

# Basic Skills and Communication for the Railway Sector



## Executive Summary

Guidelines  
and  
Training Materials

Basic Skills for Work

Combined Basic Skills and Communication Training for Low-Skilled Workers in Five  
Different European Work Sectors



Education and Culture

**Leonardo da Vinci**

# BASIC SKILLS FOR WORK

In the past years, the issue of “Basic Skills” has gained particular attention in most European countries. Of particular concern are what is generally called ‘functional literacy’ and ‘functional numeracy’ defined as “*the ability to read, write and speak in the respective language and to use mathematics at a level necessary to function at work and in society in general*”.

This Curriculum has mainly been designed for adult education providers, trainers and teachers. It consists of different modules, the main chapters dealing with information on the target group, literacy, numeracy and social skills, that allow for flexible utilisation according to various specific requirements.

The main objective is to empower employees with improved basic skills in both numeracy and literacy (numbers, measures, calculations, reading comprehension, short writing tasks). The Curriculum also focuses, on important social and communication skills particularly required in this profession.

## LITERACY: DIDACTIC BACKGROUND

### Module 1: Reading Workplace Materials

Information at work is given in verbal, written or visual form. Information about health and safety is critical to the safety of the workforce, and it is important that learners understand it. Learners need to be able to extract and interpret information from a variety of texts and graphics. These may range in difficulty from safety signs to lengthy policies and procedures. The different format of texts affects the way they need to be read.

In order to read and understand written information learners need to be able to understand the following:

- format
- language.

Learners may need specific support in these areas:

- understanding the format and structure of a text
- recognising the typical language of different types of text, for example, information and instruction
- understanding the meanings of unfamiliar and technical words.

Learners should be encouraged to look at their own workplace materials in order to apply these skills to their own setting.

Opportunities should be given to practise the language used in health and safety, including safety sign types such as mandatory and prohibition. They should also be given examples of a variety of positive, negative and conditional instructions in order to recognise a range of expressions and types of instruction.

Learners should be encouraged to ask about or look up the meaning of unfamiliar or technical words. This may entail using a multi-lingual dictionary. Learners may need support to use dictionaries or glossaries.

## Learning outcomes

- To recognise different types of information.
- To read and extract information.
- To locate information quickly.

## Learning contents and purpose (exercises 1 - 21)

- Reading safety information
- Understanding notices
- Understanding procedures
- Understanding flow chart procedures
- Understanding policies
- Understanding safety at work policies
- Understanding safety policies
- Using glossaries
- Finding information – contents lists
- Finding information - Headings and subheadings

## **Module 2: Communication at Work**

A lot of information at work is passed on verbally. This includes safety critical information and instructions. Learners need to be able to listen carefully in order to follow the information or instructions correctly. It is also vital that they ask questions to check and confirm information.

In order to listen carefully and respond to information learners need to be able to:

- listen for and pick out key points and detail
- ask questions to check and confirm details.

In order to give clear information and instructions learners need to be able to:

- give direct and clear instructions in a sensible order
- speak clearly in a way that suits the situation.

Learners may need specific support in these areas:

- understanding the purpose of listening (in order to listen for relevant details)
- distinguishing relevant from irrelevant details
- asking relevant questions
- giving instructions in a sensible order
- using clear and direct language for instructions

The activities in this section rely upon role-play and working together in pairs. Learners will need support to get the most out of these activities. The instructions for these tasks need to be clearly explained. Do not rely upon learners to follow the instructions independently. Modelling or giving examples is an important part of the tutor role in this type of activity, which may be new to some learners.

Opportunities should be given to practise adapting speaking and listening skills to a variety of relevant day-to-day work situations, both face to face and on the telephone. This may be done through a number of practical exercises such as discussion, improvisation and role-play. However, these will need to be organised and structured.

Learners will find it easier to talk about familiar topics first, such as those related specifically to their own job. They can then extend their skills practice to less familiar areas of work.

Where reading aloud is required, learners should be carefully selected and supported as this may be challenging for some participants. Be prepared to read through the cards with each individual to ensure that they can read it fluently and to interpret any unknown language.

#### Learning outcomes

- To listen actively to others.
- To communicate clearly with others.
- To check and confirm understanding.

