



Building foundation skills: Top teaching tips for vocational trainers

by Ann Leske and Chemène Sinson

Vocational trainers—you—are in an ideal position. Your training offers a work context that gives depth and reason to the foundation skills needed for the workplace. Learners need you to bolster their foundation skills so they can perform work tasks with confidence.

This article offers five tips to help you get started with building your learners' foundation skills within your vocational training.

Set your eye on the future

We are in the Infotronics age—an age of unprecedented, constant change in today's workforce, as signalled by recent reports by the CSIRO and CEDA. Research by the Foundation for Young Australians tells us that 70 per cent of employers need workers to work proactively in the online environment, develop new and innovative ideas and solutions and interpret data. This is the 'real world' of work, for which we must prepare our learners. It places new foundation skill demands on VET graduates.

To set your eye on the future: stay in touch with current and emerging trends in the industries in which you train; and pitch your training at 'workplace reality'—identify and teach both the vocational and foundation skills learners will need to succeed in today's constantly-evolving workplace.

Make friends with the ACSF and the CSfW

Foundation Skills include:

1. LLN in the Australian Core Skills Framework; and
2. employability skills in the Core Skills for Work framework.

Each document provides hundreds of performance (skill) descriptions. Use them to help you:

- interpret pre-training assessment results;
- identify the particular foundation skills needed for work; and
- isolate foundation skill requirements for summative assessment.

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Upskill and support

Introduce instructional strategies that both upskill and support learners:

- upskilling strategies aim to explicitly build particular core skills (eg. teach how to skim a report to find its main idea—reading); and
- support strategies include anything you do to support learner efforts (eg. provide an online 'lounge'—a place learners can go to ask questions).

Expose and explain

When introducing a new work skill:

- initially, expose the foundation skills together with the work skill (eg. say, "This calculation will help you to...");
- **explain** the range of foundation skills needed to perform the work skill. To do this you'll need to identify the foundation skills needed, then clearly introduce and practice these throughout training; and
- **demonstrate** each foundation skill in context of the work skill (eg. offer a live demonstration or record a 'how to' video that shows the steps to take and identifies challenges involved).

Try this simple exercise to identify the foundation skills needed to perform a work skill:

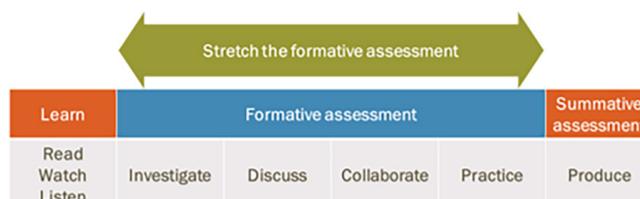
1. make a list of the foundation skills you think a retail salesperson needs to do their job; and
2. when finished, compare your list to [this one](#).

Stretch your delivery plan

Plan training to extend the space between your first introduction to a new work skill, and the summative assessment, as shown in the figure below. Incorporate diverse opportunities for learners to 'intersect' with the material, with you and with each other.

To do this, emphasise **formative assessment**:

- monitor progress, give feedback often; and
- continuously adjust training to meet learner needs.



Need help?

Visit [LLN and VET Meeting Place](#) or contact llnandvetmeetingplace@gmail.com. We offer resources and information to energise your tool kit. ■