

Reskilling a Virtual Workforce

What is Digital Literacy?

Digital skills are a very broad set of skills relating to the use of technology. Some examples include:

- The use of mobile phone apps to record hours worked and tasks completed and to flag items that need attention has increased the digital skill demands of hotel room attendants.
- Truck drivers monitor the condition of their cargo through sensors attached throughout their semi-trailer.
- Fast food restaurants digitally link the front counter or order kiosks to the cooks in the kitchen.¹

A comprehensive definition of digital literacy must work to encompass this broad skillset.

One way of understanding Digital literacy is as:

"the awareness, mind-set and ability of individuals to confidently use digital workplace tools responsibly and effectively in order to solve problems, be productive, support well-being and thrive at work."²

Awareness includes knowledge of the tools, opportunities and risks related to accessing technology.

A digital mind-set refers to having a positive and receptive attitude towards technology as an integral part of work.

Using technology responsibly means using the tools appropriately and in a way that is safe for yourself and your organization.

Using technology effectively means solving problems and being productive.

Supporting well-being includes looking after yourself (including your physical and mental health) and maintaining boundaries (designating working hours and sticking to them).

With this definition in mind, digital skills can be broken down into the following framework:³

¹ Janet Lane, "What Now? Digital Skills Decoded, Canada West Foundation Policy Briefing," (December 2019).

² Elizabeth Marsh, "Raising Workforce Digital Skills – A Compendium," (January 2021).

³ European Commission's Digital Competence Framework. For more information, visit <https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/digcomp/digital-competence-framework>.

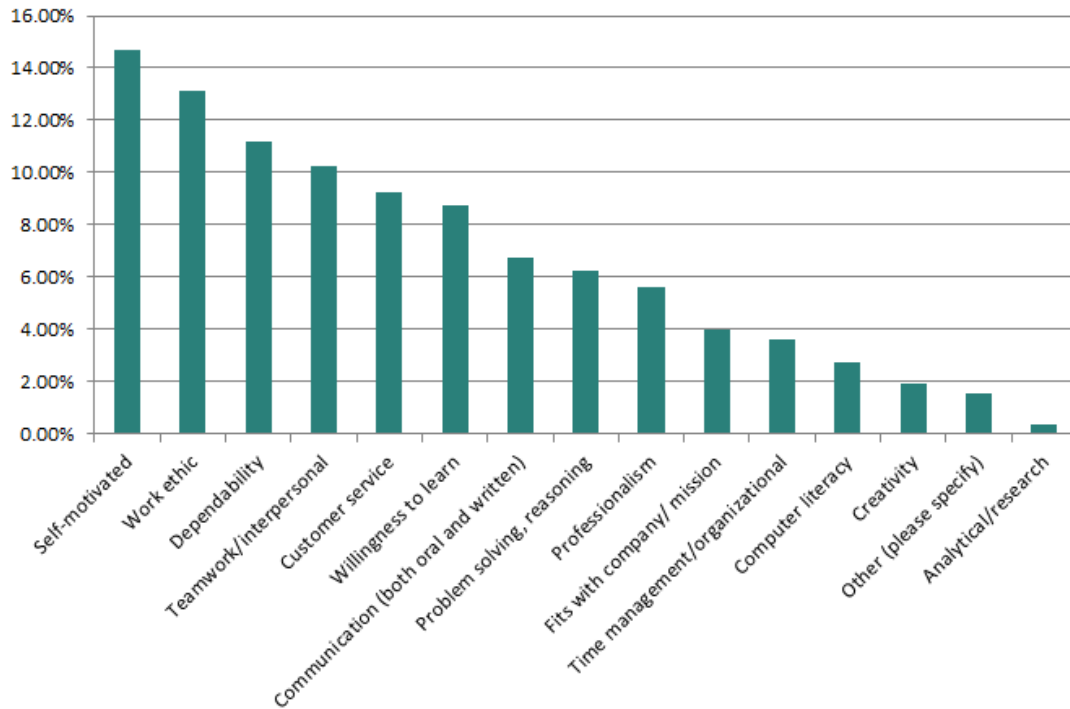
Digital Skills Framework



Why are digital skills important?

Digital skills are important because most employers expect at least a minimum level of digital literacy when hiring.

Top Three Competencies while Hiring



However, this is not always identified in a job posting.⁴ This is because most employers consider computer skills to be an essential skill.

According to SLWDB's most recent EmployerOne Survey results, when asked to identify the top 3 skills that are in demand, employers rank computer literacy relatively low on the list. Employers identify many of the soft skills above digital skills.

So, are digital skills not necessary? Ideally, employers would like to see both.

As one research group explains, "Often, employers are looking for a special blend of digital and non-digital skills... [Employers] are looking for candidates with digital capacity and who are fluent with digitally intensive tools, but not at the expense of soft skills."⁵

⁴ Of the 13,525 job postings on SLWDB's WISL Job Board, only 87 postings, or 0.6%, listed computer use as a requirement. Other digital skills, including software (all), social media and computer literacy were mentioned even less frequently. Source: SLWDB WISL Job Board Data, Job postings from June 1, 2020 to June 20, 2021.

⁵ Denise Shortt, Brian Robson and Magdalena Sabat, "Bridging the Digital Skills Gap: Alternative Pathways," (January 2020).

COVID-19 has placed an even greater emphasis on digital skills. According to SLWDB’s survey results, 44% of local businesses moved to a remote workforce at some point during COVID. Lack of digital literacy was identified by employers as a key barrier to working during COVID-19.⁶

Anyone looking to either begin a new job or advance in their current role will need to continue to build on these skills in order to succeed.

