacy and numeracy (LLN)

A person will use and respond to spoken and written language every day in the course of undertaking their workplace tasks. Numeracy skills will also be used every day, often at the same time as language and literacy skills are being used. It is very important that people who have difficulties with LLN are treated with sensitivity. A lot of emotional issues relating to poor skills may be raised during training. Critical to good practice is the ability to put into place effective personal and professional strategies to support the LLN skills needs of learners, while focusing training or assessment on the workplace outcome.

The term 'language, literacy and numeracy' or LLN, is used together throughout this guide, however each of these skills (as with the other core skills of oral communication and learning) is not interchangeable and not always linked. They are always context specific. Sometimes they may individually be the focus of training (for example, when carrying out calculations for a length of timber). Each of the LLN terms is explained below as they will no doubt be the focus of any core skill development.

Language

Language commonly refers to spoken words. It involves listening as well as using verbal and non-verbal forms of communication such as gestures and body movements which can be used to convey meaning. In using language, we generally use a combination of communication forms such as speaking, listening, reading, writing and visual communication. Visual communication skills, for example, underpin the agreed language of the Australian deaf community - Australian Sign Language (AUSLAN). Language can be:

- English words, verbal structures and gestures used to convey meaning
- languages other than English (eg Indigenous language, Mandarin or Greek)
- forms of communication based on visual communication skills such as Australian Sign Language (AUSLAN).

Language changes over time and context. Industries have their own vocabulary, including jargon, technical terms and acronyms that workers must understand. This can be challenging for some people, particularly if English is not their first language.

Effective cross-cultural communication requires a range of skills including the ability to appreciate that there may be variations in the value placed on the communication forms of language. For example, while written language is highly regarded in the English language, Indigenous languages often place higher value on verbal and visual communication forms.

Literacy

Literacy means *'the integration of listening, speaking, reading, writing and critical thinking. It incorporates numeracy and it includes the cultural knowledge that enables a speaker, writer or reader to recognise and use language appropriate to different situations. Providing literacy training and assistance helps people to fully participate in the labour force, participate in adult education and training, and use literacy at home and in the community.*

Literacy is about both skills acquisition and the critical application of these skills in multiple environments for multiple purposes. Language, literacy and numeracy are core skills that are fundamental to other learning.' (Source: Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) Program: Program Guidelines for WELL Training Projects, 6/2009).

Literacy skills enable us to interact with one another to achieve particular purposes, for example to explain, debate, retrieve and provide information, explore issues, entertain and create.

Like language, literacy practices change over time and context. This is evidenced by the emerging multi-media and information technologies and our multi-cultural society. The literacy demands placed on individuals also changes throughout their lifetimes. Literacy skills need to continually adapt to new situations, particularly in the workplace.

Numeracy

Numeracy involves the practical application of mathematical skills to absorb, use and critically evaluate information in numerical or graphical form. Depending on the context, this can include basic number skills, spatial and graphical concepts, the use of measurement and problem solving. Numeracy may also involve literacy, for example when extracting mathematical information from written text. Methods used to achieve certain numeracy tasks will differ according to the workplace requirements, technology and culture.

Workplace communication

Communication is fundamental to most jobs and is commonly defined as *'the sending, receiving and processing of messages'*. Workplace literacy involves use of a range of communication skills which require people to describe, explain, locate, organise and use information. It may also include gestures, hand signals and jargon used by a workplace and the volume and tone of voices in exchanges between workers. Numeracy skills are also involved, for example estimating quantities, measuring things and expressing ideas in diagrams and graphs.

Key considerations

Communication in a workplace occurs at all levels and in a variety of contexts, for example workers reading safety procedures, and supervisors writing reports or dealing with clients on the phone. The media for communication also varies. It can be spoken (face-to-face or on the telephone), or written (on paper or electronically).

Workplace communication happens whenever people work together to get things done. Often, unspoken rules are developed about what to do in particular situations. Examples of the application of workplace literacy are provided in the table below.

