



TARGET CRIME WITH LITERACY

CHAPTER 1 - FACT SHEET 1

Measuring the Literacy Problem in Canada

What is literacy?

More than 23,000 Canadian adults took part in an International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey in 2003. This survey defined *literacy* as “the ability to use and understand information that is fundamental to daily life at work, at home, and in the community.” Statistics Canada and Human Resources Development Canada have adopted this definition.

The 2003 International Survey measured four skills:

- **Prose literacy:** the knowledge and skills needed to understand and use information from texts
- **Document literacy:** the knowledge and skills needed to find and use information in various formats, like schedules, maps, tables, and charts
- **Numeracy:** the knowledge and skills needed to do arithmetic and understand numbers in printed materials
- **Problem solving:** the process of solving problems by using goal-directed thinking and action, when the person does not have a routine to follow

How is literacy measured?

Everyone who took part was rated on each skill on a scale from 0 to 500 points. Their prose literacy, document literacy, and numeracy scores were then grouped into five levels of competency. (Problem solving has only four levels.)

The Government of Canada sets Level 3 as the minimum literacy that people need to cope with the increasing information demands of our society. The Conference Board of Canada believes that, in an information society, people need a score of at least 300 to be employable.

These are the five cognitive levels:

• Level 1	0–225 points	This is the lowest level of literacy.
• Level 2	226–275 points	
• Level 3	276–325 points	This is the minimum level needed.
• Level 4	326–375 points	
• Level 5	376–500 points	This is the highest level of literacy.

How literate are Canadians?

- 58 of 100 adults in Canada aged 16 to 65 have the basic reading skills they need for most everyday tasks.
- The average score for Canadian adults in prose literacy and document literacy is near the bottom of Level 3.
- That means that about two in every five Canadian adults— 9 million people –can't read well enough to do everyday things. If we add in the people who are older than 65, that number goes up to 12 million Canadians.
- The average for numeracy and problem solving is just below Level 3. Only 45 of 100 adults in Canada aged 16 to 65 can do everyday arithmetic and understand the numbers in printed materials.

Some people who have low literacy skills come from vulnerable groups, but that isn't the whole story. This problem affects many people in the general adult population too.

But people who come into contact with police, as suspects, victims, or witnesses, tend to have lower literacy skills. And neighbourhoods with low literacy levels tend to have higher crime rates.

These basic facts show the challenge to improve literacy performance among Canadians is far from over and affects law enforcement.

[Read Fact Sheet #2 >](#)

[Read the full Chapter One, Resource Manual >](#)