



Digital Literacy Project for CLBC

Best Practices to Help Learners with Learning Digital Skills



COMMUNITY LIVING
BRITISH COLUMBIA

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Best practices to help learners with learning digital skills

Introduction

Best Practices documents, like curricula, mean different things to different people. For the purpose of the ISSoFBC Digital Literacy Project for Community Living BC (CLBC), Best Practices are defined as a set of key guidelines for delivering basic digital literacy tutoring to CLBC-eligible individuals and self-advocates or learners in order to optimize the learning process.

These Best Practices have been written as part of ISSoFBC's Digital Literacy Project for CLBC, but apply to all learners who need to learn or improve their digital literacy skills to perform basic digital tasks. They are not meant to be all-encompassing, but instead are designed to offer practical suggestions for how to offer digital skills tutoring.

The main sources shaping the Best Practices for this project were the needs assessment focus groups, surveys and interviews with service provider staff in CLBC funded organizations, and with individuals and self-advocates representing the target learners of the project. The project team also drew on the resources used in, and the considerable knowledge and experience gained from, the development and field testing of ISSoFBC's Digital Literacy Curriculum Resource (DLCR) funded by the Canadian government in 2019. An environmental scan of current digital literacy programs and resources was also conducted to find other material and approaches that might be incorporated to strengthen the project.

Digital literacy vs. conveying digital information


When approaching the tutoring of very basic digital skills, it's very important to make a distinction between just conveying digital instructions and building digital literacy.

Giving digital information consists of giving specific instructions. For example, telling or writing down the steps showing how to get into a Zoom meeting so a person can join a social program, or showing them how to go to a certain website to find particular information.

When you give digital information, you show the learner the steps, and perhaps use a document of instructions for support, such as screenshots of each step: "click here, then click here," etc. However, that is not the same as helping learners increase their digital literacy skills. A person can follow or even memorize a set of instructions to do something and appear to be very competent. But being able to do ONE task using technology does not mean you know how to transfer those skills to other contexts, to other digital tasks.

A concrete example was given by one of the Researcher/Developers on the Digital Literacy Curriculum Resource. While this Researcher/Developer was living on an

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island in Japan in the mid-1980s, she needed to get cash from a bank machine, which was still relatively new technology at the time. Where she lived, nothing was translated to English and she didn't read much Japanese. Luckily, because the technology was fairly new to the island, the bank had someone to help people use the machine. The Researcher/Developer would watch the demonstrations and catch some words, but mostly she memorized steps to take out money. So that was all that she could do at the machine – she could get money, but she could not even make a deposit. However, being a confident person, she looked pretty competent! And her skills for using the bank machine were fine – until she went on a trip to a different city in Japan and needed to get cash there.

Not surprisingly, she couldn't use the bank machine in the new city. Why? Because she didn't know if the screens would be the same, and she knew she couldn't read the screens to get information about what to do next. Because of that, she was terrified that if she did something wrong, the machine would confiscate her card. This Researcher/Developer, an educated and highly accomplished person, was very good at observing, copying and memorizing, which allowed her to do ONE thing in controlled circumstances. But at that point in her life, she wasn't bank machine literate. She had not learned the discrete skills to use the bank machine that she could then transfer to another machine. She did not understand WHY she did each step to get money. She just followed the same steps, the same way each time.

This is a perfect example of coping in someone who lacks literacy, whether language literacy or digital literacy. When we increase a person's literacy, we are building knowledge and independent abilities that are transferable from task to task. This means someone who is digitally literate is able to transfer digital skills from one context to another. Like figuring out how to use a new app for texting and making calls on their phone from the skills they have to use WhatsApp. Digital literacy is what we are building with this project rather than just conveying digital information to use specific programs.

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What we know about learners and digital literacy

As you begin tutoring in digital skills, there are some expected characteristics of beginning learners that are helpful for you to know. Note that all these characteristics will not apply to all learners! But if you know the possibilities, you can be better prepared to support learners as they learn and begin to practice on their own.

Reluctance to admit low digital skills

Based on what service providers told us during the research period for this project, some individuals are reluctant to admit they lack digital skills. Wanting to fit in, to be seen as competent, they may say they are able to do a digital task when in fact guidance is needed for them to acquire those skills and learn to do them independently.

