

A Guide to

# Linking

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## Essential Skills and the Ontario Curriculum

2015

Ontario

**Skills**

**Passport**

*Skills*



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Une publication équivalente est disponible en français sous le titre suivant :

*Pour faire le lien entre les compétences essentielles et le curriculum : Guide pratique, 2015*

This publication is available on the Ontario Skills Passport website, at [www.ontario.ca/skillspassport](http://www.ontario.ca/skillspassport).

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# Preface

The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities are co-sponsoring the Ontario Skills Passport (OSP) initiative to support 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 OSP is being used in a wide range of educational and training contexts, including cooperative education, Specialist High Skills Majors, Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP), Supervised Alternative Learning (SAL), and special education programs; activities connected with Community Involvement; courses such as Discovering the Workplace and Navigating the Workplace, and courses in a variety of disciplines, including technological education and Canadian and world studies; and various Employment Ontario programs, including literacy programs.

This resource guide is designed to show educators how they can use the OSP to make linkages between Essential Skills and the Ontario curriculum. Essential Skills are transferable skills that enable people to perform tasks in work, learning, and life. Competence in Essential Skills is the foundation for learning other skills, such as technical skills and job/workplace-specific skills. As well, having strong Essential Skills helps people to adjust to change, something that is critical in today's classrooms, communities, and workplaces. Learners need to know what they are learning and why they are learning it. By making explicit reference to Essential Skills, teachers can connect learning activities to a range of tasks in school, in the community, at home, and at work, increasing classroom relevancy and learner engagement.

The Ontario Skills Passport is a bilingual web-based resource that provides easy-to-understand descriptions of the Essential Skills and work habits that are important in work, learning, and life. It includes the Essential Skills identified and validated by Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC; formerly Human Resources and Skills Development Canada [HRSDC]), such as Reading Text, Writing, Document Use, Oral Communication, Money Math, Problem Solving, and Critical Thinking, as well as work habits such as working safely, teamwork, reliability, and initiative. The OSP also includes authentic tasks and videos that illustrate how people use these skills in everyday life and on-the-job in more than 400 occupations from all pathways. It offers numerous tools and resources for use in educational, training, volunteer, and workplace contexts that can help learners and job seekers assess, practise, build, and document the demonstration of their Essential Skills and work habits. Since Essential Skills and work habits are transferable from job to job and sector to sector, learners and job seekers can use them when they enter the workforce, change employment, or pursue further education or training.

One of the tools on the OSP website is the OSP Tracker, which learners and job seekers can use to keep track of their demonstrations of Essential Skills and work habits. They are encouraged to complete an OSP Reflection Worksheet after every experience in which they have demonstrated their skills. They can use this information in developing their Individual Pathways Plan (IPP) as they answer the four education and career/life planning questions from a skills perspective: *Who am I? What are my opportunities? Who do I want to become? What is my plan for achieving my goals?*

For more information on the OSP, go to [www.ontario.ca/skillspassport](http://www.ontario.ca/skillspassport).



## Why Use This Guide?

Essential Skills empower people to perform the tasks required to succeed in school, in the workplace, and in other activities of daily life. These skills provide individuals with the foundation for learning other skills, such as technical skills, and enhance their ability to adapt to change. The Essential Skills addressed in this guide are transferable skills that all high school students, adult learners, job seekers, and workers can take from school to work, from job to job, and from sector to sector.

This guide was created with you, the educator, in mind. By incorporating the materials in this guide into your teaching practice – no matter what your subject area – you will help learners see and experience the connection between what they do in the classroom and what they need to succeed in the real world. A clear understanding of the relevance of their learning will improve their experience as learners, which will in turn fuel your own growth as an educator.

This guide was created to help all educators – teachers, literacy practitioners, adult educators, curriculum writers, and developers of learning materials – to develop learning activities that allow them to identify students' Essential Skills, as well as their work habits, and to provide immediate feedback. Educators can use this guide to help learners meet curriculum expectations and at the same time gain a better understanding of the value of their Essential Skills and work habits. When learners recognize that the Essential Skills and work habits they are developing and demonstrating at school are relevant and transferable to further education, training, the workplace, and everyday life, they come to value those skills, gain confidence, and become more engaged in their learning.

This guide is designed to help you as an educator to:

- ✓ identify the Essential Skills and work habits you are already teaching;
- ✓ understand task complexity from an Essential Skills perspective;
- ✓ analyse learning activities to determine where Essential Skills are embedded;
- ✓ make the Essential Skills and work habits explicit in your classroom teaching and assessment;
- ✓ create learning activities focused on Essential Skills and work habits that enhance your classroom teaching;
- ✓ identify skill-building activities and interactive learning resources to help all learners develop their abilities to perform Essential Skills tasks both within and outside the classroom.

Essential Skills in the Ontario Skills Passport		
Essential Skills are defined as the skills needed for work, learning, and life. They include:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reading Text</li> <li>• Writing</li> <li>• Document Use</li> <li>• Computer Use</li> <li>• Oral Communication</li> </ul>	Numeracy: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Money Math</li> <li>• Scheduling or Budgeting and Accounting</li> <li>• Measurement and Calculation</li> <li>• Data Analysis</li> <li>• Numerical Estimation</li> </ul>	Thinking Skills: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Job Task Planning and Organizing</li> <li>• Decision Making</li> <li>• Problem Solving</li> <li>• Finding Information</li> <li>• Critical Thinking</li> </ul>

Employment and Social Development Canada defines the Essential Skills as the skills needed for work, learning, and life. If this is the first time you're hearing about Essential Skills, take some time to familiarize yourself with the **Ontario Skills Passport (OSP)** website. On the website you will learn about the Essential Skills and work habits, and you will see examples of how workers, learners, and community members use these skills. Some knowledge of the Essential Skills will help you use this guide to its maximum advantage.

#### The Ontario Skills Passport offers:

- ✓ clear descriptions of Essential Skills and work habits;
- ✓ resources and tools, including learning materials, assessments, and an OSP Tracker, to support its use in educational and training contexts and workplace contexts;
- ✓ a method for employers to assess and record the demonstration of Essential Skills and work habits.



[www.ontario.ca/skillspassport](http://www.ontario.ca/skillspassport)

#### Work Habits in the Ontario Skills Passport

- ✓ Working Safely
- ✓ Teamwork
- ✓ Reliability
- ✓ Organization
- ✓ Working Independently
- ✓ Initiative
- ✓ Self-advocacy
- ✓ Customer Service
- ✓ Entrepreneurship



# Why Do Essential Skills Matter?

We use Essential Skills every day in our roles as learners, workers, and members of the community. Essential Skills tasks are real tasks used in daily life and in the workplace, such as reading a brochure to learn about a fitness class, writing a note to a co-worker, or deciding which route to take to get from one part of the city to another. A person with strong Essential Skills is like a tree with a strong root system, which both allows for growth and provides protection in difficult times.

Individuals with strong Essential Skills are able to learn new skills more easily and to transfer their learning from one context to another. This ability makes them less vulnerable to forces of change, whether at work or in their personal lives.

## Essential Skills in Action

Watch these [videos](#) to see how Essential Skills are used in everyday life.

Understanding how to use Essential Skills within educational settings gives educators and learners a powerful tool for analysing the ways in which skills apply to real-world tasks. Equipped with this tool, educators can answer the question, “Why do I need to learn this anyway?”

Essential Skills tasks have a clearly defined structure based on a well-researched and internationally recognized body of knowledge. This structure enables educators to more easily identify Essential Skills tasks embedded in classroom learning. Making use of Essential Skills explicitly and intentionally helps learners understand the skills that they have and those that they are developing, as well as how they can use these skills in work, life, and further education and/or training.

The Essential Skills methodology uses an internationally recognized scale – between 1 and 4 or 5 – to describe the complexity of tasks. This scale enables each Essential Skills task to be analysed for its relative difficulty. The scale for each of the Essential Skills can serve as a common “language” with which to discuss skill levels and skill requirements in a way that is meaningful for learners, educators, employers, and other community members.

When you, as an educator, understand what an Essential Skills task is, you are in a better position to build real learning opportunities for learners. These learning opportunities, framed as Essential Skills tasks, enable learners to make connections between what is learned in the classroom and how learning can be applied beyond the classroom. This guide will help you understand what constitutes an Essential Skills task and how to make those skills explicit in your teaching.

All learners can be taught within an Essential Skills context, even when they are not yet at a point where they can manage Essential Skills tasks on their own. When you provide skills development opportunities and describe the connection to Essential Skills tasks, learners will be able to see that what they are learning will help them achieve their goals.

We know that learners do best when they can make connections between what they do in class and what they want to do outside the classroom. And this is true whether you are working with learners with learning disabilities, learners in a mathematics class, or learners in a literacy program. Working with learners who are challenged by level 1 tasks is covered in more detail in Section 2 of this guide.

## What's in This Guide?

This guide includes information on all Essential Skills and work habits in the **Ontario Skills Passport**. As well, the four main sections of this guide – Essential Skills, Skill-Building Activities, Work Habits, and Creating Engaging Learning Activities – are followed by a set of useful appendices that include a quick reference sheet for future use, more practice activities, and reference materials to help you understand how to make linkages between curriculum expectations and Essential Skills and work habits. Appendix 3 provides supplemental information on the skills of problem solving and critical thinking. These thinking skills are identified most often today as critical to success across the secondary and postsecondary curricula, and in the workplace.

Section 1 outlines a two-step process for identifying and analysing Essential Skills tasks embedded in your learning activities. Once you have learned this process, you will have a quick way to recognize the Essential Skills in what you teach and to analyse Essential Skills tasks to determine their skill level. This section also includes examples and opportunities for practice. As well, Appendix 1 gives you a quick reference sheet for future use, and Appendix 2 provides even more practice activities. The reference materials listed at the back of this guide are provided to help you understand how to make linkages between curriculum expectations and Essential Skills.

You can also access an inventory of learning activities created by teachers who have already used this two-step process to analyse hundreds of classroom activities. These learning activities are available on the OSP website (for more information, see Appendix 4) and can be used in a variety of grades and settings to help learners practise, build, and demonstrate their Essential Skills. The activities contain curriculum connections and identify the Essential Skills tasks and the skill levels of these tasks so you can easily integrate them into your lesson planning.

Section 2 provides both the rationale and ideas for developing skill-building activities that help learners develop their abilities to perform Essential Skills tasks. This section emphasizes activities for all learners, including those with special needs.

Section 3 provides information about good work habits and learning skills, the building blocks of skill mastery, as well as ideas for creating activities to help learners practise good skills and work habits. Examples illustrate links between work habits as defined in the OSP and the learning skills and work habits as defined in *Growing Success: Assessment, Evaluation, and Reporting in Ontario Schools* (Ministry of Education, 2010, pp. 9–14).

Section 4 guides you through a four-step process for creating learning activities that help learners develop their Essential Skills and work habits. The steps focus on finding examples of the kinds of things individuals do outside the classroom, then on creating learning activities that reflect those real-life tasks.

Appendix 3 examines problem solving and critical thinking in more detail, and provides examples of how to teach thinking skills while making linkages between these Essential Skills and the curriculum expectations.

Appendix 5 provides an outline for training others in teaching the Essential Skills and work habits.

Many additional useful materials for educators and learners can be found in the “Resources” section at the end of this guide.

# How to Use This Guide

Whether you teach math or family studies, write curriculum, instruct adult literacy learners, or develop learning activities for students with learning disabilities, you can use the information and ideas presented in this guide in your practice. Here are some examples of how you can use this guide.

