

**RIFLI Computer Skills Curriculum Aligned to**

**Northstar Digital Literacy Assessment**

**Introduction**

This RIFLI computer skills curriculum has been designed to meet the needs of adult English language learners (ELLs). The idea of designing a computer curriculum for ELLs was in response to ESL learners who expressed the need for computer skills classes that moved at a slower pace, included more support and afforded opportunities for further practice of their skills. The elements that we found helpful for learners and have included in this curriculum are:

* modules that implement the features of the teaching and learning cycle: assessment, evaluation, planning, and teaching
* a vocabulary list to pre-teach terms needed for comprehension of content
* instructional videos allowing students to review big ideas outside of class and as a means of offering another mode of learning
* further practice and application of skills
* formative assessments

As part of the teaching and learning cycle, we have aligned this curriculum with fourof the Northstar Digital Literacy Assessments, here after referred to as NS. Learners who master the skills in any module will receive a NS certificate and a digital badge upon achieving 85% mastery on the corresponding assessments. The assessments used are: Basic Computer Skills, World Wide Web, Email, and Microsoft Word. RIFLI is a sponsoring site for Northstar and our trained proctors can issue the certificates for learners from any agency.

**Lessons Learned**

We piloted this curriculum with 17 ESL adult students in a 12 week course that met twice a week for 2 hours each in the Summer of 2014. We gave the Northstar assessment at the start of each corresponding module and found that learners often needed more than 45 minutes to complete the assessments. To eliminate frustration for individuals with no computer skills and/or low literacy skills, Northstar has an alternative screening process, which is available to sponsoring sites. Following is a description from the Northstar Admin site: “ [Northstar Pre-Assessment Screeners](https://sites.google.com/site/mnlearnerweb/projects/northstar" \t "_blank) - These screeners are provided as a quick and easy way to determine whether low-literacy individuals have a level of computer skills needed to take the Northstar assessments in a meaningful manner. If individuals have very low skills, it is best to provide some instruction prior to having them take the assessments so they do not become overly frustrated by attempting to complete assessments far above their skill level. There are two versions of the screener for each module, one for large group screening and one for one-to-one screening. The use of these screeners is not required, but recommended for use with low skills.”

For learners who do the on-line pre-assessment, NS is a formative assessment tool and learners should not spend a lot of time trying to figure out the correct answer. Instead, learners should click on the ‘I don’t know’ button at the bottom of their screen. The assessments are performance based and inform instructors of what students can and cannot do. Teachers can print out the assessment results for each student. We do, however, acknowledge that ELLs are processing language while taking these assessments and consequently, we allow more time. Some students felt overwhelmed in doing an assessment and learning new content during the same class session.

Because the online assessments can be very time consuming, teachers may want to use hard copy or some other pre-assessment tool. The post assessment, however, must be done online with Northstar and through a proctoring site in order to issue certificates and digital badges.

As with any class, learners process information and progress at different paces. We found it invaluable to have volunteers work as assistant teachers. They were able to give one-on-one help and ensure all students were able to follow the lessons. They also provided extra information when needed and helped resolve technical difficulties. Our volunteers had excellent computer skills and technical knowledge.

Although we were able to cover enough content in each module, it did not ensure that every learner mastered the skills and received a certificate. Our recommendation is to provide multiple opportunities for learners to practice and apply their skills. If you have volunteers, allowing learners to work on different skills until they master them, would be most helpful. We found that learners who were practicing outside of class, made the most progress. We also allowed learners to work on the skills that were most important to them.

Our learners were working on Microsoft Surfaces with a Windows 8 operating system and our curriculum is designed for Windows 8. Northstar has an assessment for Windows 7 and a Mac operating system; therefore, we did not use their assessment.

We hope you will find our curriculum useful. **We ask that if you reproduce and/or use a modified version of this curriculum that you give credit to the Rhode Island Family Literacy Initiative (RIFLI).**

**Acknowledgements**

We would like to acknowledge and thank St. Paul, MN Public Library and Broadband RI Digital Literacy for sharing their curricula with us. From St. Paul Library we adapted parts of their Basic Computer Skills curriculum and from BBRI, we adapted the Internet Safety and Privacy Basics of the Broadband RI Digital Literacy Train the Trainers curriculum to meet our needs. We have aligned the content of this curriculum with the Northstar Digital Literacy Assessment standards. An extra special thank you goes to the Rhode Island Office of Library and Information Services (OLIS). The development of this project was supported by the Institute of Museum and Library Services through the Library Service and Technology Act which is administered by OLIS.