Tendency to overestimate digital skills

As in the example of bank machine literacy given earlier, many individuals with lower digital literacy develop coping skills in which they learn to do tasks by rote. For example, an individual may be able to go to a certain website such as selfadvocatenet.com to get information about community events, because they do that regularly. However, it does not mean these individuals have the skills yet to navigate on other websites. It does not equate with having strong digital literacy skills.

Being able to go to selfadvocatenet.com and get community event information may demonstrate that the individual has learned steps by rote rather than showing skills that indicate true understanding of how/ what they are doing. In addition to the learners themselves overestimating their skills, staff or other support people may overestimate skills because they observe them doing one digital task well.

If individuals have learned to access information or websites by rote, it is unlikely they can transfer those steps to other tasks or applications. It is often not until individuals are unsuccessful in tasks that require a higher level of digital literacy that it becomes clear they need tutoring and practice in digital skills..

Unaware of the relevance of digital skills to their life

Learners who usually have another person to do digital tasks for them may not recognize the need to learn how to use digital devices. They may be unaware of the relevance of learning digital skills and how those skills can help them become more independent.

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Lack of awareness of all the discrete steps involved in doing digital tasks

Many people are unaware that seemingly simple digital skills like sending an email are actually comprised of a large number of smaller discrete skills. In fact, learners may have tried to acquire digital skills in the past and been frustrated and unsuccessful because some of the small discrete steps were unintentionally skipped over when the tutor attempted to guide them. This happens because those with higher levels of digital literacy perform digital tasks without thinking about all the minute steps.

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Stressed when faced with completing digital tasks

Needing to complete a task using technology can be stressful for anyone, particularly if the task is urgent or high stakes. We know that excess stress impedes learning. This is seen, for example, in learners who are refugees who experienced trauma in their countries and major stresses coming to Canada. Stress activates the fight-flight response, which interferes with both short term and long-term memory, meaning that learning is not retained. It does not help that every day, more and more services are online, not in person. This creates more possibility of learners feeling overwhelmed when thinking of learning digital skills.

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Barriers to learning

It's important to be aware of possible barriers to learning so that they can be addressed. Some of the barriers to learning are visible while others can be hidden. Barriers could include:

Fear of technology

Some people with a fear of technology believe they might break a computer, laptop or other device by using it improperly. For this reason, they may be fearful of learning digital skills and feel that such skills are beyond their ability. Or perhaps they are overwhelmed by the learning process, not knowing where to start and worried they won't remember what they learned.

Feeling afraid or incompetent can cause strong emotions to be displayed during the learning process that may seem out of place. At the very least, we know that fear blocks the learning process.

In addition to the actual devices causing fear, the language of technology can include a lot of "techno jargon" that can be intimidating. Learners may not want to admit they don't understand technical terms because they want to fit in. A simple strategy to reduce fear of

technology for all learners is to be sure to reduce the technical terms you use. Keep the wording in descriptions, explanations and instructions simple yet accurate.

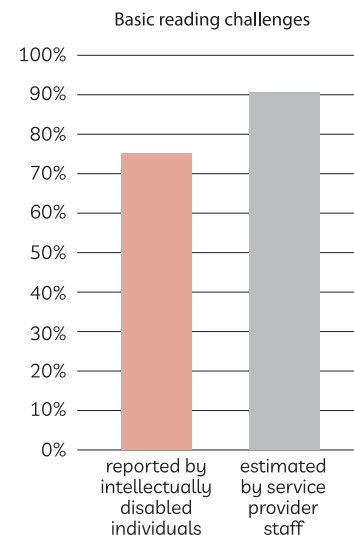
A simple strategy to reduce fear of technology for all learners is to be sure to reduce the technical terms you use. Keep the wording in descriptions, explanations and instructions simple yet accurate.

Internalized failure

The focus groups, surveys and interviews completed for this project showed that many people with intellectual and/or other disabilities may have internalized failure. Because so much skill learning for them has been a struggle, they have unfortunately adopted a "deficit mentality" or a feeling that they lack ability and can't do things. Many individuals/self-advocates can get frustrated and discouraged easily. Some have self-regulation issues and get upset or turned off quickly. Those who want to seek help during digital skill learning may also worry they did something wrong. All of these feelings can block the learning process.

Reading challenges

Low language literacy can be an added barrier to learning digital skills. The needs assessment for this project revealed that many individuals/self-advocates may have basic reading challenges. For example, 75% of intellectually disabled individuals in the focus groups reported reading challenges, while service provider staff interviewed estimated that upwards of 90% of those they supported struggled with reading.





