



A SkillsPlus Socio-Economic Report:

What Skills Are Essential for Employees in Victoria's Small Businesses



This is the fourth in a series of four socio-economic reports prepared by SkillsPlus. The purpose of these reports is to provide relevant labour market information for small businesses in the Retail/Wholesale/Grocery and Tourism/Hospitality industries in the Victoria region.

The information in this report comes from two sources.

The first is an assessment of essential skills among employees of 10 local businesses, based on interviews with employers and employees conducted in the fall of 2009 as part of the SkillsPlus project.

The second is the essential skills profiles produced for each occupation by the Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC) National Occupation Classifications (NOC) system. The system is based on extensive occupational research and consultations conducted across the country, and is updated every five years in partnership with Statistics Canada.

What are essential skills?

Essential Skills are the skills people use to carry out a wide variety of everyday life and work tasks.

Essential Skills are not the technical skills required by particular occupations, but rather the skills applied in all occupations. For example, writing skills are required in a broad range of occupations. The complexity and frequency of writing varies, of course. Some workers fill out simple forms every day, while others write daily or monthly reports.

Essential Skills enable people to do their work. For example, repair persons may have to read and understand written work orders before they can do the repairs.

– Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC)

We gratefully acknowledge the financial support of the Province of British Columbia through the Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development as provided by the Canada-British Columbia Labour Market Agreement.



HRSDC groups essential skills into nine categories:

- reading
- writing
- oral communication
- numeracy
- thinking
- document use
- computer use
- continuous learning
- working with others.

The SkillsPlus interviews

We interviewed the employers and some of the employees at 10 local businesses in 4 sectors, including:

- 3 Clothing and Retail businesses
- 3 Restaurant businesses
- 3 Bakery, Deli or Café businesses
- 1 Food Store business.

Participants at each business were asked to choose the three most relevant of the nine essential skills, in order to focus training plans on their most important needs.

The interviews provided information that allowed us to compare:

- the essential skills identified by workers within the same occupation, and
- the essential skills identified by the local businesses with those identified for each occupation by the National Occupation Classifications (NOC) system.

Because of the small number of participating businesses, the results should not be considered representative of the local businesses that fall within these sectors. However, they do give us a better understanding of the essential skills needed in the small businesses participating in the SkillsPlus project.

Essential skills in Clothing and Retail businesses

Employers and employees interviewed at all three of the participating Clothing and Retail businesses chose **oral communication** and **computer use** as essential skills, while those at two of the three businesses selected **thinking**, and those at one business selected **reading**, **writing**, **continuous learning**, and **working with others**. None chose numeracy or document use.

Both the three local businesses and the NOC identify oral communication as essential. However, while the local businesses identified computer use as essential, the NOC does not. Also, while the NOC identifies **continuous learning** and **working with others** as essential skills, only one of the three local businesses selected these skills as essential for their workplaces.

Essential Skills	Clothing and Retail	
	Local businesses (3)	NOC
Reading	1	

Writing	1	
Oral communication	3	*
Numeracy	0	
Thinking	2	*
Document use	0	
Computer use	3	
Continuous learning	1	*
Working with others	1	*

Essential skills in Restaurant businesses

Employers and employees at all three of the participating Restaurant businesses identified **working with others** as an essential skill in the workplace, and two of the three identified **numeracy** and **continuous learning**. **Document use** and **computer use** were chosen at only one of the restaurants. Reading, writing and thinking were not chosen as essential skills at any of the restaurants.

The essential skills identified by the local Restaurant businesses are quite different from those identified by the NOC. While employers and employees interviewed at all three restaurants identified working with others as essential skills, the NOC does not. Numeracy is identified as essential by the NOC and by participants at two of the three restaurants, but the NOC does not identify continuous learning, which was identified by participants at two of the three restaurants. In addition, while the NOC identifies **thinking** as essential, this skill was not identified as essential for the workplace at any of the three restaurants.

Essential Skills	Restaurant	
	Local businesses (3)	NOC
Reading	0	
Writing	0	
Oral communication	1	*
Numeracy	2	*
Thinking	0	*
Document use	1	
Computer use	1	
Continuous learning	2	
Working with others	3	

Essential skills in Bakery, Deli, and Café businesses

Employers and employees at all three of the local Bakery, Deli, or Café businesses chose **thinking** as an essential skill, and those at two of the three chose **oral communication** and **numeracy**. **Document use**, **computer use**, and **working with others** were chosen at only one business each, and reading, writing, and continuous learning were not chosen.

The essential skills identified by the local Bakery, Deli, or Café businesses are similar to those identified by the NOC. All of the businesses and the NOC identify thinking as an essential skill, while two of the businesses and the NOC identify oral communication and one of the businesses and the NOC identify working with others as essential for this workplace. However, while the NOC identifies **continuous learning** as essential, none of the Bakery, Deli, or Café businesses identified it.

Essential Skills	Bakery / Deli / Café	
	Local businesses (3)	NOC
Reading	0	
Writing	0	
Oral communication	2	*
Numeracy	2	
Thinking	3	*
Document use	1	
Computer use	0	
Continuous learning	1	*
Working with others	1	*

Essential skills in a Food Store business

Both the employers and employees interviewed at the participating local Food Store business and the NOC identified **oral communication** and **thinking** as essential skills. However, while the Food Store participants also identified **numeracy** and **document use** as essential skills for their workplace, the NOC did not.

Note: As only one Food Store business participated in the project, comparisons among local food stores are not possible.

Essential Skills	Food Store	
	Local businesses (1)	NOC
Reading	0	
Writing	0	
Oral communication	1	*
Numeracy	1	
Thinking	1	*
Document use	1	
Computer use	0	
Continuous learning	0	
Working with others	0	

What does all this mean?

The essential skills most commonly identified by both the local businesses (Clothing and Retail, Bakery/Deli/Café, and Food Store) and the National Occupation Classifications (NOC) are **oral communication** and **thinking**.

The skills identified as essential by employers and employees at local Restaurant businesses differ from those identified by the other local businesses, and also differ somewhat from those identified by the NOC. The Restaurant business employers and employees identified **numeracy** and **working with others** as essential skills for their workplace, and did not identify oral communication and thinking.

Computer use is not identified as an essential skill by the NOC for any of the sectors we looked at. However, in contrast, employers and employees at all three of the participating Clothing and Retail businesses, and one business each in the Restaurant and the Bakery/Deli/Café groups, identified computer use as an essential skill. It is important to note that this may be a result of changes over time, since the data for the NOC skills profiles were collected as early as 1994, while the local business employers and employees were interviewed in 2009. Workplaces (including the prevalence of computers and their role in work) and job requirements have evolved during the intervening 15 years.

How training can help your business

Research shows that addressing essential skills (including reading, writing, using documents, numeracy, oral communication, and problem-solving) in the workforce benefits both employees and employers. Essential skills training:

- helps retain and promote employees
- encourages employee loyalty
- improves safety

- increases productivity
- reduces errors and waste.

Canadian businesses that have addressed the need for workplace learning say employees are:

- confident
- willing to participate in ongoing training and adapt to change
- have better team-building and problem-solving skills
- believe they are valued by their workplaces.

For more information about the findings in this report, or to find out more about what they mean for your business, please contact info@communitycouncil.ca.

SkillsPlus provides essential skills training for businesses in the Retail/Wholesale/Grocery and the Tourism/Hospitality sectors in the Victoria region. SkillsPlus is offered by the Victoria READ Society and the Community Social Planning Council of Greater Victoria, with funding through the Canada-British Columbia Labour Market Agreement.