

# Gaining Access to the Workplace



**New Employee  
Orientation for  
Newcomers in the  
Workplace**

## Acknowledgements and Thanks

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# Preface

English in the Workplace: New Employee Orientation for Newcomers in the Workplace project was a response to a need identified in the Alberta trades sector to increase the percentage of newcomers passing basic site safety training as a requirement to gain access to employment.

The goal for the project was to create, implement and evaluate a welcoming model of new employee orientation for newcomers that integrates accessible language for general safety orientation that can be adapted to other industries and workplace contexts.

An orientation training curriculum was created that integrated the language of safety and the Canadian/Albertan industrial workplace culture of safety to help newcomers participating to develop the skills needed to gain access to industrial worksites.

# Acknowledgments

English in the Workplace: New Employee Orientation for Newcomers in the Workplace exists because of the generous and visionary support from Carolyn Dieleman, Manager of Language Training Programs, Alberta Employment and Immigration.

This project was also assisted by the farsighted interest from industry and trade union associations including:

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# Needs Assessment

## **Needs assessment activities**

An assessment of 4 industrial worksites was conducted in July, 2009. Categories assessed included the procedures and requirements needed to access sites and how site orientations were conducted. Onsite orientations were observed, focusing on the nature of activities and hazards, the number of people onsite, where and when the orientation was conducted, who provided the orientation and how it was done and the level, register and speed of language used. Samples and descriptions of orientation materials were collected; new hire orientation quizzes were taken by the assessors.

## **Needs Assessment Results**

The following information provides a summary of information gathered:

### **ESL speakers may have difficulty accessing the sites and communicating their concerns.**

Procedures to access the sites were not clear to newcomers (neither English L1 nor L2 speakers) causing confusion, and/or the need to search out site offices or even being left behind at the gate. There was no identification on onsite busses or marked bus stops to identify locations.

### **ESL speakers may have problems asking questions or clarifying what they heard.**

The process at the orientation can also be confusing. Trades people need to have their CSTS cards and their drug and alcohol tests filled out prior to arriving. On some sites they must know to report to security for name checks before proceeding. The dispatchers often speak very quickly, abruptly, quietly and frequently use idioms or slang.

## **ESL speakers will have to adopt and use trade safety language.**

Site safety orientation training varies. At one site the training consisted of a security guard who put a video on and left the room to return once it was over. He handed out a 12 question multiple-choice 'quiz' after which he asked if anyone had questions they needed the answers for. Other sites had safety personnel who used power point presentations combined with videos on particular safety points. These sites used checklists of items covered in the orientation and a signed consent form that the information had been covered. Vocabulary including words like muster points, 100% retention required, lanyards on clothes, imminent danger, house-keeping policy – definitely challenging for L2 speakers below an advanced level.

## **ESL speakers will have to learn acronyms, slang and idioms in the safety context.**

Examples of the acronyms used include WHMIS, JHA, PPE and of slang include 'this place is going to be a zoo', 'everything has to be tied off', 'luck runs out', and 'in the line of fire'. These may justifiably cause misunderstandings for L2 speakers.

## **Newcomers will have to understand and adopt the concept of safety as an attitude and an essential way of thinking.**

The notion that safety is a value and a "100 % safe culture to deliver construction without harm to people, property or the environment" is a stated workplace goal. The notion of 'common sense' regarding safety on the job may be different across cultures and thus expectations need to be addressed. The idea of that, "the success of our safety and loss prevention program requires the dedication, commitment, involvement and participation of all personnel working together to achieve this common goal", is stated in Safety and Loss Prevention Handbooks and could cause confusion, for example, for trades people from cultures where workers are not part of the decision making process.

## Resource Development Activities

The needs assessment results were used to generate a list of key topics for newcomer orientation. The list of topics for training was selected to ensure common knowledge with the greatest transferability across trades and work sites was being assessed. The final curriculum framework and module topics were narrowed to 6 themes – prioritized by the advisory committee’s feedback on topics that were most important for newcomer trades employees.

The outcome target for the curriculum is intercultural communication and the language of safety to develop skill and knowledge on expectations of trades’ workers in a Canadian workplace. At the end of this training, participants will better understand how to both become and demonstrate being safe workers on industrial work sites in the Canadian context.

