



UP Skills for Work Facilitator Guide: Facilitators supporting newcomers to Canada

UP Skills for Work is a program that helps build skills for learning, work, and life.

This guide supports facilitators using *UP Skills for Work* resources with learners who are new to Canada but who don't themselves have lived experience as a newcomer. This guide can be used in addition to the free [online training](#) available for facilitators using *UP Skills for Work* materials.

As a facilitator, it's important to understand the perspectives and experiences adult learners bring to the learning environment. When you take the time to listen to and get to know learners, you gain a deeper understanding of what they want and need to succeed. As you read through this introductory guide, take time to identify what your next steps for learning will be.

In this guide, you'll find information about:

- creating an inclusive learning environment
- common barriers many newcomers to Canada face in the workplace
- what to do if you make a mistake as a facilitator
- resources that can help your learners overcome barriers

Creating an inclusive learning environment

An inclusive learning environment is one where everybody's needs and experiences are welcomed. Inclusivity encourages participation and collaboration. Learners are more likely to participate when they feel respected.

Here are some things to consider when using *UP Skills for Work* resources.

Collaborate with your learners

The discussion-based framework in *UP Skills for Work* resources supports a balanced relationship between facilitator and learner. Instead of the facilitator acting as an expert, the facilitator and learner collaborate to build understanding together.

Use a flexible learning schedule

A flexible learning schedule acknowledges that newcomers to Canada have competing life priorities. In addition to developing their workplace skills, many learners may also be:

- securing childcare
- attending immigration hearings
- looking for employment
- trying to find safe and affordable housing
- learning how to access unfamiliar social services

A flexible learning schedule includes providing options for learning online or in-person.

Help learners identify their goals

Support learners' autonomy by encouraging them to identify their learning goals. Use the introductory information at the beginning of each *UP Skills for Work* workbook to prompt learners to think about their personal learning goals for the session. Each learner is unique, and all learners will have different goals. For example, a learner who has come to Canada by choice may have different goals than one who has come to Canada as a refugee. Model how to identify specific and achievable goals.

Avoid making assumptions

Every learner is a unique individual and has a preferred learning style. Some learners may also have a different communication style from you. For example, some forms of non-verbal communication are not universal. Some learners may not be comfortable making eye contact, but this doesn't automatically mean they are not interested or engaged. A learner could be hesitant to participate for any number of reasons, including challenges with language or literacy, challenges with learning, stresses in their personal life, or just feeling unsure.

Use trauma-informed instructional practices

Using a trauma-informed approach to facilitation is important, particularly when you're unsure about learners' lived experience. You should assume that at least one person in the room has experienced trauma. Consider creating an intervention plan in case a learner needs extra support during a workshop.

- **Build trust and rapport with learners from the beginning.** Set clear expectations about the training including:
 - the rights of each learner in the classroom
 - the content and format of the training
 - attendance and participation
 - specific rules of the training
 - expected outcomes

Have learners agree to the expectations and clarify or modify them according to their input.

Many newcomers to Canada experience poverty. Keep in mind that some learners may benefit from access to snacks at the beginning of a workshop.

- **Establish a safer learning environment.** Keep in mind that negative or limited prior experiences with education can impact a learner's willingness or ability to participate and engage in learning environments. If a workshop feels too much like a school environment, there's a risk of some learners disengaging entirely.

Be mindful of sudden noises, smells, language, or dynamics that may retraumatize learners. Try to stay knowledgeable of world news that may impact your learners. For example, be aware if there's an armed conflict or natural disaster happening in a part of the world your learners have immigrated from.

- **Support learners as they adjust to the learning environment.** Explain why you're doing each activity to help learners anticipate what is going to be asked of them. Keep in mind that as is the case in any learning environment, learners will have a wide range of literacy levels. Pay attention to speaking clearly and at an accessible pace. Avoid using expressions and idioms that may be unfamiliar to learners.

Some learners may be unfamiliar with Canadian ways of teaching and learning. For example, some learners may not have experience learning with people of different genders, people from other cultures, or members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community. They may need time to adjust to the new environment.

- **Be an active listener.** When you're an active listener, you respect other people's boundaries and preferences. Each learner has a unique lived experience. If a learner feels comfortable sharing, it's important to take the time to listen respectfully and not offer opinions or judgment about their experiences. Be genuine in the way you thank learners if they choose to share.

Don't be afraid of silence after somebody has shared something personal or after asking a question. Some people need time to process and respond.

- **Support a strength-based approach to learning.** Allow learners to focus on what they excel at. Each *UP Skills for Work* workbook includes opportunities for learners to reflect on and discuss their experiences and consider their next steps for learning. Be aware that this approach can take time and that some learners may need additional support to recognize their own strengths. You can help by reminding them of the strengths and achievements you learn about or observe. For many learners, a good place to start is to reiterate that showing up for the workshop was itself an act of courage.
- **Skip, adapt, or extend activities and discussions when appropriate.** Use the *UP Skills for Work* resources in ways that work best for your learners. If there's a good discussion happening, you may not want to interrupt it. If you're familiar with the materials, you can select a less-important topic for your learners to skip or spend less time on. See the *UP Skills for Work* [online training](#) or [contact a Community Coordinator](#) for more information about adapting materials.

