



# Guide to Blended Learning



*Skills at Work series*

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### **Resources for adult learning**

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The early ideas for a “series of materials to help adults develop the literacy and technology skills needed for work” were reshaped many times before they evolved into *Skills at Work*. Many people and events helped us develop a better understanding of workforce literacy, where it fits in adult literacy and basic skills programs, and how to create materials that respect the adults who use them.

Jane Barber wrote the original drafts of the print materials and took the terrific workplace photographs that appear in the workbooks. Trudy Kennell coordinated the project and wrote the two learner *Workbooks*, the *Practitioner Guide* for them, and the *Guide to Blended Learning*. Karen Geraci wrote the *Guide to Workforce Literacy*. Her insightful work will help the literacy field in Ontario consider different ways to incorporate workforce literacy into their programs. Mike Kelly created and animated the on-line activities that complement these print materials – a great blended learning package! You’ll see his face and hear his voice when you check out the *Skills at Work* on-line activities on the AlphaRoute Web site.

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Settling on a name for the very broad audience for these materials was not an easy task. The series was written for practitioners/instructors/tutors who are teaching/tutoring in adult literacy programs with learners/students. We hope you feel included as you use *Skills at Work*.

**Susan Toews**

*Manager of Field Consulting, Centre AlphaPlus Centre*

# Introduction



## Notes

This book is a guide to developing and using a blended approach to learning. The focus of the guide is how to go about blending the best resources, technology, and practices from the elearning world into your setting, and what you need to know to do that.

Blended learning combines the best features of your face-to-face sessions with the flexibility of elearning. You will find that some aspects of elearning are more effective than face-to-face learning, and vice versa.

### **A blended approach to learning – the best of both worlds**

When you integrate elearning with face-to-face learning, you are using a blended approach to learning.

One of the statements you might read about a blended approach is that it takes “the best of both worlds” to create an improved learning experience. But what are those worlds?

### **The world of face-to-face teaching**

The world you already know well is the world of face-to-face teaching, tutoring, or training.

The face-to-face setting for your adult literacy program might be dedicated or shared space in an office building, community centre, school, college, library, or kitchen. Most programs have continuous intake and don't run like set courses, but some do.

You may send students to a different instructor in a computer lab, go with students to a computer lab, or have computers right in your teaching space. You may be an instructor or a tutor. You may work with groups or one-on-one with learners.

### **The world of elearning**

The other world is elearning – using electronic media such as computers, CD-ROMs, and the Internet for teaching and learning.

In the last ten years, a host of buzzwords have sprung up to describe this kind of learning. You may have read other terms which also describe ways to use electronic media to deliver educational programs.

Throughout this guide, the term elearning is often used because it suggests the use of the widest range of electronic media, methods, and formats. You will also read about on-line learning, Web-based learning, and Web-based resources.

The following glossary will help you sort through the different terms you will read as you become more familiar with elearning.

### **Glossary of terms**

#### **What is the Internet?**

The Internet is a public computer network. Four components of the Internet that people often use are:

1. Web sites
2. Email
3. Chat rooms
4. Newsgroups

#### **What is elearning?**

A very broad definition of elearning is that it is any learning that occurs by using electronic means. It might include a variety of formats such as the World Wide Web, email, discussions or chats, video, audio, TV, software, or through any other Information Communication Technology (ICT). Elearning can involve a group of people all learning at the same time in a live electronic conference or course, it can involve just one person accessing some static learning activities on a Web site, or it can be a combination of both types of learning.

#### **What is a blended approach to learning?**

A blended approach to learning recognizes that elearning and face-to-face learning are not mutually exclusive. Although there are many definitions of blended learning, the basic concept is it includes both elearning and face-to-face elements, and a mix of formats, media, and experiences, so the most appropriate and effective approach can be used for each part of the learning experience.

- To learners, it means achieving their goals by being able to choose from a variety of media (Web-based materials, print materials, audio tapes, software, etc.) and learning methods that take into account what they already know and that address their learning style.



- To literacy practitioners, it means organizing and making choices available to students about media, formats, and methods they use to achieve their goals.

### **What is computer-based learning?**

In this type of learning, students use software installed on a single computer or on a closed institutional network.

### **What is on-line learning?**

This kind of learning takes place in a learning environment that includes a range of technologies such as Web-based applications, email, chat, newsgroups, and audio and video conferencing. It is delivered over computer networks at your site or from a remote site (via the Internet).

### **What is Web-based learning?**

This kind of learning takes place using Web sites on the Internet or on any other kind of computer network. Web-based learning can be instructor-facilitated or self-paced. AlphaRoute is an example of Web-based learning.

### **What is distributed learning?**

This is a multimedia method of program delivery which includes a mix of Web-based instruction, streaming video conferencing, face-to-face classroom time, distance learning through TV or video, or other combinations of instructional media.

### **Achieving goals**

Literacy practitioners use a variety of resources to help adult students achieve their learning goals. This makes good sense since one book or series of exercises can't meet every adult's needs, or even all of one adult's needs. Individualized programming requires a blend of resources and methods to help adults reach their goals.

In an effort to help learners reach their goals, practitioners working in adult literacy have been adding a variety of electronic resources to their programs for several years.

## **The scope of this guide**

This guide lays out information and suggestions, as well as examples of people, programs, and resources that illustrate a blended approach to learning. The terms blending, mixing, and adding may make it seem

AlphaRoute is an on-line adult literacy learning environment. If you are not a registered AlphaRoute user, get three-day trial access to AlphaRoute by going to <http://alphaplus.ca>. Roll your mouse over **AlphaRoute** and choose **Try AlphaRoute**.

as if all you have to do is add interesting electronic resources to what you are already doing. Although this guide does suggest choosing among new resources as one component of a blended approach, there's more to it than that.

Using a blended approach doesn't just involve adding Web sites or Internet use to the resources you already use. This *Guide to Blended Learning* will help you think about what you might need in addition to those great new resources. It contains suggestions for getting started, tips about how to record your learning, ideas for getting involved in on-line communities, and some practical problem-solvers.

Adult literacy programs are so varied in nature and practice that it is impossible to suggest there is one way to approach any issue. This is a great opportunity to find what works well in your program and build from there.

1. In Part 1 you will learn about the elements that make up a blended learning approach.
2. Part 2 provides practical information and resources which will support both literacy practitioners and adult students.
3. Part 3 gives examples of benefits for both literacy practitioners and adult learners when they are involved in a blended learning approach. This part also looks at some of the challenges practitioners and students have reported in using a blended approach.

### **What belongs on-line and what doesn't?**

In the rush to be on-line, people sometimes put information, courses, or services on-line that don't need to be there. It is important to use the **appropriate** media for the appropriate task. Students don't need to have everything available in every format. If something is better learned in print or face-to-face, use **that** medium.

For an example outside of adult literacy, think about sailing. On-line sailing courses won't get you ready for the feeling of choppy seas, but you can complement on-the-water courses with information from the Internet: you can find and learn about safety symbols, boating regulations, and use on-line charts and maps, and you can find out about great marinas in an on-line discussion.

### **A blended approach to learning: A worldwide trend**

Blended learning is quietly happening around the world in education, at work, and in daily life. Students in adult literacy programs need to be familiar with this way of learning so they are ready when they encounter it at work or during further education, and so they can

access and assess information and services the same way as the rest of the population does.



# Part 1



## Notes

## Elements of a blended learning approach

### An example of blended learning: *Skills at Work*

*Skills at Work* is a series of materials developed by AlphaPlus Centre for adult literacy program students who want to develop the literacy skills they need for work.

