
College Success

Bow Valley College
Student Information for Writing TOWES

Winter 2008

What is TOWES?

The Test of Workplace Essential Skills (TOWES) is an assessment tool that uses actual workplace documents to evaluate three out of nine essential skills. TOWES evaluates:

- **Reading Text:** The ability to find and use information contained in text, paragraphs, letters, reports, etc.
- **Document Use:** The ability to find and use information contained in charts, schematics, icons, lists, tables, signs, etc.
- **Numeracy:** The ability to find and use quantitative information like measuring, calculating, scheduling, budgeting, estimating, analyzing data, etc.

Everyone has essential skills! Essential skills are not the technical skill required by a particular occupation, but the skills used in all occupations. They are generic, transferable, enabling skills that help people perform the tasks necessary to succeed in their job. What differs between occupations is the level of skill required and the frequency with which the skill is used. For example, some workers read emails every day while others read long technical reports monthly. Both of these activities are reading tasks, but one is much more difficult than the other.

When you write TOWES, you will assume the role of a worker who has been asked to perform a workplace task. Each task, or question, will require you to use at least one of the three essential skills. Results from your TOWES test will determine your skill level in Reading Text, Document Use and Numeracy.

The Government of Canada has conducted research with thousands of workers across the country to create Essential Skill Profiles. The Essential Skill Profiles outline the skills needed for work in over 200 occupations. You can compare your TOWES score with the Essential Skill Profiles to:

- Determine if you have the essential skills needed for various occupations.
- Evaluate areas that you need to improve if you would like to work in a particular job.
- Highlight your essential skill competencies with a potential employer.

About the Test

TOWES can typically be completed within 2 to 2 ½ hours. TOWES tests contain about 18 problem sets – a problem set is made up of an authentic workplace document and a series of questions or “tasks” directly related to the document. Although you may not be familiar with the subject matter of the document, all the information needed to answer the questions is contained within the material provided. You should be able to answer the question or “perform” the task because your essential skills are transferable from one environment to another!

TOWES for College Success Students

All students in the College Success program are required to write the TOWES ADM102, referred to as the “Office and Administration Sector Series”. The questions that appear in this version of TOWES reflect the types of tasks that are typical in an office setting, such as using office equipment, reducing loss, or utilizing policy and procedure manuals. The ADM102 measures essential skills in the same way as other TOWES tests, but it best suited for students in Administration, Business, Health Care and Human Services programs at Bow Valley College.

How to write a TOWES Test

1. Your Testing Session

Your TOWES testing sessions have been scheduled for April 2008. Please see the attached schedule for details about your testing session. Please remember that late arrivals will not be accepted as doors will close promptly at test time. Each testing session will begin with a 20 minute overview and question period, followed by 3 hours to write the test. Although it is unlikely that you will require the full three hours, please anticipate staying at least 2½ hours.

2. Prepare for Writing TOWES

The best way to prepare for your TOWES test is to review the TOWES Preparation Guide. The Preparation Guide includes some tips for writing TOWES and includes a practice problem set, along with the steps for solving the questions, so that you become familiar with the types of questions that appear on TOWES. You can download the prep-guide at www.towes.ca, or if you are unable to access an electronic version of the document you should speak to your College Success instructor.

There are many additional online resources available to help you prepare for the TOWES Test, so please take advantage of them! Your TOWES test score can significantly increase if you spend time reviewing the essential skills and practice problem sets. The following resources are available in the “Test Taker Information” section of the TOWES website www.towes.ca:

- ♦ TOWES Preparation Guide
- ♦ The TOWES Sample Test Booklet
- ♦ Measure Up! (practice problem sets)
- ♦ Additional Resources & Links

3. Gather Equipment

TOWES is a paper and pencil test. You will need a pen/pencil, highlighter and a basic calculator to successfully complete your test. You should also remember to bring your glasses if you have difficulty reading small text. You must also bring your student ID.

The following items will not be permitted in your testing session: programmable calculators, PDA's, cellular phones and dictionaries (including electronic or translation dictionaries). Please note: test markers will not deduct marks for incorrect spelling.

4. Writing the Test

Carefully read the test instructions and test questions. The questions on the test are not designed to trick you, however, if you rush through the problem sets you may miss important information needed to answer the questions. Attempt all questions on the test - you will not lose marks for incorrect answers. Make sure that your answer is clear to the test marker, if the test marker is uncertain about what you intended for your answer they will mark your response as incorrect.

5. Retesting

In some circumstances you may need to rewrite TOWES. Please see your College Success instructor for more information on retesting.

Interpreting your TOWES Results?

Test results will be distributed on an ongoing basis. At your testing session, your test administrator will provide you with all the information you will need to pick up your results.

You will receive an Individual Results Report that will display your current essential skills levels for Reading Text, Document Use and Numeracy. The report will include examples of how your essential skill levels relate to typical workplace tasks and will suggest skills to build on.

Your Individual Results Report will also outline the range of skill levels needed for different programs offered at Bow Valley College. This information can help you to evaluate how your essential skill levels compare to the requirements of over 200 occupations profiled by the Government of Canada. You are much more likely to succeed at work if you have the skills needed for your chosen occupation!

Measuring Essential Skills

The complexity of workplace tasks are described on a 5-point scale; level 1 tasks are considered least difficult and level 5 tasks are considered most difficult. All occupations require workers to perform a range of tasks at different levels, but some occupations require workers to perform more difficult tasks on a frequent basis.

