

Making the Connection: Adult Literacy & Academic Upgrading Referral Guide



Metro Toronto
Movement
for **Literacy**

EMPLOYMENT
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Introduction:

How this resource booklet can help you

This resource guide has been developed for you – frontline workers at employment centres, social service agencies and community organizations who work with adults that may benefit from literacy and academic upgrading programs. It is designed to help you identify clients who are eligible for adult literacy and upgrading programs and to assist you in making appropriate referrals.

Low literacy is often a barrier for adults who struggle with chronic unemployment or under-employment. Weak reading, writing and numeracy skills are also linked to lower incomes, poor health, and increased risk of workplace accidents. It is important to remember, however, that adults with low literacy usually have a range of skills in other areas of their lives and often have very creative and effective coping strategies to compensate for their weak literacy skills!

In this guide you will find information about:

- How to recognize low literacy
- How to talk with clients about their literacy skills
- The range of literacy and academic upgrading programs available for adults
- The benefits to your clients of participating in a literacy program

Established in 1978, the **Metro Toronto Movement for Literacy (MTML)** is a membership-based nonprofit organization working to advance the issue of adult literacy in Toronto and York Region.

MTML's members include adult literacy and upgrading programs, adult literacy learners, literacy instructors, volunteer tutors and engaged individuals. As a nonprofit organization, MTML supports the literacy field through professional development, service planning, communications, special events, advocacy and leadership. MTML also runs the Literacy Access Network, a free Information & Referral service, helping adults find literacy and upgrading programs that fit their needs and goals.

MTML envisions a community where literacy is a right that is enjoyed by all people.

We hope that you will help us make this vision a reality! To learn more about the Metro Toronto Movement for Literacy and adult literacy programs in Toronto and York Region, visit www.mtml.ca.

What do we mean by ‘Literacy’?

What are ‘Essential Skills’?

We often think of literacy as the ability to read and write with ease. However, the ability to *read, interpret and understand information*, and the ability to *effectively communicate ideas and information* incorporate a much larger set of skills. In today’s information-based society, being literate also means that an individual has the capacity to:

- Understand and use a range of documents, such as charts, tables, application forms, newspapers, recipes, websites, etc.;
- Compose a range of different documents, such as e-mails, formal letters, schedules, invoices, lists, etc.;
- Use language that is appropriate for the specific task at hand;
- Understand and use numbers;
- Use digital technology and various computer applications to obtain and communicate information;
- Identify the process required to complete a particular task that involves reading or writing.

Reading, writing and numeracy are part of a larger set of **Essential Skills** that we use every day at work, at home and in the community. Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC) has identified nine Essential Skills:

1. Reading
2. Writing
3. Document Use
4. Numeracy
5. Computer Use
6. Thinking
7. Oral Communication
8. Working with Others
9. Continuous Learning

Adult literacy and upgrading programs in Ontario **help individuals develop or improve their Essential Skills** and use them to complete tasks related to employment, further education and training, and everyday life. All jobs require us to complete simple tasks that involve basic skills; however, many jobs involve more complex tasks that require a higher skill level, and even entry-level positions now require workers to use computers and other digital technology. Upgrading one’s Essential Skills opens up new possibilities for finding work or career advancement.

Identifying low literacy

What are some signs that your client would benefit from a literacy program?

One of the first steps in making an effective referral to an adult literacy program is recognizing when a client is struggling with basic reading, writing and numeracy. While some clients are aware of their need for upgrading, others are not. Below are some situations and examples that can help you identify clients who may have problems with reading, writing or math skills. Beware of making assumptions! Anyone can struggle with low literacy skills and formal education is not always an accurate indicator of an individual's literacy skills. A college graduate may have low skills in some areas, while someone who left school early may have excellent skills.