The *Skills at Work* series contains two print-based learners' workbooks and a practical guide for literacy practitioners. The series also contains this *Guide to Blended Learning*, a *Guide to Workforce Literacy* programming, and a series of on-line activities. You can access the on-line activities through the AlphaRoute learning environment if you are a registered AlphaRoute user. Contact AlphaPlus Centre to obtain the *Skills at Work* package.

The series offers a variety of learning opportunities: group and individual, and using print-based and on-line resources. Take a look at the *Skills at Work* workbooks and practitioner's guides; you'll see that some of the information and activities appear in the books, and that there are suggestions to do other activities and get other information on the Internet.

There is an assumption in the *Skills at Work* materials that literacy practitioners and students in literacy programs have the technical skills or are developing the technical skills to access on-line resources. If you don't have these skills, this guide will help you identify what you need to know.

Linking literacy practitioners and students to different kinds of learning environments in this way is a blended approach to learning. Using the Internet enables you to bring more and better resources into your face-to-face location. It also enables you to provide learners with opportunities to use computers and navigate the Internet to look for information or do activities directly related to their goals.

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## Understanding the elements in blended learning

The definition of blended learning used in this guide is that it includes a combination of computer-based and/or on-line and face-to-face elements, and a mix of **formats**, **media**, and **methods**, so the most appropriate and effective approach can be used for each part of the learning experience.

As you read the following list of elements from the definition, you will begin to see how large the range of options is using a blended approach. For example, you might be working on a group project with students in your centre, or they might be working independently in an on-line project they found in a discussion group. The project could be as simple or as complicated as is appropriate for the students.

### Formats

You might work face-to-face with students or they might work independently in a self-paced way.

Your meeting place could be something like a classroom, community centre space, kitchen table, etc.

You and/or your students might work some of the time in a computer lab.

You might suggest learners join on-line learning communities and discussions.

You might suggest learners try Web-based tutorials or activities.

### Media

You might use CDs, videotapes, audio tapes, books, newspapers, television, radio, on-line chat rooms, computers, Web sites, and games.

Some of these media – for example, newspapers or games – are available or usable on-line or as a physical resource.

### Methods

You might set up group projects.

You might work one-on-one with students.

You might put different groups together to work on similar topics or projects.

## **The roles for literacy practitioners and adult learners**

### **Using the Internet to find information**

Both literacy practitioners and students will find that using a blended approach to learning involves many changes to what they are used to.

Students will become adept at using computers and the Internet. They will find information and do activities based on the route they choose to navigate a Web site. They'll click on what interests them, enrol in chat rooms, and take part in on-line discussions. Their routes may not be predictable or controllable. This independence may be new to you and to learners.

You too will find that using the Internet enriches your learning experience. In Part 2 you will read about the different types of information you can arrange to have delivered to your desktop and about Web sites you can explore using whichever path you choose.

### **Importance of facilitation**

Your role as a facilitator is still very important when using a blended approach, even though using a computer and the Internet for learning gives students opportunities to take advantage of tools that allow them to direct their own learning.

Your role will include helping with decisions such as how much structure learners need and want, what the pace of learning should be, who controls the flow of learning, and which components will take place face-to-face in groups, individually, or with computers – with software or on-line. You will probably need to help students sequence tasks, deciding when to practise and what level of task to practise, and how to self-assess their progress.

### **Using students' on-line skills to extend learning**

If students in your program have a lot of experience on-line with gaming for example, they may have some very advanced Internet skills, such as navigating using icons, trying shortcut keys, and intuiting where to go next. One of the interesting tasks for you will be to help learners use these skills to learn – something that may seem unusual to both of you.

### **Learning from each other in new ways**

If the learners you work with are accustomed to having you give them information, being active participants in learning will be new to them.

If you are accustomed to being able to control the flow and sequence of information to learners, this way of sharing decisions about the learning process may be new to you.

If you are not an experienced Internet user, you may feel uneasy if students' skills surpass your own. Students may have the chance to teach you what they know.

## **Using technology in adult literacy programs**

A blended approach to learning continues to build on the Ontario Literacy and Basic Skills Program's goal-directed approach.

### **Supportive responsive facilitation**

There is an important technical aspect to a blended approach to learning. You may have terrific technical skills to handle elearning components or you may still be getting your feet wet in these areas. The same may be true for students. Your role as a supportive and responsive facilitator continues to be extremely important when you are providing resource choices that include Web-based learning, computer software, email interaction, and chat rooms, in addition to more familiar print-based materials.

### **Role of support and communication**

When you adopt a blended approach to learning, you continue to choose the best resources for learners, but as you integrate electronic resources into the learning experience, learners will be able to respond to what they are learning in new ways, such as by sending you their answers to quizzes electronically.

Students are often most satisfied with the elearning component of blended learning if they feel they can rely on support from their mentor or literacy instructor, even though they may be communicating on-line. Web-based learning sites often ask for photos of participants, and mentors often share some personal details about themselves. Mentors acknowledge students' work as soon as they receive it on-line, even if they can't respond to it immediately.

### **A comfortable environment**

Learning at a computer is physically different from working at a table or a desk. You should do what you can to make sure students are comfortable with the height of the keyboard and monitor, can read the text on the screen comfortably, and are able to handle the mouse. Students also should be comfortable using audio support tools such as



headphones and volume controls. Encourage students to take frequent breaks to prevent shoulder and eye strain.

For more suggestions about how to set up a comfortable computer workspace, visit the Canadian Health Network at <http://www.canadian-health-network.ca> and click on the topic **Workplace Health**.

### **Assess as you go**

When you are using a blended approach, you will want to assess several things in addition to learning progress.

- Assess whether students are comfortable with and able to use the technology available to them.
- Find out if students understand why you have been using different tools with them for different purposes.
- Ask students if they have been getting enough support to use the tools.
- Find out if students feel they have had an opportunity to share their own skills with others.

The *Skills at Work* print materials contain several self-assessment activities and lots of discussion points. Use this kind of tool to assess progress as well.

## **On-line communities**

You may not be aware of on-line communities or you may not realize how important they can be to learners.

On-line communities, communities of practice, virtual communities – these are terms used to describe what may be the most important aspect of a blended learning approach.

### **Characteristics of on-line communities**

In order for an on-line community to thrive, it must satisfy a need – a need for information, for support, for validation. If you have ever joined an on-line discussion or event where there is no dynamic participation or discussion, you know it takes a lot of skill to maintain this kind of interaction in a meaningful way. These are some of the things that are important for successful on-line communities:

- Members have a common interest, purpose, or need to engage with each other, and come together on-line to do so.

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- Groups of people share a concern, set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and deepen their understanding by interacting on an ongoing basis
- People recognize that in the on-line world the amount of information is vast and readily accessible, but making sense of it is the real challenge.
- Members get something from the on-line community they can't get anywhere else. For example, there may be someone from far away who shares a need or concern with you. Once you discover that, you have much to discuss.

### **Scope of an on-line community**

As you use Internet-based resources for learning, you will soon discover that many learning sites offer dynamic areas where students can interact with others, as well as more static areas where students can develop and practise skills using learning activities.

If students in your program are using *Skills at Work* on AlphaRoute, they will notice an icon announcing a virtual café. Inside the virtual café there is a writing club, several ongoing discussions, Internet scavenger hunts called Cyber Searches, and chat rooms. All of these virtual areas invite learners to take part in personal, authentic, and meaningful conversations that lead to rich interactive learning experiences.

