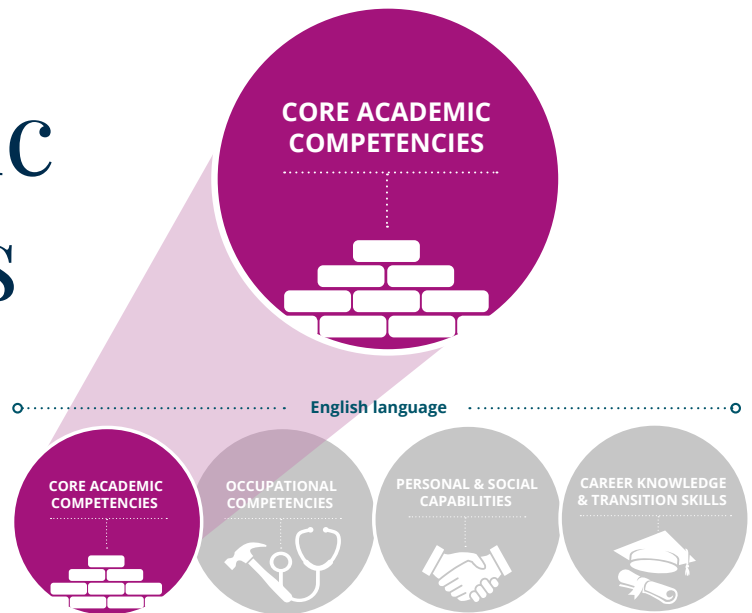


# Core Academic Competencies

At Pearson we have identified four areas that make up employability, based on formal and informal research with employers, educators, and learners. Individuals need to develop skills in each area, but the stage they are at in their life – whether that’s starting, developing, or changing career – will impact which areas to focus on most. *Core Academic Competencies* is one of those areas.



## What the skills are

Core academic skills are the foundational skills needed for active participation in adult life.

- Literacy
- Numeracy
- Digital literacy
- English skills (in many countries and positions)

The roots of these core skills are found in K-12 education.

## Why they matter

Regardless of the field we select or the education we pursue, there are few opportunities open to us without these competencies.

- 1 They are related to better employment outcomes, greater civic engagement, and wages. Those with higher literacy skills are more likely to report good health, to believe that they have an impact on political processes, and to participate in volunteer activities.<sup>1</sup>
- 2 Many employees don't have the appropriate digital skills to succeed. 76% of CEOs are concerned about the availability of digital skills in their workforce.<sup>2</sup>
- 3 Individuals who learn English are likely to earn more, and countries who have invested significantly in English language education should also experience a benefit of this in their economies.<sup>3</sup>

## How to teach

The challenge is in selecting from the sea of materials available. Teachers should use material that is in keeping with how people learn, and where there is evidence that use is related to improved learner outcomes.

### Literacy & Numeracy

In reading, the debate centers on the balance between phonics instruction and exposure to literature in learning. In numeracy it focuses on the balance between procedural practice and less structured problem solving.

Cognitive psychologist Dan Willingham suggests a balance of approaches for literacy.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, we can find principles of mathematics instruction<sup>5</sup> that cut across sides of the math debates.

### English Language

Rather than a perfect knowledge of grammar, employers want a workforce that can communicate in English. Teach language from the perspective of how it is used in particular situations (known as a functional approach) rather than having students just learning rules.

### Digital Literacy Skills

Learners don't just pick up the digital skills they need in the classroom and at work through exposure to digital products in their everyday lives. Students need to consistently use technology to read, evaluate evidence, write, and interact with each other in order to develop digital literacy. This should be embedded through the day and through coursework in more traditional disciplines.

### Older Learners

Older learners are often ashamed at not having acquired these skills at an early age, and they may have experienced multiple rounds of failure. Address this with specific breathing techniques, making note of the feelings, and turning anxiety into excitement (which has similar physical characteristics to anxiety and so can be easier than relaxation).<sup>6</sup>

Would you like to talk to us about employability? Email [efficacy@pearson.com](mailto:efficacy@pearson.com)

1 [https://www.oecd.org/skills/piaac/Skills\\_Matter\\_Further\\_Results\\_from\\_the\\_Survey\\_of\\_Adult\\_Skills.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/skills/piaac/Skills_Matter_Further_Results_from_the_Survey_of_Adult_Skills.pdf)

2 2018 PwC CEOs survey. Retrieved from <https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/ceo-survey/2018/deep-dives/pwc-ceo-survey-talent.pdf>

3 Erling, Elizabeth (2015). *The Relationship Between English and Employability in the Middle East and North Africa*. British Council, Manchester.

4 <http://www.danielwillingham.com/daniel-willingham-science-and-education-blog/just-how-polarized-are-we-about-reading-instruction>

5 <https://www.nctm.org/Conferences-and-Professional-Development/Principles-to-Actions-Toolkit/Resources/7-EffectiveMathematicsTeachingPractices/>

6 <https://blog.mindresearch.org/blog/math-anxiety>