Memory impairments and short attention spans

Both service provider staff and individuals themselves reported in the project needs assessment that many individuals/self-advocates have trouble remembering things. For whatever reason this occurs, some daily functioning is impacted, including learning and the ability to retain information. The needs assessment also revealed that many individuals have short attention spans and may get distracted easily. This affects the amount and the speed of learning that can be attempted in a session.

Physical challenges

Physical challenges may include problems holding a mouse or using a trackpad or keyboard due to fine or gross motor impairments. Other individuals may have vision or hearing impairments. Vision issues can particularly affect digital learning, as many icons and text online can be very small on a computer screen.

Strategies for ensuring successful digital skill learning

Create a safe space for learning

Take time to build rapport with the learner. It is crucial to create an environment of trust and a safe space for learning. The first few sessions should focus on doing this even more than on teaching skills.

If tutoring a small group, ensure that dominant individuals with more digital skills don't take over and show off their digital skills, which can intimidate others. Ensure that all learners feel seen and heard. This means managing the group dynamic so there is equal space for each person to participate and language is respectful. For example, the tutor may need to ask some individuals to wait to speak.

Another aspect of creating a safe space is assuring learners that it's totally OK to make mistakes and also to not know how to do something in the digital environment. You can convey that making mistakes and not knowing are OK by deliberate modelling and voicing your thought process out loud. Seeing that the tutor is OK with their own mistakes is more powerful than just telling learners it is OK. What is meant by deliberate modelling and voicing thought processes? For example, while demonstrating completing a digital task, you might vocalize:

"Oops, that doesn't seem right ... hmmm, how do I go back? ... do I click here? no ... oh yeah ... I can click here on the back button. I can always click on the back button to go back".

"I forget how to reply all to an email ... Hmmm ... where is the reply all button? It's not here. I just see reply. (Gmail) ... There are three dots. I know that means it's a menu with more options inside. Maybe reply all is in there ... I'll click on it and see."

Talking through the process of a digital task calmly shows that mistakes happen to everyone, while also modelling how to recover without getting stressed.

Slow the pace of learning

Tutors can reassure individuals that it is normal and expected for everyone to take time to learn and retain digital skills. None of us learned digital skills in one day. We learn them over time. Normalizing the gradual learning process allows individuals to relax.

To do this, set a very slow pace for the learning session. A slow pace allows those who learn more slowly to have the time they need. Remember that the slow pace will likely feel "boring" to the trainer far earlier than to the learners. If it seems too slow to the tutor, it's likely a good pace for the learner!

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For example, when the Digital Literacy Curriculum Resource was piloted in 2019, one class of literacy level learners took 10 hours to complete the first Module of Mouse and Navigation, and likely would have spent longer if there were time. This was much longer than was suggested for the Module and more than other groups of learners needed, but not unreasonable given those learners' challenges.

As a tutor looking at a lesson in the Digital Literacy Curriculum Resource, you may think it's going to take a long time to complete. You may look at the detail in the lesson and be tempted to skip through parts. But it's important to realize that the lesson needs to take that time. If you speed up, learners will likely get frustrated. Moreover, when learners come back for the next tutoring session, you will see some have forgotten the skills. This may be because some learners get frustrated and not practice. Or it may be due to memory impairments that more repetition is needed. Whatever the reason, you need to expect that those parts of earlier lessons need to be reviewed or repeated.

Be patient with learners and encourage learners to be patient with themselves

As the tutor, you need to remind yourself that you are working on a process, on helping the individual learn skills, not on conveying information. That of course means the learning will be slow. Learning skills is slower than learning information. The learners also need to be reminded "Be patient with yourself!" Learning something well takes time. Many learners are not aware of that. They think they can learn in an unrealistically short time and may get discouraged when they can't.

Use plain language

Use simple, direct language. Simple structures and vocabulary aid understanding. This does not mean using broken, incorrect or childish language. It means choosing words and phrases that are more concrete than abstract, as well as shorter sentences. Not using techno jargon and too many technical terms is important.

Use the example language given in the DLCR lessons and the teaching videos as guidance for simple, direct language. This is good practice at any time, but particularly when introducing the new language that goes with digital literacy.

