

# Integrating Literacy Guidelines for Vocational and Workplace Trainers

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# NALA

**National Adult Literacy Agency**  
Áisíneacht Náisiúnta Litearthachta do Aosaigh

# Background

## What is literacy?

Literacy involves listening and speaking, reading, writing, numeracy and using everyday technology to communicate and handle information. It includes more than the technical skills of communication: it also has personal, social and economic dimensions.

Literacy work starts with the needs and goals of the individual. Literacy increases the opportunity for individuals and communities to reflect critically on experience, explore new possibilities and initiate change.

## What is integrating literacy?

Integrating literacy into vocational training and education means designing and delivering courses that help all participants to learn the core content of the course, by:

- eliminating unnecessary literacy barriers to participation and learning
- helping participants learn the essential language, literacy and numeracy for the course or job.

In 2009 NALA published a study of a vocational education and training centre called 'Literacy-friendly Further Education and Training'. It explores the potential for a whole organisation approach to integrating language and literacy in further education and training in Ireland. The main messages are available here: <http://bit.ly/I1guCV>

## Why integrate literacy into workplace or vocational training?

Integrating literacy

- makes your course more inclusive, by giving equal access and opportunities to people who may have literacy difficulties;
- increases the effectiveness of the course by overcoming literacy barriers to learning the core content;

- increases participants' motivation and ability to complete the course;
- increases participants' confidence and skill in literacy, by providing a meaningful purpose and context to use it; and
- increases confidence and motivation to continue in education and training.

Integrating literacy is about making your teaching and training more effective for everyone on the course.

### **Aims of integrating literacy**

Integrating literacy into vocational training has two aims. The main one is reduce unnecessary literacy barriers so that participants have a fair chance to learn the content of the course itself, and to show what they know and can do. The second one is to help raise confidence and skill in literacy.

### **Literacy awareness**

Learning and thinking about adult literacy issues is an important first step in developing a respectful and effective approach to integrating literacy into your training programme. It's useful to consider

- the causes of literacy difficulties experienced by adults and young people;
- the possible effects on the person, both of the literacy difficulties themselves and of the stigma created by prejudiced or ill-informed responses;
- the possible effects on the person from their experience of initial schooling, where their learning strengths may not have been identified or affirmed; and
- what literacy is: the knowledge and skills involved as well as the social and emotional dimensions.

## Where can I learn more about integrating literacy?

### 1. Literacy Integration Awareness Training is available from NALA.

This is a one day programme. It aims to give an overview of adult literacy issues, and to explore how vocational and workplace trainers can:

- reduce literacy barriers to access, participation and learning in the core skill or subject; and by doing so
- contribute to developing participants' skills and confidence in literacy.

Topics covered include:

- What is 'literacy'?
- Causes and effects of literacy difficulties
- How do literacy issues affect participants on vocational training courses?
- What does this mean for the trainer/facilitator?
- What is 'integrating' literacy and how do we know it works?
- Designing and delivering literacy-aware training courses: an introduction to practical approaches.

### 2. NUI Maynooth offer the Certificate Course in Integrating Literacy.

This is a 16-day course which is accredited at Level 7 in the National Framework of Qualifications.

The course content focuses on building literacy into teaching and training practice. It includes the following topics:

#### Context for literacy work:

- \* Literacy awareness: causes and effects of literacy difficulties
- \* Philosophies of adult learning
- \* Tutor - learner relationship
- \* How adults and young people learn

#### Practical approaches to integrating literacy

- \* integrated session planning and assessment
- \* reading, writing, spelling, numeracy
- \* using and designing integrated materials
- \* Multiple Intelligences
- \* Specific Learning Difficulties, including dyslexia
- \* Group work and teambuilding.

# Integrating Literacy Guidelines for Vocational and Workplace Trainers

The following guidelines are for vocational and workplace trainers who are delivering very short courses – from a few hours to a few days – and who therefore have limited time and scope for helping participants develop literacy skills. The emphasis here therefore is on reducing literacy barriers to participation on the course, and on providing successful learning experiences.

The 8 guidelines are:

1. Identify the key language, reading, writing and numeracy demands of your course
2. Identify which of the literacy activities are essential elements of your course
3. Use a variety of methods that don't rely solely on reading and writing
4. Identify participants' prior knowledge and experience
5. Integrate language support and development
6. Integrate support with reading
7. Integrate support with writing
8. Know where participants can get further information and support on further learning

## 1. Identify the key language, reading, writing and numeracy demands of your course

As a trainer focusing on a particular skill or subject, it can be easy to take for granted the range of literacy activities involved. The first step in integrating literacy support into your course, is to notice those and think about them.

**For each topic or skill that you teach, ask yourself:**

- What **reading** do you ask participants to do? Do you use handouts, Powerpoint slides? Do participants need to read from a flipchart or whiteboard?