A person may have difficulty with literacy if they speak English well but:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gives excuses for not reading or writing such as “I forgot my glasses” or “I hurt my hand.”• Has difficulty filling in forms accurately and completely;• Copies their name and/or address from other documents like envelopes or ID cards when filling in forms or applications;• Asks very few questions about printed information (seemingly ignores it or glances over it quickly and puts it away “to look at it later”) or spends a very long time looking at documents;• Asks an excessive amount of questions about printed materials, especially about information that appears to be obvious to a reader;	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Has writing with many obvious spelling or grammatical errors;• Presents forms or notes that are obviously completed/written by another person;• Does not show up to training or workshops that involve writing and reading;• Consistently shows up very early, very late, or not at all, for appointments and does not appear to record appointments anywhere when they are set;• Has worked many short-term, low-skill jobs;• Has been turned-down by several training programs or has been unable to complete them.

When informally assessing a client's skill level, it may be helpful to...

- Ask about their **experience of formal schooling**. Was it positive or negative? When was the last time they were in an educational program?
- Ask if they have a **computer at home** and if they use it. If not, do they use computers in other places, such as the library?
- Ask whether they have taken any **pre-employment or skills training programs**. Did they complete them successfully? If not, what was challenging for them?
- Present the client with **printed information** about a program or service (a flyer or poster) and ask them to look it over. Ask which aspects of the program they find most interesting.

Literacy & Basic Skills program: What is it?

Literacy & Basic Skills (LBS) refers to adult education programs for individuals whose first language is English or French, or who speak English or French well enough to function comfortably in an English language classroom. Literacy & Basic Skills is an **Employment Ontario (EO) program** funded by the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU).

LBS programs help adults to improve their **Essential Skills**, including foundational **reading, writing and math skills** up to Essential Skills level 3. Learners can also work on their basic computer skills and capacity for self-management and self-directed learning. LBS programs are goal-oriented, and a **personalized learning plan** is designed for each learner, outlining what the learner will need to learn in order to achieve their declared goals.

There are **full-time and part-time** programs offered during the daytime and evening. Most programs have **continuous intake** or frequent blocks of new learner intake. Special focus programs are available for at-risk youth, women, individuals with mental illness, adults with intellectual disabilities, Deaf/Deafblind learners and Aboriginal learners. Students can learn in a classroom setting or in small groups. Many community-based programs offer **one-to-one tutoring** with trained volunteers. For some learners, this is the most effective method of instruction and progress can be made in only a few hours each week.

Specialized Literacy & Basic Skills programs: Francophone, Deaf/Deafblind, and Native programs.

In addition to the Anglophone stream, Francophone programs are offered for adults whose first language is French, and American Sign Language programs are available for adults who are Deaf/Deafblind. There is also a stream of literacy instruction for Aboriginal adults that incorporates traditional Aboriginal culture and teachings. *(see page 11)*



Who is a good candidate for the Literacy & Basic Skills program?

An LBS program is a good option for individuals who:

- Did not finish high school and need to work on their reading, writing, math and basic computer skills in order to find employment, prepare to write the GED test, or upgrade their foundational skills before beginning high school credit courses;
- Have finished high school but have been out of school a while and need to work on basic skills in order to prepare for college, apprenticeship or employment;
- Need to strengthen their reading, writing, math and basic computer skills, as well as their capacity for self-direction and self-management, in order to enhance their independence and their level of participation in the community;
- Are employed or underemployed, and who want to upgrade their skills in order to find more gainful, sustainable employment.

What are the benefits of an LBS program?

What skills will clients gain?

Literacy & Basic Skills programs focus on six competencies. In a literacy program your client will work to strengthen skills in some or all of the following areas as they apply to their goals of employment, apprenticeship, high school or college diploma or greater independence:

1. Find and Use Information

- Improved reading and comprehension skills
- Greater ability to analyze information
- Stronger critical thinking skills
- Greater ease using a variety of documents

2. Communicate Ideas and Information

- Ability to create documents that effectively organize and present information
- Comfort completing forms and other documents

3. Understand and Use Numbers

- Greater financial literacy
- Stronger math skills and more comfort with numbers in a variety of settings
- Problem solving with measurements

4. Use Digital Technology

- Increased comfort using computers to access information
- Ability to understand, summarize, evaluate and communicate information in a digital format

5. Manage (your own) Learning

- Better time management
- Ability to set goals and follow through on them
- Improved self-direction/self-management
- Greater self awareness and confidence

6. Engage with Others

- Improved ability to work and communicate with others

In addition to these areas of competency, adults who participate in literacy & basic skills programs also achieve an overall improvement in their quality of life.



