

> LANGUAGE

Strong language skills are very important in most workplaces. Employers often have real concerns about whether the language skills of an immigrant job applicant are adequate. A resumé may be well written, but what about the immigrant's oral language skills, including accent? Also, many jobs in Ottawa require both English and French language skills. What can you do to assess an immigrant applicant's language skills, and help him or her improve those skills on the job?

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Language is a very important factor when you are considering an immigrant job applicant. Employees in many workplaces use a lot of sector-specific terminology and jargon as well as slang, idioms, and colloquial language. These terms can be difficult for immigrants, and are usually only learned over time and through experience. Oral language skills are often more troublesome than reading or writing, especially when the speaker has a heavy accent in roles that involve front line customer service.

There are several programs and services available to help immigrants assess and improve their language skills. As an employer, being aware of these programs and the associated benchmarks can help you recognize some of the terminology you may encounter in

an immigrant's job application, and what the terminology means in terms of language proficiencies.

ASSESSING LANGUAGE SKILLS

The Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks (CCLB) (www.language.ca) is the national standard-setting body for the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) and the Niveaux de Compétence Linguistique Canadiens (NCLC). The CLB and NCLC are recognized as the official Canadian standards for describing, measuring and recognizing the language proficiency of adult immigrants and prospective immigrants for living and working in Canada, in both English and French. They also provide common standards for all the immigrant-serving agencies.

DID YOU KNOW...?

The Center for Canadian Language Benchmarks has produced mini-posters that cover benchmark levels 1 to 10 and provide a very clear 'Can Do' description of the language skills designated by these levels. You can download these posters in PDF format. See the bottom of the page at http://www.language.ca/display_page.asp?page_id=572

If an immigrant's job application or resumé includes results from a CLB assessment, you can use the benchmarks to easily understand the applicant's language skills.



The CLB is a descriptive scale of communicative proficiency in speaking and listening, reading and writing. There are 12 proficiency levels³ that use real life language tasks to measure language skills.

CLB assessment is free for qualifying newcomers to Canada. Job applications and resumes that you receive from newcomers to Canada may include results from a CLB assessment. The assessment, conducted at an official CLB assessment centre, determines the existing level of language proficiency of the newcomer through a process that usually takes about three hours. The result of a CLB assessment is a report provided to the newcomer specifying the benchmark levels in speaking and listening, reading and writing that he or she demonstrated during the assessment. For information about the Ottawa assessment centre visit http://www.ymcaywca.ca/Adults/newcomer_services/languageassessment/

LANGUAGE TRAINING

Newcomers to Canada usually participate in one or more of the following types of language training available to them. You may find reference to these programs in an immigrant's job application.

- **ESL/FSL** (English and/or French as Second Language) training is available at no charge for newcomers to Canada, and many skilled immigrants seeking employment in Ottawa will have completed various courses. There are many levels of ESL/FSL training that correspond to a broad range of CLB benchmarks (see <http://www.eslottawa.com/canadianlanguagebenchmarks.html>)

³It is purely coincidental that the number of benchmark levels is 12 – which happens to be the same number of elementary and secondary grade levels in the Ontario school system. There is no relationship between CLB levels and Ontario grades.

HIRING CONCERN:

Skilled immigrants may not have strong enough language skills to work effectively.

SOLUTION:

A good occupation-specific language assessment will ensure that businesses hire immigrants who have sufficient communication skills for the job.

TIP

We all have accents, but if *intelligibility* is a concern, ESL courses/coaching could be the solution.

TIP

You can use the CLB benchmarks to understand the level of language proficiency that you require in a particular job. Now you know exactly what you're looking for in a job applicant's language skills – whether or not the applicant is an immigrant! You can refer any applicant for a CLB assessment to ensure that his or her language skills meet your requirements.



- **Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC)** is a settlement program funded by Citizenship and Immigration Canada. This ESL program provides basic English language instruction to eligible adult newcomers - immigrants and those to whom Canada intends to grant permanent resident status - to facilitate their social, cultural and economic integration into society. These programs are provided by different agencies and organizations to help immigrants during the post-landing settlement and adaptation phase.
- **Enhanced Language Training (ELT)** programs have been developed for some specific trades or professions, to provide skilled immigrants with the required job-related language skills in their trade or profession. ELT Programs are a pre-condition to meet the requirements of some professional regulatory bodies for licensing and practicing

in Canada. For more information about ELT programs in Ontario visit http://www.settlement.org/sys/faqs_detail.asp?k=ESL_ADULT&faq_id=4001181

EFFECTIVE LANGUAGE SOLUTIONS

- If language skills need improvement, refer learners to the Ottawa CLB assessment centre <http://www.ymcaywca.ca/Adults/> for a Canadian Language Benchmarks Placement Test (CLBPT). Test results will be used to direct the learner to the most appropriate training program: ESL/FSL, LINC, ELT.
- Providing on-site ESL or FSL upgrading at your workplace is a win-win option for learners and other employees.
- Free online ESL lessons for learners are available on various sites. Try <http://a4esl.org>

