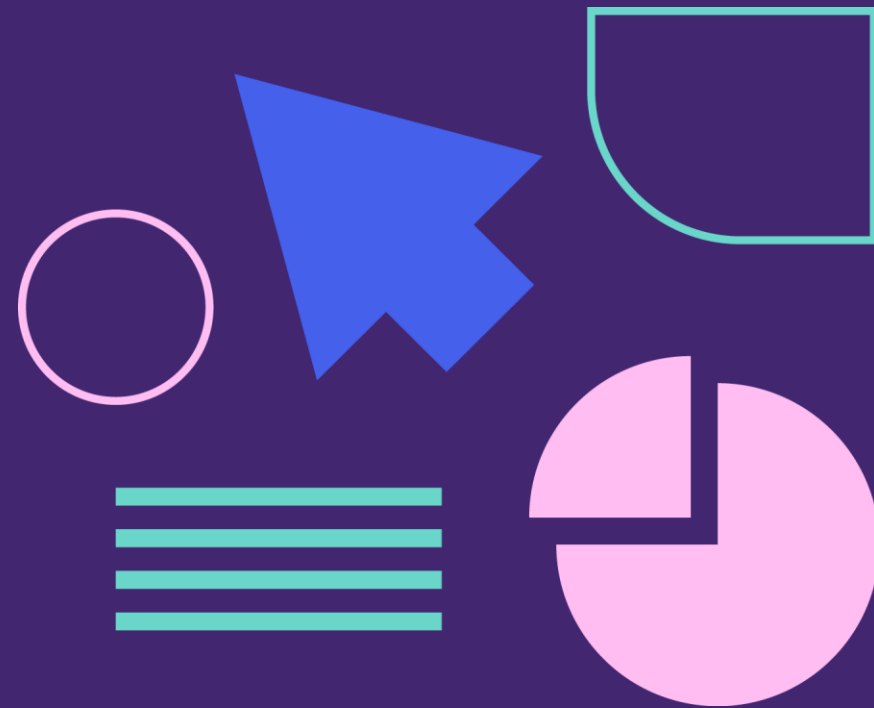


Adult literacy and inequality in Ireland today

Webinar with The Wheel
AONTAS Spring into Learning festival

3 March 2026



National Adult Literacy Agency

What we do?

We support adults to improve their reading, writing, everyday maths and digital literacy.

We support organisations to use **and** promote a literacy friendly approach.

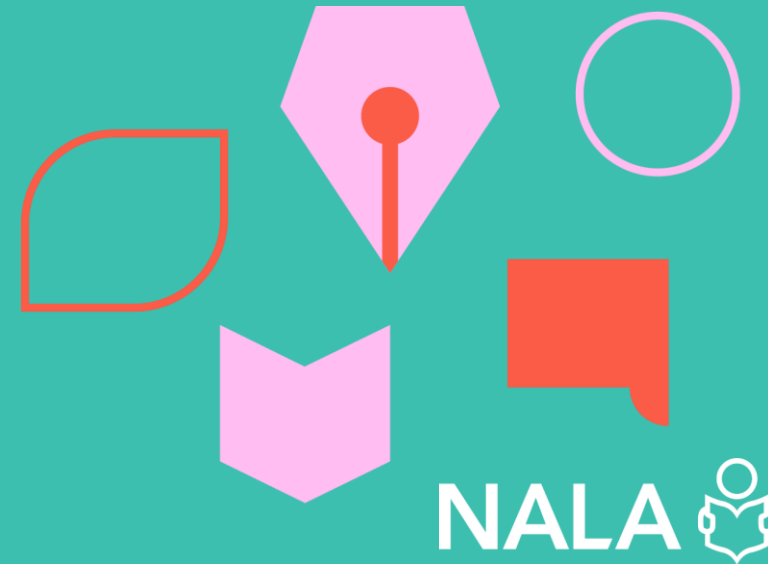


Outline

1. Introduction
2. Literacy for life
3. Literacy in Ireland
4. Plain English
5. Supports available



What is literacy?



Literacy is...

