



# Integrating Literacies into Community Adult Learning Programs

## Introduction

Adult participants in community programs or training courses may have difficulties with some of the literacy requirements of their program. Integrating literacies means addressing these difficulties and providing support for people to use and practice literacies while learning the program content. Integrating literacies is a way to reduce barriers and widen access to participation and learning.

This workshop package was developed for coordinators of Community Adult Learning Councils. In Alberta, CALC coordinators generally work with a variety of agencies that offer learning programs in their communities. The workshop and package could be adapted for agency managers and others who want to integrate literacies into agency programs. (A workshop plan and PowerPoint presentation are available on the Widening Access for Adult Literacies website.)

## Workshop intentions

- Discuss the meaning and purpose of integrating literacies into programs
- Explore what is involved in integrating literacies into adult community learning programs
- Identify a range of literacy support resources
- Identify how and where to access literacy support resources
- Take the first steps to create a literacy support resource

Other intentions or objectives you would like to include:

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

Written by Michael Wallace, 2008.

Widening Access for Adult Literacies Project.  
<http://www.wideningaccessforliteracies.ca>



## About literacy

In Canada, literacy is often defined as the ability to read and interpret printed information, write, and do mathematical calculations to perform everyday tasks— at work, at home and in the community. In 2009, the Alberta government issued a provincial literacy strategy. It included the following guiding definition:

*... While reading and writing provide the necessary foundation for learning, literacy is fundamentally about an individual's capacity to put his/her skills to work in shaping the course of his or her own life. Literacy involves "reading the word and the world" in a variety of contexts. Individuals need literacy skills to obtain and use information effectively, to act as informed players and to manage interactions in a variety of contexts whether the context is making decisions about health care, parenting, managing household finances, engaging in the political process or working.<sup>1</sup>*

This definition recognizes that reading not only includes reading skills and strategies but that reading is carried out for various purposes and in various social contexts.<sup>2</sup>

## About literacies

In the Widening Access project we used the term "literacies" to recognize that literacy is not only a set of cognitive skills or strategies. Literacies include a wide range of social and cultural practices that are associated with reading, writing and oral communication.

People read and write for meaning. They use their knowledge of a topic and of the situation to make sense as they read and write. Reading is affected by purposes and situations as well as the feelings and values associated with them.

Literacies also recognizes that reading and writing are social in the sense that people often help each other out and share what they are reading or writing: "What does this word mean?" "How about you read the instructions while I put the shelf together." "How do you spell....?"

And a literacies perspective values the range of reading and writing that are based in everyday activities and networks, as well as the traditionally more valued literacies associated with schools, workplaces, legal and medical, government and similar institutions. At the same time, literacies recognizes that institutional literacies are often more powerful than others.

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<sup>1</sup> Alberta Advanced Education and Technology. (2009). p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Definitions of literacy are now expanding to include "Essential Skills" such as oral communication, computer skills, the ability to work with others and continuous learning. For more information about Essential Skills go to: Human Resources and Skill Development Canada. Understanding Essential Skills. [http://www.rhdcc-hrsc.gc.ca/eng/workplaceskills/essential\\_skills/general/understanding\\_es.shtml](http://www.rhdcc-hrsc.gc.ca/eng/workplaceskills/essential_skills/general/understanding_es.shtml)

