Introducing the Curriculum Framework

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Some background information

The Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework (OALCF) has been developed to include all the features of competency-based programming, including

- competencies
- assessment
- learner transitions to work, further education and training, or independence
- learning materials

The Curriculum Framework is comprised of six competencies that organize learning content and describe learner proficiency, using three levels of performance.

What is the Curriculum Framework within the OALCF?

A curriculum framework sets out the content of learning within a system, using an established set of organizing principles. Within the OALCF, the Curriculum Framework uses competencies, broad generic categories of learners' abilities, to organize the full range of learning addressed in the Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) Program, Ontario's adult literacy system. The primary purpose of the new Curriculum Framework is to make visible the skills, knowledge, and behaviours that adult learners need to fulfill their responsibilities at work, in the community, and within learning situations.

The Curriculum Framework's competency-based approach helps practitioners and learners clarify connections between literacy development and the real-life tasks learners perform in work, learning, and community contexts. It extends literacy instruction beyond discrete skill building and focuses, instead, on the interaction of skills, knowledge, and behaviours that reflect learners' needs, goals, and interests.

What guided the development of the Curriculum Framework?

The following six principles guided the development of the Curriculum Framework:

1. **Address learner needs first and foremost.** The competency-based model allows for the development of effective, meaningful programming to meet the complex and changing needs of learners. By using context-free competencies, the Curriculum Framework enables learners to work towards their chosen goals and to change goals part way through a learning program, if they wish to do so. The Curriculum Framework also supports the real-life application of skills, knowledge, and behaviours, allowing learners to draw clear connections between what they learn in the classroom and how this learning applies outside the LBS Program.
2. **Make practitioners' jobs easier.** This principle acknowledges the important role that practitioners play in supporting learners as they work towards their goals. The Curriculum Framework is designed to make learning objectives explicit through its use of tasks and to provide clear direction to practitioners as they work with learners to select appropriate content.

3. **Be appropriate for, and accessible to, learners, and practitioners with diverse cultural needs.** This principle acknowledges that learners in literacy programs have diverse cultural and linguistic needs. Built upon the tasks learners need to be able to do once they complete their literacy programming, the Curriculum Framework considers the cultural and linguistic realities in which tasks will need to be carried out—making room for the type of instruction necessary to help all learners achieve their goals.
4. **Be accountable to the public.** This principle acknowledges the responsibility of LBS delivery agencies to deliver efficient and effective programming. The Curriculum Framework is designed so that members of the public, funders, and other stakeholders can easily understand what the LBS Program delivers.
5. **Be built on a specified, strong, theoretical foundation consistent with andragogy.** This principle acknowledges the importance that adult learning theory plays in literacy programming. The Curriculum Framework is consistent with current theories of adult learning, language development, literacy and numeracy development, and theories of task and text complexity.
6. **Be clear to learners, practitioners, the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU), and other stakeholders.** This principle acknowledges that language can be used both to include and to exclude. Throughout the development and documentation process, we have tried to use clear language to produce an accessible Curriculum Framework.

The Curriculum Framework draws on existing frameworks and curricula used in Canada, including the

- *Essential Skills Research Project*
- *Manitoba Stages of Learning*
- *Canadian Language Benchmarks*

It has also drawn on curriculum frameworks used in other countries, in particular,

- the *Australian Core Skills Framework*
- England's *Adult Literacy and Numeracy Core Curricula*
- the United States' *Equipped for the Future Standards*

What are the features of the Curriculum Framework?

The Curriculum Framework uses broad competencies to organize learning content and describes learner proficiency using three levels of performance. Tasks and the features that contribute to their complexity are also key features of the Curriculum Framework.

Competencies

Taken together, the six competencies cover the full range of ways in which learners will need to use their abilities once they reach their goals. In this sense, the OALCF competencies extend beyond traditionally narrow concepts of reading, writing, and numeracy. They allow for the integration of thinking and interpersonal skills, as well as the behaviours that help learners apply their skills to manage at work, in the community, and in other educational settings.

Within a competency-based approach, the interaction of skills, knowledge, and behaviours, as well as learners' understanding of how to use their skills, contributes to learners being able to perform tasks. Competency-based education articulates success in many ways, but always key are the learners' abilities to demonstrate success against the standards set by the Curriculum Framework.

Developing the competencies

To establish the competencies, developers synthesized responses to the question: *What should learners learn in literacy programs?* from the literacy service providers in Ontario. Then, development team members representing the interests of learners in anglophone, Deaf, francophone, and Native programs, in addition to representatives from community-based, school board, and college service providers, each independently identified competencies. Through discussion, the team reached consensus on the set of competencies that would comprise the framework.

