

ma yvar van swe rsm  
we rsm ayva rya nsv  
ya nsw ersm ayv ary

## *Answers May Vary* Guidebook

Incorporating Literacy and Other Essential Skills into Daily Life  
for Adults with Development Disabilities

Belle Auld

**Answers May Vary Guidebook:**

Incorporating Literacy and Other Essential Skills into Daily Life for  
Adults with Developmental Disabilities

Belle Auld

©2015 Bow Valley College

These resources may be reprinted for educational non-commercial purposes  
without additional copyright permission. Full attribution to Bow Valley College must  
be maintained. Permission to reproduce for commercial purposes must be obtained in  
writing from Bow Valley College.

Bow Valley College  
345 6th Avenue SE  
Calgary AB T2G 4V1  
Attn: Director, Learning Resource Services

email: [copyright@bowvalleycollege.ca](mailto:copyright@bowvalleycollege.ca)



FUNDING SUPPORT PROVIDED  
BY ALBERTA INNOVATION AND  
ADVANCED EDUCATION

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>START HERE</b> .....	<b>1</b>
The burning questions: .....	1
Answers: .....	1
<b>1. INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>2</b>
First of all, what are essential skills? .....	2
How to use this guidebook .....	3
<b>2. STRATEGIES TO BUILD LITERACY AND ESSENTIAL SKILLS INTO DAILY LIFE</b> .....	<b>5</b>
Strategy 1 RAP – Read, Ask yourself what it means, Put it in your own words .....	5
Strategy 2 Chunking – Small bits at a time .....	6
Strategy 3 Use as many senses and learning styles as possible .....	8
Strategy 4 Language Experience Approach (LEA) – Use the person’s own writing .....	13
Strategy 5 Make it fun and of interest to the person .....	16
Strategy 6 Assisted Reading (also known as Echo Reading) .....	20
Strategy 7 KWL (what I Know, what I Want to know, what I Learned) and other predicting activities .....	21
Strategy 8 Phonics .....	23
<b>3. EFFECTIVE PRACTICES TO BUILD LITERACY AND ESSENTIAL SKILLS INTO DAILY LIFE</b> .....	<b>24</b>
EP 1 Be person-centred .....	25
EP 2 Be competency-based or strength-based .....	25
EP 3 Use materials from daily life .....	26
EP 4 Patience .....	27
EP 5 Respect .....	28
EP 6 Positive encouragement/attitude .....	29
<b>4. RESOURCES TO BUILD LITERACY AND ESSENTIAL SKILLS INTO DAILY LIFE</b> .....	<b>30</b>
Everyday Life Resources .....	30
Books .....	38
Online Resources .....	39
Suggestions of supplies to take with you .....	40
<b>5. MORE ABOUT US AND RESEARCH REGARDING LITERACY AND ADULTS WITH DISABILITIES</b> .....	<b>41</b>

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to Calgary Learns for funding that made this Guidebook possible.

Thanks to the teachers and tutors at Bow Valley College who took part in this project:

Richard Arndt

Sahar Husain

Carol McCullough

Darmody Mumford

Terry Price

Jennefer Rousseau

Debbie Scott

Mary Smith

And all the tutors in the Speech-Assisted Reading and Writing (SARAW) program who took part.

Thanks also to Jayna Layden and Candace Witkowskyj for their help with Answers May Vary.

Design and illustrations by Rim Schewczyk

# START HERE

## The burning questions:

- How do I help an adult with a developmental disability improve their reading, writing, and other essential skills?
- How do I incorporate skills-building activities into their daily life?
- What resources and strategies are available to help me?

### Answers:

Don't lose hope, but first we have to say sorry we don't have all the answers. Answers May Vary, a survey of tutors and teachers working with adults with disabilities, shows that there is no single answer. Not only do answers vary, but according to adult literacy experts, they should vary. "The primary barrier to learning: inflexible, one-size-fits-all curricula that raise unintentional barriers. Learners with disabilities are the most vulnerable to such barriers." (TEAL, 2010, p. 1).

"The primary barrier to learning: inflexible, one-size-fits-all curricula that raise unintentional barriers. Learners with disabilities are the most vulnerable to such barriers."

The good news? We interviewed tutors working with adults with developmental disabilities in the Speech-Assisted Reading and Writing (SARAW) program at Bow Valley College (BVC) and teachers who have taught adults with disabilities. They identified common strategies and resources that they find work well with these learners. If you don't want to read further, some quick answers from the Answers May Vary research are:

- Use daily life materials.
- Use learners' experiences and their own writing.
- Choose activities that are fun and are of interest to them.
- Provide positive encouragement and a supportive environment.
- Work from learner goals – be learner centred.
- Use different learning styles and senses.

Also, remember you are working with an adult and respect his or her maturity. Choose activities that the average adult would be proud to talk about doing. Teacher Darmody Mumford explains the importance of having age appropriate content: “So it may have ... to have a lower reading level, but to ensure that we [aren’t] crossing the line with very childish material.” Having said that, some adult learners prefer to relate to more child-based materials. If this is the case with the person you are working with, just remember to be respectful.

If you want to learn more about the strategies that literacy tutors – and you – can use to incorporate these ideas into the daily lives of adults with disabilities, keep reading.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### First of all, what are essential skills?

‘Essential skills’ is a popular term right now used to describe the skills a person needs to have in order to function well in today’s society. There are nine essential skills according to Employment and Social Development Canada (2014):

1. Reading
2. Writing
3. Numeracy
4. Document use
5. Digital literacy
6. Thinking
7. Oral communication
8. Working with others
9. Continuous learning

(Reading, writing, numeracy, and sometimes document use are commonly known as literacy.)

In this guidebook we focus mostly on activities, strategies, and resources that can help a person improve in seven of the nine essentials skills: reading, writing, document use, numeracy, digital literacy, thinking, and continuous learning skills.

## How to use this guidebook

If you are working with a person with a developmental disability,<sup>1</sup> you may have already realized that there are not many resources or programs that help adults with disabilities to improve their literacy and essential skills. This is unfortunate, as adults with disabilities tend to have lower literacy skills than the general population. You can read more about some of the reasons any adult may have low literacy skills (whether they have a disability or not) and some of the reasons why there are so few literacy programs and resources for adults with disabilities in the Answers May Vary research report. You can download the report for free from: <https://centreforfoundationallearning.wordpress.com/projects-in-progress/answers-may-vary/>

Here again the answers also vary. In *Meeting Challenges: A literacy project for adults with developmental disabilities*, Maureen Sanders says, “We believed that there was no set curriculum, no set of teaching techniques or strategies that would work for all learners” (1991, p. 19). We do know that sometimes the best ‘lessons’ are out in the real world, not in a classroom. And our research has told us that some of the most effective literacy and essential skills-building activities and strategies can be incorporated into daily life (e.g., at a restaurant, on the train, at the zoo, etc.). Learning through experience works! That’s what this guidebook is all about.

“We believed that there was no set curriculum, no set of teaching techniques or strategies that would work for all learners.”

<sup>1</sup> In this guidebook we are referring to mostly intellectual disabilities. We are not including learning disabilities (where a person has average or above average IQ), though many of the strategies work regardless of diagnosis.

There is a section on Strategies, a section on Effective Practices, and a section on Resources. When we talk about a strategy we mean a specific plan or method you can try with your learner. Effective practices are broader and refer to general ways of being with that person that will help them in his or her learning journey. However, practices, strategies, and resources are often interconnected – we can't describe a strategy like RAP (described on page 5) without covering some associated resources or overlapping with an effective practice like being person-centred (described on page 25). So read the guidebook in order or not. Take whatever is useful to you in your situation with the person you are working with. Make it work for both of you, and have fun!

This guidebook will be most effective if you are working with adults reading between a grade 2 to grade 7 level. An example of grade 2 reading and writing skills is that the person can read a simple sentence and understand it well enough to be able to write an answer to a simple question about that sentence.

The following table lists the strategies offered and identifies the essential skills to which they can be applied. It is provided to guide you in finding activities to use with your learner in the areas where they want to improve.

ESSENTIAL SKILLS							
	Reading	Writing	Numeracy*	Document Use	Digital Literacy*	Thinking	Continuous Learning
1. RAP	✓			✓		✓	✓
2. Chunking	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓
3. Different senses/learning styles	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
4. Language Experience Approach	✓	✓				✓	✓
5. Fun and of interest	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6 Assisted reading	✓			✓		✓	✓
7. KWL and predicting	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓
8. Phonics	✓	✓				✓	✓

\* Numeracy and Digital Literacy can be practiced within many of the strategies – it just depends on what you are working on (i.e., whether it involves numbers and/or digital devices).

Many of the Effective Practices also contain ideas for practising these essential skills, particularly EP3 Use materials from daily life.



## 2. STRATEGIES TO BUILD LITERACY AND ESSENTIAL SKILLS INTO DAILY LIFE

### Strategy 1

#### RAP – Read, Ask yourself what it means, Put it in your own words

I learned this strategy working as a tutor with BVC students who had learning disabilities. RAP – Read, Ask yourself what it means, Put it in your own words – helps with comprehension. It slows people down and makes them think about what they are reading. If they can paraphrase – put it in their own words – they understand it. If not, then talk about what is being read. Don't just ask, "Do you understand?" Have the person repeat what he is reading as many times as he likes, without getting bored or frustrated.

You can apply this strategy with a paragraph, a couple of sentences, or even a single sentence. It is very similar to summarizing, but taken a step at a time to ensure comprehension.

Encourage the person to read out loud and talk with her about what she is reading. When a person talks about what she is reading, it helps her remember and understand.

A co-worker once talked about a teacher he had at university – this professor would ask the students to teach to each other. In order to do that, he found that he had to understand the material well enough to be able to put it in his own words. One of the SARAW tutors, who used to teach people with disabilities

in a classroom setting, talked about making one of the learners "teacher of the day" for part of the class. These are good examples of how "put it in your own words" practises and demonstrates comprehension.