## About literacy statistics

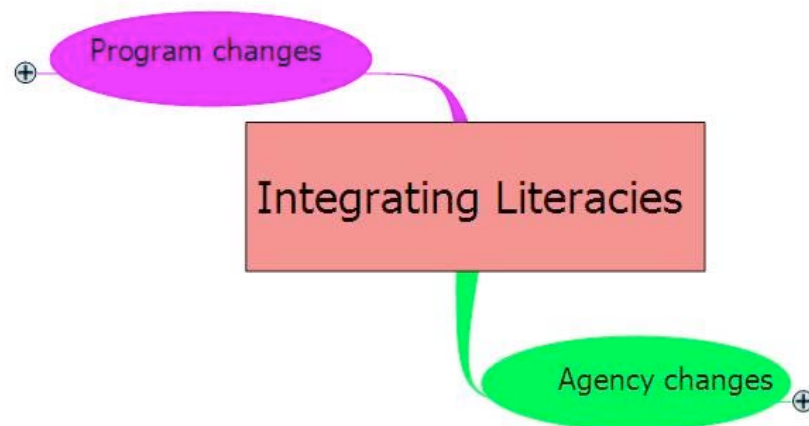
The *International adult literacy survey* (1994-98) and the *International adult literacy and skills survey* (2003) measured literacy skills of adults in Canada and six other countries. The surveys used common tasks of varying difficulty to assess adults' literacy, numeracy and problem solving skills. The literacy tasks included reading prose and reading documents.

From a literacies perspective, it is important to note that completing a task in the survey was not the same as completing an actual task in a real context. For example, reading instructions on an actual medicine bottle in your own home for a real purpose is different from reading similar instructions in the survey. Still, the survey results do show that many adults in Canada have challenges with literacy.

The survey developers used a 500-point scale to rate the complexity of reading tasks. This scale was divided into 5 levels of reading proficiency.<sup>3</sup> In Canada, it is generally suggested that adults need skills at level three to "participate fully in the knowledge economy."<sup>4</sup> According to the 2003 survey, 42% of Canada's working age population has reading skills below level three.

Some people who scored below level three may be able to read well enough to cope with everyday situations, but they may have difficulty with unfamiliar literacies or in new situations involving literacy. Integrating literacies can make it easier for people to manage when reading and writing is required.

## What is involved in integrating literacies into adult community learning programs?



<sup>3</sup> A Frontier College summary of the International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey (IALSS) 2003. Retrieved April 30, 2010 from <http://www.nald.ca/library/research/frontier/ialss03/cover.htm>

<sup>4</sup> International survey of reading skills. The Daily. Statistics Canada Retrieved April 30, 2010 from <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/080109/dq080109a-eng.htm>

Integrating literacies starts with supporting reading and writing in real situations that are meaningful to people. Integrating literacies is also known as “embedding literacies.” In some places, integrating or embedding literacies has to do with including literacy instruction in post secondary education and training courses. Some schools also aim to teach literacy across the curriculum. For instance, science and math teachers might teach literacy skills in relation to those topics.

Integrating literacies does not mean that program facilitators have to be literacy teachers as well. Facilitators’ main role is to help learners acquire confidence, knowledge, and skill in their particular program areas. However, there are many things a program facilitator can do to address literacies needs of their participants.

Integrating literacies into programs includes the following activities:

- Develop literacy awareness.
- Identify program literacies (including Essential Skills of reading, writing, numeracy, computer, verbal communication, thinking skills etc.).
- Develop literacy support materials (e.g., mind maps, glossaries, cloze exercises etc.).
- Have access to literacy specialists and literacy classes.
- Develop or find program materials in clear language (graded readers, appropriate reading level for handouts and PowerPoint presentations etc.).
- Use participatory learning methods that build on people’s life experiences, cultural practices, interests, enthusiasms and current learning goals.
- Ensure that program delivery accommodates a range of learning styles.
- Apply adult learning principles.

## Develop literacy awareness

One way to develop awareness is to conduct a literacy awareness quiz (see Appendix 1). Another is to invite facilitators to think about program participants who may have had literacy challenges.

## Identify the literacy needs of programs<sup>5</sup>

In working towards an integrated approach to literacy, an important step is to identify the key literacy requirements of your program. Begin by identifying and recording the specific language, reading, writing and numeracy skills learners need to develop. Will learners need to be able to:

- Read PowerPoint presentations, flip chart notes, handouts or books? Will they need to read for main ideas? Skim for an overview or scan for details?