Don't be tempted to show or tell everything you know

It can be difficult for trainers with solid digital skills to remember a time and how it felt to have their own skills at a beginning level like the individuals being tutored. For example, you may get excited about sharing what you know about Zoom and start to show learners all the features, how to turn on and off the video and mic; how to use chat; how to add a background filter, how to share their screen, etc. Or, depending on your own process of learning, you might feel it would be faster and

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easier for the individuals to learn technology shortcuts. Or you might feel it is important or interesting for the individuals to learn some background or additional knowledge about the technology.

Keep in mind that the goal is to build digital skills and the DLCR is designed for that purpose. You will see that the lessons in the DLCR include just enough detail and no more. Too much information, extra information or even shortcuts can be overwhelming and confusing as learners try to remember everything. When learners are overwhelmed, the skills will not be retained.

Deliver tutoring sessions in manageable “chunks”

Trying to cover too much material in one session will be frustrating and overwhelming to the learner. This will set back their learning as they now have even more stress related to technology! Instead, plan tutoring sessions with smaller objectives, and use any leftover time in a session for review and additional practice.

Keep learners focused on the lesson

Some learners can get sidetracked easily and ask for extraneous information not necessary to learning and practicing a particular skill at that time. Others may want you to show them how to do a very specific thing related to the session topic, or ask you about vocabulary unrelated to what you are focused on.

Don't get sidetracked from the digital skills you are building. Stay focused on the lesson and keep the learners focused on it to ensure objectives are met.

Deliver the tutoring to cater to different ways of learning

Accessibility is around being flexible; doing things in more than one way. For example, although watching a video for information can help overcome reading challenges and may be more enjoyable for some, it may not be the best strategy for everyone. If watching a video to learn skills doesn't seem to work for one learner, you can try an illustrated instruction page with a screenshot for each step. Or, demonstrate the skills step-by-step in person instead.

You should also demonstrate skills in different ways depending on whether the learner is more an auditory learner, a visual learner or does best with hands-on/kinesthetic learning. If a learner gains skills best by using visuals, use the handouts in the lessons and go through them step-by-step. But if the learner prefers hands-on learning, be sure to move quickly from teaching and demonstration to allowing the learner to try the skills for themselves.



Build motivation in learners

Digital skills need to be practical, useful and relevant to the learner. Learners who see the relevance of what they are learning will be more motivated to learn and practice regularly.

- Find out what kind of digital challenges learners have in their daily lives and then determine what specific skills they need to learn in order to overcome those challenges.
- Show learners how mastering basic digital skills can have a positive impact on their daily lives, and use concrete examples of how they will benefit.
- Be direct. Point out the relevance and the usefulness to the learner of each digital skill they will learn before they start. For example, you can say, “You want to get a job. Knowing how to go to a website and find information will help you look for a job on another website like Indeed or on a company website, and to do that more independently.”

To further build motivation, you should tailor the content to the individual’s more immediate needs. Learners will be more motivated to learn email skills, for example, if they understand that it will help them apply for a job or stay connected to friends and family. Someone who wants to join a social program that meets on Zoom every Tuesday will be motivated to learn Zoom skills. Of course, individuals may need to learn more fundamental digital skills in the curriculum first, depending on the current skills of each learner. But if they know those fundamental skills are connected directly to their broader goals, they will have more reason to master them.

Finally, if you know your learner’s interests as well as needs, you can use those as a hook to teach digital skills. Perhaps employment is not the learner’s goal, and social or recreational needs are more important. Does the learner love hockey? Then adapt the lesson to teach online navigation skills using the NHL website instead of an employment-related site. In general, learners who are excited about accessing content they enjoy will be more engaged and motivated to continue learning, including practicing on their own.

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Strategies for addressing physical challenges

Fine motor challenges

Some learners with fine motor impairments may find a mouse easier to use than a trackpad. For others, it may be the reverse and they may find it hard to use a mouse but easier to tap on a touchscreen digital device like a tablet or iPad.* For learners using laptops who are able to use a mouse, attaching an external mouse to a laptop offers greater control and makes many tasks much easier than using the built-in laptop trackpad.

*Note that tutors who are working with learners using touchscreen devices may find the ISSofBC digital literacy material for mobile phones useful to improve their digital skills. Research for this Digital Literacy Project for CLBC indicates that a mobile phone or tablet are not recommended for individuals trying to build digital skills for employment.