### Module themes include:

- Rights and Responsibilities
- Workplace Hazards
- Proactive Strategies for Unsafe Working Conditions
- Personal Protective Equipment
- WHMIS
- Safety is an Attitude

### Targeted language development topics include:

- Clear Speech  
(e.g. appropriate volume and speed, pause, word stress)
- Vocabulary in context with the module themes
- Trade acronyms
- Common expressions, idioms and slang

### Targeted cultural concepts include:

- The meaning of safety in the Canadian context
- Tacit Canadian knowledge around imminent danger

- Building rapport in the Canadian context
- Showing initiative in the Canadian workplace

## **Module Outcomes mapped to Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLBs) and Essential Skills (ES)**

### **CLB Learner Profile**

Although it would be ideal for safety and understanding on the job for all employees to be at least intermediate level speakers and listeners, we found that is not the reality on jobsites and in the trades. For this reason, employers and employees need to be made aware and reminded of the communication misunderstandings and safety issues lower language levels can cause on jobsites and be encouraged to make EWP training available and/or accessible so that employees can begin the process of developing the level of communication skills needed to function in English in the workplace.

The potential miscommunication problems become evident when comparing the Canadian Language Benchmarks between a level of beginner to a level of intermediate speakers and listeners (i.e. level 3: beginner developing and level 5: intermediate initial).

In a perfect world one could expect that the workers hired would have the language, soft skills and cultural information expected of those working in the trades. Through our needs analysis and our pilot project it was apparent that in reality newcomers couldn't meet the often 'unstated' standard or expectations of language and 'common sense' knowledge needed to be safe or be perceived as safe coworkers.

Specifically we had expected to engage listeners and speakers with CLB 5. In fact, the reality of the market timing and reality of the project inevitably lead us to realize and address the reality in the workplace by engaging with speakers at CLB 3. The challenge became how to create a curriculum that would develop **English in the Workplace: New Employee Orientation for**

**Newcomers in the Workplace** for the level of speakers and listeners who are trying to gain access to the worksites.

## **Comparing Canadian Language Benchmarks Level 3 Beginner to Level 5 Intermediate speakers and listeners**

### **CLB Speaking Level 3 Includes:**

- Saying simple sentences
- Answering simple questions
- Asking for help
- Asking short, routine questions
- Giving basic information about familiar subjects

### **CLB Listening Level 3 Includes:**

- Understanding short sentences that are spoken slowly
- Understanding instructions
- Following directions
- Get the most important words in a story
- Understands when a person asks something

### **CLB Speaking Level 5 Includes:**

- Joining in conversations on familiar topics
- Beginning to use longer sentences
- Knowing a lot of common vocabulary and some idioms
- Feeling comfortable using English with familiar people
- Asking for clarification

### **CLB Listening Level 5 Includes:**

- Understanding conversations if people speak slowly
- Follow simple, repetitive, predictable speech
- Catch many words and phrases in informal conversations at a normal speed
- Follow the general idea if the subject is personally relevant
- Understands a range of vocabulary and a few idioms
- Can identify the situation, emotional state and relationship of speakers

- Can catch some inferred meanings in advice, offers and suggestions

## Essential Skills Learner Profile

The value in designing workplace curriculum in consideration of essential skills is obvious. This program endeavored to use the comparative framework “to facilitate the integration of ES-related tasks and materials into the ESL context” (Relating Canadian Language Benchmarks to Essential Skills: a comparative framework p. 4) even with the adjustment to include CLB stage 1 in order to accommodate newcomers in the workplace. For example, the ES Level 1 -oral communication-speaking and listening - match with CLB stage 2 (level 5 and above).

From the above example, it can be recognized that newcomers in the field may not have the level of English required to meet ES needed, however, our purpose in continuing with the comparative framework was to:

- Identify context - appropriate ES resources and workplace materials
  - Support the successful integration of newcomers and immigrants into the workforce by continually trying to inform and educate those in the field to understand the relationship between language competence and safety issues
    - Identify soft skills and cultural competencies required to ensure workplace safety
    - Support appropriate workplace preparation and training (Relating Canadian Language Benchmarks to Essential Skills: a comparative framework p. 8)

## Program Learning Outcomes Matched to Essential Skills

The program learning outcomes took shape from discussions with key stakeholders on the project's advisory committee, from interviewing safety staff on job sites and observing several different company's onsite orientations and reviewing new hire site orientation quizzes. The following outcomes were developed and then matched with [Essential Skills](#).

