ISS ofBC
WELCOMING NEWCOMERS

Best Practices for Digital Literacy Coaching

Remote Access to Digital Literacy Training for Newcomers

UBC THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
Learning Exchange

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Overview

Best Practices documents, like curricula, mean different things to different people. For the purpose of this project, Best Practices are defined as a set of key guidelines for delivering basic digital literacy coaching to eligible learners in order to optimize the learning process.

These Best Practices 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 coaching.

The main sources shaping the Best Practices for this project were needs assessment focus groups, surveys and interviews with service provider staff and learners in IRCC funded organizations.

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. Two key resources informing the Best Practices were the UBC Learning Exchange Best Practices and the ATESL Best Practices for Curriculum Framework Development.

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

Giving digital instructions consists of giving specific steps. For example, telling or writing down the actions 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 giving digital information, the facilitator should show the learner the steps, and perhaps use a document of instructions for support, such as screen shots 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 learners know how to transfer those skills to other contexts, to other digital tasks.

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

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 do other tasks such as making a deposit. However, being a confident person, she looked pretty competent! 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 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 apply when using 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.

> Someone who is digitally literate is able to transfer digital skills from one context to another.

Often when faced with these learners with low digital literacy, and the need is immediate, service providers try to help with what we call short term inventions so that they can quickly connect them to services; for example, helping them memorize steps or give them instructions for how to do one thing **right now**; such as how to get into a Zoom meeting to attend a workshop for the first time.

Short term interventions are extremely important to help learners connect with service providers and gain access to things like online workshops or an app they need. And they certainly contribute to raising awareness of the digital environment of learners who have low digital skills.

However, it's crucial to recognize the limitations of such short-term interventions in order to really help learners thrive in a digitally literate society like Canada.

By contrast, when increasing literacy through a **long-term intervention**, a facilitator is building knowledge, confidence and independent abilities that are transferable from task to task in different digital environments.

This means helping learners understand how the online environment works, developing their basic digital problem solving skills, and giving them the skills to move around in the online environment. It's **not** about learning one particular program, for example, like learning how to use Zoom. It's learning how programs like Zoom work, so that they can use Zoom, or Microsoft Teams, or another video conferencing platform. **Someone who is digitally literate is able to transfer digital skills from one context to another**.

Digital literacy is what is being built with ISSofBC digital literacy materials, rather than just conveying digital information to use specific programs.

Beginner learners and digital literacy

When beginning coaching in digital skills, there are some expected characteristics of beginner learners that are helpful to know. Not all of these characteristics will apply to all learners, but knowing the possibilities can better prepare facilitators to support them as they learn and begin to practice on their own.

Digital skills do not correspond to language skills

It is possible for a learner to have strong language skills and be able to communicate well on a wide number of topics, but not be comfortable holding a mouse, or know how to access information on the internet. Conversely, it is not unusual to find learners who are just beginning to learn English but are already digitally literate, and who have no trouble using online resources to aid in their language learning. So, it's important not to make assumptions based on their language skills.

Unaware of the relevance of digital skills to their life

Learners who are dependent on others, including their children or grandchildren, to do digital tasks for them may not recognize the need to learn how to use digital devices. This is especially true for some seniors or others who have not had access or the need to use technology in the past. They may be unaware of the relevance of learning digital skills and how those skills can help them become more independent. It is important to use strategies to engage these learners, so they are excited to learn new digital skills and become motivated to continue practicing on their own.

Learners are not always good at assessing their own digital literacy

Some learners will say that they desperately need to "learn email" in order to find a job and function in Canadian society, when in fact, what they need <u>first</u> is to learn how to use the mouse correctly. Others will say that they know how to use online programs, when they have simply memorized a series of steps to reach the desired program, but have little to no understanding of how to actually navigate websites. Relying on a self-assessment alone may not give accurate enough information to plan digital skills instruction. Instead, giving learners some version of a needs assessment will inform a facilitator better; whether by watching them do a simple digital task, or a more formal needs assessment. For a digital task, observing how the learner responds to the task without support will provide a better understanding of their true digital skills. In addition, asking the learners specific questions about when, where, and how they use computers, laptops, tablets, etc. in their daily lives will provide better insight into what type of instruction and practice is needed.