Get to know your learners

Avoid making assumptions about learners' strengths, challenges, and personal circumstances. If possible, invest time in developing relationships with learners on an individual basis to build trust and to understand their unique learning strengths and challenges. Encourage learners to actively participate by considering their needs and interests. Failing to consider their needs and interests can have the opposite effect. Factors that influence a learner's participation and experience include culture, language, personal history, and learning needs and abilities.

Common barriers in the workplace

One aspect of getting to know your learners when facilitating workplace skills training is understanding their lived experiences in the workplace. While everyone's lived experience is different, many newcomers encounter common barriers in the workplace.

Here are some examples, though they may not be relevant to all learners.

Pre-employment barriers

Many newcomers to Canada may face barriers when looking for a job including language, access to reliable transportation, and childcare. Other barriers adult learners may face are invisible such as struggles with mental health, substance use, neurodiversity, or dealing with trauma.

Lack of Canadian work experience

Many employers prefer to hire people with Canadian work experience. This is a challenge for newcomers to Canada. They might not be hired unless they have Canadian work experience, but they can't get Canadian work experience unless they're hired.

Discrimination

Many newcomers to Canada face discrimination from their co-workers and supervisors. Company policies can also be discriminatory. Everybody has rights in the workplace, but it takes some time to learn and understand those rights. It also takes time to feel confident enough to advocate for yourself. Some learners may worry about losing their job if they speak up.

Discrimination against newcomers often occurs as **microaggressions**. A microaggression is an everyday behaviour or remark that implies negative associations or insults towards an individual or group. Examples of microaggressions include using harmful terminology, being condescending, and making inappropriate jokes. Microaggressions can be subtle or more overt and may be intentional or not.

A co-worker or supervisor may say or do something casually, with no real intent to inflict harm. But the remarks or actions can have long-lasting effects. Those impacted by microaggressions can feel unwelcome and emotionally exhausted. Many workplaces have policies in place to prevent and address bullying, but microaggressions might not obviously break any official rules. This makes addressing microaggressions in the workplace difficult.

Communication

Many workplaces require a certain level of fluency in English or French. This can be a significant problem for newcomers whose first language is something other than English or French. Language proficiency impacts a person's ability to communicate both verbally and in writing. Social cues and non-verbal communication can also vary from one culture to another.

Confidence

A typical Canadian workplace environment might look and feel different from what a newcomer to Canada is accustomed to. It can be difficult to ask questions or seek clarification in a workplace with unfamiliar policies and procedures, as well as unfamiliar materials and software. The need to constantly adjust and learn can have an impact on a newcomer's confidence. Feeling different or like an outsider can be very isolating.

Lack of representation

When newcomers to Canada don't see people like themselves in the workplace, especially in leadership roles, it can lead to a feeling of isolation. This can make it feel like there are limited opportunities for professional growth. Being perceived as different from others can make it feel unsafe to speak up or make a mistake.

Loneliness

Many newcomers to Canada don't have support systems in place to help them cope with feelings of isolation or loneliness.

What to do if you make a mistake

As a facilitator, you'll likely make mistakes from time to time. For example, you may perpetuate a harmful stereotype by being careless with your words. Think about your mistakes as an opportunity to learn and grow.

Decide if you should address the mistake in front of the group or in private on a case-by-case basis. If the mistake occurs in front of the group, you may wish to openly acknowledge the error and take responsibility in front of the group. In some situations, it may be better to acknowledge your mistake and apologize privately and directly to the person involved to avoid embarrassing them.

Here are some suggestions for what you can do.

- **Take responsibility.** The most important first step when you make a mistake is to acknowledge it. Don't be defensive. Explain that you understand why what you did or said is a problem. Avoid making excuses for why you made the mistake.
- **Apologize.** Be sincere and specific about what you did wrong, but don't over-apologize. Respectfully correct yourself.
- **Learn from the mistake.** Every mistake is an opportunity to learn. Take time to reflect on the mistake you made and what caused it. This will help you avoid making the same mistake in the future.

Other resources

When you take the time to understand your learners and their unique needs and experiences, you have a better understanding of how to support their growth by choosing relevant instructional approaches and resources. Visit upskillsforwork.ca for more information about resources in the *UP Skills for Work* program that you can use with your learners to support the development of key workplace and life skills.

To learn more about trauma-informed training and resources, visit the [Crisis and Trauma Resource Institute](#) website.

Extension activities

UP Skills for Work offers a series of activities that expand on content in the core workbooks. Examples of activity topics that may be relevant to your learners include making mistakes, writing clear emails, and finding a community. Visit upskillsforwork.ca to download activities.

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