

WORKPLACE LITERACY

What skills are needed in the workplace?

Literacy is a term often used to refer to a much broader group of skills that can be referred to as 'core skills' - sometimes referred to as language, literacy and numeracy (LLN). These are defined by the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF)¹ as:

- Reading
- Writing
- Speaking
- Listening
- Learning
- Using mathematical ideas

Other workplace core skills are defined by the Core Skills for Work Developmental Framework². These are:

- Managing career and work life
- Working with roles, rights and protocols
- Communicating for work
- Connecting and working with others

- Recognising and utilising diverse perspectives
- Planning and organising
- Making decisions
- Identifying and solving problems
- Creating and innovating
- Digital literacy

These skills are essential for good communication, critical thinking and problem-solving in your workplace.

Under the NDIS, the literacy requirements of many roles in the workforce are becoming more complex.

The business cost of under-developed literacy skills

The Australian Industry Group researched workplace literacy and published the *When words fail*³ report in 2012. The report noted the following:

- Literacy and numeracy problems in the workplace are not restricted to low-skilled segments of the workforce. Inadequate literacy skills can affect both lower-skilled and higher-skilled employees.
- 75 per cent of employers stated that their business was affected by low levels of literacy and numeracy, including impacts on productivity.

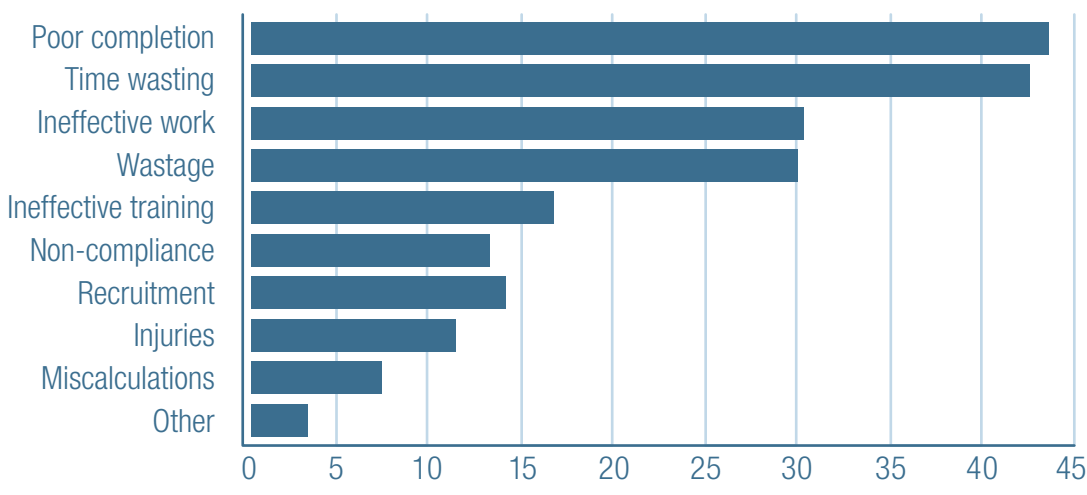


Figure 1:
Overall impacts on business

% of survey respondents

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AIG also found that employers identified a role for themselves, partnering with government, individuals and education authorities, to address the issue.

Return on investment from literacy training

The Federal Government operated the Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) program for over 25 years. Throughout the Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) program the government subsidised between 25 and 50 per cent of the cost of workplace literacy training in recent years.

An evaluation of WELL⁴ observed that 78 per cent of employers rated the program as either effective or highly effective in meeting their business needs, which they listed, in order of priority, as:

- Improved communications
- Improved documentation
- Improved safety and WHS requirements
- Increased computer literacy

Feedback from employers indicated that in some organisations, meeting times halved because communication among staff improved and meetings became more structured. It was also noted that WELL projects contributed to a reduction in staff turnover rates.

In 2015, Australian Industry Group undertook research into the return on investment afforded employers through investment in the WELL program. This was illustrated through several case studies focussing on organisations that have participated in WELL projects. These organisations indicated an ROI of between 102 per cent and 163 per cent in the first year. This was mainly a result of reducing supervisor and worker time correcting errors.

Strategies to strengthen literacy in the workplace

- Create all workplace documents in Plain English. That is, write them in clear language and give or ask for information in a logical order.
- Ensure workplace practices are 'literacy friendly.' For example, train new workers to use workplace documents during their induction, identify the need for literacy training at all levels of the workforce and provide exemplar documents to model what is expected.
- Build literacy training around authentic workplace tasks.
- Train managers, supervisors and team leaders to recognise signs that an employee can't complete the tasks within their role.
- Arrange training at work, during paid time, with a literacy specialist using authentic workplace tasks.
- Act to destigmatise literacy training by treating it like all other workplace skills. Workers need to be trained to a competent level over time, and supported to complete tasks until they have achieved the appropriate level.

This document has been created to assist disability workplaces to strengthen core skills in the workplace. It is part of a set that includes: Workplace Literacy Activity Guidelines, Workplace Literacy Activity Worksheet, Workplace Literacy Activity Answer sheet.

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¹ Australian Government (2012) Australian Core Skills Framework. Retrieved from [Australian Core Skills Framework](#)

² Australian Government (2013) Core Skills for Work Developmental Framework. Retrieved from [Core Skills For Work Developmental Framework](#)

³ Australian Industry Group (2012) [When Words Fail: National Workforce Literacy Project](#)

⁴ DIISRTE (2012) [Strengthening Foundation Skills In The Workplace: An Evaluation Of The Workplace English Language And Literacy Program](#)