Which digital skills have local employers identified as in demand?

Based on consultations, employers have identified the following digital skills:



⁶ SLWDB 2021 EmployerOne Report.

Action Plan

The purpose of this Digital Skills Action Plan is to help employees, job seekers and employers continue to build their digital skills so that they can confidently use digital workplace tools responsibly and effectively in order to solve problems, be productive, support well-being and thrive at work.

Building on the results of consultations and key partner meetings, SLWDB has identified the following action items:

1. Create a Tip Sheet to identify key digital skills and how to acquire them
2. Promote existing local and regional digital skills training programs
3. Offer training session(s) in 2021 to fill identified gaps
4. Survey SLWDB's training session attendees at the end of the session, review the results and modify the curriculum accordingly
5. Work with local service providers to continue offering this training beyond 2021
6. Review project findings with local educational institutions (secondary and post-secondary) and make curriculum recommendations to them as well

2021 Digital Skills Training Sessions

Working alongside community partners, SLWDB will offer the following Digital Skills Training Sessions:

Digital Skills for Job Seekers and Employees

This two-hour session will cover the following topics:
accessing basic digital skills training opportunities with local service providers;
communicating and collaborating through digital technologies by creating and sharing documents online;
protecting devices, content, personal data and privacy in digital environments.

Digital Skills for Employers and Managers

This two-hour session will cover the following topics:
accessing basic digital skills training opportunities with local service providers;
managing a remote workforce using digital technologies to communicate and collaborate;
hosting online meetings, including screen sharing and breakout rooms.

Job Seeker and Employee Digital Skills Tip Sheet

The purpose of this Job Seeker Digital Skills Tip Sheet is to help employees and job seekers continue to build their digital skills so that they can confidently use digital workplace tools responsibly and effectively in order to solve problems, be productive, support well-being and thrive at work.

Points to keep in mind:

- ✓ Most employers consider computer skills to be an essential skill.
- ✓ When asked to identify the top 3 skills that are in demand, employers rank computer literacy relatively low on the list. Employers identify many of the soft skills above digital skills. So, are digital skills not necessary? Ideally, employers would like to see both.
- ✓ Anyone looking to either begin a new job or advance in their current role will need to continue to build on these skills.

How do I build my Digital Skills?

1. Take an assessment of your digital skills

Many local service providers offer assessments that will help you to identify your strengths and areas where you can continue to improve.

2. Access existing local and regional digital skills training programs

Many local service providers also offer digital skills training opportunities, beginning with basic computer skills and covering many different platforms and programs.

3. Practice your digital skills on the job and for fun

The best way to grow your digital skills is by continuing to use them. Incorporate new skills into your time at work and consider taking on a hobby that helps you develop them at home.

4. Showcase a portfolio of your digital work

Do you have a collection of photos you have taken? A compilation of your favourite recipes? Photos of your latest knitting project? Share them online!

5. Teach digital skills to others

Once you are confident with your skills, share them with people you know. Consider volunteering your time to teach other people in the community.

6. Utilize workplace training funds, if they are available

Many workplaces have training funds available that can be used to access digital skills training. Ask your boss if these are available at your workplace.

7. Ask your employer to build in time for developing your digital skills regularly

Talk to your boss about building time into your schedule to continue to build your digital skills (i.e., 1-2 hours per week). Both you and your employer will benefit!

Employer Digital Skills Tip Sheet

The purpose of this Employer Digital Skills Tip Sheet is to help employers continue to build their digital skills so that both they and their staff can confidently use digital workplace tools responsibly and effectively in order to solve problems, be productive, support well-being and thrive at work.

Points to keep in mind:

- ✓ Most employers consider computer skills to be an essential skill.
- ✓ When asked to identify the top 3 skills that are in demand, employers rank computer literacy relatively low on the list. Employers identify many of the soft skills above digital skills. So, are digital skills not necessary? Ideally, employers would like to see both.
- ✓ Anyone looking to either begin a new job or advance in their current role will need to continue to build on these skills.

How do I support my team as they continue to build their Digital Skills?

1. When working remotely, agree on how everyone will be working

Working remotely is a significant adjustment for some people. Be clear about your expectations, including schedules and methods of communication.

2. Communicate with your team regularly

Leaders have an opportunity to create a positive working environment that empowers everyone to contribute and share ideas. Some people will prefer to use email, others will appreciate a phone or video call, while still others prefer group chats. Make multiple channels available.

3. Check on their mental health well-being

Hold daily stand-ups and check in individually. Discuss how things are going with their work. Also ask how they are feeling and share information on available mental health supports if they need them.

4. Don't assume your staff know how to use technology

Any time you introduce a new system or piece of software, make time to ensure that everyone knows how to use it. If you are not the expert, identify the team member who is. Empower tech savvy team members to support others.

5. Run effective virtual meetings

An effective meeting has a specific purpose, it is structured, and it is collaborative. Prepare an agenda ahead of time and during the meeting, stick to the time allotted for each item. Make sure that someone is responsible for taking notes, highlighting any action items, and share them afterwards.

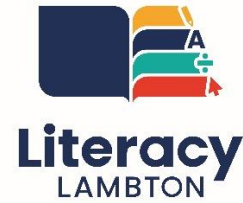
6. Contact local service providers to learn about funded training opportunities

Many local service providers offer funds for training opportunities, including digital skills training. Reach out to them to learn more.

7. Show appreciation and celebrate success

It is more important than ever to celebrate successes. Consider new ways of showing appreciation, even if it cannot be done in person.

Service Providers offering Free Digital Supports and Training



Service Providers offering Funded Training Opportunities to Employers



Additional Resources

