



# **Don't Take Yes for an Answer**

**and other tips for communicating across a language barrier**

**Presentation to the  
COAA Best Practices Conference**

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# The Near Future



- **Steady growth in Alberta's construction industry**
- **Non-residential employment to reach levels 10% above the peak in 2008**
- **New entrants to the workforce will not meet the need**
- **Industry will need to recruit 27,000 construction workers from other industries, regions or countries.**

*-Sector Council Source: ALBERTA  
Looking Forward: 2010 – 2018 Key Highlights*

# The New Reality



*“Immigrants are expected to account for all net labour force growth by 2011, and for all net population growth by 2031”*

-HRSDC: Skills and Learning for Canadians,  
[http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/publications\\_resources/research/categories/llsd/2002/km\\_slc/page07.shtml](http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/publications_resources/research/categories/llsd/2002/km_slc/page07.shtml)

# The Real Opportunity

- To optimize and leverage the skills of Internationally Trained Workers (ITWs) while mitigating and managing the challenges, *if any*
- To gain competitive advantage by recruiting, training, retaining and developing ITWs

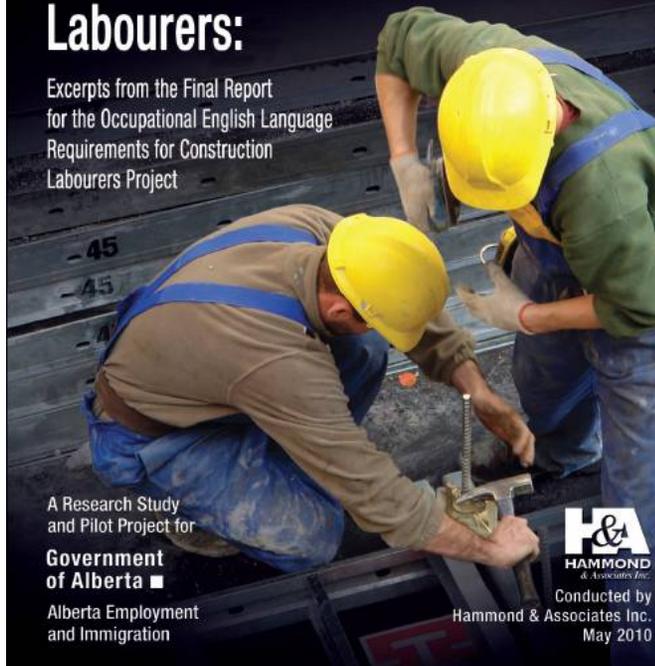


# Two Recent Projects



**Analyzing the Language Demands of Construction Labourers:**

Excerpts from the Final Report for the Occupational English Language Requirements for Construction Labourers Project



A Research Study and Pilot Project for  
**Government of Alberta** ■  
 Alberta Employment and Immigration

**H&A HAMMOND & Associates Inc.**  
 Conducted by Hammond & Associates Inc. May 2010



**Analyzing the Language Demands of Electricians**

By: Hammond & Associates Inc.  
 January 2011

**H&A HAMMOND & Associates Inc.**

A project for:

- Electrical Contractors Association of Alberta
- The International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 424

Funded by:

- Electrical Industry Education Trust Fund of Alberta
- Government of Alberta ■

[www.hammondassociatesinc.com](http://www.hammondassociatesinc.com)