In his book *How the Brain Learns*, David Sousa reports that we remember as much as 90% of information we teach others and 75% of what we practise by doing. We remember only 10% of what we read and only 5% of what we hear (2001, p. 95).

You can use RAP anywhere there is printed material: a display board at the zoo, a text on a cell phone or an email on the computer, the schedule at a transit station, a notice at the gym, price cards or product labels at the grocery store, a recipe in a cookbook or magazine – look for opportunities everywhere. You can even help someone learn safety words and sign recognition using RAP.

In *Impact of the Cognitive Sciences on Teaching*, author and teacher Bob Aitken says, "Our job as teachers is to help students experience things so they can construct meaning from them" (2015, p. 9).

RAP works well with the next strategy.

## Strategy 2

### Chunking – Small bits at a time

I tutored a man who had a brain injury. He could still read and write, but with difficulty as he couldn't concentrate or remember enough. It was more like work and he had lost the joy in reading. Over the period of about a year, we got together and read books – we called it an informal book club. I suggested several strategies, and of these, he told his speech language therapist that 'chunking' had made the biggest difference.

Large amounts of text can be overwhelming for anyone, but particularly for someone who does not read well. Chunking breaks things down into smaller pieces. You can chunk any written material into a page, a paragraph, a sentence, or even part of a sentence (a part that stands on its own). The idea is that the person only has to focus on a small bit of information at a time. You cover the rest of the text with another book, a piece of paper, or your hand (especially if you are out in the community) so that the person only sees the part she is reading. You can stop her and ask what it meant (use the RAP strategy to ensure comprehension), then move on to the next chunk. Talk about it as you go and put the chunks together – make it interesting and fun.

It turns out that our brains chunk information naturally. David Sousa writes, "Chunking is when the brain perceives several pieces of information as a single item" (p. 129) and "Chunking is an effective way of enlarging working memory's capacity and for helping the learner make associations that establish meaning" (p. 112).

BVC teachers who teach or tutor adults with disabilities spoke of how they use chunking. Jennefer Rousseau described it as "teaching things a lot more slowly and not teaching more than one concept – maybe two concepts in a class but not teaching more than two for sure in one class." Debbie Scott said that "using a different coloured pen it helps chunk the information.... It's quite a technical term, 'chunk' your information, but ... that's part of organization."

Candace Witkowskyj gave a wonderful example of using chunking. She would teach people to

*make a 'window' with their hands so only a little square of whatever they see is visible.... Essentially your hands section off your vision in a rectangle/ square shape and it helps to block out other distractions (chunking things out). I used to do this with adults with disabilities for reading ... but it came from when I used to work with kids who had autism spectrum disorder. They would get too distracted and overwhelmed by all the stimuli in their environment. I would have them make that shape with their hands and say, "This is your TV. You get to choose what you watch. So if something's bothering you, you can turn it off." By moving their hands they could 'turn off' what was overwhelming and focus on what was enjoyable for them. It was also a good indicator for us: if they were doing that, we knew they were feeling agitated.*

Colourful flyers can work well for practising chunking. The flyer may seem confusing until you block out all the surrounding text and graphics so you see just the one item and can focus on it. Successfully doing this can also be good for a person's self-esteem – something he thought was too hard for him to focus on becomes manageable.

Chunking is primarily a reading skills activity, but it is a strategy that can be used in any situation or applied to almost any daily task. For example, you can turn figuring out the steps involved in making coffee into a literacy activity by writing down the individual steps as chunks (either you or your learner), preferably on index cards or individual pieces of paper so that putting them in order also becomes part of the activity.

Text on a smart phone is already chunked – you can only see a bit on the screen. You can make the text larger so that it is easier to read (and this makes even less of the text visible at one time).

Almost anything in life can become a learning moment.

## Strategy 3

### Use as many senses and learning styles as possible

This was one of the recurring themes that BVC teachers identified as an effective strategy. Teaching the same skill in different ways, including addressing the different learning styles (kinesthetic, visual, auditory) is recommended in effective teaching principles.

Teacher Sahar Husain offered an example of success using multiple senses while helping students learn to read. "Matching exercises: we would have a printout and we would tell them to cut and paste in the right order. ... Physically cut and paste with the same activity, connecting what they've done, later." You can match pictures to words. She added that she would later remove the picture as the students began to recognize the word.

Mary Smith, a teacher who has worked with children and adults with disabilities, commented that reading while having an image to look at "really helped [the students] to make connections."

Teacher Terry Price says that he is always "thinking about people's learning styles. Not just relying on people reading stuff but working with their hands as well." He also talks about the value in getting people "working with each other, bouncing ideas off of their neighbor.

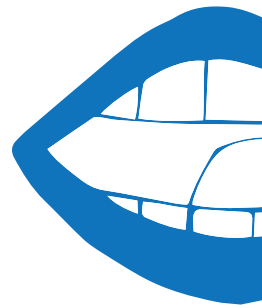
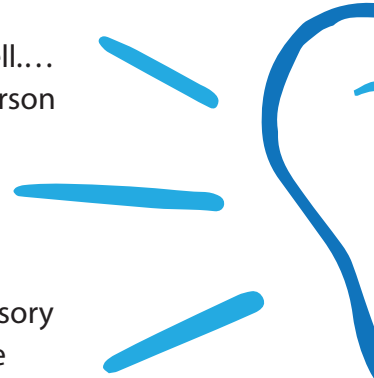
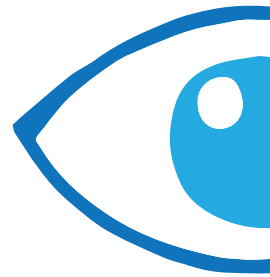
They start to build confidence as well... Then they start realizing that the person next to them perhaps has the same questions and they can help each other."

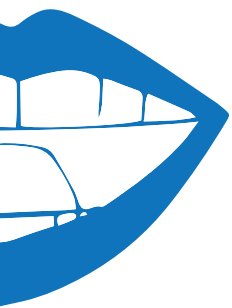
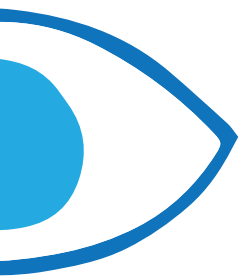
Bob Aitken writes, "Use as many sensory faculties as possible when you come across something you want to learn. Read it. Write it down. Say it out loud. Act it out. Use as many of your senses as possible and this will help put it into long term memory" (2015, p. 10).

Mary also offered some advice: "If you are the tutor ... and you're struggling, [you need to be able] to say 'I need to get a different strategy because I don't think this is working right now so let's try something else.' ... It's not always what I think is appropriate but it's what they [the students] think is appropriate and giving [them] some voice that way."

I have many examples and tips of how to include different senses and learning styles:

- I often ask my students (especially those who have had a brain injury) to 'write' a word on their arm or leg using their finger.



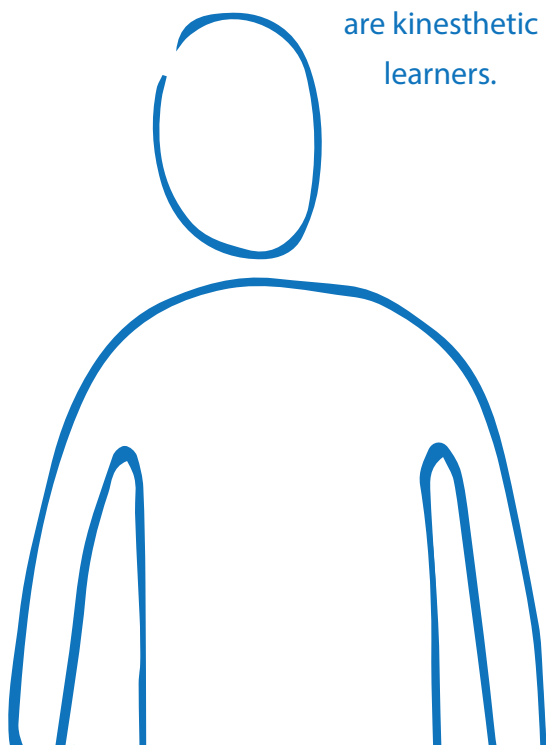


That way they can ‘feel’ the word. Then I write the word out in large print and ask them to trace the word with their finger or a pen. You can do this with some printed material you encounter in daily life (e.g., store signs in a mall) or printing in dirt, sand, or water with your finger.

- Many teachers and tutors use different colours to emphasize different parts of something – an essay, a paragraph, a sentence (actions words vs. things), a person’s address, etc. Jennefer said, “We made kind of a worksheet on how to write a four paragraph essay and it [is] colour-coded.... We would make the intro a different colour, and the conclusion and the thesis and support.” It doesn’t have to be as high-level as an essay. You can use colours to highlight the differences in almost anything. If a person finds colours too childlike, use index cards.
- Yellow overlays usually help someone see printing clearer, but try different colours and let the student tell you what works best. I just buy the coloured dividers sold in stationery stores. You can keep one in your bag and use it with a menu in a restaurant.
- Include the visual. Teacher Carol McCullough says, “I like language experience [approach] so much, and incorporating viewing with language experience. Incorporating viewing, looking at a video – looking at objects even – and talking about them combined with language experience, makes it multisensory.”
- Use all the senses. Deborah Morgan, in her book *Writing Out Loud* (1997), suggests many different fun writing activities that use a multisensory approach. For example, for sight she suggests going on a ‘colour walk’ where a person picks a colour and then walks around trying to find all the things that colour. Either you or the learner can write down those things.

For taste, be silly – ask what flavour your dog would be. You can have your learner use her sense of touch by asking her to close her eyes and feel something you put in front of her. Then ask her to describe it while you copy her words. Look at the words after and have her read them. Use your imagination and have fun with all the senses.

- Focus on kinesthetic/hands-on activities. I attended a conference years ago and learned that many teachers are auditory and visual learners, while most people who have problems reading and writing are kinesthetic learners.



