Companion Resources: Introduction

Companion Resources have been developed to compliment the [Guide to Linking Essential Skills and the Curriculum](#) which supports the development and recognition of learners' acquisition and demonstration of Essential Skills and work habits in the classroom, in experiential learning opportunities, and in training programs. The Guide is available on the Ontario Skills Passport website at www.ontario.ca/skillspassport .

These Companion Resources are most helpful to educators who have used the guide to identify Essential Skills tasks in classroom activities and are interested in getting more information in the following areas:

Companion Resource 1: Problem Solving
Companion Resource 2: Skill-Building Activities
Companion Resource 3: Creating ES-focused Learning Activities
Companion Resource 4: Identifying Work Habits
Companion Resource 5: Skills Zone Games and Interactive Learning Resources

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Companion Resource 1: Problem Solving
In the Essential Skills framework, problems are events that prevent workers from carrying out their work activities.

Here are some examples:

- Bakers find that there are not enough baking supplies to complete customers' orders. (Problem Solving, level 1)

- Cleaners encounter emergency situations, such as leaking pipes or power blackouts, while cleaning office buildings at night. (Problem Solving, level 3)

- Employment counsellors encounter clients who have unrealistic wage and career expectations. (Problem Solving, level 3)

- Tool and die makers find that malfunctioning equipment makes further fabrication impossible. (Problem Solving, level 2)

In each case illustrated above, workers are prevented from carrying out their activities, at least temporarily. Not all problems are alike, but in the Essential Skills

research they typically fall into three categories: lack of resources (money, time, staff, etc), interpersonal conflict and equipment failure.

Confronted with these situations, workers must deal with the problems they face before their regular work can continue. Workers consider the magnitude of the problem, their own roles in finding solutions, and the activities they are responsible for carrying out in order to reach solutions. Some problems are relatively easy and quick to fix, while others require workers to analyze options, select an approach, and then watch to make sure their idea really has solved the problem. Problems that are large in scale and affect many people are typically more challenging to resolve than those that present a minor hurdle with a relatively obvious solution.

Take a look at the examples below to see how the workers' problems listed above were addressed:

Problem	Solution
Bakers find that there are not enough baking supplies to complete customers' orders.	They pay retail prices at other bakeries and grocery stores until wholesale purchases are delivered. (Problem Solving, level 1)
Cleaners encounter emergency situations, such as leaking pipes or power blackouts, while cleaning office buildings at night.	They assess the seriousness of the problem before contacting the appropriate authority. (Problem Solving, level 3)
Employment counsellors encounter clients who have unrealistic wage and career expectations.	The counsellors review licensing, certification and language requirements to help clients modify their immediate expectations and develop long-term career plans. (Problem Solving, level 3)
Tool and die makers find that malfunctioning equipment makes further fabrication impossible.	They locate faults such as broken parts and correct them. They install replacement parts and resume fabrication as quickly as possible. (Problem Solving, level 2)

Complexity

Several factors contribute to the complexity of problem solving, according to the Essential Skills. Problem solving is more complex when…

- **… many factors are involved**, including factors that are unclear or ambiguous. Problems are also more complex when they are difficult to identify. Imagine being faced with a laptop indicating that it is out of battery power and is shutting down, versus a laptop simply shutting down for no apparent reason. The first situation is much easier to solve than the second because you know exactly what the problem is.

- **… the steps to solutions aren't apparent**. Some problems have very clear steps to solutions, and others do not.

- … **there is more than one way to the solution** and it is up to the individual to determine which way is best. In some cases workers need to determine whether the problem has been solved effectively or efficiently. In some settings, workers are asked to refer irate customers to supervisors. In these cases, the problem and the solution are very easy to match, so the worker doesn't need to explore different possibilities. The same problem would be much more complex if it were up to the worker to select from a number of possible ways to make the customer less upset, and to evaluate whether their approach to solving these types of problems has long-term positive impacts on the business.

Problems Outside of Work

While the Essential Skills research provides examples of workers solving problems on the job, there are problems that we encounter in our everyday lives and even in school. Here are just a few:

- A learner finds that a projector needed for a presentation doesn't work

- A parent finds that a babysitter is sick and cannot work as scheduled

- A learner finds that a classmate is not doing her share of work on a project

- A volunteer encounters a collision on the way to his volunteer activities, preventing him from arriving on time

- A learner finds that she does not have enough time to complete an assignment

Each of the examples above meets the criteria for Essential Skill (ES) problem solving tasks because in each case, the problem encountered stops the parent, citizen and learner from completing their activities as planned.