As an educator, you can use this guide to:

- ✓ uncover the Essential Skills and work habits your learners are already demonstrating in the classroom and discuss why they are important in work, learning, and life;
- ✓ understand the skill demands of learning activities. You'll find that sometimes the demands we make of learners exceed the demands required outside the classroom. In other cases, skill demands could be increased to better prepare learners for next steps;
- ✓ assess learners' demonstration of Essential Skills and work habits while addressing curriculum expectations;
- ✓ direct learners to [SkillsZone games](#), [interactive learning resources](#), and [learning activities](#) designed to provide additional practice in using Essential Skills and work habits;
- ✓ encourage learners to value feedback on their demonstrations of Essential Skills and work habits and to use the [OSP Tracker](#) and the [OSP Reflection Worksheet](#) to develop their "All About Me" portfolio or their Individual Pathways Plan (IPP) as they answer the four education and career/life planning questions from a skills perspective: *Who am I? What are my opportunities? Who do I want to become? What is my plan for achieving my goals?*;
- ✓ encourage learners to use the [Track Your Essential Skills and Work Habits in Learning Activities](#) resource to add both a skills focus and career connections to your course.

As a learning materials developer, you can use this guide to:

- ✓ reflect on the balance of activities included in the materials you develop. Having a balance of skill-building activities and Essential Skills tasks is a great way to link learning activities to applications outside the classroom;
- ✓ create learning activities focused on Essential Skills and work habits to enrich both existing and new resources.

In addition to the suggestions provided in this guide, there are a number of additional tools and resources in the [Ontario Skills Passport](#) designed to assist learners in assessing, building, documenting, and tracking their skills in the classroom, in cooperative education and other experiential learning opportunities, and in activities

connected with Community Involvement, as well as volunteer and extracurricular activities. Be sure to encourage learners to check out the following OSP resources:

- ✓ OSP Self-Assessments
- ✓ OSP Learning Activities
- ✓ Create an OSP Work Plan
- ✓ Create an OSP Transition Plan
- ✓ OSP Tracker
- ✓ OSP Reflection Worksheet

## Let's get started!



*Supporting implementation  
of Creating Pathways to Success*



*A user-friendly gateway to  
the Ontario Skills Passport*

## SECTION I: Essential Skills

This section outlines a two-step process for identifying and analysing Essential Skills tasks that are embedded in learning activities. Once learned, this process provides a quick way for educators to recognize the Essential Skills implicit in what they teach and to analyse Essential Skills tasks to determine their skill level.

Each of the two steps is presented in the same way. First, the step is introduced and explained. Next, illustrations of how to carry out the step by using real learning activities are provided.

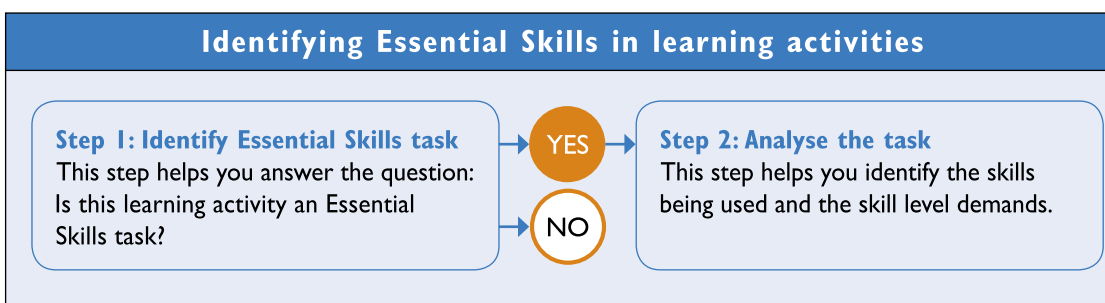
Finally, practice opportunities that allow you to try the process out for yourself are included. Answers and explanations follow the practice activities so you can be sure you are on the right track.

# Identifying and Analysing Essential Skills Tasks Embedded in Learning Activities

Whether you teach in an elementary school, help adults upgrade their math skills, or create activities for use in physics classes, you are giving learners an opportunity to develop and practise their Essential Skills. But which Essential Skills are learners using? And how challenging are the skill demands? The following two-step process for identifying and analysing Essential Skills in learning activities will help you uncover the Essential Skills learners are using and determine the skill demands. You already require learners to use these skills; now there is a method to help you describe *how* they are being used.

The first step in the process is to figure out whether the learning activity is an Essential Skills task. Once you know that it is, you can move to Step 2 to determine which Essential Skills are being used and what the skill demands are.

As you go through Step 1 of this process, you will most likely discover learning activities that are not Essential Skills tasks. Learning activities that are not Essential Skills tasks are skill-building activities. These activities are crucial in helping learners develop their skills and prepare to apply their skills to perform tasks. You can think of skill-building activities as the building blocks for Essential Skills tasks. It is important to understand the relationship between skill-building activities and Essential Skills tasks. Seeing the connections yourself enables you to explain to learners what they are learning, why they are learning it, and when they will use it outside the classroom. When learners understand these connections, they are more likely to see how skill-building activities are connected to real-world tasks. See Section 2 and Appendix 4 for more information about the relationship between Essential Skills tasks, skill-building activities, and curriculum expectations.



These two steps are described in detail on the following pages. Each step is followed by examples and opportunities to practise identifying Essential Skills tasks. You can find more opportunities for practise in Appendix 2. The quick reference sheet in Appendix 1 summarizes the two-step process in a worksheet format so you can analyse other learning activities on your own.



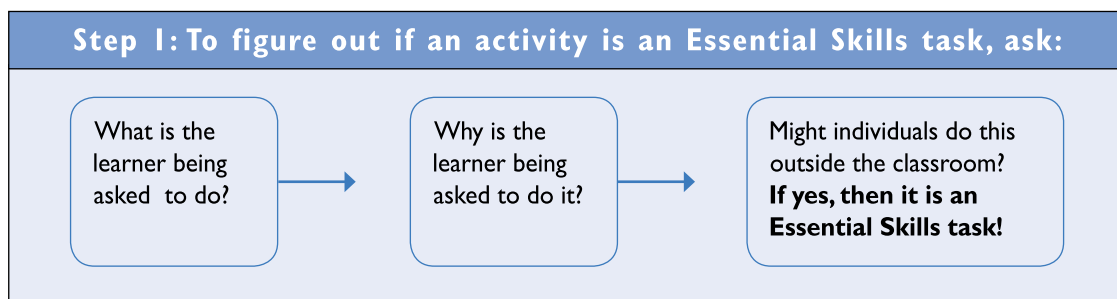
# Step 1

## Identifying Essential Skills Tasks

Our lives are filled with Essential Skills tasks. Leaving notes to let family members know we've gone out or figuring out how much money to put in parking meters are both Essential Skills tasks. Even when we go shopping and ask a store clerk for help, we are engaged in an Essential Skills task. But what makes these tasks similar? In each case, we are using our skills to complete an activity with a purpose.

Learners carry out learning activities all the time in the classroom. Often these activities help learners develop skills so they can use them in more complex ways on their own. At other times, learners must decide which skills to use, and then use them independently to accomplish tasks much as they would outside the classroom. The first step in determining the Essential Skills demands of classroom activities is to distinguish between learning activities that are designed for building skills and learning activities that can be analysed as Essential Skills tasks. **This step is important because the skill level rating scale used to describe task complexity applies only to Essential Skills tasks.**

To figure out whether an activity is an Essential Skills task, ask yourself a few questions. First, identify what the learner is being asked to do. Next, determine why the learner is being asked to do this. Finally, ask whether individuals would do this outside the classroom. The activity might be something that individuals do at home or at work. When you find that the activity both has a purpose and also is something that individuals do outside the classroom, you have identified an Essential Skills task!



This step is illustrated over the next few pages, where typical learning activities are examined to see whether *they* are Essential Skills tasks. Read through these examples to see whether you can distinguish the skill-building activities from the Essential Skills tasks. Then practise identifying Essential Skills tasks on your own from the learning activities found under *Step 1: Practice* on pages 18–19.

# Step 1

## Examples

Over the next few pages, you will have a chance to see Step 1 in action. You'll recall that Step 1 helps you figure out whether a learning activity is an Essential Skills task. (Note that the term "Essential Skills" is often abbreviated to "ES" in tables, charts, and similar materials in this guide.) Six learning activities are described in the first column of the table below. For each learning activity, you will find the questions introduced on the previous page and explanations of why the learning activity is, or isn't, an Essential Skills task.

Activity	Step 1: Identify the Essential Skills task		
	What is the learner being asked to do?	Why is the learner being asked to do it?	Might individuals do this outside the classroom?
1. Read pamphlets and information sheets to learn about the causes of diabetes.	Read pamphlets and information sheets	To learn about the causes of diabetes	NO  <b>YES</b> – you have an ES task!
	✓ <b>Why this is an ES task:</b> The purpose of this task is reading to learn about a topic. Individuals read to learn about topics outside the classroom; therefore, it can be considered an Essential Skills task.		
2. Complete activities to show an understanding of a recently taught concept in geometry.	Complete activities	To demonstrate understanding	<b>NO</b>  YES – you have an ES task!
	✗ <b>Why this isn't an ES task:</b> This activity is meaningful for learners and teachers because it gives learners an opportunity to demonstrate their understanding of a topic. It is not, however, something individuals are likely to do outside the classroom.		
3. Give a 10-minute presentation to the class on findings from Internet research about the long-term health effects of narcotics use.	Give a presentation to the class	To present findings about long-term health effects of narcotics	NO  <b>YES</b> – you have an ES task!
	✓ <b>Why this is an ES task:</b> Giving an oral presentation to share one's findings on a topic is a task with a purpose, and one that individuals do outside the classroom setting. A parent may present findings during a school council meeting. A workplace trainer may present this kind of information to workers as part of a health and safety training module.		

(continued)

Activity	Step 1: Identify the Essential Skills task		
	What is the learner being asked to do?	Why is the learner being asked to do it?	Might individuals do this outside the classroom?
4. Read a short story to identify the author's use of foreshadowing.	Read a short story	To identify the author's use of foreshadowing	<b><u>NO</u></b> YES – you have an ES task!
	<b>✗ Why this isn't an ES task:</b> This activity is often meant to expose learners to various styles of literature and to familiarize them with literary devices. While a worthwhile activity, it would not be considered an Essential Skills task because reading a short story <i>for this purpose</i> is not something that is likely to be done outside the classroom.		
5. Complete and sign a waiver acknowledging awareness of risks associated with using equipment in a technological education facility.	Complete a waiver	Acknowledge awareness of risks	<b>NO</b> <b><u>YES</u></b> – you have an ES task!
	<b>✓ Why this is an ES task:</b> This activity has a clear purpose and is a task routinely carried out in everyday work and life. Given that it meets these criteria, it would be considered an Essential Skills task.		
6. Count money to show an understanding of currency.	Count money	To show understanding of denominations	<b><u>NO</u></b> YES – you have an ES task!
	<b>✗ Why this isn't an ES task:</b> Activities like this are designed solely for the purpose of demonstrating understanding. If the task had learners counting money for a purpose common outside the classroom, such as to see if they had enough to make a purchase, that would be considered an Essential Skills task because it mirrors a real-world task.		

Sometimes you will encounter tasks whose purpose is not specified or immediately recognizable. In these cases, you will need to identify for yourself what the purpose is. This will help you decide whether the activity can be considered an Essential Skills task, or whether it is primarily designed so that learners can demonstrate knowledge and/or understanding.

# Step 1

## Practice

Below are six more classroom activities. Use the questions in the table to help you figure out which are Essential Skills tasks. Answers are on pages 20–21.

