

The

# Adult Basic Classroom



*For Florida Adult Basic  
Education Practitioners*

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**Aren't workplace readiness skills just for GED students? Why should I take class time to teach job skills if my students are still struggling with basic literacy?**

"The purpose of the Workplace Readiness Skills Course is to improve the employability of adult education students," says the Workforce Implementation Guide. But aren't literacy skills more important to employers? Employers tell us no. Though most jobs require literacy skills, no employer will keep an employee who is frequently late, absent, or causing trouble with the other workers regardless of her literacy, technical, or vocational skills. Workplace Readiness Skills are necessary for adult education students to reap the benefits of their hard-earned education. So how do they fit into the curriculum?

## FITTING IT ALL IN

Workplace Readiness Skills can be taught in conjunction with literacy skills. Adult learners learn best when they see that their learning is applicable to their daily lives. Computation skills are necessary for figuring sick leave and the use of time cards. Workplace skills such as phone etiquette, interpersonal problem solving, and reliability can be explored and reinforced in writing assignments. Reading lessons can be done using an employee handbook.

Workplace Readiness Skills are best taught in a group setting, because collaborative activities require that stu-

dents interact in ways that reinforce skills of a successful employee. The first two learning activities in the Workplace Readiness Implementation Guide involve questions that are to be discussed in both large group and small group settings. Discussions about careers, leisure, and why people work can develop into writing and even research assignments. Students can interview people outside the classroom and compare their answers with the class members' answers. Comparisons can be done with graphing and math skills are being developed. With a little creativity, the completion of benchmarks 1.1 and 1.2 in Workplace Readiness can be tied to the completion of language, reading, and mathematics benchmarks. The added benefit is the use of collaborative learning in the classroom. Workplace Readiness skills are applicable to any level learner which make them a very efficient tool for providing group instruction in an adult basic education classroom.

The most exciting way to develop Workplace Readiness Skills is, perhaps, to ask local businesses to participate. Contact your local Chamber of Commerce, or call on mentors already established to find business leaders willing to present to your students information about what makes a good employee. Depending on the level of commitment the business can offer,

business leaders could make one presentation or return for a series of workshops on interview skills, conflict resolution, dealing with the public, talking to your boss, and managing sick days. The preparation and follow-up to the speaker's visit could easily be tied to literacy skills. Students could prepare questions for the speaker, write a thank-you note to the speaker and his boss, or compute and compare salaries.

## RECOGNIZING PROGRESS

Keeping track of the Workplace Readiness Skills benchmarks and standards met is important to both your student and to your student's future employer. Every standard met is a verifiable job skill your student can present to a prospective employer. Usually workers can only prove that they know how to be a good employee through letters of recommendation generated by previous jobs. The Workplace Readiness Skills standards demonstrate that even a student new to the workforce is competent. And, a statement written by the student about their understanding of and commitment to the requirements of being a good employee can show a prospective employer literacy skills, as well. Students are rewarded when you recognize their progress, but they will be even more rewarded when their employer recognizes it.

## CAREER CENTERS

Areas with career centers have even more resources to offer both GED and ABE students. Typically, career centers offer software, books, and other materials that help both GED and ABE students explore career options. Mock interviews, career counselors, and help with job applications and resumes are available at career centers. Though many of the materials available are for literacy level ABE students, even beginning level ABE students can benefit from instruction on job interviews and help with understanding the education needed for a “dream job.” As career centers serve all kinds of adult learners – ABE, GED, and ESOL students – the potential for multi-level instruction is great. Counselors are available to help teachers plan instruction as well.

## WORK AND LEARNING ARE A NATURAL COMBINATION

Everyone who keeps a job or advances in a job learns on the job. Learning doesn't stop after employment and emphasizing Workplace Readiness Skills in the Adult Basic Education classroom helps our students make this connection. Reading new policies, learning new software, creating a new organizational chart, figuring out how to interact with the newest hire are all ways that employment demands learning. Workplace Readiness Skills and literacy not only go hand-in-hand in the classroom, they continue to rely on each other once “formal” schooling is over.

## THE BUSINESS WORLD'S VIEW

Indeed, small business owners and corporate executives have gone on record stating that both Workplace Readiness Skills and literacy are important. While 41% of the small busi-

ness owners surveyed thought computer skills were important, 86% ranked verbal communication skills important and 77% chose interpersonal skills (<http://www.nifl.gov/nifl/facts/workforce.html>). Getting along with others, knowing how to professionally solve conflicts ranked above skills in math, writing, and science.

A survey of the National Association of Manufacturers in 2001 found the number one deficiency of hourly employees to be poor basic employability skills (<http://www.nifl.gov/nifl/facts/workforce.html>). This ranked above poor reading and writing skills, poor math skills, and even poor English language skills. NIFL reports that “The American Management Association’s (AMA) study, “Corporate Concerns,” found that companies ranked developing and improving workforce skills as the 8th most important corporate concern out of a possible 25 issues in 2001, compared to 9th out of 25 in 2000 and 1999 (*American Management Association*, p1).”

The National Center on the Educational Quality of the Workforce found that a 10% increase in the average education of all workers – generally equivalent to one year of schooling – increases productivity 8.6% in the manufacturing sector and 11% in the non-manufacturing sector (<http://www.nifl.gov/nifl/facts/workforce.html>). This means education helps personal and national productivity more than an increase in hours of work or capital.

Workplace Readiness Skills are as important as literacy, to our students, our businesses and our national economy. Let's make sure our students are fully prepared.

## Resources

### [www.florida.access.bridges.com](http://www.florida.access.bridges.com)

Bridges.com offers high school and adult career planning information, including resume writing, job interview practice, and an interest profiler.

### [www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/AdultEd/workplace.html](http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/AdultEd/workplace.html)

Posted by the Federal Office of Vocational and Adult Education, this site offers updates on current research, workplace education materials and on-line resources, and noteworthy practices.

### [worklink.coe.utk.edu/workforce\\_educators.html](http://worklink.coe.utk.edu/workforce_educators.html)

Sponsored by LINC, this site has curriculum ideas and lesson plans for integrating Workplace Readiness Skills into the Adult Education classroom.

### [www.nifl.gov/nifl/facts/workforce.html](http://www.nifl.gov/nifl/facts/workforce.html)

Federal studies of the relationship between Workplace Readiness Skills and the needs of corporations, small businesses, and manufacturers are summarized here. This site demonstrates a clear call for both literacy and Workplace Readiness Skills in successful workers.

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