Vision impairments

Many icons and text on computers and online can be very small. This can be challenging for many learners but is especially difficult for those with vision impairments. Think about the little triangle ‘chevrons’ that open drop-down menus. They are usually quite tiny and easy to miss.

One way to reduce frustration is to teach learners how to enlarge their window, their browser, their Word or PDF document, and their font. Showing them how to make their cursor larger, and thus more visible, can also be helpful.

Gaining simple digital tools to overcome an impairment can be very empowering and also help a learner get more enjoyment from learning, making it more likely they will try to practice on their own. Fortunately, these days there are more accessibility tools more easily available that help learners interact better with their computer or other digital device. Some accessibility tools allow the user to use contrast on the screen or to space text farther apart, to highlight text to make it easier to see, or to use an immersive reader with text to voice. For learners with physical impairments, choosing accessibility tools that support a specific learner’s needs is crucial to setting up the tutoring and practice for success.

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Using the ISSofBC Digital Literacy Curriculum Resource materials

Start with needs assessment

Do you know your learners' digital literacy skills? Do you know their challenges? Their learning needs? For some individuals you may have a very clear idea but for others you may have no idea at all. Perhaps you have only met some individuals remotely? Or you have not yet had the chance to see them interact with digital devices.

Service providers who need to help with raising digital literacy are not always aware of the digital devices their individuals use or want to use. In the research conducted for the ISSofBC Digital Literacy Project for CLBC, 32% of self-advocates/individuals surveyed or interviewed responded that they use or need to use a computer, whereas only 19% of service provider staff responded that self-advocates and individuals need to use computers and laptops.

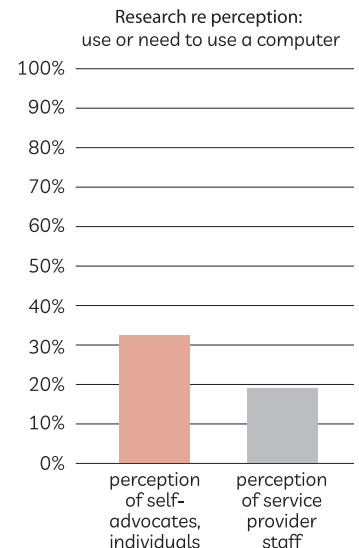
Asking the learners specific questions about what devices they need to use and when, where and how they use computers, laptops, tablets, or mobile phones in their daily lives will provide insight into what type of instruction and practice is needed.

As mentioned in the section on barriers to learning, individuals often over- or underestimate their digital skills. Self-assessment of skills is often inaccurate. Service provider staff and other support people may also misgauge the abilities of the individuals they are supporting. It's therefore important to complete a formal or informal diagnostic/needs assessment of skills to determine needs.

The ISSofBC Digital Literacy Curriculum Resource (DLCR) includes a Diagnostic/Needs Assessment Tool or DNA Tool. This tool consists of online interactive diagnostic activities, checklist-rubrics for the tutor-assessor, and self-assessment for learners. The tutor-assessor observes the potential learner and uses the checklist-rubrics for each of the activities to determine the instructional needs in the various digital skill areas.

Instead of, or in addition to, the formal diagnostic/needs assessment, giving learners a simple digital task to perform and observing how the learner responds to the task will give a tutor a better understanding of true digital skills. When completing an informal diagnostic task, how a learner performs, not just what they accomplish, is important to observe. If they struggle to even open the browser, you need to go back to even simpler digital skills and check their mouse and navigation skills. If they can open the browser but are unclear how to navigate on a webpage to find information, then perhaps the Online Skills basic module is a place to start.

If the learner's needs are unclear, be sure to use the DNA Tool to help understand both their abilities and their gaps before attempting to start tutoring.



Ensure prerequisite digital skills are taught

Most digital tasks are composed of a number of digital skills. Even a simple task may need a large number of skills to complete. Each module in the ISSofBC Digital Literacy Curriculum Resource contains a lesson on a different broad digital skill.

These lessons reference the prerequisite skills contained in other modules. It is very important to be sure that all prerequisite skills have been mastered before teaching a new digital literacy skill. For example, the lesson on email requires that learners have mouse and navigation, keyboarding, and basic online skills before they can master composing an email.