#### Learning contents and purpose (exercises 22 - 33)

- Following instructions and explanations
- Listening on the telephone
- Checking and confirming information
- Questions for more information
- Teamwork
- Giving information and instructions
- Source material

Note: There are two pages of source materials:

- 1 A set of six cards, three for 'information' (blue) and three for 'instruction' (green), to go with the first three listening activities. There should be one full set of cards per pair of learners. In order to provide listening rather than reading practice, the cards should be cut up and placed face down in two piles in number order.
- 2 A sample team briefing script for use by the tutor in activities 6, 7 and 8 plus oral questions for activities 7 and 8. It is important that this is delivered as a role-play and not given as a reading exercise.

## **NUMERACY: DIDACTIC BACKGROUND**

### **Module 1: Measures used for rail work**

In order for rail workers to be responsible for their own and others' safety at work, it is essential that they are able to understand and follow both work instructions and health and safety information relating to measures. This is particularly important for track workers and shunters working on or near the line.

There are many different units of measure used in rail operations. Learners need to understand:

- the units used for different aspects of measure, e.g. length, weight, capacity, etc.
- the correct abbreviations for units of measure
- the approximate size of each unit of measure
- how units of measure relate to each other (e.g. millimetres and metres)
- which measuring tools to use and how to use them
- when it is appropriate to measure accurately and when it is appropriate to estimate
- mathematical and directional language associated with measure.

Do not assume that learners (particularly speakers of other languages) are clear about any language associated with maths.

The language used to describe maximum and minimum distances, for example, may be open to misinterpretation. It is very important that the range of expressions used is known and understood.

The best method when teaching measure is to offer plenty of practical activities. The aim should be to provide learners with opportunities for exploration and investigation, moving from simple estimation activities in which learners might respond by trial and improvement, to more complex situations where learners can be expected to gauge a more precise response. It should be emphasised that good estimation skills are very powerful skills which should be both acknowledged and encouraged.

The activities that follow focus on metric units of length. Once the metric system is understood, it can be applied to other aspects of measure such as weight and capacity.

Note: Measuring tools vary and may present measurements in different ways. This can lead to confusion for learners. Take some time to look at different measuring tools and point out the ways in which the units are marked.

Learning outcomes

- Know the standard abbreviations for different units of measure.
- Know the relationship between metres and millimetres.
- Convert millimetres to metres and metres to millimetres.
- Estimate and measure distances in workplace situations.

Learning contents and purpose (exercises 34 - 47)

- Knowing the standard abbreviations for different units of measure
- Knowing the different units of measure
- Using and converting metric measures
- Estimating distance
- Understanding instructions involving measures
- Work safety
- Distances

## Module 2: Using timetables

It is essential that employees who are customer-facing have the ability and confidence to advise passengers about specific journeys and other journey options. This requires a thorough understanding of how the network operates, together with lots of practice of using timetables.

Timetables can be very complicated. Learners need to understand:

- how tables work
- how to extract and interpret information from a timetable
- the meanings of text features, such as bold type, shading, symbols and abbreviations
- how to use row and column headings to locate information.

The amount of information on timetables can be overwhelming to learners. The best method for teaching and building confidence in reading timetables is to focus on one skill at a time. Start by explaining the table format and show that it is a good way of organising a lot of information to make it more accessible. Identify the features of a table such as rows and columns; demonstrate how this can be used to locate information and encourage learners to use a ruler or piece of paper to isolate a particular row or column.

Point out and discuss the meaning of any abbreviations used and highlight textual features, such as bold type to denote which are the main stations; colour or shading to highlight specific information; the use of asterisks and accompanying notes, etc. Ensure learners understand the basic principle that a timetable provides a chronological account of different train journeys. Once all these skills are in place, get learners to use timetables to read off the service provided by individual trains.

It is important to give plenty of practice in order to build confidence with these skills. Use familiar timetables that learners will recognise to begin with.

Learning outcomes

- Understand and use abbreviations and notes on train timetables.
- Read and interpret information from timetables.

Learning contents and purpose (exercises 58 - 62)

- Understanding dates
- Reading and interpreting information from timetables

## ASPECTS OF LABOUR SAFETY

### Contents and purposes

- Additional safety measures



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