

Manitoba Literacy Stages One—Three

In Canada today literacy means more than the ability to read and write. Canadians need to be *functionally literate* in order to live in our complex society. In a recent report, **Reading the Future** from the Canadian Council on Learning, it says almost half (48%) of Canadian adults have low literacy skills. What does this mean? It means almost half of us cannot read, write or understand the language needed in our daily lives. This includes not only our language skills, but the ability to analyze information and also the numeracy skills needed for daily tasks at home and at work.

Basic Skills for Living decided when it first developed its website to use the Manitoba Literacy Stages for its resources, so educators can select life skills topics when teaching learners at various stages of literacy. Here is a brief overview of these Stages.

Equivalence of Stages to other Learning Levels

Manitoba literacy programs do not use grade levels, but some programs in other provinces do. Therefore, we are providing a **summary** below of how each Stage equates with grade levels. Use this as a quick reference when deciding which activity to select for a learner.

How Literacy Stages Equate with Education Levels	
Stage One	— exit level is approximately Grade 3/4 reading level
Stage Two	— exit level is approximately Grade 6/7 reading level
Stage Three	— exit level is approximately Grade 9/10 reading level.

Why is literacy important?

Adult literacy is important for many reasons. We need literacy skills to be able to read and understand nutrition labels on food, follow recipes and instructions on food packages, as well as recognize the relationship between diet and health. Many people need to follow directions for medicine and we all need to be able to read consumer information about health issues.

As well, managing money throughout the life cycle is more complicated. Today we have a variety of ways to bank and handle money. Many people often have difficulty managing their money day to day and knowing how to track their spending. Saving is not stressed in our consumer society and credit use is often not understood. Many people find themselves in debt because they do not understand a credit contract, or how to read the “fine print”.

Literacy is not only important for our personal lives, but also for our working lives. The Conference Board of Canada indicates seven million Canadians do not have the literacy skills needed in the work force today, and that number shows no sign of changing in the immediate future. Also of concern is people with low literacy skills often choose not to use computers, yet computers play an increasingly important role in our access to information.

Background to Manitoba Literacy Stages

The **Facilitator Guide** from the Manitoba Advanced Education and Literacy website can be found at www.edu.gov.mb.ca under Adult Learning & Literacy (ALL). This Guide provides background information about the Manitoba adult literacy program and its development. Educators will also find references to other resources and information on adult education.

Literacy programming is based on a **learner-centered** approach in which the adult learner is involved with the facilitator in goal setting. This result is a *collaborative process*. It is a process where the learner and facilitator agree on where the learner is now and what outcomes the learner wants to achieve. This model has been in use in Manitoba since 1988.

In 1992, the Manitoba Literacy Branch began using the **three stages of learning** options for students. These were adapted with permission from the Basic Skills Agency in Great Britain and evolved into the current three Stages of literacy used today. From this developed the current Certificate programs. In 2001, the Pembina Valley Learning Center, in partnership with the province, revised the stages so that they aligned with the Essential Skills Profiles. Further revision was done in 2002 so the stages now align with the *International Adult Literacy Survey* as well as the *Essential Skills Profile* complexity scales.

When an educator is using the Stages as a reference, it is important to recognize when a learner is not confident with the level at which they are learning an activity. It may be advisable to go to a lower Stage for the same activity so that they can build confidence and perhaps learn relevant vocabulary, or numeracy skills, before moving up to the learning level you have been working at earlier. This will build confidence and also motivation to continue.

We encourage educators to review the Literacy Stages marked on the educational modules of *Basic Skills for Living* resources so that you can select the appropriate activity for learners.