> For a digital task, observing how the learner responds to the task without support will provide a better understanding of their true digital skills

Reluctance to admit low digital skills

Some learners 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. A facilitator may, for example, give them a website address to go to find the information they are requesting. However, they <u>may not admit</u> they lack the digital skills to use a browser and find that website.

Tendency to overestimate digital skills

As in the example of bank machine literacy given earlier, many learners with lower digital literacy develop coping skills through which they learn to do tasks by rote. For example, a learner may be able to go to a certain website such as Janis's ESL to practice English skills, because they do that regularly. However, it does not mean they have the skills yet to navigate on other websites. It does not equate with having strong digital literacy skills. If they can't navigate other websites, it may demonstrate that the learner has learned steps to get to Janis's ESL website and practice English by rote, rather than showing skills that indicate true understanding of how/what they are doing.

> Many learners are unaware that seemingly simple digital skills like sending an email are actually comprised of a large number of smaller discrete skills.

In addition to some learners themselves overestimating their skills, staff or other support people may overestimate skills because they observe the learner doing some digital tasks well. Perhaps, for example, the learner can do a few things on a smart phone and that makes it look like they have digital skills even though what they can do on a computer is actually very limited.

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

> ... 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 facilitator attempted to guide them.

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

Many learners are unaware that seemingly simple digital skills like sending an email are actually comprised of a large number of smaller discrete skills. The need to accomplish something online is high for learners, and they don't realize all the steps needed in doing digital tasks, so they think they can learn faster, and therefore feel impatient with learning.

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 facilitator attempted to guide them. This happens because those with higher levels of digital literacy perform digital tasks without thinking about all the minute steps.

Barriers to learning

What's even more difficult is that learners with low digital literacy can also have barriers to learning. It's important to be aware of possible barriers so that they can be addressed. Some of the barriers to learning are visible while others can be hidden. Barriers could include the following, or others:

Fear of technology

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.

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.

> At the very least, it is well known that fear blocks the learning process.

Techno-jargon

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 be seen as competent and fit in.

Stress 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. Excess stress impedes learning. Stress activates the fight-flight response which interferes with both short-term and long-term memory, meaning that learning is not retained. For immigrants facing many barriers as they settle in a new country, stress can be high.

For example, the pressures of trying to get a job in Canada and the many steps involved, in addition to all the other daily demands and responsibilities they have to manage, take the learner's attention away from learning.

For some refugees who experienced trauma in their countries, and struggles coming to Canada, the stress can be debilitating. Many have come to Canada after surviving not just the violence of war but also protracted refugee situations of much hardship. A facilitator should be aware of this as a possibility, while also not making assumptions. It is well known that trauma impacts not just physical and mental health but also the capacity for, and the speed of, learning new skills and concepts.

Such learners may have short attention spans and impaired memory, or may even get overwhelmed and shut down. Facilitators need to respond and be flexible during coaching sessions.

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.

Limited or no access to equipment or wi-fi

Of course, one major barrier is a learner not having access to equipment at home, or needing to share equipment with others who are prioritized to use it (like children who use the computer for school). Learners may not be able to afford a device with their own funds, or may not have accessed programs that provide free or low-cost devices.

Another barrier is the very high cost of wi-fi in Canada. Lacking access to a computer or other digital device, or lacking wi-fi makes it very hard for the learner to practice and gain skills. Even though access may be possible at a public library or perhaps at the service provider organization, that access is limited. As a result, learning will be much slower.

Lack of time or space to concentrate on learning

Some learners may have very limited personal time and/or lack a private, quiet space to learn and practice digital skills. This can be especially challenging for those working full time, or for parents with young children at home who require constant attention.

The learner may not have had the chance to practice the skills being reviewed, so will likely not be ready to move on to the next skill. It's important to recognize the personal circumstances of the learner and that they could be a barrier to learning.

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Reading challenges

Low language literacy can be an added barrier to acquiring digital skills. How much reading is required when using laptops and other digital devices? A lot! The online and digital environments are very text dependent, so if they can't read, even if they could learn the digital skills, they can't navigate. Learners who struggle with symbol recognition and other reading skills find learning to use the keyboard, the desktop and navigating online really challenging, and a much slower process than learners with solid literacy skills.