LBS, ESL and LINC... what's the difference?

Literacy & Basic Skills programs offer skills development opportunities for individuals **who are comfortable with spoken English or French** and who want to focus on upgrading their foundational reading, writing, math and computer skills.

Literacy & Basic Skills (LBS/Academic Upgrading)	English as a Second Language (ESL) / Language Instruction for Newcomers (LINC)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on reading, writing, numeracy • Native English/French speakers • Immigrants who are proficient with spoken English/French but struggle with reading and writing • Immigrants who do not have a high level of education from their home country and want to further their education • No eligibility restrictions based on status. Must be a resident of Ontario. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immigrants or newcomers whose English speaking, listening, reading and writing skills are weak • Learners may or may not have a high level of formal education from home country • Emphasis on speaking, listening and reading • Immigration status a factor in eligibility

Individuals who speak English or French as a second/additional language may be eligible for LBS programs if:

- They have been living in Canada long enough to acquire a high level of spoken English or French but still have weak reading and writing skills;
- They have progressed through ESL/LINC classes and learned to speak English or French well but need to improve their reading and writing skills;
- They learned to speak English or French as a second language in their home country, but have poor reading and writing skills in English or French.

In some cases, low literacy may prevent adults who are participating in an ESL program from making progress. Some individuals benefit from concurrent participation in both an ESL or LINC and a literacy program. For individuals who have very low levels of literacy in their **first language**, there are ESL Literacy and LINC Literacy classes. For more information about these programs, contact your local school board or visit the following websites:

www.settlement.org

www.oklearn.ca

Academic Upgrading/Academic and Career Entrance: What is it?

Academic Upgrading programs are **tuition-free** classes for individuals who have not completed high school but want to go to college or begin an apprenticeship AND individuals who have finished high school but need to **upgrade their skills and knowledge to prepare for college entry.**

Most Academic Upgrading programs offer **Academic and Career Entrance (ACE)** courses in Communications (English), Math, Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Computers and Self-Management. French-language upgrading courses are offered for native French speakers through Alpha-Toronto.

Students who successfully complete four ACE courses (two of which must be English and Math) receive an **ACE certificate**, which is recognized as a **Grade 12 equivalency** (college level) by public colleges and government apprenticeship offices in Ontario.

Academic and Career Entrance programs are offered by colleges and by community-based organizations in partnership with colleges. There are **full-time and part-time programs** offered during the daytime and evening. ACE courses are also offered online in both French and English. See Appendix A for a listing of Academic Upgrading/Academic and Career Entrance programs in Toronto and York Region.

Who is a good candidate for the Academic and Career Entrance program?

Academic and Career Entrance (ACE) programs are a good option for individuals who:

- Have not finished high school but have at least a Grade 10 level of reading and writing and want to prepare for college, apprenticeship or employment;
- Have finished high school but need to upgrade their skills to get ready for college or employment;
- Are employed or underemployed, and who want to upgrade their skills in order to find more gainful, sustainable employment;
- Want to apply for university but do not have the academic credentials. A growing number of adults who finish the ACE program move on to university bridging or transitional year programs.