- Reading and understanding
- Writing and spelling
- Everyday numbers
- Digital technology
- Listening and speaking
- Confidence and self-esteem

[NALA's Literacy for Life report, 2020](#)

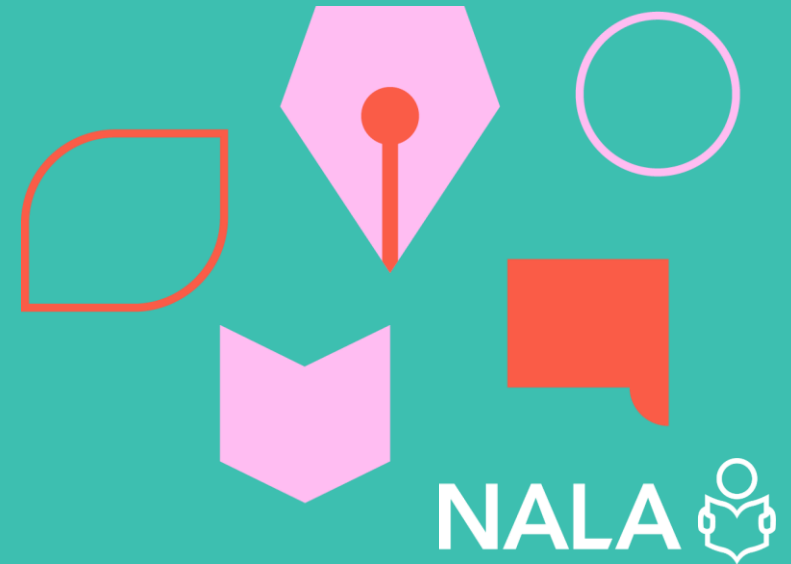


The impact of literacy on life

Maurice Sammon



Literacy in Ireland



Latest research

Survey of Adult Skills 2023

- Survey = questionnaire and assessment
- Adult = age 16-65
- Skills =
 - Literacy (reading)
 - Numeracy (maths)
 - Adaptive problem-solving

International

[OECD Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies \(PIAAC\)](#)

Ireland

[Central Statistics Office \(CSO\)](#)

Ireland – headline results

- Scores grouped into 5 levels (different to NFQ levels)
- At or below Level 1 = literacy / numeracy needs