Visit the HRSDC (Human Resource Skills Development of Canada) Essential Skills Database to view the required skill levels for your desired profiled occupation.

www.hrsdc-drhc.gc.ca

The following chart provides examples of how the essential skill levels (1 to 5) relate to different workplace tasks:

Reading

Level	Essential Skills Task
Level 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Read relatively short texts to locate a single piece of information• Follow simple written directions
Level 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Read more complex texts to locate a single piece of information or read simpler texts to locate multiple pieces of information
Level 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Choose and integrate information from various sources or from several parts of a single text• Make low-level inferences from multiple sources• Identify relevant and irrelevant information
Level 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Choose and integrate information from various sources or from several parts of a single text• Make low-level inferences from multiple sources• Identify relevant and irrelevant information
Level 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Interpret dense and complex texts• Make high level inferences and use specialized knowledge

Document Use

Level	Essential Skills Task
Level 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Document is very simple• Limited search using key words, numbers, icons or other visual characteristics to locate information• Entering few pieces of information• Minimal inference is required
Level 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Document is simple• Locating one or more pieces of information• Entering several pieces of information• A low level of inference is required• Limited knowledge of the content of the document may be required to use the information. Limited analysis required.
Level 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Document is somewhat complex• Locating one or more pieces of information• Entering multiple pieces of information• A moderate degree of inference is required• Some knowledge of the content of the document is required to use the information. Some analysis required involving selection and integration of information
Level 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Document is complex• Locating multiple pieces of information• Entering multiple pieces of information• Considerable inference may be required
Level 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Document is complex• Locating multiple pieces of information• Entering multiple pieces of information• A high level of inference is required

Numeracy

Levels	Essential Skills Task
Level 1	<p>Numerical Calculation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only the simplest operations are required and the operations to be used are clearly specified. Only one type of mathematical operation is used in a task. Only minimal translation is required to turn the task into a mathematical operation. All information required is provided. <p>Numerical Estimation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is a formula. It identifies the variable and how they are to be combined. Only one factor. All information about the factors that make up the estimate and how to combine them is known. Any complicating factors are known. Little or no consequences of error; estimation errors can be easily and quickly rectified with little or no work plan required or costs incurred. Little or know precision required.
Level 2	<p>Numerical Calculation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only relatively simple operations are required. The specific operations may not be clearly specified. Tasks involve one or two types of mathematical operation. Few steps of calculation are required. Some translation may be required or the numbers needed for the solution may need to be collected from several sources. Simple formulae may be used. <p>Numerical Estimation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is a formula, but it does not incorporate all of the variables. There are a small number of factors. Most information is known, but there are factors that could throw an estimate off. Estimation errors have some minor consequence. Precision required within relatively wide range.
Level 3	<p>Numerical Calculation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tasks may require a combination of operations or multiple applications of a single operation. Several steps of calculation are required. Some translation is required but the problem is well defined. A Combination of formulae may be used. <p>Numerical Estimation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is no formula, but an approach has been developed, possibly by having to perform the task repeatedly. Many factors, but a routine has been established. Information about significant factors that make up the estimate is uncertain; several complications are possible but they are constrained in their impact. Estimation errors have significant consequences. Precision required within a small range of values.
Level 4	<p>Numerical Calculation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tasks involve multiple steps of calculation. Considerable translation is required. <p>Numerical Estimation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is no formula and no established approach is available to the worker. Many factors involved and the methodology for making the estimate must be developed by the worker. Little or no information about significant factors that make up the estimate; the factors may have to be estimated. Many complications are possible and they may not be constrained in their impact. Estimation errors have significant consequences that are not rectifiable or only rectifiable at significant cost. High degree of precision required.
Level 5	<p>Numerical Calculation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tasks involve multiple steps of calculation. Advanced mathematical techniques may be required. Numbers needed for calculations may need to be derived or estimated; approximations may need to be created in cases of uncertainty and ambiguity. Complex formulae, equations or functions may be used. <p>Numerical Estimation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Numerical Estimation is based on a four-level rating scale.

TOWES Testing Sessions

Winter 2008

The following testing sessions are scheduled at Bow Valley College (Main and Franklin campuses)
by BVC Programs Departments.

You must arrive on time, as doors will close promptly at testing start times.

Please be sure to bring your **STUDENT ID CARD**. **Photo ID is required.**

Further questions may be directed to your College Success Instructor.

MAIN CAMPUS PROGRAMS

<u>Program</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Room #</u>
Financial Services	April 14	9:00 am - 12:30 pm	LRS Testing Centre
Interior Decorating	April 14	9:00 am - 12:30 pm	LRS Testing Centre
Events Management	April 16	12:30 - 4:00 pm	LRS Testing Centre
Accounting & Financial Mgmt	April 16	12:30 - 4:00 pm	LRS Testing Centre
Office Administration	April 25	8:00 am - 11:30 am	LRS Testing Centre

FRANKLIN CAMPUS PROGRAMS

<u>Program</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Room #</u>
Disability & Community Support	April 19	9:00 am - 12:30 pm	Room 122
Early Learning & Child Care	April 19	9:00 am - 12:30 pm	Room 122
Education Assistant	April 25	12:30 - 4:00 pm	Room 122
Life Skills & Career Development	May 22	5:30 - 9:00 pm	Room 117

Check for updates on the TOWES website www.towes.ca - TOWES Test Taker Section