- What **language – key words and concepts** - do you use on the course that might be new or unfamiliar to some participants?
- What **maths** concepts, knowledge or skills are involved?  
For example, are there charts, tables, or graphs in handouts or overheads or on flipchart? In discussing your topic, are there references to per centages or proportions or fractions? Are participants asked to measure, calculate, estimate?
- What **writing** if any will you ask participants to do?  
Once you realise what literacy is involved in the teaching and learning activities, you can make realistic plans about how to help participants with those, and/or you might decide to introduce some alternative methods.
- If your course aims to equip participants with knowledge and skills for a specific job, identify the specific language, reading, writing and maths associated with that. Plan to assist participants with those. This may involve communicating with workplace supervisors and with literacy experts to identify the core literacy skills involved in the job.

## 2. Identify which of the literacy activities are essential elements of your course

Some of the literacy you have identified in step 1 might be essential to the topic or skill or job that your course focuses on. Others might not be essential, and might be more about the kinds of teaching and learning activities used.

Being clear on this will help you to focus your support on the specific types of literacy participants need as part of the core topic or job.

### 3. Use a variety of methods that don't rely solely on reading and writing

The main suggestion here is to consider alternatives to text – to reading and writing. If your usual way of teaching a particular point on your course is by reading through a handout or Powerpoint presentation, perhaps you could try one or two other methods. Handouts and Powerpoint can be very effective. The point isn't necessarily to do without them – just to add other methods that don't depend on people being comfortable with reading.

We all learn differently, and usually each of us learns best when we try more than one way to learn something. **Use a variety of methods** to help people learn your course content. One way to plan this is to think 'VAK' – **V**isual, **A**uditory, and **K**inaesthetic.

- **Visual** methods and materials *include*
  - using colour-coding of notes in handouts and on whiteboard or flipchart
  - using mind-maps of key concepts/topics, using images more than words
  - showing DVDs to illustrate the point
  - creating graphics or cartoon-strips to illustrate points on flipchart or whiteboard, rather than words
  - using photographs, charts and maps and a range of visual aids to trigger discussion or illustrate learning points
  - asking participants to create their own images or collages to represent what they have learnt, using art or photography or computers
  
- **Auditory** methods and materials *include*
  - giving a talk on the topic
  - using music and song either in the background for some activities, or to illustrate a particular point
  - using rhyme or rap: for example, ask participants to work in pairs or threes to make their own short rhyme or rap summarising the key points of a topic

- **Kinaesthetic** methods include encouraging participants to illustrate the concept or topic by
  - making 3D models
  - using dance or mime or movement
  - making a group 'sculpture': participants pose together to form an image that represents the point they want to communicate

Remember: 'VAK' is just *one* way of remembering to use a **variety** of methods. Remember too to 'mix and match'. For example, if a group makes a group 'sculpture' to illustrate a point, that can be photographed and possibly used later as a visual reminder of that point.

Using a variety of methods doesn't mean that you have to present your topic in a way that you yourself are uncomfortable with. It means trying to **add just one or two new methods to your own 'toolkit'**.

#### 4. Identify participants' prior knowledge and experience

When introducing a topic, identify participants' prior knowledge and experience of it. Ask participants to share what they already know about it. This can be in:

- a brief whole-group discussion, or
- whole-group wordstorm, or
- small groupwork, where participants share their knowledge and create a 'knowledge map' on the topic. The knowledge maps from each group can combine to give a picture of the whole group's knowledge and experience of this topic.

This helps the participants – and you – focus on the topic in a way that builds on what they already know, and that respects and draws on their experience.



## 5. Integrate language support and development

### Teach the essential terminology and concepts

In steps 1 and 2 you identified the key terminology and concepts associated with your course. It is likely that some participants may not be familiar with these. Make a point of ensuring participants get to know the language they need for the course, job or vocational area.

- Explain to participants that it is important to spend some time getting to know the new words that they'll meet on this course. These are part and parcel of the subject or trade or area of knowledge.
- **Explain new terminology** when you introduce it for the first time. Check that participants understand it.
- When making a presentation or giving a talk on a topic, **display the key words** on whiteboard or overhead or flipchart sheets so that you can refer to them and explain them as they arise.
- Prepare a **glossary** of key words. Include the word, its meaning, and if possible an illustration or example to help make it clear. This can be a useful reference for participants both during and after the course.
- Give participants **varied opportunities to use the new terminology**, by encouraging focussed discussion in pairs or small groups as well as in the whole group. Encourage participants to explain key words and concepts to each other.
- Ask participants to prepare short presentations to the whole group, using the key words and demonstrating their understanding of the concepts. Doing this in pairs would give participants more opportunity to hear and use the new terminology and to check out its meaning.