Anything you can do to include movement or action usually helps a person learn.

- o For example, when I am tutoring grammar I will ask a learner to act out a sentence. We stand up, I give him a book, and I ask him to throw it to me. He is the noun and the subject; throwing is the action (verb). Then we write out the sentence: "I throw the book to Belle."
- o Another suggestion from Deborah Morgan's book is to have a person choose a key and then ask her what door that key opens. The fact that it is an actual physical key helps make it more real



and more hands on. Tell her it can be the key to an actual door or lock, or something like the key to someone's heart. Copy down what she says and then read it with her.

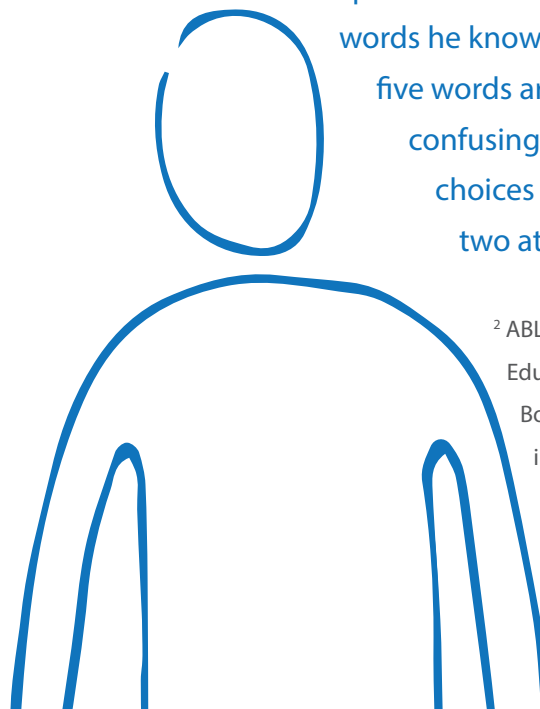
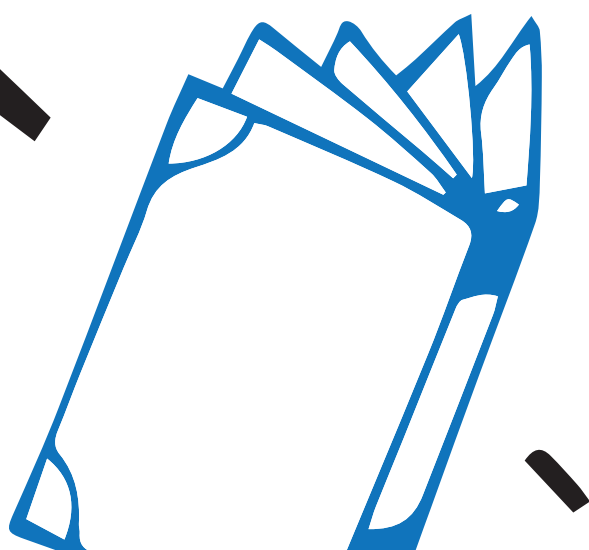
- o Terry likes to "use lots of manipulatives and play little games. So really that's just more thinking about people's learning styles, not just relying on people reading stuff, but working with their hands as well." Matching words to pictures is another hands-on activity. Students in the ABL<sup>2</sup> Math class each have an individual white board to write their answers on and hold them up to show the class.

- o I learned the fly swatter activity from a tutor with an English Language Learning (ELL) class. Give the person something like a fly swatter (it can be a rolled up piece of paper) and put out several index cards with words you have encountered that day written on them. For example, from an outgoing to the Zoo you might have words such as Sunnyside (C-train station name), Afrika (exhibit title), elephant, (type of animal), exit (sign), and hamburger (concession item). You call out the word and he has to hit the word. Remember to focus on your learner's

competencies and include

words he knows. If five words are too confusing, give fewer choices – put out two at a time.

<sup>2</sup> ABL<sup>2</sup> is Adult Basic Literacy Education, and identifies Bow Valley College's inclusive adult literacy classes.



- o Point to one word on a menu at a restaurant or a sign at the zoo, for example, and ask the person what it says. If you can, write the word out and then speak each letter aloud. You can also ask the person to close her eyes and try to picture the word and the letters in her mind; then show her the word again. When you are somewhere you can write the word down, have her spell it. You can use one index card or piece of paper for each letter. Or use alphabet cards and put out all the letters and have her pick the letters that spell the word.

Plate





## Strategy 4

### Language Experience Approach (LEA) – Use the person’s own writing

This strategy uses the learner’s writing instead of a work written by someone else. It is one of the most successful and commonly used strategies/effective practices in most adult literacy programs. It is usually called Language Experience Approach (LEA) or Language Experience Story. Although LEA is not strictly a practice related to everyday life, it is so successful that it deserves to be mentioned.

Carol, who also taught in the K-12 school system, spoke of using this practice:

*What was so popular was they would dictate a story to me and we would create a little book – a reader – and they would illustrate it and we would get it bound. Adults like that too. When we have our book of stories [in the ABLE Reading & Writing class] and I hand them out in class, people right away are flipping through; they are interested in what other people have written. And for the adult version, being able to put it on the computer and pull from clip art is more grown up than drawing illustrations.*

LEA is exactly what it says it is - it is a person’s own story that uses a person’s own language and own experiences. Learners can write independently, or have tutors help them. LEA honours learners’ own life experiences and their own words. It can be a safe way for them to write. It is easier and more interesting to write about something you know. It is also easier and more interesting to read something you’ve written. Finally, it is easy for tutors to do.

Have your learner tell you about something that happened to her. It could be what she had for lunch, what she did on her birthday, a trip she has taken, a story she has been told about her birth – anything she wants to talk about. You can also use photos taken by the person as a starting place and write something about those photos. Write down or type exactly what she says without editing words – this is called scribing. Then read her words back to her, placing your finger on each word as you read. Have her read with you, either silently or out loud. Encourage her to read her own words. You can focus on one sentence at a time or more, depending on how well she reads.

Then have her copy her own words. Not only is it easier to read her own words, but copying them encourages her to learn to recognize and spell the words she speaks.

There are many different ways you can use LEA with your learner, from pre-writing (talking about what he wants to write), to writing (with your assistance if needed by you writing first and then asking him to copy the words again), to reading his own writing. You can have him read his own writing and copy only the words he knows. This can become his word bank. If each word is on an index card, he can use these to put together other stories. You can also keep all the words in a book, which becomes his personal dictionary.

I also like to add in game-type activities for a person's own writing. For example, once your learner knows her own story pretty well, delete some of the words and see if she can remember them and how to spell them. You can print the story out with a couple of blanks and have index cards or pieces of paper with the missing words written on them, and then have your learner to choose which word goes where. Or you can take a sentence and

put each word on an index card and have her organize the sentence. If your learner wants to learn the difference between past, future, and present tense, you can use her own story and change all the verbs. Use cues like yesterday, tomorrow, and today.

Encourage your learner to write for 10 minutes a day. If he doesn't like writing, don't force him to do this himself. Offer to scribe for him.

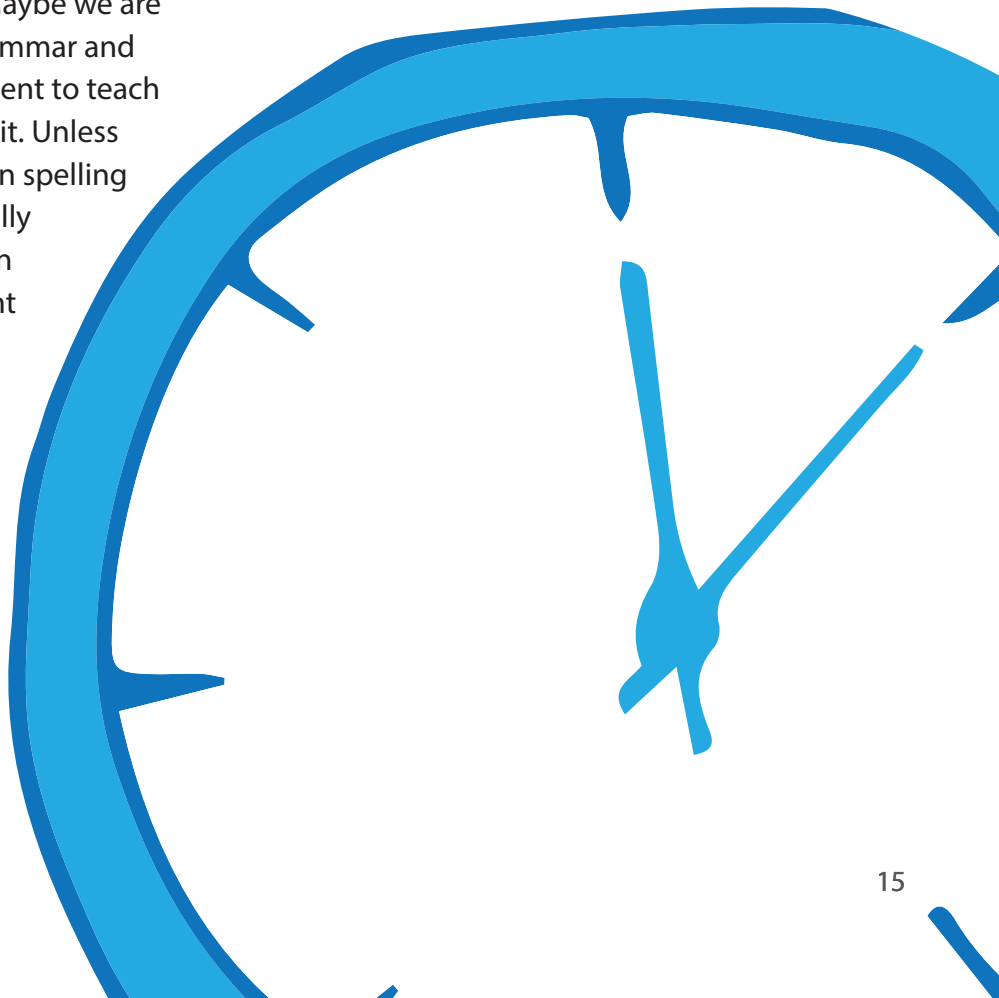
I like to scribe (write the words the person speaks) for a person. This shows her that if she can talk, she can write. If she doesn't speak correctly grammatically, don't worry about it and don't correct her – simply copy down exactly what she say. If she is interested in speaking more correctly, you can point out how she can change this; for example, prompt what words to add (e.g., "I go to the store" instead of "I go store").