Credential comparison: OSSD, ACE & GED

Credential	What is it?	Suitable for...	Learning process	Outcome
OSSD	<p>Ontario Secondary School Diploma Delivered by agencies funded through the Ontario Ministry of Education including school boards and the Independent Learning Centre. Provincially recognized credential.</p>	<p>Individuals who left high school early, who want to move on to further education, especially students who already have several credits and students who want to pursue university education.</p>	<p>Enrolment in a credit program delivered by a school board or Independent Learning Centre (online). Students should contact the school board to learn more about start dates and requirements. Free.</p>	<p>The OSSD is recognized by all employers, apprenticeship programs and educational institutions, including colleges and universities.</p>
ACE	<p>Academic & Career Entrance Adult upgrading courses delivered by community colleges in Ontario and through partnerships between colleges and community literacy organizations. Certificate is Grade 12 equivalent (C-level). Provincially recognized credential.</p>	<p>Adults who want to enter a college program but have not completed Grade 12 or adults who do not have the credits or skills needed for a college program or apprenticeship.</p>	<p>Students can take stand alone courses. ACE certificate requires completion of four courses: English and Math plus two electives. Time to complete the certificate depends on students' commitment but usually 6-9 months. Free.</p>	<p>The ACE Certificate is recognized as a Grade 12 equivalency by colleges and apprenticeship offices in Ontario. Not recognized by universities. Recognized by a growing number of employers.</p>
GED	<p>General Educational Development Recognized by colleges, employers and apprenticeship offices as a Grade 12 equivalency. Certification obtained through an exam administered by the Independent Learning Centre.</p>	<p>Ontario residents aged 18 and older who have not completed the OSSD or a Grade 12 equivalency, and have been out of school for at least one year.</p>	<p>Lengthy exam that covers reading, writing, social studies, science, literature, math, arts. \$100 to write the exam. Many GED preparation courses have fees.</p>	<p>Ontario High School Equivalency Certificate is recognized by most employers, many post-secondary institutions, and most unions and licensing bodies for apprenticeship.</p>

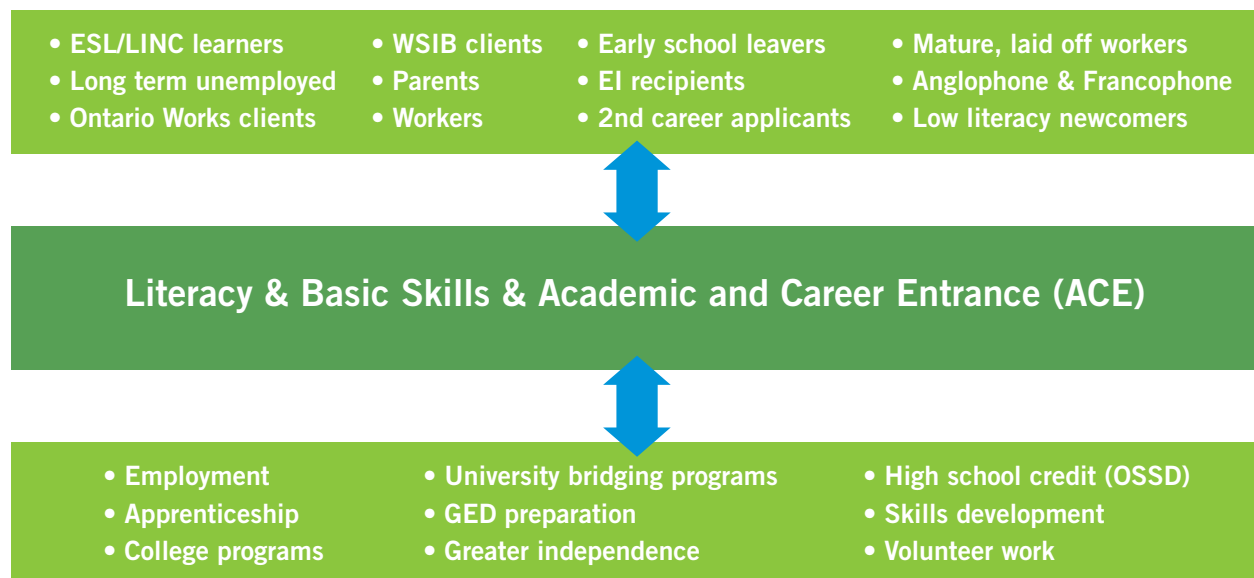
Transition pathways to and from Literacy & Upgrading programs

Individuals come to literacy and upgrading programs from a range of places, backgrounds and organizations. Depending on their goals, their learning pathway may lead to employment, further education or greater independence. Literacy instructors work with learners to explore ‘next-step’ options and identify the skills that are needed for successful transitions.