Activity	Step 1: Identify the Essential Skills task		
	What is the learner being asked to do?	Why is the learner being asked to do it?	Might individuals do this outside the classroom?
1. Measure the usable floor space in a classroom and design a sensible seating plan for 25 students, to show an understanding of a recently taught unit on area.			NO  YES – you have an ES task!
2. Respond to reading comprehension questions about Newton's third law of motion.			NO  YES – you have an ES task!
3. Calculate the average temperature for each month of the year in different cities.			NO  YES – you have an ES task!

(continued)

Activity	Step 1: Identify the Essential Skills task		
	What is the learner being asked to do?	Why is the learner being asked to do it?	Might individuals do this outside the classroom?
4. Write a one-page proposal to the class to persuade them that a suggested guest speaker would be interesting. Conduct Internet research to decide who to invite to speak to the class.			NO  YES – you have an ES task!
5. Discuss ideas with classmates to create a schedule for a term-long group project.			NO  YES – you have an ES task!
6. Read a play by William Shakespeare to learn about Elizabethan courting customs.			NO  YES – you have an ES task!

# Step 1

## Answers

- 1. Measure the usable floor space in a classroom and design a sensible seating plan for 25 students, to show an understanding of a recently taught unit on area.**

✓ **Why this is an ES task:**

In this case, learners are being asked to apply knowledge of area to figure out how many desks fit in a room. There are two purposes for this learning activity: the first, to figure out how many desks will fit in a room and the second, to demonstrate knowledge and understanding. Many of us measure at home and at work when figuring out options for ways to lay out rooms and offices. Because the learner is being asked to do something that we do outside the classroom, this is an Essential Skills task.

- 2. Respond to reading comprehension questions about Newton's third law of motion.**

✗ **Why this isn't an ES task:**

In this activity, learners use writing skills to answer comprehension questions. Since writing skills are not typically employed in this way outside the classroom, this cannot be analysed as an Essential Skills writing task. On the other hand, if the activity were described as reading a text to learn about Newton's third law of motion, it could be analysed as an Essential Skills reading task because we read to learn all the time.

- 3. Calculate the average temperature for each month of the year in different cities.**

✗ **Why this isn't an ES task:**

The primary purpose of this activity is to practise calculations. Practising a math concept is not something individuals typically do at work or in their communities. On the other hand, if learners were asked to calculate average temperatures in different cities *to decide which place to visit*, then this would be an Essential Skills task.

- 4. Write a one-page proposal to the class to persuade them that a suggested guest speaker would be interesting. Conduct Internet research to decide who to invite to speak to the class.**

✓ **Why this is an ES task:**

In this case, learners are required to employ several skills over a couple of stages to accomplish the task of writing a proposal. They carry out research with the purpose of deciding on a guest speaker, and then write a proposal with the purpose of persuading classmates that their speaker is worth inviting. Given the purpose of both activities, we can conclude that they are, in fact, activities carried out frequently outside the classroom. For example, consider workers who research and write proposals to persuade co-workers that a new initiative is worth pursuing. So this is definitely an Essential Skills task.

- 5. Discuss ideas with classmates to create a schedule for a term-long group project.**

✓ **Why this is an ES task:**

In this activity, learners engage in discussion. The purpose of the discussion is to create a schedule. We could easily imagine individuals having a group discussion like this to achieve this very purpose. So yes, this is an Essential Skills task.

- 6. Read a play by William Shakespeare to learn about Elizabethan courting customs.**

✓ **Why this is an ES task:**

This activity has learners reading a play. The purpose of the reading is to learn about a topic, in this case to learn about life many generations back. Reading for the purpose of learning about a topic is a common activity both within and outside educational settings. So this activity fulfils the criteria for an Essential Skills task.

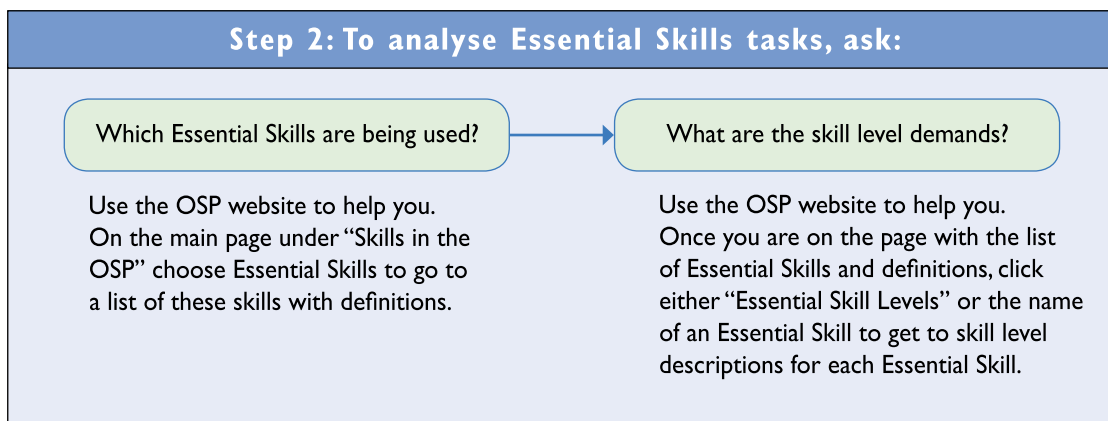
## Step 2

### ***Analysing the Tasks***

After completing Step 1 you will know how to recognize which learning activities are Essential Skills tasks. These tasks can now be analysed to figure out which Essential Skills learners are using and the skill level demands.

So how is this done? The [OSP](#) website can help you. You can use the resources on the website to learn about the Essential Skills and the work habits that contribute to individuals' success in work, learning, and life. The website also contains descriptions of tasks at each skill level for each of the Essential Skills.

To analyse the Essential Skills tasks you have identified, you must first figure out which Essential Skills are being used. It is most often the case that one skill is predominant in carrying out a task, although other skills can also be identified. For example, the primary skill used to figure out how much money to put into the parking meter is money math, a numeracy skill. But document use may be required to read the label on the parking meter, and numerical estimation may be used to figure out how much time is needed to run errands. Once you know which Essential Skills are being used, the skill level descriptions can be used to assign a skill level for each of the skills. To learn about skill levels, go to the [OSP](#) website.



This step is illustrated over the next few pages, where we analyse the Essential Skills tasks we identified using Step 1. Read through these examples to see how Essential Skills tasks are analysed. Then practise identifying skills and skill levels using the Essential Skills tasks found under *Step 2: Practice* on page 25.



## Step 2

## Examples

Below are examples of Step 2 in action. In the Essential Skills Task column are the three activities identified as Essential Skills tasks in Step 1. Beside each task statement are the answers to the questions you were introduced to on the previous page, along with an explanation of how Essential Skills requirements and skill level demands were determined. Hyperlinks take you to the related content on the OSP website.

Essential Skills Task	Step 2: Analyse the task	
	Which Essential Skills are being used?	What are the skill level demands?
Read pamphlets and information sheets to learn about the causes of diabetes.	Main Skill: Reading Text	1   2   ③   4   5
	Other Skills: No additional skills	n/a
	<b>Why?</b> The task statement itself makes it clear that the skill being used is <b>reading</b> . It is a <b>level 3</b> reading task because the reader is integrating information from various sources.	
Give a 10-minute presentation to the class on findings from Internet research about the long-term health effects of narcotics use.	Main Skill: Oral Communication	1   ②   3   4   5
	Other Skills: Computer Use Finding Information	1   ②   3   4   5 1   ②   3   4   5
	<b>Why?</b> Giving this presentation requires the use of <b>oral communication</b> skills at <b>level 2</b> because the content being communicated deals mostly with facts that are moderately complex and detailed. The task also requires <b>computer use</b> and <b>finding information</b> skills because learners need to conduct Internet research. Computer use skill demands are also <b>level 2</b> because only simple software features are used. Finding information is a <b>level 2</b> task as well because learners are consulting a specific source. <i>Note:</i> If the task included a description of the text consulted, reading text could also be rated.	

(continued)

Essential Skills Task	Step 2: Analyse the task	
	Which Essential Skills are being used?	What are the skill level demands?
Complete and sign a waiver acknowledging awareness of risks associated with using equipment in a technological education facility.	Main Skill: Document Use	1   ②   3   4   5
	Other Skills: Critical Thinking	1   ②   3   4   5
	<b>Why?</b> This task requires learners to extract information from a form and sign it. Using forms is a <b>document use</b> task. It is a <b>level 2</b> task because the document itself is simple, what the user must do with the form is straightforward, and learners do not need much knowledge of the content in order to complete it. It is also a <b>critical thinking</b> task (level 2) because learners must consider their own abilities and evaluate the risks involved in using information provided in a waiver. For more information on critical thinking, see Appendix 3.	

## Step 2

## Practice

Below are the four learning activities you identified as Essential Skills tasks in Step 1.

Use the list of Essential Skills and the skill level descriptions on the [OSP](#) website to help you figure out which Essential Skills are being used and the skill level demands. Level 5 is in parentheses because it is not part of every skill. Answers are on page 26.

Essential Skills Task	Step 2: Analyse the task	
	Which Essential Skills are being used?	What are the skill level demands?
1. Measure the usable floor space in a classroom and design a sensible seating plan for 25 students, to show an understanding of a recently taught unit on area.	Main skill:	1 2 3 4 (5)
	Other skills:	1 2 3 4 (5) 1 2 3 4 (5)
2. Write a one-page proposal to the class to persuade them that a suggested guest speaker would be interesting. Conduct Internet research to decide who to invite to speak to the class.	Main skill:	1 2 3 4 (5)
	Other skills:	1 2 3 4 (5) 1 2 3 4 (5)
3. Discuss ideas with classmates to create a schedule for a term-long group project.	Main skill:	1 2 3 4 (5)
	Other skills:	1 2 3 4 (5) 1 2 3 4 (5)
4. Read a play by William Shakespeare to learn about Elizabethan courting customs.	Main skill:	1 2 3 4 (5)
	Other skills:	1 2 3 4 (5) 1 2 3 4 (5)

## Step 2

## Answers

1. **Measure the usable floor space in a classroom and design a sensible seating plan for 25 students, to show an understanding of a recently taught unit on area.**

**Main skill:** [Measurement and Calculation – level 2](#)

**Other skills:** No additional skills

**Why?** This task requires learners to measure the area of a classroom and then make calculations to figure out how many specified objects will fit into the space. Measurement is captured in the Essential Skills under numeracy. It is a level 2 task because it requires learners to calculate the area of simple, familiar shapes and to understand how the shapes fit together.

2. **Write a one-page proposal to the class to persuade them that a suggested guest speaker would be interesting. Conduct Internet research to decide who to invite to speak to the class.**

**Main skill:** [Writing – level 3](#)

**Other skills:** [Computer Use – level 2](#) and [Decision Making – level 2](#)

**Why?** Several skills are employed in carrying out this task; however, it is set up primarily as a writing task. Writing a one-page text to persuade is a level 3 task because it is not routine. The computer use is at level 2 because it only requires the use of familiar software features. Decision making is at level 2 because the factors to be taken into account in making the decision are well defined and there is a set procedure to follow.

3. **Discuss ideas with classmates to create a schedule for a term-long group project.**

**Main skill:** [Oral Communication – level 2](#)

**Other skills:** [Scheduling or Budgeting and Accounting – level 2](#)

**Why?** This is set up primarily as an oral communication task, but it also has learners create a schedule, requiring scheduling or budgeting and accounting, a numeracy skill. Oral communication demands are at level 2 because the task involves a group discussion and the context is largely predictable.

4. **Read a play by William Shakespeare to learn about Elizabethan courting customs.**

**Main skill:** [Reading Text – level 5](#)

**Other skills:** No additional skills

**Why?** This task requires high-level reading skills, at Essential Skills level 5. This rating is justified because of the dense and complex nature of the text.

