

INFORMATION NEEDS AND STRATEGIES  
OF CANADIANS WITH LOWER LITERACY  
SKILLS

FINAL REPORT

Presented to:  
REVENUE CANADA

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## INTRODUCTION

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This report presents the results of a qualitative study conducted on behalf of **Revenue Canada** by **Cogem Research Inc.** The primary purpose of this study was to assess behaviours and strategies of Canadians with low levels of literacy, especially those strategies involving interactions with various government departments (including Revenue Canada) and other large institutions (such as banks).

The results of the 1995 International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS)<sup>1</sup> showed quite clearly that a significant proportion of the general population experiences difficulties in performing tasks necessary for interaction with government and other institutions. Such activities as filling out an income tax return, formulating personal financial strategies and applying for or renewing mortgages place demands on literacy beyond the abilities of many Canadians (or, for that matter, residents of other countries).

The large number of Canadians with low literacy skills (almost half are at Levels 1 or 2 on the IALS scale, in which literacy can range from Level 1 up to Level 5) is of special concern to Revenue Canada, whose interactions with the public are numerous and often demand fairly sophisticated literacy skills (especially "document" and "quantitative" literacy, as defined in the IALS). Revenue Canada has long recognized the special nature of its interaction with its clients and has been a leader among federal government departments in attempting to meet the challenges of dealing with groups with lower literacy skills. Plain Language initiatives, community volunteer programs and telephone self-service programs are just some examples of the areas that have been explored.

It is clear, however, that more information is required as to how individuals with low literacy levels cope with the types of information processing tasks described above. In order to design initiatives that best meet the needs of these clients, we must first know the coping strategies they currently employ. This will allow the development of initiatives that can take advantage of the alternative information processing skills developed by this group as coping mechanisms. Thus, the research proposed here can be seen as a baseline study of how individuals with low levels of literacy cope with interactions that demand literacy skills.

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<sup>1</sup> The results of the Canadian portion of the IALS can be found in the report *Reading the Future: A Portrait of Literacy in Canada* (1996), Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 89-551-XPE

Specifically, the objectives of this research include the following:

- identifying the government departments and other institutions with which low-literacy individuals interact;
- assessing the types of interactions that are involved;
- specifically assessing the types and characteristics of their interactions with Revenue Canada;
- defining what makes these different types of interactions relatively more or less difficult;
- assessing how the target group currently receives information on government programs and services in general, and Revenue Canada programs and services in particular;
- assessing the information needs of the target group, and the preferred modalities of information delivery;
- assessing the mechanisms used to complete information processing tasks and reporting obligations that emerge from their interactions with government, other institutions (such as banks) and, particularly, Revenue Canada; and
- specifically assessing the characteristics that make learning new information processing tasks relatively more or less difficult.

The findings of this study are intended to provide a firm basis for the design of new Revenue Canada initiatives to improve service to Canadians with lower levels of literacy.

## METHODOLOGY

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The methodology for this study was a qualitative one consisting of: (1) a series of depth interviews with students in community and workplace literacy programs<sup>2</sup>, and (2) focus groups among instructors in community literacy programs. (A depth interview is a semi-structured, personal interview, while a focus group is a semi-structured discussion among 8-10 individuals, guided by a moderator.)

Specifically, 5 depth interviews with participants in community literacy programs were conducted in each of:

- St. John's, Newfoundland,
- Grand Falls, Newfoundland,
- Montreal, Quebec,
- Berthierville, Quebec,
- Vancouver, British Columbia, and
- Maple Ridge, British Columbia.

Ten depth interviews with participants in workplace literacy programs were conducted in each of:

- Winnipeg, Manitoba, and
- Toronto, Ontario.

One focus group with instructors in community literacy programs was conducted in each of:

- Grand Falls, Newfoundland,
- Montreal, Quebec, and
- Vancouver, British Columbia.

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<sup>2</sup> The fact that study participants had self-identified as having literacy difficulties should be kept in mind when interpreting the findings of this study, as this group may differ from those who have not sought literacy upgrading. Reaching this latter group would require a study of a much larger scale than that of the study reported here.

All interviews and focus groups in Quebec were conducted in French.

## **Eligibility Criteria**

Participants for the depth interviews were selected according to the following criteria:

- all participants were of literacy levels 1, 2 or 3 (according to the IALS definition described in the following section<sup>3</sup> ;
- up to two participants in the **community** literacy interviews in each location were over 55 years of age;
- an approximately equal number of males and females were selected in each location.

For the focus groups, all participants had at least two year's experience as a literacy tutor and, as a group, taught students at a range of literacy levels.

## **Recruiting**

Because of time constraints and the nature of the target population, the co-operation of the community literacy programs in the areas to be researched was solicited to aid in recruiting depth interview participants. No formal screening questionnaire was used. Rather, representatives of the community literacy programs were contacted and informed of the purpose of the study. They then solicited volunteers from among their students (or students in other local programs) to participate in the depth interviews. Potential participants were assured that their participation was voluntary and confidential.

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<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that participants were **not** tested to determine their IALS literacy level as a part of this study. Rather, the literacy level of the participant was judged by his or her literacy tutor. Furthermore, the individual literacy programs often used assessments that did not conform to the IALS model. In these cases, the tutor judged the IALS literacy level of the participant.

Similarly, workplace depth interviews were recruited through the employer. Employers offering workplace literacy upgrading were contacted and their participation solicited. The employer then recruited interview participants from among eligible employees. Once again, participation was voluntary and confidential.

The screening questionnaire used in the recruiting of the focus groups with literacy instructors is shown in Appendix A. In Grand Falls, the local literacy centre recruited the focus group participants. In Montreal, the focus group was recruited by Cogem, while the Vancouver focus session was recruited by Research House, Inc., under the direction of Cogem.

Because of the recruiting method used for the depth interviews with participants in community literacy programs and the nature of the programs, it was impossible to provide a wide age range among these participants. In fact, only three of the 30 interview participants were under the age of 30 and four were over the age of 50. With this exception, interviews and focus groups were well-recruited and well-attended.

### **Participant Incentives**

Incentive payments of \$50 were made to **all** depth interview and focus group participants as a token of appreciation for their participation.

### **Conduct of the Interviews and Focus Groups**

The depth interviews loosely followed the format shown in the Depth Interview Guide (see Appendix B). The nature of the interviewed group mandated a very unstructured approach to the interviews; however, all topics in the Guide were covered in each interview. Interviews ranged in duration from 35 minutes to one hour. The average interview lasted approximately 45 minutes.

Interviews with participants in community literacy programs were conducted at the literacy centre

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itself, except in Vancouver, where the facilities of Research House were utilized.

In Toronto, the workplace depth interviews were held in a chocolate products factory. In Winnipeg, the literacy program was offered by a union in the garment industry, and participants were interviewed in the union centre.

The focus groups followed the format shown in the Discussion Outline (Appendix C). There was an adequate level of participation and interaction among participants in all focus groups.

In Grand Falls, the focus group was held at the community literacy centre, while in Montreal and Vancouver, specialized focus group facilities were used.

### **NOTE TO THE READER**

Qualitative research techniques such as depth interviews and focus groups are not designed to provide results that are necessarily representative of the general population. Instead, these techniques are intended to provide a deeper insight into the views of a small number of individuals, in order to allow an in-depth exploration of the range of possible opinions and to provide direction on the relevant issues. Thus, the findings of this study should be considered as indicative, rather than conclusive, of what may be found among the general population of Canadians with lower literacy skills.



## A NOTE CONCERNING LITERACY LEVELS

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Throughout this report, reference is made to "levels of literacy" and, more specifically, to "Levels 1, 2 and 3". These refer to the scale used in the 1995 International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS), referred to in the Introduction to this report. In the IALS, three specific "domains" of literacy skills were assessed. These are:

- Prose literacy - the knowledge and skills needed to understand text-only documents, such as news stories or fiction;
- Document literacy - the knowledge and skills needed to use information contained in various formats, such as forms, schedules, tables and maps; and
- Quantitative literacy - the knowledge and skills needed to apply mathematical operations to numbers embedded in printed materials.

To get an idea of the skill-set required at any given literacy level for each of the literacy domains, it is necessary to examine the types of tasks requiring that level of literacy. Appendix D reprints a summary (from the Canadian IALS report<sup>4</sup>) showing examples of tasks characteristic of each of the five levels of literacy within the three domains. As document and quantitative literacy are most relevant to this study, and as participants were selected from those at Levels 1, 2 and 3, the types of tasks characteristic of the first three levels (for each domain) are briefly described below:

### Document Literacy

Level 1 and 2 tasks in the document domain generally require the individual to find one specific piece of information located on a chart or table. Level 2 tasks are distinguished from those at Level 1 by the amount of potentially distracting information. Level 3 tasks require the individual to take conditional information into account before selecting the appropriate piece of information from the display. However, even in Level 3 tasks, the information can be found directly on the chart or table.

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<sup>4</sup> *Reading the Future: A Portrait of Literacy in Canada* (1996), Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 89-551-XPE, p.16. Used by permission.

## Quantitative Literacy

Level 1 and 2 tasks in the quantitative domain involve making a single straightforward arithmetical (addition or subtraction) operation. Level 2 tasks are distinguished by the fact that the operation may not be stipulated, but can easily be inferred from the question. Level 3 tasks (while still involving a single arithmetical operation) may involve multiplication or division and often require the individual to make a higher-order inference to decide which operation to use. Also, the numbers to be used in the operation are often embedded in more complex displays.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

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This study had two major aims. The first was to assess the strategies used by Canadians with lower literacy skills in information-processing tasks, primarily those involving interactions with larger institutions (such as banks and insurance companies) and government. The goal here was to gain insights from these individuals' current interactions that will enable Revenue Canada to better serve this group. The second major aim was to assess how these individuals receive information now, so as to provide Revenue Canada with a basis for formulating communications strategies for Canadians with lower literacy skills.