Literacy programs help people prepare for employment, high school credit courses, GED testing and Academic Upgrading. Learners may transition into pre-apprenticeship, skills development or employment readiness programs, or simply continue their current activities with greater skills and independence. **Academic Upgrading/Academic and Career Entrance (ACE) programs** help people prepare for college and apprenticeship. Some learners go on to university bridging or transitional year programs, while others seek out employment.

It is important to note that many people who participate in literacy and upgrading programs are already employed or actively looking for work. Literacy programs offer flexible instruction, allowing learners to work or continue a job search while concurrently upgrading their skills.

Individuals who are receiving Employment Insurance (EI) should contact a Service Canada EI office before beginning a learning program.



How do I refer a client to a Literacy or Academic and Career Entrance program?

Direct Referral

You can refer your clients directly to a Literacy & Basic Skills or Academic and Career Entrance program.

It is best to have the client with you in your office when you make the call OR ask your client to make the call themselves.

If the program does not have a waiting list, they will want to arrange a time for your client to come in for an intake assessment and registration. If they do have a waiting list, the program will most likely refer your client to another agency that offers a similar program, invite the client to join a waiting list, or refer the client to MTML's Literacy Access Network Information Hotline (see the numbers to call below).

For information about Literacy & Basic Skills and Academic Upgrading programs in York Region and Toronto, visit the MTML Literacy Access Network website: www.mtml.ca/lan

For information about LBS programs in **French**, visit: www.mtml.ca/francophoneprograms

For information about LBS programs that support your **Deaf/Deafblind clients**, visit: www.mtml.ca/deafprograms

For information about LBS programs serving **Aboriginal clients and communities**, visit: www.mtml.ca/nativeprograms

Another detailed resource to help you and your client find an appropriate program is MTML's **OKLEARN Reference Guide to Adult Learning Pathways**. The user-friendly Quick Reference guide is available from the MTML office, or through the OKLEARN website at: www.oklearn.ca



Assisted Referral

If you are not sure which program is best suited for your client, you or your client can call the Literacy Access Network Information and Referral Hotline for assistance and advice at: **416.961.5557** or toll-free at: **1.855.611.2212**. TTY service is available through the Deaf Literacy Initiative at: **905.897.6772**

Please be prepared to answer questions related to the client's goals, educational history and level of proficiency with spoken English.

For information about LBS programs in French and to speak to a Francophone referral service, call the Francophone Literacy Access Network hotline at: **1.877.464-0504**

To recommend a program for your client, we will also want to know:

- Whether the individual would like to be in a full-time or part-time program;
- The most convenient program location for the client and/or how the client will travel to and from the program;
- What type of learning environment your client would prefer (one-to-one tutoring, small group, classroom, computer-based, etc.);
- Any other special needs the client might have that would influence their ability to learn.

With both direct referrals or assisted referrals, the literacy program staff will want to speak to the learner directly in order to schedule an initial assessment and intake interview.



Literacy Access Network

Information & Referral Hotline

416.961.5557 | 1.855.611.2212

For service in French, call **1.877.464.0504**

TTY Hotline **905.897.6772**

Where can my clients be assessed?

Placement Assessment

All Literacy & Basic Skills and Academic Upgrading programs assess learners before they begin a program. They assess an individual's reading comprehension, writing and math skills, as well as the learner's coping strategies for working with printed information.

These are placement assessments designed to tell instructors what basic skills level the learner is at or what class they should be in. They are not diagnostic assessments – **LBS assessments do NOT provide information about grade level equivalency, IQ score, language skills or Canadian Language Benchmark levels.**

Academic Skills Assessment

Academic and Career Entrance (ACE) programs offered by colleges can assess your clients in order to estimate approximately how much time they will need to spend in an upgrading program before they are ready for a college program. This is often helpful for clients who are applying for Second Career.

