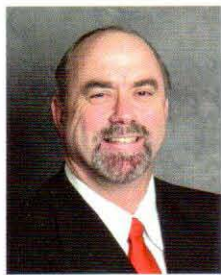


Literacy Today Is More Than It Used To Be



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A 2008 survey by the Society for Human Resource Managers found that 77.8 percent of surveyed employers ranked critical thinking and problem solving as the number one skill set required of employees in the coming years. As we are in an age labeled the “Information Age” by some and the “Knowledge Age” by others, it only makes sense that

analysis and processing of information is fundamental to many of today’s workplace tasks.

The 2002 *Alabama Community Audit* accomplished by the Alabama Workforce Investment Board and the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs identified poor reading, writing, recording and computer literacy as areas that need to be improved within our workforce. One of the top issues identified as a problem in the workplace was “Employees need to learn to think.”

The Workforce Investment Act of 1998 defines literacy as “an individual’s ability to read, write, speak in English, compute and solve problems at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job, in the family of the individual and in society.”

So in essence, what the employers were saying in the *Alabama Community Audit* was that many of the workers and potential workers are illiterate by today’s definition of literacy.

L.E Hedges, Ohio State University, presents the following attributes for critical thinking:

- The ability to identify and formulate problems, as well as the ability to solve them.
- The ability to recognize and use inductive reasoning.
- The ability to draw reasonable conclusions from information found in various sources, whether written, spoken, tabular, or graphic.
- The ability to comprehend, develop and use concepts and generalizations.
- The ability to distinguish between fact and fiction.

ACT WorkKeys has developed a program to quantify occupational literacy requirements and to access individual foundational literacy skills and work preparedness. The three components of the ACT WorkKeys program for determining work preparedness are:

- Reading for information;

- Applied mathematics ; and

- Locating information.

One can easily see how these three core areas relate to functional literacy and critical thinking/problem solving as described above.

An Individual’s skill level is determined through assessment/testing and job/occupational skill requirements are determined through profiling of specific jobs. When a classified job is profiled more than once the profiles are averaged, and an occupational profile is created.

ACT classifies educational level in three categories: high, middle and low. Middle education is defined as: associates degree, post-secondary vocational award or work experience in a related field. High education is anything above an associate degree and low education would be less than an associate degree or post-secondary certificate.

ACT WorkKeys occupational profiles provide benchmarking of fundamental skill requirements for several thousand occupations. Comparing an individual’s WorkKeys assessment results with occupational skill level requirements provides a means to identify job readiness or skills gaps.

Assessment scores range from three to seven. WorkKeys issues a hierarchy of certificates based on an individual’s assessment performance in fundamental skills/core areas (reading for information, applied mathematics and locating information). A National Work Readiness Certificate has been created for issuance. The four levels are:

- Bronze - Score of three in all three core areas;
- Silver - Score of four in all three core areas;
- Gold - Score of five in all three core areas; and
- Platinum - Score of six in all three core areas.

Through analysis of occupational profiles, ACT has determined what level of skills are required within the core areas for 85 percent of the jobs in various occupation clusters.

Cluster	Applied Math	Reading for Information	Locating Information
Manufacturing	6	5	5
Health Care	5	5	5
Energy	5	5	5
Construction	6	5	5

The Alabama Department of Education has adopted the WorkKeys assessment and the ACT exam as the high school exit assessments in order to provide meaningful information to high school seniors as to their work readiness and college preparedness.