A talking program or app on smart devices can read back what has been written. Many computers and laptops have a setting that will read the text on the screen out loud.

Mary says, "Sometimes even with writing we'd have a scribe, so they could get their stories out and then we'd have them look at it and say, 'Is this what you wanted to say?'" This is one of my favourite questions when a student and I are reviewing what he has written. I feel it is a more valuable consideration than whether the spelling and grammar are correct.

Many – maybe even most – tutors are uncomfortable teaching writing. Perhaps we've been told we didn't know how to write a proper essay or paragraph or short story or whatever. Maybe we are not sure about proper grammar and therefore don't feel confident to teach it. My suggestion – forget it. Unless someone wants to work on spelling and grammar, I don't usually focus on it. I try to focus on encouraging an enjoyment of writing.

A talking program or app on smart devices can read back what has been written. Many computers and laptops have a setting that will read the text on the screen out loud.



## Strategy 5

### Make it fun and of interest to the person

A student in the ABLE Math for Everyday class told me one day that they never do work in the class, they just play games. I loved this. I knew they were math games, and despite 'just playing games' some of these students learned how to do division for the first time in their lives.

As their teacher Terry says, "Sometimes they don't realize that they're learning or that they're developing, but they are actually ... learning how to problem solve. They don't realize that they're doing it, but you just can see the difference from week to week."

Making learning fun is a wonderful strategy. So is connecting what you are teaching to your learner's life – making it something that is relevant. When something is relevant to a person, it is generally more interesting as well. In SARAW we find that learners are much more interested in reading and writing about something if it somehow relates to their own lives.

David Sousa reports that brain research shows "information is most likely to get stored [in long term memory] if it makes sense and has meaning ... that is *relevant* to the learner" as proven by the evidence that "brain scans have shown that when

new learning is readily comprehensible (sense) and can be connected to past experiences (meaning), there is substantially more cerebral activity followed by dramatically improved retention" (2001, pp. 46-48).

It just makes sense. We are all more interested in reading, writing, and thinking about things that interest us and/or are relevant to our lives. A lesson in reading or math doesn't have to feel like being in a classroom. Learning can happen anywhere, anytime. And it can be fun. Some people think that if it's fun, it can't be real learning. We need to reject traditional views about 'what counts' as learning, and instead, focus on 'what makes sense'.

Mary told of a strategy she used in teaching reading to 15-19 year old students:

*We would have different sections of the newspaper. Everybody would have their own in front of them, so ... it was pointing out what was familiar to you. With the reading it was about identifying with the picture ... to make connections so they could have a visual image and then they'd go,*

*'Oh, it's hockey!' and a lot of the boys were really excited about that and then that could help them make a connection. If they had some input into what we were reading and it was their interest areas, that made a huge difference.*

Tutor Richard Arndt says, "I always try to relate things back to an experience that they have had. I always try to ... make it mean something to them."

Bob Aitken writes, "Anything that captures learners' attention and gets their minds engaged, has the potential to produce learning" (2015, p. 7).

Debbie says, "We need to ... identify what their needs are and approach them from that level ... [and] whenever possible, draw on their life experiences to relate to what's going on."

Mary says, "The main thing is to connect with the students where they're at with their interest and their level, because once we connect with that, then they often open up and just get enthusiastic about it."

Maureen Sanders described a learner who was very worried about her memory problems. The tutor working with this woman changed the focus of the tutorials to reading for enjoyment and the learner slowly adopted the same attitude. "She became less gravely serious about the whole business and began to take a more light-hearted approach towards her classes." By the end of the course, her reading comprehension score had "increase[d] several grade levels" (1991, p. 38).

It is astounding how learning can be influenced by adding a little fun. It operates as an effective practice, but it can also be used as a strategy when applied in combination with other strategies or activities. You can probably tell by now that I try to build fun into most things I do.

Making learning fun can encourage curiosity. Curiosity is valuable. If the person is curious about something, he is more likely to be engaged in learning about it. Darmody talked about having students choose their own research topic "and then that motivation helped them because they wanted to read about the material."

Recent brain research has shown that when a person's "curiosity [is] piqued, the parts of [the brain] that regulate pleasure and reward [light] up" (Singh, 2014, para. 12). It is a double reward – fun encourages curiosity which leads to pleasure, and we already know that people learn better when they feel good.

In order to make learning fun for your learner, you need to have fun too. Use your imagination. Be mindful, however, to choose activities that the average adult would be proud to talk about doing, so that respect for the learner is maintained.

To get you started, here are some ideas.

- In a restaurant, ask the person to choose a food that begins with 'A'. If she doesn't like that food, have her find an item on the menu that has the letter 'A' in it. The next day she might eat 'B' foods, and so on. If she is unwilling to try new things, have her pick foods for you.
- When you are reading a sign or a menu item (or anything) read it

out loud and throw in something totally bizarre every once in a while. For example, "Our king penguins know how to travel to the moon and back." See if your learner can catch what isn't true. This encourages active listening and thinking.

- Read your fortune from a fortune cookie, and then write your own.
- Use the person's own photos. If he doesn't have any, ask him to take some and consider labeling them. Create a book with the photos. He can write as much or as little as he wants to describe the pictures. If he doesn't want to use photos, have him choose pictures from a newspaper or magazine and put them together to tell a story. You can scribe for him if he wants you to.
- Play with words – turn it into a fun game. For example you can take the person's writing and delete a word.

See if she can remember the missing word and how to spell it. If you delete three words, leave blanks where the words were. You can also print out those three words and have her choose which one goes where. Or provide different synonyms (e.g., cold, wet, rainy) and ask her what she likes best or what sounds best (e.g., it was a *rainy day*).

As part of 'making it fun' I want to mention that it is important to not aim for perfection. In volunteer adult literacy programs, we often point out that if a student and tutor get together once a week for two hours, that only adds up to about 100 hours in a year. There is no time for perfection. We also often talk about the 85% rule – if someone gets something right about 85% of the time, it is time to move on to something new.

This is also a good time to talk about attention span. We've often heard that a person's attention span is about 15 minutes. But this is very individual. You may need to vary activities more or less often than this to keep a person interested, engaged, and enjoying what he is doing.

"One day, when teaching two learners how to write a paragraph, I asked them what they wanted to write about. When they couldn't come up with a topic, I suggested they could write about their support worker. I knew they had a good relationship with her that included having fun together. So the three of them – the two learners and support worker – wrote a paragraph about her; I scribed. There was lots of laughter, and I'm betting they remember at least part of the process."

**Belle Auld**

## Strategy 6

### Assisted Reading (also known as Echo Reading)

This is also a well-known literacy strategy that can be used in daily life. Pick a sentence or group of words you encounter in your everyday life – something easy and of interest to the person you are working with or something she is already familiar with (particularly if there are pictures). Read each word as you point to the word. Encourage the person to read along with you. Read slowly but evenly, not stopping at difficult words but reading them for her. Go over the sentence again several times, encouraging her to read along as before. As the person gets better at speaking the words, have your voice fade out and supply the difficult words only when necessary. She may begin to either decode the words using phonics – matching the letters to the sounds in small words – or begin to recognize and memorize the words as she speaks them. These are called sight words – words that a person can recognize right away without having to sound them out. This is particularly useful for some words that can't be sounded out easily (e.g., laugh). If the text is too hard for the person, stop before she becomes frustrated or feels she is a failure.

You can also do assisted reading using any software or app that reads text out loud. Have the person follow along as the program reads the words. This is especially valuable to use with any of his own writing. He will be more interested in reading his own words, and usually find it easier. Set the program to read at an appropriate speed for your learner. The speed option is usually found under settings, or you can search online for how to change the speed.

Assisted reading and language experience approach were found to be especially successful in pilot literacy project for adults with developmental disabilities by the Edmonton Prospects Literacy Association.



## Strategy 7

### KWL (what I Know, what I Want to know, what I Learned) and other predicting activities

KWL is a strategy that teachers, adult literacy practitioners, and tutors use. If you want to write this out on a piece of paper, you can make three columns. But you don't have to be that formal.

to know and how/where you think you might find that information. Activities such as this encourage thinking and continuous learning skills, as well as self-monitoring.

What I Know	What I Want to Know	What I Learned

You can incorporate this into a discussion about whatever you encounter in daily life – it doesn't even need to be a printed resource. For example, at the zoo you can ask, "What do you know about elephants?" Then, "What do you want to know about elephants?" and "Where can we go to find out more?" Provide any information you have that the person wants to know. Find a nearby information post, or maybe you are able to do an internet search about elephants on your smart phone. Perhaps later you can make a trip to the library to get a book about elephants.

Model how you learn something you want to know more about with a subject that your learner is interested in. You can talk out loud about the things you want

If you are going to read a book, before you even begin you can ask, "What do you think this book is about?" You can both look at the cover and the title and come up with ideas. After reading a section, stop and ask, "What do you think will happen next?" You can relate it to the person's life and any background knowledge she may have: "Have you ever \_\_\_\_\_? Has \_\_\_\_\_ ever happened to you?" Perhaps share something about your life that is relevant to what the book is about (tutoring is firstly a relationship). This is also known as Directed Reading and Thinking Activity and it helps increase reading comprehension. You can include all the senses: "What does \_\_\_\_\_ look like/smell like/feel like/taste like?"