Diagnostic Assessment

Some agencies and organizations do use standardized assessment tools that may provide you with information about your client's skill level or level of academic achievement. They often involve fees.

Assessment	Offered by	Details
Canadian Adult Achievement Test (CAAT)	George Brown College www.georgebrown.ca	Measures an adult's current functional level in math, reading and language. CAAT D is used for people with 11-12+ years of formal education.
Test Of Workplace Essential Skills (TOWES)	Seneca College, Centennial College, Humber College www.towes.com	TOWES measures three Essential Skills needed for employment using the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) scale: Reading Text, Document Use, and Numeracy.
Learning disabilities	JVS Learning Disabilities Ctr. www.jvstoronto.org	For individuals who want to understand their learning challenges and overcome barriers to find meaningful employment.
Canadian Language Benchmark (CLB)	LINC assessment centres www.learnspeaklive.ca	CLB assessors test learners' language skills and recommend an ESL program suitable to the learners' abilities, interests and needs.
CAMERA	PTP Job Solutions www.ptp.ca	Employs real-life workplace documents and tasks to test reading, document use, writing, and numeracy at Essential Skill levels 1-3.

Making sensitive referrals: Talking with clients about skills upgrading

In Canadian society, there is a great deal of stigma associated with illiteracy. For people who struggle with reading and writing, the word 'literacy' may bring up feelings of shame, guilt, embarrassment, fear or anger. Using the term '**upgrading**' rather than 'literacy' may help to make the conversation a little easier. 'Upgrading' implies that your client already has skills – they just need a little improvement. No matter how strong our skills are, we can all benefit from upgrading!

If you want to talk with clients about their literacy skills:

- Acknowledge and affirm the skills and strengths they already have.
- Help them to think about how their existing skills and experience could be enhanced by stronger literacy, numeracy and computer skills.
- Point out that many adults struggle with reading, writing, basic math and computers. Last year, over 10,000 adults in Toronto participated in literacy and upgrading programs.
- Review with the client the various skill areas and competencies that they can work on in an adult literacy or upgrading program. (*see page 5*)
- If your client is able to articulate goals or aspirations (big or small!), spend some time researching which Essential Skills or qualifications are needed to achieve them. There are many online resources that link National Occupational Classification (NOC) profiles with Essential Skills.
- Assure the client that adult literacy and upgrading programs are not like 'normal' school for children. They are adult classes that address the needs and goals of adult learners. Explain that there is a range of instructional methods and learning environments (classrooms, small groups, one-to-one tutoring, computer-based, etc.).
- Encourage your client to explore online videos or testimonies of other adults who have benefitted from literacy and upgrading programs.
- Encourage them to visit a program to get a sense of the learning environment.



Upgrading for Second Career applicants

Sometimes, individuals who want to pursue Second Career require skill upgrading before they are ready to succeed in the post-secondary program of their choice. This need for upgrading can become evident at various points:

- During the application process the Employment Consultant may recognize the need for upgrading;
- Early on in the application process, the client may state that they will need upgrading to prepare for college;
- After being accepted into a private college program, the client may struggle with course material because of weak literacy skills;
- Following the entrance assessment by the college or post-secondary institution.

How much upgrading will my client need?

Successful Second Career applicants are eligible for one year of upgrading in an LBS or Academic and Career Entrance (ACE) program, prior to entry in a post-secondary program. Unfortunately, it is difficult to predict with certainty how long an individual will need to spend in an upgrading program before they are ready for a college program. Clients should be aware that, if their skill level is very low, one year may not be enough time to upgrade their skills to an appropriate level for college courses.

What if my client just needs to work on their math skills?