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<sup>5</sup> Some parts of this section and the next one were adapted from *Integrating literacies. NALA guidelines for further education and training programs. 2008.*)

- Take notes? Note-taking requires learners to identify key points from presentations and written material. Learners also need to be able to spell and write fluently.
- Write to complete exercises, forms, quizzes or reports?
- Spell? Spelling difficulties can hold people back from writing and note taking.
- Learn new vocabulary and concepts? Does the program content introduce words and ideas that may be new to program participants? Are participants learning English as an additional language?
- Use numeracy skills? Will learners need to measure or calculate?

## Find and develop program resources

It is best for adults to develop literacy skills within the context of meaningful, relevant and purposeful activity. Look for literacy support materials that make key texts and handouts more accessible to people with literacy difficulties; help familiarize learners with the vocabulary associated with the program; and help them acquire and practice the literacy skills needed to complete the program.

Examples of literacy support program materials include:

- *Glossaries of words* related to the program topic. Learners can refer to these to check the meaning or the spelling of new vocabulary. You can also introduce and review words during program sessions.
- *Writing templates or frameworks* (e.g., outline for reports). Learners can use these to become familiar with the structure of writing assignments.
- *Completed writing tasks*.
- *Handout summaries* of the main points of presentations. These will help those who have difficulties with note-taking.
- *Summaries of, or guides to, key program texts*.
- *Simplified versions* of program instructions, notes and handouts in plain language. These documents will support people with literacy difficulties to participate in the program. They can also be used for reading practice.

Depending on the program and learners' needs and interests, you could also offer materials that provide direct practice of literacy skills. As much as possible, find or develop materials that relate directly to the program content. Examples include:

- *Worksheets* such as cloze, word-blending, sentence completion, crosswords and word-find software to enable practice and reinforcement of key reading, spelling, writing and numeracy components of the course.
- *Comprehension exercises* to help learners recognize, read and understand the program content and terminology. These might include word searches, flash cards, word-matching, words-within-words, cloze exercises, picture/short passage – question/response comprehension. These exercises can also provide varied practice in the writing and spelling needed for the program.

- *Numeracy materials* to help learners understand and practice skills needed for what they are learning in the program.

Examples of literacy resources developed for adult learning programs

*Skillwords resource pack for integrating literacy* includes materials to support the integration of literacy into areas of vocational training. Although produced for facilitators and learners working in areas such as woodwork, catering and horticulture, the worksheets are useful examples of literacy resources  
<http://www.nala.ie/publications/listing/20030401144845.html>

*How do your skills measure up?* (Burnaby, BC: SkillPlan). This website includes downloadable workbooks on the construction, tourism and trucking industries. <http://measureup.towes.com/english/workbooks.asp>

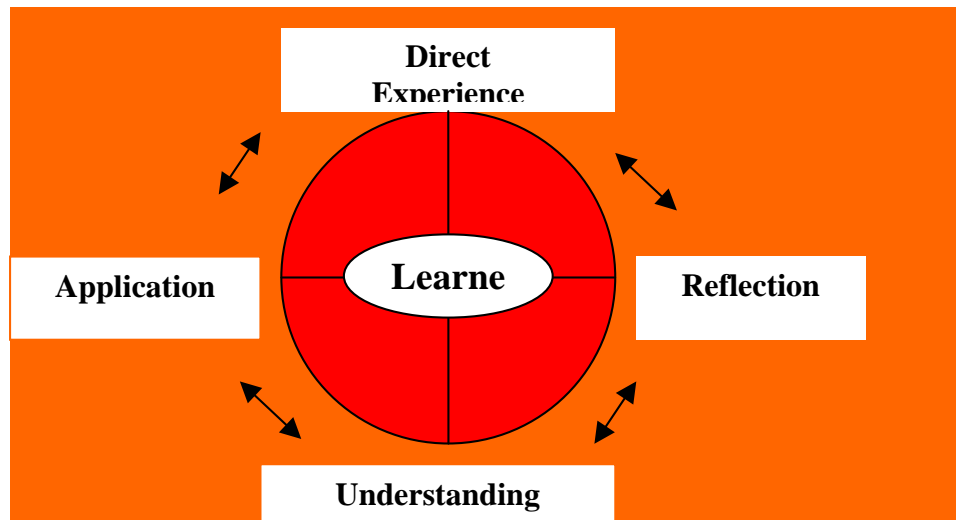
Appendix 3 includes the following examples of literacy support resources for a Stress Management program.