Strategies for ensuring successful digital skill learning

As mentioned, when dealing with learners with low digital skills, and in particular those with barriers, one thing that is clear is that, just as important as having **good material** for delivering digital skills training, is having the **right approach**. If a facilitator has the materials but not the right approach, they could actually **reinforce some of the negative characteristics** and barriers mentioned earlier that learners experience, such as frustration and anxiety, low confidence, and fear of failure.

Access to equipment and wi-fi

The earlier section on barriers to learning pointed out how some learners have limited or no access to equipment and wi-fi.

One solution is programs in the community that help connect learners to free or low cost devices, or provide access to cheaper wi-fi. Depending on staff capacity and learner interest, if a learner is eligible for such a program, settlement or other support staff can help learners apply. However, not all learners qualify for such programs so lack of access to equipment and wi-fi remains a barrier for many.

It's important to know if a learner has to share a device with other family members and as a result, may lack access in order to practice skills. A facilitator may need to adjust their lesson plan, and instead of moving on, review previously taught skills.

> 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 digital skills.

Time or space

Lack of time or space to concentrate are other barriers to learning that were mentioned earlier. It is best to attempt to trouble shoot this with the learner.

For one-on-one facilitating, a better time for sessions should be sought if the current schedule doesn't work because, for example, their child always wakes up from a nap during the coaching session. Or, maybe another person could care for the child during sessions. For a learner in a small group, if the group session time consistently doesn't work, maybe one-on-one coaching is an option and may be a better way of learning for that individual.

Create a safe space for learning

It is crucial to create an environment of trust and a safe space for learning. The first few sessions should focus on doing this more than on teaching digital skills.

Coaches who are teachers or are used to facilitating groups know how to build rapport with the learner. There are ways to create a safe space for teaching digital literacy skills and some of these may differ from what has been done in the past.

A facilitator should call on learners by their first name and get to know at least a few things about each of them. If coaching a small group, it's best to ensure that dominant learners with more digital skills don't take over and show off their digital skills, which can intimidate others. It is advisable to 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 facilitator may need to ask some learners to wait to speak by teaching them to raise their hands, whether during an in-person session or a remote session in Zoom or MS Teams.

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.

A facilitator can convey that making mistakes and not knowing are OK by **deliberate modelling, and voicing their thought process out loud**. Seeing that the facilitator doesn't know everything and makes mistakes at times and is OK with that, is more powerful than just telling learners it is OK to make mistakes. What is meant by

deliberate modelling and voicing thought processes? For example, while demonstrating a digital task, a facilitator might vocalize:

> "I forget… hmm 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… Hmm… 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."

> "How to scroll… Hmm… ok … let's see… click and hold the mouse button down… then drag the mouse… then let go…

> "Oops… I don't want to do that… well… it's ok… I can change that."

Talking through the process of a digital task calmly shows that forgetting how to do skills and making mistakes happens to everyone, while also modelling how to recover without getting stressed.

Slow pace of learning is expected

Facilitators can reassure learners that it is normal and expected for everyone to take time to learn and retain digital skills. Nobody learns digital skills in one day, but, rather, over time. Normalizing the gradual learning process allows learners to relax. It also accommodates learners with other competing stress in their lives and the impacts of that, as mentioned in the earlier section on barriers to learning.

Setting a very slow pace for the learning session allows those who learn more slowly to have the time they need. The slow pace will likely feel 'boring' to the facilitator far earlier than to the learners. If it seems too slow to the facilitator, it's likely a good pace for the learner!

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 was 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.

> Setting a very slow pace for the learning session allows those who learn more slowly to have the time they need… If it seems too slow to the facilitator, it's likely a good pace for the learner!

A facilitator looking at a lesson in the Digital Literacy Curriculum Resource may think it's going to take a long time to complete, or may look at the detail in the lesson and be tempted to skip through parts. But the lesson needs to take that time. If they speed up, learners will likely get frustrated. Moreover, when learners come back for the next coaching session, some will have forgotten the skills. This may be because some learners don't have <u>time</u> to practice, or others get frustrated and <u>don't</u> practice. Or it may be due to memory impairments as a result of aging, as in the case of some seniors, or due to trauma for some learners, as mentioned earlier. Whatever the reason, those parts of earlier lessons may need to be reviewed or repeated.