## SECTION 2: Skill-Building Activities

This section provides strategies designed to help educators meet the needs of all learners, including those with special needs. Real-world examples of Essential Skills tasks are broken down into skill-building activities, which are very useful in helping students perform these tasks.

# Meeting the Needs of All Learners

It may not be possible for learners who are working at a very basic level (e.g., some learners with developmental disabilities) to perform Essential Skills tasks. However, for these and other learners, teachers can identify selected skill-building activities that help learners progress towards the performance of these tasks. These skill-building activities prepare learners to develop the requisite knowledge and skills to perform Essential Skills tasks. Connecting skill-building activities and Essential Skills real-world tasks provides a focus, an organizational structure, and a purpose for learning and helps teachers to explain to learners what they are learning, why they are learning it, and when they will use it outside the classroom.

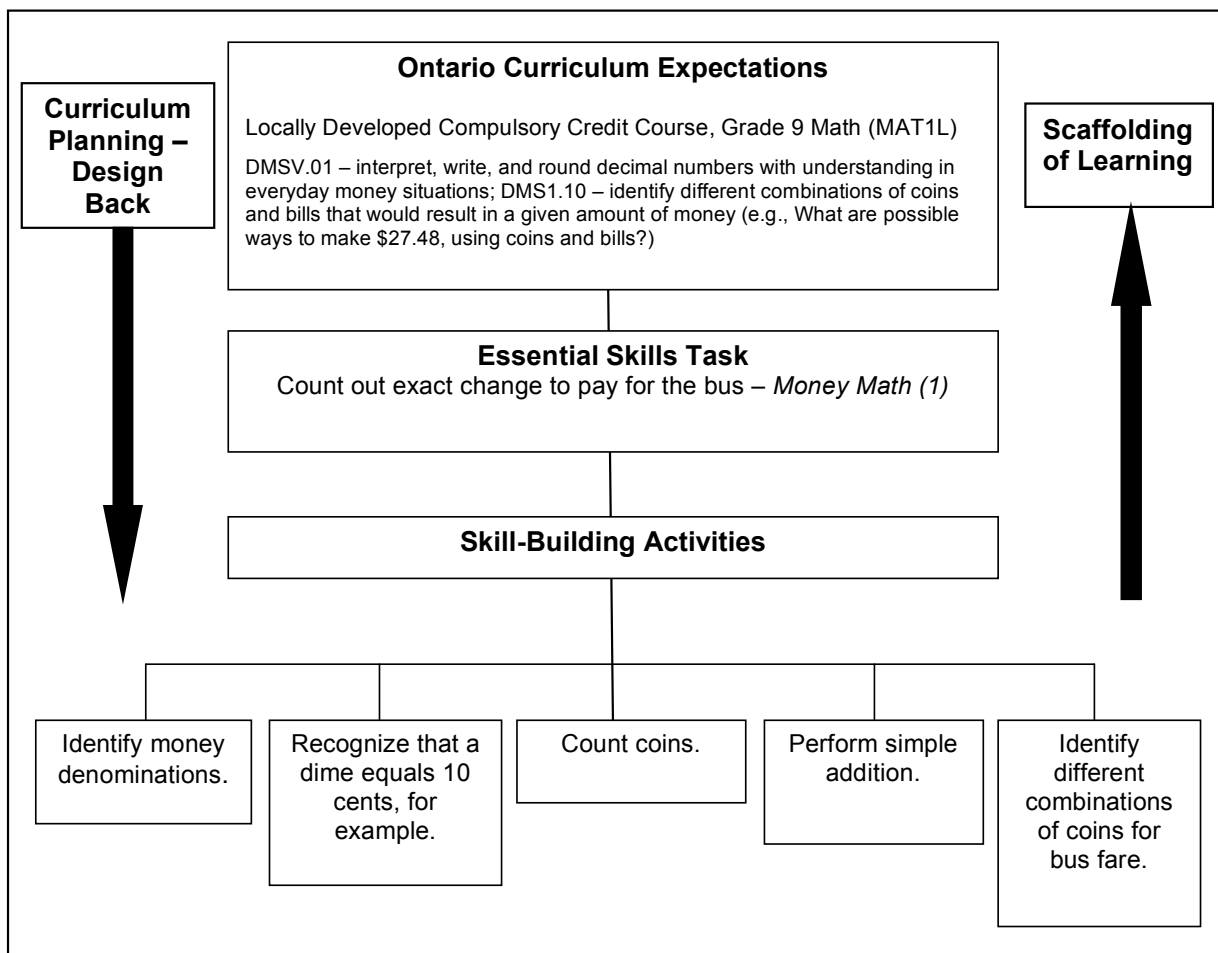
For example, “counting money” is not an Essential Skills task because there is no clear purpose or context. Counting money is, however, a skill necessary in an Essential Skills task such as *Count out exact change to pay for the bus*. A person cannot successfully perform the Essential Skills task without being able to count money.

See the chart on the next page for skill-building activities required for this Essential Skills task. A teacher would engage learners in practising these skill-building activities in order to scaffold learning and work towards successful performance of the Essential Skills task.

## **Learners with Special Needs**

All learners require opportunities to learn and demonstrate their learning in a variety of ways. By differentiating instruction, assessment, and evaluation, teachers address the diverse needs of learners in their classrooms and support learner achievement. Engaging in Essential Skills tasks may be particularly relevant for learners with special education needs. These learners may require an individual program that differs in content and in instruction, assessment, and evaluation strategies. In planning a program for learners with special education needs, teachers, with the support of an in-school team, begin by considering the strengths, needs, necessary accommodations, and transition plans identified in the learners’ **Individual Education Plan (IEP)**. The annual program goals, learning expectations, and skill-building activities appropriate for learners’ instructional level are also considered.

Essential Skills tasks can serve as the focus for modified or alternative learning expectations. When they do, learners should work on the tasks independently, once skill-building instruction has been provided. These demonstrations can then be documented in learners’ IEPs, and learners’ progress should be reported in these terms.



# Building Blocks to Task Mastery

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

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

Essential Skills task	Skill-building activities
Read instructions on a prescription label to figure out how to use the medication. (Document Use, level 1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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).</li> <li>• Provide a list of common phrases found on prescriptions (e.g., “Take x tablets, by mouth, every x hours, twice daily”).</li> <li>• Have learners match instructions found on prescriptions to line drawings (e.g., match the instruction “Take 2 tablets” to an image of two tablets).</li> <li>• Have learners locate and circle the part of prescription labels that includes instructions.</li> </ul>
Figure out how much bread will cost after a 50-cent coupon is applied. (Money Math, level 1; Document Use, level 1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have learners practise recognizing dollar values.</li> <li>• Explain how to convert 50 cents to decimals. Provide practice making these conversions.</li> <li>• Provide practice sheets in which learners subtract decimals.</li> <li>• Have learners match the brands of bread on coupons with images of the brands.</li> </ul>
Complete and sign a waiver acknowledging awareness of risks associated with using equipment in a technological education facility. (Document Use, level 2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explain different conventions for recording the date; practise recording dates using forms that specify the order in which to record the date.</li> <li>• Explain and discuss the purpose of waivers to help learners recognize their significance.</li> <li>• Point out the key terms that indicate the document is a waiver.</li> <li>• Show examples of waivers to help learners identify common features of these documents.</li> </ul>

(continued)



Essential Skills task	Skill-building activities
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)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide learners with tips on choosing Internet search terms.</li> <li>• Have learners compare search results, using different terms to help them understand the concept of search terms.</li> <li>• Share tips on evaluating sources on the Internet. For example, discuss the kinds of differences students should look for between information sourced from commercial sites and information found on educational and government sites.</li> <li>• Provide information from reputable and unreliable Internet sources on the same topic. Have learners compare the information to help them understand the importance of evaluating information sources.</li> <li>• Provide a list of vocabulary related to the topic of narcotics use. Have learners find dictionary definitions of unfamiliar words.</li> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• Have learners outline their presentation and discuss its organization with a classmate.</li> </ul>
Read pamphlets and information sheets to learn about the causes of diabetes. (Reading Text, level 3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have learners compare the features of pamphlets to look for common formatting elements.</li> <li>• Ask learners to skim the various texts in a timed exercise and to identify, from skimming alone, the topic and the purpose of each text.</li> <li>• Introduce vocabulary relevant to the topic.</li> <li>• Construct comprehension activities. For example, use isolated sentences taken from the reading sources. Have learners match sentences to communicate cause and effect relationships.</li> <li>• Discuss health concepts typically discussed in the materials (e.g., disease rates, prevention versus treatment).</li> </ul>

Educators identify skill-building activities by looking closely at what learners are required to do in order to perform a task. The next step is to identify the teachable elements that could help learners become better able to manage the task. Educators 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 a document is involved, how can I help learners recognize the type and purpose of this document?

- In numeracy tasks, what are the math fundamentals I can have learners practise? How can I help learners recognize which math operations they need to use?
- In writing tasks, how can I help learners communicate more clearly without being bogged down by grammar?
- If the task involves oral communication, 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?

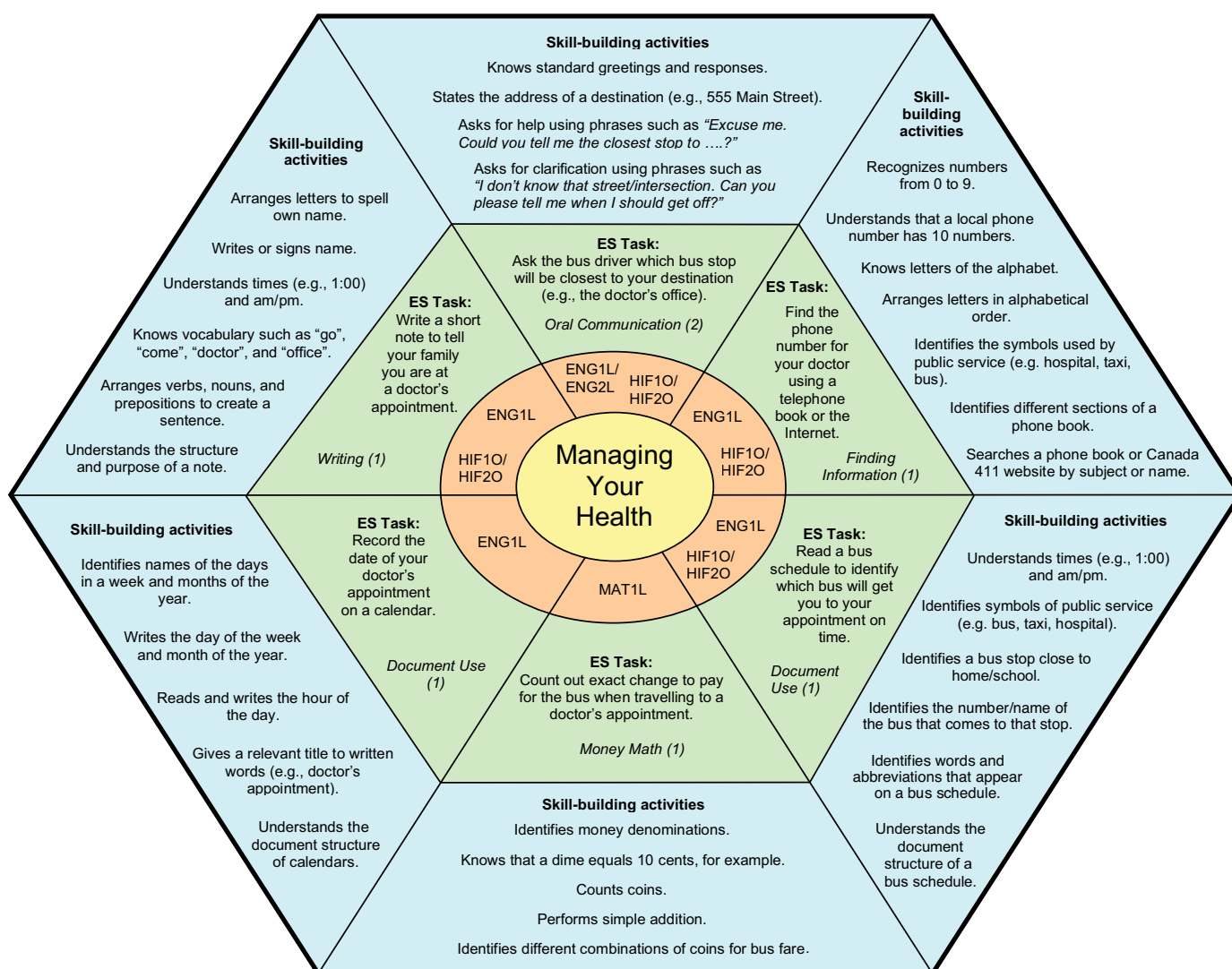
Breaking down tasks into their component skills for instructional purposes is key, but striking a balance is also important. If you spend too little time explaining the tasks, learners may find tasks overwhelming. On the other hand, if you spend too much time on skill building, learners may fail to see 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 Essential Skills tasks;
- ✓ break down these tasks into teachable elements;
- ✓ throughout skill building, draw connections back to Essential Skills tasks so that learners can see the relevance of what they are learning.