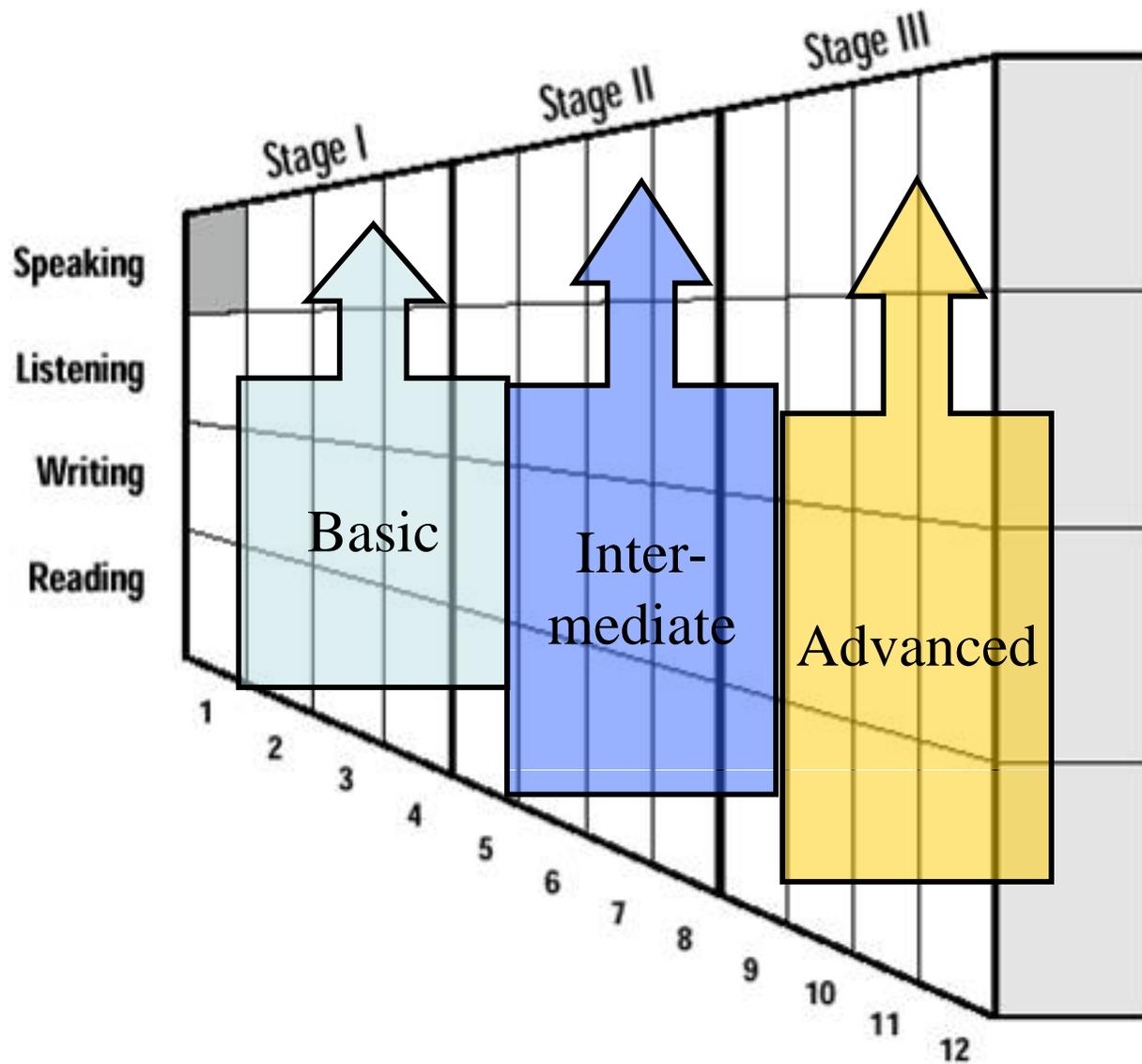
# The Canadian Language Benchmarks



- **Canada's national standard for describing, measuring and recognizing the second language proficiency of adult immigrants and prospective immigrants for living in Canada**

See: [www.language.ca](http://www.language.ca)

## Schematic Structure of the Canadian Language Benchmarks



# Lessons Learned

- **It's not just English**



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# Lessons Learned



- **It's not just one number**

Occupation	Construction Labourers		Electricians	
	Routine	Spikes	Routine	Spikes
Speaking	5	6	5-6	6
Listening	5	6	5-6	7-8
Reading	4	6	5-6	6-8
Writing	3	4	5	5

# Lessons Learned

- **The numbers aren't the same, anyway**
- **What level of English I need to work for you depends on:**
  - The work
  - The people
  - The processes
  - The systems



# Example: Toolbox Talk

- **Same task, three companies, three results**
  - **Company A: Listening CLB 5-6**
  - **Company B: Listening CLB 6-7**
  - **Company C: Listening CLB 7-8**



# In Summary

- **It's a team effort**



# Strategies for Supervisors



## Let's start with the supervisor 10 strategies to use tomorrow

### 1. Don't take yes for an answer

- Why would someone *not* tell you they don't understand?
- It's probably the wrong question, anyway
  - Ask open-ended questions (5 W's)
  - Tell me what I just told you
  - Show me what I just told you