- Team quizzes are useful and enjoyable ways to hear and use the new terminology and to get to understand the concepts.
- Individually, or in pairs or teams, ask participants to make an image or a cartoon or a 3D model or a story or a rhyme or a mind map to explain important new terms or concepts. Participants could also create their own dictionary or glossary of terms.
- Encourage and facilitate participants to ask questions. Sometimes, individuals can be shy about asking questions in a group, or saying that they don't understand something. It can be useful to set a short task after you have covered a particular topic: ask participants to talk about it in pairs or small groups with the aim of bringing at least one question back to the group. Remind them to include questions about any words or concepts they might want clarified.

### **Giving a talk**

There are some points to keep in mind when '**giving a talk**' to the group:

- Remember that many people find it difficult to follow a talk. This is especially the case for people who may have dyslexia or some language processing difficulties. It is helpful to provide a 'structure that helps participants settle in and to be able to listen usefully and comfortably to what you have to say.
- Introduce the topic in a 'holistic' way. That means starting with a very **brief summary of the whole picture**, followed by naming the specific points within it that you will be covering.
- Say roughly **how long** you will be speaking for. Knowing what to expect helps participants to settle in to active listening.
- Explain any new or key words as described above.

- Stop after each main point, to briefly summarise it and check for questions before moving on. It might be useful (depending on the length of your presentation) to ask participants to 'buzz' in two's or three's to summarise the point or ask for clarification before you move on.
- At the end, summarise as you did at the start: the 'whole picture' and the main learning points, and invite questions/discussion.

## 6. Integrate support with reading

As mentioned above, try to use methods that don't solely rely on reading handouts or Powerpoint. However, this doesn't mean avoiding reading activities altogether! Overheads and flipchart notes and handouts are useful aids and reminders for participants. They are also commonly used in education and training and it is useful for participants to learn how to use them effectively.

Here are a few suggestions for things to keep in mind when using reading activities on your course:

- Review your **overheads/Powerpoint** presentation to make them easier to read
  - Use very little text
  - Use images that will clearly illustrate the topic or will trigger an interest in it or questions about it
  - When using graphs or tables or maps, do not assume that participants will be able to read and understand them: explain them clearly when you get to that point
  - If relevant, use some DVD slides to provide variety and movement and an alternative 'voice' and look to reinforce key points and maintain interest
  - Keep it simple!

- When using the **flipchart or whiteboard**
  - Don't overcrowd the board or the page with words
  - Write just the main points and the key words on the chart or board
  - Use spidergrams & mind maps occasionally as alternatives to lists of words
  - Use picture-stories, stick-images/cartoons occasionally as alternatives to or alongside key words
  
- Review your **handouts** and re-design them if necessary so that they are easier to read.
  - Use a clear, easy-to-read font size (minimum point 12)
  - Use good spacing between lines and between paragraphs
  - Use headings and sub-headings to break up the text and guide the reader through the main points
  - Include pictures or graphics when and if they will help the reader understand the key points.
  - Take care to avoid graphics that might distract from or confuse key points
  - Use colour if possible to highlight or distinguish particular points
  - Include a clear definition of any terminology that might be new to participants
  
- When distributing a handout, **help participants to get ready to read** it. Many people can find it difficult to read or really follow a handout, especially when they're in a 'classroom' situation. Put participants at their ease, and give them a structure to make their way easily through the handout.
  - Introduce the handout 'holistically' by saying what its overall purpose or content is. Point out the main heading which usually indicates the main overall purpose and content of the handout.

- Ask participants to say what they already know about this topic, so that they can approach the reading with some active questions in mind.
- State the main parts of the overall content. Point out any sub-headings that may indicate those.
- Sometimes handouts that you haven't prepared yourself can have graphics that can confuse rather than clarify. Point out any of these and explain what they are.
- If there are charts or graphs remember these might be difficult for some people to read: explain what they are illustrating.
- Finally – and as always – explain any words that may be new or unfamiliar to participants.

## 7. Integrate support with writing

Many people who have few if any problems with reading, are anxious about writing – especially in a classroom situation. Here are some suggestions:

- **Provide alternatives to written activities where possible:**
  - participants can record information in different ways (such as tape recording or in graphic form), and
  - participants can demonstrate what they know in a variety of ways (such as verbal presentation, role play, simulation).

When asking participants to do writing activities:

- **Keep writing activities short.** For participants who aren't used to it, handwriting can be very stressful physically and mentally. We use a particular set of muscles when we handwrite, and if these are out of practice they can be very quickly strained. (Try writing for ten minutes or more with the hand you **don't usually** write with, to get a sense of this).