You can also find resources on the Links page of the Widening Access for Adult Literacies website.

### Use a participatory learning model - the learning cycle

David Kolb<sup>6</sup> developed the experiential learning cycle theory, which is the basis of following learning cycle. The learning cycle establishes four key components to the learning process. To undergo a complete learning experience, a learner needs to move through all components of the cycle. A new learning experience can begin at any point on the cycle.

The learner learns through:



<sup>6</sup> You can find many resources by and about David Kolb through an internet search.

The four components of the learning cycle include:

*Direct experience* (aware, attentive, sensing, involving, doing, acting in real-time)

Direct, sensory, real-time learning comes from involvement in specific tasks and activities. It can also include involvement in simulated activities such as games, teamwork, problem solving, role-play exercises, chairing a meeting, leading a discussion or giving a presentation. Direct experience learning involves identifying and solving present-time problems.

*Reflection* (observing, standing back, watching, going over, reflecting on feelings, associations, memories, past experiences and learning processes)

Reflective learning can involve observing others and reflecting on what they are doing, demonstrating, or explaining. In reflective learning, we consider our wants and feelings and associations. We consider how something new relates to what we already know and what we still need to learn to further our knowledge. We can reflect upon what we have learned, what we intend to learn and what we are interested in learning. The reflective component of learning involves taking time to consider the meaning, purpose and implications of our learning.

*Understanding* (thinking about and considering ideas, facts and theories; building concepts that relate to experiences, events and processes)

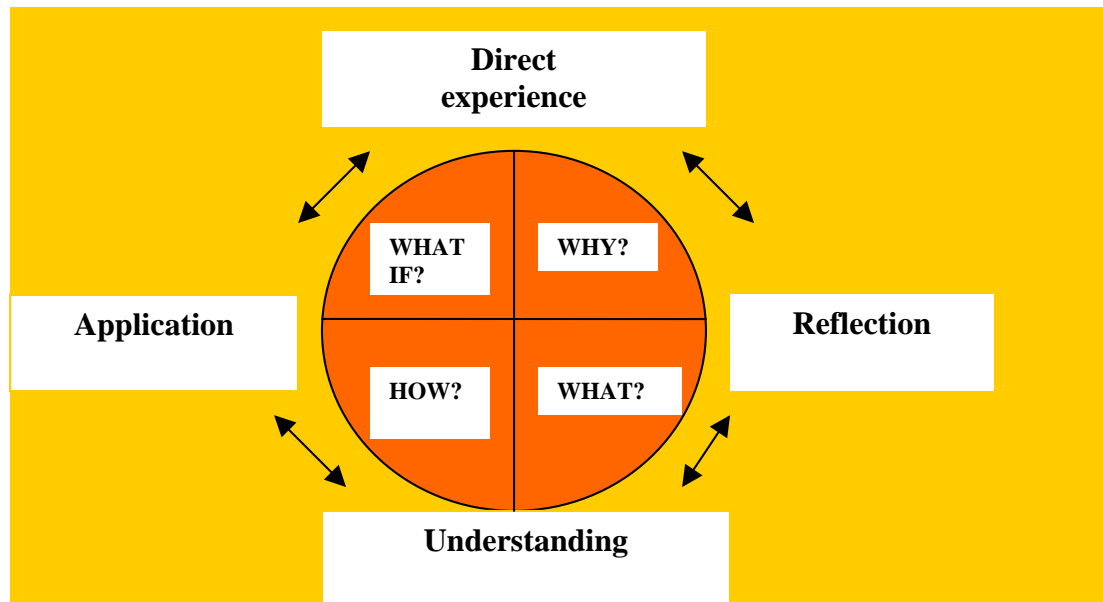
Thinking allows us to structure and formalize our learning experiences. It enables us to name, classify, analyse and see patterns and distinctions in things and events. By thinking things through, we can give structure and stability to our world of experiences. Understanding requires us to stand back from the immediacy of our direct experiences to establish the facts we need to know. When we say we understand something, it usually means we can explain things about it – what it consists of, its functions and how it works. In the process of understanding something we may formulate principles, procedures and systematic ways of doing things. We consider concepts and theories that relate to the performance of tasks. We make generalisations, draw conclusions and make hypotheses about our experiences. We use ideas, logic, theoretical models and analysis of systems to understand problems and situations.