The major findings of the study are summarized below:

### Current Interactions

- **Many participants, especially those at the lowest literacy levels, have in their own view relatively few interactions with the types of institutions mentioned above.** The most common ones mentioned were with banks. Most participants had a savings account - fewer than half had a chequing account. Some in the workplace interviews reported having mortgages; few had any investments or RRSPs. Employment Insurance and provincial social services were the other most commonly mentioned institutions. Participants in rural areas were more likely than urban participants to have automobiles, and thus had a broader range of interactions with provincial motor vehicle registration, licensing and auto insurance. A few participants mentioned interactions with the legal system, usually in terms of divorce and child custody disputes.
- **Most see themselves as having little to do with Revenue Canada and did not see Revenue Canada as important to them in their daily lives, the way the other institutions mentioned above are.** Most, especially those in rural areas, did not know where the local Revenue Canada office was located. Almost no one completed his or her own income taxes; the vast majority paid a tax preparer such as H & R Block to complete his or her taxes. Relatively few had friends or relatives do their taxes.

- **Participants see Revenue Canada only in terms of tax collection.** None, for example, spontaneously mentioned Revenue Canada as the provider of the Child Tax Benefit (although many of the women interviewed received the Benefit). However, when it was mentioned by the interviewer, most seemed aware that Revenue Canada provides this benefit. Awareness of the GST credit seemed more strongly tied to the filing of income tax and, thus, to Revenue Canada.

### Mechanisms of Interaction

- **There is a strong preference for face-to-face interactions.** For example, relatively few participants used automated teller machines (ATMs), preferring to deal directly with a teller. More importantly, they prefer to deal with the **same** teller at the **same** branch. Those participants that did use the ATM rarely used it exclusively and they usually used it only for simple withdrawals.
- **Intermediaries are often used to facilitate interactions.** This was particularly true for those at the lowest literacy levels; most of these individuals bring a trusted friend or relative (usually a spouse or adult child) along with them, particularly if they are entering a new or otherwise unusual situation.
- **Avoidance is a common mechanism for dealing with a new or different situation.** Many participants, particularly those at the lowest literacy levels, took the view that if they ignored a problem, it would either go away or resolve itself somehow. Some thought that they could force face-to-face interactions (or, at least, a phone call) by ignoring mailed notices.
- **Methods of handling mail interactions vary by literacy level.** Those at the lowest levels usually, but not always, had someone they trusted read any mail that "seemed important" to them. However, a small number tended to ignore mail, unless, as one participant put it, "it's a bill or a cheque." Those who could more comfortably read mail did so and saved any government communications religiously. There is some evidence, however, that misinterpretation of the content of the communication is a problem.

### Comfort with Interactions

**Government inspires fear.** Participants automatically saw communications from "government" (viewed in an undifferentiated manner) as signifying trouble. As one participant put it: "It is scary when the brown envelopes come." Regular monthly payments such as the Child Tax Benefit escape this perception because their regularity allows them to be emotionally removed from the concept of "government".

- **The person deals with another individual, not the institution.** For these individuals, the institution is the teller, or the EI officer, or the insurance agent.
- **Comfort with a given interaction is directly related to the extent to which a "relationship" has developed.** Participants across the country reported that they dealt with people they "felt comfortable with", whether at the bank, the insurance company or the EI or social services office. Once they found the "right person", they dealt with that individual exclusively and turned over many of their own responsibilities to that individual, within the context of the interaction.
- **The basis of a relationship is, first, sensitivity and, then, trust.** A particular individual within the institution is chosen based on his or her sensitivity to the problems (including literacy problems) of the client. If the individual is not sensitive, the interaction will go badly. If he or she displays compassion (without appearing to condescend) and sensitivity, the relationship develops and the client will come to trust the individual implicitly over time.

### Dissemination of Information

- **The television news is the main source of information at home.** Somewhat surprisingly, not all the participants in literacy programs interviewed reported watching television to a great degree. However, almost without exception, they watched the news. Some watched **every** newscast during the evening. Participants, in the main, were quite proud of their knowledge and understanding of current events. Virtually all felt that advertising during the television news was a great way of getting information out to them.
- **Literacy programs play a critical role.** Although more about the literacy programs

will be said below, it should be noted here that both program participants and instructors agreed that the literacy programs can play a key role in disseminating information to their students, and, by word of mouth, to others with lower literacy skills who are not in literacy programs.

### Role of Literacy Programs

- **The literacy program often becomes a centerpiece of the participant's life, socially as well as intellectually.** This is particularly true of programs that offer one-on-one tutoring and those that are part of a social or community centre.
- **Program participants often come to trust their instructors a great deal and come to depend on them for help with information tasks outside the classroom.** Once again, this seems to happen more often in programs oriented towards one-on-one tutoring, and seems also to be a function of the area: rural programs are more conducive to the development of this kind of relationship than are urban ones.
- **Literacy programs play a critical role in teaching new interactions.** Generally, participants in literacy programs interviewed for this study were uncommunicative when it came to learning new interactions. Most insights in this area came from the literacy tutors. They saw their role as expanding the horizons of their students, teaching them new things and exposing them to new experiences. Many noted that their students live very limited existences and become very insular. The good news is that most are very eager to learn, once the initial shyness is overcome.

It is clear from the findings that, for Canadians with lower literacy skills, Revenue Canada must have a "face". Any move away from face-to-face counter service is a move in a direction **opposite** to the orientation of this group. It will be very difficult to make inroads among this group using automated telephone or computerized workstation methods.

In addition, the choice of counter personnel is critical. They must be sensitive to the possibility that the individuals with whom they are dealing across the counter may have lower literacy skills. As noted in the Introduction to this report, individuals with lower levels of literacy make up a large group and the findings indicate that this group disproportionately favours counter service. As one participant put it, "I just wish that the [person behind the counter] realized that I might have trouble reading."

Revenue Canada will have to make special communications efforts to reach this group. They do not feel that Revenue Canada is an important part of their lives and they see Revenue Canada **only** in terms of tax collection. An essential first step is changing the image of Revenue Canada in the eyes of this group. The Department has to find a way to disassociate itself from the fear-inspiring concept of "government" within which it is now viewed by this group.

Clearly, television advertising, especially during the local evening news, will have to be a part of any communications effort. However, another important component will involve partnerships with community literacy groups. They see themselves as a major point-of-entry into the lower-literacy community and are willing and eager to play a part.

The community literacy organizations also have a role to play in helping Revenue Canada educate Canadians with lower literacy skills in new procedures and methods of interacting with the department. Although it would be unfair to state that clear insights were gained from this study as to exactly what methods should be implemented or what changes should be made to existing procedures or forms, it is clear that the community literacy organizations will provide the basis for any attempt to, for example, implement workshops or information sessions on existing or new Revenue Canada policies or procedures.

## **PARTICIPANT PROFILE**

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One of the keys to success for the depth interviews was building a rapport with the participant. Whenever possible, the interviewer was given some background on the participant before the interview began. In addition, the interviewer focused, especially at the beginning of the interview, on the participant's life and past experiences, particularly as they led to the participant's presence in the community (or workplace) literacy program. These data, coupled with the insights of the literacy instructors, provide an important context within which to interpret the study findings, and are briefly summarized below.

Although the participants came from a variety of backgrounds, there were some commonalities. All were from lower socio-economic backgrounds, or had come to Canada from another country at some time in the past. Most (but by no means all) were characterized as shy or lacking self-confidence by literacy program officials or instructors familiar with them. The instructors noted that the interview subjects led very limited, constrained lives, as do individuals with lower literacy levels in general. They did not have a wide range of life experiences; they did not tend to travel, or have hobbies that took them outside the home, or have an active social life. Of course, there were exceptions (one participant, for example, coached gymnastics and had travelled extensively), but, by and large, participants' lives were tied to home and family.

Almost none of the interview participants (except, of course, those in the workplace depth interviews) were employed. Most were receiving Employment Insurance benefits, while a number were receiving provincial social assistance benefits. The majority were married; some had children living at home. Many reported having adult children living in the same community.

Although we did not ask the question explicitly, we gained some insights into the factors contributing to lower literacy levels among the interview participants. Among older participants, a common reason was lack of educational opportunities - the participant was forced to leave school early to work and help support the family (this was most notable in rural areas). Younger participants were more likely to report difficulties in school. Several reported dropping out of school because it just "wasn't worth the hassle." It is difficult to determine exactly what status the concept of education enjoyed in these households; however, no participant commented on any parental resistance to his or her dropping out. It should be noted that relatively few of our participants were under the age of 35. A younger group of participants would have yielded more insights into the factors contributing to lower levels of literacy



among young people.

Most participants were referred to the community literacy centre by their Employment Insurance or social assistance caseworker. Those who were referred from Employment Insurance tended to be very goal oriented. When asked what the goal of their literacy upgrading was, they were likely to report that it was to get a (better) job. Although they acknowledged the value of education for its own sake, it was clear (several admitted as much) that, had they not lost their previous job, they would not be in the program. Those referred from the provincial ministry of social services were more likely to see the benefits of the literacy program in terms of general self-improvement. There were also a small number of participants that had heard about the literacy program from friends or relatives and had come without referral. All participants over the age of 50 fell into this group. These participants tended to report that they had managed to live without ever learning to read; generally, their spouse or an adult son or daughter helped them. However, when the spouse died or the child moved away, they realized how difficult their situation was. As one man put it, "I can't even read my granddaughter a story."

## **TYPES OF INTERACTIONS**

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### **Current Interactions**

For the most part, participants in the depth interviews led very constrained lives. That is, they did not socialize a great deal or have hobbies that took them outside the home; their lives seemed to revolve around home and (for those who were employed) work. Thus, their initial self-assessment was that they had relatively few interactions with the types of institutions that were the subject of this study.

When the interviewer specifically asked, the most common institution the participant mentioned was the bank. Most (but not all) participants had a bank account. Generally speaking, participants had only one bank account and many of them only used this account (usually a savings account) for cheque-cashing. Participants rarely reported any transactions more complicated than making deposits, withdrawals and paying bills. Fewer than half of those interviewed reported having a chequing account and, thus, writing cheques. Participants in the workplace depth interviews were more likely to report having mortgages or car loans. Few reported investment or RRSPs of any kind. Relatively few (but more among the workplace participants) used automated teller machines; those that did tended to use only one type of machine (that of their own bank) and to use it only for withdrawals.

After banks, Employment Insurance (EI) was the next most commonly-mentioned institution. The large majority of participants had some past or current contact with EI. In fact, many of the interview participants had first come to their community literacy program on a referral from an EI officer. A number of interview participants were also recipients of provincial social assistance and reported interactions with their social services caseworker.