Literacy

21%

1 in 5

700,000 adults



Numeracy

25%

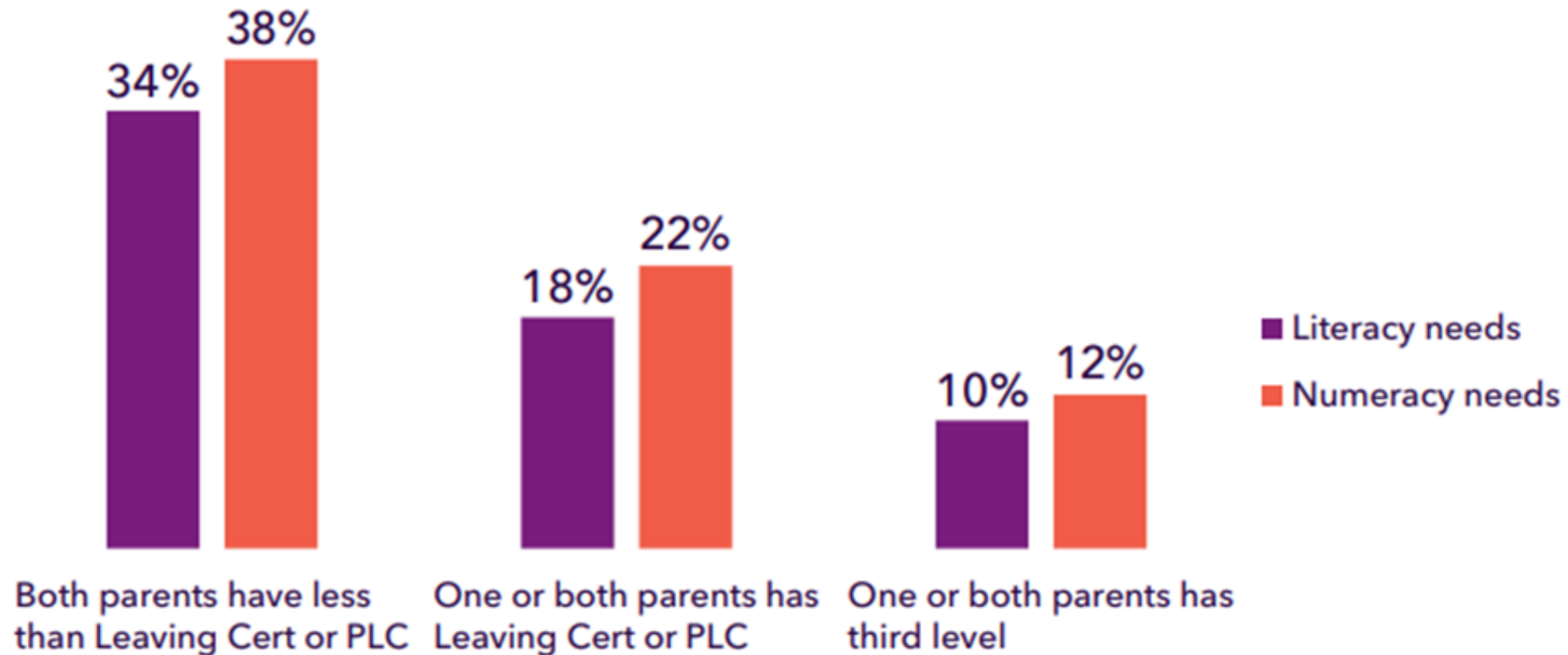
1 in 4

835,000 adults

Higher levels of need

Group	How many have literacy needs?
All adults	21%
55-65 year-olds	33%
Workers in Transportation and Storage	35%
Adults without upper secondary education	61%

Intergenerational disadvantage



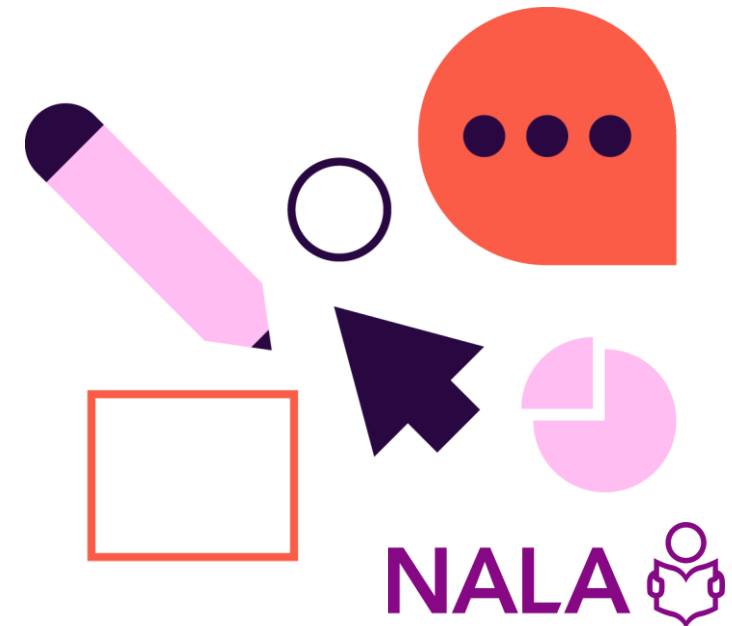
What “literacy needs” means

Most adults with literacy needs can understand and find information in short, simple texts.

Most texts are not short and simple!

Consider:

- emails
- workplace policies
- Garda vetting forms



Real world impact

People with literacy or numeracy needs are more likely to...