Essential Skill Problem–Solving Tasks in the Classroom

The ES definition of problem solving is very specific. It is intended to help researchers capture the challenges encountered by workers and their responsibility in addressing these challenges.

Understanding ES problems can help educators design classroom activities that give learners opportunities to identify and solve the types of problems they will face outside the classroom. Group projects offer opportunities for learners to exercise problem solving in realistic ways. Learners may need to address problems such as not having enough time, difficulty with equipment and even interpersonal conflicts. Educators can control the complexity of these situations by giving learners the tools to identify problems and the steps to solutions.

Educators can also design activities that give learners practise solving problems. These might include scenarios describing workers, parents and even learners encountering problems. Having learners identify problems and possible solutions, and discuss what they would do in those same situations, can provide good practice opportunities with a range of problem types.

Examples of ES problem solving tasks:	Examples that are **not** ES problem solving tasks:
✓ Resolve a conflict with a classmate in order to complete a group assignment (Problem Solving, level 2) ✓ With help from the teacher, work out what to do if there aren't enough computers in the lab for each learner (Problem Solving, level 1) ✓ Come up with ways a worker might be able to deal with an upset	✗ Match a list of problems with a list of solutions ✗ Read a scenario to determine whether a solution was found to be successful ✗ Solve a math word problem ✗ Make a list of problems that could occur while working on a group assignment ✗ Conduct a science experiment

Examples of ES problem solving tasks:	Examples that are **not** ES problem solving tasks:
customer (Problem Solving, level 2)	

As you can see, some of what educators identify as problems aren't considered problems within the Essential Skills framework; math and science *problems* are the most common examples of this. Math and science problems are typically activities and tasks that offer learners an opportunity to apply their developing abilities to different situations. When learners encounter math and science problems, they are expected to figure out how to solve the problem using recently taught applications.

In contrast, ES problems are events that prevent individuals from completing their work. When looking for examples of Essential Skills problem solving in classroom activities ask yourself: Is this a situation where someone is prevented from accomplishing an objective, or from completing his or her work? If the answer is yes, it is likely to be a problem as captured by the Essential Skills. For more information about analyzing ES tasks, have a look at the A Guide to Linking Essential Skills and the Curriculum. ES problems can be rated using the complexity scale found on the OSP web site.

Companion Resource 2: Skill-Building Activities

Educators use skill-building activities to help learners develop their abilities to perform Essential Skills tasks both within and outside the classroom. They are the building blocks necessary to help learners manage tasks. Skill-building activities are particularly helpful for learners as they work towards demonstrating their abilities to perform Essential Skill level 1 tasks.

Every Essential Skills task can be broken down into a series of skill-building activities. Take the following examples:

ES task	Skill-building activities
Read instructions on a prescription label to figure out how to use the medication (Document Use, level 1)	• Generate a list of the typical information included on prescription labels (e.g. amount of medicine to take, how to take the medicine, how often to take it). • Provide a list of common phrases found on prescriptions (e.g. take x tablets, by mouth, every x hours, twice daily). • Have learners match instructions found on prescriptions to line drawings (e.g. match the instruction: 'take 2 tablets' to an image of two tablets). • Have learners locate and circle the part of prescription labels that include instructions.
Figure out how much bread will cost after a $0.50 coupon is applied. (Money math, level 1; Document Use, level 1)	• Have learners practise recognizing dollar values. • Explain how to convert 50 cents to decimals. Provide practice making these conversions. • Provide practice sheets where learners subtract decimals. • Have learners match the brands of bread on coupons with images of the brands.
Complete and sign a waiver acknowledging awareness of risks associated with using shop equipment. (Document Use, level 2)	• Explain different conventions for recording the date; practise recording dates using forms that specify the order in which to record the date. • Explain and discuss the purpose of waivers to help learners recognize their significance. • Point out the key terms that indicate the document is a waiver.

