



# Literacy and Plain Language

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# Introductions

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# Workshop Objectives

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- Introduce Literacy Quebec & members
- Create a portrait of literacy in Quebec
- Introduce Plain Language
- Practice using Plain Language

# Literacy Quebec

We envision a Quebec where everyone has the literacy skills they need to live a fully engaged life.



# Literacy Quebec

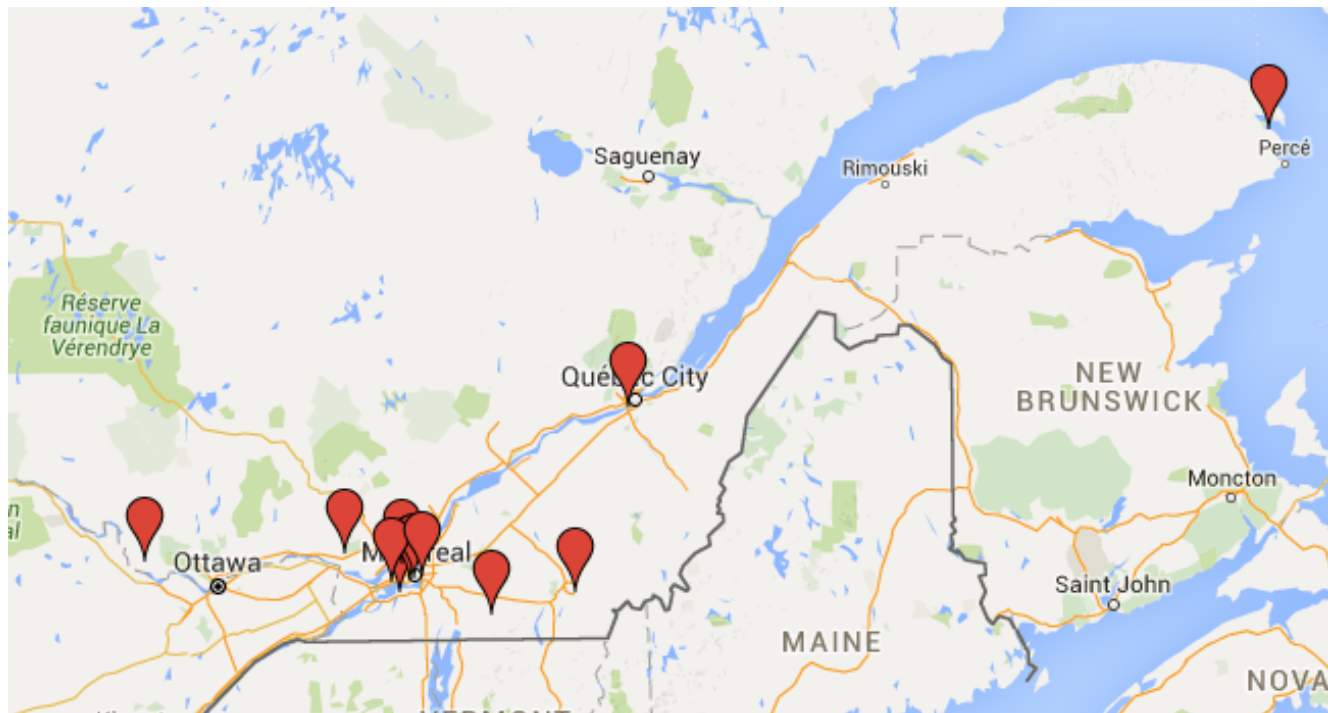
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- Founded in 1980 by volunteers to support literacy for English-speakers in Quebec.
- We are a network that connects and represents community-based literacy organizations to empower people, impact lives and build a stronger society.

# What we do

- Raise awareness of the importance of literacy in Quebec
- Campaign to combat the stigma of low literacy
- Strengthen ties in the community
- Offer capacity building opportunities for Literacy Practitioners
- Advocate and represent our member organizations
- Offer training and work experience opportunities to volunteers

# 13 Member Organizations



# Member Services

## Member Services



Book Club



Book Drop-off



Computer Skills



Family Literacy Day



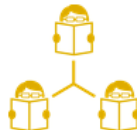
Employment Skills



Tutoring



Math Skills



Reading Circle



Family Activities



Referral Centre



Resources



School Activities



Help with Forms



Study Skills



Peer Tutoring



Workshops



Entrepreneurship



Technology



# What is literacy?

Understanding, evaluating, using and engaging with written texts to participate in society, to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential.