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Being aware of the basic skills learners need to have before they attempt to learn a more complex skill will set them up for success. For example, in the Employment module, before learners can do the lesson to fill out an online job application, they need to know:

- mouse skills or trackpad skills: how to hold the mouse or position their hand on the trackpad, how to left-click, double-click, scroll, the different shapes of the cursor showing text, a link, a text box;
- navigation skills: how to move the mouse around the screen to position the cursor in the correct location; how to open and close a window;
- keyboarding skills: how to type words, numbers, symbols; how to use Shift and Enter keys;
- online skills: how to open a web browser, recognize a text box or field like the address bar or search bar; type a name to search for a website; how to scroll down and up, and that there are different places to scroll; what a hyperlink looks like; how to recognize the back button and to click on it to go back; how to close the website they opened.

Although it may be tempting to start with the task the learner needs to complete, it is always recommended to start with Module 1 to establish fundamental skills. At the very least, do not just jump to the module “Fill out an online job application form” if the learner struggles with the prerequisite skills during the diagnostic/needs assessment.

Prerequisite skills are listed clearly at the top of each lesson in the DLCR. Being aware of the prerequisite skills for each lesson allows the tutor to better tailor the learning to the individual by covering skills that need to be mastered to perform digital tasks. Tutors can also skip parts of the lesson that the learner has clearly and consistently demonstrated they have mastered during the diagnostic/needs assessment or other lessons.

Allow time for each skill

The lessons in the Digital Literacy Curriculum Resource include an estimate of the time needed to demonstrate and teach each skill. However, this timing does not take into account review of previously taught skills or any supplemental activities or materials you may wish to add in order to provide further practice during the tutoring session. Depending on the existing skills of the learners, their assets and barriers for learning, and their experience with digital devices, it is not unreasonable to double the amount of time allotted to completing a module. Lessons may also be divided into smaller sections so that more review of previously taught components can be built in.

In each lesson, a range of time is given to account for the different abilities of learners. However, a minimum time is suggested. You may think even the minimum time seems like too much and that you can cover the skill in much less than that time. However, if you keep a steady but slow pace, including lots of repetition, asking concept-check questions and responding to the needs of the learners, you will see that each skill actually takes at least the minimum time to cover correctly.

Remember that it is more important that the learner learns one skill thoroughly and well than too many skills partly and poorly. Learners need time to practice and time to absorb and consolidate skills.

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Teach skills vs. content

When tutoring with the DLCR, you are not only conveying information where items are on the screen and how to move from place to place. You are teaching skill development. It's a crucial distinction.

How are teaching content and teaching skills different? If we use visuals and teach lots of vocabulary about computers and have the individual learn the meaning of those terms, that is content. However, if we focus on briefly showing the learner how to do things on the computer and get them to do lots of practice after or while they are being shown, that is skill building. With this curriculum, you are doing hands-on skill development with the learner rather than building content knowledge.

Focus on building skills

There may be a sense of urgency from individuals, as well as from those who support them, to acquire the needed digital skills as quickly as possible. It is important to convey that trying to rush the learning is more likely to cause frustration and impede learning than enable the learner to complete digital tasks on their own faster.

Focussing on the process, not the end result, means giving the learner time to reflect. If you ask the learner to move the cursor and try to find a particular icon, they need time to think about the instruction, to scan the screen, and to decide where to move their hand to move the cursor. As the tutor or support person, you should never take

over the learner's mouse or trackpad and click on the icon for them, however tempting that is when the lesson is moving slowly. Waiting for the learner to follow the instruction and even to make a mistake and perhaps self-correct are more valuable for skill-building than simply showing them again.

The DLCR is designed with earlier modules teaching foundational skills such as mouse and navigation, keyboarding and basic online skills, and the later modules building on those skills for more complex tasks like sending and receiving emails. Remember that the steps to do a very simple task might get memorized but building transferable and lasting skills that are the hallmark of digital literacy takes time and consistent practice.

Looking at the visuals that accompany the lesson in each unit, there are sets of illustrated instructions that might seem feasible to jump ahead to. For example, getting the individuals into Zoom before teaching or reviewing keyboarding.

It's perfectly reasonable to use the included instructions to help an individual access services (such as getting into Zoom to attend an interview or a workshop). However, when teaching or tutoring digital skills, it's important to build sequentially, with lessons that begin at the beginning from the smallest and least complex actions.

