

# Words and Numbers



**CLAN EDINBURGH**

city literacy and numeracy



# Words and Numbers

An initial screening tool to ask adults about their reading, writing and numbers

## User Guide

Front line advisors and outreach and development workers are often in contact with young people and adults who may have the need to develop their skills in reading, writing and the use of numbers.

As a result, the workers are ideally placed to play a key role in identifying and supporting potential new literacies learners. However, this can be difficult, as workers can struggle to find useful assessment frameworks which enable an early identification of need and levels of skill. *Words and Numbers* aims to help with this process.

**Acknowledgement: Words and Numbers has been developed from a screening tool published by the Basic Skills Agency in England.**

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## What does Words and Numbers do?

- ✚ Helps identify literacy and numeracy needs in 1:1 interviews
- ✚ Takes only TEN minutes to complete
- ✚ Gives a reliable and user friendly approach to assessment

It is not a detailed diagnostic assessment but it can help to identify those who wish to become more confident in their reading, writing and numbers.

## Who may find Words and Numbers helpful?

Anyone who is involved in providing advice and guidance to adults and young people would find Words and Numbers helpful. It can be used (and freely photocopied) by:

- ✚ Community learning and outreach programmes
- ✚ Personal advisors e.g. in Job Centre Plus
- ✚ Those supporting homeless people, offenders, people with mental health difficulties or substance misusers
- ✚ Careers advisors
- ✚ Young People's support workers
- ✚ Voluntary Organisations
- ✚ Development workers in housing, health and capacity building projects

## What do we mean by Literacies?

Sometimes you will find Adult Literacy and Numeracy described as “basic skills” or “Adult Basic Education”. This tool uses the term “literacies” to emphasise the dynamic and diverse ways in which adults encounter and use words and numbers in their written form. (*Literacies in the Community: Resources for Practitioners and Managers, 2000*)

In Scotland, we are working to a definition of Literacies (encompassing Numeracy), which has emerged from much work in this area and resulted in the Adult Literacy and Numeracy In Scotland Report, published in July 2001 (*the ALNIS report*). This report sets out the Scottish Executive Strategy for raising literacy and numeracy levels across Scotland using a social practices approach.

### **A Scottish Definition of Adult Literacy and Numeracy**

*The ability to read, write and use numbers, to handle information, express ideas and opinions, make decisions and solve problems, as family members, workers, citizens and lifelong learners ( ALNIS, 2001)*

This definition tells us that:

- ✚ Literacy and numeracy are not just about mechanical skills of encoding and decoding symbols but also the skills, knowledge and understanding that enables us to do what we want to do in all areas of our lives
- ✚ These key life areas and social contexts in which we use literacy and numeracy are important in deciding what is to be learned
- ✚ Such skills are almost always employed for a purpose – such as making decisions or solving problems or communicating effectively with others. Therefore, their use is closely linked with social practices that have their own social purpose and meaning

*(Adapted from “An Adult Literacy and Numeracy Curriculum Framework for Scotland”, 2005)*

The approach in Scotland therefore puts the learners, and the contexts in which they choose to use their skills, knowledge and understanding, *at the centre of the process*. The learning curriculum, then, stems from the everyday literacy and numeracy events in their daily lives rather than being presented as a set of functional, decontextualised and mechanical manipulations to be mastered or as *something that they lack* (a deficit model).

### Why is it important to identify Literacy and Numeracy Needs?

Research has documented the links between lack of educational qualifications, and especially difficulties in literacy and numeracy, and the experience of:

- ✚ poverty
- ✚ higher risks of unemployment
- ✚ offending
- ✚ poor health
- ✚ poor housing
- ✚ less likelihood of being involved in public and community life

(National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (2005) Does Numeracy Matter More ?)

Many individuals operate to their current satisfaction and aspirations within the contexts of their daily life until they identify a particular goal that they wish to achieve or problem that they feel they now need to solve. Front line workers often come into contact with people at a point of transition or difficulty *during which it is an ideal time* to discuss Literacy and Numeracy as an integral part of moving forward, achieving new goals and tackling difficult situations in their everyday lives.

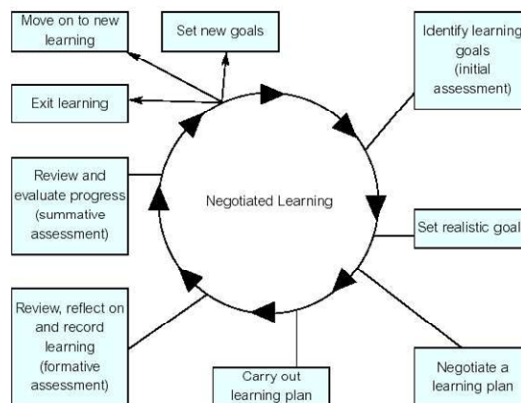
## How does Words and Numbers fit in?