### **ESL speakers may have difficulty accessing the sites and communicating their concerns.**

Procedures to access the sites may not be clear to newcomers (neither English L1 nor L2 speakers) causing confusion, and/or the need to search out site offices or even being left behind at the site gate. At some sites there was no identification on onsite busses nor marked bus stops to identify locations.

#### Essential Skills

- Document Use (study maps and refer to directions to find job sites)
- Oral Communication (relay messages, ask and give directions and coordinate tasks with co-workers)

### **ESL speakers may have problems asking questions or clarifying what they heard.**

The process at the orientation can be confusing. For example, trades people need to have their CSTS cards and their drug and alcohol tests filled out prior to arriving. On some sites they must know to report to security for name checks before proceeding. The dispatchers often speak very quickly, abruptly, quietly and frequently use idioms or slang.

#### Essential Skills

- Reading (read instructions and complete forms) (read handbooks)

Employer: recommend mentors to assist employees

## ESL speakers will have to adopt and use trade safety language.

Site safety orientation training varies. For example, at one site training consisted of a security guard showing a video , returning once it was over handed out a 12 question multiple choice 'quiz' after which he asked if anyone had questions they needed the answers for. Other sites had safety personnel who used power point presentations combined with videos on particular safety points. These sites used checklists of items covered in the orientation and a signed consent form that the information had been covered. Vocabulary including words like muster points, 100% retention required, lanyards on clothes, imminent danger, house-keeping policy – definitely challenging for L2 speakers below an advanced level.

### Essential Skills

- Reading (read completed forms, read material safety data sheets, read safety manuals)
- Writing (record information about daily work, details of conversations)
- Document Use (scan Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS) for safe handling information)
- Oral Communication (discuss safety issues on the worksite, exchange opinions with co-workers regarding critical safety issues)
- Working with Others (participate in discussions about work processes or product improvement)
- Continuous Learning (enroll in classes offered through unions, or other groups if any are available to meet this specific need)

Employer: offer sessions to train employees

## **ESL speakers will have to learn acronyms, slang and idioms in the safety context.**

Examples of acronyms used include WHMIS, JHA, PPE and of the idioms used, including, “this place is going to be a zoo”, and “everything has to be tied off” and “luck runs out” and “in the line of fire”. These will cause misunderstandings for L2 speakers.

### Essential Skills

- Continuous Learning (pay attention onsite and ask for clarification when needed, establish mentors or cultural bridges to help in the process, enroll in classes at unions, from employer or other groups if any are available to meet this specific need)

Employer: consciously attempt to reduce the lingo onsite to clear plain language

## **Newcomers will have to understand and adopt the concept of safety as an attitude and an essential way of thinking.**

The notion that safety is a value and a ‘100 % safe culture to deliver construction without harm to people, property or the environment’ is a stated workplace goal. The notion of “common sense” regarding safety on the job may be different across cultures and accordingly needs to be addressed. The idea that, ‘the success of our safety and loss prevention program requires the dedication, commitment, involvement and participation of all personnel working together to achieve this common goal’, could also cause confusion, for example, in trades people from cultures where workers are not part of the decision making process.

### Essential Skills

- Reading (read completed forms, read safety manuals)
- Writing (record information about daily work, details of conversations)

- Oral Communication (relay messages, give directions and coordinate tasks with co-workers, discuss safety issues on the worksite, exchange opinions with co-workers regarding critical safety issues)
- Working with Others (participate in discussions about work processes)

Employer: offer sessions to train employees

### Barriers to learning

- Basic CLB level of some trades people
- Time removed from formal education
- Lack of available time to attend courses due to long work days and/or personal commitments

### Modules Overview

The challenge of designing and implementing this program, originally intended for appropriately higher language levels, to include beginning level CLB3 speakers was to adapt complex workplace material to be accessible to the newcomers with their current language levels while still keeping the important messages to also meet the orientation needs of the workplace.

