

Essential Skills for Life

Reading



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Essential Skills for Life

Welcome to *Essential Skills for Life!*

This program helps you build nine essential skills for the workplace and for life:



Reading



Thinking



Writing



Oral communication



Document use



Working with others



Numeracy



Continuous learning



Digital technology

These skills are used in nearly every job and in daily life. They also allow us to learn new skills and to adapt to changes. Improving your essential skills can help you to build a good life for yourself.



This workshop

This workshop deals with the skill of **reading**.

It's easy to see why reading is an essential skill. Reading helps us find information and communicate with others.

In this workshop, we will talk about how and why we read. We will also learn about key strategies that can improve reading skills.



What is reading?

It's hard to imagine a world without **reading**. We use reading every single day. We need it to understand the safety notice at work, the instructions on a pill bottle, a note from our child's school, a cooking recipe, or a friend's Facebook post.



Reading is understanding written language.

Text is written words. When we talk about "a text," we mean a piece of writing. It could be a book, an email, or a note from a friend.

In the world today, reading is for more than just books and letters. Email, websites, text messages, and social media are just a few of the newer forms of reading we do.

When we read, we use many strategies to understand **text**. Being able to read and understand different kinds of texts makes everyday life easier. It also helps us succeed at work.



Meet Rose

Rose doesn't read. People are often surprised to learn this, because she manages well. She remembers spoken instructions much better than her co-workers, and she seems to have a map of the whole city in her head.



Let's talk about it

Discuss your thoughts with a partner or in a group.

- What skills does Rose use to get along without reading?
- It's still not easy for Rose, and she needs help sometimes. What are some things she would need a friend or partner to read for her?



Why do we read?

We read for many reasons:

- To find information
- To learn how to do something
- To communicate with people
- To learn more about an interest or hobby
- To connect with others
- To grow as a person
- To enjoy ourselves

This is only a short list. **Reading** is very useful for your work and your life.

Activity Why might you need to read these types of **text**? Work with a partner or group to fill out this chart.



Type of Text	Why Read It?
IKEA instructions	
Magazine	
Pamphlet about blood pressure	
Work email	
Child's report card	
Facebook posts	
Movie review website	
Safety policy	



What makes a good reader?

Activity What does being a “good reader” mean to you? What does it look like?



How does it feel?

Write your ideas below.



Looks like:



Feels like:



Let's talk about it

Discuss your thoughts with a partner or a group.

- Do you notice any differences between how you see being a good reader and how others see it?
- Does being a good reader mean the same thing to everyone?



Self-assessment

How are your **reading** skills? Thinking about your skills honestly helps you figure out your strengths. It also helps you plan how to get better at reading.

Activity



- I am confident in my reading skills. I read most things well, and sometimes I read for fun.
- I am fine with basic reading, like emails, work notices, and notes from school. I usually don't read for fun. I only read when I have to.
- I find reading slow and difficult. I avoid it if I can.
- I can't read much at all.
- None of these describe me. Here's my situation:



Many kinds of readers

We all have different **reading** skills and different feelings about reading.

Some people learn to read easily and enjoy reading. For other people, reading is not so easy. It's hard, slow work, and they may feel embarrassed when they have to read. But there's no shame in having different skills than others.



Meet Kelly

Kelly has a hard time with reading. The words seem to blur together. When she has to read something long she feels stressed. She has to go very slowly and reread many sentences. She wishes her boss would just tell her what she needs to know.



Meet Nour

Nour came to Canada from Syria. She reads Arabic well, but English is so difficult! Right now, Nour reads English slowly and makes many mistakes. She knows that she will get better at reading as she practices.



Meet Jacques

Jacques has no trouble with most kinds of reading, like emails and reading the news on his iPad. But technical reading is hard for him. He struggles to read contracts and manuals for new equipment. Jacques worries that this might make it hard for him to get a better job.



Ask yourself...

Jacques, Nour, and Kelly are all different kinds of readers, and that's ok! You're a unique reader, just like them.