Workplace literacy	Example of application in the property services industry	Example of application in the construction industry
Reading and using different types of information	Reading and understanding lease agreements, letters and notices, electronic data such as property listings, and emails.	Reading and understanding work instructions, job specifications and plans, OHS notices, electronic data such as Australian Standards, and emails.
Writing and recording information	Preparing property information for clients, maintenance reports, and letters to clients.	Completing hazard proformas, tender documentation, work plans and specifications, incident report forms and notes.
Listening to different types of information	Receiving verbal work instructions from supervisors, answering the telephone, and listening for bids while conducting an auction.	Receiving verbal work instructions from supervisors and contractors, information provided in OHS induction training, answering the telephone, listening for safety signals on site (eg alarms, messages etc).
Giving different types of verbal information	Negotiating property listings, offering solutions and feedback, reporting issues to the supervisor, using the telephone to convey property information.	Discussing job progress and work details with others, offering solutions and feedback, reporting hazards or incidents to the supervisor, using the telephone to order materials, giving verbal signals to other workers for safety.
Performing a range of numeracy tasks	Estimating a quantity of supplies to be ordered, calculating time such as hours worked in a shift, and measuring distances.	Estimating a quantity of materials to be ordered, calculating quantities for mixing of chemicals and materials, and measuring lengths of timber.

Understanding how adults learn

A final consideration relates to understanding the ways that adults learn best. Here are some key principles which have been adapted from *Training for Dummies* (Elaine Biech, 2005).

- Adults need to know why they should learn something before investing time in the learning. You need to ensure that the learner knows the purpose for training as early as possible.
- Adults enter any learning situation with a perception of themselves as self-directing, responsible people. You need to help them to identify their needs and direct their own learning experience. Encourage their participation and facilitate the learning (rather than directing).
- Adults come to a learning opportunity with a wealth of experience and a great deal to contribute. Identify ways to build on and make use of that experience.
- Adults have a strong readiness to learn those things that help them cope with daily life effectively. Training that relates directly to situations faced by them is viewed as relevant.
- Adults are willing to devote energy to learning those things that they believe help them perform a task or solve a problem. Identify those needs and interests and develop appropriate content that responds to those needs and interests.
- Adults are more responsive to internal motivators such as increased self esteem, than external motivators such as higher salaries. Create a safe learning environment to ensure that this internal motivation is not blocked by barriers such as a poor self-concept (eg surrounding literacy) or time constraints.

LLN skills and the AQF

The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) is a single, coherent framework for qualifications ranging from senior secondary certificates through to doctoral degrees. The framework covers qualifications issued by secondary schools, VET providers, and higher education institutions. All qualifications are nationally recognised.

Each vocational area has a unique set of LLN tasks (eg reading, writing, communication, and numeracy tasks) that are part of everyday vocational tasks. As with all the core skills, LLN skills do not progress in complexity against the progression of the AQF. They are most often at different levels within qualifications as well as across qualification levels. Some qualifications, such as engineering or refrigeration, have only limited writing demands at a Certificate IV level, but require specific and complex numeracy even at entry level. Qualifications in retail are often very demanding in the oral communication area, but have reading and writing tasks that are of a lower level.

You will need to analyse each qualification and vocational area to identify the required skills. This will enable you to understand the LLN skills needed by individual learners to successfully participate in training, and to identify any gaps as the basis for designing training and assessment.

AQTF compliance

The Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) is the national set of standards which assures nationally consistent, high-quality training and assessment services for the clients of Australia's VET system. The three components of the AQTF are:

- **The Essential Standards for Registration**

Training organisations must meet these standards in order to deliver and assess nationally recognised training and issue nationally recognised qualifications. They include three standards, a requirement for RTOs to gather information on their performance against three quality indicators, and nine conditions of registration.