### **Where does an on-line community fit in a blended learning approach?**

Interactive discussions in chat rooms or virtual cafés are similar in many ways to the discussions you might have face-to-face with students. It is just as important for you to be present in an on-line discussion as it is to be there when face-to-face discussions take place. Your skill as animator and facilitator will help guide the discussion.

Topics for discussion will arise by themselves or from suggestions of the participants. The content of the discussions will help and direct you as you work with learners to achieve their goals through face-to-face learning or elearning.

### **Professional development**

The same types of interaction and learning that students enjoy on-line are possible for you as a literacy practitioner as well. The different electronic resources recommended throughout this guide also provide opportunities for you to have meaningful communication with others who have interests or passions similar to yours.

You can always spend some time “lurking” (reading messages without posting your own) on-line at first, but as you become more comfortable with the discussion format, if you join in and share what you know about issues, and ask questions about how others handle the issues you are dealing with, you become part of an on-line community as well.

### **Elearning – the importance of getting to know others on-line**

The following example describes a participant’s feelings in a course for literacy practitioners that didn’t have a face-to-face component. It will give you a sense of how important the social aspect is for people who are participating in elearning. It also shows how hard it is for many people to put their writing on-line.

Maria enrolled in an elearning course that required her to post her responses to course reading on-line. At first she felt alone and afraid to post because everyone would see what she wrote. She didn’t know the other people attending the course and felt she wanted some kind of place on-line to get to know others in the course as people. The course facilitator did set up a chat space for introductions, which became very important to the course participants’ learning experience. Everyone was always welcome in the chat space. Maria felt that to become comfortable with other people looking at her writing, it was important to find out something about who she was taking the course with.

## **Is elearning all about on-line activities?**

### **Is there enough content on-line to keep students interested?**

**Q:** What are my options when a learner completes the elearning activities suggested in a blended resource such as *Skills at Work* and does not have any other related elearning content to work on?

### **A: Try these on-line tools**

Although many people at first think they will need resources similar to what they have always been using – for example, activities, readings, and exercises – there are many on-line tools available to learners.

In addition to the on-line tools described below, there are an almost infinite number of Web sites that **do** have every possible type of content on them, no matter what you’re looking for. You’ll be alerted to

them through the other electronic resources suggested in this guide, such as the AlphaPlus Index to Web Resources, alerts, and newsletters.

The key to using these resources is to choose the ones relevant to the other work you are doing.

### **Use email**

Tools such as email enable learners to communicate with others who are working on similar topics, while at the same time giving students the opportunity to learn to use those tools effectively. Many literacy students already use Yahoo! or some other email program. Sending emails to other students or to you is a great way to generate new writing activities and bring new ideas into the learning environment.

You might want to send a group email to all your students asking learners to share information such as, What's the last movie you saw/book you read/job you had? Why did you like it or not like it?

The responses will be fun to read, especially if you ask learners to **Reply to All** when they answer. This encourages students to share information and adds personal narrative to the learning experience, thus helping to build a lively on-line community.

### **Use on-line discussions to find out what else students want to learn**

Elearning environments often have an interactive area, which may be called a bulletin board, a café, a discussion, or a chat room, where learners can practise and discuss what they have been learning. These components of elearning also develop an on-line community and can be powerful motivators for learning.

Some people believe that instead of having students practise activities on-line and then talk about what they learned in a chat room, that learning content should come from what is discussed, described, and asked in chat rooms or other on-line community places.

In a March 2004 article for the Australian Flexible Learning Framework, Stephen Downes, senior research officer with the National Research Council of Canada in Moncton, New Brunswick, raises the point that on-line communities should not be supplemental to on-line activities or courses; he says they're so important that learning activities should spring from the discussions that happen within the on-line community.

Why not try to find out which of these two ways of thinking about on-line communities fits your literacy program better?

For more information about the Australian Flexible Learning Framework, visit <http://www.flexiblelearning.net.au/aboutus/>

## Assess tech readiness

Are you ready to integrate the use of electronic learning resources into your programming? Take this self-assessment to find out.

	Yes	No
1. Are computers available to you and your students?		
2. Do you have access to high speed Internet?		
3. Are your learners interested in using computers?		
4. Are your learners interested in using the Internet in your program?		
5. Are you comfortable using computers in your teaching?		
6. Are you comfortable using the Internet in your teaching?		
7. Is tech support available to you?		
8. Can you troubleshoot some tech problems on your own?		
9. *Do you see the relevance of technology in learning in your own everyday life?		

If you answered yes to most of these questions, this guide will help you get ready to use a blended learning approach.

\* Before you answer this question, think about some of the different kinds of technology you probably use to accomplish everyday tasks:

- The ATM you use for banking
- The debit machine you use to pay for purchases
- The self-serve payment system available at many grocery stores and gas stations
- The customer loyalty cards the cashier swipes when you make a purchase
- Your voice mail
- Automated switchboards which ask you to press 1, etc.

- The address book or ring tones on your cell phone
- Remote devices for TVs, stereos, garage doors

**Some suggestions if you're not ready yet**

1. Find out how to get access to the computers in your centre.
2. Find out what is necessary for your program to get high speed Internet access.
3. Raise your students' and colleagues' awareness of the importance of being able to work with computers and technology of all kinds.
4. Get some computer training for yourself. You could start with the Tech skills – general manual from the Step by step guides to using on-line literacy resources. It's available on-line from AlphaPlus at <http://alphaplus.ca/onlinetraining.html>. Take courses, or take tutorials on-line. Try this one from CanConnect: <http://canconnect.ic.gc.ca/certificate/en/matrix.asp>.
5. Find out who provides tech support to others who work with computers in your centre and see if you can get the same support.
6. Remember that technology is one tool among many available to literacy practitioners.
7. Read on in this guide to get a better sense of what is involved in blended learning.

# Part 2



## Notes

## Supports for students and literacy practitioners

### Supports for students

#### Evaluation

Let students know they have the last word on the resources they use and that their opinion about this is important. Find out what kinds of resources worked best for different learners and what the challenges might have been for them. Ask directly what they learned, if they enjoyed the variety of learning materials they used, and if the choices you made and they made worked for them.

#### Build computer skills

Students may need skills development so they can take advantage of what is available to them on-line. If you need to spend some time getting their Internet and computer skills up to speed, try these sites:

- <http://wvabe.org/on-button.htm> – This curriculum was designed to teach basic computer literacy skills and to be a prerequisite to the future publication Internet for the Absolute Beginner. Student handbooks and worksheets are available on-line but the Instructor Manual must be requested from the West Virginia Adult Basic Education Program.
- The following link to the list of Student/Learner Resources by Category comes from the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL) LINC Technology Special Collection. This is a useful list of resources to support instructors and learners in the use of computers and software.  
[http://www.altn.org/techtraining/student\\_category.html](http://www.altn.org/techtraining/student_category.html)

#### Build Internet skills

Use this clear language resource to introduce use of the Internet:

**firstfind.info** is a collection of Web sites providing basic information about a wide range of topics - like a library! All Web sites are reviewed by librarians, and are accurate, up-to-date, and easy to use.  
<http://www.firstfind.info/>

## Literacy practitioner supports

### Tech tips to help with day-to-day tasks

- Does someone at your agency have a special knack with computers? Make a list of employees who can help with the computers from time to time.
- Become familiar with your operating system and the tools you are using.
- Find a volunteer! There are many people in your community who are very familiar with computers and the Internet. Put out a call for a volunteer to help specifically with computers. Contact the local high school for computer whizzes. They may be available very quickly by email. Post your volunteer position at your local volunteer centre.
- Can't find anyone in your community? Post an ad for a "Virtual volunteer" at Charity Village (<http://www.charityvillage.com>). This is what Melanie from Charity Village has to say about this service:

"We do have a place on the Charity Village Web site for people who are willing to offer their professional services to non-profits and charities. It's on the **HelpLink** page at <http://www.charityvillage.com/cv/charityvillage/help.asp#oservice>.