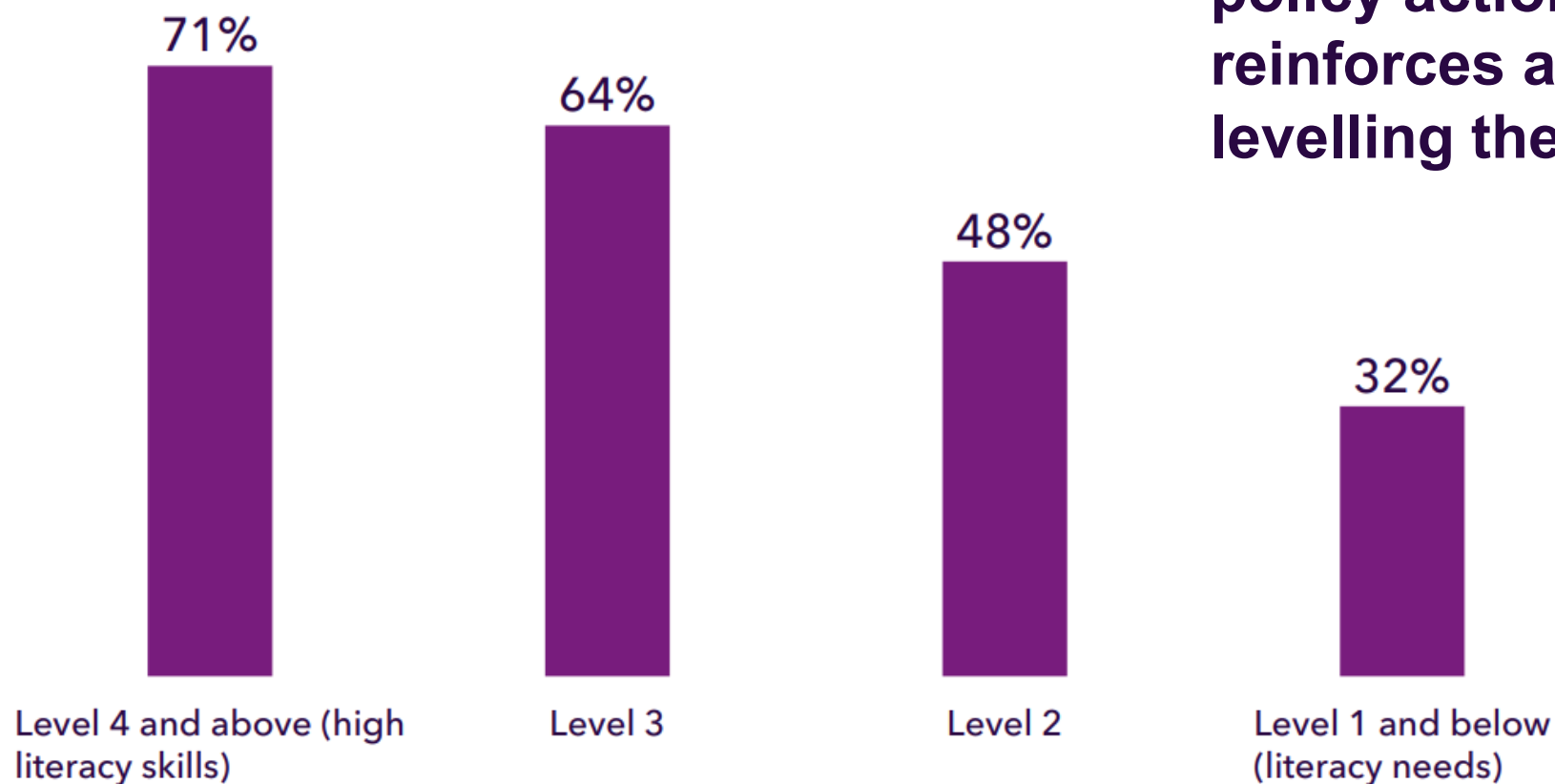
- have poor health
- have low income
- be unemployed

And less likely to...

- be very satisfied with their life
- trust others
- believe they have a say in government
- take part in adult learning



Adult learning rates



“Without deliberate, coordinated policy action, adult learning reinforces advantage rather than levelling the playing field.”

[OECD policy brief](#)

Adult Learning

Barriers

[OECD Trends in Adult Learning report](#)

- Time
- Childcare
- Cost

Impact

[AONTAS Learner Voices Across Ireland report](#)

- Confidence
- Belonging
- Wellbeing

*“It has gave me great confidence ...
I just felt it was something I was doing
for myself as I fell through the cracks in
school”*

[Learning with NALA report](#)