- What is an example of something you read easily?
- What is an example of something you find hard to read?
- Is reading ever fun or relaxing for you? When?
- Is reading ever stressful or unpleasant for you? When?



Reading strategies

Some **strategies** can help us read more easily and confidently. They can save us time and help us make sense of a **text**.



A **strategy** is a plan or method for solving a problem or meeting a goal.

Some strategies we use mostly *before* we read. Some strategies we use mostly *while* we read. Some strategies we use mostly *after* we read. But the strategies overlap and work together to help us understand what we're **reading**.

You don't need to use every strategy with every text. With practice, you'll learn which strategies are most helpful for the kind of text you're reading. As you go through this workbook, think about which strategies you might want to try.



Strategies for before you start reading

Let's look at some strategies to use before you read:

1. Set a goal
2. Ask questions
3. Look for clues
4. Take a quick look

1. Set a goal

Why are you **reading** this **text**? What do you want to get from it? When you set a goal, you know why you're reading a text. Setting a goal can make it easier to know what to look for as you read.



2. Ask questions

What do you know about the text you're about to read? Knowing a little bit about what you're reading and what information you're looking for can make reading easier. Ask yourself a few helpful questions, like:

- What kind of text is this?
- Who is it from?
- What do I think it's about?
- What information am I looking for?
- What **key words** will help me find it?
- What do I already know that might be helpful?



Key words are related to the information you need. When you see a key word, that's a hint that you're at an important part of the text.

Are you looking for specific information? Searching for key words can help you find it more quickly.



Tips for finding your key words

How do you know what **key words** to look for?

1. Write down the answer to the question: What information am I looking for?
2. Highlight or underline important words in your answer. These are your key words.
3. Think about the words that you've highlighted or underlined. Do you know any other words that mean the same thing? If so, you can write them down. These are also key words.
4. Have your key words with you while you read. Watch for them in the **text**. Try highlighting them as you read!



Remember, if you see a key word, you could be at an important part of the text. Read carefully!

Activity **Choosing key words**



John just started a new job. He wants to check how many vacation days he gets this year. What key words could he look for as he reads his employee handbook?

1. What information is John looking for?

2. Circle any important words that could be key words.
3. Do you know any words that mean the same thing as the words you've circled? Write them down.

3. Look for clues

Longer **texts** usually contain clues that help us find our way around the pages and understand what we read. Look for these clues before you read.

Your text might have some of these clues:

- Table of contents: Some texts, such as reports, manuals, and school textbooks, have a table of contents. The table of contents will give you the title of each section, and the page number where it begins. A table of contents shows you how the information is organized so that you can find what you’re looking for easily, without **reading** the whole text.

Here’s an example:

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION

A Word from Lindsay.....1
 About the Author..... 2
 Why Fat-Free and Low-Fat?....3
 Getting Started.....4
 Everyday Cooking Tips.....6
 How to Use This Book.....8

SMOOTHIES, YOGURTS & GRANOLA

Cinamon Bun Smoothie.....13
 Mojito Smoothie.....14
 Noepolitan Smoothie.....15
 Tropical Bliss Smoothie.....16
 Oatmeal Cookie Smoothie.....17
 Oh She Glows Smoothie.....18



SUMMER BARBEQUE

Grilled BBQ Chicken.....51
 Sweet and Spicy Wings.....53
 Spicy Wings.....54
 Honey Garlic Ribs.....56
 Savory Corn on the Cob.....57
 Veggie Burgers.....58

- Titles and headings: Many long **texts** are broken up into chapters. Each chapter has its own title. Inside a chapter, the text might be broken up into smaller sections. These smaller sections usually have a heading. Titles and headings are clues that tell you what information you can find in that section.

Check out the example below. Can you spot a title or a heading?

Grilled BBQ Chicken

Cook Time: 45 minutes
 Total Time: 45 minutes
 Servings: 6 servings
 Author: Holly Nilsson
 Course: Main Course
 Cuisine: American



Slather in barbecue sauce, this grilled BBQ chicken is easy to season grill and serve!