# W

- 1: Who?
- 2: What?
- 3: Where?
- 4: When?
- 5: Why?

You can include the FIVE Ws:

Who is the story about?

What is the story about?

Where is this happening?

When does it happen?

Why did it happen?

Throw in "How?" if it fits. Remember, if it's fun a person will learn better than if she feels it is a test. Keep in mind that not every detail needs to be analyzed. Consider focusing on the details needed to have a general understanding of what is being read.

## Strategy 8

### Phonics

When I'm training a tutor, I always say that phonics – the relationship between the sound of the letter(s) to the written letter(s) – doesn't work for everyone, but it is definitely worth trying a few times. It should be one tool, not the only tool used. Generally adults with low literacy skills had problems learning to read and write when they were kids. For this reason alone, they should be given more tools to choose from and more chances to learn in different ways to find what works best for them. However, if phonics does work for a person, it will probably be easier to help him improve his reading and writing skills.

Working with alphabet flash cards, show the letter and say the sound of the letter. For example, show the B card and say "Buh". I had a tutor from Scotland who was horrified at the way we learn our alphabet in Canada. We say the name of the letter ("Bee") instead of the sound it makes ("Buh").

You and the learner can think of words that begin with that sound/that letter (bear, beer, bottle, bathtub...). You can write out the words, perhaps highlighting the B in each word. You can take alphabet cards and spell each word out using the uppercase and lowercase letters. You can make up a silly sentence using the words: The bear was drinking a bottle of beer in the bathtub. Have fun with it.

### 3. EFFECTIVE PRACTICES TO BUILD LITERACY AND ESSENTIAL SKILLS INTO DAILY LIFE

“Effective practices are ... ways of working that are useful, efficient, and valuable to those who are participating in the literacy learning activities.” (Gardner, 2005, p. 2)

We’ve kept the information about effective practices short. We do encourage you to at least skim through this section, because most, if not all, strategies are interconnected with effective practices.

We cover six of what we have found to be the most important effective practices. These were identified by adult literacy teachers and tutors at BVC in the Literacy and Disability Study (LaDS) research (Gardner, 2005).

1. Be learner/person-centred
2. Be competency-based
3. Use materials and experiences from learners’ daily lives
4. Patience
5. Respect for others
6. Positive attitude

These effective practices may sound like common sense, and they mostly are. Sometimes we just need reminding; sometimes we need new ideas. They are things that need to be said because they work well in adult literacy. They are ways of being that will make a positive contribution to a person’s ability to learn.

## EP 1

### Be person-centred

In adult learning this is called being learner-centred. Audrey Gardner writes, "Adult learning principles are the foundation for effective practices as they focus on learner competencies, not deficits" (2005, p. 21). Being learner-centred is one of the main adult learning principles, whichever book or report you read. For example, Susan Imel's list of adult education principles begins with "involve learners in planning and implementing activities" and "draw upon learner's experiences as a resource" (1998, p. 1).

Maureen Sanders writes, "The importance of student choice is ... worth continually emphasizing to tutors" (1991, p. 22). Focus on the things learners are interested in. Respect their life experience and, because they are adults, use adult-based activities and resources as much as possible.

Terry says, "I'll find out from the students what they really need.... Often they know themselves because they've been through it before."

## EP 2

### Be competency-based or strength-based

This is another adult learning principle. Start from what a person knows and where he experiences success. This means finding something the person is good at and building from there. The focus is on a learner's strengths, not weaknesses, and competencies, not deficits. This helps set the learner up for success, not failure. Start with something that is easy for him, but not so easy that he is bored.

As Richard says, "You have to have enough challenge to keep the student interested, but you can't hit them with so much challenge that they shy away.... I always try to pull out of the student what they know, what they think.... I always try to relate it back to something they know. And building on what we know."

Carol, who has over 20 years of experience in teaching adults with disabilities, says, "Let the students show what they know because they haven't had many chances before – people have not expected a lot of them in many instances. So make sure you set up an atmosphere so people can show off what they do know."

Maureen Sanders suggests recording and working with the words known by the learner (1991, p. 23). You can do this within other activities such as reading a menu or writing a language experience story. You can also brainstorm words relating to a topic to find out what words are already familiar to the learner. You can read more about these kinds of activities in the Strategies section.

### EP 3

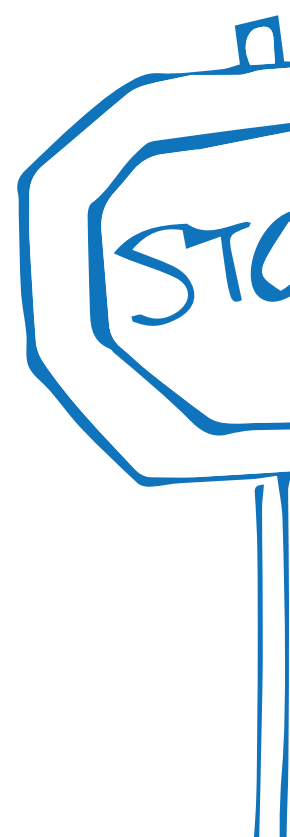
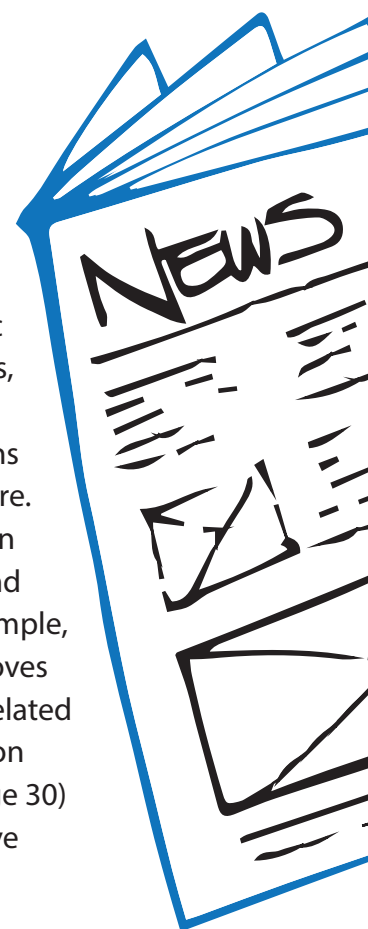
## Use materials from daily life

That's what this guidebook is all about. Many of the resources, strategies, and effective practices that tutors use in the SARAW program can be used outside of a formal literacy program. In fact, as the Answers May Vary research verified, "many of the most meaningful and effective practices involve using materials encountered in everyday life and a learner's own life experiences" (Auld, 2014, p. 1). These materials include such things as restaurant menus, public transit

schedules, forms, newspapers, traffic signs, texts on cell phones, TV guides, easy-to-read health brochures, food labels, calendars, environmental signs (e.g., "Open", "For Rent", etc.), and more. Just about anything you encounter in your daily life that is in print form, and some that isn't, can be used. For example, if the person you are working with loves to watch TV, you can build literacy-related activities around what she watches on TV. See Everyday Life Resources (page 30) for ideas on how to use TV to improve essential skills.

Most learners will value their improved ability to use reading and writing in their daily lives much more than any mark on a test. As reported in the Learner Progression Measures research, "learners are often more likely to name their progress as increased self-confidence and autonomy or an increased ability to perform in real-life contexts" (Jackson, & Schaetti, 2014, p. 18). It goes on to say "developing skills and personal growth are inextricably linked" (p. 54).

Sahar talked about a program she taught in Scotland. "For shopping, we used to ask moms and dads to give us the





shopping list and give [the learner] the money, and so we'd take them around the aisles. 'Okay, what do you see?' 'We're looking for cookies.' 'What kind of cookie does your mom like?' 'We are looking for washing powder.' 'What kind?' So we would encourage them." This is a good example of using a real-life experience as 'the classroom', and it allows learners to see progress in their skills.

## EP 4 Patience

The number one thing I look for when I recruit tutors is patience. Adults with low literacy skills generally have low self-esteem. They have failed, often more than once, at educational endeavours. When you ask them if they understand, they will say 'yes' even if they don't because they are tired of being thought of as 'stupid'. It takes time, patience, and kindness to undo any previous negative experiences with learning.



This is, of course, over and above the fact that people with low literacy skills (whether they have a disability or not) tend to learn slower and/or in different ways than others.

Mary says, "I think my strategy is patience, I think that's the biggest one, and then not giving up, because someone will be trying to learn to read for eight or nine years or ten or eleven or twelve years and then all of a sudden something will click."

Richard provided another perspective on patience, saying, "Everyone's at their own level and they're going to do as well as they're going to do, and you're really trying to get them a little bit better ... and you need to be patient."

Adults with low literacy skills and disabilities may learn at a slower pace than others. They may need lots of repetition. Progress may be slow. Be patient with your learner, and with yourself.

## EP 5

### Respect

You also need to be aware that learners may be impatient with themselves. This is often an indication of the link between low literacy skills and low self-esteem. Richard says, "Sometimes students come in [for tutoring] and they are really very impatient with themselves. They think the process should be going faster and I will emphasize to students that learning is tough ... and you have to be patient with yourself. ... If you don't have patience, it's tough to learn."

It is good practice to focus on short-term goals – small achievable steps – rather than a long-term goal that may seem overwhelming.

Patience and respect go together. As I said previously, people with low literacy skills tend to have low self-esteem, which is low respect for themselves. Showing a person respect helps improve his self-esteem and self-confidence. When a person feels respected, he is more likely to open up, trust, and learn.

Mary says, "I think best practice is always respecting the individual as a person and knowing they have wants and needs and good days and bad days just like we do, and just allowing for grace for everybody. That's the ultimate."

As I always tell my tutors, tutoring is firstly a relationship. When a trusting relationship is established, a person is more willing to try something that she may have failed at previously.

As many tutors have learned, a literacy tutor often becomes an informal kind of social worker – the person will often open up about much more than learning. Respect is also about honouring the stories that a person shares and their right to privacy.