*Words and Numbers* can be part of a wider process of gaining access to adult literacies provision. It can be integrated into other assessment tools for individual action plans.

The concept of Individual Learning Planning is central to effective Adult Literacy and Numeracy practice. It can be thought of as a cycle.

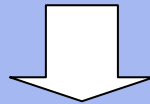
# The Learning Cycle

A LEARNING CYCLE



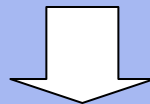
### Step 1 INITIAL CONTACT

Service user comes into contact with worker in agency and is identified as appropriate for support (e.g. returning to work / learning/ housing/ advice/ health issues/ community involvement)



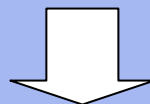
### Step 2 IDENTIFYING NEEDS

Through the establishment of trust and a professional relationship, worker and individual discuss areas relevant to the issue at hand or the future goals of the individual. At this stage the idea of wider learning goals and development of skills in Literacy and Numeracy can be raised. What skills and knowledge do you need at this stage? How does literacy and numeracy fit in? It might be useful to check out how confident you feel about reading, writing and numbers.



### Step 3 INITIAL SCREENING

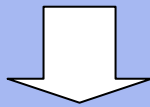
Go through the *Words and Numbers*. Make clear this is not a test and that it will simply highlight possible areas they may wish to follow up as part of their wider activities. Also make clear that nothing will be passed on without their permission but that they can choose to share whatever they find out with others who may be able to support them.



## Step 4 ACCESS TO APPROPRIATE SUPPORT / REFERRAL

Based on outcomes of *Words and Numbers* you can either

- + refer to local Literacy and Numeracy Partnership (see useful contacts at the end of the document) for follow-up referral and interview in the local area *or*
- + make contact with local Literacies Worker and support individual to meet *or*
- + match individual into on site provision *or*
- + integrate literacy and numeracy into further support within your service



## Step 5 IDENTIFYING LEARNING GOALS

From initial screening with non-literacies professional, match into support with a literacies specialist, tutor or worker who can help the learner to further identify learning goals or carry out further assessment as appropriate. By assessment we mean non-formal, detailed discussion with learners to identify their particular learning needs through one to one interaction between tutor and learner, as an integral process of Individual Learning Planning – see the Learning Cycle diagram on page 6.

## Using Words and Numbers

The questionnaire asks about everyday reading, writing and numeracy activities and how often the service user needs support to complete these.

### Before you begin

*Words and Numbers* has been designed to be used in informal situations. You do not need to be a specialist to use this material. Before you use the assessment you should read the user guide thoroughly.

The questionnaire should take about ten minutes to complete. It can be used as part of a 1:1 interview among questions about wider learning options.

Think about how and at what point you will introduce the assessment in the interview. Clients are more likely to respond positively if the situation is:

- ✚ Non-threatening
- ✚ Private and confidential
- ✚ Relaxed
- ✚ Encouraging

1. Choose a suitable point in the interview to introduce the questionnaire. Ensure that you will have at least 10 minutes of uninterrupted time to complete the questionnaire with the service user.
2. Explain the reason for the assessment. It is intended to find out if people need extra support or training.
3. The following script may be used to introduce the questionnaire.

*"I am going to ask you a few questions about your qualifications and skills so that we can find out what options best suit you. Take your time. I can repeat any question if you want to hear it again."*

4. Explain that you will go through the questionnaire first and that you will make no comments while you are asking the questions, but you will discuss the results at the end. DO NOT tell the client how many questions there are, as you may not ask everyone all the questions.
5. Read each question together with the alternative answers and ask the service user to choose one of the alternatives. If the client has any difficulty with making a selection you may repeat the question, but DO NOT reword the question.
6. Circle the answer chosen by the client.
7. DO NOT comment on any of the responses or give any indication as to whether answers are 'good' or not. If someone finds one of the questions difficult to answer, you might find it useful to use remarks such as "Thank you. Let's move on to the next question".
8. Think of the questionnaire as an opportunity for discussion, a tool for you to check out whether the service user would like support in reading, writing or numbers.