**The presentation slides (PPTs) were developed, adapted and piloted to meet the outcomes for this language level.**

**Adaptations included:**

- Key visuals – to help focus and understanding e.g. employee, employer, question, answer, think aloud, are repeated in each module for example, visuals to represent employer and employee Short sentences that can be exploited for further meaning – e.g. used in brainstorming session, to create lists and to reference more complex written information guides or acts
- Practical information – e.g. authentic vocabulary and authentic orientation tasks
- Clear, plain language – e.g. process charts that keep words at a minimum
- Reduced amounts of text into understandable slides

- Communicating the language and concepts of safety through practicing speaking and listening to the new language provided
- Including clear speech and pronunciation features - practicing the language in the modules
- Adapting onsite training material to accommodate for cultural differences
  - Reflect the 6 most important themes determined by an advisory board as a beginning in a series of 12 potential topics for the trades
  - Encourage a safe work environment that accommodates for basic level speakers

## Power Points Overview

### Module themes include:

- Rights and Responsibilities
- Proactive Strategies for Unsafe Working Conditions
- Workplace Hazards
- Personal Protective Equipment
- WHMIS
- Safety is an Attitude

### Module one

#### Rights and Responsibilities

This module was designed as an exemplar of a 3 part guide. As such it includes:

- PPT slides
- PPT with Facilitator Guide
- Student Handouts

The remaining modules include PPT slides that can be used to develop lessons and learner handouts.

## **Training and capacity development activities**

The New Employee Orientation for Newcomers in the Workplace program was piloted at NorQuest College from November 7 to December 5, 2009: five consecutive Saturdays for four hours per session.

## **Overall Lessons Learned**

### **Recruitment challenges**

Recruitment of newcomer trades people to participate in the orientation training presented challenges during the pilot. Conducting information sessions prior to offerings on worksites, in work camps or other easy to reach locations could help to ensure that the training reaches the target audience. Employers need to be engaged to help address barriers to participation for newcomer trades people.

Challenges in recruitment of newcomer trades people impacted project timelines and reduced the length of training program offered, from 30 hours of recommended training to 20 hours for the pilot.

Consistent attendance by newcomer trades people was an issue; of the 21 total participants, 12 attended a minimum of 60% of the training sessions. Saturday was selected as the only possible day to schedule the orientation training sessions. As one participant said, "Evenings due to the work schedules are very hard to make and could not be more than 1 to 1 1/2 hours. We get home at 7 pm – so not in the evenings."

## **Barriers identified to full participation included:**

- Participants choosing to take on work shifts and/or overtime shifts rather than attending the training session.
- Participants who were unsuccessful in negotiating shift changes in order to participate.
- Participants who were concerned about losing their jobs if they were not available for work. Project team member attributed this concern partly to a culturally based perception, (i.e. reluctance to approach their supervisor) but their participation in the training competed with their availability for work. Supervisors were not always aware of the training participation by their newcomer employees.
- Some participants were also involved in other training on Saturdays which impacted their consistent attendance for the pilot training.
- Some participants were hired mid-training to work outside of Edmonton so were unable to complete the training program.
- For the pilot, many participants signed up for training through their own initiative. The source of this motivation varied from the starting assumption for the pilot that newcomers would be recommended to attend by unions or employers. The project team recommends communicating to employers about the training as an additional learning opportunity that will enhance the newcomer trades person's value to the company.

## **Safe Workers**

For newcomer trades people to be safe and to be perceived as safe by their co-workers, the language of safety, issues of intercultural communication and Canadian workplace culture of safety all need to be addressed in addition to safety training required for their job.

## Learners noted:

*"This course taught me how to say to boss, if I met a danger job I haven't done before – how to say it to the boss. Not just yes or no – not good for anyone (boss or me)."*

*"Safety is the first importance in the Canadian workplace. In our company foreman always says, take time and don't rush. You can learn on the job."*

## Safety in Emergency Situations

One emerging issue from the pilot was the issue of appropriate Canadian Language Benchmark levels of language proficiency for trades' employment (e.g. NOC 7242 Industrial Electricians)<sup>1</sup> and the required language proficiency for emergency situations. A practice reported during the project is employing internationally educated trades people with lower language levels to work onsite in a lower skilled capacity (e.g. working as a wire puller rather than as an electrician). This practice was reported to work well under typical working conditions. In emergency situations, however, the language gap could contribute to misunderstandings about emergency protocols (e.g. gathering at a muster point). Information from *Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training* indicates that those wanting to enter the apprenticeship training for electrician or power-line technician require the highest level of English (5 on a 5 point scale that is equivalent to English 30 and which requires an advanced CLB level). L2 speakers are responsible to reach that goal prior to entering the training. Information from

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www10.hrsdc.gc.ca/CE/English/ShowProfile.aspx?v=207#OtherInformation>

*Trainees in the Trade, NorQuest* indicates a general language ability of CLB 5 – 8 for entrance to training in the trades.