Rural participants were relatively more likely than their urban counterparts to operate a motor vehicle. Thus, rural participants were more likely to mention a range of interactions associated with vehicle ownership, including provincial motor vehicle registration, drivers' licenses and automobile insurance. The only other interactions of note involved the legal system. Although no respondents reported any troubles of a criminal nature, several noted current or past civil difficulties, usually involving divorce and child custody disputes.

In an effort to spark recollections of other interactions, the interviewer, in some sessions, asked participants about paying household bills. Those that did so (many had another person, such as a

spouse, handle bill payments), did so exclusively at the bank. Bill paying was seen by the participant as simply another bank transaction, no different than any other in terms of the interaction between the individual and the bank.

### **Interactions with Revenue Canada**

It must be noted immediately that the vast majority of participants did not see Revenue Canada as an institution with which they had any type of connection. Most participants simply could not see how Revenue Canada had anything to do with them. Other institutions like the banks, EI and provincial social services were seen as having some type of connection to them and their lives - not so with Revenue Canada. Relatively few, for example, had any idea where their local Revenue Canada office was located, especially among rural participants. Even among urban participants, there was much confusion. In St. John's, for example, the few participants who indicated knowledge of the location of the office reported the location of the Taxation Centre, rather than the Tax Services Office. Although it may be argued that these participants were aware of the location of "a Revenue Canada office", this is probably because the community literacy program where several of the interviews took place was located not far from the St. John's Taxation Centre, which served as a local landmark.

It is clear that the participants in the depth interviews viewed Revenue Canada only in terms of its role as a tax collector. This perception, interestingly, was shared by the focus group participants (literacy tutors and instructors) as well - Revenue Canada are the "tax people". Depth interview participants never seemed to be able to fully grasp or accept that Revenue Canada had a broader mandate, even after the interviewer mentioned such benefits as the Child Tax Benefit and the GST Credit. For example, a number of the women interviewed received the Child Tax Benefit and seemed aware (but only when prompted) that it was provided by Revenue Canada; however, they still seemed to see Revenue Canada, throughout the remainder of the interview, as the "tax people".

Given these facts, it is not surprising to learn that few participants reported any interactions with Revenue Canada. The majority of participants, whatever their level of literacy, paid a tax preparer such as H & R Block to complete their income taxes on their behalf. Thus, the participant had no personal contact with Revenue Canada. A small number of participants reported that their spouse, another relative or a friend completed their income taxes, while one or two participants reported that they paid a professional in another field, with whom they had an existing relationship, to complete their taxes. For example, one participant had his taxes done by his automobile insurance agent.

When probed as to the cost of professional tax preparation and the perceived value of the service, most participants were of the opinion that the cost of professional tax preparation was money well spent. These participants knew that they were unable to complete the tax return themselves and felt that it was worth it to pay for the service, rather than get a friend or relative to do it, because only by doing so could they be confident that there would be no errors. Several participants noted that the service was "guaranteed", although most did not know precisely what that meant in the context of tax preparation. That said, however, there was a strong sense that interview participants used professional tax preparers to complete their taxes because (1) it seemed the only reasonable way to do it and (2) it is what they have always done.

It is for this last reason that participants generally did not express a strong wish to do their own taxes if they could. Although participants often felt that the income tax return was unnecessarily complex and could be simplified, the majority still felt that they would probably not do their own taxes - the current method worked for them, and they did not feel that the money paid was unreasonable for the service received.

It is interesting to note that fewer participants than might be expected took advantage of any available "cash-back" option (in which some or all of the anticipated refund is provided by the preparer at the time of submission of the return) from their tax preparer. Many seemed to be aware, from media reports, that the this type of service was, in the words of one participant, a "rip-off".

A very small number of participants in the depth interviews reported interactions with Revenue Canada that went beyond the completion of income taxes or the receipt of Child Tax Benefits or the GST Credit. In all cases, these interactions stemmed from monies owed to Revenue Canada from previous years. One case involved taxes owing from a failed landscaping business; the others involved personal income taxes. These cases were resolved prior to the interview, but the sense from the participants was that the resolution was not "successful" - they felt that you "can't beat the system." That is, if Revenue Canada says you owe money, you owe it, whether you **really** do or not. That said, these participants reported that the Revenue Canada personnel they dealt with treated them with respect and fairness. (It should be noted that in all cases, these individuals had a spouse that interpreted any correspondence and accompanied them to the Revenue Canada office.)

## MECHANISMS OF INTERACTION

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Although specific methods for handling interactions did vary by literacy level, there were some constants. The most notable of these was the preference for face-to-face interactions. In all interviews, a preference for dealing with representatives of institutions on a one-to-one basis was very clear. The most striking example involved banks. As noted earlier, participants tend not to use automated teller machines. In fact, it goes much farther than this. Participants not only preferred to deal with a teller, they preferred to deal with the **same** branch and the **same** teller. This is particularly true of those at the lowest levels of literacy. Participants' interactions with bank tellers will be discussed in more detail in the next section of this report.

The preference for face-to-face interactions was re-iterated by the literacy instructors, who reported that their students were very loathe to use automated telephone systems or computerized information kiosks or workstations. The instructors reported that these types of systems place sufficient demands on individuals with lower literacy skills that they tend to not even try to learn them, especially if an alternative method of completing the operation exists. During discussions of automated telephone systems, it was noted that they often require the user to remember a number of options prior to making a choice, or they require interpretation of the choices available to judge which, if any, is applicable to the user.

Although it is logical that individuals with lower literacy skills might try to avoid **automated** telephone systems, it may seem somewhat paradoxical that they would seek out face-to-face interactions rather than the relative anonymity of the telephone, if they wish to speak with an individual. Participants often noted that they were very adept at hiding their lack of literacy skills; why would they risk exposing this fact in a face-to-face interaction? The answer lies in the type of interaction. In the next section of this report, we will examine what it is that makes for a "successful" interaction. We will see there that the key lies in the building of a relationship. For now, it is sufficient to note that the face-to-face interactions preferred are those of a long-standing nature.

That said, it is true that interview participants who were at the lowest literacy levels were more likely than others to report using avoidance as a mechanism to cope with interactions. This group was likely to take the view that if they ignored a problem, it would go away or resolve itself. An instructive example comes from the depth interviews conducted in rural Newfoundland. During a discussion of interactions with Revenue Canada, one participant was asked, "What would you do if you got a letter

from Revenue Canada saying that you owed them money for taxes from a previous year?" He replied, "I got a letter like that." When asked what he was going to do about it, he replied, "Nothing. I figure if they want their money bad enough, they'll come to me."

This head-in-the-sand attitude extends to other mail as well. Among those at the lowest literacy levels, mail tended to be ignored, unless it was perceived as urgent. As one participant noted, "If it's not a bill or a cheque, it goes in the garbage."

Of course, the preceding paragraph begs the question of how the individual with lower literacy skills decides whether or not a piece of mail is "urgent". Although it is partially a function of the envelope colour (brown means government), the main answer illustrates another major mechanism of handling interactions: the use of intermediaries. Most of the interview participants reported using a spouse, adult child or friend to help them read mail and other communications materials delivered to the home.

The lower the individual's literacy level, the more likely he or she was to use an intermediary and the more extensive was his or her use of and dependence on this individual. At the lowest literacy levels, a significant life issue for the individual is the search for another person that he or she can trust, who can act as a helper in these information tasks. Once that person is found, he or she becomes, in some ways, an extension of the individual with lower literacy skills, accompanying him or her to the EI or welfare office or to any new or otherwise unusual situation and completing any required forms on his or her behalf. It is important to note that the judgement of this "trusted other" is given significant weight - it is on his or her say-so, for example, that a given piece of mail is acted upon or tossed in the garbage.

Even among individuals at literacy Level 3, the "trusted other" is used. In these cases, the other person is most likely to be a spouse and the helper relationship is more casual - it is a less significant part of the individuals coping strategies. Here, the helping relationship is a simple outgrowth of living together; if the mail comes and something seems complicated, the spouse takes a look at it. If there is no convenient person to act as a helper, the Level 3 individual will not make a special effort to find one.

The importance of the "trusted other" can be seen most dramatically when that person is lost. Two of the depth interviews involved older Canadians who were at the very lowest literacy levels. One had depended for many years on his adult son, the other on her husband. In both cases, they had lost this trusted other (the adult son moved away and the husband died). Both individuals reported the crushing effect of this loss. Both reported being overwhelmed and unable to cope. In both cases, it was after the loss of the trusted other that the individuals decided to upgrade their literacy skills and, in one case, the literacy instructor was slowly becoming the new trusted other. This participant reported that he

regularly brought materials to his literacy tutor to be read and interpreted. The other individual was coming to depend on an adult daughter, but reported feeling very guilty about burdening her.

It was noted above that interview participants at higher levels of literacy (ie, Level 3), were less likely to rely on helpers. This is significant, as these individuals no longer have an independent interpretation of a given piece of mail or other written communication. At Level 3, there is a significant amount of printed material, whether from government or the private sector, that they are unable to completely and accurately interpret. However, it is clear that they often do not feel that they are "missing something" when they read these written communications. Clearly, there is a substantial danger of misinterpretation and, thus, inappropriate action (or inaction) based on that interpretation. However, it is also true that those individuals at relatively higher levels of literacy are more likely to recognize a given written communication as "important". Furthermore, these individuals tend to save important documents or pieces of mail (particularly those coming from government) religiously.

## COMFORT WITH INTERACTIONS

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One of the major goals of the examination of study participants' interactions with institutions was to discover what aspects of these interactions determined whether or not they were viewed in a positive manner. It quickly became apparent that the major determinants were **not** fundamentally related to the institutions themselves. (Although interactions with banks were generally viewed in a positive manner by all participants, this was the exception.) For example, some participants reported that they preferred dealing with the EI office rather than the social services office; others reported the opposite.

The determining factor in this preference is the relationship that evolves at the individual level. To the study participants, the individual representing the institution **is** the institution. That is, participants do not deal with, for example, the provincial ministry of social services; rather, they deal with their own caseworker. The extent to which the individuals are comfortable in their interactions with the institution and view the interaction positively is directly related to the extent to which they feel they have a "good" relationship with the individual representing the institution.