ES task	Skill-building activities
	• Show examples of waivers to identify common features for learners.
Give a 10-minute presentation to the class on findings from Internet research about the long-term health effects of narcotics use. (Oral Communication, level 2; Computer Use, level 2; Finding Information, level 2)	• Provide learners with tips on choosing Internet search terms. • Have learners compare search results using different terms to help them understand the concept of search terms. • Share tips on evaluating sources on the Internet. For example, discuss the differences between information sourced from commercial sites versus educational and government sites. • Provide information from reputable and disreputable Internet sources on the same topic. Have learners compare the information to help them understand the importance of evaluating information sources. • Provide a list of vocabulary related to the topic of narcotics use. Have learners find dictionary definitions of unfamiliar words. • Show Internet videos of individuals making presentations. Have learners identify aspects of each that they find effective and aspects that they do not find effective. • Have learners outline their presentation and discuss its organization with a classmate.
Read pamphlets and information sheets to learn about the causes of diabetes. (Reading Text, level 3)	• Have learners compare the features of pamphlets to look for common formatting elements. • Ask learners to skim the various texts in a timed exercise. From skimming alone, have them indicate what the topic of the texts are, and what purpose they serve. • Introduce vocabulary relevant to the topic. • Construct comprehension activities. For example, use isolated sentences taken from the reading sources. Have learners match sentences to communicate cause and effect relationships. • Discuss health concepts typically discussed in the materials, e.g. disease rates, prevention versus treatment, etc.

Educators identify skill-building activities by looking closely at what learners are required to do in order to accomplish the task. The next step is to identify the teachable elements that could help learners become better able to manage the task. Teachers can ask themselves some questions to help identify teachable elements. Here are just some examples:

- Are there reading strategies I can teach to help learners manage these tasks?
- If there is a document involved, how can I help learners recognize this document?
- With numeracy, what are the math fundamentals I can have learners practise? How can I help learners recognize which math operations they need to perform?
- With writing tasks, how can I help learners communicate more clearly without being bogged down by grammar?
- If oral communication is involved, what phrases would be helpful for learners to know? What communication strategies should learners be considering?
- If the task involves computer use, what kind of practice activities will help learners become more familiar with computer programs used for the task?

Breaking down tasks into their component skills for instructional purposes is key, but striking a balance is also important. Spend too little time and learners may find tasks overwhelming. Spend too much time on skill building, and learners will fail to see the connection to real life applications of those skills, resulting in the dreaded question, "Why are we learning this?"

To identify skill-building activities for learners at all levels:
- Start by identifying ES tasks
- Break down these tasks into teachable elements
- Throughout skill building, draw connections back to ES tasks so that learners can see the relevance of what they are learning

Companion Resource 3: Creating ES-focused Learning Activities

Creating ES-focused activities is all about finding examples of the kinds of things individuals do outside the classroom, then creating learning activities that reflect those real life tasks.

Step 1: Get inspired

Start by looking around you. We are called upon to use our Essential Skills all the time; we just might not notice. Take an ordinary experience like visiting the doctor.

> *Molly has an appointment with a specialist coming up. She checks the appointment card to see what time the appointment is scheduled for. She's never been to this specialist before so she reads the address on the card and conducts an Internet search to get directions. She jots down the directions so she can refer to them on the way. Although the Internet search gave her an approximate travel time, she decided to give herself a few extra minutes because traffic tends to be bad at that time of the morning. When she arrives at the address, she realizes the building is much bigger than she had expected. She checks a building directory to locate the office. Once on the correct floor she follows the signs to the department to check in with the receptionist.*

Or consider the Essential Skills demands of fundraisers that many learners take part in.

> *Kendall's school is raising money by selling raffle tickets. Kendall is taking part by asking family, friends and neighbours if they would like to purchase tickets. When neighbours agree, he needs to calculate how much they owe based on how many tickets they purchase. He needs to count money to make sure that each payment is correct. He also needs to complete receipts to keep track of who purchased each ticket.*

Molly used reading, document use, writing, numerical estimation, oral communication and computer use when going to the doctor and Kendall used document use, oral communication and money math. Think about all the activities you and your learners carry out in the course of a week, then use those situations to generate ideas for Essential Skills tasks and instructional opportunities.

The OSP has two databases that are a good source of ideas. Visit the **Search for Tasks in Work, Learning and Life** section of the OSP website for hundreds of examples of the ways Essential Skills are used at work, in everyday life and at school. For examples of the way workers use the Essential Skills, check out the occupation-specific ES tasks in the **Search for Tasks by Occupation** section of the OSP site. Think of the profiles as illustrative examples of the ways workers use their Essential Skills on the job; as such, they can be the starting point for hundreds of ES-focused activities. As an added bonus, all the ES tasks on the OSP website are already rated for complexity.

Step 2: Collect Materials

Each of our everyday experiences is full of Essential Skills demands. Pay attention to those experiences to come up with lots of ideas for ES-focused tasks you can bring into the classroom. And while you are at it, collect examples of documents and texts you encounter. Forms, floor plans, notices, flyers, brochures, tables, graphs…all of these materials can help you create realistic activities that help learners develop their skills and apply them to their everyday life demands. If you plan to share or reproduce any of the documents or texts you collect without altering them first, be sure to get permission from the copyright owner.