Another way to find a volunteer with the Charity Village Web site is to post a listing on the Volunteer Bulletin Board. It's free for non-profits and charities to post a volunteer listing, and the process is fairly quick and simple, and people looking for volunteers can specify the types of skills and experience they're looking for in a volunteer. You can find instructions on how to post volunteer listings in the **FAQ** section at [http://www.charityvillage.com/cv/faq/faq\\_vol.html](http://www.charityvillage.com/cv/faq/faq_vol.html).

Although I don't have any hard statistics on how successful the Volunteer Bulletin Board is, it is a very popular part of the site and we've gotten lots of great feedback about the site in general: <http://www.charityvillage.com/cv/media/media9.html>."



- Go to the source. Whether it is a system problem or a software problem, go to the vendor's Web site, for example <http://www.microsoft.com>, to find extensive help sections. It may be difficult to find the answer to your specific question, but sites such as this one are great training resources full of tips and tricks.

## Tips to make elearning easier

Create a skills inventory by asking questions about other practitioners' and students' technical skills. Follow this up by creating and posting a prominent list of information about your centre's great technical skills and encourage everyone to help out in your literacy program.

### Stay organized

The following organizational strategies will help to increase learners' competence, confidence, and sense of independence:

- Create tip sheets and/or checklists for routine tasks such as how to log on, log off, and do basic troubleshooting. Post these beside computers for ease of access.
- Organize clearly labelled folders in the Favorites folder on all computers that will be used by your students. Whenever you or your students find great Web sites, add them to the correct folder or create a new clearly labelled folder.
- Decide how you will help students keep their user names and passwords secure but available to them.
- Make suggestions to help students organize their time and schedules. Make learning a habit. For example, use on-line calendars to record learning time.
- Provide information about tech support, who gives it, if and when it is available to students, and what to do before calling tech support.

### Use shortcuts

- Help students learn to look for the shortcut keys for frequent tasks. If there is a shortcut key for a task, it will appear on the pull-down menu next to the task name.
- For example, in Internet Explorer you can refresh the screen either by clicking on **View/Refresh**, or you can do it quicker by pressing the **F5** key. (These function keys are on the top row of your keyboard.) In Netscape you can refresh the screen by clicking on **Reload** or **Ctrl+R**.

NIFL is the US National Institute for Literacy. To join NIFL lists or AlphaCom discussions, follow the instructions on page 29.

- If learners prefer to work on a screen that lets them see their work without all the toolbars, they can click on **View/Full screen**, or they can press the **F11** key. In Netscape, learners can **Hide all toolbars** by selecting the menu bar option **View/Show** and then unchecking all toolbars.
- Be aware of windows that seem to have disappeared but are really just hidden behind your current window. The names of hidden windows appear in small boxes at the bottom of your screen. To reveal hidden windows, click on the small box with the name of the window you want.
- If you can't see behind a pop-up window, click and hold on the dark area at the top of the pop-up (usually blue). Keeping your finger on the mouse button, drag the pop-up to a different area and release.
- To go quickly from one open window to another, press **Alt+tab**
- If you can't see all the images on the screen properly, or if it's taking a long time for a window to appear, you may have too many windows open. Instead of continuing to click on the screen, close windows by clicking on the **X** at the top right of the windows. Or, if your computer is "locked", press **ctrl+alt+del** and view the Task List – you may have too many windows open. Do *not* keep clicking on the screen. You should see a list of programs that are running. Look for any task marked as **not responding**. From here, you can click on a program to highlight it, and then click on **End Task** to close that program.

Reminder: Give everyone responsibility for keeping track of better and faster solutions to tech problems – use a program-wide or group issues log.

## On-line resources

### Find great teaching ideas on the Internet

These tips are based on a posting from Steve Quann on the NIFL Literacy and Technology list. Join this list to read about how others are using technology in adult literacy programs.

1. Make sure students can use a mouse and know at least one way to scroll through a Web page. Some students like to practise using the mouse by playing the Solitaire game which you can access from your desktop through **Start>Program>Accessories>Games>Solitaire**. If you are using AlphaRoute, try some mouse games found under **More Stuff**.

2. Spend time talking about the layout, format, and navigation features of a variety of Web sites. Scan the sites for buttons or links that lead to more information. If you expect learners to use a search engine, do some scavenger hunts to get started. Talk about pop-up ads and decide what to do with them when they appear.
3. Develop strategies students can use to get the information they are looking for and to return to the page they started from. Practise visualizing a path and becoming aware of the **Back** button.
4. Talk about the pitfalls of following too many links. Remind learners to use skimming and scanning reading techniques to get a sense of a page's main ideas. Try to get the focus of a page by just skimming the headings and subheadings rather than trying to read everything. Don't just keep clicking! Use the 5 W's (who, what, where, when, why) to ask questions about a page. Who is it about? Or who created this page? etc.
5. Compare and contrast the information on two different Web sites on the same topic. Present the information to students by copying it from the Web sites and pasting it into a word processing document. (You can also do this as a word processing exercise.) Come up with questions together of what they'd expect to find on each site. See what's missing, what's extra, how the two sites present information differently (for example, two different newspapers), how the site's point of view reflects its perspective (for example, two different teams' sites), how language is used differently (for example, a fan site and a movie studio site), etc. Choose sites based on your students' interests, goals, reading levels, comfort with navigating, etc.
6. A good way to help students with outlining and mind mapping is to suggest they put sticky notes on their monitors. For example, across the top of their monitor they could put sticky notes showing the main Web page URLs that help with the main ideas of what they are writing or looking for. Down the side of the monitor they could have sticky notes with the URLs for linked pages that provide supporting detail. There are lots of other ways to use this technique. Since learners can be distracted by the amount of information they find on-line, it's a good idea to use a sticky note as a place to put a guiding question for them to refer back to as they navigate. (Sticky notes are easily removable and easy to transport.)

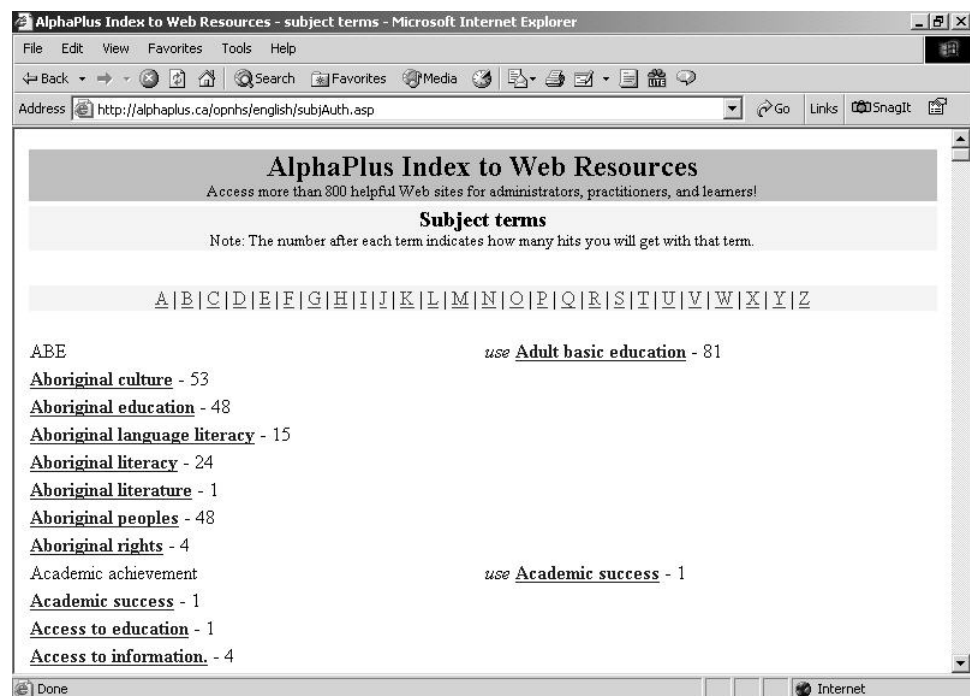
### **Search for resources using the AlphaPlus Index to Web Resources**