*Application* (practicing, experimenting, trying out, applying, relating learning to other contexts)

We learn by applying what we know and by practicing skills. Hands on practice, experimentation and play are important components of the learning process. Through applying knowledge and having opportunities to practice and receive constructive feedback, we learn to achieve competence in the performance of skills. When we take a practical approach to our learning, we discover how things work and see the application and relevance to our everyday experience.

## Integrating literacy with the four stages of the learning cycle

We can view the learning cycle as four stages of the learning process. Each stage is made from one quadrant of the cycle. Each quadrant is a combination of two components as shown in the diagram below.



Direct experience to reflection. Asking Why?

During this phase of learning, we want to explore the meaning, purpose and value of a new learning experience. We need reasons for learning that connect new information with our previous experience. New information needs to be useful in our daily life. We want to consider things from different points of view. Often, we would rather watch first before taking action. We want to gather information and create categories; use our imagination in problem solving; and be sensitive to our own and others' feelings when learning.

Our primary question is "Why am I learning this and how will it be useful to me?" During this period of learning we enjoy activities that allow us to listen, speak, interact, know ourselves and understand and appreciate others.

Effective learning strategies include cooperative learning, real-time experiences, activities that involve valuing and building upon previous experience, expression of feelings, brainstorming, role-play, making personal connections and seeing how different areas of study are related.

*Activities and resources to support literacy in this stage could include:*

- KWL exercise
- Photo-language activities
- Glossaries of terms
- Brainstorming
- Overview maps

Reflection to understanding. Asking What?

During this phase of learning, we are primarily interested in acquiring facts and explanations in order to deepen our understanding of things and processes. We want to gather information, make associations with previous knowledge, employ abstract ideas and concepts, and formulate them in a concise and logical manner. Practicality is less important than a good logical explanation.

Our primary question is "What are the facts and what do I need to know to understand this?" During this phase, we enjoy activities that allow us to observe, analyse, classify, draw conclusions, theorize, see patterns and make connections. We want to understand both the big picture and the details.

We may learn from lectures, guest speakers, videos, independent research, data analysis, listening to and watching experts, making use of good handouts and having access to a variety of print-based resources.

*Activities and resources to support literacy in this stage could include*

- Mind maps – concept maps
- Clear language handouts
- Handout and program summaries
- Glossaries of terms
- Cloze exercises
- Graphics and well illustrated texts at appropriate reading level
- Videos, DVDs, audio-tapes

Understanding to application. Asking How?

During this phase of learning, we are primarily interested in how things work. We want to get in and try things out for ourselves. We like solving problems and finding practical solutions and uses for our learning. Our learning is focused upon achieving specific goals and outcomes. We may shy away from social and interpersonal issues and prefer technical tasks.

Our primary question is "How does this work and how can I apply it in my everyday life?" At this stage of learning, we enjoy activities that allow us to manipulate materials and ideas, follow directions, build on givens, make

things work, test reality, tinker, improve, try out ideas, learn from mistakes and apply knowledge to the performance of skills.