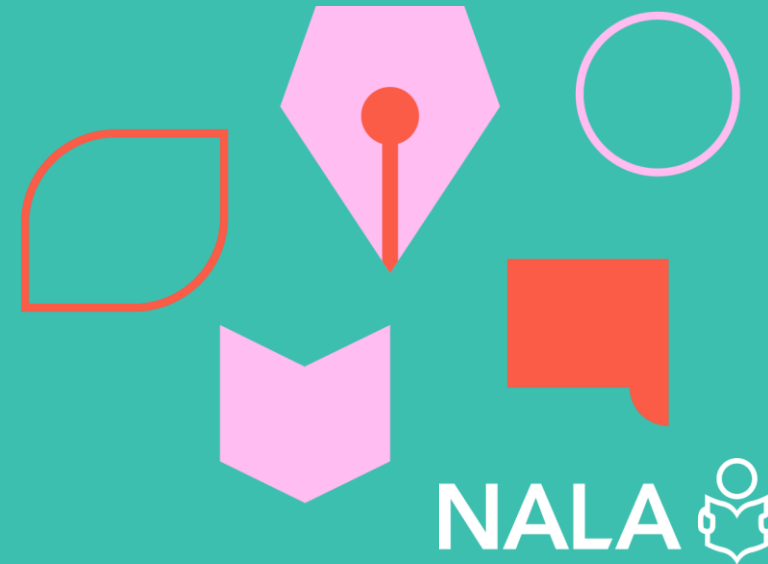
More information

NALA factsheets

www.nala.ie/literacy-and-numeracy-in-ireland/



Literacy Friendly Approach



Taking a literacy friendly approach means:

Using this approach means:

1. **being aware,**
2. **taking account** of needs,
3. **removing** literacy related **barriers**, and
4. **promoting literacy friendly** approaches

Why take a literacy friendly approach:

You can't be sure who understands information or services

Literacy is situational

Everyone benefits from clear information

Use a '**universal precautions approach**' - treat everybody as if they are at risk of not understanding information.

Look out for possible signs of a literacy or numeracy issue

How you use a service



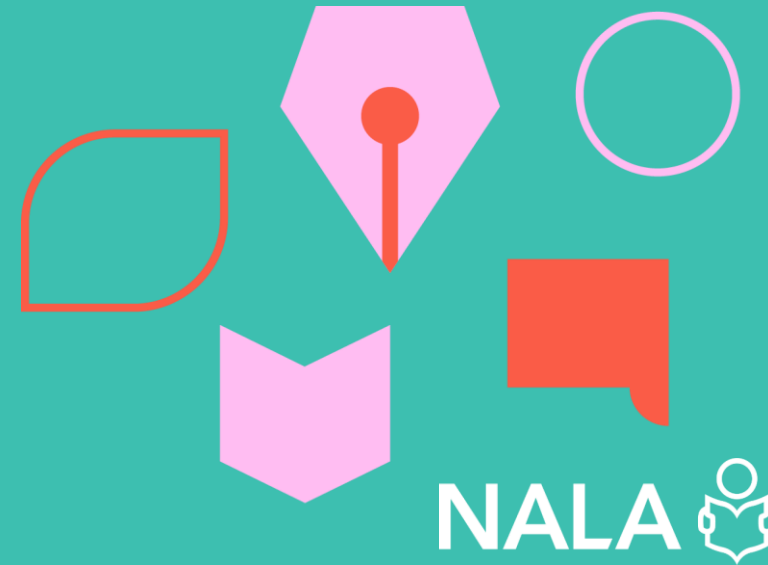
Public places



Using technology



Plain English



Are you using plain English?


**Plain
English**
Approved by NALA



Why use plain English?