## EP 6

### Positive encouragement/attitude

Tutors in our Answers May Vary research talked about the importance of giving a learner positive encouragement, which echoed what tutors in the Literacy and Disability Study (LaDS) research had said. Audrey Gardner reports that positive attitude is key: "Relationships where respect, dignity, and independence are valued contribute to effective learning experiences" (2005, p. 19).

Research shows that when people feel fearful, they do not learn well. Jenny Horsman, a well-known adult literacy practitioner who specializes in violence and learning, talks about people being "too scared to learn." She writes, "If people who should have been trustworthy weren't, then a lot of energy may go to figuring out who to trust" (1999/2000, p. 2). It doesn't have to be a fear of physical violence; it could be a fear of simply being chastised for being wrong. Having a positive attitude and using positive encouragement will help establish a relationship of trust and create a positive environment where a person is more open to being able to learn.

Bob Aitken writes, "Stress can kill neurons in the hippocampus by releasing cortisol.... In too heavy a dose, it kills the neurons" (2015, p. 6).

David Sousa writes, "Students must feel physically safe and emotionally secure before they can focus on the curriculum" (2001, p. 44).

Carol says, "The main thing is getting to know them, setting up an experience where they feel like they can say what they want to be able to say, that they've never been able to say before."

Sometimes learners expect too much of themselves. Often they will think that a skill is much beyond their level of competency, when in fact, given encouragement, they may be able to learn that skill.

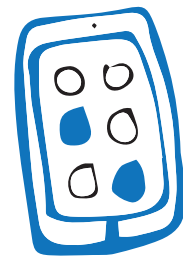
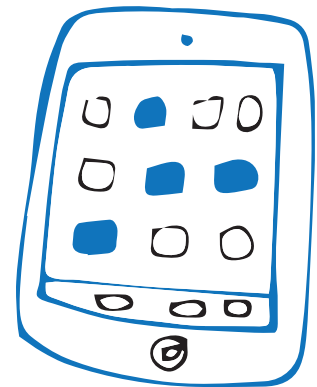
## 4. RESOURCES TO BUILD LITERACY AND ESSENTIAL SKILLS INTO DAILY LIFE

There are plenty of resources that can be used to help improve a person's reading, writing, and other essential skills. Some may be right at hand and others you may want to seek out. The suggestions here are meant to be a starting place only.

### Everyday Life Resources

Daily activities present many opportunities to incorporate learning. What follows are some ideas on how to use things from everyday life to take advantage of these opportunities.

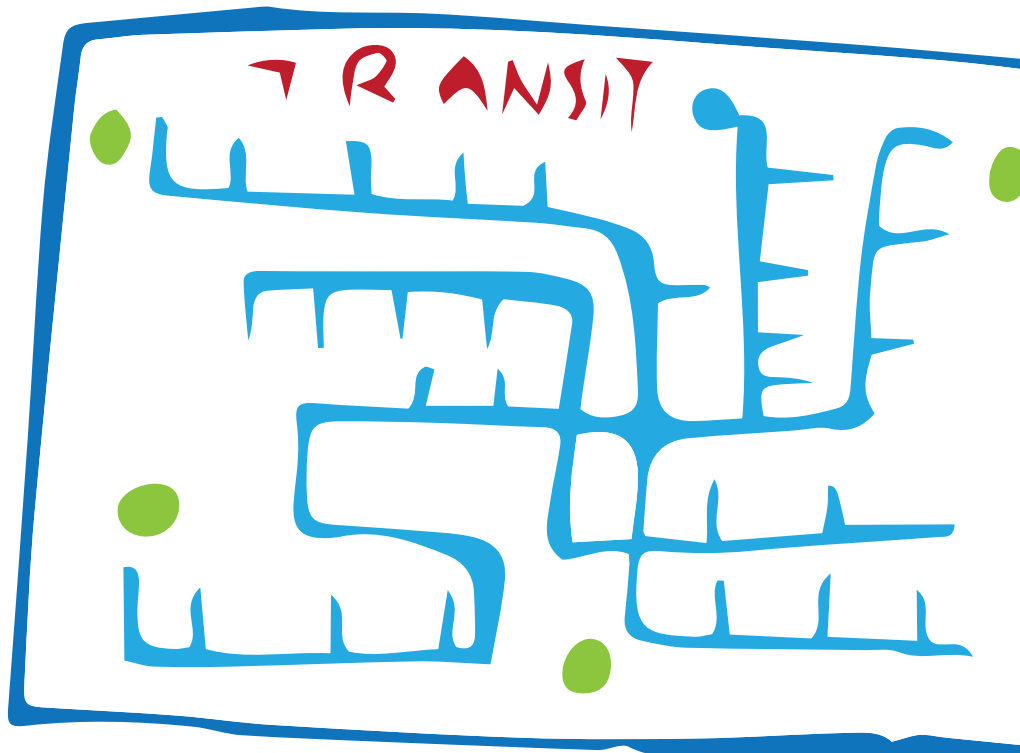
- **iPad/smart phone:** Technology and the access it provides has become so portable. If you carry a smart phone, when you are out you have the ability to look up what your learner is interested in, whether it is different types of monkeys (at the zoo), what gluten is or how many calories fries have (at a restaurant), or any number of other things. Encourage him to look up what he is interested in and model for him how to find the information. There are lots of free, fun, and educational games available for iPads and smart phones. Texting and Facebooking friends is, of course, part of daily life now – definitely reading and writing activities. You can use the accessibility features to increase the font size and change the background.<sup>3</sup>



<sup>3</sup> To change the accessibility settings on a Windows computer or laptop, click "Start," "Control Panel," "Appearance and Personalization," and open the "Ease of Access Center" for a variety of changes that can be made in response to varying abilities of the senses and of movement, such as making the mouse and keyboard easier to use. On an Apple computer or laptop, click on the apple icon in the top left corner and select "System Preferences" from the list. Find the "Accessibility," or "Universal Access" icon in the window to select what changes work best for the learner. Apple also has a "Speech" or "Dication & Speech" icon in the "System Preferences" window to allow the user to speak through a microphone instead of typing. They have similar options for iPads and iPhones. These can be changed by going to "Settings," "General," "Accessibility." For more information on these accessibility features, go to <https://www.apple.com/ca/ios/accessibility-tips/> and <https://www.apple.com/ca/accessibility/osx/> for Apple computer and laptop settings. In other phones, such as Samsung and Windows, these settings may be found under "Personalization" or a similar heading.



- **Menus:** If there are photos, you can connect the photo to the description. You can include a 'lesson' in numeracy by adding up how much things cost. Have fun with it – ask your learner what he would get if he had \$100 dollars to spend on food. Look at the menu and ask what he would put first on the list and how much it would cost. If you are in a place where you can write it down, then do that and play with the items on the list.
- **Transit map:** Ask your learner what C-train station she would want listed first, second, etc. Perhaps have index cards with the different station names and have fun reorganizing them (correctly and incorrectly). Ask her to rename a station and how she would spell it. Follow this with looking at a map of the city and placing the index cards in the area of the C-train stops. You can do a modified version of this with bus routes and maps.



- **TV:** You can help your learner increase his continuous learning and thinking skills while watching TV. Prompt with questions like:

- How many times does someone say the \_\_\_\_?  
(Use whatever is likely to come up during the show - family, crime, food, etc.). You can turn this into a game by writing two common words on sticky notes or make a chart with them. He chooses one word and you choose the other. Every time those words are said on TV, make a tick beside that word. Whoever has the most at the end of the show wins.
- How many times do they show \_\_\_\_?  
(The list can be the same or different.)
- What was the main message? What did you learn?
- Who is your favourite character? Why?  
What is the character like?
- How many men are in the show? How many women?  
Or how many bad guys/good guys?
- If you were in the show, who would you be?
- Where does the story happen?
- Is it a happy story or a sad story?
- If you made this show, how would you make it different?



After you talk about these, you can encourage him to write things down or make a chart – happy vs. sad stories or men vs. women. You can also talk about some of the elements of a story: setting (where the story happened), characters (your favourites and their qualities), and theme (what did you learn from the story). Encourage him to write his own version of the story. You can scribe for him if he is uncomfortable writing, then have him read it.

- **Songs and music lyrics:** One of my tutors taught me this. She and her learner would search their favourite songs on the internet, download the lyrics, and read them together. This is particularly good as the learner is able to connect the auditory (the song as it is played) to the visual (the look of the printed words). Encourage her to write her own song if she is interested.
- **Calendar:** This can be a hard copy or digital, including the calendar feature of a smart phone. Calendars have words and numbers (and often pictures on them). Your learner can practise writing holidays, birthdays, reminders, and ‘to do’ lists on the calendar, or can copy words from the calendar.
- **Easy to read brochures, flyers, and newspapers:** For example, Vecova has produced a series of large print, plain language information brochures on a variety of topics.<sup>4</sup> Several organizations have plain language driver’s manuals.<sup>5</sup> Free daily newspapers are often easy to read and of interest to learners. Read these materials together and talk about them. Relate them to your life and/or your learner’s life if possible.

<sup>4</sup> <http://vecova.ca/research/knowledge-centre/easy-reading/>

<sup>5</sup> Literacy Alberta’s Clear Language Driver’s Guide is available at <http://library.copian.ca/item/12687>

# Book CLUB

- **Informal book club:**

You don't have to call it a book club – some learners will like the idea that they are part of a book club, some won't. It doesn't have to be an actual book – it can be a newspaper, magazine, brochure, comic book, etc. Keep in mind that all of us are more interested reading about something that is related to our lives in some way or is something we like (e.g., hockey, cooking, travel, etc.) so let the person pick reading material that he is interested in. You can help make almost anything relevant by talking about it and sharing similar experiences. This relies on the two of you having a good open relationship where you both feel safe sharing.