Effective learning strategies may include concrete and experiential learning, goal setting, hands-on tasks, practical application, role-play and case studies

*Activities and resources to support literacy in this stage could include:*

- Guided and supported hands-on activities
- Positive feedback, encouragement, building on strengths
- Step-by-step guidelines with graphics
- How to diagrams
- Clear language case studies with graphics
- Videos, DVDs, audio-tapes

Application to direct experience Asking What happens if?

During this phase of learning, we are interested in self-directed discovery. We want to take things further to discover possibilities and limitations. At this time we may seek to teach both ourselves and others. We use intuition as well as logic. We enjoy applying our learning in real life situations.

Our primary question is "What happens if ...?" We enjoy activities that allow for experimenting, modifying, shifting, adapting, risking, intuiting, acting, collaborating, innovating and creating.

Effective learning strategies may include independent study, opportunities to take risks, practice unfamiliar behaviour and receive feedback. Simulations, role-play, games and space and time for active experimentation work well at this stage.

*Activities and resources to support literacy in this stage could include:*

- Peer learning/teaching activities
- Coaching and mentoring
- Positive feedback, encouragement, building on strengths
- Discussions that explore application of new learning to outside contexts
- Graded study guides and simple fact sheets
- Creating space in which there is freedom to experiment and make mistakes
- Videos, DVDs, audio-tapes

## Appendix 1. Literacy Awareness Quiz

1. What is the percentage of Canadian adults with low literacy?

- 7%
- 18%
- 29%
- 42%

2. What is the percentage of adults in Alberta with low literacy?

- 10%
- 19%
- 27%
- 35%

3. Literacy means being able to read and write.

- a. True
- b. False

4. Adult Literacy is the responsibility of the educational system.

- a. True
- b. False

5. Most adults with low literacy in Canada are immigrants.

- a. True
- b. False

6. School completion ensures that a person will have strong literacy skills.

- a. True
- b. False

See Appendix 1 for answers.

## Appendix 2. Literacy Awareness Quiz Answers

1. What is the percentage of Canadian adults with low literacy?  
7%, 18%, 29%, 42%

The *International adult literacy and skills survey* (2003) measured literacy skills of adults in Canada and six other countries. The survey used common tasks of varying difficulty to assess adults' literacy, numeracy and problem solving skills. The literacy tasks included reading prose and reading documents.

The survey developers used a 500 point scale to rate the complexity of reading tasks. This scale was divided into 5 levels of reading proficiency.<sup>7</sup> In Canada, it is generally suggested that adults need level three skills in order to "participate fully in the knowledge economy."<sup>8</sup> According to the 2003 survey, 42% of Canada's working age population has reading skills below level three. (See also page 2 in this package.)

2. What is the percentage of adults in Alberta with low literacy?  
10% 19% 27% 35%

35% (750,000) of adult Albertans scored below level three.

3. Literacy means being able to read and write.

True but, but reading and writing are not "either/or" skills. People may be able to read well enough for some situations and have challenges in other instances.

4. Adult Literacy is the responsibility of the educational system.

False. Literacy is everyone's responsibility. Statistics show that only 5 – 10% adults who have literacy challenges go to adult literacy classes.<sup>9</sup> Many adults are not in adult literacy classes, but they may be coming to community agencies. Literacy friendly environments can make it easier for all people to access agency services and resources.

There are links between having low levels of literacy, employment and income. Low income is related to many challenges, including health, housing, nutrition and access to transportation.

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<sup>7</sup> A Frontier College summary of the International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey (IALSS) 2003. Retrieved April 30, 2010 from

<http://www.nald.ca/library/research/frontier/ialss03/cover.htm>

<sup>8</sup> International survey of reading skills. The Daily. Statistics Canada Retrieved April 30, 2010 from <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/080109/dq080109a-eng.htm>

<sup>9</sup> Long, E. and Middleton, S. (2002). *Nonparticipation in literacy and upgrading programs. A national study*. Toronto, ON: ABC Canada.