# Integrating Essential Skills and the Ontario Curriculum

The diagram below illustrates how the use of Essential Skills can be integrated into secondary school courses, including locally developed compulsory credit courses (LDCCs).<sup>\*</sup> In the centre of the diagram is a unifying concept surrounded by identifiers for courses with curriculum expectations that can be addressed by using the concept. In the next ring there is a sampling of Essential Skills tasks that can be used to meet curriculum expectations. Finally, in the outside ring there are some skill-building activities that will help learners develop the skills they need to accomplish the Essential Skills tasks. Using this model, you can meet curriculum expectations while engaging learners in using Essential Skills.



<sup>\*</sup> Locally developed compulsory credit courses (LDCCs) are developed by school boards and approved by the Ministry of Education. In order to meet the needs of the local community, they must be reviewed and resubmitted to the ministry every three years. The examples in the diagram may vary, depending on the LDCC curriculum expectations.

The course, curriculum expectations, and skill-building activities that are linked with one of the Essential Skills tasks in the “Managing Your Health” unit (page 33) are shown below. Teachers can use this chart format to show curriculum connections when creating their own units.

Course(s)	Curriculum Expectations	Essential Skills Tasks	Skill-Building Activities
Locally Developed Compulsory Credit Course, Math, Grade 9 (MAT1L)	DMS1.10 – identify different combinations of coins and bills that would result in a given amount of money (e.g., What are possible ways to make \$27.48, using coins and bills?)	Count out exact change to pay for the bus when travelling to a doctor’s appointment. <i>Money Math (1)</i>	Identify money denominations (e.g., demonstrate knowledge that a dime equals 10 cents)  Count coins  Perform simple addition  Identify different combinations of coins for bus fare

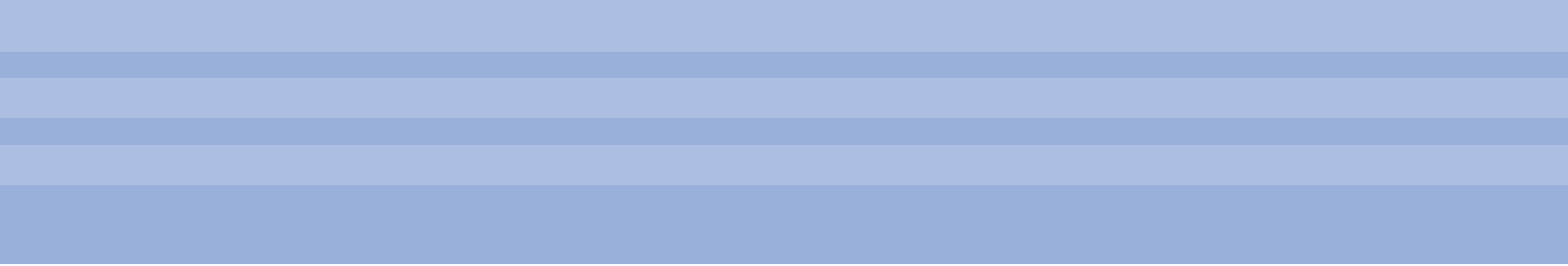
Learners who are able to demonstrate the learning in the curriculum expectations shown in the chart above will also have demonstrated the Essential Skills at the level indicated. If learners are not able to demonstrate the learning in the curriculum expectations, teachers can support them by scaffolding the learning. Scaffolded learning should begin at a level that learners can manage, using either the skill-building activities or the Essential Skills tasks from the chart above.

### ***The Achievement Chart and Skill Level Ratings for Essential Skills***

The achievement chart for each secondary school discipline in the Ontario curriculum is a standard province-wide guide that is to be used as a framework by teachers to both assess and evaluate learners’ achievement of curriculum expectations against clear performance standards. It is important to recognize that the levels used in achievement charts are distinct from the skill level rating scale for Essential Skills. The achievement charts measure learner performance in a particular grade and subject or course, while the skill level ratings for Essential Skills describe *task complexity* and do not align with grade level, age, or course. The two scales are very different and serve different purposes.

Teachers can use the skill level rating scale for Essential Skills to find out how the tasks that learners carry out relate to practical demands outside the classroom.

The achievement chart identifies four categories of knowledge and skills: Knowledge and Understanding, Thinking, Communication, and Application. All skills require some knowledge and understanding of context, vocabulary, and concepts. Some Essential Skills can be used to address the Thinking category, others the Communication category. However, the transferability of the Essential Skills relates directly to the Application category, in which learners apply knowledge and skills in familiar contexts and transfer knowledge and skills to new contexts. It makes sense that learners who are familiar with the language of Essential Skills, and with how they use these skills in other areas of their lives, can more readily apply and transfer the knowledge and skills they demonstrate in the classroom to new contexts.



## SECTION 3: Work Habits

Work habits play an important role in helping learners achieve success in school, in work, and in life. This section provides information about work habits in the Ontario Skills Passport (OSP), as well as the work habits and learning skills outlined in *Growing Success* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, pp. 9–14).

# What Are Work Habits?

Both Essential Skills and work habits are important in work, learning, and life and are transferable from one context to another. Essential Skills are the foundational skills that enable people to perform tasks required by their occupation and other activities of daily life. Work habits are the embedded behaviours 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.





# Work Habits in the Ontario Skills Passport

The OSP provides a description of each of the work habits, consisting of a list of performance indicators. The work habits covered in the OSP are as follows: working safely, teamwork, reliability, organization, working independently, initiative, self-advocacy, customer service, and entrepreneurship.

You can use the OSP to uncover the work habits in your learning activities and give learners feedback on how they are developing and demonstrating them. Please note that there are no skill levels associated with work habits.

You can also access [learning activities](#) on the OSP that make explicit reference to Essential Skills, skill-building activities, and work habits. Here are some examples that show the correlation between an Essential Skills task, the work habits demonstrated, and skill-building activities that can be used to break down the task.

Essential Skills Task	Work Habits Demonstrated	Skill-building Activities
Find the phone number for Brent's doctor by using the telephone book or the Internet. (Finding Information, level 1; Computer Use, level 2 (if demonstrated))	Initiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recognize numbers from 0 to 9</li> <li>Select the numbers 0 to 9 from an array of numbers that are arranged as a telephone number and enter them on a calculator</li> <li>Select the numbers 0 to 9 from an array of numbers that are arranged as a telephone number and enter them on a variety of touch-tone telephones</li> <li>Understand that a local phone number has 10 numbers</li> <li>Match the appropriate symbol (picture, icon) to word and to number</li> <li>Identify the different sections of a personal phone book</li> <li>Identify the different sections of a public phone book</li> <li>Search a phone book or the Canada 411 website by subject or name</li> </ul>
What should Brent say when he calls the doctor's office? When you are ready, record your response. (Oral Communication, level 2; Document Use, level 1)	Self-advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify feelings that describe self</li> <li>Identify feelings to describe self as a healthy person</li> <li>Identify feelings to describe self as not feeling healthy</li> <li>Orally convey feelings</li> <li>Answer the "5 W" questions (Who, What, When, Where, and Why?) about self</li> </ul>

(continued)

Essential Skills Task	Work Habits Demonstrated	Skill-building Activities
Count out the exact change Brent will need for his bus fare. (Money Math, level 1)	Organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sort coins by type</li> <li>Identify money denominations (e.g., demonstrate knowledge that a dime equals 10 cents)</li> <li>Count coins</li> <li>Perform simple addition</li> <li>Identify different combinations of coins for bus fare</li> </ul>
How many tablets should Brent take in one day? Circle the side effects Brent may experience. (Reading Text, level 2)	Working Safely	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Locate specific text on a form</li> <li>Identify the headings on a prescription form</li> <li>Read abbreviations on a prescription form</li> </ul>

## Relating the Learning Skills and Work Habits from *Growing Success* to the OSP Work Habits

*Growing Success* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010) identifies the following learning skills and work habits that students need to succeed in school and in life: responsibility, organization, independent work, collaboration, initiative, and self-regulation. Learners begin to develop these learning skills and work habits early in their schooling and, as they move through the grades, they further develop and consolidate them in preparation for postsecondary education and the world of work.

As mentioned earlier in this section, the OSP provides clear descriptions of the Essential Skills and work habits important for work, learning, and life. The work habits are defined as transferable – that is, students can apply them in various contexts, including many situations in learning, work, and life.

The reality is that we often use different terms when referring to similar types of skills and behaviours in school, at home, in the community, and in the workplace. Whether educators and learners are describing the work habits from the OSP or the learning skills and work habits from *Growing Success*, their focus should be on the skills and behaviours, and why they are important and transferable to different contexts, and not on the terminology.

The following chart provides sample behaviours to show the similarities and overlap in these two different classifications and descriptions of learning skills and work habits. Keep in mind that the behaviours are meant to help educators and learners understand the correspondence between the two, and not to imply that there is a one-to-one match. The sample behaviours identified in the chart are provided for guidance and are not intended to be restrictive.

Educators and learners can search the OSP database for work habits used in work, learning, and life. Teachers will find these tasks useful in helping learners understand why the learning skills and work habits matter.

See how Essential Skills and work habits are used in work, learning and life.