Showing patience with learners, and encouraging learners to be patient with themselves

Facilitators need to remind themselves that they are working on a process, on helping the learner acquire 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, especially if they have children or grandchildren who use technology and learn new devices easily. They think they can learn in an unrealistically short time and may get discouraged when they can't.

Using plain language

Simple, direct language is best. 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. This helps understanding and reduces learner fear of technology. The wording in descriptions, explanations and instructions should be simple yet accurate.

> ...choosing words and phrases that are more concrete than abstract, as well as shorter sentences ... The wording in descriptions, explanations and instructions should be simple yet accurate.

Any resources with writing should have plain language and minimal text. This supports all learners, not just those with reading challenges. This is good practice at any time, but particularly when introducing the new language that goes with digital literacy.

If using the lessons in the ISSofBC Digital Literacy Curriculum Resource, guidance is given on using simple direct language to orally explain the digital environment and digital tasks. Following this guidance carefully will help develop skill to simplify concepts and directions quickly when teaching digital skills.

Avoiding temptation to show or tell everything you know

It can be difficult for trainers or facilitators with solid digital skills to remember a time and how it felt to have their own skills at a beginning level like the learners being coached. For example, they may get excited about sharing what they know about Zoom and start to show learners all the features at once: 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 their own process of learning, they might feel it would be faster and easier for the learners to learn technology shortcuts. Or they might feel it is important or interesting for the learners to learn some background or additional knowledge about the technology.

The goal is to build digital skills. The lessons in the ISSofBC Digital Literacy Curriculum Resource are designed for that purpose. The lessons 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.

Delivering coaching sessions in manageable "chunks"

Trying to cover too much material in one session will be frustrating and overwhelming to the learner and the facilitator. This will set back their learning as they now have even more stress related to technology! Instead, it's best to plan coaching sessions with smaller objectives, and use any leftover time in a session for review and additional practice. Instead of trying to rush and get through the lesson plan as written in one session, a facilitator might give the learner the time they need to learn and practice each skill. Rather than being bored, beginner learners are often very happy and even relieved to do extra practice and demonstrate their success at learning new skills.

Keeping 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 to be shown how to do a very specific thing related to the session topic, or ask about vocabulary unrelated to what the class is focused on.

A facilitator shouldn't get sidetracked from the digital skills being built, but stay focused on the lesson and keep the learners focused on it to ensure objectives are met.

> 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.

Delivering the coaching 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 be more accessible for those with reading challenges and may be more enjoyable for some, it may not be the best strategy for everyone. For most learners, demonstrating the skills slowly, step-by-step works well. Many also benefit from following an illustrated instruction page with screen shots for each step.

Demonstrating skills in different ways might depend 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, a facilitator may use the handouts in the lessons and go through them point by point. But if the learner prefers hands-on learning, the facilitator should be sure to move quickly from teaching and demonstration to allow the learner to try the skills for themselves.

Building 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. Some individuals may have learned to become dependent on another family member, a spouse or child to perform digital tasks for them.

To engage these learners, a facilitator might find out what kind of digital challenges they have in their daily lives and then determine what specific skills they need to learn in order to overcome those challenges. They could 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. Facilitators should be direct, and point out the relevance and the usefulness to the learner of each digital skill they will learn before they start. For example, the facilitator might 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, content could be tailored 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, learners 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 they know their learner's interests as well as needs, a facilitator 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 the lesson could be adapted 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.

Encouraging the learner

Learners need encouragement! This is even more essential when the personal barriers facing them are greater.

During each session, a facilitator may point out to the learner what they have learned to do better, or what they can now do that they struggled to do before, even if these are small discrete skills; for example, being able to double click with the mouse, instead of just single clicking. While there may still be many digital skills to master, the seemingly small gains are in fact big strides for the learner. Part of the facilitator's role is to make them aware of the skills they have gained. This can really bolster learner confidence and increase motivation.

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Best Practices and using the ISSofBC Digital Literacy Curriculum Resource materials

Starting with needs assessment

A facilitator may or may not know their learners' digital literacy skills or their challenges and learning needs. For some individuals they may have a very clear idea but for others they may have no idea at all. Perhaps they have only met some individuals remotely, or have not yet had the chance to see them interact with digital devices.

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, learners 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.

> 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.

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 facilitator-assessor, and self-assessment for learners. The facilitator-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 they respond to the task will give a facilitator 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, the facilitator may 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 web page to find information, then perhaps the Online Skills basic module is a place to start.

