



TARGET CRIME WITH LITERACY

CHAPTER 1 - FACT SHEET 3

The Problem of Low Literacy in Canada

The Problem

In Canada, about 58 of 100 adults aged 16 to 65 have the basic reading skills they need for most everyday tasks. The other 42 – 9 million adult Canadians – have low literacy skills

How does low literacy affect people?

People with low literacy can only read short pieces of text and understand a specific piece of information at a time. If text isn't written in clear language and presented in a simple layout, they have trouble understanding it.

But low literacy means more than having trouble reading marks on paper. People who have poor literacy skills may also have trouble organizing information, following a line of reasoning (even when the information is given orally), and keeping track of a set of instructions.

Many people with low literacy find it hard to do everyday things that others take for granted. Here are some examples:

- Parents may not be able to help their children with homework, or to understand letters they receive from the school.
- People may have difficulty understanding the newspaper, so they don't find out about important community notices and other information.
- Drivers who get tickets may not be able to understand the instructions on the ticket. This could cause more legal problems for them.
- People who can't understand contracts and due dates may get into financial and legal difficulties.
- People who don't read well may avoid reading their mail, which could lead to problems like getting their electricity cut off or not attending at court when required.
- People who don't understand instructions from the lawyer, counsellor, or probation officer, can't follow those instructions properly. As a result, their legal problems get worse instead of better.

Having low literacy skills affects many aspects of a person's life. It can also affect the lives of

their spouse, children, neighbours, and co-workers.

What can you do about low literacy?

- Be aware of the extent of the problem and how it affects the everyday lives of the people you meet.
- When someone is acting inappropriately, remember that low literacy may be a factor in how they're feeling and behaving. Make sure you are communicating with them clearly, and remember that the reason for their behaviour may be that they don't fully understand the situation.
- Remember the 42% of adult Canadians who have trouble reading are found throughout Canadian society – they live in all the provinces and territories, they belong to all the ethnic and religious groups, and they are in all income groups.
- Keep in mind that how much education a person has and their literacy don't always go together – some well-educated people have lost their literacy skills.
- Help to improve relationships with the community by making sure that you communicate clearly and in a way that works for the people you are in contact with.
- Use tact and consideration to encourage cooperation.
- When you become aware that someone has low literacy skills, refer them to the appropriate community service agencies.

[Read Fact Sheet #4 >](#)

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