Note that if individuals clearly demonstrate they can perform basic skills, a module might be completed more quickly. However, it is very important to always review basic skills even briefly, to be sure learners really do have the transferrable ability. Reviewing basic skills, stopping to teach and fill in gaps as needed, ensures that individuals have a firm foundation for building and retaining more complex digital skills over time. Regular review before introducing new skills should never be skipped.

Individuals clearly demonstrating that they can do the discrete digital skills consistently, not just once or twice, should be the measure of whether it is time to move on.

Demonstrate

When looking at the lessons, you will find that the training is hands-on, with the tutor demonstrating each skill and the learner then practicing on their own device. The lessons include repetition of the demonstration portion to reinforce the learning. Similarly, the teaching videos in the Employment module allow the learner to replay the demonstration as many times as needed before trying the skills on their own.

Include practice and repetition of skills

In order to learn a new skill, it is commonly understood that learners need to do the skill many times correctly to retain it through muscle memory. This is the same for digital literacy. Learners need repeated practice of each digital skill.

When going through each lesson, if it seems like there is too much repetition, be assured that there is not. The lessons intentionally include repetition throughout. Repetition reinforces learning and increases confidence. You as the tutor may even feel bored or get tired of the content, often much faster than the learners do. A

Waiting for the learner to follow the instruction and even to make a mistake and perhaps self-correct are more valuable for skill-building than simply showing them again.

learner may even say, “ok, I’ve got it!” before the lesson is over. But if they still need support to do a skill, that means they cannot yet do it independently and they do not really know it.

Field testing has shown us that instructors or tutors often feel pressure to complete certain components of a lesson within a particular time frame, perhaps a particular amount of time that has been allotted to a workshop series or course. Focusing on completing the lesson rather than on what learners demonstrate they can do may not allow learners the time needed to understand and internalize what they have been taught. To avoid falling into this trap, at the beginning of the session, be sure to review what was taught in the previous lesson before moving on and be sure to build in ample time to practice any new skills in a session. Since learners need differing amounts of time to process information, this may mean that you are not able to complete the lesson, or portion of the lesson, that you had planned. Be prepared to allow as much practice time as needed without worrying about completing the lesson.

Finally, always leave time at the end to review the highlights of the current lesson. Concept-check questions will help you check in with learners to see if they have understood what was demonstrated.

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Have learners demonstrate skills

Get learners to clearly show you that they can do a skill, not just once but multiple times so you can say definitively that they can do the skill before you move on. Don’t assume the learner saying they can do it is accurate. If they truly can do the skill, it will not take long to perform it. But if they are still struggling at any part, going on will only compound the problem as they build more and more actions on top the ones they are supposed to already know.

Recognize multiple ways to do digital tasks

There are often multiple ways to do the same digital task, to get to the same end. For example, to enlarge a Word document, you can use the zoom-in/zoom-out bar in the bottom right corner of the screen. You can also click on the “View” button in the toolbar and then choose what percentage you want to zoom in. The first way to zoom in is easier and faster. The second way involves more steps and is slower, but it still works.

The Digital Literacy Curriculum Resource tries to always model the most straightforward way to do digital tasks and that is what is supported by visuals, and in some cases, video. If another way to do a digital task is also simple and seems more appropriate for the learner, you, as the tutor can substitute that way for the demonstration given in the curriculum. Be sure, however, that you can provide as much instruction with visual support as can be found in the DLCR in order to support the learner.



Check learner comprehension

How do you know if a learner understands what you are trying to teach them? You can ask, “Do you understand?” but experience shows that is not an effective way to determine their understanding, and more importantly, their ability.

Instead of asking learners if they understand, you need to instead ask comprehension-check questions. Instead of saying, “Ok?” or “Got that?” ask specific questions about what was just taught and demonstrated. For instance, if the lesson is on;

- writing a message to participants during a Zoom meeting, ask: “Do you click here or here?”
- opening a browser, ask: “Do you click or double click on the browser icon?”
- returning to a previous webpage, ask: “Let’s go back to the page we saw before. Show me the back button we use to do that.”
- opening an email, ask: “What do you do first?”

Asking comprehension-check questions confirms that the learner understands a concept and can complete an action with their understanding rather than relying on a self-assessment of skills. One way to know if your question is useful as a comprehension-check: note what the answer must be. If the learner can answer yes or no only, the question is not a comprehension-check question. If the learner has to describe or do an action (or give a content answer if the question is knowledge based), the question is checking for comprehension.