Because Academic and Career Entrance programs are goal-focused and flexible in their delivery, individuals can focus their efforts on the area(s) where they need the most improvement. A learner does not need to take four ACE courses at the same time in order to be enrolled in the program. However, research has shown that those students who complete the ACE certificate do better, on average, in their college courses than students who take only part of the upgrading program.

Where can my client be assessed to find out if they need upgrading?

Most colleges will conduct a half hour entrance assessment to determine whether an individual has the skills needed to succeed in the program of their choice. If an individual's skill level is low, they will be referred to the college's ACE program for a full assessment (approximately three hours) to determine their upgrading needs.

Do all Second Career applicants require an academic skills assessment?

It is not required that Second Career applicants have a skills assessment; however, it can be helpful for the applicant, the case manager, and the Employment & Training Consultant who reviews the application. An academic skills assessment provides a good estimate of how much upgrading the applicant will need in order to prepare for the college program of their choice.

Frequently Asked Questions

What if I don't have a good sense of my client's skill level?

You do not need to know your client's literacy level in order to make an effective referral.

You can call the Literacy Access Network for some assistance with the referral process or refer the client to a Literacy & Basic Skills agency in your area. The LBS agency will conduct a placement assessment and if the agency does not provide the level or type of instruction that your client needs, they will be referred to an appropriate program.

An online Essential Skills assessment for employment counselors and caseworkers is under development and will be rolled out in 2013. The Ontario Skills Passport also offers some useful Essential Skills assessment tools: <http://skills.edu.gov.on.ca/OSPWeb/jsp/en/login.jsp>

What if my client has been through ESL or LINC classes but still has trouble with reading and writing?

If your client can speak English or French with ease but has weak reading and writing skills, an LBS program is likely a good option. Most LBS programs require a learner to have speaking and listening skills at Canadian Benchmark Level 6 or higher to enroll.

What if I suspect that my client has a learning disability?

While LBS instructors are not specialists in dealing with learning disabilities, most LBS programs can work with your client to find an approach to learning that suits their needs and abilities. Your client may also want to contact the Learning Disabilities Association of Toronto (www.ldatd.on.ca) to learn about various support programs.

How long will it take for my clients to finish the program?

It is difficult to predict how much time someone will spend in a literacy or upgrading program. This depends on an individual's skill level coming into the program, what their goals are and whether the program is full-time or part-time. Some learners make great gains in a one-to-one tutoring program, even when the instructional time is only a few hours each week. A learner's progress also depends on a wide range of other factors such as learning challenges, physical and mental health status, socio-economic barriers, and family commitments, as well as the rate at which the individual acquires skills.



Key information about Adult Literacy & Academic Upgrading/Academic and Career Entrance

Literacy & Basic Skills (LBS)

- Programs for adults who are comfortable with spoken English or French and who want to improve their Essential Skills for employment, further education or greater independence.
- Learners will improve their ability to:
 - Find and use information
 - Communicate ideas and information
 - Understand and use numbers
 - Use digital technology
 - Manage their own learning
 - Engage with others
- Many learners are eligible for supports (child care, transportation, supplies, etc.)

Academic Upgrading/Academic and Career Entrance (ACE)

- More advanced level courses for adults who want to upgrade their skills and knowledge for college entry, apprenticeship, or employment.
- The ACE Certificate is recognized as Grade 12 equivalency (college-level) by Ontario colleges.
- Course options include:
 - Communications/English (or Français for Francophone students)
 - Math, Computers, and Sciences (Biology, Chemistry, Physics)
 - Computers
 - Self-direction/Self-management

Making a Referral

- **Direct:** Clients/learners can be referred directly to a literacy or upgrading program by calling to arrange a time for an initial interview or intake application.
- **Assisted:** Clients/learners can be referred to the Literacy Access Network for information about the range of programs available to them.



Literacy Access Network

Information & Referral Hotline for Adult Literacy & Upgrading

416.961.5557 | 1.855.611.2212

www.mtml.ca/lan

For service in French, call

1.877.464.0504

For TTY service, call

905.897.6772

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