Task groups

Task groups organize the content within each competency. They link the broad competencies to program development and make it easier to determine what a learner can or cannot do. When taken together, task groups describe the full range of content within each competency. Task groups present no implied hierarchy, as they can be taught or selected in any order, depending on the learner's goals and needs.

Developing the task groups

To identify task groups, developers gathered and sorted examples of learning activities deemed appropriate and representative of all literacy service providers and all learning contexts within Ontario's adult literacy system.

Tasks

Tasks and the features that contribute to their complexity constitute a significant portion of the Curriculum Framework. Tasks are purposeful activities that bundle skills, knowledge, and behaviours in unique ways; in their successful demonstration, tasks show practitioners and learners how learning can be transferred to activities in work, family, and community contexts.

The Curriculum Framework supports a task-based approach by helping adults draw connections between what they learn in an educational setting and how they can apply their skills, and knowledge, in everyday activities. While the six competencies provide an overall organizational structure, the task-based nature of the Curriculum Framework supports practitioners as they determine how to teach and assess learning.

Developing the tasks

Development team members representing the interests of learners in the four cultural groups and three delivery sectors each independently contributed task ideas to ensure that the full range of literacy provision was reflected in the curriculum framework within the OALCF.

Levels of performance

The Curriculum Framework uses three levels to describe a learner's developing proficiency to perform tasks; these levels are informed by the same factors that drive complexity at Essential Skills (ES) Levels 1, 2, and 3. In general, the two features that drive complexity within the Curriculum Framework are the

- task descriptors, the features of the task itself

- performance descriptors, the qualities of learner performance expected at the end of a given level

To understand the level of performance, these two factors must always be interpreted together. Learners may well demonstrate proficiency at different levels across the different competencies and task groups.

The following table summarizes features of task complexity used in the Curriculum Framework:

Descriptors	Level 1 → Level 2 → Level 3
Task descriptors **describe features of tasks at the end of a given level.**	Tasks are more complex when they • are not well-defined • require more steps • can be completed in more than one way, especially when they do not have a set procedure • contain unfamiliar elements, such as context and vocabulary • involve multiple or complex documents and texts
Performance descriptors **are the expected features of a learner's performance at the end of a given level.**	Learners who perform increasingly complex tasks can • make inferences to determine task requirements • apply their background knowledge and experience to carry out unfamiliar tasks • manage tasks with unfamiliar elements • identify a variety of ways to complete tasks • find, integrate, and analyze information • experiment and problem-solve to achieve desired results

The OALCF Curriculum Framework and the Essential Skills Framework

Like the Essential Skills, the OALCF's Curriculum Framework focuses on the ways in which individuals use their abilities to accomplish tasks outside a learning context. Where skills treated in the Curriculum Framework intersect with ES domains, task descriptors are consistent with ES Levels 1, 2, and 3. In cases where the ES do not have a corresponding complexity scale, either similar task complexity features have been identified to describe tasks along a scale of 1 to 3, or tasks have been deemed appropriate for learners regardless of their level of proficiency.

The Curriculum Framework departs from the ES Framework in that its primary purpose is to support adult learning. To do so, the Curriculum Framework moves away from using the nine Essential Skills established by the ES Framework and adopts, instead, a system whereby learning is organized and articulated to competencies and task groups.

Although the ES scale describes 5 levels of task complexity, the Curriculum Framework addresses the first 3 Levels of the ES. The decision to include only Levels 1, 2, and 3 was informed by International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) findings, indicating that adults with Level 3 skills can meet most of the

Essential Skills demands of daily life and can transfer their learning more easily from one context to another. For programming purposes, practitioners may choose to carry out tasks that rate beyond Level 3 with their learners. However, the focus of the OALCF Curriculum Framework remains on the 3 Levels indicative of foundational literacy and numeracy needs.

The OALCF Curriculum Framework and LBS Levels

The OALCF Curriculum Framework Levels do not align neatly to the LBS Levels, as LBS Levels organize skills acquisition in a hierarchical manner. In the Curriculum Framework, the skills required to perform a task vary according to task demands.

How is the Curriculum Framework organized?

The Curriculum Framework is organized according to the following six competencies:

- *A. Find and Use Information*
- *B. Communicate Ideas and Information*
- *C. Understand and Use Numbers*
- *D. Use Digital Technology*
- *E. Manage Learning*
- *F. Engage with Others*

Furthermore, the Curriculum Framework pages are organized into six sections, one for each competency. Each competency section starts with a definition of the competency and any associated task groups.