PIAAC measures:

- literacy,
- numeracy
- problem solving in a technology-rich society (PS-TRE)

Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), 2013  
The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

# Literacy Levels

**Below Level 1\***: very weak skills

**Level 1**: weak skills

**Level 2**: can deal with material that is simple and clearly laid out

**Level 3**: approximately skill level required for secondary school completion

**Level 4 and 5**: requires higher level of information processing skills

# Literacy Levels

## LEVEL 1:



**ΓΑΥΤΙΟΞ**

ΧΑΞΙΞΗ: ΔΑΞΗΕΨΟΥΣ GAS  
ΙΣ ΖΟΨΝΕΔ ΧΘΕΞ ΤΘΙΣ  
ΠΨΟΔΥΓΤ ΙΣ MIXED ΧΙΤΘ ΑΓΙΑ

## LEVEL 2:



**CAU TION**

WAR NING: DAN GER OUS GAS  
IS FOR MED WHEN THIS  
PRO DUCT IS MIX ED WITH ACID

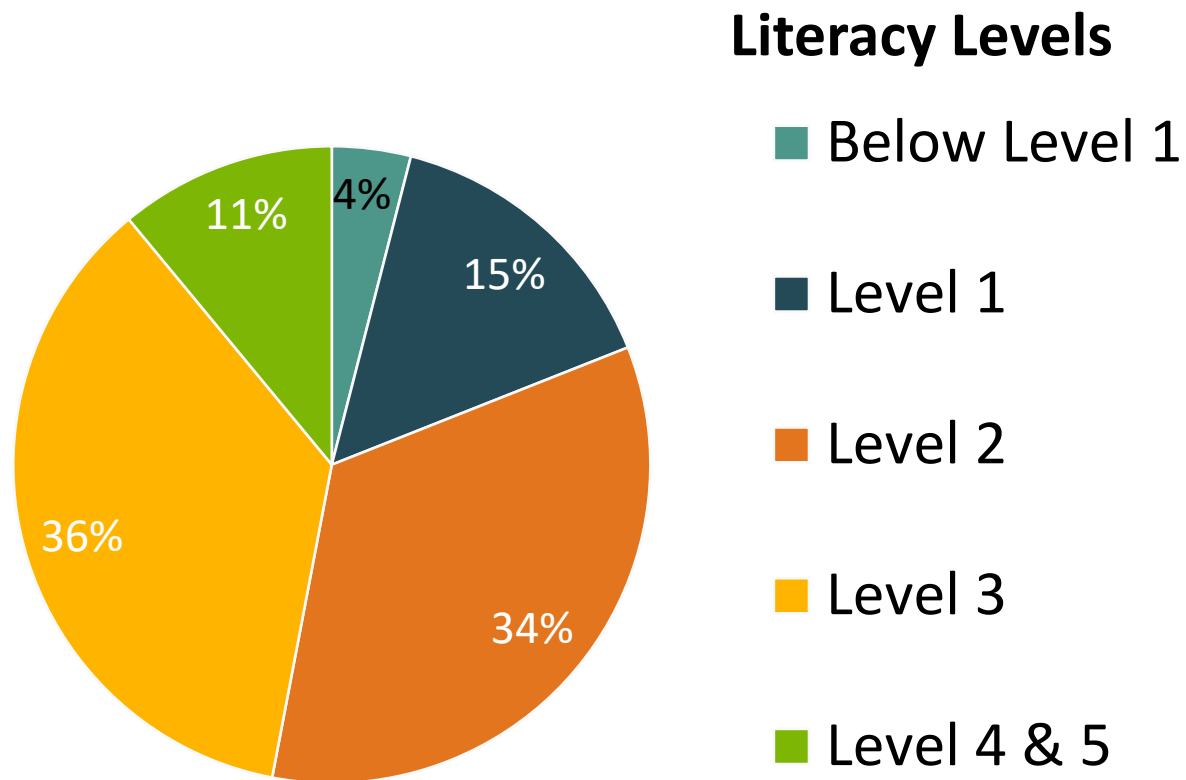
## LEVELS 3-5:



**CAUTION**

WARNING: DANGEROUS GAS  
IS FORMED WHEN THIS  
PRODUCT IS MIXED WITH ACID

# Literacy Statistics



# Anglophones in Quebec

- Anglophones have a higher average **literacy** score than Francophones in Quebec (276 vs. 271, on a scale of 500)
- There is no difference in average **numeracy** scores between Anglophone and Francophones. However, Anglophones score higher at Levels 4 and 5 (17% vs. 11%)
- A higher proportion of Anglophones score at Level 2 or 3 in PS-TRE than Francophones.