If the learner's needs are unclear, using the DNA Tool to help understand both their abilities and their gaps may be helpful before attempting to start facilitating.

Ensuring prerequisite digital skills are taught

Most digital tasks are composed of a number of digital skills. Sometimes even a simple task may require a large number of skills in order to complete it.

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 check 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.

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, before learners can fill out an online 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, or a text box;

- **Navigation skills:** how to move the mouse around the screen to position the cursor in the correct location; or how to open and close a window;

- **Keyboarding skills:** how to type words, numbers, symbols; or how to use Shift and Enter keys;

- **Online skills:** how to open a web browser; or 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; or how to close the website they opened.

Many discrete skills are needed in order to fill out an online application form. It may be tempting to start with the task the learner says they most need to do in their life, for example, filling out an online form. However, it is always recommended to start with Module 1 to establish fundamental skills. A facilitator shouldn't just jump to how to 'Fill out an online application form' if the learner struggles with the prerequisite skills for that task. A facilitator should always check that the learner has the prerequisite skills for the task being planned, and if not, coach them in those skills first.

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 facilitator to better tailor the learning to the individual by covering skills that need to be mastered to perform digital tasks.

> 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.

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 a facilitator may wish to add in order to provide further practice during the 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. A facilitator may think even the

minimum time seems like too much and that they can cover the skill in much less than that time. However, by keeping a steady but slow pace, including lots of repetition, asking comprehension check questions and responding to the needs of the learners, each skill actually takes at least the minimum time to cover correctly.

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.

Teaching skills vs. content

When coaching with the DLCR, the facilitator is **not** only conveying information about where items are on the screen and how to move from place to place, but is teaching skill development. It's a crucial distinction.

How are teaching content and teaching skills different? Using visuals and teaching lots of vocabulary **about** computers and teaching the learner the meaning of those terms, is teaching *content*. However, focusing on briefly showing the learner how to do things on the computer and getting them to do lots of practice after or while they are being shown, is *skill building*. With this curriculum, they are doing hands-on skill development with the learner rather than building content knowledge.

> It is more important that the learner learns one skill thoroughly and well, than too many skills partly and poorly.

Focusing 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. By asking the learner to move the cursor and trying 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. The facilitator or support person 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. 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.

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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 instead of starting from the beginning; 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 digital skills, it's important to build sequentially, with lessons that begin at the beginning, from the smallest and least complex actions.

If learners 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 learners have a firm foundation for building and retaining more complex digital skills over time. Regular review before introducing new skills should <u>never</u> be skipped. Learners 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.

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Demonstrating

In the lessons, training is hands-on, with the facilitator teaching each skill step by step through demonstration, then the learner practicing on their own device. Instead of telling the learner all the steps at once and expecting them to remember and do those steps, the facilitator demonstrates a few steps at a time and has the learner practice.

The lessons include repetition of the demonstration portion to reinforce the learning, as many times as needed until the learner is clear. After practicing, if the learner needs more guidance, the facilitator should go back and repeat the demonstration.

> Repetition reinforces learning and increases confidence.

If coaching a small group, one strategy is to have one learner who has begun to master the skill, demonstrate to the others. This builds peer rapport as well as self-confidence.

Practice and repetition of skills are essential

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.

The lessons intentionally include repetition throughout. Repetition reinforces learning and increases confidence. A facilitator may even feel bored or get tired of the content, often much faster than the learners do. A 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 facilitators 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, facilitators should 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 the facilitator is not able to complete the lesson, or portion of the lesson, as they had planned. They should be prepared to allow as much practice time as needed without worrying about completing the lesson.

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

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Having learners demonstrate skills

A facilitator may get learners to clearly show them that they can do a skill, not just once but multiple times so they can say definitively that they can do the skill before moving on. The facilitator shouldn'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 with any part, moving on will only compound the problem as they try to learn more and more skills on top of the ones they have not yet mastered.

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, using the zoom-in/zoom-out bar in the bottom right corner of the screen; or clicking on the '*View*' button in the toolbar and then choose what percentage 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, by video. If another way to do a digital task is also simple and seems more appropriate for the learner, the facilitator can substitute that way for the demonstration given in the curriculum. They should be sure, however, that they can provide as much instruction with visual support as can be found in the DLCR in order to support the learner.