Ingredients

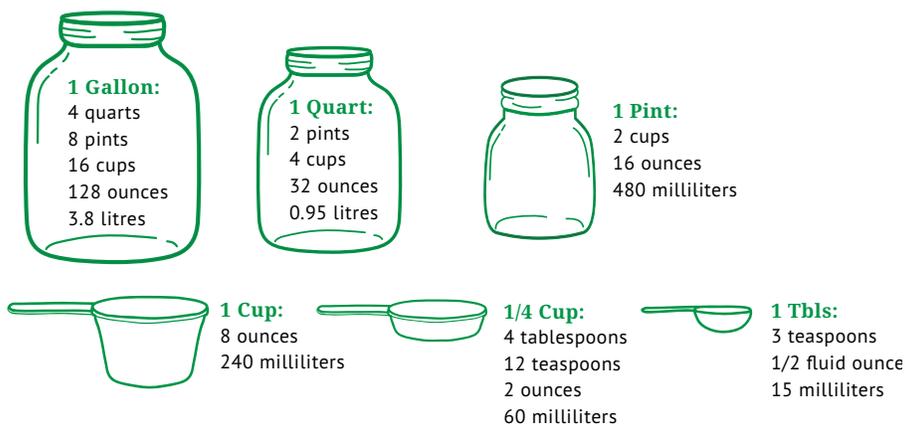
- 10 chicken legs or thighs (3-4lbs)
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- salt & pepper to taste
- 2 cups barbecue sauce

Instructions

1. Preheat grill to medium heat.

- Pictures, charts, and diagrams: These items give visual clues about the information in a section of text. Have a look at the diagram below. How would this type of diagram help the reader?

Common Kitchen Measurements “Cheat Sheet”



4. Take a quick look

Sometimes it's useful to have a quick look at a **text** before you read it carefully. For example, you might want to read some bits of a text quickly to get a sense of what it is about. That's a bit like watching a trailer for a movie. Or you might glance down the page looking for a **key word** or heading.

How you take a quick look depends what you want to find out. You can try different **strategies** to see what works for you.

Here are a few examples for when you might want to take a quick look:



1. To figure out if the text is something you want to read

You want to buy a book about training your new puppy, but you don't want one that talks about hitting or yelling. Before you buy the book, you can read about the author on the back cover. You can also read a few pages to make sure you like the advice.

2. To figure out what a text is about and if it's important

You get a letter from your bank. First, you wonder if there's a problem with your credit card. But you take a quick look at the headings and see that it's just an ad to sell life insurance.

3. To find the part of the text that has the information you need.

You want to double-check how many eggs you need to make your favourite brownies. You decide that "eggs" will be one of your key words. You run your eyes quickly down the recipe until you see "eggs." Then you read the line: 2 eggs, beaten.

Let's practice these **strategies**.



Meet Anita

Anita just got a prescription medicine for her migraine headaches. She wants to make sure she's taking the medicine correctly. Her doctor has given her a 2-page patient information sheet.

Activity



What kind of information do you think Anita will find on a patient information sheet?

What is Anita's goal for **reading** the sheet?

What is one question Anita might have that the info sheet might answer?

What clues could Anita look for to find her answer?