Task groups and indicators are two other elements of the Curriculum Framework. Task groups organize the content within the larger competency, when necessary. They provide a way to explore features of tasks and performance for different aspects of competencies. Indicators are rooted in individual task groups and exemplify one level; therefore, practitioners, learners, and stakeholders can get a sense of how complexity increases across a task group by reading the indicators.

The table on the following page summarizes the competencies, task groups, and levels.

Competency	Task Group	Level 1 Indicator	Level 2 Indicator	Level 3 Indicator
A. Find and Use Information	**A1.** Read continuous text	**A1.1** Read brief texts to locate specific details	**A1.2** Read texts to locate and connect ideas and information	**A1.3** Read longer texts to connect, evaluate and integrate ideas and information
	A2. Interpret documents	**A2.1** Interpret very simple documents to locate specific details	**A2.2** Interpret simple documents to locate and connect information	**A2.3** Interpret somewhat complex documents to connect, evaluate and integrate information
	A3. Extract info from films, broadcasts and presentations	Tasks in this task group are not rated for complexity.		
B. Communicate Ideas and Information	**B1.** Interact with others	**B1.1** Participate in brief interactions to exchange information with one other person	**B1.2** Initiate and maintain interactions with one or more persons to discuss, explain or exchange information and opinions	**B1.3** Initiate and maintain lengthier interactions with one or more persons on a range of topics
	B2. Write continuous text	**B2.1** Write brief texts to convey simple ideas and factual information	**B2.2** Write texts to explain and describe information and ideas	**B2.3** Write longer texts to present information, ideas and opinions
	B3. Complete and create documents	**B3.1a** Make straightforward entries to complete very simple documents **B3.1b** Create very simple documents to display and organize a limited amount of information	**B3.2a** Use layout to determine where to make entries in simple documents **B3.2b** Create simple documents to sort, display and organize information	**B3.3a** Decide what, where and how to enter information in somewhat complex documents **B3.3b** Create more complex documents to sort, display and organize information
	B4. Express oneself creatively	Express oneself creatively, such as by writing journal entries, telling a story, and creating art		
C. Understand and Use Numbers	**C1.** Manage money	**C1.1** Compare costs and make simple calculations	**C1.2** Make low-level inferences to calculate costs and expenses that may include rates such as taxes and discounts	**C1.3** Find, integrate and analyze numerical information to make multi-step calculations to compare cost options and prepare budgets
	C2. Manage time	**C2.1** Measure time and make simple comparisons and calculations	**C2.2** Make low-level inferences to calculate using time	**C2.3** Find, integrate and analyze numerical information to make multi-step calculations using time
	C3. Use measures	**C3.1** Measure and make simple comparisons and calculations	**C3.2** Use measures to make one-step calculations	**C3.3** Use measures to make multi-step calculations; use specialized measuring tools
	C4. Manage data	**C4.1** Make simple comparisons and calculations	**C4.2** Make low-level inferences to organize, make summary calculations and represent data	**C4.3** Find, integrate and analyze data; identify trends in data
D. Use Digital Technology	n/a	**D.1** Perform simple digital tasks according to a set procedure	**D.2** Perform well-defined, multi-step digital tasks	**D.3** Experiment and problem-solve to perform multi-step digital tasks
E. Manage Learning	n/a	**E.1** Set short-term goals, begin to use limited learning strategies, and begin to monitor own learning	**E.2** Set realistic short- and long-term goals, use a limited number of learning strategies, and monitor own learning	**E.3** Set realistic short- and long-term goals, use a variety of learning strategies, and monitor and evaluate own learning
F. Engage with Others	n/a	This competency is not rated for complexity.		

Figure 1: OALCF Competencies, Task Groups and Levels

How are the Curriculum Framework pages organized?

Teaching and assessing within the OALCF should consider all aspects of the competencies – the task groups, indicators, and descriptors, as well as the relationship between competencies. Task and performance descriptors are designed to work together and help develop meaningful, contextualized learning opportunities.

The visual on the next page depicts the typical elements of the-Curriculum Framework pages and the purpose of each element.

- **Competencies** represent the full range of skills, knowledge, and behaviours addressed in the LBS Program.
- **Task groups** organize the content within the larger competency, when necessary. Task groups have no implied hierarchy; practitioners can teach or select from task groups in any order, depending on learners' goals and needs. Three of the six competencies have task groups.
- **Indicators** describe achievement at the end of each level and present a snapshot of the programming focus at the level.
- **Descriptors** detail the qualities of tasks and learner performance at a given level. They are intended to work in combination with each other to foster understanding of task complexity at a given level within a given task group. Descriptors are typically unique to a level; however, some qualities may apply to more than one level. **Performance descriptors** are observable characteristics of learner performance, whereas **task descriptors** describe the qualities of tasks. Competencies *E. Manage Learning* and *F. Engage with Others* contain only performance descriptors.
- **Example tasks** illustrate what learners can do at the end of a level. Each example task indicates the goal paths in which learners are likely to be expected to perform similar tasks once they have transitioned. They also clarify how the Framework applies to all learners, regardless of their goals.