Following are some examples of the kinds of Web-based resources you can access quite easily from the AlphaPlus Index to Web Resources. The Index to Web Resources is a good place to begin your search for

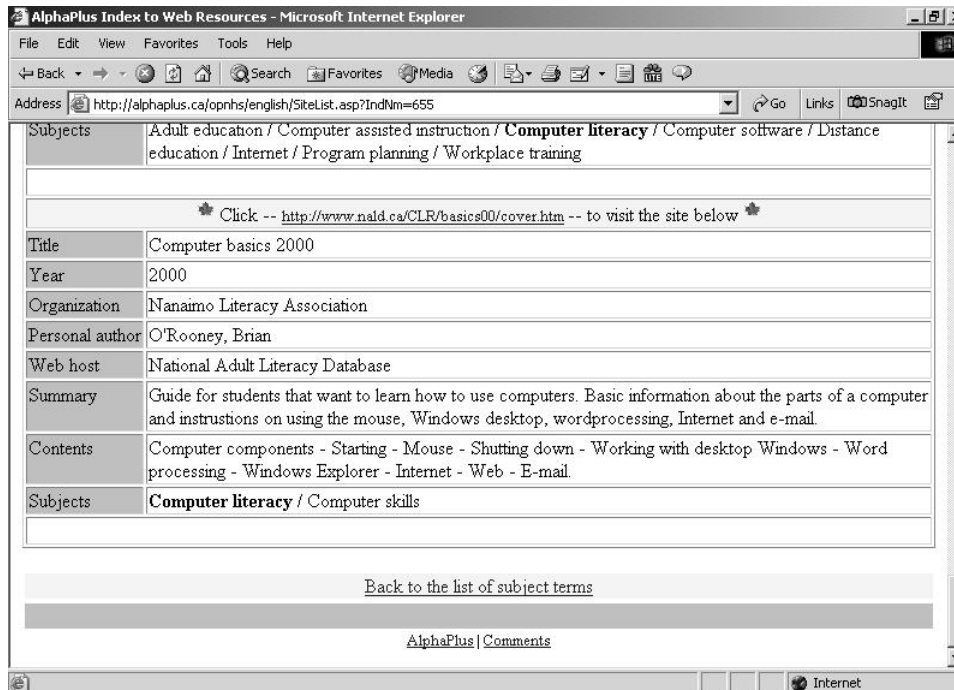
materials because its focus is adult literacy and the Web sites on it are reviewed regularly for broken links. This index contains a wide variety of resources, including research articles, computer and Internet tutorials for learners and literacy instructors, exercise sheets, virtual field trips, and games.

If you'd like more in-depth ideas of how to use this index, work through the *Index to Web Resources* manual in the *On-line access for success!* series. The on-line training manuals are available on the AlphaPlus Web site at <http://alphaplus.ca/onlinetraining.html>.

Start using the Index to Web Resources by going to the AlphaPlus Web site at <http://alphaplus.ca>. Roll your mouse over **Library services** and then click on **Index to Web resources**. This is the first screen you'll see:

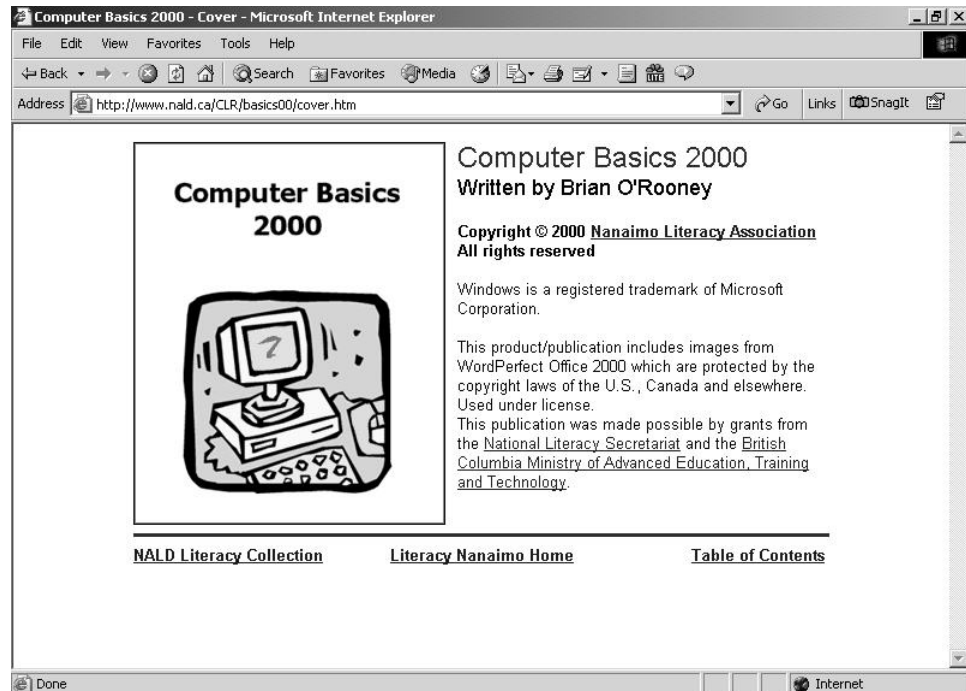


The examples shown here go to the letter **C** (for **computer**), and explore these different subject terms about computer use. The next screen capture highlights one of several sites you might find on the index if you search the term **Computer literacy**.



This screen tells you a bit about a site to help you decide whether it is worth a visit. It tells when the site was developed, tells which organization maintains the site, gives a brief description of the contents, and gives some subject terms if you want to search for something similar elsewhere.

By clicking on the Web address shown above, you are taken directly to the Web site on the next page where you can try the tutorials.



Here are some other subject terms you could try, to get slightly different kinds of results, but still on topics related to computers:

- Computer assisted instruction
- Computer skills
- Computer software
- Educational technology

For something completely different, you might want to try the subject terms under **W** (work...). Try the entry “How everyday things are made” under **Workplace environment**. The link will take you to a very deep site with videos of manufacturing processes, and virtual factory tours showing how to manufacture everything from pencils to pianos. Spend some time exploring the site to see which parts of it might be of interest to the learners in your program.

On-line games can provide lots of fun while giving users the chance to repeat and master certain computer tasks. The spirit of competition in **Games** can motivate learners. Choose games carefully and use them for the learning opportunities they provide to develop literacy, numeracy, and computer skills. In the index, you’ll find entries for quite a few different kinds of games. The games listed run the gamut from scrambled word games to bingo to jigsaw puzzles and word searches. Choose the ones relevant to the learners you work with.

### **Find related print materials in on-line library catalogues**

Books are a great resource too! Find appropriate content in exercise books. Start with the books already available in your agency. Browse or search the AlphaPlus catalogue or your local library's catalogue to find new titles, or call a librarian for suggestions. If you use AlphaPlus services, consult the contact information on the inside cover of this guide to reach a librarian, or to arrange to borrow a customized mini-collection of up to 100 titles. Delivery is free in Ontario and you can keep the collection for up to four months.