## 2. A picture is worth a 1000 words

- **Show vs. Tell**



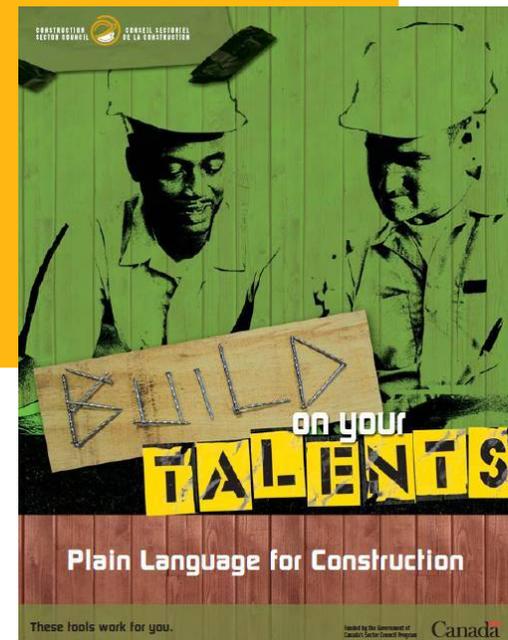
### 3. Rephrase using *different* words

- For example, say
  - “tell” vs. notify, inform, advise, indicate, report to...
  - “start “vs. initiate, commence, undertake, implement, instigate
- Use the dictionary term or explain the slang or brand name (e.g. pliers vs. kleins or linesman)
- Explain acronyms or abbreviations e.g., FLHA
- A Clear Language Guide for the Construction Industry [www.hammondassociatesinc.com](http://www.hammondassociatesinc.com)
- Building on Your Talents [www.whhttp://www.csc-ca.org/en/products/plain-language-constructionateveritis.com](http://www.whhttp://www.csc-ca.org/en/products/plain-language-constructionateveritis.com)

#### Good Resources



#### Clear Language Guide FOR THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY



## 4. Modify fast, reduced speech

- Translate this:

*Wellwuzzygonnagetiternot?*

- Intonation makes a difference
- Little sounds matter; emphasize them!
  - canNOT vs. can't; did not vs. didn't;
  - DISconnect; UNhook; MISaligned;  
DISassemble; UNnecessary

## 5. Use sequence markers

- **Use clear sequence markers**
  - First, second, third
  - One, two, three, four
  - Then, next, after that, do this...
- **Be careful with multiple clauses**
  - Before doing/Prior to doing x, do x...
  - Do not do x, until x
  - If you are going to do x, then be sure to ...
  - While doing this, do that...
  - Under no circumstances are you to...
- **Package instructions in smaller units**

## 6. Don't be passive (grammatically)



- Choose active vs. passive word order
- Active voice (S-V-O) is shorter, clearly states or implies the subject (who does the action) and uses an easier form of the verb (e.g., wear vs. worn; drive vs. driven)

Active	Passive
<b>Subject – Verb – Object</b>	<b>Object – Verb – Subject</b>
Visitors must wear safety goggles.	Safety goggles must be worn by visitors.
Obey all safety rules.	All safety rules must be obeyed.
No cell phones or radios.	The use of cell phones or radios is prohibited.

## 7. Avoid or explain idioms

- An idiom's guide to communication ☺

*Idiom (def'n): words, phrases or expressions that cannot be taken literally*

- **Examples:**

- *Off the top of my head, I'd say...*
- *He's breathing down my neck.*
- *Good housekeeping is the cornerstone to safety.*
- *I'm gonna give him a little more rope...*
- *Two rolled ankles and a headbanger*
- *(In fall protection training): a beaver tail and a dog collar*

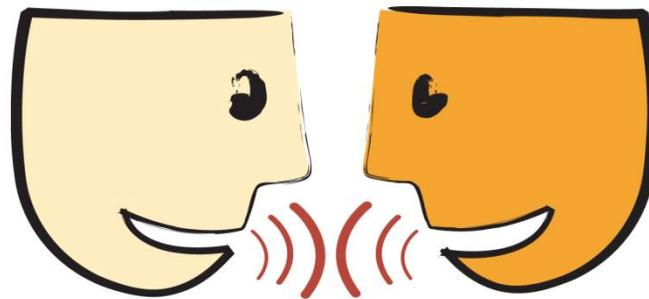
## 8. Watch the sports metaphors

- **From Baseball:** *Cover your bases, touch base; Step up to the plate; way over his head; bring it home; dropping the ball; way off-base*
- **Name the Sport:**
  - *It's a long shot, but...*
  - *Way over his head*
  - *Jump the gun*
  - *Carry it across the goal lines*
  - *You're out of bounds*



## 9. Let them see you talk

- **Face-to-face communication is much easier to follow**
- **Phone and radio communication may benefit from some standard terms and checks**



## 10. Put yourself in their shoes



- **Be patient**
- **Think about “what would help me”?**
- **Reflect on your own reactions**



***Thank you!***

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