

Adult Literacy Skills for Success



LITERACY CHANGES EVERYTHING

Literacy is more than the ability to read and write. It's the ability to understand the printed word and put it to use, and to engage fully in activities and opportunities at home, at work, and in the community. It enables people to meet their goals and succeed in today's world.

Frontier College is a national charitable literacy organization. We believe that literacy is a right. We work with volunteers and community partners across Canada to help people build the skills and confidence they need to reach their potential and contribute to society. Each year, more than 2500 adults participate in our literacy and essential skills programs.










What is literacy?

"Literacy is ... a means of identification, understanding, interpretation, creation, and communication in an increasingly digital, text-mediated, information-rich and fast-changing world." - UNESCO[1]

What are essential skills?

Essential skills are the skills that help people learn, work, and participate in the community. Basic literacy and essential skills are critical—they provide the foundation for learning all other skills and helping people prepare for employment, succeed at work, and pursue further training and education.

In April 2021, the Government of Canada announced a major investment of \$298M to support adult skills development, upgrading, and retraining to ensure that Canadians are equipped to succeed in the workplaces of today and tomorrow. The nine **Skills for Success** enable people to learn, work, and participate in the community.

-  **Reading:** the ability to find, understand, and use information presented through words, symbols, and images
-  **Writing:** the ability to share information using written words, symbols, and images
-  **Numeracy:** the ability to find, understand, use, and report mathematical information presented through words, numbers, symbols, and graphics
-  **Communication:** the ability to receive, understand, consider, and share information and ideas through speaking, listening, and interacting with others
-  **Digital Skills:** the ability to use digital technology and tools to find, manage, apply, create and share information and content
-  **Problem Solving:** the ability to identify, analyze, propose solutions, and make decisions to address issues, monitor success, and learn
-  **Collaboration:** the ability to contribute and support others to achieve a common goal
-  **Adaptability:** the ability to achieve or adjust goals and behaviours when expected or unexpected change occurs, by planning, staying focused, persisting, and overcoming setbacks
-  **Creativity & Innovation:** the ability to imagine, develop, express, encourage, and apply ideas in ways that are novel, unexpected, or challenge existing methods and norms

INVESTMENT IN LITERACY

This investment comes at a critical time, as lower skilled adults across Canada are dealing with the aftershocks of the pandemic. Many adults in Canada don't have the literacy skills needed to succeed in today's knowledge-based society, and they are most vulnerable to unexpected change and economic hardship.

Why does literacy matter?

“Literacy is important not just for work and learning, but also for quality of life. Even those who predict a kind of employment dystopia, where robots take over most jobs, call for increasing levels of literacy and other cognitive skills to support a life of self-fulfillment outside the traditional areas of the market economy.” [2]

Improving literacy improves people's lives—research shows that people in Canada with higher levels of literacy, numeracy, and problem-solving skills report better health and stronger connections with their communities and society.[3] Literacy upgrading also has a positive impact on higher earnings and job retention.[4] In fact, about one in five adults (17%) has extremely low literacy. At this level, a person may find it very difficult to:



Find and apply for employment opportunities



Secure appropriate housing



Follow workplace health and safety instructions



Participate in community organizations and decision making



Read a bus schedule or a newspaper



Understand a contract or legal document



Open a bank account and make informed financial decisions



Help a child with homework

COVID-19, LITERACY, EDUCATION, AND EMPLOYMENT

COVID-19 will have long-term impacts on the economy and Canadian workers. Adults who were already struggling before the pandemic have been affected the most by unemployment, insecure employment, and lower wages, and are more likely to have difficulty re-entering the workforce. COVID-19 has also reinforced inequities caused by poverty and related to learning, education, and high school completion. The Public Health Agency of Canada says that populations vulnerable to COVID-19 include anyone who: has difficulty reading; is facing economic barriers; or is experiencing insecure or inadequate housing. Research shows that some groups face additional barriers: new Canadians, single parents, people living with disabilities, seniors, Indigenous peoples, women, or people with criminal records.

As a leading literacy organization, Frontier College knows that, now more than ever, Canadians need the basic and essential skills required to pursue further education and training, apply new skills in various contexts, find sustainable employment, succeed in their jobs, and fully participate in society.

What the research says...

- ◇ Gaps in literacy, numeracy, and other essential skills lead to economic marginalization, poorer health, reduced trust in others, and reduced civic engagement.[5]
- ◇ Approximately 75% of offenders admitted to federal custody on their first sentence between April 2008 and March 2013 did not have a high school diploma.[6]
- ◇ Individuals with low literacy are also more likely to be victims of a crime, [7] and are at greater risk of discrimination or miscarriages of justice within the court system.[8]
- ◇ Research has shown that literacy and numeracy are complementary skills, and both are important for health self-management. [9]
- ◇ Essential skills training significantly improves success rates on the overall performance component of industry certifications.[10]
- ◇ Literacy upgrading can lead to improved job performance, increased employment, higher earnings, and longer-term job retention.[11]
- ◇ Increasing the literacy skills in the Canadian workforce by an average of 1% would, over time, lead to a 3% increase in GDP, or 54 billion per year every year and a 5% increase in productivity.[12]

FRONTIER COLLEGE LITERACY PROGRAMS

Frontier College offers programs to help adults increase their essential skills, to complete their high school education, find sustainable employment, and fully engage in their communities. Using adult learning principles, our instructors and tutors provide a supportive environment that helps participants build their foundational skills and confidence to become self-directed, life-long learners. We offer one-to-one tutoring or small group environments, both online and in person. Our learner-centered programs are tailored to individual learners' skills, interests, experience, culture, and goals.