A1.1

Competency A:
Find and Use Information

Competencies represent the full range of skills, knowledge, and behaviours addressed in the LBS Program.

Task Group A1:
Read continuous text

Task groups organize the content within the larger competency.

Level 1

At this Level, learners:

Read brief texts to locate specific details

Performance Descriptors	Task Descriptors
The learner:	Scope of task is limited
Decodes words and makes meaning of sentences in a single text	Involves one text
Reads short texts to locate a single piece of information	Is up to one paragraph in length
Follows the sequence of events in straightforward chronological texts	Contains common, familiar vocabulary
Follows simple, straightforward instructional texts	Has a familiar context
Identifies the main idea in brief texts	Addresses concrete, day-to-day topics
Requires support to identify sources and to evaluate and integrate information	Has a highly explicit purpose

Text Types:

instructional,
narratives

Examples:

- Notes
- Simple directions

Indicators describe achievement at the end of each level and present a snapshot of the programming focus at the level.

Descriptors detail the qualities of learner performance and of tasks at a given level. They are intended to foster understanding of task complexity, and are typically unique to a level.

Examples of tasks learners can do at the end of Level 1:

Read brief texts to locate specific details

Tasks	E	A	SS	PS	I
Read instructions on a cleaning product label	●	●			●
Read a brief email confirming the date and time of a meeting	●	●	●	●	●
Read a brief note from a co-worker	●	●			
Follow directions to a local retail outlet	●	●			●
Read a brief blog entry on a familiar top			●	●	●
Read a note in a log book					

Each example task indicates the goal paths in which learners are likely to be expected to perform similar tasks once they have transitioned

Example tasks illustrate what learners can do at the end of a level.

How do you apply the Curriculum Framework?

The Curriculum Framework was designed for use in a variety of settings, including literacy programming delivered in community-based, school board, college, and workplace settings. Although the primary users of the Curriculum Framework are literacy practitioners, other stakeholders can use the Curriculum Framework to better understand the services provided to literacy clients.

The Curriculum Framework supports a range of service delivery functions in Ontario's literacy programs, including information and referral, learner plan development, training, and assessment.

Information and referral

The Curriculum Framework provides practitioners with a common language for describing and discussing learner performance across the six competencies. Informed decisions about referral can be made based on an understanding of what learners can do and what they need to work on. The consistent use of indicators allows learners to move easily among literacy programs. Other stakeholders can use the indicators to help make informed decisions about client referrals to programs in LBS delivery agencies.

Scenario: Facilitating stakeholder referrals

Luke has been looking for a job for the past six months since he left high school without graduating. While registering at an employment service agency for help, Luke reveals that he does not know how to use the computer to complete the online service application form. As Luke fills out the paper-based version, the employment consultant notices that Luke has trouble completing the form and leaves many of the entry fields blank. Having recently reviewed the summary table of OALCF Competencies, Task Groups and Levels (Figure 1 in this document), the consultant recognizes that Luke is unable to perform a Level 2 task in task group *B3. Complete and create documents*. Based on this information, the consultant suggests that Luke go to a literacy program for further assessment that may indicate he needs to further develop skills for seeking employment.

Learner plan development

The Curriculum Framework recognizes that a person may be able to do tasks at different levels across the competencies. An individual's performance across the competencies can be analyzed to gain valuable information about her or his areas of strength and to identify areas of need. This information can then be used to support learner plan development. The indicators can be used in the learner plan to show what a learner needs to be able to do once she or he transitions. The information can also be used to make decisions about the appropriate placement of a learner within a program.

Scenario: Understanding patterns of strengths and needs

Jeremiah was referred to a literacy program by a local employment service agency. He was recently laid off after working in a factory for 15 years. Interested in becoming a welder, Jeremiah wanted to obtain his Secondary School Diploma since he was just a few credits short of achieving it. He could then apply to the welder program at his local community college. His task-based intake assessment yielded the following results:

Task Group or Competency	Level
A1. Read continuous text	2
A2. Interpret documents	2
B1. Interact with others	1
B2. Write continuous text	1
B3. Complete and create documents	2
C1. Manage money	2
C2. Manage time	2
C3. Use measures	1
C4. Manage data	2
D. Use Digital Technology	2
E. Manage Learning	3