Strategies for while you're reading

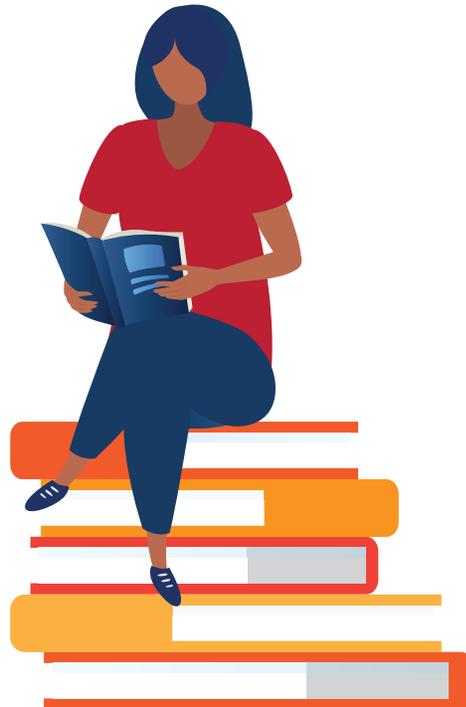
Even strong readers often have trouble **reading** and understanding some kinds of **text**. For example, legal documents are a challenge for everyone.

But there's good news. These **strategies** can help us understand what we're reading. You probably use some of them already.

Let's look at some strategies to use while you're reading:

1. Check your understanding
2. Picture what you're reading
3. Read between the lines

These strategies can help you to understand what you're reading, and might make reading easier.



1. Check your understanding

Have you ever read something that didn't make sense to you? Sometimes, we continue to read without realizing that we don't understand a **text**. But when we don't understand a text, it can be hard to achieve our **reading** goals. **Checking your understanding** can help.



When you **check your understanding**, you're thinking about what you're reading and making sure it's clear to you.

As you read, ask yourself:

- Do I really understand this?
- Is something not clear?
- Does what I'm reading make sense?
- Do I have questions about the text?



Checking your understanding can help you to figure out what to do next.



If you understand, you can continue!



If you understand most of what you're reading, but have some questions, write them down. The answers might appear later in the text.



If you don't understand what you're reading, you can stop and try some of the **strategies** on the next page.



Getting back on track

If you don't understand a **text**, try one of these suggestions:

1. Reread the difficult passage, more slowly or out loud
2. Look up words you don't know in a dictionary, or try to figure out the meaning from the words that come before and after
3. Try using Google. Search for:
"What does _____ mean?"
4. Write down difficult points in simple language

Checking your understanding and asking questions about the text will also help you see when there are problems with a text. This is an important skill to have! Sometimes, the problem is not that you don't understand — the problem is that the writer has left important things out or is not making sense.



2. Picture what you're reading

Sometimes it can be helpful to **picture what you're reading** as you go through a **text**.

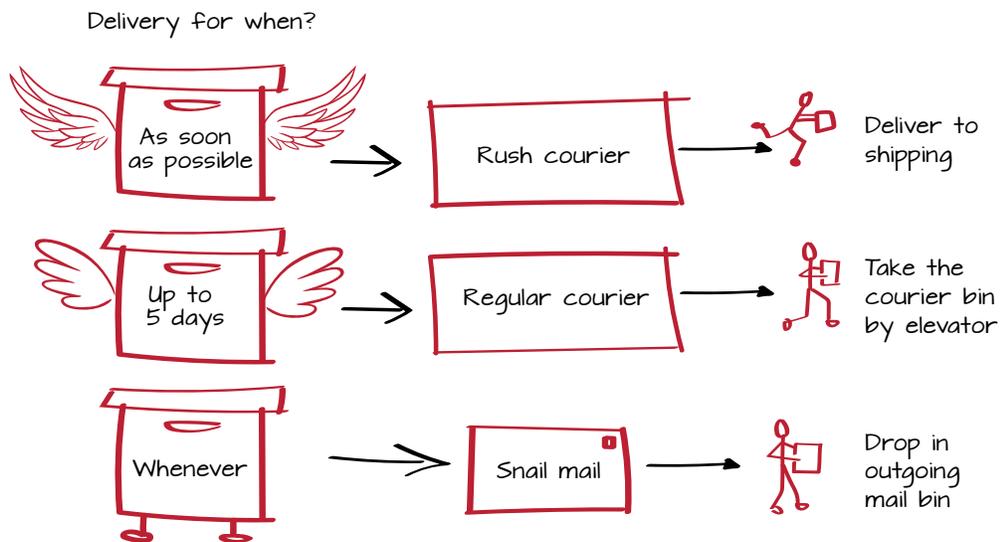


When you **picture what you're reading**, you make a mental picture using your imagination. You can also sketch a drawing on paper. This can help you understand what the text means.