5. Most adults with low literacy in Canada are immigrants

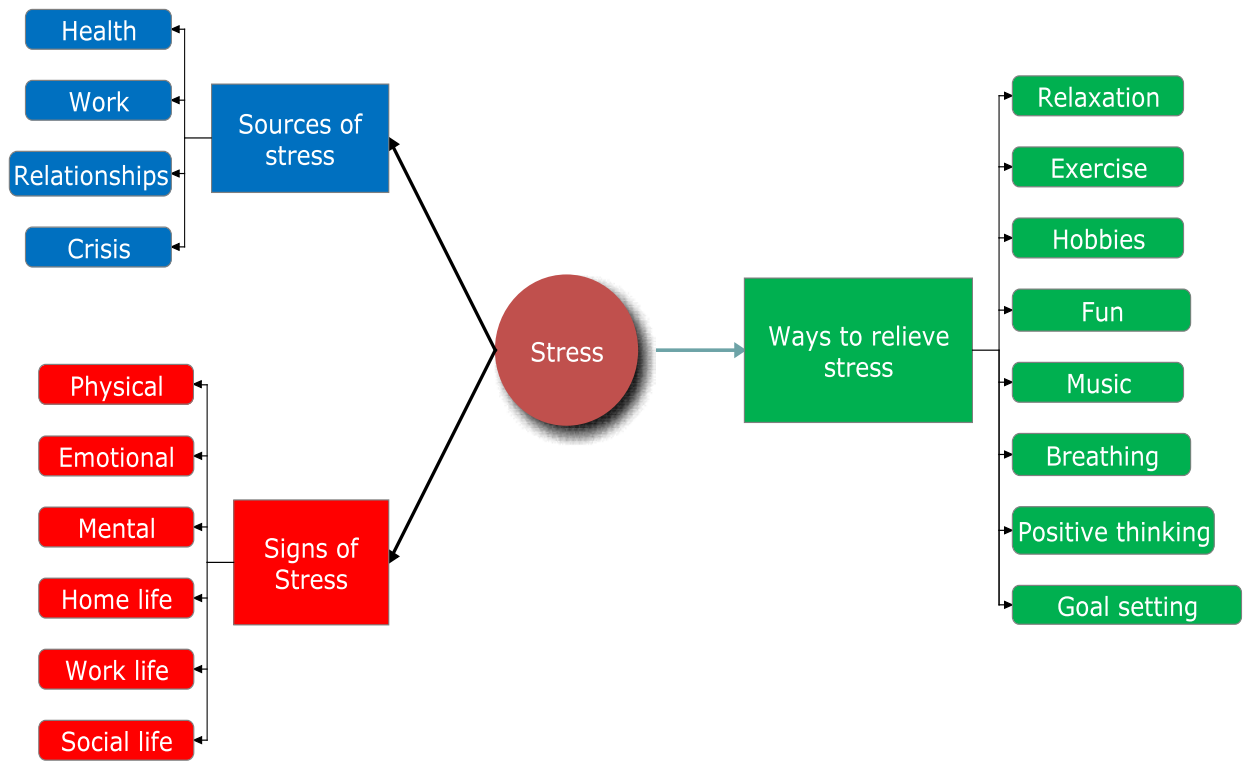
False. The *International adult literacy and skills survey (2003)* shows that of the 3.1 million at Level 1, 1.4 million are immigrants. Of the 5.8 million at level 2, 1.2 million are immigrants. The highest group for low literacy is seniors who either didn't gain the skills in youth or are losing the skills with lack of use. However, immigrants do have high rates of low-level literacy in English. Many immigrants now have a higher standard of education but do not speak English or French. As well, higher percentages of Aboriginal people have lower levels of literacy.