In an emergency situation clear and detailed communication is extremely important to avoid injuries and possible loss of time and money. Communication often takes places in noisy environments. These contexts raise required skills considerably. (From levels 1 to 4 in the Essential Skills Oral Communication framework and from CLB levels 5 – 12 for the speaking and listening skills (Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks, 2005).<sup>2</sup>

The gap between appropriate language skill proficiency under typical working conditions and in the event of emergency situations can be significant. To achieve a goal of ensuring safety for newcomer trades people and their co-workers in industrial worksite contexts, more work needs to be done to prepare internationally educated skilled workers to be safe.

## Program Length

Based on needs assessment results, in order to address key topics related to the language and culture of safety on industrial worksites, at least 30 program hours are needed. The project advisory committee reviewed suggested orientation training topics and confirmed their relevance and importance to achieve the project outcome (i.e. Ladders & Scaffolding, Emergency Response, Personal Physical Care, Environmental Factors, Housekeeping & Seasonal Safety).

Further, 40% of newcomer trades-people completing the program, did not agree with the statement, “I can understand safety language on worksites”. This result indicates that 20 hours of orientation training is not sufficient to meet safety

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<sup>2</sup> CCLB (2005). Relating Canadian language benchmarks to essential skills: A Comparison framework.

language needs for newcomer trades people with lower English proficiency levels (below CLB 5).

In order to support newcomer trades people to successfully gain access to industrial worksites, there is also a need to develop an orientation package for worksite supervisors on how to welcome newcomer trades people to the worksite. (e.g. transportation to the site, required equipment/clothing, how to locate building onsite, orientation to the physical layout of the site, etc.) This kind of orientation information was outside the scope of the current project but emerged as an unmet need.

## Outcomes

### Outcome 1:

Positive impact on newcomer trades people completion of welcoming orientation that is focused on site safety compliance.

### Measurement:

1. 75% of employees completing orientation training pass and indicate satisfaction with orientation and materials.
2. Compilation of learner level of satisfaction data and learner success stories.

### Results:

#### 1. Pass rate

- Pre-test, 70% of assessment participants passed; 30% of assessment participants did not pass.\*
- Post-test, 100% of participants passed.

#### 2. The New Employee Orientation for Newcomers in the Workplace Program had a positive impact for newcomer trades people participating in the pilot.

100% of participants agreed to the following statements:

- "I can apply the training to my work."
- "The training helped me understand onsite safety words."
- "I learned new workplace safety language."

- "I learned about workplace culture."
- "I am satisfied with the training."

*\* A grade of 70% on pre- and post- assessment tools was considered a passing grade*

## **Outcome 2:**

Positive impact on current electrical union employees' perception of confidence for workplace/site safety.

### **Measurement:**

75% of employees indicate satisfaction with self-confidence following orientation.

### **Results:**

100% of participants strongly agreed with the following statement:

"I gained confidence in myself."

### **Participant comments from the post-training focus group included:**

- *"If you know the task has danger don't be shy to ask for information."*
- *"I've been in Canada for 4 years. I know all about workplace safety. What's new is the language – this course taught me a lot...language skills, need to know the tools, the equipment and how to pronounce it."*
- *"Around safety words, the words are hard to pronounce. It can be dangerous."*
- *"In my country we studies English for about 10 years. I know English for a test. The best way to learn is to...ask English speakers...it's helpful to ask English speakers to clarify and repeat."*

## Learner Impact Stories

Learner Impact information is taken from the post-training focus group discussion and open-ended questions from the post-training survey.

One learner described an interaction with a supervisor who was asking him to remove a tag line but he refused to do the work. He needed a bucket lift to do the work safely and refused to do the work without one. After this incident, others started to ask for safe working conditions and the job became safer.

A learner had just started in a company and was asked to drive a scissor lift. The worker didn't know training was needed to operate the scissor lift. After the orientation training class, the worker asked the manager about it and was offered scissor lift training.

A learner described not knowing about support assists needed for working on ladders over a set height and not realizing it was required to ask a co-worker to help. The worker learned the proper way to use ladders in the training.

*"I learned my rights as an employee... it enhanced my knowledge."*