Meet Lauren

Lauren likes to draw. She reads maps and flow charts more easily than blocks of text. She was getting a bit confused **reading** about a new shipping procedure at her company, until she sketched it out for herself:



Are you someone who can picture things easily? This strategy could be useful for you!

3. Read between the lines

Reading between the lines means putting together what you're reading with what you already know. This helps you understand the bigger picture. You probably already do this without realizing it!



Reading between the lines means making a realistic guess about information that a **text** suggests, but doesn't actually say.



Let's talk about it

In a story, you read:

"I jumped out of my chair and ran to turn off the lights. Then I crouched in the farthest corner of the closet."

Can you picture this in your mind? Work with your group to read between the lines.

- At the beginning of this story, was the person telling the story sitting or standing? Were the lights on or off?
- Why do you think they went in the closet? What makes you think that?
- Why do you think they "jumped" out of the chair instead of just getting out of it? What makes you think that?

In this story, we can be pretty sure of some things, even though they aren't written. Reading between the lines helps us "put together the whole story" and understand the text better.



Meet Arjun

Arjun’s son needs braces. They are very expensive! He knows his company benefits plan includes braces, but he does not know how much of the cost they will pay. Arjun looks in his benefits booklet and finds the section on braces. He reads:

“Benefit payments under this section are subject to the co-payment first and then to the maximum amount as stated in the Schedule of Benefits. It is necessary to submit a treatment plan including X-rays, completed by your dentist, before any work or treatment begins. You will then be advised of the eligibility of treatment.”

Arjun does not fully understand what he is **reading**.

Let’s practice the **strategies** we’ve learned for while we’re reading.

If you were Arjun:

What is one question you would have after reading this benefits booklet?

What words would you want to look up?

Is there anything you can learn about this **text** from **reading between the lines**?

Do you have any advice to help Arjun understand what he’s reading?



Strategies for after you've finished reading

Even after you've read a **text**, your work might not be done! These **strategies** will help you remember what you've read, fit it into what you already know, and act or follow up if needed. They can also help you to clear up any questions you still have.

Strategies you can use after **reading** include:

1. Summarize
2. Make connections
3. Ask questions

1. Summarize

After you've read a text, you can try to **summarize** what you've read. Summarizing what you've read can help you remember it. You can also read your summary later to remind you of what you read. That way, you don't have to read the whole text again.



Summarizing means writing down the most important parts in your own words. The important parts are the things you might need to know and remember from the text.

It can be hard to know how to summarize. Here are some suggestions to help:

1. **Decide what's important**
Ask yourself: Do I need to remember or use this piece of information? If the answer is "yes," write it down.
2. **Use point form**
You don't need complete sentences for your summary. But don't make them so short that you might not understand them later on.
3. **Make action items stand out**
Will you need to do something after you finish reading? Make a separate to-do list or highlight the tasks you need to complete in a different colour.

2. Make connections

Making connections means thinking about what you've read and applying it to your life. Thinking about what you already know or have experienced can make **reading** more meaningful. It can put what you read into a bigger picture. It can also help you better understand the person or situation you're reading about.



Reading Tips

Asking questions can help you make connections to a **text**.

Try asking:

1. Does this remind me of something similar in my own life?
2. Do these memories help me understand the text more fully?
3. How will what I've read change or impact my life?
How can I use what I've read in the future?



Meet Erin

Erin receives an email from her union asking its members to vote on whether to strike. Erin reads through the reasons carefully. She also remembers what it was like for her brother when he was on strike. That helps Erin imagine what a strike might mean to her and her family.



Let's talk about it

- What connections can Erin make between what she's reading and her own life?
- How will these connections affect the way she feels about the strike? How do these connections help her to understand the email?