6. School completion ensures that a person will have strong literacy skills.

False. While it is true that individuals with more years of formal education are less likely to experience low literacy, 20% of Albertans at the lowest literacy level do have some post secondary education. Also, people's skills decline if they are not used.

### Appendix 3. Examples of literacy resources

Stress management mind map



KWL: Learning about stress <sup>10</sup>

K What do I already KNOW about Stress?	W What do I WANT to learn about Stress?	L What did I LEARN about Stress?

- K - Ask yourself: What do I know about the subject? Write your ideas under the first column
- W - Ask questions about what you want to know. Write your ideas under the second column
- L - After the presentation writer answers to your question about what you learned under the third column

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<sup>10</sup> Ogle, D. (1986). K-W-L: A teaching model that develops active reading of expository text. *The Reading Teacher*, 39, 564-571.

Cloze Exercise: Understanding stress

Use the words in the table below to fill the gaps and complete the sentences about understanding stress.

Stress and change are part of our ..... We all talk about ....., but we are not always clear about what it is. This is because stress comes from both the good and ..... things that ..... to us. If we did not feel any stress, we would not be ..... to do anything. Stress becomes a ..... when we are not sure how to handle an event or a ..... Worry set in and we feel stress. It is how we ..... about and we ..... towards events in our life that determines whether we will find them stressful or fairly ..... to deal with.

Stress is the body's ..... to anything that makes us feel ..... or under pressure. It is caused by any kind of ..... to which we must adapt, adjust or respond. It is the body's ..... way of reacting to changes,..... , and demands placed on us.

lives	demand	automatic	easy	response
happen	stress	problem	act	bad
motivated	threatened	challenges	think	situation

## Example of re-writing information into clear language

### The fight or flight response (original)

In a challenging situation the brain prepares the body for defensive action—the fight or flight response by releasing stress hormones, namely, cortisone and adrenaline. These hormones raise the blood pressure and the body prepares to react to the situation. With a concrete defensive action (fight response) the stress hormones in the blood get used up, entailing reduced stress effects and symptoms of anxiety.

When we fail to counter a stress situation (flight response) the hormones and chemicals remain unreleased in the blood stream for a long period of time. It results in stress related physical symptoms such as tense muscles, unfocused anxiety, dizziness and rapid heartbeats.

#### Readability scores

- Words per sentence: 21.4
- Passive voice: 10%
- Flesch readability: 49.1%
- Flesch/Kincaid Grade Level: 11.7

### What is the 'fight or flight' response? (clear language version)

When you are facing a challenging situation, your brain gets the body ready for action. This is the 'fight or flight' response. Your body releases stress hormones: cortisone and adrenaline. These hormones raise your blood pressure and prepare your body to deal with the situation.

If these hormones build up in your body, they can cause stress. Symptoms of stress include tension, feelings of anxiety, dizziness and fast heartbeats.



#### Readability scores

- Words per sentence: 11.5
- Passive voice: 0%
- Flesch readability: 67.7%
- Flesch/Kincaid Grade Level: 6.6

Learn to relax

Follow these steps:

1. Choose a quiet place. Before you start, do a few gentle stretching exercises to relieve muscle tension.



2. Make your self comfortable, either sitting or lying down.

3. Start to breathe slowly and deeply, in a calm and effortless way.

4. Gently tense, and then relax, each part of your body. Start with your feet and work your way up to your face and head.

5. As you focus on each part of the body, think of warmth, heaviness and relaxation.

6. Push any distracting thoughts to the back of your mind; imagine them floating away.

7. Don't try to relax; simply let go of the tension in your muscles. Allow your muscles to become relaxed.

8. Let your mind go empty. Some people find it helpful to imagine a calm, beautiful place such as a garden or meadow.

9. Stay like this for about 20 minutes. Then take some deep breaths and open your eyes. Stay sitting or lying for a few moments before you get up.