Better access

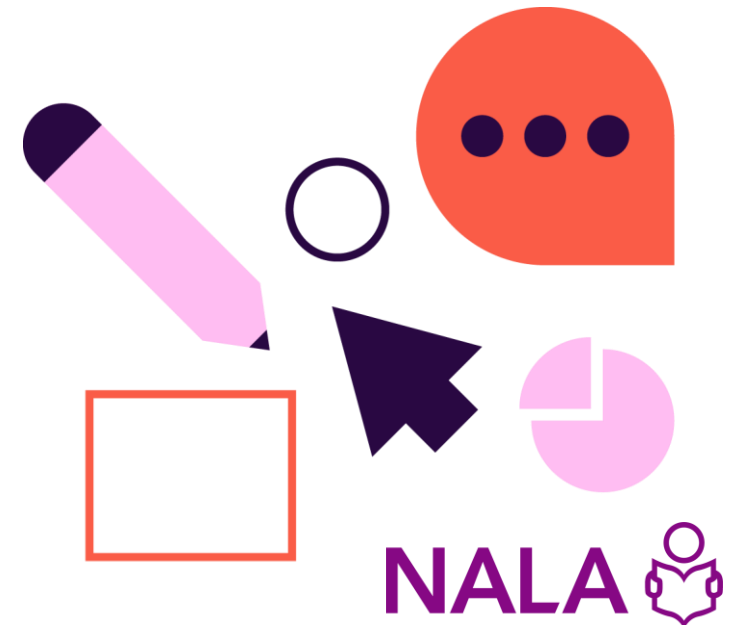
Better
understanding

Fewer
mistakes

Fewer
questions

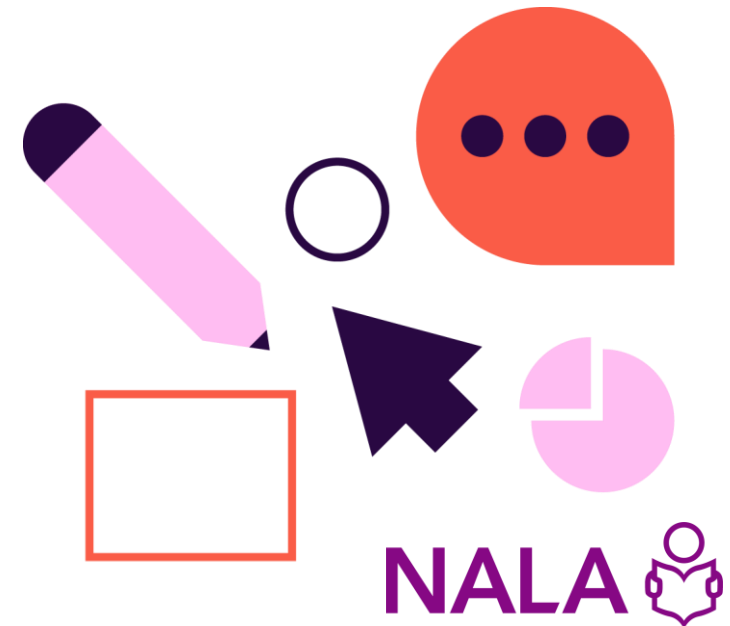
Saves time

Saves money



Top five plain English writing tips

- Imagine your readers and speak directly to them
- Use the active voice
- Use everyday words – cut jargon and explain technical words
- Keep sentences short, use 15-20 words
- Use the inverted pyramid of writing
- Use white space, headings and bullets to break up text



Using plain English in practice

- DON'T USE ALL CAPITALS, lower case is easier to read.
- Line spacing of 1.5
- Align to the left
- Use bold for emphasis not italics



[Writing and Design Tips booklet](#)

Using plain English in practice

- Use sans serif fonts like Arial
- Use font size 12
- Define acronyms like NALA
- Use the active voice



[Customer Communications Toolkit
for Services to the Public](#)

Before

Dear Residents - we would appreciate your help in getting a clear picture of the skills and training needs that you may have.

ABCDE will be able to deliver a number of skills based training and we would like to know which may be of most benefit to you.

If you can complete the follow Jot Form ([link here](#)) and submit your response by Wednesday 25th September, we will move forward to arrange this training as soon as possible.

After

Please tell us about training you'd like to do

Dear resident,

I want to contact you about training.

We can organise classes to help you learn new skills and practise the skills you have.

To help us, please fill in the form below with your information before
Wednesday 25 September.

We will then organise the training as soon as possible.

Derv from X

Before

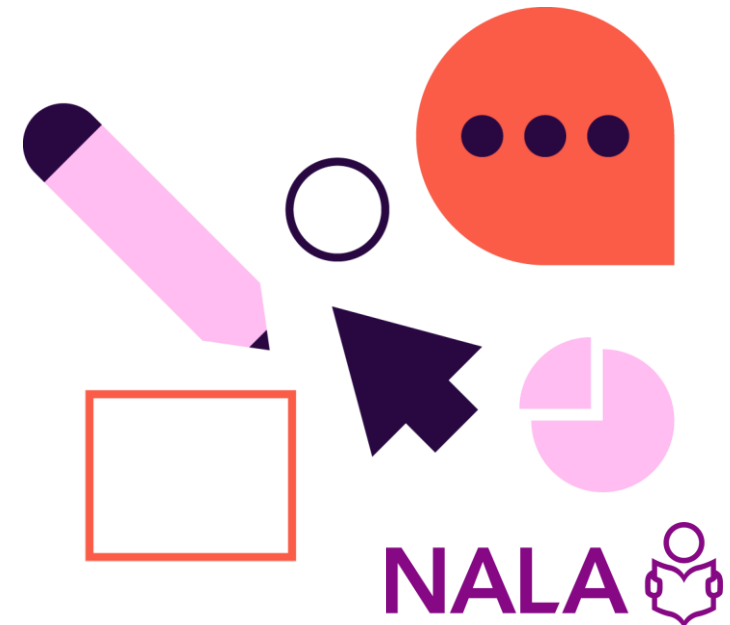
Safe & Confidential

Crisis Support Line

The National Traveller Mental Health Network offers a free support service that is available to anyone from the Traveller Community who is seeking support or information about issues relating to their own mood or the mood of a friend or family member.