This explains why participants' interactions with banks are so positively regarded. As noted earlier, participants prefer to deal with the same teller at the same branch. In this way, a relationship is begun. Because of the frequency of interactions with banks, the relationship develops quickly and the individual quickly becomes comfortable dealing with that bank (or, more precisely, that teller).

If the development of a relationship with an individual representing an institution is so critical, what determines whether a relationship will develop with that specific individual? It appears that the initial contact is the critical factor and the key factor in this initial contact is sensitivity. If the individual representing the institution is sensitive to the needs and problems of the client (including literacy problems), without having a condescending attitude, then the seed for the development of a relationship is planted. An example will illustrate the concept of sensitivity. A participant in one interview noted that one of the ways he hid his lack of literacy skills was to never complete a form at the office or institution where he received it: "I always say, 'I don't have time to do it now, can I take it home and bring it back later?'" Then, he had someone at home complete it for him. He noted that, when he applied for Employment Insurance benefits, he dealt with an EI counter person who, when he asked to take the form home, replied that she could go through it with him and they could probably complete it in a few minutes. The interview participant felt clearly that the counter person realized that he could not complete the form himself but did not embarrass him about it.



Why is the development of a relationship so important to individuals with lower literacy levels? The answer becomes clear when the details of the interactions themselves are examined. For example, at the bank, the individual does not simply deal with the same teller in order to see a familiar face or chat about the weather. Rather, the individual **uses** the teller, to complete withdrawal and deposit slips, explain bank procedures and even offer advice on banking matters. The development of a relationship with one person representing the institution is critical because the individual with lower literacy skills wants to use that person as a resource. Once that "right person" is found, the individual will turn over a significant portion of their own responsibilities (in the context of the interaction) to that person. In a very real sense, this person becomes the "trusted other" mentioned earlier, but only in the context of interactions with the institution he or she represents.

Clearly, in the case of Revenue Canada, the relative infrequency of interactions makes the development of a relationship, as detailed above, that much more difficult. This makes the initial interaction an even more important factor. Presumably, if an individual goes into a bank and doesn't "connect" with a particular teller, he or she can go again the next day and try a different one. This cannot happen with Revenue Canada (or other government departments or offices). There, the sensitivity of the counter personnel is a critical factor.

Another factor working against the success of interactions with Revenue Canada among individuals with lower levels of literacy is the fact that the concept of "government" often inspires fear. This is particularly true of individuals at the lowest levels of literacy, who seemed almost always to view the receipt of mail from the "government" (including Revenue Canada) with alarm. As one such individual put it, "It is scary when the brown envelopes come." Among these individuals, government is viewed in a relatively undifferentiated manner. One interesting finding is that government departments with which these individuals have frequent contact, such as social services (for those receiving social assistance benefits), seem to be removed from the concept of "government" and stand alone as institutions. That is, the ministry of social services is not seen as a department of the provincial government; rather, it is seen as a stand-alone institution. It should be noted that the difference is more a function of how the institution is perceived emotionally; participants are aware that the ministry of social services is part of the government, they just don't look at it the same way as they do "government".

Another interesting example of this involves Revenue Canada. Although the receipt of a brown envelope is viewed with alarm by many, the receipt of the monthly Child Tax Benefit cheque is not.

Once again, the difference is frequency. A monthly cheque coming on the same day each month becomes emotionally removed from Revenue Canada ("government") and becomes a stand-alone benefit. The individual may or may not know that the Child Tax Benefit comes from Revenue Canada. However, even if this fact is known, in a very real sense it is not the "same" Revenue Canada.

## DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION

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Participants were often aware that they lacked information about government programs and services. When asked if they felt that there were probably programs "out there" that could benefit them of which they were unaware, most replied in the affirmative. The interviewer often used the example of Revenue Canada's volunteer program to help seniors and lower-income individuals complete their income tax form. No participant was aware of this program. Other examples of programs or services that could benefit individuals with lower levels of literacy in other areas were reported during the focus groups with literacy instructors. For example, in Newfoundland, the written examination taken as part of the requirements for a driver's license can be administered orally upon request. The focus group participant noted that none of her students was aware of this fact. In fact, a depth interview participant in St. John's noted that she had studied a full year with the help of her brother before she even attempted her written test. Thus, much of the discussion in the latter part of the depth interview revolved around how participants receive information now and how information could be more effectively communicated to them.

One of the common threads that bound the depth interview participants was their knowledge of and interest in current events. Participants across the country, whatever their literacy skills, were eager to discuss local issues and politics (at all levels - federal, provincial and local). In many cases, especially among those at the lowest levels of literacy, it was clear that participants were very proud of their knowledge of current events. Clearly, the lack of literacy skills does not prevent individuals from learning about the world around them. How do they get this information?

Not surprisingly, the main source of information is television. What is surprising is that interview participants generally reported that they did not watch very much television. However, almost all indicated that they watched the news. Many indicated that this was the only television they watched. A common answer to the question: "Do you watch television?" was "Not very much - but I watch the news." Some participants watched **every** local evening newscast that they could. It should be noted, however, that the participants' self-perceptions of how much television was watched may be unreliable: the instructors tended to feel that their students watched a lot of television.

Given this interest in local news, it is not surprising that participants were very quick to recommend that any information government wanted to get out to them be broadcast during the local evening news. Although the characteristics of the television advertising that should be used were not discussed

in detail, most participants favoured a clear delivery of the message by an on-screen individual. Obviously, the message should not be graphics-heavy, but it could show, for example, a telephone number to call.

Other media were generally not mentioned with any frequency. Some participants indicated that they listen to the radio; however, participants generally did not recommend radio advertising as a good method for government to get information out to individuals with lower levels of literacy. In addition, some participants in the workplace depth interviews (mostly Level 3 individuals) indicated that they read the newspaper. Once again, however, this was not considered a good means of communicating messages from Revenue Canada or government in general.

Along with their interest in television news, another factor common to virtually all participants was their belief in the power of word-of-mouth as a means of disseminating information. For example, as will be discussed in the next section, interview (and focus group) participants believed that community literacy programs were a great way for the government to distribute information to individuals with lower levels of literacy. When the interviewer pointed out that there were many people with lower levels of literacy that were **not** in literacy upgrading programs, the general reaction among interview participants was that the information would filter to them as their friends or acquaintances who **were** in such programs told their friends, and they told their friends, etc. Participants' belief in the power of word-of-mouth was unshakeable and quite compelling.

Literacy instructors echoed the students' comments about the potential effectiveness of word-of-mouth, but were more aware of its limitations. Similarly, they noted that individuals with lower literacy skills watched a great deal of television, but were somewhat less enthusiastic than were the students when assessing the potential effectiveness of a television ad designed to provide information from Revenue Canada.

It should be noted, as well, that several participants indicated that the mail was a good method of distributing information, as those who could not read it generally had access to someone who could. However, as noted earlier, there are two major problems with mailed communications: misinterpretation among those individuals with literacy skills advanced enough to read the

documents and discarding of the material as not "urgent" among those who depend on intermediaries to read their mail.

## **ROLE OF LITERACY PROGRAMS/INSTRUCTORS**

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Much of the perspective on the lifestyles of those with lower literacy skills mentioned in the Participant Profile section of this report was provided by the focus group participants. They noted that, because of the severely limited life experiences that often characterize those with lower levels of literacy, the literacy centre often becomes a focal point in the student's life. The literacy instructors (particularly those in rural Newfoundland) noted that they saw their role as broader than simply improving their students' reading and writing skills. They also felt they had a responsibility to broaden their students' horizons. Thus, they organized field trips to such places as cultural centres, art galleries and music concerts.

Similarly, participants in the workplace sessions (who worked in factory environments) noted that the workplace in general and the literacy upgrading classes in particular function as important social centres in their lives. They felt that, in a way, their lives revolved around their jobs. They were shift-workers who did not have much of a social life outside the job. Thus, the literacy classes were seen as having important social, as well as educational, advantages.

Another focus of the literacy centre was the teaching of situational skills. Thus, the centres often organized sessions or workshops to teach students some of skills required in everyday interactions. For example, one centre organized a session to teach their students to use the automated teller machine.

The perception that the literacy centre was an important part of the student's life was strongest in rural areas and for those literacy programs that were attached to a social or community centre. This perception was echoed by the students. As mentioned earlier, it was not uncommon (again, most often in rural areas and in programs offering one-on-one tutoring) for interview participants to indicate that they brought documents or pieces of mail from home for the instructor to read. In urban areas and larger group settings, however, interview participants often felt that these types of materials were "private" or "none of their [the literacy instructor's] business."

Depth interview participants were generally not forthcoming when asked about learning new procedures or experiencing new interactions. One difficulty was the complexity of the concept as presented and the difficulty of finding suitable examples. The only one that seemed effective was the example of learning to use a banking machine. A more fundamental difficulty came from the reticence

of individuals at lower literacy levels to try new ways of doing things if they are not forced to do so. As we have seen, once they find a way that works for them (for example, professional tax preparers) they are not inclined to attempt another way. Overall, the instructors were a more productive source of insights on the learning process of individuals with lower levels of literacy than were the individuals themselves.

Instructors noted that their students usually had to overcome (sometimes extreme) shyness in order to begin to interact with the group and to learn. This process, of course, is that much harder in group settings than in one-on-one environments. That said, literacy students are usually eager to learn and are quite enthusiastic once they "get going", as one participant put it. Instructors were in agreement that individuals with lower literacy skills learned most effectively in one-on-one or small group settings. Outside the literacy program, these individuals tend to learn new procedures or methods by having a "trusted other" show them or, less frequently, by observation followed by trial. This reflects the experiences of the depth interview participants in terms of learning to use the banking machine. Most indicated that a spouse or friend showed them how to use it, while a small number said that they watched others use it and then tried it themselves. In these cases, much trial and error was reported. It is interesting to note that one of the problems cited by interview participants reflected the comments of instructors concerning automated telephone systems: the pressure to make a decision quickly is felt by individuals with lower levels of literacy in both situations, and this pressure can often be enough to make the individual withdraw from the situation entirely.