- **Provide templates** of any essential written tasks. These templates, or frameworks, are handouts where a lot of the text is already there and where participants need to insert key words or phrases.
- **Provide models** of correctly completed forms or reports or assignments.
- Whenever possible – when it doesn't involve individual assignments or assessments - **encourage collaborative** rather than individual **writing**. Ask participants to work in pairs or in small groups where everyone contributes to composing the content but one person acts as the 'scribe' or writer.
- If resources allow, encourage participants to choose whether to handwrite or word-process their written work.
- Make it easier for participants to **take notes** during the session by
  - Providing handouts summarising the key points of any talk or presentation, and a handouts summarising the key points from the session as a whole
  - Put key words and important points on the board or flipchart: don't overcrowd with unimportant words
  - Use simple diagrams and mind-maps to summarise points on the board
  - Encourage participants to decide which type of note-taking to use: e.g. mind-maps, graphic, or lists of main points.
- Explain to participants how important or unimportant **spelling and punctuation** are in any given written task. There may be times when perfect spelling is required, for example. But often all that's needed is for the written piece to be understandable. Perfect spelling and punctuation aren't always needed for that.
- If your role includes reading and responding to participants' written work, remember to:
  - Comment on the **content** of the assignment first and mainly, giving appropriate feedback on that.

- Only comment on aspects of the **presentation**, such as spelling, layout, punctuation, if they are necessary for the person to succeed on your course.

## **8. Know where participants can get further information and support on further learning**

You are not a literacy tutor or an educational guidance counsellor. Your main role is to deliver your course in a way that helps participants learn what it is your course offers. However, in providing a successful experience of learning, it's likely your course will have encouraged at least some participants to think positively about further learning opportunities. Here are some suggestions on what you can do to support participants who may wish to improve their literacy and/or engage in further education and training.

- Find out about the local Adult Literacy Services (run by the local Education and Training Board – formerly the VEC). At a minimum, have their contact details available in case any participants ask you for information and advice on developing their reading, writing or basic maths. You can get contact details on [www.nala.ie](http://www.nala.ie) You can then get more detailed information from your local ETB adult literacy service.
- Consider volunteering as an adult literacy tutor. ETB Adult Literacy Services locally run tutor training courses, usually in September each year. The course is usually 20 hours delivered one evening per week. Then if suitable you will be matched with a student who you will work with in the centre on a one-to-one for 2 hours a week. You will be making a valuable contribution to the community and to your student, as well as getting to know and learning from adult literacy students. This is probably the best way to increase your understanding of adult literacy issues and your ability to deliver your own course effectively and inclusively.
- Find out about where adults can get information and advice on other education and training opportunities. For example, learn about what's available from the Adult Education and Guidance Service and Education and Training Board.

See **Appendix 1** for information on ETB Adult Literacy Services and for contact details of Adult Education and Guidance Services. By having some contact details and basic information to hand, you will be able to give these to participants on your course who might want to consider progression options in education and training.

## **Whole-organisation approach to integrating literacy**

These guidelines provide some suggestions for individual workplace or vocational trainers.

Usually, these trainers provide courses in a particular workplace, company or network of companies, or in a particular education and training centre. The vocational trainers can make a great contribution to developing participants' confidence and skill in literacy, and their self-belief and motivation to take on new learning challenges.

However, there is of course a limit to what an individual trainer can do, in a short time and without support, to help participants deal with the overall literacy demands of the particular workplace or of the particular education and training centre. That is a broader challenge that requires a whole-organisation strategy and plan.

NALA advocates a whole-organisation approach to integrating literacy, and has published **guidelines** on this for:

- Businesses and other organisations
  - Right from the start: A guide to supporting staff and connecting with customers, NALA, 2009 <http://bit.ly/14dOAJo>
  - An Employers' Guide to Basic Skills at Work, NALA, 2006 <http://bit.ly/1hZdqYB>
- Further education and training centres
  - 'Integrating Literacy: Guidelines for further education and training centres', NALA, 2013 <http://bit.ly/18qmT5b>

NALA also provides a consultancy and on-site support service to organisations who wish to develop inclusive literacy policies and procedures.



## **For further information please contact**

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## Appendix 1 Sources of information and advice on adult literacy services and on further education and training options for adults

### ETB Adult Literacy Services

There are 16 Education and Training Boards (formerly 33 VECs) in Ireland. Countrywide, they provide over 126 adult literacy centres at local level. These are managed by Adult Literacy Organisers (ALOs). Each adult literacy centre offers both individual and group tuition. ETBs also run workplace literacy and family literacy programmes.

Contact details for local adult literacy centres can be found here: <http://www.nala.ie/courses>

### Adult Educational Guidance Initiative

The Adult Educational Guidance Initiative consists of 38 guidance projects throughout the country with the aim of providing a quality adult educational guidance service to participants in VTOS, literacy and other adult and community education programmes nationwide.

For further information on the Adult Educational Guidance Initiative, contact:

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