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Checking learner comprehension

How does a facilitator know if a learner understands what they are trying to teach them? Asking "Do you understand?" is not an effective way to determine understanding and most importantly, ability. Instead of asking learners if they understand, they need to ask comprehension-check questions. Rather than saying, "Ok?" or "Got that?" they should 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, they should ask: "Do you click here or here?"
- opening a browser, they should ask: "Do you click or double click on the browser icon?"
- returning to a previous web page, they should ask: "Let's go back to the page we saw before. Show me the back button we use to do that."
- typing a capital letter, they should ask: "Show me the Shift key."

Asking comprehension-check questions confirms that the learner understands a concept and can complete an action. This is more accurate, and more fair to the learner, than expecting them to self-assess their skills and tell you whether they understand or not.

One way to know if a 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 digital literacy coaching

Coaching group size

One-on-one coaching provides the most effective approach for learners to gain digital skills. With one-on-one coaching, the facilitator 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 coaching may not be logistically possible for the facilitator or their organization. In that case, small group coaching is still very effective. Small group coaching 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 facilitator. If choosing small group coaching, learners should be grouped by similar level of digital skills. The group should not exceed five learners with one facilitator, or three learners if the coaching is delivered remotely.

Volunteer assistants are highly recommended with small group coaching in person, to ensure that all learners get some individual attention without waiting too long. Facilitators need to create a safe space for learning in small groups. This includes managing dominant or more skilled learners so less skilled learners don't become intimidated and withdraw.

Preparation for coaching

Of course, when coaching someone in any skills, being prepared is essential. In order to prepare for coaching digital skills, some key components help ensure success. Some of these include the following:

- Establishing a coaching space that is free of distractions, i.e. a quiet space to focus, no glare from a light or a window on the screen.
- Setting up and testing any equipment being used to coach learners; for remote coaching, the webcam, the tripod, the Zoom meeting platform, etc. Equipment should be tested at least 30 minutes prior to the start of a coaching session.
- Gathering all material needed, opening the electronic PDF of the visuals, and if using one, having 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 familiar and comfortable for the facilitator.
- Having the electronic versions of visuals they will use already open and ready to show. A facilitator 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 pace.
- If a facilitator has limited experience coaching digital skills remotely, it is recommended do role play with another coach or a friend or a relative to practice, especially on how to demonstrate digital skills remotely to a learner.

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

In-person instruction delivery

In-person coaching is by far the best approach to teaching digital skills. This is strongly recommended over trying to teach remotely through a video platform like Zoom. And this is the case for the learner as well as the facilitator.

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First of all, in person, the learner can easily see what the facilitator is doing when they demonstrate with the mouse, the keyboard and on their computer screen. Conversely, when the learner practices and demonstrates skills they have learned, the facilitator can see the learner's whole body; they can watch the learner's hands and what they are doing on the mouse and keyboard as well as what is on their screen and what their eyes are focussed on. This is crucial to facilitate understanding and help the teacher support the learner.

When interacting in person, it's possible to read and interpret body language. This is important not just because communication is easier, but also because non-verbal communication helps establish trust, confidence and respect much faster than verbal communication. For the facilitator, it's far easier to read the learner's body

language in person and be attuned to their mental and emotional states; whether they are relaxed and confident, or stressed while learning.

With in-person coaching, it's easier and simpler for the facilitator to set up the coaching space including the equipment needed and the coaching resources. Sharing resources with the learner to practice is also much more straightforward. For example, it's easy to give a printout of a document that has step-by-step instructions with screen shots, or to put a link on the learner's computer for them to click on and practice an interactive activity.

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Remote instruction delivery

Remote delivery is not easy and not recommended; however, it is possible and it may be the only option for some learners, for example, someone who is geographically distant, has physical disabilities or is unable to access in-person services because the office is closed. In these cases, learning remotely reduces isolation for learners and allows them to get support. Learning this way will be successful if learners have a support person to help them (staff person or relative) and everyone involved approaches the process with patience and recognition that learning will likely take longer than in person.

Equipment and set-up for facilitator and learner – simulating the in-person learning experience

ISS*of*BC recommends a set-up that allows the facilitator to see the learner's computer while teaching and also allows the learner to see their computer, basically to mimic what the facilitator would have if they were doing the training in person.