(Monday – Friday between the hours of 9AM – 5PM,
4PM on Fridays)

Call Us (01) 868 5761



After

Crisis Support Line

If you or a friend or family member are feeling down,
you can call us for free.

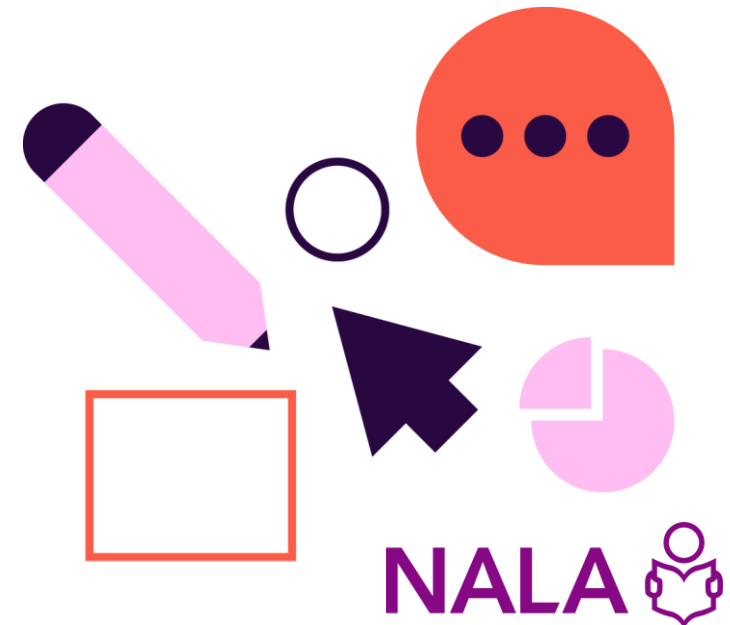
We provide information and support to get you through.

Call 01 872 1094

Monday – Thursday 9am – 5pm

Friday 9am – 4pm

Safe and Confidential



Before

Office Use

Membership No. _____ Other No. _____

Borrower Type: _____ PIN: _____

**CARLOW
COUNTY LIBRARY
Membership Form**

C A R L O W
COUNTY COUNCIL
COMHARA CHONTAE CHATHARLOUGH



Surname: _____ First Name: _____

Permanent Address: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Nationality: _____ First Language: _____

Male: ☐ Female: ☐ Date of Birth: __/__/____

Age Group: 0-13 ☐ 14-18 ☐ 18-30 ☐ 30-40 ☐ 40-50 ☐ 50-64 ☐ 65+ ☐

Please tick if you wish to receive SMS and email notices/reminders: ☐

I agree to abide by the terms and conditions of Carlow County Library Service: ☐

Signature: _____ Date: __/__/____

Children under the age of 18 years require a guarantor's signature:

Guarantor's Signature: _____ PRINT: _____

Address: _____ Phone No: _____

I wish this child to use the Internet in any of Carlow County Libraries:

Membership form: Carlow County Library Service

After

Please fill in your details in the boxes below.

First name

Surname

Date of birth

Would you like to get a monthly library news email?

Yes ☐

No ☐

Can we share your membership details with other Irish libraries?

Yes ☐

No ☐

Permanent address

Email

Phone

How can we remind you about requested books and loans? Email ☐ Text Message ☐ None of these ☐

I agree to follow the terms and conditions of Carlow County Library Service.