As noted briefly in the previous section, the literacy instructors were unanimous in their belief that they should play an important role in disseminating information from Revenue Canada to individuals with lower literacy skills. They noted that they had already built the trust relationship described earlier in this report. This makes them a credible source of information for these individuals. The credibility of the source is a factor not mentioned by the program participants but given great weight by the instructors. In addition, the instructors discussed "information" in a much broader sense, including teaching new procedures. An example will illustrate both factors. One instructor cited a hypothetical program whereby Revenue Canada would run a workshop to teach individuals with lower literacy levels to complete their own taxes. This participant noted that this program would be far more effective if led by the regular instructor of the literacy program than if led by a Revenue Canada official. The students would simply learn more effectively from someone they know and trust. A similar situation would obtain in the case of a purely informational message - the individual would pay more attention to the message coming from his or her literacy instructor than coming from some previously unknown individual.





## OTHER ISSUES

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One issue came to light in the British Columbia portion of this study that was not raised elsewhere. It merits mention here, outside the main body of study findings, because it was raised by **both** the depth interview participants and the literacy instructors in the focus group session.

It was noted earlier in the report that government (viewed in a somewhat undifferentiated manner) inspires fear. This was seen among participants in B.C., as well. There, however, an additional element of **distrust** of Revenue Canada was apparent. For example, when the interviewer asked the depth interview participants whether they felt that there were Revenue Canada programs or services available to help them that they didn't know about, the reaction, in several cases, was that Revenue Canada did not want people to know about these programs or services. They felt that Revenue Canada was **deliberately** withholding information that could benefit individuals, so that it could keep the money itself.

In the Vancouver focus group session, much of the discussion revolved around the complexity of Revenue Canada tax forms. The sense in the session was that these forms were needlessly complex and that, by making the forms this complex, Revenue Canada was somehow distancing itself from ordinary Canadians, particularly those at lower levels of literacy. The strong sense in this session was that Revenue Canada was not connected to people, that it existed in some insular environment where making its forms, policies and procedures accessible to the public was not a primary concern. In this session, much was made of Revenue Canada's need to improve its image in the eyes of Canadians and make itself more accessible, with more storefront style locations recommended by at least one participant. Although the focus group participants did not seem to feel the same malicious intent on the part of Revenue Canada seen among some of the interview participants, there was still a clear feeling that Revenue Canada must build some bridges to the low-literacy community (and to Canadians in general) before taking any further steps in terms of programs or form revisions to benefit Canadians with lower literacy levels.

Unfortunately, no evidence within the study findings exists to support any possible explanation for the prevalence of these perceptions B.C. and their absence elsewhere. It may be a manifestation of "western alienation" or perhaps tied to some particular recent event in the province. Any potential explanation is, at this point, only speculation.

## **APPENDICES**

**APPENDIX A**

**SCREENING QUESTIONNAIRE - TUTORS**

**FINAL SCREENING QUESTIONNAIRE  
LITERACY TUTORS**

Hello. May I please speak with \_\_\_\_\_ ?

Good day/evening. My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I'm calling from \_\_\_\_\_, a professional research firm located in \_\_\_\_\_. We are currently conducting a study on behalf of Revenue Canada designed to help the Department provide better service to low-literacy Canadians. Part of this study involves discussion groups with literacy tutors. Let me assure you that your participation in this research is completely voluntary. As a professional research firm, we make sure that all of your answers are kept strictly confidential; the opinions you express in the group discussions are never associated with you by name. These discussion groups will involve 8-10 people like yourself and will last no more than 2 hours. You will be paid for your time if you participate.

**[RECRUITER: IF ASKED, GIVE SOURCE OF PARTICIPANT'S NAME]**

Since we are looking for a number of different types of people representing the literacy tutoring community to participate in this research, I have to ask you just a few questions to ensure that you qualify.

1. How long have you been a literacy tutor?

\_\_\_\_\_ years

**[RECRUITER: AIM FOR ALL PARTICIPANTS TO HAVE AT LEAST 2 YEARS EXPERIENCE]**

2. At what literacy level would you place the majority of your students?

\_\_\_\_\_

**[RECRUITER: AIM FOR A RANGE OF STUDENT LITERACY LEVELS]**

3. Have you ever participated in this type of discussion group for a public opinion polling or marketing research company?

Yes	1 --- <b>ASK Q.4.</b>	No
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4. When was the last time you participated in this type of meeting?

Less than 1 year ago	1 --- <b>THANK AND TERMINATE</b>
More than 1 year ago	2

5. Which of the following categories includes your age?

UNDER 20	1
20 to 30	2
31 to 39	3
40 AND OVER	4

6. RECORD SEX OF RESPONDENT [DO NOT ASK]:

MALE	1
FEMALE	2

**[RECRUITER: AIM FOR A MIX OF MALE AND FEMALE PARTICIPANTS, IF POSSIBLE]**

7. We give each participant \$50 in appreciation for attending the group discussion, which, as I mentioned, will last no more than 2 hours. Would you be interested in participating?

Yes	1
No	2 --- <b>THANK AND TERMINATE</b>

**INVITATION**

The next discussion will be held on:

\_\_\_\_\_, March \_\_\_, 1997,

at the offices of:

8. Can you attend on that date?

Yes  
No

1  
2 --- **THANK AND TERMINATE**

9. In order that we can confirm your presence the day before the discussion group, could you please tell me the following:

Last Name: \_\_\_\_\_ First Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Tel. (home:) \_\_\_\_\_ Tel. (office): \_\_\_\_\_

If, for some reason, you find you can't attend the group, please call us at \_\_\_\_\_ and ask for \_\_\_\_\_.

**Thank you for your participation and have a good day●**

CONFIRMED BY: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

## QUESTIONNAIRE FINAL DE SÉLECTION DE TUTEURS EN ALPHABÉTISATION

Bonjour. Puis-je parler à M. ou Mme \_\_\_\_\_?

Bonjour/bonsoir. Mon nom est \_\_\_\_\_ et j'appelle de Cogem Recherche inc, une compagnie professionnelle en recherches. Nous sommes actuellement à mener une étude pour Revenu Canada afin d'identifier des moyens pour offrir un meilleur service aux Canadiens ayant un faible niveau d'alphabétisation. Une partie de notre étude est composé de groupes de discussions avec des tuteurs en alphabétisation. Laissez-moi vous assurer que votre participation à ce projet de recherche est entièrement volontaire. En tant qu'entreprise de recherche professionnelle, nous nous assurons que toutes vos réponses resteront strictement confidentielles, les opinions que vous exprimez lors des groupes de discussions ne seront jamais associées à votre nom. Ces rencontres se dérouleront avec 8 à 10 personnes telles que vous et ne dureront pas plus de 2 heures. Si vous participez, vous serez rémunéré pour le temps que vous nous aurez consenti.

(RECRUTEUR: Si demandé, donnez la provenance de la liste des participants)

Par ailleurs, puisque nous sommes à la recherche de différents types de personnes représentant les tuteurs en alphabétisation pour participer à cette recherche, j'aurais quelques questions à vous poser afin de m'assurer que vous êtes éligible.

1. Depuis combien de temps êtes vous tuteur d'alphabétisation?

\_\_\_\_\_ ans

(RECRUTEUR: ASSUREZ QUE TOUS LES PARTICIPANTS ONT AU MOINS DEUX ANS D'EXPÉRIENCE)

2. A quel niveau d'alphabétisation situeriez-vous la majorité des étudiants?

\_\_\_\_\_

(RECRUTEUR: DEMANDEZ POUR UNE ÉCHELLE DE NIVEAUX D'ALPHABÉTISATION DES ÉTUDIANTS)

3. Avez-vous déjà participé à ce genre de rencontre pour une maison de sondage d'opinion ou pour une compagnie de recherche marketing?

Oui

1-- POSER Q4

Non

2-- PASSER A Q5

4. Quand avez-vous participé à ce genre de rencontre pour la dernière fois?

Il y a moins d'un an

1-- REMERCIER ET TERMINER

Il y a plus d'un an

2

5. Auquel des groupes d'âge appartenez-vous?

MOINS DE 20 ANS

1

20 à 30 ans

2

31 à 39 ans

3

40 ANS ET PLUS

4

6. INSCRIRE LE SEXE DU RÉPONDANT (NE PAS DEMANDER)

HOMME

1

FEMME

2

RECRUTEUR: ASSUREZ-VOUS D'UNE BONNE RÉPARTITION ENTRE LES HOMMES ET LES FEMMES)

7. Nous remettons à chaque participants la somme de 50\$ en guise de remerciement pour leur participation. Ce groupe ne durera pas plus de 2 heures. Êtes-vous intéressé à y participer.

## INVITATION

Notre prochaine rencontre aura lieu à :

\_\_\_\_\_, le \_\_ Mars 1997

au bureau de Cogem Recherche situé au:  
1155 Boul. René-Lévesque Ouest  
Bureau 2420

8. Pouvons-nous compter sur votre présence lors de cette soirée

Oui

1



Non

2 REMERCIER ET TERMINER

9. Afin que nous puissions confirmer votre présence la veille des groupes de discussion, pourriez vous me donner les renseignements suivants:

Nom: \_\_\_\_\_ prénom: \_\_\_\_\_  
Tél. (maison): \_\_\_\_\_ Tél. (bureau) \_\_\_\_\_

- P.S. Si vous deviez avoir un empêchement, veuillez nous contacter au \_\_\_\_\_  
et demandez pour M. \_\_\_\_\_

Merci de votre participation et passer une bonne journée.

**APPENDIX B**

**DEPTH INTERVIEW GUIDE**

## **FINAL DEPTH INTERVIEW GUIDE CANADIANS WITH LOW LITERACY SKILLS**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

- Introduction of interviewer, company
- Purpose/sponsor of research
- Presence of tape recorder
- Importance of candid, honest comments
- Confidentiality. Emphasize that information will not be used for tax or policing purposes

### **2. TYPES OF INTERACTIONS**

- Let's start by talking about your dealings with places like banks, the government, insurance companies, etc. How often do you have dealings with these types of institutions?
- What types of dealings do you have at the bank? Do you have savings account? a chequing account? any loans or mortgages? any investments, RRSPs, etc? **PROBE FOR SPECIFIC ACTIVITIES INVOLVED.**
- **[IF MENTIONED INSURANCE:]** What types of insurance do you have? What types of dealings do you have with the insurance company? **PROBE FOR SPECIFIC ACTIVITIES INVOLVED.**
- How about government? Do you ever have any dealings with your local government? the provincial government? the federal government? What types of dealings do you have with them? **PROBE FOR SPECIFIC ACTIVITIES INVOLVED (EG, UI FORMS).**
- **[IF NOT ALREADY MENTIONED:]** How about Revenue Canada? What types of dealings do you have with them? **PROBE FOR FILING OF INCOME TAX RETURN, CTB, GST**
- Are there any other institutions like the ones we've been talking about that you sometimes deal with? What are they? What kinds of dealings do you have with them? **PROBE FOR SPECIFIC ACTIVITIES INVOLVED.**
- **[IF EMPLOYED:]** What kinds of things do you do at work that require literacy skills

like reading and working with numbers? Do you have to fill out a timesheet or time report? How about filling out claim forms for things like health benefits? Do you do these types of things on your own or do you have help? Who helps you? Why that particular person?