**How Learning Skills and Work Habits from *Growing Success*  
Can Be Aligned with OSP Work Habits**

Work Habits from the OSP	Sample Behaviours	Sample Behaviours for Related Learning Skills and Work Habits from <i>Growing Success</i>
<b>Work Safely</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Works in a manner that prevents injury to self and others</li> <li>• Uses and wears all protective equipment and devices</li> <li>• Participates in health and safety training as required</li> <li>• Reports unsafe conditions</li> </ul>	<p><b>Responsibility</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Takes responsibility for and manages own behaviour</li> <li>• Fulfils responsibilities and commitments within the learning environment</li> </ul> <p><b>Initiative</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognizes and advocates appropriately for rights of self and others</li> </ul>
<b>Teamwork</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Works willingly with others</li> <li>• Takes responsibility for his or her own share of the work</li> <li>• Shows respect for ideas and opinions of others</li> <li>• Contributes to team efforts by sharing information, resources, and expertise</li> </ul>	<p><b>Collaboration</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accepts various roles and an equitable share of work within a group</li> <li>• Responds positively to the ideas, opinions, values, and traditions of others</li> <li>• Shares information, resources, and expertise and promotes critical thinking to solve problems and make decisions</li> </ul>
<b>Reliability</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is punctual</li> <li>• Gives attention to detail</li> <li>• Uses time effectively and produces work on time</li> <li>• Acts in accordance with health and safety practices</li> <li>• Follows directions</li> </ul>	<p><b>Responsibility</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fulfils responsibilities and commitments within the learning environment</li> <li>• Completes and submits class work, homework, and assignments according to agreed-upon timelines</li> <li>• Takes responsibility for and manages own behaviour</li> </ul>
<b>Organization</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organizes work priorities when faced with a number of tasks</li> <li>• Devises and follows a coherent plan to complete a task</li> <li>• Revises the plan when necessary to complete a task or make improvements</li> </ul>	<p><b>Organization</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishes priorities and manages time to complete tasks and to achieve goals</li> <li>• Devises and follows a plan and process for completing work and tasks</li> </ul> <p><b>Independent Work</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Independently monitors, assesses, and revises plans to complete tasks and meet goals</li> </ul>

(continued)

Work Habits from the OSP	Sample Behaviours	Sample Behaviours for Related Learning Skills and Work Habits from <i>Growing Success</i>
<b>Working Independently</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Accomplishes tasks independently</li> <li>Independently selects, evaluates, and uses appropriate materials, tools, resources, and activities</li> <li>Uses prior knowledge and experience to solve problems and make decisions</li> </ul>	<p><b>Independent Work</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Follows instructions with minimal supervision</li> </ul> <p><b>Organization</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identifies, gathers, evaluates, and uses information, technology, and resources to complete tasks</li> </ul> <p><b>Self-Regulation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assesses and reflects critically on own strengths, needs, and interests</li> </ul>
<b>Initiative</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Begins and completes tasks with little prompting</li> <li>Approaches new tasks with confidence and a positive attitude</li> <li>Seeks assistance when necessary</li> </ul>	<p><b>Initiative</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Looks for and acts on new ideas and opportunities for learning</li> <li>Approaches new tasks with a positive attitude</li> </ul> <p><b>Self-Regulation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Seeks clarification and assistance when needed</li> </ul>
<b>Self-advocacy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Asks questions and seeks clarification where appropriate</li> <li>Identifies and makes use of appropriate resources and support when needed</li> <li>Is proactive regarding individual rights and responsibilities where appropriate</li> </ul>	<p><b>Self-Regulation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Seeks clarification and assistance when needed</li> <li>Identifies learning opportunities, choices, and strategies to meet personal needs and achieve goals</li> </ul> <p><b>Initiative</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recognizes and advocates appropriately for the rights of others</li> </ul>
<b>Customer Service</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Listens effectively to determine and meet a client's needs</li> <li>Interacts positively with co-workers, clients, and customers</li> <li>Creates a positive impression of the company or organization</li> <li>Endeavours to meet and exceed expectations</li> </ul>	<p><b>Collaboration</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Responds positively to the ideas, opinions, ideas, traditions, and values of others</li> <li>Builds healthy peer-to-peer relationships through personal and media assisted interactions</li> </ul> <p><b>Self-Regulation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Perseveres and makes an effort when responding to challenges</li> </ul>

(continued)

Work Habits from the OSP	Sample Behaviours	Sample Behaviours for Related Learning Skills and Work Habits from <i>Growing Success</i>
<b>Entrepreneurship</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognizes and acts on opportunities</li> <li>• Is innovative and creative</li> <li>• Is versatile and resourceful</li> <li>• Shows perseverance</li> </ul>	<p><b><i>Initiative</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Looks for and acts on new ideas and opportunities for learning</li> <li>• Demonstrates the capacity for innovation and a willingness to take risks</li> </ul> <p><b><i>Self-Regulation</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifies learning opportunities, choices, and strategies to meet personal needs and achieve goals</li> <li>• Perseveres and makes an effort when responding to challenges</li> </ul>

## **SECTION 4: Creating Engaging Learning Activities**

A four-step process for creating learning activities that help learners develop their Essential Skills is outlined in this section. Steps 1 and 2 are designed to help you find ideas based in real-life experiences. These provide the foundation for your learning activities. Steps 3 and 4 address how to analyse experiences into tasks associated with the Essential Skills and develop these tasks into your own engaging learning activities.

# Steps for Creating Essential Skills–focused Activities

The four-step process outlined below is designed to help you create Essential Skills–focused activities. These steps focus first on finding examples of the kinds of things individuals do outside the classroom, then on creating learning activities that reflect those real-life tasks.

## Step 1

### **Get Inspired**

Start by looking around you. Many situations require us to use our Essential Skills, even though we may not be aware of them at the time. Take, for example, 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 gives her an approximate travel time, she decides to allow 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 doctor's office to check in with the receptionist.*

Now, consider the Essential Skills required of fundraisers, something that many learners do:

*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.*

In the first example, Molly used several Essential Skills: Reading Text, Document Use, Writing, Numerical Estimation, Oral Communication, and Computer Use. In the second example, Kendall used the following Essential Skills: Document Use, Oral Communication, and Money Math.

You can get inspired by thinking about – or even brainstorming with your class – all the activities that you and your learners carry out in the course of a week. You can then use those situations to generate ideas for Essential Skills tasks and instructional opportunities.



As well as drawing upon your own experiences for generating ideas, you can use the two databases in the OSP, which provide an excellent source of ideas for creating learning activities.

- The **Work, Learning and Life database** provides hundreds of examples of the ways in which Essential Skills are used at work, in everyday life, and at school.
- The **Occupation-specific database** consists of more than 400 OSP Occupational Profiles, which detail how workers use their Essential Skills in performing job tasks. The job tasks included there can be the starting point for hundreds of Essential Skills–focused learning activities. As an added bonus, all the Essential Skills tasks on the OSP website are already rated for their level of complexity.

## Step 2

### **Collect Materials**

Many of our everyday experiences demand that we use Essential Skills. By paying attention to your own and others' experiences, you can generate lots of ideas for Essential Skills–focused tasks that are suitable for learning activities. While you are looking for appropriate tasks, collect examples of any useful documents and texts you may encounter, such as forms, floor plans, notices, flyers, brochures, tables, and graphs. These materials can help you create realistic activities that help learners develop their skills and apply them to their everyday lives. If you plan to share or reproduce any of the documents or texts that you collect without altering or adapting them for your use, be sure to get permission from the copyright owner.

## Step 3

### **Ask Questions**

Once you have some ideas for real-life experiences that require Essential Skills, you can begin breaking them down into tasks by asking a few strategic questions. For instance, if you start with a document that you've collected, you can begin by asking, "How is this document used?" Try to stay focused on how documents and texts are used and how tasks are performed in real-life settings.

On the other hand, if you are starting with examples from the Essential Skills profiles or from the OSP's Work, Learning and Life database, the expectations for each task are already described. The sample tasks tell you what the individual is doing and why.

## Step 4

### Create Activities

Now that you have developed some ideas, found some documents, and identified some tasks, you are ready to move on to the next step: creating learning activities. Making use of Essential Skills explicitly and intentionally helps learners understand the skills that they have and those that they are developing, as well as make connections between classroom learning and the use of 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 points to keep in mind when using Essential Skills–focused activities or when creating new activities for learners:

- The objective is to enhance existing – or to create new – activity sets that explicitly link curriculum expectations with Essential Skills and skill-building activities.
- Essential Skills–focused activity sets begin with a real-world context – or story – that links to an occupation or scenario from everyday life.
- Essential Skills–focused activity sets identify the course codes, curriculum expectations, Essential Skills tasks (specifying the Essential Skills and their skill level), and, where possible, skill-building activities that scaffold learning, which, in turn, connects to the Essential Skills tasks.
- Essential Skills–focused activities are an integral part of *all* courses, including university preparation courses and non-credit-bearing courses. Giving feedback on Essential Skills demonstrations through activity sets can help *all* learners better understand and value their strengths. This information is also helpful for learners when they are required to choose their courses, programs, postsecondary pathways, and careers on the basis of their strengths and interests. Essential Skills–focused activities can also help learners become more confident and prepared in their search for employment, including summer and part-time jobs.

**It is also important to make explicit the work habits in learning activities so that you can give learners feedback on *how* they are developing and demonstrating those work habits, which are also important in work, learning, and life.**

## What's Next?

Now that you have been introduced to the concepts in this guide – from understanding Essential Skills and work habits to creating engaging activities that help learners perform these skills – you are ready to integrate this approach into your daily work.

If you teach learners from Grades 1 to 12:

- ✓ examine the activities you have planned for your next class to figure out which ones are Essential Skills tasks;
- ✓ uncover the Essential Skills and work habits embedded in learning activities to assess learners' demonstration of the skills that will help them in work, learning, and life;
- ✓ point out to learners when they are demonstrating Essential Skills and work habits and when they might use those skills outside the classroom too;
- ✓ check out the learning activities already analysed for you, some of which will surely help you meet curriculum expectations;
- ✓ start a collection of authentic workplace or community documents that you can draw on to create activities that complement your existing learning materials;
- ✓ encourage learners to use the [OSP Tracker](#) and [OSP Reflection Worksheet](#) to track their skills demonstrations and plan further skills development so that they can achieve their goals. This information can help them develop their "All About Me" portfolio or their Individual Pathways Plan (IPP) as they answer the four education and career/life planning questions from a skills perspective: *Who am I? What are my opportunities? Who do I want to become? What is my plan for achieving my goals?*;
- ✓ encourage learners to go to the [Track Your Essential Skills and Work Habits in Learning Activities](#) resource to add both a skills focus and career connections to your course.

If you write learning materials:

- ✓ check the balance of activities in the materials to determine whether there are enough activities with a purpose that would typically be carried out in the workplace or in everyday life;
- ✓ create activities that illustrate skills that people use outside the classroom and why they use them, to make clear to learners why they are developing these skills;
- ✓ identify the skill level demands for the Essential Skills involved to make sure learners will be appropriately challenged by your activities;
- ✓ identify work habits associated with these activities;
- ✓ look for opportunities to include authentic workplace or community documents in the materials you are developing to provide real-world practice in learning activities.

If you teach adults:

- ✓ review the lessons you have planned to check that they include Essential Skills tasks;
- ✓ analyse the tasks to make sure they are challenging enough, but not too challenging, for the learners in your class;
- ✓ figure out which skill-building activities you can give learners to help them get ready to perform those Essential Skills tasks;
- ✓ illustrate why strong Essential Skills and work habits will help learners manage outside school as well as in school;
- ✓ ask learners to bring in authentic documents from their workplace or the organization for which they volunteer, to serve as the basis for your activity development;
- ✓ encourage learners to use the [OSP Tracker](#) and [OSP Reflection Worksheet](#) to track their skills demonstrations and plan further skills development so that they can achieve their goals.

The information and tools in the appendices that follow are provided to help you apply the ideas presented in this guide in your work.

## Appendix I: Quick Reference Sheet

Learners often ask, “Why do I need to know this?” The answer to this question lies in the Essential Skills. Much of what we teach in the classroom has real-world applications; real people out in the community and at work use the very skills taught in the classroom to complete tasks. But it may not always be easy for learners to connect what they learn in the classroom with how they will use their skills in everyday life. By choosing, using, and analysing Essential Skills tasks, educators make explicit connections for learners between learning activities and real-world applications.

Whether developing learning and teaching examples or selecting activities for use in the classroom, this quick reference sheet guides you through the process for identifying and analysing Essential Skills tasks.