<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-555-x/2013001/chap3-eng.htm>

# Key Points

- The term **low literacy** is used to refer to **53%** (below level 3) of adults in Quebec who have difficulty with reading, writing and basic math.
- Literacy skills are no longer linked to a single threshold that separates the literate from the non-literate.
- Living in an “information culture” requires higher levels of literacy than at any previous time in history.
- Daily practice of reading, writing, and calculating sustains and enhances literacy skills. ***Use it or lose it!***

# Myth vs. Reality

## People with low literacy

- Seniors
- Immigrants
- People who didn't go to school
- People who don't work
- Less intelligent

## People with low literacy

- Majority are 16-44 years (+65yrs were not included in stats)
- Majority born in Canada (in Quebec the majority of -1 and 1 were born in Canada)
- Went to school
- Many have jobs
- Intelligent – navigate society
- Disadvantaged backgrounds

# Why Low Literacy?

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- Learning disability(ies)
- Physical, mental or developmental disability
- Illness or absence from school
- Lack of support in learning
- Learning environment not suited to learning style



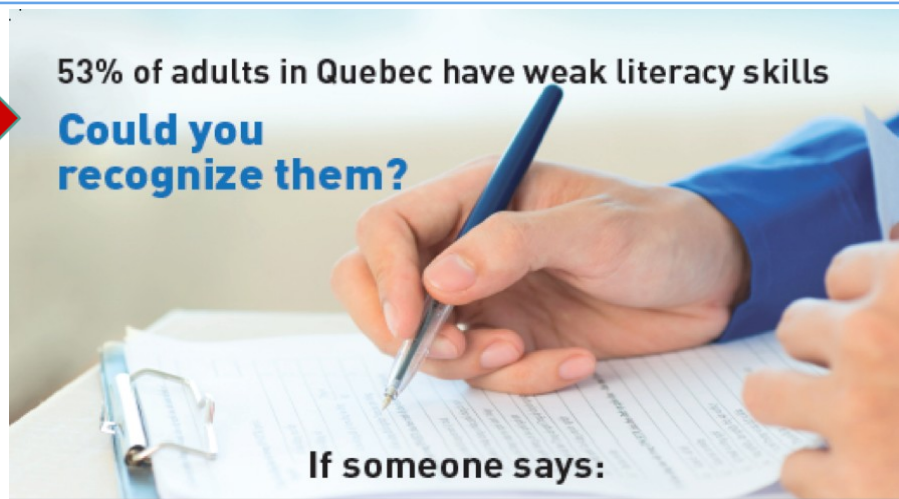
# Impact of Low Literacy

- Low self-esteem
- Medication errors
- Workplace errors or accidents
- Unemployed or under-employed
- Crime
- Dropping out of school
- Inability to help children with homework
- Depression
- Stress



**53% of adults in Quebec have weak literacy skills**

**Could you  
recognize them?**



**If someone says:**

“

**Could you fill out this form for me?**

**Thanks, I'll read it at home.**

**My writing is too bad; I'll ask my wife to fill it out.**

**I don't have my glasses.**

**I have a good memory, I will remember it...**

”

**If the person you meet:**

- Takes a document without glancing at it
- Is reluctant to fill out a form in front of you
- Finds excuses to avoid reading and writing
- Has missed several appointments, arrives very early or very late
- Recognizes medications by their shape or colour
- Distorts or mispronounces words when speaking

It is possible that this person has low literacy skills

**How to help them?**

Don't dramatize the situation; be attentive and create an atmosphere of trust  
Communicate using clear and simple language:

- Avoid medical jargon
- Pause between each important point
- Avoid closed questions that can be answered with "yes" or "no"
- Limit information given to 3 or 4 important points

Refer the person to literacy resources



**For more information: Yamaska Literacy Council 450 263-7503**

# Voices

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Gary and Ernest

# How does it feel?

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dyslexia generator

# What is Plain Language?

**Plain language is writing for your readers.**

When you think about your reader, pay attention to:

- How you organize the information (where to find info)
- What you write (content)
- How you write (words, sentences, grammar)
- How you present the information (design)

# Why use Plain Language?

Plain Language:

- Reaches people who cannot read well
- Helps all readers understand information (Universal design)
- Avoids misunderstandings and errors
- Saves time...gets the job done well the first time!

Plain language is NOT “dumbing down” content.

# Step 1: Know Your Readers and the Purpose of Your Document

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- Who are my readers?
- Where and when will my readers use this document?
- What is the purpose of this document?
- What do my readers need to know?
- What type of document do I need?