### **3. MECHANISMS OF INTERACTION**

- I'd like to talk to you in a bit more detail about the dealings you have with the types of institutions we've been mentioning. Let's start with banks. Do you do all your banking yourself? Does anyone help you or give you advice? Who? What type of help/advice? Do you use the banking machine? telephone banking? Why/Why not?
- CONTINUE AS ABOVE WITH INSURANCE COMPANIES, GOVERNMENT AND OTHER INSTITUTIONS AS APPROPRIATE
- When you have to deal with Revenue Canada, how do you generally do it? Do you call? visit the local office? Why? Have you ever used any of the automated telephone services or self-service options provided by Revenue Canada? Would you be willing to use them? Why or why not?
- Do you do your own income tax return? [IF YES:] Do you have help? Who helps you? What kind of help? [IF NO:] Who does your taxes for you? Why did you choose this person/organization? Do you know if you're entitled to a benefit or a refund?
- [IF DOESN'T GO TO REVCAN OFFICE:] If, for some reason, you had to visit the local Revenue Canada office, would you know where it was located? Would you bring someone along with you? Who? Why?

### **4. COMFORT WITH INTERACTIONS**

- Thinking about the different types of things we've been talking about so far, which of these institutions do you find it easiest or least worrying to deal with? What do they do that makes it easier to deal with them? PROBE OF EFFECT OF THE TYPES OF INTERACTIONS.
- Which do you find hardest or most worrying? Why? PROBE FOR EFFECT OF TYPES OF INTERACTIONS. What could they do to make things easier, do you think?

- [IF REVCAN NOT ALREADY MENTIONED:] How do you find dealing with Revenue Canada? How do they rate compared to the other institutions we've been talking about? PROBE FOR EFFECT OF TYPE OF INTERACTIONS. What could they do to makes things easier? What do you think would stop you from going there?

## 5. LEARNING NEW ACTIVITIES

- Let's talk for a few minutes about coping with changes in your dealings with the kinds of institutions we've been talking about. For example, banks have come out, in recent years, with banking machines, telephone banking, banking by computer, etc. When you have to learn something new in your dealings with these institutions, what makes it easy or hard to learn these new things?
- Do you get help in learning these new things? Who do you get to help you learn these types of things? Why that person? How do they help you?
- Do you think one of the types of institutions we've been talking about does a better job than others in making new things easy to learn? Which one? What do they do that makes it easier to learn a new procedure?
- Is there an institution that makes it harder to learn new procedures? Which one? What do they do that makes it harder?
- [IF REVCAN NOT MENTIONED:] How about Revenue Canada? Do you find it easy or hard to learn to do new things related to Revenue Canada, like filling out new forms? If you had to learn a new form, what could Revenue Canada do to make it easier to learn to fill it out?

## 6. INFORMATION NEEDS AND CHANNELS

- We just talked about learning new procedures, forms, that type of thing. How do you usually find out about these changes? For example, how do you find out about changes at your bank? How would you prefer to get this kind of information? Why?
- How about information from Revenue Canada? How do you find out about the services and payments you may be entitled to from Revenue Canada? From friends? family? from Revenue Canada directly? [IF YES, PROBE FOR SPECIFICS]
- If you get information in the mail from Revenue Canada, what do you do with it? Do you read it? keep it? give it to a friend? Do you ever get something in the mail where

you are not sure whether it came from Revenue Canada? How do you know its Revenue Canada?

- Do you think there is information from Revenue Canada out there right now that could probably help you if you knew about it? How can they communicate it to you? Would you find it more useful if information from Revenue Canada was advertised on TV or radio? Why or why not? Can you think of any other way that Revenue Canada could give you information? If so, what? What do you like about that way?

## **7. ROLE OF TUTORS**

- [IF NOT ALREADY MENTIONED:] Does your literacy tutor help you with any of the kinds of things we've been talking about? What? How does he/she help you?
- Have you ever got your tutor to help you learn a new procedure at the bank, for example, or a new form from Revenue Canada or some other institution? [IF YES:] How did the tutor help you? After the first time, did you get the tutor to help you again, or did you do it yourself?

## **8. CONCLUSIONS**

- As you know, this research is being sponsored by Revenue Canada. They are trying to find ways to make dealing with them easier for Canadians with lower literacy skills. Also, they are trying to find the best ways to get important information out to the people who need it. Do you have any final suggestions for them that could help them accomplish these goals?
- Thank participant for his/her co-operation on behalf of Cogem and Revenue Canada.

## **GUIDE DE DISCUSSION CANADIENS AVEC DIFFICULTÉ D'APPRENTISSAGE**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

- Présentation de l'intervieweur, de l'entreprise
- Objectif/commanditaire de la recherche
- Présence de magnétocassettes
- Importance de commentaires francs et honnêtes
- Confidentialité. Mettre l'emphase sur le fait que cette information ne sera pas utilisée pour fins d'impôt ou vérification

### **2. GENRE D'INTERACTIONS**

- Commençons par parler de la façon avec laquelle vous traiter avec les banques, le gouvernement, les compagnies d'assurance, etc. A quelle fréquence faites vous affaire avec ces institutions?
- Quel type de relation avez-vous avec les banques? Avez-vous un compte-épargnes? Un compte-chèques? Des prêts personnels ou hypothécaires? Des investissements, RIER, etc? **SONDER POUR L'IMPLICATION DANS D'AUTRES TYPES D'ACTIVITÉS**
- [SI ASSURANCE MENTIONNÉ] Quel type d'assurance avez-vous? Quelle sorte de relation avez-vous avec la compagnie d'assurance? **SONDER POUR L'IMPLICATION DANS D'AUTRES TYPES D'ACTIVITÉS**
- Parlons maintenant des gouvernements, avez-vous déjà eu à faire affaire avec le gouvernement provincial? Avec le gouvernement fédéral? Quel type de relation avez-vous avec eux? **SONDER POUR L'IMPLICATION DANS D'AUTRES TYPES D'ACTIVITÉS**
- [SI N'EST PAS DÉJÀ MENTIONNÉ] A propos de Revenu Canada, quelle sorte de relation avez-vous avec eux? **SONDER POUR FORMULAIRE D'IMPÔT, PRESTATION FISCALE POUR ENFANTS, TPS**
- Y a-t-il d'autres institutions comme celles mentionnées précédemment avec qui vous faites affaire à l'occasion? Lesquelles? Quelle sorte de relation avez-vous avec eux? **SONDER POUR L'IMPLICATION DANS D'AUTRES TYPES D'ACTIVITÉS**

- [SI TRAVAILLE] Quelle activités faites-vous au travail et qui requièrent des habiletés d'apprentissage, tel la lecture, le calcul? Devez-vous remplir des feuilles de temps ou des rapports? Et pour ce qui est des formulaires de réclamation tel l'assurance médicale? Les complétez vous seul ou avez-vous de l'aide? Qui vous aide? Pourquoi cette personne là?

### 3. MOYENS D'INTERACTIONS

- J'aimerais vous parlez un peu plus en détail au sujet des institutions avec qui vous faites affaire et dont nous avons déjà parlé. Commençons par les banques, faites-vous toutes vos transactions bancaires vous-même? Est-ce que quelqu'un vous aide ou vous conseille? Qui? Quelle sorte d'aide/conseil? Utilisez-vous les guichets automatiques? Les téléphones de service? Pourquoi/pourquoi pas?
- CONTINUEZ COMME CI-DESSUS AVEC LES COMPAGNIES D'ASSURANCE, GOUVERNEMENT OU AUTRES INSTITUTIONS SI OPPORTUN.
- Lorsque vous faites affaire avec Revenu Canada, comment le faites vous habituellement? Appelez-vous? Visitez-vous le bureau local? Pourquoi? Avez-vous déjà utilisé les services téléphoniques automatiques ou les possibilités de libre-service fourni par Revenu Canada? Seriez-vous prêt à les utiliser? Pourquoi ou pourquoi pas?
- Faites-vous votre rapport d'impôt vous-même? [SI OUI] Avez-vous de l'aide? Quel genre d'aide? [SI NON] Qui fait votre rapport d'impôt pour vous? Pourquoi avez-vous choisi cette personne/entreprise? Savez-vous si vous avez droit aux avantages ou au remboursement?
- [SI NE VA PAS AU BUREAU DE REVENU CANADA] Si pour quelques raisons que ce soit vous deviez vous rendre au bureau de Revenu Canada, est-ce que vous sauriez où aller? Est-ce que quelqu'un vous accompagnerait? Qui? Pourquoi?

### 4. AISANCE AVEC LES INTERACTIONS

- En pensant à tout ce que nous avons discuté jusqu'à maintenant, quelles sont les institutions avec lesquelles il est plus facile/complicé de traiter? Que font-ils pour rendre les choses plus faciles? **SONDER L'EFFET SUR TYPES D'INTERACTIONS**
- Qu'est-ce que vous trouvez-vous le plus compliqué ou plus énervant? Pourquoi? **SONDER L'EFFET SUR TYPES D'INTERACTIONS**



- Selon vous, que pourraient-ils faire pour rendre le processus plus facile? **SONDER L'EFFET SUR TYPES D'INTERACTIONS**
- [SI REVENU CANADA PAS ENCORE MENTIONNÉ] Comment évaluez-vous cela, vos relations avec Revenu Canada? Comment les évaluez-vous par rapport aux autres institutions déjà mentionnées? **SONDER L'EFFET SUR TYPES D'INTERACTIONS**
- Que pourraient-ils faire pour vous rendre la vie plus facile? Qu'est-ce qui vous empêcherait d'y aller?

