

Equipped for the Future: 21st Century Skills for the New Economy

Equipped for the Future Standards have been developed to answer a complex question: What do adults need to know and be able to do in order to carry out their roles and responsibilities as workers, parents and family members, and citizens and community members?

It is widely recognized that the demands of adult life changed dramatically in the last quarter of the 20th Century. In order to carry out daily responsibilities at home, in the community, and in the workplace, adults must now read critically, sifting through vast amounts of information before they can make decisions that affect the well-being of families, neighborhoods, and ultimately, this country.

Research to identify the *EFF* Standards began by looking at these changes in what it takes to negotiate successfully the complexities of contemporary life.

The current and future health of America's 21st Century Economy depends directly on how broadly and deeply Americans reach a new level of literacy—21st Century Literacy—that includes strong academic skills, thinking, reasoning, teamwork skills, and proficiency in using technology.

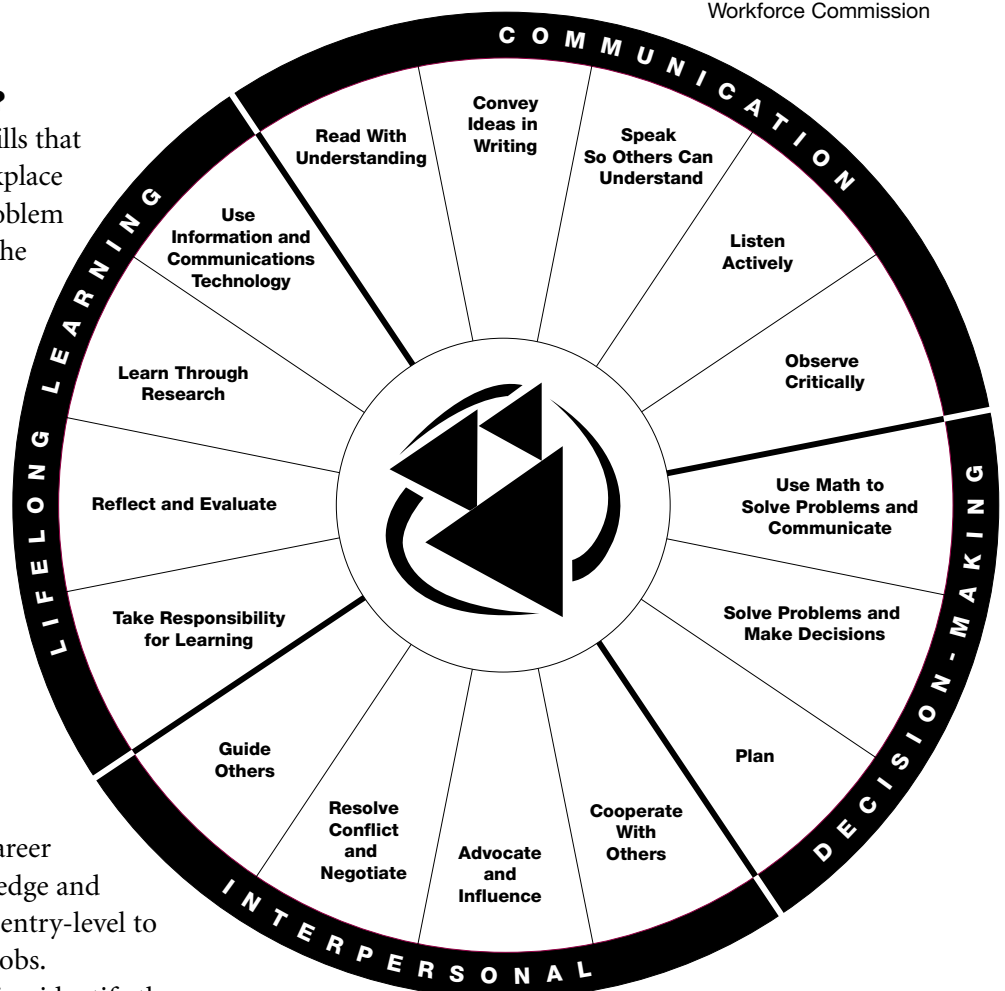
— Report, 21st Century Workforce Commission

What are the *EFF* Standards?

The *EFF* Standards focus on the skills that are essential for success in the workplace today. These include teamwork, problem solving, and learning skills as well the traditional communication skills.

What can *EFF* provide the workforce development system?

- *EFF* facilitates universal access. *EFF* Standards address the needs of the broad spectrum of job seekers who are customers of the new workforce investment system. *EFF* helps
 - workers at every level identify the knowledge and skills they need to stay current.
 - workers at every level create career ladders, identifying the knowledge and skills they need to move from entry-level to higher-skilled, higher-paying jobs.
 - workers whose jobs are changing identify the knowledge and skills they need to stay competitive.



**EFF Standards for
Adult Literacy and Lifelong Learning**

- single parents and those with little work experience learn how to balance the worlds of family and work successfully, so that they can get and keep a job.
- young people get ready for the multitude of adult responsibilities that lie ahead.

- **EFF communicates what it takes to be successful in ways that make sense to employers.** *EFF's standards focus on the competencies that lead to more effective performance on the job. As a result, EFF can help the system reach out to employers at every level of service.*
- **EFF standards support customer choice.** *EFF has developed a results-based set of criteria for evaluating program effectiveness. This can be the basis of a strong Baldrige-like program certification system for state and local workforce investment boards. EFF not only builds quality programs, it gives customers information about program results that enable them to make sound decisions about what services work best for them.*
- **EFF standards support WIA accountability requirements.**
 - EFF is developing performance-based credentials that link to established credentials at the same time they focus on what's important to employers. They communicate what job seekers can do in terms that make sense to employers.*
 - Job retention: EFF-based work readiness programs focus on the knowledge and skills that lead to enhanced employability. As a result, graduates of EFF-based programs not only get jobs faster—they keep them longer.*

How do these standards fit with SCANS?

While the skills included in *EFF* are similar to the SCANS competencies and foundation skills, *EFF* differs in two ways that reflect changes since the 90's in how we think about work:

- SCANS asked employers and workers what work requires. *EFF* asked employers and workers what workers need to do to be effective in the workplace. This shift enabled us to identify the knowledge and skills related to a feature of contemporary work life—how to cope with constant change.
- SCANS focused only on work. *EFF* research investigated adult roles as parent/family member and citizen/ community member as well as worker. Looking at all three roles led to a stronger focus on the interpersonal skills that enable us to work with others and the decision-making skills that enable us to set priorities, balance competing needs, and plan for the future.

To find out more visit our web site: www.NIFL.gov/lincs/collections/eff



Equipped for the Future is a collaborative standards-based system reform initiative supported by the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL), an independent federal organization, with strong links to the U.S. Departments of Education, Labor, and Health and Human Services.

EFF has been tested and it works.

■ In Ohio:

TANF clients graduating from programs based on *EFF* get jobs and keep them—for more than a year so far!

■ In Tennessee:

EFF and the National Retail Federation piloted a six-week curriculum that prepares prospective retail workers to meet the national retail standards. New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Washington are next!

■ In Maine:

EFF provides the common language that enables One-Stops to build strong partnerships among diverse providers.