If a student has tried some of the activities in the *Skills at Work* series and has read about a job she wants to get, she could try different kinds of searches to gather real information from the Internet. Decide together what keywords might work to find what she is looking for, remembering that sometimes a link leads to other unexpected great information, and that sometimes it can take a while to get the search terms right.

### **Work with an issues log**

Try to think about tech problems as learning experiences. You will see that a log, one of the documents profiled many times in *Skills at Work Workbook 2*, will be of great use as you become accustomed to keeping track of both problems and solutions.

Logs are used in workplaces from coffee shops to call centres. They are used to record any number of details, such as the temperature of a coffee shop's refrigerated case at regular timed intervals, the initials of who cleaned the washroom and at what time, which telephone surveys an operator worked on and how long each call was, or which days and times a visiting homemaker visited an elderly person.

Introduce the format of the log during your blended learning orientation to familiarize students with the idea of rows and columns. Decide together on the best titles for the rows and columns, such as date, computer id, problem, solution, and initials.

Create the log form together using word processing software and make sure every student knows how to fill it in and what it is for. As time goes by, you and your students will be able to refer back to previous problems for solutions and you will see that although problems are a regular part of using technology, you can solve them and learn from them.

The bonus is students learn to work with one very commonly used document, and in a job interview, they can say they are comfortable using logs to track and troubleshoot computer problems.

This site gives some suggestions and ideas about how to create a logbook for learning:

[http://suppremi.unige.ch/docs/guides\\_html/journal/en/html/Chap3\\_public\\_guide\\_journalEN.html](http://suppremi.unige.ch/docs/guides_html/journal/en/html/Chap3_public_guide_journalEN.html).

## **Use these ideas to collaborate with students and other literacy practitioners**

### **Map software and Web sites**

Mapping resources collaboratively – creating a record of the path and contents of all software and Web sites you use in your literacy programming – saves time and makes resources more accessible and usable to more people. The map can be as detailed or as general as you wish. You should involve other literacy practitioners and learners in this process.

At some point most instructors and tutors guiltily find themselves using materials without looking closely at them ahead of time. Inevitably there are unanticipated problems: the materials are at the wrong level, they use unfamiliar terminology, they require some other resource students don't have, or they're just not very good. Sound familiar?

This has the potential to be an even bigger problem if you don't know what's involved in software or a Web site, because you can't see at a glance what they contain. Mapping these on your own can involve a lot of work, and the knowledge that results usually benefits only the person who did the work. If you map collaboratively in your program, and if this becomes a regular part of your program's practice, the resulting professional development raises both skill and comfort levels with resources, removes the fear factor for those who are just beginning to develop their computer skills, and creates reusable guides for literacy practitioners and students. On the next page you will see an example of a form you could use to map software or Web sites.

Decide on the best way to make these maps available to your program. Should they be on-line in a file everyone can access, or does an easily accessed binder work better for your program?



**Title:**

**Evaluated by:**

**Description of contents**

--

**Activities**

--

**Skills**

**Level**

--	--

Can I record progress?

Can I print?

Can I add my own content?

Can I adjust features, e.g. sound?

Can I set levels of difficulty?

**What other resources could I use with this site or program?**

--

**Ideas for use:**

--

### **Read *The Node's Guide to Blended Learning***

*The Node's Guide to Blended Learning* (available from AlphaPlus) gives excellent examples of four college professors who try different schemes as they figure out for themselves the best way to adapt blended learning within their courses. The examples and suggestions in the Node's guide could be easily adapted to literacy programs. More information about purchasing the Node's guide appears on their Web site at <http://node.on.ca/guides/blended>.

The Node's guide emphasizes the importance of thinking about how to choose the best combination of learning modes, materials, and types of presentation. To make these choices, you need to consider the best ways for learners to achieve their goals.

The following example shows how some choices can be made for selecting the media that might be most appropriate for learning:

A student wants to learn how to make presentations. Together, the literacy practitioner and the student might decide the best way to learn to do that is to work in a group with other learners who are also in her centre or class, rather than trying to develop oral skills through elearning. The group could listen to and give feedback on her presentations.

When it comes to deciding how to improve the same student's writing skills however, if she is the only one in the group at her writing level, she might choose to practise those skills using elearning. This could mean anything from working on AlphaRoute writing activities, to composing emails in response to something she reads on-line, to posting messages on a discussion board. Another option would be for her to use software that focuses on improving writing skills.

### **Keep up to date with these electronic resources**

#### **1. Try on-line discussions.**

- The AlphaCom discussion system allows literacy practitioners and learners to interact on-line on topics of interest and concern to them. There are more than 100 discussions on general topics having to do with adult literacy and also on more specialized topics such as self-management/self-direction or native literacy resources. To join an AlphaCom discussion, roll your mouse over **AlphaCom** on the AlphaPlus home page at

<http://alphaplus.ca>. Click on **Register** and follow the instructions to sign up for the discussions.

- If your program is part of the Literacy and Basics Skills Program in Ontario, you can start a private discussion for your own program on AlphaCom. To do this, go to the AlphaPlus Web site at <http://alphaplus.ca>, roll your mouse over **AlphaCom**, and click on **Request a new discussion**.

If you'd like more in-depth ideas on how to use AlphaCom, work through the *AlphaCom* manual in the *On-line access for success!* series. The on-line training manuals are available on the AlphaPlus Web site at <http://alphaplus.ca/onlinetraining.html>.

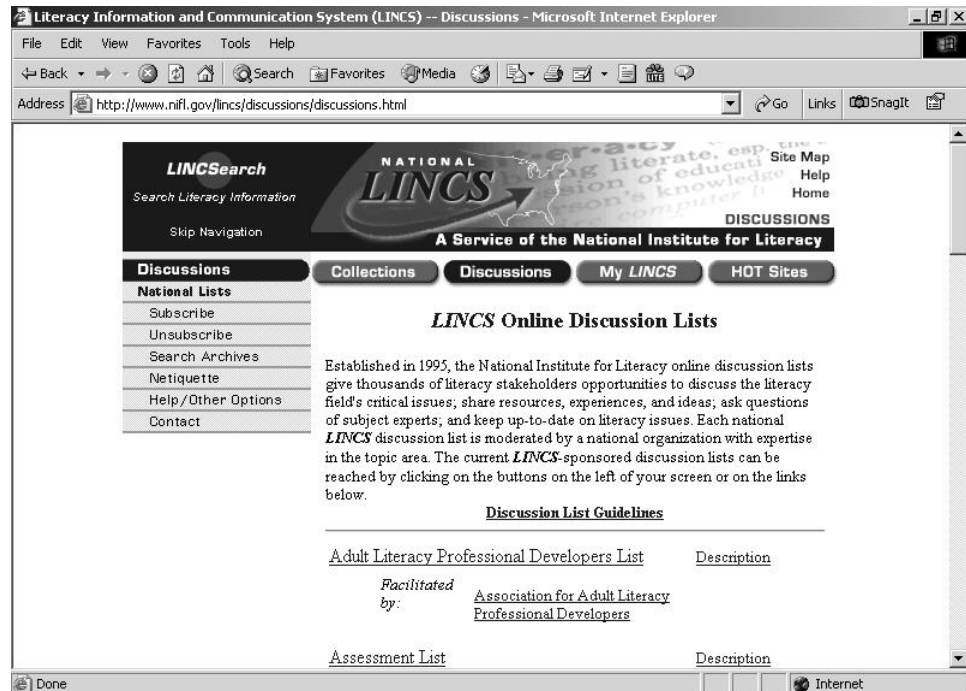
## **2. Visit the NALD (National Adult Literacy Database) Web site often.**

This bilingual Web site is located at <http://www.nald.ca>.