How often do you read a newspaper or magazine?	Every day <input type="checkbox"/>	Every week <input type="checkbox"/>
	Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/>	Never <input type="checkbox"/>
Has someone helped you with reading newspapers and magazines?	<b>Always</b> <input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Sometimes</b> <input type="checkbox"/>
	Never <input type="checkbox"/>	
How often do you go to the library?	Never <input type="checkbox"/>	Once a year <input type="checkbox"/>
	Once a month <input type="checkbox"/>	More often <input type="checkbox"/>
How often has someone helped you to read official information e.g. from the job centre/ DSS/ college/ hospital/ council?	<b>Always</b> <input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Sometimes</b> <input type="checkbox"/>
	Never <input type="checkbox"/>	
How often do you read for pleasure?	Every day <input type="checkbox"/>	Every week <input type="checkbox"/>
	Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/>	Never <input type="checkbox"/>
How often do you read from other things e.g from the television, computer, mobile phones or computer games?	Every day <input type="checkbox"/>	Every week <input type="checkbox"/>
	Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/>	Never <input type="checkbox"/>
How often has someone helped you with reading instructions (e.g. on medicine bottles, recipes, household appliances)?	<b>Always</b> <input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Sometimes</b> <input type="checkbox"/>
	Never <input type="checkbox"/>	
Do you think you could get a better job if you had some help with reading and writing?	<b>Yes</b> <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>

How often do you get help to fill in forms?	<b>Always</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Never	<input type="checkbox"/>		
How often has someone helped you to write letters/notes(e.g. note to school, application for a job, letter to DSS, electricity company)	<b>Always</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Never	<input type="checkbox"/>		
When writing letters or filling in forms how often do you worry about your handwriting and spelling?	<b>Always</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Never	<input type="checkbox"/>		
How often do you write letters/ notes/ anything?	<b>Never</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Once a year</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Monthly	<input type="checkbox"/>	Weekly	<input type="checkbox"/>
How did you get on at school?	Got qualifications			<input type="checkbox"/>
	<b>Got no qualifications</b>			<input type="checkbox"/>
	<b>Got extra support</b>			<input type="checkbox"/>
	Got on fine			<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you had any support with reading, writing or return to learning since school?	<b>Yes</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
When working out wages or benefits, do you	Do it in your head			<input type="checkbox"/>
	Use pen/paper/calculator			<input type="checkbox"/>
	<b>Ask someone</b>			<input type="checkbox"/>
	<b>Not do it</b>			<input type="checkbox"/>
If you need to check your shopping bill, do you:	Do it in your head			<input type="checkbox"/>
	Use pen/paper/calculator			<input type="checkbox"/>
	<b>Ask someone</b>			<input type="checkbox"/>
	<b>Not do it</b>			<input type="checkbox"/>

When you are working out how long it will take to get to an appointment on time by bus or train, do you:	Work it out using a timetable <input type="checkbox"/> Phone the bus or train station <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Ask someone</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Guess</b> <input type="checkbox"/>
You want to buy something which was £37.00 but is now reduced to half-price. To find the price, do you:	Work it out in your head <input type="checkbox"/> Work it out using a calculator <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Ask someone</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Guess</b> <input type="checkbox"/>
How confident are you that your maths is good enough for what you want to do at home or for the job you would like?	Very confident <input type="checkbox"/> Quite confident <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Not very confident</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Not at all confident</b> <input type="checkbox"/>
Do you think you could get a better job if you had some help with maths?	<b>Yes</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b>No</b> <input type="checkbox"/>

**More than 4 answers in bold print suggest you could ask the service user if s/he would like you to refer her/him for fuller assessment – see options Step 4.**

Notes:

For more information about CLAN Edinburgh, including contact details:

[www.clanedinburgh.org](http://www.clanedinburgh.org)

To refer service users	0800 085 4440
CLAN Office	0131 270 6072
Fax	0131 270 6074
CLAN Training Officer	0131 270 6070 (if you or your project would like to find out about free staff development)
CLAN Resource Base	0131 652 3938

#### Useful Contacts

East Lothian	01620 827492
Midlothian	01875 82176
West Lothian	01506 776377

#### Publications

Scottish Executive (2001) Adult Literacy and Numeracy in Scotland. Edinburgh: Scottish Executive.

City of Edinburgh Council and Scottish Executive (2000) Literacies in the Community: Resources for Practitioners and Managers. Edinburgh: City of Edinburgh Council.

Learning Connections (2005) An Adult Literacy and Numeracy Curriculum Framework for Scotland. Edinburgh: Communities Scotland.

National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (2005) Does Numeracy Matter More?