



The literacy and numeracy requirements and demands of entry-level supermarket work.

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Terms used:

Entry level worker / supermarket assistant.

- those at the lowest level in the supermarket hierarchy with no line or staff responsibilities.

Literacy and numeracy requirements.

- literacy and numeracy pre-requisites to obtain work

Literacy and numeracy demands.

- literacy and numeracy encountered and used:
 - at the time of induction
 - while learning the job
 - as daily tasks are performed

Outline

- Methodology – brief!
- Findings
 - ‘Requirements’- pre-requisites for employment
 - ‘Demands’ – on the job
 - Numeracy
- Implications for training/instruction.

Methodology

- Interviews
 - Managers
 - Assistants
- Observation
 - Assistants
 - Induction
- Analysis
 - Assistants' job description
 - Job advertisements for assistants

Participants

23 participants:

- 7 assistants

- 7 managers

- 9 inductees (all assistants)

12 different national or cultural groups

Managers' pre-requisites for employment

- Literacy and numeracy not mentioned.
- (Oral) communication skills
- Also
 - Reliability and of 'good character'
 - well-presented - neat and tidy
 - motivated and willing to learn
 - fit and healthy
 - Can work any day of the week
 - Previous experience not required

- Assumption: literacy and numeracy skills are sufficient if applicant has the required oral communication skills .
- *“Basically, I’d say I just hope they do have it. If they can speak proper English, I just assume that they can write English and read English.”*

(Seafood Manager)

Job demands

- **Customer service**
 - a. Interaction with customers
 - “spoken language is usually context-specific, polite but brief, almost ritualised” Searle (1991, p.35)
 - b. Product knowledge and presentation
 - Multifaceted

Customer Service



A six-teeth smile

“There is not a lot of reading and writing in their jobs” (Human Resources and Training Manager)

- **Right**

- literacy events requiring extended reading and writing are rare (Searle, 2005, 1991)

- **Wrong**

- Many work in literacy -rich environments.
 - A wide repertoire of multimodal literacy and numeracy strategies is required to establish meaning





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- Many work in literacy -rich environments.
 - A wide repertoire of multimodal literacy and numeracy strategies is required to establish meaning
 - Writing informal and ‘customised’

Numeracy

- Often 'invisible' because it is embedded.
- unlike mathematics studied at school (Marr and Hagston 2007)
- requires a repertoire of different skills:
 - ability to estimate, 'reasonableness'
 - accuracy with mental arithmetic
 - understanding and ability to work with different date formats
 - understanding of graphs and tables

Traceability for Salads: 2 days storage life*

Product	Supplier	Date Opened	BB4 Day	Sign	Date Remove from Display		Action Taken	Sign
					Guideline date	Actual Date		
Wild Rice	Speirs	21/9	11/9	---	4/9	3/9	Sold	---
egg + potato	Speirs	21/9	14/9	---	4/9	21/9	Sold	---
Chicken Pesto Orzo	FIT/G	21/9	6/9	---	4/9	31/9	Sold	---
Baby Pot Swiss Cream	FIT/G	21/9	8/9	---	4/9	3/9	Sold	---
Potato Salad	Speirs	21/9	13/9	---	4/9	31/9	Sold	---
Falafel	Pita Bread	21/9	10/3/8	---	4/9	2/9	Sold	---
Potato salad	Speirs	21/9	13/9	---	4/9	3/9	Sold	---
egg + potato	Speirs	21/9	21/9	---	4/9	3/9	Sold	---
chicken pesto	Salads to go	21/9	6/9	---	4/9	3/9	Sold	---
weopaltain Pesto	Salads to go	21/9	7/9	---	4/9	3/9	Sold	---
Coleslaw	Speirs	21/9	10/9	---	4/9	3/9	Sold	---
Coleslaw	Speirs	3/9	9/9	---	5/9	5/9	Sold	---
Potato salad	Speirs	3/9	16/9	---	5/9	4/9	Sold	---
Chicken pesto	Salads to go	3/9	7/9	---	5/9	4/9	Sold	---
Dijon chicken	Salads to go	3/9	8/9	---	5/9	4/4/9	Sold	---
Smoked chicken	Nutri Fare	3/9	14/9	---	5/9	4/9	Sold	---

* Form when the product is first opened to when it is sold (the customer shelf/life must fall within the "Best Before Date" set by the manufacturer)

Example of Traceability Documentation

CAN NOT SOLD DATE WHEN
PRODUCT HAS TO BE OUT OF
STORE.

Implications for training

Non-work settings

A. Employment pre-requisites

- Social and cultural morés underpinning work
- Presentation skills
- Interview skills
- CV
- Form filling
- Work enquiries – ‘cold’ calling, networking

Implications for training

Non-work settings (cont)

B. Foundation for on-the-job communication, literacy and numeracy learning .

- social and cultural morés underpinning work.
- communication skills
- Exposure to a range of texts including IT.
- Problem-solving approach/ strategies
- Understanding of mathematical concepts
- Voluntary work experience

Some implications for training

Work settings

- Ensure management appreciation of workplace literacy and numeracy characteristics
- Recognize potential for literacy and numeracy 'issues' amongst staff
- Encourage problem solving, identify strategies
- Practise oral interactions
- Review role of induction and induction texts
- Plan a career path – potentially 'dead end' work









Carlsberg Beer, Beck's, Stella Artois, Corona

Mac's Black, Mac's Copperhead, Mac's Gold, Mac's Red, Mac's White, Mac's Dark

King of the Hill, Doritos, M&M's, Dark

Carlsberg, Beck's, Corona, Mac's Gold, M&M's, Doritos

0.99, 13.95, 18.99, 21.95, 21.95, 12.99, 12.99, 19.90, 11.90