## 5. **APPRENTISSAGE DE NOUVEAUX CHAMPS D'ACTIVITÉS**

- Parlons maintenant de vos réactions face aux changements de relations d'affaire que vous subissez avec les institutions que l'on a déjà mentionnés, par exemple: les banques au cours des dernières années ont implantés les guichets automatiques, les téléphones bancaires, les opérations bancaires par ordinateur, etc. Quand vous devez apprendre de nouvelles procédures avec ces institutions, qu'est-ce qui rend plus facile ou plus difficile ce nouvel apprentissage?
- Avez-vous de l'aide pour apprendre ces nouvelles techniques? A qui demandez-vous de l'aide? Pourquoi cette personne? Comment vous aide t-elle?
- Trouvez-vous qu'une des institutions dont nous avons discuté précédemment vous facilite la vie plus qu'un autre dans l'apprentissage de ces nouvelles techniques? Laquelle? Que fait-elle pour rendre les choses plus faciles à apprendre?
- Y a-t-il une institution qui rend les choses plus difficiles à apprendre? Laquelle? Que fait-elle pour rendre les choses plus difficiles à apprendre?
- [SI REVENU CANADA N'A PAS ÉTÉ MENTIONNÉ] Que pensez-vous de Revenu Canada? Trouvez-vous cela facile ou difficile d'apprendre de nouvelles choses concernant Revenu Canada, comme compléter de nouveaux formulaires? Si vous deviez avoir un nouveau formulaire à compléter qu'est-ce que Revenu Canada pourrait faire pour vous faciliter la tâche?

## 6. **BESOIN ET RÉSEAUX D'INFORMATIONS**

- Nous venons juste de parler d'apprentissage de nouveaux processus tels que les formulaires. Habituellement, de quelle façon entendez-vous parler de ces changements? Par exemple, comment découvrez-vous les changements À votre

institution bancaire? Comment aimeriez-vous obtenir ces informations? Pourquoi?

- Concernant les informations de Revenu Canada, comment prenez-vous connaissance des services et des paiements auxquels vous auriez droit de la part de Revenu Canada? De vos amis? Familles? Directement de Revenu Canada? **[SI OUI, SONDER POUR PLUS DE DÉTAILS]**
- Si vous recevez de l'information de Revenu Canada par la poste qu'en faites vous? La lisez-vous? La donnez-vous à un ami? Avez-vous déjà reçu du courrier, tout en n'étant pas certain que cela provenait de Revenu Canada? Comment saviez-vous que c'était de Revenu Canada?
- Pensez-vous qu'il y a de l'information à Revenu Canada qui pourrait vous être utile si vous en connaissiez l'existence? Comment peuvent-ils vous la transmettre? Préférez-vous que ces informations de Revenu Canada soient annoncées à la télévision, à la radio? Pourquoi ou pourquoi pas? Avez-vous d'autres suggestions quand à la façon de vous transmettre ces informations? Si oui, comment? Qu'appéciez-vous de ces façons?

#### 7. **ROLE DU FORMATEUR/FORMATRICE**

- **[SI N'A PAS ÉTÉ MENTIONNÉ]** Est-ce que votre formateur/formatrice vous aide avec toutes les choses dont nous avons parlé précédemment? En quoi? Comment vous aide-t-il?
- Avez-vous déjà eu l'aide de votre formateur lors d'une nouvelle procédure à la banque, par exemple ou avec un nouveau formulaire de Revenu Canada, ou d'une autre institution? **[SI OUI]** Comment vous a-t-il/elle aidé? Après cette première fois, avez-vous eu besoin de l'aide de votre formateur ou vous l'avez complété vous-même?

#### 8. **CONCLUSION**

- Comme vous le savez, cette étude est commandité par Revenu Canada. Il désire améliorer et simplifier les interactions entre eux et les Canadiens qui ont des difficultés d'apprentissage. Par ailleurs, ils tentent aussi de trouver une meilleure façon de transmettre les informations importantes au gens qui en ont besoin. Auriez-vous d'autres suggestions à leur soumettre afin de les aider à atteindre leur but?

**REMERCIER LES PARTICIPANTS POUR LEUR COLLABORATION AU NOM DE REVENU CANADA ET DE COGEM**

**APPENDIX C**

**FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION OUTLINE**

## **FINAL DISCUSSION OUTLINE LITERACY TUTORS**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

- Introduction of moderator, company
- Focus group procedures
- Purpose/sponsor of group
- Presence of microphones, mirror, Revenue Canada personnel
- Importance of candid, honest comments
- Confidentiality
- Introduction of participants; first name (or alias), number of years tutoring literacy, level of students, etc.

### **2. TYPES OF INTERACTIONS**

- In your experience, what types of interactions with government and other institutions (such as banks, insurance companies, etc.) that require literacy skills do your students talk to you about? What types elicit negative reactions? What do you think it is about these interactions that make them negative?
- Are there any cases of interactions where students have commented in a positive way about the institution's ability to simplify the interaction? Which one(s)? What were the student's comments?
- In your view, what types of interactions with government and other institutions are the most difficult for your students? Which are the least difficult? Other than the degree of literacy required, are there any other differences between the easy and more difficult interactions? What are they?
- Do your students ever discuss their interactions with Revenue Canada with you? What types of interactions do they talk about? How do you think Revenue Canada rates against the other institutions we've been talking about in terms of the complexity of interactions with its clients? What makes you say that?

### **3. MECHANISMS OF INTERACTION**

- In your experience, what are the main coping strategies used by your students when

they are faced with interactions requiring literacy skills? Do they get solicit assistance from others? Who? Why these individuals? What other mechanisms are used? What are the advantages and drawbacks of each?

- Looking particularly at interactions with Revenue Canada, do your students use any different strategies with Revenue Canada than with other institutions? Which ones? Why do you think this is? Are some strategies used more or less frequently with Revenue Canada interactions than others? Which ones? Why do you think this is?
- [IF NOT ALREADY MENTIONED:] How would you say your students handle their income taxes, GST, CTB, etc? What proportion do them themselves? What do the others do? What sources of help are used by those who attempt to do their taxes themselves? Why do you think these sources are chosen?

#### **4. LEARNING NEW ACTIVITIES**

- When your students are faced with having to learn new procedures or how to fill out new forms, etc., what strategies do they use? Which ones are more effective and which are less so?
- Based on what you hear from your students, what do you think can be done to make learning these new procedures easier? Is there anything about the new procedure itself that can affect the ease with which it can be learned? presentation? use of pictures? new modalities of interaction (eg, computers, interactive telephone or TV)?
- Thinking particularly about Revenue Canada for a moment, how would you rate the difficulty of their new procedures or forms compared with those of the other institutions we've been talking about? Why do you say that? Is there anything Revenue Canada can realistically do to make things easier for those with lower literacy skills in terms of presenting new forms or procedures?

#### **5. INFORMATION NEEDS AND CHANNELS**

- Based on your experience, how do you think your students find out about new information that is relevant to them (eg, government entitlements, banking information, information on social benefits, etc.)? Are some channels cited more often than others? Which one(s)? Why?
- What channels do you think are most effective in getting this type of information to low-literacy individuals? Why? Which types of channels are least effective? Why?

- When information comes to the homes of these individuals in printed form, how do they handle it? How do they recognize what it is? Do they keep it themselves? Do they pass it on to someone else to hold onto for them? If so, who? Why?
- Thinking particularly about Revenue Canada, what do you think, based on your experiences with low-literacy individuals, would be a good way for Revenue Canada to get information to this group? Why?
- How much information from Revenue Canada do you think is out there right now that could benefit your students, if they only knew about it? How can Revenue Canada get this information to them?

## **6. ROLE OF TUTORS**

- How active a role do you, as literacy tutors, take in helping your students cope with the kinds of interactions and tasks that we've been talking about today? Tell me about some of the kinds of things you do. How often?
- Do you find that you consistently help the same people do the same kinds of things over the long term? Do you think that your students depend on you to do certain things with or for them? What kinds of things? Why?

## **7. CONCLUSIONS**

- As you know, this research is being sponsored by Revenue Canada. They are trying to improve and simplify interactions for Canadians with lower literacy skills. Also, they are trying to find the best ways to get important information out to these individuals. Do you have any final suggestions for them that could help them accomplish these goals?
- Thank participant for his/her co-operation on behalf of Cogem and Revenue Canada.

## **GUIDE DE DISCUSSION TUTEUR**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

- Présentation de l'animateur, de l'entreprise
- Déroulement du groupe de discussion
- Objectif/commanditaire du groupe
- Présence des micros, miroir, représentants de Revenu Canada
- Importance de commentaires francs et honnêtes
- Confidentialité
- Présentation des participants, prénom, nombre d'années de formation et d'expérience en alphabétisation, niveaux des étudiants, etc.

### **2. GENRE D'INTERACTIONS**

- Selon votre expérience, quelles genre d'interactions avec le gouvernement ou autres institutions (comme les banques, les compagnies d'assurance, etc.) qui demande des habilités d'apprentissage vos étudiants rencontrent-ils? Quels types suscitent des réactions négatives? Qu'est-ce qui les rend négatifs dans ces différentes interactions?
- Y a-t-il des cas d'interactions où les étudiants ont commenté positivement la façon de simplifier ces interactions dans ces institutions? Lesquelles? Quels étaient les commentaires des étudiants?
- Selon vous, quels genres d'interactions avec le gouvernement ou d'autres institutions sont les plus difficiles pour vos étudiants? Lesquels sont les moins difficiles? Mis à part le degré d'alphabétisation requis, existe t-il d'autres différences entre les interactions simples et les plus difficiles? Quelles sont-elles?
- Est-ce que vos étudiants discutent avec vous de leur problèmes avec Revenu Canada? De quelle sorte de problèmes s'agit-il? Comment pensez-vous que Revenu Canada se situe par rapport aux autres institutions dont nous avons discuté précédemment, quant à la complexité de ces problèmes avec ses clients? Pourquoi dites-vous cela?