Delivering tutoring

In-person instruction vs. remote delivery

In-person tutoring is much, much easier for both tutor and learner than trying to teach digital skills remotely through a video platform like Zoom.

First of all, with remote tutoring, there is more equipment and setup needed on the part of both learner and tutor. The learner will very likely need support from someone at home to set up, and perhaps also during the tutoring session. Not everyone has a support person at home for help, so this must be considered.

Secondly, when tutoring remotely, even with extra equipment set up, it is difficult for the tutor to see what the learner is doing on their device – what they are looking at, what they are clicking on onscreen, what their hands are doing. Without that knowledge the tutor will have greater struggles to support the learner. Proper setup of extra equipment will lessen the frustration but will not replace being in person.

Finally, if you must choose remote delivery to tutor digital skills, it is critical to recognize that the learning process will be much slower, and the potential for frustration is amplified. The time allotted for learning and mastering each skill will need to be extended even more than suggested in the section on timing.

Remote tutoring is not ideal. However, it is still possible if done slowly and with a great deal of patience. Checklists to guide set-up are provided in the tutor training.

Tutoring group size

One-on-one tutoring provides the most effective approach for learners to gain digital skills. With one-on-one tutoring, the tutor can easily and effectively tailor the content and pace of learning to the individual and respond to their specific needs and interests.

However, one-on-one tutoring may not be logistically possible for you or your organization. In that case, small-group tutoring is still very effective. Small group tutoring can also offer the learner the chance for peer support and connection, positive peer encouragement and more chance to demonstrate independence than they would get in a one-on-one session with only the tutor.

If choosing small-group tutoring, learners should be grouped by similar level of digital skills. The group should not exceed five learners with one tutor. Volunteer assistants are highly recommended with small-group tutoring, to ensure that all learners get some individual attention without waiting too long. Tutors will be responsible to create a safe space for learning in small-group tutoring. This includes managing dominant or more skilled learners so less skilled learners don't become intimidated and withdraw.





Preparing for tutoring

To get prepared prior to the tutoring sessions:

- Read the whole lesson including the notes. You need to have an overview of where the lesson is going as well as a solid grasp of each step to get there. As well, there may be things you need to do prior to starting. For example, **Module 3 Online Skills Basics** suggests that you bring a newspaper as a visual example of a format that lays out information in a specific way, to compare to how a website is organized.
- Get familiar with the visuals that accompany the lesson and how to locate what you need for the lesson.
- Test any equipment you are using to tutor learners: the webcam, the tripod, the Zoom meeting platform, etc. Test equipment at least 30 minutes prior to the start of a tutoring session.
- Gather all material you need, open the electronic PDF of the visuals, and if you are using one, have the paper copy of the lesson ready. It is generally easier to have a paper copy of one document than to use many electronic documents at once unless that is something you are used to doing.
- Have the electronic version of visuals you will use already open and ready to show. You can have the lesson open in one tab to use and the visuals in another. This will save time during the lesson and keep it moving at a steady, even pace.
- Establish a tutoring space that is free of distractions, i.e., a quiet space to focus, no glare from a light or a window on the screen.

Remember that if you feel rushed, unprepared or distracted when trying to teach digital skills, you may not be as attuned to clues from the learner as you need to be for the session to be successful. As well, an anxious learner may pick up cues from you that the tutoring is unfocused or stressful. The more prepared you are for each lesson, the better you will be able to deal with anything unexpected during the lesson and model calm ways to interact with technology.

Conclusion

Experience shows that it takes repetition, patience and perseverance for individuals with low digital literacy skills to gain confidence and ability with basic digital skills such as using email or navigating on a website.

Expectations for both learners and tutors should be tempered by the recognition that learning digital skills can be challenging, and gains in digital skills take time. This is especially true for individuals with short attention spans, memory impairments or other impairments. As a tutor, you might not feel successful learning is happening quickly enough, especially if the learner seems uninterested at times. But following the approach laid out by these Best Practices, you can be assured you are laying the groundwork for digital literacy improvement in the learner or learners.

It's important to remember that the goal of digital literacy training isn't to show learners how to do a task one time. The goal is to support learners in building their knowledge and ability for discrete skills so they can apply them in new situations without support. That is also the goal of the ISSofBC Digital Literacy Curriculum Resource.

