

## Newcomer Literacy

This issue of *Migration Matters* presents statistics on the literacy of newcomers to BC. It explores useful terms, how the *Canadian Language Benchmarks* incorporate literacy as well as the resources available to BC settlement service providers.

### Introduction

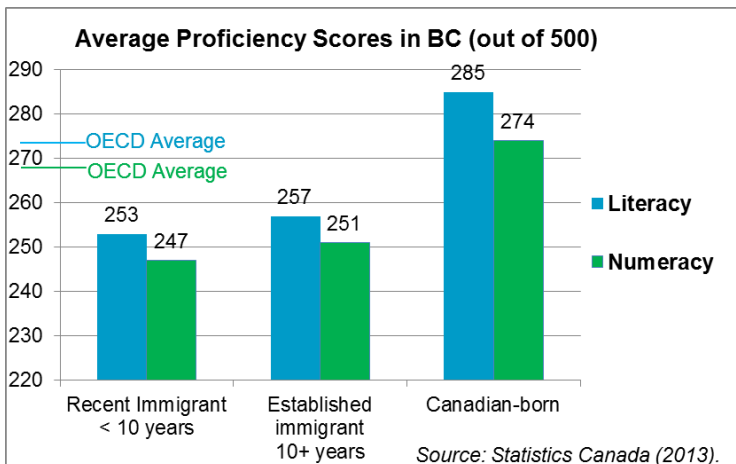
Literacy is a set of skills – particularly the cognitive skills of reading and writing, or “reading the world” as Paulo Freire put it.<sup>1</sup> We are all on a continuum of learning for different types of literacy. Numeracy is the ability to engage with mathematical information such as numbers, dimensions, diagrams and graphs.<sup>2</sup> Other types of literacy include financial literacy, economic, health, justice, civic, family, digital, relational and workplace literacies.

### Measuring literacy and numeracy

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Survey of Adult Skills measures the literacy and numeracy of 16-65 year-olds in 25 countries. Participants are categorized into five proficiency levels based on a 500 point scoring system.<sup>3</sup> The Level 3 score of 276 to 326 is considered a suitable minimum for surviving the demands of Canada’s high-literacy focused society.<sup>4</sup> Canadians score at the OECD average of 273 points in literacy and below the OECD average of 269 at 265 in numeracy.<sup>5</sup> The average literacy gap between newcomers and Canadians is equal to 3.5 years of schooling.<sup>6</sup>

### Newcomer literacy in British Columbia

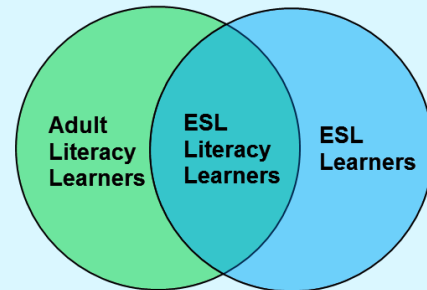
More than 60% of immigrants to Canada have literacy skills below the level 3 category.<sup>7</sup> Established immigrants who have been in the country for more than 10 years, have only a slightly smaller proportion of its population in the lower levels (60%) compared to recent immigrants (63%).<sup>8</sup> Similar numbers hold true for numeracy.<sup>9</sup> The trend of lower average numeracy scores is true of immigrants to BC and Canadian-born British Columbians.<sup>10</sup>



### References

- <sup>1</sup> UNESCO (2005). [Education for All Global Monitoring Report: Literacy for Life](#). UNESCO Publishing.
- <sup>2,3,4,5,10</sup> Statistics Canada; Employment and Social Development Canada (2013). [Skills in Canada: First Results from the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies \(PIAAC\)](#). Minister of Industry.
- <sup>6,19</sup> OECD (2017). [Why are immigrants less proficient in literacy than native-born adults? Adult Skills in Focus # 6](#).
- <sup>7,8,9,18</sup> TD Economics (2013). [Canada’s Literacy and Numeracy Challenge Worsens](#).

### Glossary



- **Adult Literacy Learners** have limited abilities to read and write in a first language (L1).
- **English as a Second Language (ESL) Learners** have varying degrees of literacy in their first language and use reading and writing strategies to navigate learning ESL.
- **ESL Literacy Learners** are not functionally literate in their first language, have zero to ten years of formal education (often interrupted by war, political unrest, famine, displacement, or poverty), and are attempting to learn English. These learners progress much slower than ESL Learners and require literacy-focused language classes and literacy trained instructors.
- **Plain Language / Clear Language** is documentation that uses simple language, is highly visual, focuses on action, and is inclusive to reach all literacy levels.

### Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLBs)

ESL learners and ESL literacy learners are placed on the same CLB scale and ESL literacy learners receive an “L” or “Literacy” designation to indicate their unique needs. The Literacy Placement Tool (LPT) is offered in English only and is used for placement when a selection of CLB 1-4 LINC literacy classes is available within a region. Assessors screen for L1 literacy by asking if clients can read and write in their first language and by using the Canadian Language Benchmark Placement Listening/Speaking Test (CLBPT). Where classes are available, specialist literacy instructors may do further diagnostics to place ESL literacy learners. The Operations Guidelines Manual for LINC Programs in BC contains procedures for language level placements.