- The resources on this site include a Learner's Story of the Week, with an archive of stories arranged according to province.
- The NALD literacy collection includes full text documents, provincial and national literacy newsletters, a resource catalogue, links to Internet resources, and links to research databases.

## **3. Join listservs.**

- Organizations such as NIFL (National Institute for Literacy) in the US host listservs on a variety of topics, including Literacy and Technology. To see what NIFL has to offer or to subscribe to a listserv, go to <http://www.nifl.gov/lincs/discussions/discussions.html>.



This page lists the different discussions available. You might want to try the **Focus on Basics List** or the **Technology & Literacy List**. Whenever a subscriber posts a message on these lists, the message is accessible from your desktop.

#### 4. Subscribe to email alerts to get up-to-the-minute information.

- Another publication you can sign up for to get more information about elearning is at <http://www.tcrecord.org>. Subscription is free and you'll receive weekly newsletter issues. The Adult Education contents section includes adult literacy research, book reviews, and articles about technology.

#### 5. Subscribe to on-line newspapers and newsletters.

- For information on-line about employment, try the Toronto-focused Possibilities Employment Resource Centre at <http://www.possibilitiesproject.com/index.asp>. This publication looks at trends, job search strategies, community resources, and access to job boards. Even if you are not located in Toronto, you'll find the information on this site extremely useful.
- For weekly tips on using Microsoft Word, subscribe to WordTips, a free tip sheet that arrives on Saturdays by email. This publication contains advice for the novice Word user as well as the expert. It's a great resource that will give you tips for yourself and for your students. To receive WordTips

regularly via email at no charge, send an email to [join-wordtips@lists.vitalnews.com](mailto:join-wordtips@lists.vitalnews.com).

- Every week Tara Calishain emails out Research Buzz, a very personal and lively newsletter containing all kinds of information about new research databases. A typical issue might include information about how to use new features on Google, where you can locate a database of the CBC archives, census information from Virginia, and shipwrecks in California. Research Buzz is another newsletter you can receive free or upgrade to a paid subscription. Subscription instructions are available at <http://www.researchbuzz.com>.



# Part 3



## Notes

## Benefits and challenges of blended learning

### Benefits for students

#### Development of self-management and self-direction skills when using an approach that includes elearning resources

Key points for self-management and self-direction include making one's own decisions, scheduling personal time, and doing things independently. Using a blended learning approach often encourages learners to take on roles that help them develop these skills as they start to be more involved in directing their own learning.

The following suggestions will help you provide learners with upfront information about the program, including some tips and tricks, and will encourage students to schedule their use of computers:

- Prepare learners by first talking about what they can expect when using elearning materials and tools such as AlphaRoute and *Skills at Work*. Give as much information up front as possible, using hands-on practice, presentations, and coaching to help learners feel supported in the use of these materials and tools. During and after the orientation, let students try elearning tools on their own and be prepared to help as required.
- Be clear about the tone of everything included in your blended programming, such as observing respectful netiquette in on-line discussions and suggesting activities that have concern for learning uppermost.
- Ask students to clarify their expectations so you all know what they can realistically expect.
- Make clear connections between what students are going to do on-line and what they are going to do using other media or face-to-face with you. Make sure they know that the on-line

component will relate well to their goals, their training plan, and the rest of the work they are doing.

- Find out from learners how much time they are going to spend on-line.
- Let students know approximately how long it will take for you to give them feedback.
- Set up opportunities for peer feedback for one-on-one and group activities. Set this up as a regular part of your program. This encourages knowledge sharing and will increase comfort levels and skills in giving and receiving feedback.
- Tell students how to contact you, such as with a specific subject line in an email or by phone, and that they should ask for help when they need it.
- Consider setting up a buddy system for learners to share ideas, support each other, or just to chat. These informal pairings of learners lead to meaningful learning.

### **The voice of experience – orientation**

Carolyn Coey-Simpson, a Community Adult Educator at Aurora College Wha Ti Community Learning Centre in the Northwest Territories, says their orientation sessions last from three to six hours depending on what is required. Carolyn uses AlphaRoute at a distance, but her approach is relevant for anyone using elearning.

To get learners comfortable with elearning, Carolyn covers these topics:

- Accessing the Web site – they devise a plan so the Web site and the passwords are always available to the learner.
- Navigating the site – this includes discussion of ideas on how to use the features of the site, which in AlphaRoute includes tools such as on-line dictionaries, Word List, and Note Pad.
- How to contact Carolyn for help – she includes her email address, telephone number, and a plan for learners if they require support and it isn't immediately available.
- What students can expect to accomplish
- The centre's schedule of availability of computers both during and after program hours – this includes the days, hours, and duration for which they are available.

In Ontario, four literacy programs are involved in trying distance learning using AlphaRoute. Brenda Dovick, coordinator of the pilot program in Sioux Lookout, has created a *Participant's Manual* that



mentors give to each learner with their training plan so they have an easy one-place reference to find contact information, training goals, student journal, etc.

## Benefits for literacy practitioners

In order for technology to have a role in your centre, it needs to fit with the rest of what you do. Staff, volunteers, and learners can decide together what will work best to achieve everyone's goals.

### Learn along with students in your program

As you choose from the different kinds of resources available to you, you have the chance to learn along with the adults in your program. When you are trying new resources and new technology, not everything will always run smoothly. There are new challenges daily with technology. Learn from the challenges, document them, internalize what you learn, and share the learning with students and other literacy practitioners you work with.

You may discover students in your program who have great technical skills and who can help you solve problems. Use a word processor or spreadsheet to create a table of learners' names and what they already know and like about technology and how to use it. Post the table in your program where everyone can see it. Encourage students to share their skills and knowledge and to help each other.

Let students know you are starting to do something new and you are learning along with them. This models the importance of lifelong learning in a very real way.

## Challenges for adult learners

Some adults find computers are impersonal. They prefer to be in an environment where there is more communication with others, and they believe they can share information better without computers. Working independently may be a challenge for some learners.

Some students will find it difficult to learn to use a computer.

Some learners may not want to use a computer because they have some fears about using new technology.

What  
AlphaRoute  
users told us:

"At first I  
couldn't even  
turn the  
computer on.  
Now the  
mouse and I  
help each  
other out to  
figure our  
moves."

The assembler's story in *Skills at Work Workbook 2* tells about how a human resources specialist looks for people willing to learn to use computers.

90% of AlphaRoute users said it was still important to have a teacher or mentor available after they had learned how to use AlphaRoute.

## Challenges for literacy practitioners

Some literacy practitioners may have some of the same difficulties with computers as students. In addition, they may not see the value of learning with technology. Some may not think teaching how to use technology is part of their job in literacy work.

Here are three important reasons to consider using technology in literacy programs:

### 1. Using blended learning at work

More and more employers expect their employees to be willing to learn to use technology both while they are being trained and in their jobs. When you read the job stories in the *Skills at Work* workbooks, you will read about the kinds of technology that workers in entry-level jobs are confronted with. Literacy programs can be a safe and supportive place for adults to develop constructive attitudes towards technology.