The results revealed that Jeremiah needed to focus on improving his abilities in a number of competencies and task groups before he could transition to credit classes. In particular, he needed to focus on task groups *B2. Write continuous text* and *C3. Use measures.*

Training

The Curriculum Framework supports a task-based approach to literacy instruction that helps learners link their literacy learning to the world around them. Completing tasks helps learners understand how they will use skills to respond to real-world demands they will encounter as they transition to their next step. The Curriculum Framework provides a common set of criteria against which practitioners can develop programming that meets the needs of individual learners as they move towards attaining their goals. Practitioners can use example tasks in the Curriculum Framework to determine what tasks might be appropriate for each of the following five learner goal paths:

1. Employment
2. Apprenticeship
3. Secondary School Credit
4. Postsecondary
5. Independence

To use the Curriculum Framework effectively, practitioners will need to be able to identify tasks that are appropriate for the learners with whom they are working. Practitioners must also be able to analyze tasks to understand the skill demands they represent. In their analysis of tasks, practitioners will be looking for two main things:

1. identifying the competency or task group to which the task belongs
2. determining the task's complexity level

To identify the competency or task group to which the task pertains, practitioners need only identify the predominant skill the learner is required to draw on to complete the task. Practitioners can then use the task and performance descriptors within the Curriculum Framework to determine the complexity level for each of the tasks.

Using *Supplemental Tasks for Practitioners*

Practitioners will also need to identify the context of the task when they are either selecting or creating tasks for programming purposes. A learner's cultural and linguistic background and chosen goal path affect the purpose and content of the task. Accessible from the "Understanding the Curriculum Framework" page of the OALCF website is the document *Supplemental Tasks for Practitioners* (http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/eopg/publications/OALCF_Supplemental_Tasks_Mar_11.pdf) providing additional tasks organized by competency, culture, language, and Level. Brief notes called Cultural Considerations provide practitioners with guidance when they develop tasks for learners from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Using *Integrated Tasks by Goal Path*

Although the competencies are explored separately in the Curriculum Framework, they are intended to work together to inform programming. This is evident in the description of the competencies and task groups where links to other task groups are identified. In this way, the Curriculum Framework supports the use of integrated tasks in literacy programming. Accessible from the "Purpose of the OALCF" page of the OALCF website is the document *Integrated Tasks by Goal Path* (http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/eopg/publications/OALCF_integrated_tasks_Mar_11.pdf) reflecting real-life activities in which learners engage. These tasks typically involve a number of competencies and task groups. When used with multilevel learner groups, integrated tasks provide opportunities to adjust activity demands to individual learner's abilities, using task and performance descriptors. For example, a practitioner might choose to develop lessons that revolve around purchasing a new computer for the classroom. The lessons could include instruction and practice regarding

- conducting Internet research on different computer models (*D. Use Digital Technology*)
- comparing costs (*C1. Manage money*)
- reading user reviews (*A1. Read continuous text*)

The practitioner could have learners

- document their research in table form (*B3. Complete and create documents*)
- write a report that outlines their recommended purchase (*B2. Write continuous text*)

The Curriculum Framework can be used to develop learning activities related to learner goals at the appropriate Level. For example, learners with a goal of independence might express interest in improving their ability to select healthy foods to eat. The lessons could include

- interpreting the *Canada Food Guide* to understand nutritional requirements (*A2. Interpret documents*)
- reading informational brochures about the link between poor diet and chronic illness (*A1. Read continuous text*)
- comparing fat and sodium counts of different products on nutritional labels (*C3. Use measures*)
- producing a shopping list with healthy food choices (*B3. Complete and create documents*)

Selecting learning materials

Practitioners can also use the Curriculum Framework as a guide in selecting learning materials. Learning materials selected to support a learner program should be relevant to the learner's goals and interests, and be level appropriate. To ensure that a level is appropriate, the materials should be examined using the Curriculum Framework while keeping in mind what a learner will be asked to do with the materials.

Assessment

The Curriculum Framework can be used to assess learners as they develop proficiency in the LBS Program. Practitioners or assessors can use the Curriculum Framework to describe a learner's level of performance at any given point in time, be it at intake assessment, ongoing assessment, or exit assessment.

Scenario: Noting learner progress over time

At intake, Julia was concerned about being able to write better and to understand and fill in forms. Her initial assessment indicated that she was able to manage Level 1 tasks in these areas. Therefore, Julia's literacy program focused primarily on building her skills through a variety of in-class and online learning opportunities. When Julia exited the program after six months, her exit assessment indicated that she had improved significantly both in writing and in her ability to understand and complete forms. As a result of participating in online learning, she also improved significantly in her ability to complete digital technology tasks.