

# Introduction

## Why include oral communication in instruction?

Your learners' ultimate goal is to keep a job, get a job or get a better job. As a practitioner, your ultimate goal is to help your learners achieve their goals. Including oral communication in instruction helps learners to become productive, safe, and therefore employable, workers. Oral communication is often the most important Essential Skill that fosters such a worker. Workers need to listen to and follow instructions to ensure that work is completed correctly and safely. There is a need to ask questions and exchange information with other workers, as well as with supervisors. Effective oral communication is an Essential Skill, as you will see in the real life situation that follows.

*Dave, a supervisor at a manufacturing company, conducts monthly safety meetings to ensure that his workers are aware of all safety issues. Knowing that his workers do not have strong English skills, Dave makes an effort to be as clear and concise as possible. The workers also make an effort to focus on the message, though at times, they are unclear about certain points. However, because the workers do not have the skills or confidence in English to ask questions or obtain more information, they often do not ask for clarification. Instead they just nod and Dave assumes that everyone understands and then moves onto the next point. From Dave's point of view, the workers are informed, but in reality they are unclear about some points. When safety is at issue, being unclear about anything increases the risks for everyone involved.*

## Who is this resource for?

This resource is for practitioners who work with adult learners who would benefit from work-related language acquisition and the development of transferable oral communication skills. It can also be used with learners who are interested in pursuing a career in the construction industry or in a certain trade.

The lessons in this resource can be taught to individuals, small groups or an entire class. Lessons can be geared to learners in Essential Skills upgrading programs. The content is also suitable for tutoring either employed or unemployed workers who need specific skills upgrading.

The real life examples that follow are examples of learners you may encounter who would benefit from instruction in oral communication skills.

*John is a hard worker who moved to Canada from Korea. He is motivated to learn new skills, but one major barrier is his difficulty understanding and being understood in English. Due to his weak oral communication skills, he often struggles when listening to instructions and was consequently laid off because of a breakdown in communication. Since he wasn't able to ask questions or show that he could understand what was said, his supervisor was concerned about his safety and that of other workers.*

*Courtney is an instructor preparing a group of young people, mostly men, for work in construction. She notices a common communication pattern amongst them. Their communication style lacks the manners and decorum expected of workers and their poor communication skills have resulted in showing up to the wrong place, not bringing the right equipment, or not completing a task because they did not clarify expectations. As a result, their records of employment are spotty at best.*

### **What makes this resource different from other learning guides?**

This resource addresses communication on work sites between workers and workers and their supervisors. The lessons in this resource are meant to simulate authentic workplace learning and language acquisition the way it happens in the real world. For example, workers on a job site attend safety or toolbox meetings when called, but they would never be ‘pre-taught’ vocabulary before such meetings. Although there is obvious merit in pre-teaching vocabulary, it does not reflect the reality of how workplaces operate. In reality, the worker would likely hear work-specific jargon at a meeting first and then learn its meaning by asking questions afterwards.

As a practitioner, you might decide to play the listening selection first before going over the vocabulary in order to reflect this. It is up to practitioners how to proceed with the lessons, depending on the needs, level and interest of the group. By using this resource and simulating workplace settings, you are providing learners with authentic opportunities to practise and prepare for reality on the job.

Although the resource uses construction content, the focus is on improving communication skills on the job. The oral communication skills taught can be applied to any occupational setting.