<b>Describe the activity:</b>			
<b>Step 1:</b> Identify the ES task	<b>What is the learner being asked to do?</b>	<b>Why is the learner being asked to do it?</b>	<b>Might individuals do this outside the classroom?</b>
			NO  YES – go to Step 2
<b>Step 2:</b> Analyse the task	<b>Which Essential Skills are being used?</b>	<b>What are the skill level demands?</b>	
	Main skill:		
	Other skills:		

**TIP:** Use the Ontario Skills Passport website to help you.  
[www.ontario.ca/skillspassport](http://www.ontario.ca/skillspassport)

## Appendix 2: Practice Sets

### Practice Activities

#### Practice Activity 1

Below is an example of a Grade 9 applied math learning activity (from Ontario Ministry of Education, Targeted Implementation and Planning Supports for Revised Mathematics [TIPS4RM]). Have a look at the activity and then use the quick reference sheet on the next page to identify and analyse the Essential Skills task.

#### Television Viewing

Foundations of Mathematics, Grade 9, Applied (MFM1P)

*Strand:* Number Sense and Algebra

*Overall Expectation:* Solve problems involving proportional reasoning

*Specific Expectation:* Solve problems involving ratios, rates, and directly proportional relationships in various contexts (e.g., currency conversions, scale drawings, measurement), using a variety of methods

Did you know that there is an optimal distance for a person to be from a television for ideal viewing?

The ratio of the size of the television screen to the distance a person should sit from it is 1:6.

If the room is 17 feet long, can a person sit at an optimal distance from a 27-inch television? Explain your reasoning.

(continued)

## Practice Activity 1

Use the quick reference sheet below to identify and analyse the activity. *Tip:* Start with a clear description of what the learner is being asked to do and why the learner is being asked to do it. This will help you work through the process. Go to *Answers* on page 58 to see the analysis.

Describe the activity:			
Step 1: Identify the ES task	What is the learner being asked to do?	Why is the learner being asked to do it?	Might individuals do this outside the classroom?
			NO  YES – go to Step 2
Step 2: Analyse the task	Which Essential Skills are being used?		What are the skill level demands?
	Main skill:		
	Other skills:		

## Practice Activity 2

Have a look at the learning activity below and then use the quick reference sheet on the next page to identify and analyse the Essential Skills task.

### What's Missing

Jean is checking the first aid kit that the landscapers take on the truck.

The First Aid kit has:

First Aid Supplies	Qty.
Safety pins	1 card
Band-aids – regular	34
Band-aids – specialty	30
Sterile Gauze pads, 3 inches square	3
Rolls of 3 inch gauze bandage	2
Sterile surgical pads	2
Triangular bandages	2
After Bite, bug repellent, sun block	1 each
Dressing tape	1
Nail clippers, scissors, tweezers	1 each
Polysporin	0
Surgical gloves	3 pair
Travel wipes	5
Eye wash bottles	0

Compare this list with the record and order form (Hint: Look at the column marked “Min. Qty.”)

Fill in the order form for 1st Aid Supplies.

1. Check either “Enough” or “Low Stock” for each item.
2. Order items that are low stock. Use Jean Marrow’s initials to show she is ordering the item.
3. Use June 3, 2014 as the “Date Ordered”.

#### PPE and First Aid-Supplies

1 <sup>st</sup> Aid Supplies	Min. Qty	Enough ✓	Low Stock ✓	Ordered By	Date Ordered
Safety pins	1 card				
Band-aids-regular	100				
Band-aids-specialty	40				
Sterile gauze pads, 3 inches square	3				
Rolls of 3 inch gauze bandage	2				
Sterile surgical pads suitable for pressure dressings, individually wrapped.	2				
Triangular bandages	2				
Summer months: After bite, bug repellent, sun block.	1 each				
Dressing tape	1				
Nail clippers, scissors, tweezers	1 each				
Polysporin	1				
Surgical gloves	10 pair				
Travel wipes	10				
Eye wash bottles	1				

(continued)



## Practice Activity 2

Use the quick reference sheet below to identify and analyse the activity. *Tip:* Start with a clear description of what the learner is being asked to do and why the learner is being asked to do it. This will help you work through the process. Go to *Answers* on page 58 to see the analysis.

<b>Describe the activity:</b>			
<b>Step 1:</b> Identify the ES task	<b>What is the learner being asked to do?</b>	<b>Why is the learner being asked to do it?</b>	<b>Might individuals do this outside the classroom?</b>
			NO  YES – go to Step 2
<b>Step 2:</b> Analyse the task	<b>Which Essential Skills are being used?</b>		<b>What are the skill level demands?</b>
	Main skill:		
	Other skills:		

### Practice Activity 3

Have a look at the learning activity below and then use the quick reference sheet on the next page to identify and analyse the Essential Skills task.

[illegible]

(continued)

### Practice Activity 3

Use the quick reference sheet below to identify and analyse the activity. *Tip:* Start with a clear description of what the learner is being asked to do and why the learner is being asked to do it. This will help you work through the process. Go to *Answers* on page 59 to see the analysis.

<b>Describe the activity:</b>			
<b>Step 1:</b> Identify the ES task	<b>What is the learner being asked to do?</b>	<b>Why is the learner being asked to do it?</b>	<b>Might individuals do this outside the classroom?</b>
			NO  YES – go to Step 2
<b>Step 2:</b> Analyse the task	<b>Which Essential Skills are being used?</b>		<b>What are the skill level demands?</b>
	Main skill:		
	Other skills:		

## Answers

Practice  
Activity  
**1**

Yes, you have an Essential Skills task!

Skill requirements: **Measurement and Calculation – level 3**

In this case, the learner is being asked to make calculations in order to figure out if it is possible for a person to sit at an optimal distance from a 27-inch TV in a room 17 feet long. Making a calculation to figure out if an object is a suitable size is a task with a purpose that we might need to do at home or at work. This means you have identified an Essential Skills task.

Making calculations falls under the Essential Skills category of Measurement and Calculation. The skill level demands are at level 3 because the task requires a combination of operations and multiple steps. The written explanation is not rated because it is meant to have learners show how they reached their conclusion and doesn't form part of the real-life task.

Practice  
Activity  
**2**

Yes, you have an Essential Skills task!

Skill requirements: **Data Analysis – level 1** and **Document Use – level 2**

The learner is being asked to compare the supplies on hand with minimum quantities for the purpose of completing a form to order supplies. Comparing how much one has with how much one needs is an activity with a purpose that is often performed outside the classroom. In fact, we often complete forms to order supplies, so this task is definitely an Essential Skills task.

Several Essential Skills are being used. First, learners use Data Analysis when they compare quantities on hand with the quantities needed. Completing a form also entails Document Use. Simple numerical comparisons require Data Analysis at level 1; completing simple forms or tables requires Document Use at level 2.



Yes, you have an Essential Skills task!

Skill requirements: **Data Analysis – level 2**; **Document Use – level 2**;  
Document Creation

In this case, learners are asked to record survey results and create graphs to display results. They do this to determine which vehicles are popular with school staff. Surveying and graphing to analyse trends happen all the time outside school – just think how many times you are called on to participate in surveys! You have another Essential Skills task here.

Analysing trends requires Data Analysis at level 2 because it involves calculating simple numerical summaries. Document Use at level 2 is required because survey results are initially logged in a simple table. Creating a graph is an example of document creation. Although it is a Document Use skill, document creation is not rated using Essential Skills methodology.

## Appendix 3: A Closer Look at Thinking Skills

Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC), formerly Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC), defines “thinking” as follows:

**“Thinking** is the ability to find information, identify and evaluate solutions to a problem, make decisions, and plan and organize daily tasks. Strong thinking skills are essential to improving success in the workplace (e.g., knowing how to deal with a difficult customer or managing your workload effectively).”

In the classroom, in the workplace, and in the larger community, thinking skills are required for success. Critical thinking and problem solving – the skills most often identified by educators and employers as critical for success in the knowledge-based economy – include the abilities to think critically when designing and managing projects, to solve problems, to make effective decisions, and to use a variety of digital tools and resources. These higher-order thinking skills are critical for successful performance and innovation, and the ability to adapt to change. The following section provides additional ideas for how to identify, analyse, and create problem-solving and critical thinking skills tasks in the classroom. It is important for educators to realize that problem-solving and critical thinking tasks will have more than one correct answer. This point should be highlighted for learners.

### **Problem Solving**

Within the Essential Skills framework, problems are defined as 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 listed above, workers are prevented from carrying out their activities, at least temporarily. Not all problems are alike, but Essential Skills research shows that problems typically fall under one (or more) of three categories: lack of resources (e.g., money, time, staff), interpersonal conflict, and equipment failure.

When 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 analyse 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 for which the solution is relatively obvious.

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.	The bakers 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.	The cleaners 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.	The tool and die makers 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 level of complexity of problem solving, according to the Essential Skills methodology.

Problem solving is more complex when the following applies:

- **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 that indicates it is out of battery power and is shutting down, as opposed to one that simply shuts 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 arrive at 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 such cases, the problem and the solution are very easy to connect, which means 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 deal with the customer, 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, we encounter many other problems in our everyday lives, including 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 Skills problem-solving tasks because in each case, the problem encountered stops the individuals from completing their activities as planned.



### Problem-Solving Tasks in the Classroom

The Essential Skills 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 Essential Skills problems can help educators design learning 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 opportunities to practise solving problems. Activities might include scenarios describing workers, parents, and learners who encounter a variety of problems. Asking learners to identify problems and possible solutions, and discussing what they would do in similar situations, can provide good practice opportunities for a range of problem types.

Examples of Essential Skills problem-solving tasks	Examples of problem-solving tasks that are not Essential Skills
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ Resolve a conflict with a classmate in order to complete a group assignment. (Problem Solving, level 2)</li><li>✓ 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)</li><li>✓ Come up with ways a worker might be able to deal with an upset customer. (Problem Solving, level 2)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✗ Match a list of problems with a list of solutions.</li><li>✗ Read a scenario to determine whether a solution was found to be successful.</li><li>✗ Solve a math word problem.</li><li>✗ Make a list of problems that could occur while working on a group assignment.</li><li>✗ Conduct a science experiment.</li></ul>

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 they encounter math and science problems, learners are expected to figure out how to solve them by using recently taught applications.

In contrast, Essential Skills problems are events that prevent individuals from completing their work. When looking for examples of Essential Skills problem solving in learning activities, ask yourself the following question: Is this a situation in which someone is prevented from accomplishing an objective, or from completing his or her work?

Essential Skills problems can be rated using the complexity scale found on the [OSP website](#).

## ***Critical Thinking***

In the Essential Skills framework, critical thinking refers to the process of evaluating ideas and information with related consequences in order to make judgments. Critical thinking includes the abilities to form good questions; assess levels of risk; make judgments; predict results; and collect, organize, and evaluate information.

