

Needs Assessment

Needs assessment is the process of examining what learners know, and identifying what they want or need to learn. Adult learners' needs are best served when their past experiences and achievements are acknowledged and used as a vehicle for encouraging learning.













Needs assessment is most beneficial if conducted on an ongoing basis: at the beginning of the program to determine what learners bring with them and what they need to learn; during the program to identify what they have achieved and what they would like to learn next; and at the end of the program to help learners with future plans. While needs assessments provide a sense of direction for the program, they also make instructors aware of the ongoing and changing needs of learners at any time during the program.

In assessing learners' needs, a variety of methods can be considered. Below is a list of possible methods for conducting needs assessments. This list is not exhaustive and instructors are encouraged to explore and experiment to find out which methods suit their learners best. While some methods are appropriate for initial assessment (surveys and questionnaires), others are more appropriate for ongoing assessment (class/group discussions).

Assessment Method	Procedure
Picture Cards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners select pictures representing their daily activities to determine what they need to learn in class. See Sample Needs Assessment 1: Picture Cards
Surveys and Questionnaires	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners answer questions about their life and learning goals. See Sample Needs Assessment 2: Questionnaire
Short Answer Questions e.g., multiple choice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners answer multiple-choice questions relating to a specific topic or skill area. E.g., When I am listening to a tape, I usually: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> prefer to see the text on the blackboard or as a handout have no difficulty understanding the main idea find it difficult to follow unless repeated more than once
Extended-Answer Questions e.g., essays and reports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners describe topics they would and would not like to study by answering questions and giving reasons
Review of Reading Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners look at different types of reading texts (e.g., news articles, memos, catalogues, greeting cards, newspapers) and decide which they would like to study in class
Class/Group Discussions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners discuss their interests using a list of topics in groups
Personal Journals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners keep a personal journal about their daily life, personal thoughts and experiences, and future plans Learners write about problems they experience with English by completing a chart with headings: when, where, with whom, about what, and the problem

Sample Needs Assessment 1: PICTURE CARDS

This is a useful method for assessing low-level learners. The instructor shows a series of photographs or drawings that represent different real-life situations such as going to the bank, shopping at the supermarket, going to school, or visiting a social service agency. Learners can sort the pictures in the order in which they would like to learn the theme or topic and omit any that are not of interest to them.

Education 	Jobs 	Government Services 	Health 
Canada 	Canadian Culture 	Relationships 	Banking 
Police 	Housing 	Shopping 	Transportation 

Sample Needs Assessment 2: QUESTIONNAIRE

Personal Information

Name: _____ Date: _____
What country are you from? _____
When did you come to Canada? _____

Language

Did you study English before you came to Canada? ☐ yes ☐ no
Did you study English in Canada before coming to this school? ☐ yes ☐ no

Which of your skills do you think is the best: ☐ reading ☐ writing ☐ speaking ☐ listening
Which of your skills do you think is the worst: ☐ reading ☐ writing ☐ speaking ☐ listening

In which situations outside school do you use English?

- | | | | |
|--|--|---|---------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> bank | <input type="checkbox"/> doctor's office | <input type="checkbox"/> supermarket | <input type="checkbox"/> job |
| <input type="checkbox"/> child's school | <input type="checkbox"/> bus and subway | <input type="checkbox"/> with landlord | <input type="checkbox"/> stores |
| <input type="checkbox"/> with neighbours | <input type="checkbox"/> at home | <input type="checkbox"/> government and other offices | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> using a computer and the Internet | | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> other: _____ | | | |

Which activities do you enjoy in an ESL class?

- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> working in groups | <input type="checkbox"/> class discussions | <input type="checkbox"/> working with a partner |
| <input type="checkbox"/> using a computer | <input type="checkbox"/> dictations | <input type="checkbox"/> grammar exercises |
| <input type="checkbox"/> listening to the news | <input type="checkbox"/> reading the newspaper | <input type="checkbox"/> vocabulary games |
| <input type="checkbox"/> watching movies | <input type="checkbox"/> writing exercises | |

Work Experience

What job(s) did you have before coming to Canada? _____
If you are working now, what job do you have? _____
If you have ever worked in Canada, what jobs did you have? _____
Are you looking for work now? ☐ yes ☐ no

Future Goals

What do you hope to learn in this class? _____
What do you want to do after you finish this program? Check one or two of the following and give more details on the line beside your choice:
☐ work (What kind of job?) _____
☐ start your own business (What type of business?) _____
☐ go to high school, college, or university (What subject?) _____
☐ take a job training course (What field?) _____
☐ be a homemaker
☐ other (Give details) _____