### 2. Modelling lifelong learning

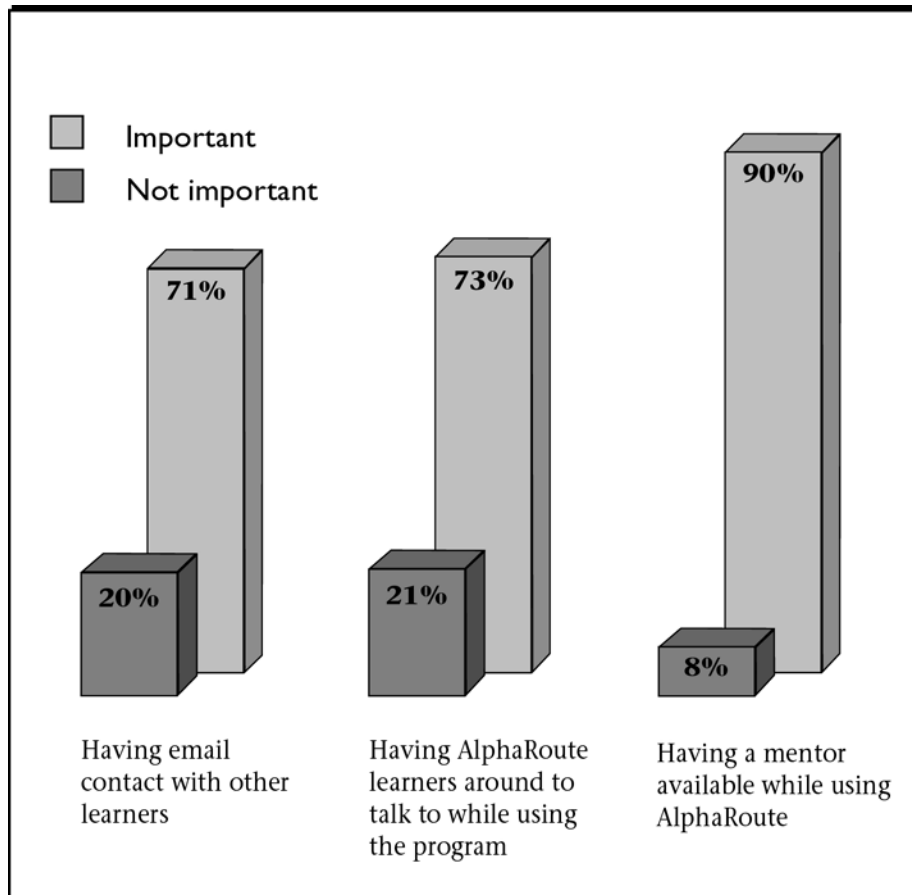
If you are also learning – without minimizing the challenges of becoming a comfortable user of technology – this is a chance to model continuous learning for learners in your program. Be frank with learners if you are doing something for the first time. Let them know you too have questions. Let them know lifelong learning is not just for them.

### 3. Using Internet-based resources in further education and for personal independence

Banking, grocery shopping, filling in job or volunteer applications, paying bills, registering for courses, and finding information are all activities that more and more people are carrying out on-line. There is an amazing range of resources available beyond your literacy program. This guide touches on some of what's available, but it's only a beginning. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to blended learning, any more than there is for adult learning in general.

### What is the role of literacy instructors and tutors in this approach?

Some literacy instructors believe their role in adult literacy will be negatively affected when students use technology. What students say, however, is they want to learn to use – and learn using – technology because they see its importance in everyday life. They also say that even though they want to learn using technology, they want to have access to an instructor.



Source: *What difference does it make? Literacy learner perspectives on Web-based learning with AlphaRoute*, Centre AlphaPlus Centre, September 2003.

To see the complete report *What difference does it make? Literacy learner perspectives on Web-based learning with AlphaRoute*, visit <http://alphaplus.ca/images/pdf/Whatdifferencedoesitmake.pdf>

## How can instructors get the technical skills they need?

In its Winter 2004 *Technology Bulletin*, Community Literacy of Ontario reported on its “Use of Technology in Community Literacy Agencies” survey.

In response to the question, “How have staff and/or tutors gained their computer skills/knowledge?”, only 4% of respondents said they’d had formal training. Thirty-six per cent indicated they “learn as you go”, and 60% said they’d had a combination of formal and learn-as-you-go training.

### The importance and value of informal training

People often think formal training in technology is the best or only way to develop skills that will enable them to deal with technical

Read the rest of this Focus on Basics article at <http://www.gse.harvard.edu/~ncsall/fob/2000/stammen.html>.

problems – that informal learning is not as valuable as formal training. As with most other adult learning, however, finding out by yourself, trying new things, making mistakes, finding the best ways to search for the information you need, and practising and using what you have learned also leads to meaningful learning. With technology, new challenges arise daily and overcoming obstacles is part of the learning process.

Talk with others at work about the challenges involved in using technology in literacy work. Identify barriers you experience using technology and decide how to address them. Create a peer support group among your colleagues. Attend professional development events on this topic. Try on-line tutorials and learn by doing.

### **Technical, structural, and attitudinal barriers**

Many people single out technical problems as their main complaint when they use or decide not to use technology. They cite their lack of formal training or lack of technical expertise as barriers. There are, however, usually other issues to consider as well.

In a conversation with *Focus on Basics*, the quarterly publication of the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy, Ron Stammen identified technical, structural, and attitudinal barriers that confront people who are learning to use computer-based technology. Although it is difficult to completely separate the three types of barriers because each one affects the others, ask yourself where any barriers you are facing in the use of technology fit in these categories.

### **Structural barriers**

Barriers may exist because of the way the computer component of a program is set up. Use the following questions to explore ways to use computers to enhance basic skills development and increase literacy skills.

1. Are computers integrated into your program in a way that maximizes the use of all the resources available to you?
  - If you now set up your program with a certain time period in the computer area for each group/class, can you try a floating schedule that requires individual students/instructors to sign up depending on what they need to work on at what time?
  - Can groups share the use of computers throughout the day so students and instructors can access the computers in a flexible way when needed? This encourages integration of computers with other literacy work.

- Can students work on writing, move to an available computer to use word processing to edit and print, then move back to the group for peer editing, freeing the computer for others?
  - Can you try linking two groups and see how they can share computer time effectively?
2. Do you have the opportunity to learn and practise your skills and understanding related to the use of technology?
- How is that time built into your program schedule, and how do literacy practitioners track their learning and share it?
3. Does your organization see the value of learning about and with technology?
- Do literacy instructors attend relevant computer training events, then follow up by using what they have learned and sharing the new information with others?
  - How do you share information about Web sites, new resources, information from email alerts, listserv messages, new studies, great activities, worksheet builders, etc., within your program?
  - Is it possible to start a group email you can circulate to share Web sites among instructors in your literacy program? Another idea is to ask everyone to share one Web site at each staff meeting.

### **Attitudinal barriers**

Adding technology to your literacy program and using it in an integrated way probably involves some change for literacy practitioners and learners. As with any kind of change, this can cause disruptions to the way things have always worked.

As a literacy practitioner, you may have believed using computers with learners would simplify your work. However, in the early stages of learning how to use electronic tools yourself, teaching learners how to use the tools, finding on-line resources, responding to learners' technical questions, and blending print, software, and on-line resources, there may be so much work you lose your enthusiasm. You may need motivation to continue.

It takes time to learn all the things listed in the previous paragraph. Don't minimize the effort involved in sticking with it to get results, and don't think you are alone in this effort. As you connect to newsletters, listservs, and Web sites, you will see you are in fact part of a worldwide movement of educators.

Keep in mind that integrating technology into their learning will lead to more learner independence and initiative, and that will translate into time savings for you.

Good luck with blended learning!!