Step 3: Question

Once you have some ideas, you can develop these ideas into tasks by asking a few questions. If you are starting with examples from Essential Skills Profiles or from OSP's Work, Learning and Life Database, the expectations for the task are already described. These task examples tell you what the worker is doing and why. On the other hand, if you start with an everyday activity or document like the ones you collect, ask the question, "How is this document used?" Try to stick close to the way documents and texts are used, and the way tasks are performed in real life settings. Refer to the [A Guide to Linking Essential Skills and the Curriculum](#) for more information about analyzing ES tasks.

Step 4: Create

Now that you have ideas, including sources for tasks and real-life materials, go

ahead and create classroom activities. Following the steps outlined in these pages, you will be constructing tasks that meet ES criteria: learners complete purposeful activities that are carried out outside classroom settings. Making use of Essential Skills explicitly and intentionally helps learners understand the skills that they have and those that they are developing. It also helps them make connections between classroom learning and how they can use these skills in work, life, and further education and training. Educators who understand what an Essential Skills task is are in a better position to build real learning opportunities for learners.

Here are some quick points to keep in mind when using Essential Skills (ES) focused activities or when creating new activities for learners.

1. Objective is to enhance existing, or create new, activity sets that explicitly link curriculum expectations with Essential Skills and skill-building activities.
2. ES-focused activity sets begin with a real world context, or story, that links to an occupation or everyday life scenario.
3. ES-focused activity sets identify the course codes, curriculum expectations, Essential Skills tasks (specifying Essential Skills and skill level) and, where possible, skill-building activities that scaffold learning that connect to the Essential Skills tasks.
4. ES-focused activities are an integral part of ALL courses, including university preparation courses and non-credit courses. Giving feedback on Essential Skills demonstrations through these activity sets can help ALL learners better understand and value their strengths and chose courses, programs, postsecondary pathways and careers based on their strengths and interests. It can also help them be more confident and prepared in their search for employment, including summer and part-time employment.

Companion Resource 4: Identifying Work Habits

Essential Skills are the underlying skills that enable people to perform tasks required by their occupation and other activities of daily life. Work habits are the attitudes individuals bring to situations at work and in life that help them manage those situations. The following illustration shows the Essential Skills as the branches of the tree and the work habits as the roots that support the growth of the tree.

Check out the OSP web site for definitions of each of the work habits. The performance indicators for each work habit can help you decide which habits to highlight or "spotlight" in the activity. Please note that there are no skill levels associated with work habits.

To identify the work habits that learners can develop and demonstrate, go to the OSP web site and click on **Assess skills in learning activities** to have a look at examples of classroom activities with work habits already identified.

Companion Resource 5: Skills Zone Games and Interactive Learning Resources

Skills Zone Games

Incorporating some games into the classroom can provide opportunities for review and practise, and make learning more enjoyable. Check out the following Skills Zone games and bring some fun to your classes!

Check out the following games on the "Skills Zone Games" section of the OSP web site, each of which is designed to enhance learners' understanding of different aspects of the Essential Skills, and to test their knowledge:

- In the **Trivia Game** learners collect points as they answer questions about the OSP web site, ES at work and in everyday life.

- **OSP Crossword** offers learners an opportunity to complete a crossword puzzle as they respond to questions that address the full range of topics covered by the OSP, including ES and work habits.

- In the **Word Search** learners race against a clock as they search for vocabulary about ES, work habits and life on the job.

- **Work Habits Match-Up** gets learners to match work habits with examples of work habits in action.

Interactive Learning Resources

Under Interactive Learning Resources, you'll find a number of links that can be useful when introducing Essential Skills and work habits to learners, and one that's especially for teachers:

- **Essential Skills Introduction** provides a quick snapshot of the Essential Skills, as well as links to other areas of the OSP including to videos illustrating how individuals use their ES at work and in everyday life tasks.

- **Work Habits Introduction** gives an overview of the work habits examined in the OSP alongside examples, and provides links to detailed descriptions of each work habit.

- **Skills Pyramid** helps learners understand that Essential Skills are the foundation for learning other skills, such as technical and job-specific skills. It also helps learners see how Essential Skills are transferable to different occupations.

- **Linking Essential Skills and the Curriculum**. This interactive "wheel" is a resource for educators. The wheel illustrates the connections between curriculum, occupational and everyday life tasks and skill-building activities.