When we read a book in the SARAW book club, we have people read a bit of the text, and then we talk about it. Chunk it (strategy 2). RAP about it (strategy 1). Have them tell you what happened when \_\_\_\_\_ or how the character felt about \_\_\_\_\_. Work on comprehension. Ask questions that relate the text to their own lives: "What is your favourite \_\_\_\_\_?" (e.g., food, if food has just been described).

Here are some questions to talk about in your book club. You can also do an internet search for 'book clubs' to get more questions.

- o Who was your favourite character in the story?  
If you were making a movie, who would play him/her?
- o If you were in the story, what character would you be?
- o Who is telling the story?
- o Why do you think this person wrote this story?  
How would you write it? What story would you write?  
One of you could write the answers down. (I always like to connect reading and writing and I like to make it fun, so feel free to be silly.)
- o Is it a happy or sad story? Why?
- o Did you like the ending?

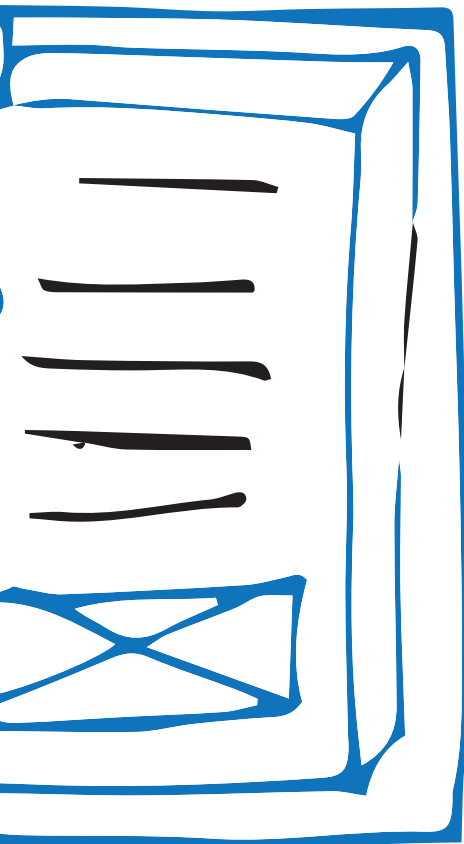
[You can also switch roles and have your learner ask you questions about the book.]

Keep in mind, "Why?" questions can be a problem for some people – they just respond that they don't know. If this is the case, avoid the 'why' questions most of the time. It is also true that for questions that can be answered with yes or no, people usually want to be agreeable and so answer 'yes'. They also do not want to appear 'stupid' and if you ask them if they understand, they will usually answer "yes". Instead, try to find a way to ask a question that indicates that person understands. For example, have him tell you what happened.

'If' questions are good. For example, "What would happen if ...": the main character had done\_\_\_\_\_ or the person couldn't \_\_\_\_\_. Write down these 'what if' stories if you are somewhere that you can do this.

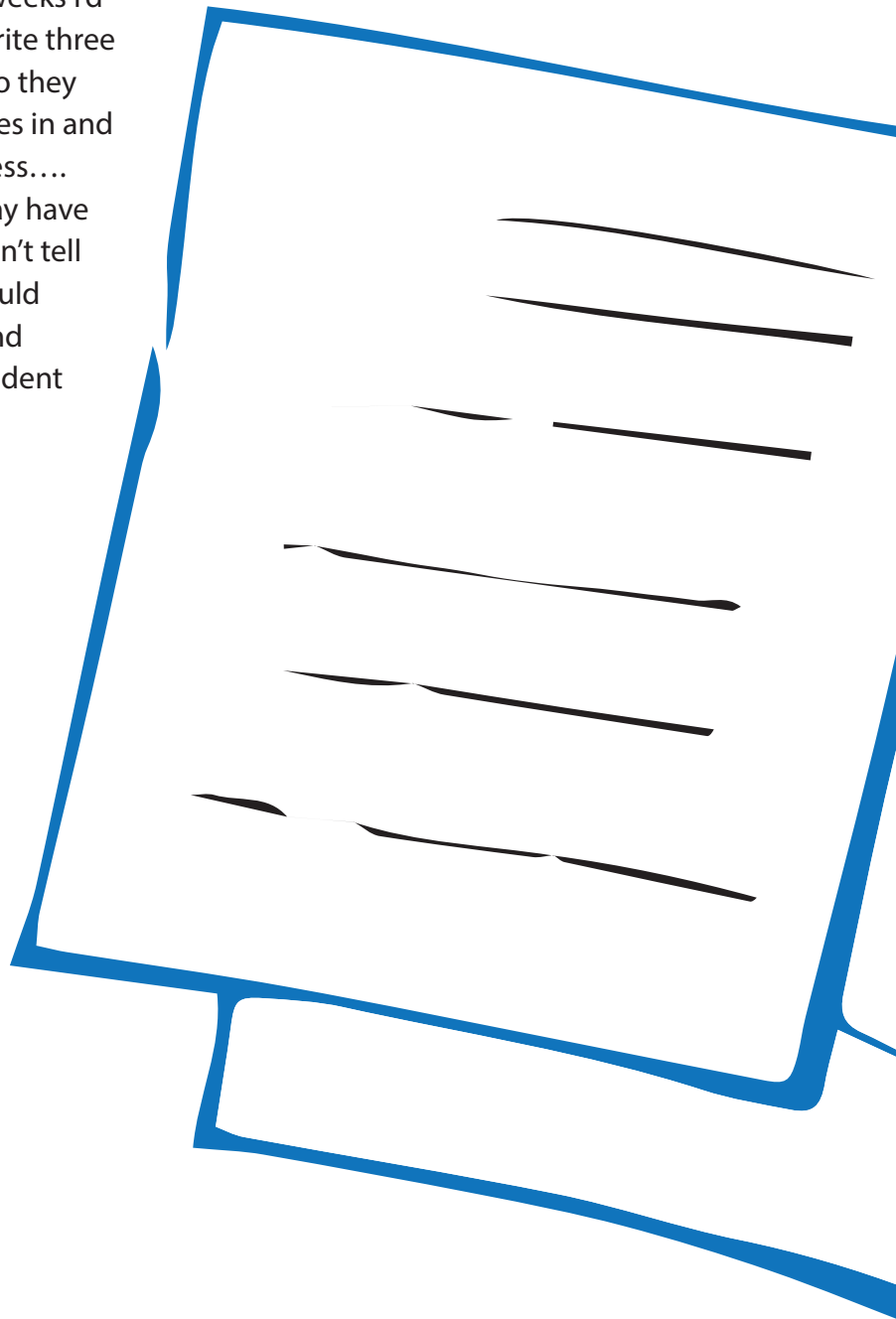
Depending on the level of the learner and what he is interested in, you can add in information about short story elements – but do it in a fun way. For example:

- o Characters: who is the good guy, the bad guy, who is telling the story (the narrator).
- o Plot: have him tell you what happened first, then second, then next – write each out on index cards and arrange them as you go.
- o Setting: have him describe where the story takes place – or draw a picture. Remember – get as many senses involved as you can.
- **Portfolio:** This is a binder (or folder or box) to keep work in. It doesn't have to be formal or 'schooly' – it can simply be a place to keep some things your learner is interested in and might be encouraged to read or write about (e.g., song lyrics, job ads, recipes, etc.). Another value in keeping a portfolio – particularly if you include things your learner has created in activities – is being able to go through it and point out progress the person has made (particularly with writing skills).






- **Journals:** Darmody describes using journal writing in a positive way. “We had journals that the students wrote in at the beginning of every class and they really enjoyed that.... I found that at the beginning, some of them maybe only wrote one or two sentences and then ... after a couple of weeks I’d say, you know, ‘Can you write three or four, four or five?’ and so they definitely put longer entries in and it was a real place to express.... Sometimes something may have happened that they couldn’t tell me in person ... and it would come out in the journal and then I could talk to the student afterwards and follow up and see, so that was really helpful.”

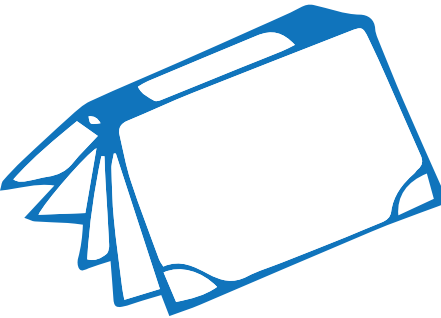
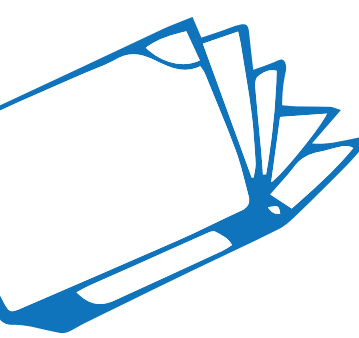




## Books



The kinds of books you will want to look for are firstly topics of interest to the learner, and secondly books that are at an appropriate reading level but still adult based (try to stay away from childish books). You can find these kinds of books in the library in the English Language Learning (ELL)<sup>6</sup> / Literacy collection. Here are some sources where you might find materials appropriate to your learner.

