

US Adult Skills Facts



59 million adults have literacy skills at or below Level 1—the lowest level. They can understand very short, simple sentences, like determining from a job listing if the work is during the day or night or locating a phone number on a sign.



72 million adults have numeracy skills at or below the lowest level. They can use basic mathematical concepts and solve single-step problems, like comparing dates on food products to determine which was packed first or using simple math to determine the number of items in a box.



68 million adults have problem-solving skills at the lowest levels. They can understand single-step problems and situations with few variables and no irrelevant information, like using an interactive map to set a route to arrive by a planned time.

Why it Matters

\$300 billion Low literacy costs the US economy over \$300 billion in lost earnings, lower workplace productivity, higher crime, and more government assistance.

Employers in 4 surveyed industries that rely on low-skilled jobs see the impact of adult low literacy.

94% say employees in their organization have low literacy skills.

\$46 billion in revenue is lost due to employees' low literacy skills.

Reaching **Level 3** proficiency in literacy and numeracy improves a person's economic, social, and educational outcomes.

80% of people who live in poverty read at a Level 2 or below.

Those with skills at or below Level 1 are over **4X** more likely to live in poverty.

\$215 billion in health care costs are linked to low literacy.

- ER visits
- Office calls
- Prescription drugs

Children born to parents with low literacy skills are likely to have low skills themselves, perpetuating poverty and other socioeconomic issues related to low literacy.

Those with low health literacy spend **\$3,362/year** on prescriptions compared to \$910/year for those with above basic health literacy skills.

A mother's reading skill is the greatest determinant of her children's future academic success, outweighing other factors, such as neighborhood and family income.

Adult Education Works

Increasing a person's literacy skills just one level from the lowest level makes it **50% less likely** they will live in poverty.

Percent living in poverty

Level	Percent living in poverty
Level 1	33%
Level 2	17%
Level 3	7%
Level 4/5	3%

47% of adult education participants made skills gains over the course of a year.

English Language Learners

Nearly **one-in-five** workers in the workforce are new to the US.

Only **half** of newcomers in the US are proficient in English.

Educational attainment among newcomers varies, but on average **25%** have less than a high school diploma.

US Adult Skills Facts Sources

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