Community programs



These programs are designed to help older youth and adults improve their foundational literacy skills and build their confidence as learners, so they can pursue personal goals such as getting a driver's license, accessing government programs and supports, returning to formal education, achieve stronger literacy in an official language, better ability to support their child's education, or increased capacity for independent living. These programs are offered in community spaces such as libraries, schools, community organizations, social service agencies, and correctional facilities. Tutoring is delivered by a combination of Frontier College staff and volunteers.

Workplace and workforce development programs

These programs are designed to help older youth and adults improve their foundational literacy, numeracy, digital, and soft skills (e.g., teamwork, time management, problem-solving) for the labour market. This helps them to prepare for, participate in, or advance in the workforce by increasing their skills, confidence, and knowledge. Workplace programs are offered in direct partnership with employers, normally at the job site during working hours, facilitating accessibility for learners and employer engagement. Workforce development programs are delivered almost exclusively in partner locations by dedicated Instructor-Coordination, who work with learners while managing program partnerships. A significant share of these programs focus on preparing individuals from underserved communities to benefit from opportunities in the skilled trades.



OUR IMPACT



92% of tutors said Frontier College programs helped adults to improve their skills and achieve their goals.

96%

of learners improved their reading skills after participating in a Frontier College program

98%

of learners improved math and writing skills after participating in a Frontier College program

96%

of learners improved their document use skills after participating a Frontier College program

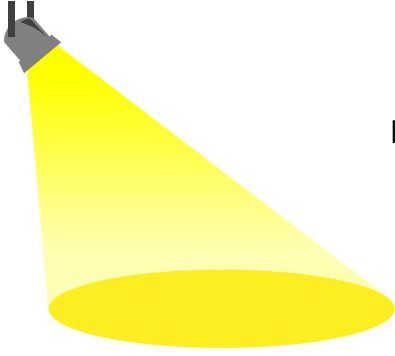
98%

of learners agreed that they have gained the necessary skills to help them reach their life goals after participating in a Frontier College program

99%

of learners made progress towards achieving their learning goal after participating a Frontier College program

LEARNER SPOTLIGHT: MARISA BLAKE



Marisa participated in Frontier College's **Independent Studies** program for learners with mild intellectual disabilities, in Toronto. Here is a story of transformation in her own words:

*"When I first started at Frontier College I was very shy and nervous and had no self-confidence. I didn't want to speak up in class and there were many topics I didn't understand, but I was too nervous to ask for them to be explained. **During my time at Frontier College I became much more confident in my literacy skills.**"*

This year I have been asked to be part of a number of groups as a self-advocate helping to give my input about living with disabilities and also life during COVID. Frontier College has prepared me for this work by helping me become more self-confident and outgoing. Also, I have learned to be a better reader by slowing down, asking for help when I don't understand and not being afraid of trying to figure out words by myself. I have improved my skills and self-confidence so I feel better about working with other people and helping them."

IN THEIR OWN WORDS: TESTIMONIALS FROM LEARNERS AND PARTNERS

"Frontier College has helped me a lot with my confidence, especially in [the] English."
—Literacy and Math learner

"We are proud of our partnership with Frontier College. The programs you are serving the community with are amazing, useful, and have positive impact on our adult community, especially at this tough time."
—Community Health Outreach Worker

"I was scared at first. Math wasn't my favorite in high school. I also knew it is a requirement for me to join the trades. With the help from Frontier College Tutors, I successfully completed the course and passed the final exam."
—Trades Literacy learner

"Learners are newcomers. I see a huge increase in speaking and listening comprehension skills. Also, digital skills, thinking skills, and working-with-others skills."
—Workplace Literacy Program Employer

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ABOUT FRONTIER COLLEGE

Frontier College is Canada's original literacy organization. Founded in 1899 on the belief that literacy is a right, Frontier College recruits and trains 2,500 volunteers annually to deliver literacy programs to children, youth, and adults across Canada.

By effectively helping Canadians improve their literacy, numeracy, and essential skills, we help them to increase their opportunities to succeed in school, work, and life.

Our programs are adaptable to the specific needs of learners from a wide range of urban, rural, and remote communities, including Indigenous, Black, and racialized youth and adults, people who are experiencing poverty and living in under-resourced communities, individuals with disabilities, low-skilled workers, and newcomers to Canada.



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