### **3. MOYENS D'INTERACTIONS**

- Selon votre expérience, quelles sont les principales stratégies utilisées par vos étudiants quand ils sont confrontés à des situations qui demandent des habiletés d'apprentissage? Est-ce qu'il demande de l'aide de quelqu'un d'autre? Qui? Pourquoi ces individus? Quels autres moyens sont utilisés? Quels sont les avantages et les inconvénients de chacun?
- En considérant particulièrement, les interactions avec Revenu Canada, est-ce que vos étudiants utilisent différentes tactiques avec Revenu Canada comparativement aux autres institutions? Lesquelles? Pourquoi est-ce différent selon vous? Y a-t-il des tactiques qui sont utilisées plus ou moins fréquemment? Avec Revenu Canada? Lesquelles? Pourquoi pensez-vous cela?
- [SI CE N'EST PAS DÉJÀ MENTIONNÉ] Comment diriez-vous que vos étudiants réagissent face à leur déclarations d'impôt, TPS, prestation fiscale pour enfants, etc? Quel proportion s'en occupe eux-mêmes? Que font les autres? A quel type d'assistance ont recours ceux qui décident de les faire eux-mêmes? Pourquoi ces ressources sont-elles choisies?

#### 4. **APPRENTISSAGE DE NOUVEAUX CHAMPS D'ACTIVITÉS**

- Lorsque vos étudiants ont à affronter une nouvelle procédure ou compléter de nouveau formulaire, etc., de quelle manière s'y prennent-ils? Lesquelles sont plus efficaces et lesquelles le sont moins?
- Selon vos expériences précédentes, qu'est-ce qui pourrait être fait pour faciliter ces nouvelles procédures? Y a-t-il quelque chose dans la procédure elle-même qui pourrait faciliter ce nouvel apprentissage? Présentation? Utilisation visuelle? Nouveau rapport d'interaction (exemples: ordinateur, téléphone interactif ou télévision)?
- Si l'on regarde Revenu Canada seulement, comment évalueriez-vous les difficultés de ces nouvelles procédures ou formulaires comparativement aux autres institutions déjà mentionnées? Pourquoi dites-vous cela? Y a-t-il quelque chose que Revenu Canada peut faire concrètement pour rendre les choses plus faciles pour ceux qui ont des difficultés d'apprentissage dans la présentation de nouveaux formulaires ou procédures?

#### 5. **BESOIN ET RÉSEAU D'INFORMATION**

- Selon votre expérience, de quelle façon vos étudiants découvrent-ils les nouvelles informations pertinentes pour eux (ex: allocations gouvernementales, informations bancaires, information sur les avantages sociaux, etc.)? Y a-t-il des réseaux qui sont plus mentionnés que d'autres? Lesquelles? Pourquoi?



- Quels réseaux croyez-vous sont les plus efficaces pour transmettre ce type d'informations aux personnes ayant des difficultés d'apprentissage? Pourquoi? Quels types de canaux sont les moins efficaces? Pourquoi?
- Lorsque de l'information est acheminée au domicile de ces personnes, de quelle façon sont-elles traitées? De quelle façon les reconnaissent-ils? Les gardent-ils pour eux? Les transfèrent-ils à quelqu'un d'autre? Si oui à qui? Pourquoi?
- Concernant Revenu Canada, selon votre expérience avec les personnes ayant des difficultés d'apprentissage, quel serait une bonne façon pour Revenu Canada de leur transmettre de l'information? Pourquoi?
- Actuellement, l'information disponible chez Revenu Canada qui pourrait profiter à vos étudiants? En autant qu'il en connaisse l'existence, comment Revenu Canada peut-il leur transmettre ces informations?

## 6. **ROLE DU TUTEUR**

- Quel rôle jouez-vous comme tuteur en regard de l'aide dont ils ont besoin pour faire face à ces interactions dont nous avons parlé aujourd'hui? Dites-moi quelles sont les différentes tâches que vous effectuez? A quel fréquence?
- Sur une longue période, trouvez-vous que vous aidez toujours les mêmes personnes à effectuer les mêmes travaux? Croyez-vous que vos étudiants sont dépendants de vous pour ces tâches? Quelles sortes de tâches? Pourquoi?

## 7. **CONCLUSION**

- Comme vous le savez, cette étude est commandité par Revenu Canada. Ils désirent améliorer et simplifier les interactions pour les Canadiens ayant des difficultés d'apprentissage. Par ailleurs, ils tentent aussi de trouver les meilleurs moyens pour leur transmettre les informations importantes.
- Avez-vous des suggestions à soumettre à Revenu Canada afin de les aider à atteindre leurs buts.

**REMERCIER LES PARTICIPANTS POUR LEUR COLLABORATION AU NOM DE REVENU CANADA ET DE COGEM**

## **APPENDIX D**

### **DEFINITIONS OF IALS LITERACY LEVELS**

# Reading the Future

## Description of the prose, document, and quantitative literacy levels

	Prose	Document	Quantitative
<b>Level 1 (0 to 225)</b>	Most of the tasks at this level require the reader to locate one piece of information in the text that is identical or synonymous to the information given in the directive. If a plausible incorrect answer is present in the text, it tends not to be near the correct information.	Most of the tasks at this level require the reader to locate a piece of information based on a literal match. Distracting information, if present, is typically located away from the correct answer. Some tasks may direct the reader to enter personal information onto a form.	Although no quantitative tasks used in the IALS fall below the score value of 225, experience suggests that such tasks would require the reader to perform a single, relatively simple operation (usually addition) for which either the numbers are already entered onto the given document and the operation is stipulated, or the numbers are provided and the operation does not require the reader to borrow.
<b>Level 2 (226 to 275)</b>	Tasks at this level tend to require the reader to locate one or more pieces of information in the text, but several distractors may be present, or low-level inferences may be required. Tasks at this level also begin to ask readers to integrate two or more pieces of information, or to compare and contrast information.	Document tasks at this level are a bit more varied. While some still require the reader to match on a single feature, more distracting information may be present or the match may require a low-level inference. Some tasks at this level may require the reader to enter information onto a form or to cycle through information in a document.	Tasks in this level typically require readers to perform a single arithmetic operation (frequently addition or subtraction) using numbers that are easily located in the text or document. The operation to be performed may be easily inferred from the wording of the question or the format of the material (for example, a bank deposit form or an order form).
<b>Level 3 (276 to 325)</b>	Tasks at this level tend to direct readers to search texts to match information that requires low-level inferences or that meets specified conditions. Sometimes the reader is required to identify several pieces of information that are located in different sentences or paragraphs rather than in a single sentence. Readers may also be asked to integrate or to compare and contrast information across paragraphs or sections of text.	Tasks at this level appear to be most varied. Some require the reader to make literal or synonymous matches, but usually the matches require the reader to take conditional information into account or to match on multiple features of information. Some tasks at this level require the reader to integrate information from one or more displays of information. Other tasks ask the reader to cycle through a document to provide multiple responses.	Tasks found in this level typically require the reader to perform a single operation. However, the operations become more varied—some multiplication and division tasks are found in this level. Sometimes two or more numbers are needed to solve the problem and the numbers are frequently embedded in more complex displays. While semantic relation terms "how many" or "calculate the difference" are often used, some of the tasks require the reader to make higher order inferences to determine the appropriate operation.
<b>Level 4 (326 to 375)</b>	These tasks require readers to perform multiple-feature matching or to provide several responses where the requested information must be identified through text-based inferences. Tasks at this level may also require the reader to integrate or contrast pieces of information, sometimes presented in relatively lengthy texts. Typically, these texts contain more distracting information and the information that is requested is more abstract.	Tasks at this level, like those in the previous levels, ask the reader to match on multiple features of information, to cycle through documents, and to integrate information; frequently however, these tasks require the reader to make higher order inferences to arrive at the correct answer. Sometimes, conditional information is present in the document, which must be taken into account by the reader.	With one exception, the tasks at this level require the reader to perform a single arithmetic operation where typically either the quantities or the operation are not easily determined. That is, for most of the tasks at this level, the question or directive does not provide a semantic relation term such as "how many" or "calculate the difference" to help the reader.
<b>Level 5 (376 to 500)</b>	Some tasks at this level require the reader to search for information in dense text that contains a number of plausible distractors. Some require readers to make high-level inferences or use specialized knowledge.	Tasks at this level require the reader to search through complex displays of information that contain multiple distractors, to make high-level inferences, process conditional information, or use specialized knowledge.	These tasks require readers to perform multiple operations sequentially, and they must disembed the features of the problem from the material provided or rely on background knowledge to determine the quantities or operations needed.

# Reading the Future

Figure 1.2  
Scale score ranges and task samples

Level	Score	Prose	Document	Quantitative
1	0-225	Use the instructions on the bottle to identify the maximum duration recommended for taking aspirin.	Identify the percentage of Greek teachers who are women by looking at a simple pictorial graph.	Fill in the figure on the last line of an order form, "Total with Handling," by adding the ticket price of \$50 to a handling charge of \$2.
2	226-275	Identify a short piece of information about the characteristics of a garden plant, from a written article.	Identify the year in which the fewest Dutch people were injured by fireworks, when presented with two simple graphs.	Work out how many degrees warmer today's forecast high temperature is in Bangkok than in Seoul, using a table accompanying a weather chart.
3	276-325	State which of a set of four movie reviews was the least favourable.	Identify the time of the last bus on a Saturday night, using a bus schedule.	Work out how much more energy Canada produces than it consumes, by comparing figures on two bar charts.
4	326-375	Answer a brief question on how to conduct a job interview, requiring the reader to read a pamphlet on recruitment interviews and integrate two pieces of information into a single statement.	Summarize how the percentages of oil used for different purposes changed over a specified period, by comparing two pie charts.	Calculate how much money you will have if you invest \$100 at a rate of 6% for 10 years, using a compound interest table.
5	376-500	Use an announcement from a personnel department to answer a question that uses different phrasing from that used in the text.	Identify the average advertised price for the best-rated basic clock radio in a consumer survey, requiring the assimilation of several pieces of information.	Use information on a table of nutritional analysis to calculate the percentage of calories in a Big Mac® that comes from total fat.

*The five IALS proficiency levels were based on qualitative shifts in the skills and strategies required to succeed at various tasks along the scales, ranging from the simple to complex.*

The five IALS proficiency levels were based on qualitative shifts in the skills and strategies required to succeed at various tasks along the scales, ranging from simple to complex.<sup>15</sup> This scaling method gives a more detailed picture of the distance between successive levels of information-processing skills, and allows analysis based on performance for a broad array of reading tasks.

15. See details in Appendix B.