CLB 2000: ESL for Literacy Learners (no longer used)	CLB: ESL for ALL (2015) Conversions
Phase 3 (Completed)	CLB4L
Phase 3 (Beginning/Developing)	CLB3L
Phase 2	CLB2L
Phase 1	CLB1L
Foundation	Foundation L

### Assessment of literacy across CLBs

CLB: ESL for Adult Literacy Learners (ALL) and the CLB: ESL for ALL Support Kit contain distinctions between ESL learner and ESL literacy learner profiles, as well as approaches and supports including strategies for those learners working through the continuum (*Emerging, Building, Expanding*). When a learner is able to perform reading or writing tasks to the degree required for a benchmark, that benchmark can be assigned, however, when literacy needs are still present, the benchmark carries the letter “L” designation.<sup>11</sup> Portfolio-Based Language Assessment includes three versions of the *Language Companion* binder: Literacy, CLB 1-4 and CLB 5-8.

### Best practices for literacy learners & providers<sup>12</sup>

- **Provide interpreters** for initial settlement services
- **Gain knowledge of client history** and culture
- **Develop oral fluency and vocabulary** before writing
- **Establish routines** and learning strategies
- **Incorporate numeracy** skill-building & technology
- **Repeat and recycle** learning material
- **Create a plain language and visual environment** with photos, flashcards, picture dictionaries and real life objects
- **Facilitate** community field trips and connections
- **Offer separate LINC classes** for literacy learners
- **Provide support and training** for literacy educators<sup>13</sup>

### Workplace literacy and essential skills

BC’s Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) programs incorporate Human Resources and Skills Development Canada’s nine essential skills profiles. The profiles describe the skills workers need, as well as the level of difficulty required to perform their jobs successfully. They are used for devising career options and learning plans, and to prepare newcomers for the workplace.<sup>14</sup> ESL literacy learners however, require specific literacy ESL instruction to learn English first and eventually contribute to the labour market.

### References

- <sup>11</sup> Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks (2017). [ESL for ALL Support Kit](#).
- <sup>12</sup> Bow Valley College (2015). [Learning for LIFE An ESL Literacy Handbook: Guiding Principles for Teaching ESL Literacy Learners](#).
- <sup>13</sup> Bow Valley College (2015). [Learning for LIFE An ESL Literacy Handbook: Building a Classroom of Excellence](#).
- <sup>14,15</sup> Work BC (2017). [Essential Skills and Literacy](#).
- <sup>16</sup> Work BC (2014). [B.C.’s Skills for Jobs Blueprint: Re-engineering Education and Training](#).
- <sup>17</sup> Statistics Canada (2003). [Building on our Competencies: Canadian Results of the International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey](#).
- <sup>20</sup> ABC Life Literacy Canada (2017). [Benefits of Training](#).

Workplace Literacy and Essential Skills <sup>15</sup>	
• Reading	• Oral communication
• Document use	• Computer use
• Writing	• Thinking skills
• Numeracy	• Working with others
• Continuous learning	

### Literacy levels and economic benefits

By 2022, 78% of job openings in BC are expected to require some post-secondary education and training or a university degree.<sup>16</sup> A large proportion of immigrants do not have the skills necessary to succeed in BC’s modern knowledge-based economy (60%, compared to about 40% for native-born Canadians)<sup>17</sup> and these percentages have not improved despite more recent newcomers having higher levels of education.<sup>18</sup> Literacy levels, levels of education attained before arrival, age upon arrival and language family are all factors that affect income and one’s ability to find and keep work.<sup>19</sup> There is a clear need to address the literacy needs of newcomers to Canada. Some of the benefits of having higher workplace literacy are<sup>20</sup>:

- **Improved productivity and workplace safety**
- **Enhanced workplace efficiencies** to suit demands
- **More engaged workforce**, higher employee retention
- **Better use of changing technologies**
- **Increased competitiveness and promotions** for employees and increase in opportunities for companies
- **More robust economy** increasing GDP per capita

### Literacy resources

#### BC Literacy organizations

- [Columbia Basin Alliance for Literacy](#)
- [Decoda Literacy Solutions](#)
- [Fort St. John Literacy Society](#)
- [Frontier College Lower Mainland—Literacy Programs](#)

#### Other resources

- [Clear Language Resources](#) (Literacy Now Burnaby)
- [English Language Learning Materials](#) (NewToBC)
- [ESL Literacy Network](#) (Bow Valley College)
- [Guide to essential skills profiles](#) (Employment and Social Development Canada)
- [Resources for Literacy](#) (The Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks)
- [Types of Literacy](#) (ABC Life Literacy Canada)