- **Standards for State and Territory Registering Bodies**

State and territory registering bodies are responsible for registering training organisations and for quality assuring the training and assessment services they provide, in accordance with the AQTF 2007 and relevant legislation within each jurisdiction. The standards and supporting guidelines provide a national operating framework.

- **Excellence Criteria**

These are criteria that RTOs may use voluntarily to continue improving the quality of their training and assessment and to gain recognition of their performance.

Source: AQTF 2007 Users' Guide to the Essential Standards for Registration

You will no doubt be familiar with the AQTF. To be compliant with the standards mentioned above, you will also understand your responsibilities to provide LLN support to learners through delivery and assessment. As a general guide, within the *Essential Standards for Registration*, there are a number of references that refer directly to issues related to LLN. These are highlighted in the tables on the next page.

AQTF 2007 requirements for provision of LLN support

AQTF standard:	1. The RTO provides quality training and assessment across all of its operations
Element:	1.2 Strategies for training and assessment meet the requirements of the relevant Training Package or accredited course and are developed in consultation with industry stakeholders
Reference to LLN:	The requirement to meet learners' needs states that learners could have needs related to those relevant to LLN levels.
AQTF standard:	2. The RTO adheres to principles of access and equity and maximises outcomes for its clients
Element:	1.2 The RTO continuously improves client services by collecting, analysing and acting on relevant data
Reference to LLN:	Matters relevant to improving client services could include the effectiveness of assistance provided in the areas of language use, literacy and numeracy. Under the requirement to systematically review and make improvements to client service, evidence of improvements might include documentation to show improved results in assessments of language use, literacy and numeracy.
Element:	2.2 Before clients enrol or enter into a contract, the RTO informs them about the training, assessment and support services to be provided, and about their rights and obligations
Reference to LLN:	The requirement to provide sufficient, clear information to the client, includes information about client support services in the areas of language use, literacy and numeracy. If clients have support needs, they need to know either how the required support will be provided, or how they can source this support externally.
Element:	2.4 Learners receive training, assessment and support services that meet their individual needs
Reference to LLN:	Ensuring learners have access to relevant learning support services, including assistance with LLN. Learners' training and learning support needs need to be systematically assessed requiring that learners have access to relevant learning support services, including assistance with LLN. In providing learning support, RTOs need to have staff and resources in place to assist learners. This could be, for example, a staff member who has expertise in LLN support; learning and assessment resources that are designed to develop LLN; a process where learners are referred to an outside agency that offers LLN support; or staff who have expertise in delivery to Indigenous learners.

Source: AQTF 2007 Users' Guide to the Essential Standards for Registration

RTO responsibilities

A learner's core skills need to be at the level of competence required by the unit(s) of competency or workplace function for which they are being trained or assessed. While you are not expected to be an expert in LLN, you are expected to identify and understand the level of skill required for the training and assessment, and to identify learners who need help to participate in training because of their core skills.

In order to learn new vocational skills, a learner will draw on their current core skills, and develop these within the context of their training, work and industry. This means that vocational learning may involve taking on new core skills to become competent. This new learning often involves skills and tasks that are not taught in school and are best learned on the job as part of the vocational training itself.

Good training also depends on good communication skills. Training materials and delivery methods are most useful when the learner easily understands them. Building in practical communication skills relevant to the enterprise culture, understanding how people learn, and relating this to the actual work done, is essential for effective delivery of vocational training.

Core skill support can be easily built into the design and delivery of your normal training or assessment processes. There are a number of support strategies. The process usually starts by having the learner complete a short proforma or indicator tool at the commencement of training so that you can quickly identify any potential problems with literacy. Other strategies include using plain English or language appropriate to the workplace context, balancing the use of written and visual materials, regularly summarising or reviewing learning, and making reasonable adjustments to assessment.

If you do not have the necessary expertise or resources to provide the level of support required by some learners, there are many ways you can facilitate their access to that support. This may include accessing additional LLN resources, or engaging the assistance of an LLN specialist (see the resources section of this guide for direction).