3. Ask questions

After **reading** a **text**, you might still be unsure about some things. Maybe the text didn't give you all the information you need.

After you've read a text, ask yourself:

- Is there anything I'm unsure about or don't understand?
- Is there any information I need to find out?
- What do I need to do now?



Getting your answers

It's normal to have questions after you've finished reading something. How do you find the answers? Try one of these tips:

1. **Ask someone.** For a work question, you could ask a co-worker, your supervisor, or your HR department. For a tricky recipe, ask a friend who's a great cook. If you have a question about a field trip your child is taking, you could ask their teacher.
2. **Do some research.** Where could you find an answer to your question? In an employee handbook, on a website, from a YouTube video?



Meet Cam

Cam has to read his company’s staff policy handbook, but he’s having a hard time understanding it. There’s a section on “non disclosure and confidentiality” that he just can’t make sense of. Cam has spent his whole lunch break **reading**, and feels like he hasn’t made any progress. He’s frustrated and doesn’t know what to do next. He feels too embarrassed to ask for help.



Let’s talk about it

Sometimes, even after using these reading **strategies**, we still might not fully understand a text. Maybe there are too many unfamiliar words. Maybe the sentences are too long and complicated. Maybe the writer isn’t clear. Or maybe we don’t have all the information we need to understand the text.

It’s frustrating to put in a lot of effort and still be struggling! And it can be hard to ask for help.

- Why do you think Cam is embarrassed to ask for help?
- If you were Cam, who would you trust to ask for help?
- What advice would you give to Cam to keep him from getting discouraged when he hits a roadblock while reading?

The reading strategies that we’ve learned today can help Cam. But going through all of the strategies can take up a lot of time. When we’re busy, it can be hard to find time to work on a text.

- How can Cam decide which texts he should read carefully, and which texts he can read quickly?
- What are some types of reading that Cam might want to do quickly? What types of reading might he want to spend more time on?



Summary of strategies

We've talked about a lot of **strategies** in this workbook. Remember, you won't use all of them all the time — that would be very slow! But when you're **reading** important or difficult **texts**, the right strategies can really help.

Here's a reminder of all the strategies:

Strategies for before you start reading

- Set a goal
- Ask questions
- Look for clues
- Take a quick look

Strategies for while you're reading

- Check your understanding
- Picture what you're reading
- Read between the lines

Strategies for after you've finished reading

- Summarize
- Make connections
- Ask questions



Take it home!

These strategies are all useful reading helpers. To get better at reading, you'll need to practice. Try using this list when you're reading at home or at work. Pick one or two strategies and try them out!



Make reading part of your life

Reading more is a great way to improve your reading skills.

If reading is hard work for you, the idea of “reading for fun” might not sound very exciting. But reading things you find interesting can help you improve your reading, learn new words, and understand more.

Try to find things you like to read. Then read a little bit every day — even if it’s only for a few minutes.

There are lots of options. If you’re stuck, try visiting your library! Librarians are happy to help, and libraries have magazines, newspapers, DVDs, and computers you can use – as well as books.

You might enjoy:

- comics and graphic novels
- news articles, either online or printed
- websites, books, or magazines about a hobby or sport
- cooking blogs
- detective novels

Happy reading!



When you’re watching TV or Netflix, turn on English captions to read along as you listen. It’s an easy way to practice reading.



Congratulations!

You've completed the *Essential Skills for Life* **Reading** workbook. You've taken a step in building the essential skills that will help you in work and in life.

What did you learn about yourself as a reader? What do you want to achieve as a reader?

For the last activity, we hope you will make a **pledge** to continue building your reading skills.



A **pledge** is a serious promise to yourself or to others.

The pledge can be personal, or you can share it with others.

My pledge

I pledge to work on my reading skills by:

Sometimes a pledge needs an action plan: a list of steps you'll take to make your pledge happen.

My action plan

What do I need to do first?

Who will support me?

How will I overcome setbacks and obstacles?