### **Critical Thinking in the Workplace**

Here are some examples of how critical thinking is used in the workplace:

- Accounting clerks evaluate the reasonableness of expense claims and invoices. They compare fees and costs to industry standards and price lists to isolate potentially erroneous and fraudulent charges. (Critical Thinking, level 1)
- Registered nurses assess and prioritize each assigned task in order to decide which tasks need immediate attention. Registered nurses may also evaluate task assignments to determine if assistance is required. (Critical Thinking, level 2)
- Automotive service technicians judge the condition of parts (e.g., they inspect sprockets for signs of cracks, missing teeth, and loose fit). They examine tires and belts for signs of cracks and exposed cords. (Critical Thinking, level 2)
- Dental hygienists may assess the effectiveness of community dental health programs. They may analyse and monitor service utilization and dental status statistics to determine if there are changes in children's dental risk level scores. (Critical Thinking, level 3)

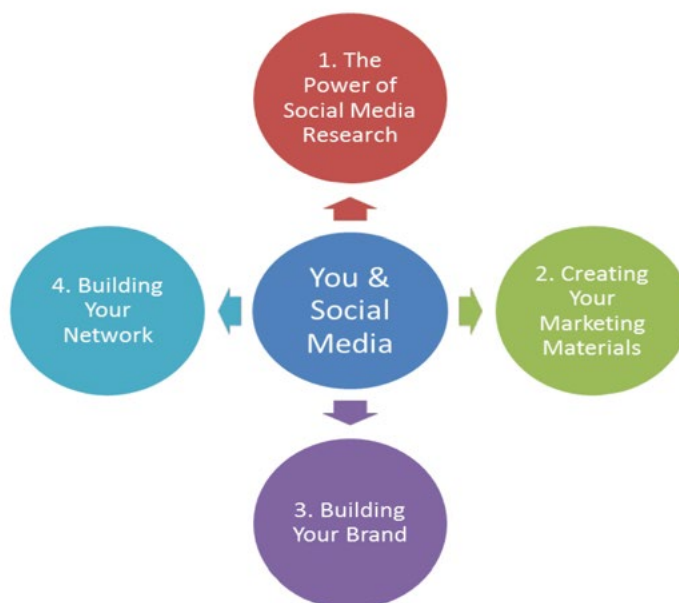
### Critical Thinking in Everyday Life

While the Essential Skills research provides examples of workers applying critical thinking on the job, we encounter many situations in our everyday lives and in school in which critical thinking is required. Here are a few examples:

- Learners evaluate the completeness of assignments before submitting them, using the assignment guidelines or rubrics provided by the teacher.
- Volunteer coaches assess the competitiveness of their teams. They consider players' skills, practice time available, other teams' records, and so on. They use the information to make adjustments to practice routines to improve the teams' chances of winning.
- Parents judge the quality of school photos to decide whether to purchase copies. They consider the children's poses and expressions, the lighting, and the associated costs.
- Learners judge the appropriateness of images and text for their various social media profiles. They consider how friends, family, and employers may perceive any publicly accessible content.

Check out the [Critical Thinking video](#) to get a better understanding of this skill.

The [OSP Social Media Resource](#) provides an additional tool for learners to help them use social media safely and effectively to showcase their Critical Thinking and other Essential Skills and work habits and get noticed when they are looking for a great postsecondary program, an apprenticeship, a volunteer position, a job, or an internship.



### Critical Thinking in the Classroom

Learners use critical thinking skills across the curriculum and across all school-related activities. For example, they:

- judge the suitability of school activities, such as sports teams, drama clubs, and social clubs, taking into account their own abilities, availability, and interests, when deciding whether to join;
- judge their readiness to take tests and exams by considering the test content, their knowledge and skills, and their performance on previous tests in the same subject area;
- judge the suitability of courses when making course selections by considering learning, employment, and graduation goals together with their personal interests;
- evaluate the accuracy of information when conducting research by considering information sources and whether the same information is found in multiple sources.

Learners also use critical thinking skills within specific subject areas (e.g., science and technology, social studies, history, geography) when they assess, analyse, and/or evaluate the impact of something, and when they form an opinion about something and support that opinion with a rationale. In each of these examples, critical thinking can be described as the ability to form relevant questions coupled with the ability to reasonably predict consequences.

As with all Essential Skills tasks, in order to figure out if a critical thinking activity is an Essential Skills task, you use the same two-step approach outlined in Section 1 on pages 13–26.

Activity	Step 1: Identify the Essential Skills task		
	What is the learner being asked to do?	Why is the learner being asked to do it?	Might individuals do this outside the classroom?
Fill in a checklist provided by the teacher to determine if an assignment is complete before submitting it.	Complete a checklist.	To determine if all the required elements in an assignment have been completed.	NO <b>YES</b> – you have an Essential Skills task.

Essential Skills Task	Step 2: Analyse the task	
	Which Essential Skills are being used?	What are the skill level demands?
Fill in a checklist provided by the teacher to determine if an assignment is complete before submitting it.	Main skill: Critical Thinking	① 2 3 4 5
	Other skills: Document Use	① 2 3 4 5
	<p><b>Why?</b> Completing the task requires learners to use <b>critical thinking</b> skills to assess whether or not their work meets a set of provided criteria. It is a <b>level 1</b> task because (1) the task statement makes it clear that the criteria (checklist) are provided by the teacher and not generated by the learners, and (2) the consequences of failing to complete the task successfully affect only the learners.</p> <p>We know the task also requires <b>document use</b> skills because the learners need to complete a checklist, which is a straightforward form and therefore is also a <b>level 1</b> task.</p>	

### Complexity

Critical thinking is more than just “being critical”. When confronted with situations similar to the examples described above (applying to everyday situations, the workplace, and the classroom), individuals – both in and outside of the workplace – must critically assess actions they might take, while considering the impact of their actions. In each case, they must consider a number of factors, both the known and not yet known, as well as those within and those beyond their control. They must do their assessment before determining the most efficient way to complete a task and ensure a positive result for themselves, for others, for their organization, and/or for the broader community. In critical thinking, the level of complexity of each task is determined by several factors, including:

- the number and availability of the criteria being considered;
- the significance and potential impact of the consequences of the decision.

At the lowest level of complexity, the criteria for solving the problem are few, straightforward, and already provided. As the complexity level increases, workers and learners must identify and generate the criteria by employing a range of strategies, which may include questioning, predicting, hypothesizing, analysing, synthesizing, examining opinions, identifying values and issues, detecting bias, and distinguishing between alternatives.

Similarly, at the lowest level of complexity, the consequences of the determined action are relatively minor and typically limited to the individual completing the task. As complexity increases, so does the scale of the consequences, expanding from the individual to include people close to the person, the organizations in which they operate, and potentially to entire systems on which the consequences may have a large-scale impact.

## Appendix 4: Inventory of OSP Learning Activities

The OSP includes a database of relevant and engaging **learning activities** that link curriculum expectations with Essential Skills and work habits that teachers can easily integrate into their lesson planning. These learning activities can be used in a variety of grades, courses, and settings to help learners practise, build, and demonstrate their skills.

Each learning activity includes:

- details about its source and course connections;
- a descriptive summary to explain what learners do in the activity;
- a statement of the Essential Skills task that learners will be carrying out;
- an analysis of the task for its Essential Skills and skill level demands;
- an indication of accompanying assessment tools;
- teacher notes.

## Appendix 5: Training Others to Use This Guide

The following are some tips you can use if you find yourself in a position to train others on how to use this guide.

### ***Begin with an introduction to the OSP Essential Skills and Work Habits***

If the people being trained are new to the concept of Essential Skills and work habits, have them begin with a tour of the OSP website to learn about each of the skills. They can read the description of each of the skills and search for sample tasks in work, learning and life, and in specific occupations. They can view the [videos](#) to see how Essential Skills and work habits are used on-the-job and in work, learning, and life.

### ***Introduce the concept of Essential Skills levels***

For people who are already familiar with the Essential Skills, a review of the skills should be sufficient to get started. Task complexity is a key concept to understand. Each Essential Skill has an associated skill level rating scale that describes the features of tasks that make some easier than others. It is not necessary to study the scales in detail; however, trainees will need some time to practise rating tasks in order to feel comfortable with the scales.

### ***Help trainees experience increasing complexity***

The following card game is one activity trainees may find useful as they learn about complexity. The “Why is this so hard?” game was created by M. Hardt of Performance by Design, Inc., to simplify the “type of match” dimension of complexity in tasks. All you need is one deck of cards for each group of three to four trainees.

#### **Part I**

1. Show trainees the ace of hearts.
2. Ask trainees to shuffle the deck of cards and then find the ace of hearts (A♥) in the deck.
3. Once they are done, ask them to think about the process.
4. Point out that since they were shown the card they needed to locate, there was a direct match between the visual of the card and the card in the deck. This strategy is known as “locating”.

#### **Part II**

1. Ask trainees to put the card back into the deck and shuffle the cards.
2. This time, ask them to locate all four aces.
3. Once they are done, ask them to think about the process.
4. Point out that this time they were asked to make a direct match between the cards they were asked to find and the cards in the deck, but they had to locate a different card four times to find the four aces (A♥, A♦, A♣, and A♠). This strategy is known as “cycling”. Increased time was required to complete the task.



### **Part III**

1. Ask trainees to put the cards back into the deck and shuffle.
2. This time ask them to find all the ♦s and place the cards in order from A (low) to K (high). Trainees should display the sequence A♦ to K♦.
3. Once they are done, ask them to think about the process.
4. Point out that this task also involves multiple “locates”, but this time they had to manipulate, or process, the cards by sequencing them. This strategy is known as “integrating”.

### **Part IV**

1. Ask trainees to put the cards back in the deck and shuffle.
2. This time they should identify the highest-scoring hand for each of the three most popular card games in North America.
3. Once they are done, ask them to think about the process.
4. Point out that this task was the most challenging because it depended on using their prior knowledge to complete the task. They had to “generate” the answer from their own heads. This strategy is known as “generating”.

Explain that Hardt’s card game illustrates the strategies of locating, cycling, integrating, and generating. It demonstrates the kinds of analysis that went into determining the Essential Skills complexity levels. In particular, tasks that require only locating are considered easier than tasks that require cycling, integrating, or generating.

### ***Provide an overview of the guide’s contents and opportunities to practise***

You can use the organization of the guide to train others how to use the guide. Refer to the relevant sections of the guide as you carry out these tasks.

- Introduce the purpose of the guide and the value of understanding Essential Skills (Why Use This Guide? and Why Do Essential Skills Matter?, pages 5–8).
- Explain how trainees can apply the content of the guide (How to Use This Guide, page 11).
- Walk trainees through the two-step process (Identifying and Analysing Essential Skills Tasks Embedded in Learning Activities, page 14).
- Review the examples in Step 1 (pages 16–17).
- Provide practice on Step 1 (pages 18–19).
- Discuss responses (Step 1: Answers, pages 20–21).
- Review the examples in Step 2 (pages 23–24).
- Provide practice on Step 2 (page 25).
- Discuss responses (Step 2: Answers, page 26).
- Provide practice using a practice set (one from Appendix 2, pages 52–57).

- Discuss responses (Appendix 2, Answers, pages 58–59).
- Point out the ongoing usefulness of the quick reference sheet (Appendix 1, page 51).

***Direct attention to the extensive collection of analysed activities***

Select some examples of the classroom activities that have already been analysed and are posted on the [OSP](#) website. Explain how trainees might use these in their work.

## Resources

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Wiggins, G., & McTighe, J. (2005). *Understanding by design*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

## **SkillsZone**

<http://www.skillszone.ca>

### **For Educators**

Under **Interactive Learning Resources**, you will find a number of links that can be useful when introducing Essential Skills and work habits to learners:

- **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 Essential Skills at work and in everyday life tasks.
- **Work Habits Introduction** gives an overview of the work habits examined in the OSP along with 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 understand how Essential Skills are transferable to different occupations.
- **Linking Essential Skills and the Curriculum** provides an interactive “wheel” that illustrates the connections between curriculum, occupational, and everyday life tasks and skill-building activities.

### **For Learners**

Incorporating some games into the classroom can provide opportunities for review and practice, and make learning more enjoyable. Check out the following games on the “SkillsZone Games” section of the **OSP website** and bring some fun into your classes! Each game 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 website and Essential Skills at work and in everyday life.
- The **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 Essential Skills and work habits.
- In the **Word Search** learners race against a clock as they search for vocabulary about Essential Skills, work habits, and life on the job.
- **Work Habits Match-Up** gets learners to match work habits with examples of work habits in action.

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