The set-up is complex:

- Both the facilitator and the learner need a computer or laptop, PLUS a cell phone and a tripod for the cell phone.
- The facilitator and the learner both need to set up the cell phone, so it is angled at the computer to show the keyboard and screen.
- Then the facilitator and the learner need to sign in to Zoom with both the computer and the cell phone. The result is a view of the learner's face and their computer. The learner also sees the facilitator's face and their computer.

This helps the facilitator to see what the learner is doing with their hands, what they are looking at, if they are engaged in the learning, how their energy level is, etc. The facilitator can catch mistakes more quickly and head off frustration. As well, it's easier for the facilitator to demonstrate.

Note that ISSofBC Developers tested this system out, and it does work! As mentioned, the learner very likely needs support from someone at home or wherever they are learning to set up, and perhaps also during the coaching session. Not everyone has a support person available for help, so this must be considered if choosing to coach someone remotely in digital skills.

What this set-up achieves for facilitator and learner

When coaching remotely, even with the extra equipment set up, it is challenging for the facilitator to see exactly what the learner is doing on their device; what their eyes are looking at, what they are clicking on on-screen, what their hands are doing. Without that knowledge the facilitator will have greater struggles to support the learner. The learner doesn't have the same understanding or knowledge of the digital environment as the facilitator, so they can't easily follow oral instructions. As described previously in set up, having the two videos of each learner, one showing their face and one showing their hands on the keyboard and mouse, definitely helps. It simulates in-person coaching.

> Although proper set-up of extra equipment will not replace being in person, it will lessen the frustration that learners experience.

However, body language will still be less visible and hard to convey and read remotely, which can be a barrier to communication and learning for the reasons mentioned earlier about the importance of non-verbal communication. It means that the facilitator may need to make more of a conscious effort to build rapport with the learner, whereas in person they can do this automatically.

Frustration creates more barriers to learning, so as soon as a learner can't do something, they may become flustered and less likely to be successful. Although proper set-up of extra equipment will not replace being in person, it will lessen the frustration that learners experience.

Sharing resources with the learner to practice skills

Another challenge with remote coaching is how to share resources with the learner for them to practice skills, such as a PDF document that has step-by-step instructions with screen shots for the learner to follow and try to do on their own.

For those with strong digital skills, sending PDFs by email or sharing them on drives are some common ways of giving access to such resources online. However, beginner learners don't yet know how to use attachments in email or shared drives, and some may not have a support person at home to assist. They may even be at the stage where they are learning how to hold and use the mouse. So the simplest strategy to address this needs to be carefully considered in order to avoid learner frustration. Again, if a facilitator must choose remote delivery because a learner is without access to in-person learning options because they live in a distant location or pandemic restrictions have closed service 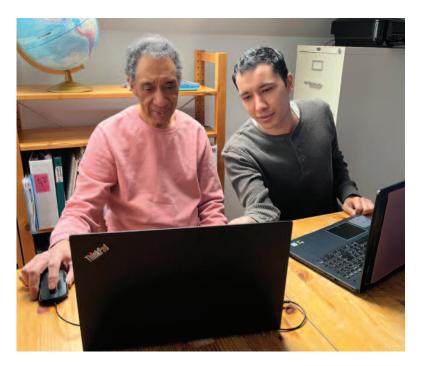provider offices etc., it is critical to recognize that the learning process will be much slower, and the potential for frustration is amplified. The time allotted for learning and mastering each skill will need to be extended even more than suggested in the section on timing in the lessons.

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Remote coaching is not ideal. However, it is still possible to do successfully if done with the right equipment, done slowly and with a great deal of patience.

Conclusion

Experience shows that it takes repetition, patience and perseverance for learners 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 facilitators should be tempered by the recognition that learning digital skills can be challenging, and gains in digital skills take time. This is even more true for learners with low English language skills, low literacy, memory impairments or other challenges. Facilitators might not feel that successful learning is happening quickly enough, especially if the learner seems uninterested at times. But following the approach laid out by these Best Practices, they can be assured that they are laying the groundwork for digital literacy improvement in the learner.

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.

Of course, the broader goal is to help the learner become independent in accessing information and services, and using digital tools for social connection.

In today's world where digital skills are now essential, all of this contributes to the learner fulfilling their responsibilities, their dreams, and living a full life.