**Engaging Adults with Low Literacy Levels**

<https://www.webjunction.org/events/webjunction/engaging-adults-with-low-literacy-levels.html>

In the U.S., there are 43 million adults–nearly one in five–who read below a third-grade level, and over half of all adults read below a sixth-grade level (National Action Plan for Adult Literacy, 2021). Low levels in literacy can impact many aspects of daily life including the ability to find and maintain employment, navigate health care needs, and complete government forms. This webinar will explore the characteristics of adults with low literacy levels and how they differ from those of adults with learning disabilities, including how and why each of these groups approaches reading. Learn about the importance and value of developing literacy skills, as well as strategies for library staff on how to identify when someone may need literacy support, how to broach the subject with a patron, and ways to suggest materials and resources to reluctant adults who may be struggling with literacy.

Presented by: Katharine Ware, Writing and Education Consultant

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| **What are your goals for viewing this webinar?** |
| **Personal Goals** |  |
| **Team Goals** |  |
| **Understanding Information Needs of Low Literacy Adults** |
| In the webinar, we learned about the characteristics of adults with low literacy levels and how they differ from those of adults with learning disabilities. Considering these characteristics, along with the many impacts of low literacy on the lives of your patrons, reflect on those interactions you’ve had with patrons and **brainstorm those information needs that are exponentially more challenging for adults with low literacy levels**. (Examples shared include: choosing a mobile phone, working through probate process online)1.
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| **Welcoming Adults with Low Literacy Levels** |
| In principle, libraries pride themselves on being welcoming spaces for all. In learning more about the additional challenges encountered by adults with low literacy, consider the ways your library can improve materials and methods that respect the strengths, experiences, and goals of these community members. **Consider each of the opportunities below within your own library context and brainstorm specific steps you can take in making adults with low literacy more welcome.*** Recognize their many roles/responsibilities and competing demands for their time
* Provide content that meaningfully builds on, and can be applied immediately to, their daily lives
* Help them overcome situational barriers such as: work schedules, childcare responsibilities, transportation, cost/perceived cost
* Support positive attitudes and feelings about school and learning that affect their decisions about further education
* Create supportive environments that reduce the stigma attached to low literacy
* Deliver in ways that allow flexibility and choice so that individuals can learn at their own pace, on their own time schedules, and under conditions that work best for them
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| **Addressing Collections for Low Literacy Levels** |
| As you look more closely at your library’s collections and other resources for patrons with low literacy, use these factors when selecting and suggesting texts. **Check those factors already included in your selection criteria, and circle those which need to be added to criteria.** Consider or discuss additional factors. Do not rely on readability formulasUse clear languageAvoid common labelsEmphasize abstract qualitiesFind the words your readers are usingDual modality (i.e. visual and audio)Be sure to explore resources collected on the event page that provide examples of collections, services and programs from other libraries serving adults with low literacy. |
| **Practicing with Patron Profiles** |
| In the webinar, two example profiles of adults with low literacy levels were shared for your reflection, and an additional profile is included in the [discussion activity](https://www.webjunction.org/content/dam/WebJunction/Documents/webJunction/2022-07/discussion-activity-engaging-adults-low-literacy.pdf) (pdf). Using your own experiences assisting patrons, along with the example profiles, **create a new patron profile that tells the story of an adult with low reading literacy**. Identify specific objectives in the profile that reflect the patron’s work or employment goals, specific parenting skills, or other desires to secure a better living situation or to self-improve.**Your Example Profile:** **Consider:*** What do you think is important to keep in mind about this person?
* What are your general thoughts about this person? Where does your brain go when talking to/about them? What kinds of questions would you ask them?
* What books/resources would you recommend [include 1 fiction and 1 non-fiction resource]? Why did you select these?
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| **Action Plan: (include next steps, when, who, etc.)** |

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