# Step 2: Make an Outline

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- Brainstorm
- Organize ideas in a logical way
- Put the most important ideas first
- Use headings and subheadings (Table of Contents for longer documents)
- Introduce your document
- Cut out information that the reader does NOT need



# Step 3: Write and Edit Text

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- Use **simple** and **short** words and phrases
- Write short sentences with **one idea** in each sentence
- Use the **active voice** (Subject – Verb- Object)
- Write short paragraphs (related ideas)
- Use point form lists where appropriate

# Use simple words & phrases

## Original

- remuneration
- terminate
- transpire
- due to the fact that
- in lieu of
- take action to

## Plain Language

- pay, salary, income
- stop, end
- happen
- because
- instead of
- act

# Write short simple sentences

## Before

Title to property in the goods shall remain vested in the Company (notwithstanding the delivery of the same to the Customer) until the price of the Goods comprised in the contract and all other money due from the Customer to the Company on any other account has been paid in full.

## After

We will own the goods until you have finished paying for them.

# Use the Active Voice

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- Use the **active voice** (Subject – Verb- Object)

Five chocolates were eaten by me. (passive)

I ate five chocolates. (active)

# Before and After

## **WHAT FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE IS AVAILABLE?**

Assistance in the form of a forgivable loan of up to \$2 500 is available. This loan does not have to be repaid provided that the homeowner agrees to continue to occupy the unit for the duration of the loan forgiveness period. If the adaptation work is being done on a rental unit, the landlord must agree that rents will not increase as a result of the adaptations. The loan forgiveness period is 6 months and may be reduced in extenuating circumstances. Repayable loans are not available.

## **What Financial Assistance is Available?**

- You can get a forgivable loan for up to \$2,500.
- If the loan is for your own house, you have to live there for at least 6 months. This is the loan forgiveness period. It can be shorter than this if necessary.
- If you're a landlord, you can't increase the rent because of changes you made with the loan.

# Step 4: Design your Document

- Use white space to break up text  
(1" margins, space between sections, 2 columns; left justified)
- Use fonts that are easy to read (2 fonts)  
San serif: short texts or online. Ex. calibri, Arial  
Serif: for dense text Ex. Times New Roman, Cambria  
Fonts for dyslexia Ex. Open Dyslexic, lexie readable  
Avoid fancy Ex. Braggadocio
- Highlight important information  
(boxes, shading, bullets, bold; **limit** italics & caps)
- Use graphics to enhance the text  
(don't mix styles, place near the corresponding text)
- Use colour effectively  
(use contrast, don't overwhelm reader)

# Step 5: Test your Document

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Be sure you will reach your readers.

- Check **readability** (apps, software, etc.)
- Ask someone else to read your draft
- Check with the experts – your readers
- Field test
- **Listen** to the feedback and **REVISE!**

# Readability

Canada's two official languages, English and French, are an integral part of Canada's social, economic and cultural makeup. The distribution of official-language minority (OLM) populations in Canada varies in proportion and in population density from one province to another. According to the 2011 Census, about 80% of the Francophone population outside of Quebec aged 16 to 65 lives in Ontario, New Brunswick, and Manitoba. In Ontario, about 4% of the population has French as a mother tongue, with the highest densities found through the mid-north-east portion of the province, an area with smaller population centres. In New Brunswick, approximately 32% of the population belong to the French-language community, which is more concentrated in the north and southeast. Manitoba's Francophone minority is mostly concentrated in Winnipeg and environs, and accounts for about 4% of the population aged 16 to 65. In Quebec, about 8% of the population aged 16 to 65 has English as a mother tongue, with 74% concentrated in the Montreal metropolitan area, and smaller proportions in the Outaouais and Estrie regions.

**Hemingway**  
*Editor*

## Readability

**Grade 14**

**Poor.** Aim for 9.

Reading time: 00:00:42

Letters: 903

Characters: 1116

Words: 176

Sentences: 8

Paragraphs: 2

Show Less ▲

**1** adverb, meeting the goal of 1 or fewer.

**0** uses of passive voice. Nice work.

**1** phrase has a simpler alternative.

**3** of 8 sentences are hard to read.

**4** of 8 sentences are very hard to read.



# Let's Practice

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Look at the document you have been given.

How would change it to Plain Language?

# Resources

## Readability

- [Hemingway App](#)
- [Readability](#)
- Readability Functions in Word

## Plain Language Tools and Checklists

- <https://www.plainlanguage.gov>
- [NWT Literacy Council Plain Language Guide](#)
- [Blog](#)
- [BC Plain Language Guide](#)

# Resources

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## Audit

- [Audit tool](#)

## Fonts (for people with dyslexia)

- [Open dyslexic](#)
- [Lexia Readable](#)

# Thank you



## Literacy Quebec

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