- 
- Publishers like GrassRoots Press specialize in adult literacy resources.  
<http://www.grassrootsbooks.net/ca>
  - Oxford University Press produces low-level English Language Learning (ELL) materials and most of these are adult based. They also publish the Oxford Picture Dictionary Literacy Program.  
<http://www.oupcanada.com/esl/adult.html>
  - Laubach Literacy publishes a number of good resources if you are looking for good phonics-based workbooks that come with a teacher's manual.  
<http://www.laubach-on.ca/bookstore>
  - Remedia Publishers provide books like Menu Math, Word Shopping, and Filling Out Forms – all daily life activities. These are usually available at teachers' stores.  
<http://www.rempub.com>
  - Box Cars and One Eyed Jacks produces a wealth of hands-on materials, firstly for math, but also for reading and writing.  
<http://www.boxcarsandoneeyedjacks.com>
- 

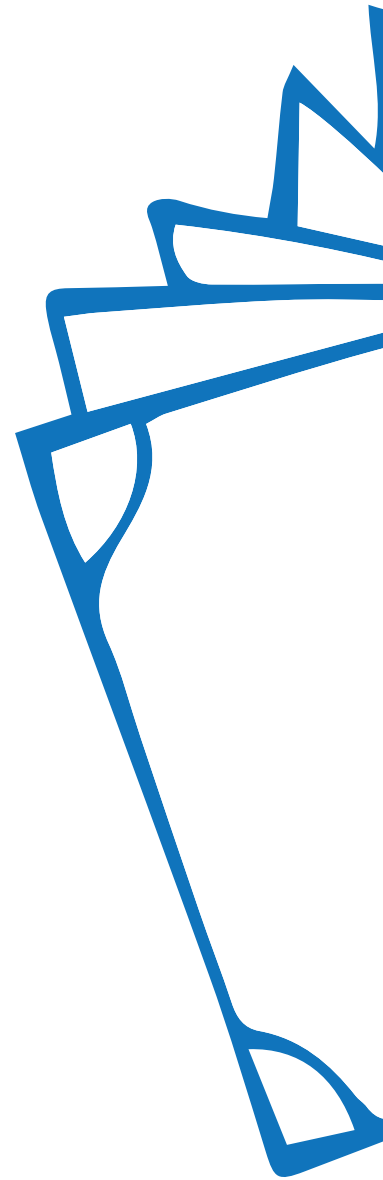
<sup>6</sup> While ELL resources are targeted to people who are learning English as a second language, note that many resources created for ELL learners work well for adults with low literacy skills.

- *Teaching Beginning Readers* by Pat Campbell, published by Grass Roots Press, includes instructional activities geared towards one-to-one tutoring situations.
- *Writing Out Loud* by Deborah Morgan, also published by Grass Roots Press, is a collection of fun writing activities and topics.
- Tutor Tools is a collection of tips from Alberta volunteer tutors, published by Literacy Alberta and available through CanLearn. <http://canlearnsociety.ca/resources/learninglinks/>

## Online Resources

The internet offers easy access to information about topics of interest to your learner. Search and you will find! But beyond that, there are sites that have activities, printable worksheets, and other resources that may be useful.


- Internet sites like Lumosity: Advertised as brain games and brain training, it is sometimes used in the rehabilitation of people with brain injuries.
- Teaching/tutoring websites: These often provide free worksheets. Terry says, "I love using interactive websites. I use them that way for math but that probably works for reading and writing as well."
- Websites for adult literacy and English Language Learning (ELL): These often have 'how to' information about working with learners as well as offering resources to use directly with them.





## Suggestions of supplies to take with you

There are some items that are good to have at hand to help with activities and to aid your learner.

- Coloured paper and/or coloured pens
  - Index cards, especially coloured index cards
  - Dark thick pens such as Sharpies if the student has difficulty seeing regular pen ink
  - A yellow coloured overlay (or whatever colour works best for your learner) if the person has some visual impairment
- 

## 5. MORE ABOUT US AND RESEARCH REGARDING LITERACY AND ADULTS WITH DISABILITIES

### First of all, who are we? We are:

- Literacy tutors in the Speech-Assisted Reading and Writing (SARAW) literacy program for adults with disabilities at Bow Valley College.
- Teachers, tutors, researchers, and coordinators who work at Bow Valley College and who have experience teaching and tutoring people with disabilities.
- I am the Coordinator of the SARAW literacy program for adults with disabilities and the Adult Basic Literacy Education (ABLE) inclusive adult literacy classes at Bow Valley College.

We worked on the Answers May Vary research project to capture the knowledge and experiences of a variety of people so that you and your learner can use these strategies and resources in your daily life. We also incorporated some helpful advice from the Literacy and Disability Study (LaDS) research, as well as books such as *Meeting Challenges: A literacy project for adults with developmental disabilities*, *Writing Out Loud*, *Teaching Beginning Readers*, and other books and research related to the subject.

### Answers May Vary

The Answers May Vary research project initially assessed students' reading levels using a tool called ReadForward.<sup>7</sup> ReadForward is useful because it uses real life materials such as the best before date on a milk carton, a recipe, etc., and it has a section where the learner is asked to match a picture to a word. Those who work directly with adults with developmental disabilities are not always aware of their clients' lack of literacy skills, or the value that improved reading and writing skills can have in these individuals' lives.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.readforward.ca>

As Karen D’Cruz noted when she worked with Answers May Vary as a practicum student:

*What really stood out to me in the preliminary findings were tasks with which the students struggled, such as locating information on work schedules, circling or filling out information on forms, and identifying phone numbers. Helping students learn to perform these tasks would help them in their everyday interactions, making them more independent. As well, the scores on the tests surprised me. Having spoken with many of the students, it was very surprising to see how they struggled with literacy in print. A disconnect in skill level between verbal language and written language became apparent. When working on developing literacy skills, tutors or workers often do not fully grasp how much their students struggle with literacy or what materials to use to help them advance their skills.*  
(Auld, 2014, p. 9)

The research project went on to interview tutors working with the students to learn from their real-life experiences and expertise in helping adults with developmental disabilities with their reading and writing skills.

Read the Answers May Vary report at

<https://centreforfoundationallearning.wordpress.com/projects-in-progress/answers-may-vary/>

## LaDS

A major finding of the research was that many of the most meaningful and effective practices involve using materials encountered in everyday life and a learner's own life experiences. Literacy learning can happen almost anywhere, using everyday materials.

The Literacy and Disability Study (LaDS) was a national research project that looked at the different settings in which the SARAW software was being used across Canada and determined effective practices for using the software within literacy and other programs for adults with disabilities.

The findings from the SARAW survey offered possibilities to improve accessibility to literacy programs for people with disabilities. In exploring contexts in which SARAW was being used, the survey looked for effective practices that contribute to literacy skill development. It found effective practices involved positive, respectful relationships; communication; and selection and use of tools and materials that reflect adult learning principles. Important in the findings was the significance of the learner-tutor/instructor relationship.

### Read about LaDS

[SARAW Survey Report. A report on how SARAW and other activities and factors contribute to positive literacy learning.](https://centreforfoundationallearning.files.wordpress.com/2012/05/lads_sarawsurveyreport.pdf)

[https://centreforfoundationallearning.files.wordpress.com/2012/05/lads\\_sarawsurveyreport.pdf](https://centreforfoundationallearning.files.wordpress.com/2012/05/lads_sarawsurveyreport.pdf)

[It Gets In Your Brain: Effective Practices in Adult Literacy using Speech Assisted Reading and Writing \(SARAW\) with People with Disabilities. A guide for practitioners to increase opportunities in their program for adults with disabilities to strengthen and maintain their literacy skills.](https://centreforfoundationallearning.files.wordpress.com/2012/05/ladssaraw_itgetsinyourbrain.pdf)

[https://centreforfoundationallearning.files.wordpress.com/2012/05/ladssaraw\\_itgetsinyourbrain.pdf](https://centreforfoundationallearning.files.wordpress.com/2012/05/ladssaraw_itgetsinyourbrain.pdf)

## Resources

- Aitken, B. (2015). *Impact of the cognitive sciences on teaching*. Vancouver, BC: Vancouver Community College.
- Auld, B. (2014). *Answers May Vary research report: Literacy strategies, resources, and effective practices for adult learners with developmental disabilities*. Calgary, AB: Bow Valley College. Retrieved from [https://centreforfoundationallearning.files.wordpress.com/2015/09/auld\\_sept2015web-2.pdf](https://centreforfoundationallearning.files.wordpress.com/2015/09/auld_sept2015web-2.pdf)
- Employment and Social Development Canada. (2014, July 17). *Skill definitions and levels of complexity*. Retrieved from <http://www.esdc.gc.ca/eng/jobs/les/definitions/index.shtml>
- Gardner, A. (2005). *Literacy and Disabilities Studies (LaDS). It gets in your brain: Effective practices in adult literacy using Speech Assisted Reading and Writing (SARAW) with people with disabilities*. Calgary, AB: Bow Valley College  
Retrieved from [https://centreforfoundationallearning.files.wordpress.com/2012/05/ladssaraw\\_itgetsinyourbrain.pdf](https://centreforfoundationallearning.files.wordpress.com/2012/05/ladssaraw_itgetsinyourbrain.pdf)
- Horsman, J. (1999/2000). *Too scared to learn – Brief notes*. Retrieved from <http://learningandviolence.net/impact/handouts/briefnotes.pdf>
- Imel, S. (1998). *Using adult learning principles in adult basic and literacy education*. Practice Application Brief. Columbus, OH: Center on Education and Training for Employment, Ohio State University. Retrieved from <http://www.calpro-online.org/ERIC/docs/pab00008.pdf>



- Jackson, C. & Schaetti, M. (2014). *Research findings: Literacy and essential skills: Learner progression measures project*. Calgary, AB: Bow Valley College. Retrieved from <https://centreforfoundationallearning.files.wordpress.com/2013/10/lpm-researchfindingsreport.pdf>
- Morgan, D. (1997). *Writing out loud* (2nd ed.). Edmonton, AB: Grass Roots Press.
- Sanders, M. (1991). *Meeting challenges: A literacy project for adults with developmental disabilities*. Edmonton, AB: PROSPECTS Adult Literacy Association. Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED337606.pdf>
- Singh, M. (2014, October 27). *Mind shift: What's going on inside the brain of a curious child?* Retrieved from <http://ww2.kqed.org/mindshift/2014/10/27/whats-going-on-inside-the-brain-of-a-curious-child/>
- Sousa, D. (2001). *How the brain learns*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Teaching Excellence in Adult Literacy (TEAL). (2010). *Universal design for learning*. TEAL Center Fact Sheet No. 2. Retrieved from [https://teal.ed.gov/sites/default/files/Fact-Sheets/2\\_TEAL\\_UDL.pdf](https://teal.ed.gov/sites/default/files/Fact-Sheets/2_TEAL_UDL.pdf)