Your signature

Date

SAMPLE - ADULT FORM

Sample form
to use as a
guide

Membership form: Carlow County Library Service	
Please fill in your details in the boxes below.	
First name	JOE
Surname	MURPHY
Date of birth	24-07-1976
Would you like to get a monthly library news email? Yes ☒ No ☐	
Can we share your membership details with other Irish libraries? Yes ☒ No ☐	
Permanent address	8 THE PARK, GREEN AVENUE, CARLOW, R93 X1C8.
Email	jojo1976@gmail.com
Phone	088 582 6565
How can we remind you about requested books and loans? Email ☒ Text Message ☐ None of these ☐	
I agree to follow the terms and conditions of Carlow County Library Service.	
Your signature	Joe Murphy
Date	6-01-2023

To join the library you will need:

Photo ID - examples



Passport



PPS card



Garda Age card



Driving
licence



Student card

+ Proof of Address - examples



Driving
licence



Utility bill eg. Gas,
Electricity,
Internet, Phone



Official letter or
document
from bank,
government etc.

Examples of what documents you need to join the library

Supports



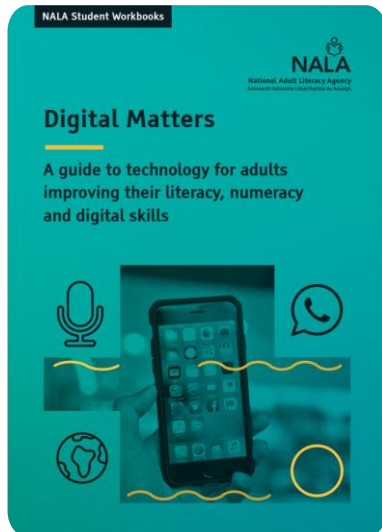
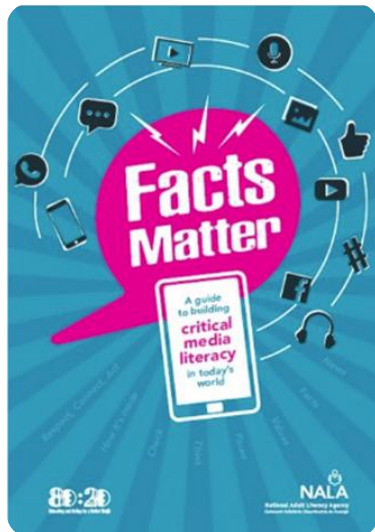
What NALA offers

- Freephone **1800 20 20 65**
- [Learn with NALA](#)
- Free tutoring over the phone
- Literacy awareness workshops
- [Plain English training and editing](#)





NALA resources



- Over 1,000 resources (worksheets, videos, books)
- Monthly worksheets for adults
- Literacy, numeracy and digital literacy workbooks
- Professional development courses



Visit www.nala.ie/tutors



Order Workbooks: <https://www.nala.ie/order-resources/>

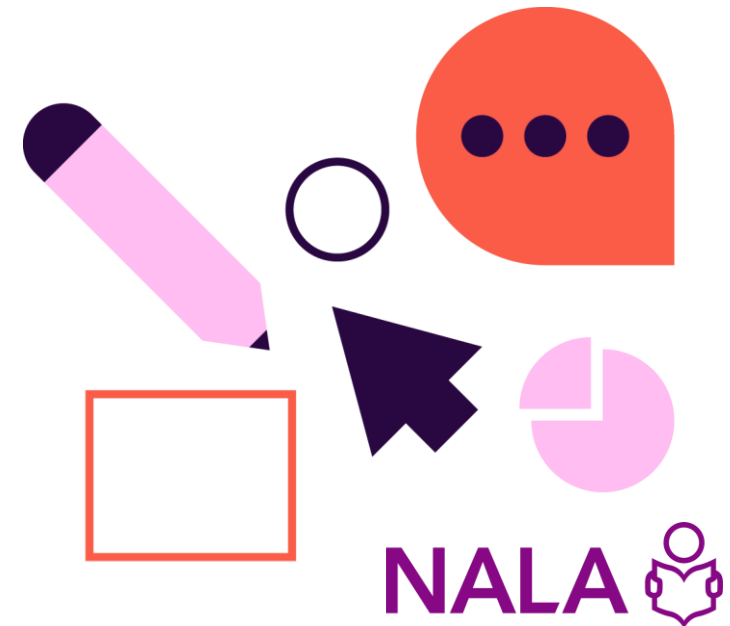
Free online courses with NALA

You can do professional development courses about literacy for free on our Learn on with NALA website.

- [Understanding literacy, numeracy and digital literacy](#)
- [Becoming literacy friendly](#)

The courses take about 45 minutes to 1 hour to complete.

You will get a NALA Professional Development Certificate on completion of the course.

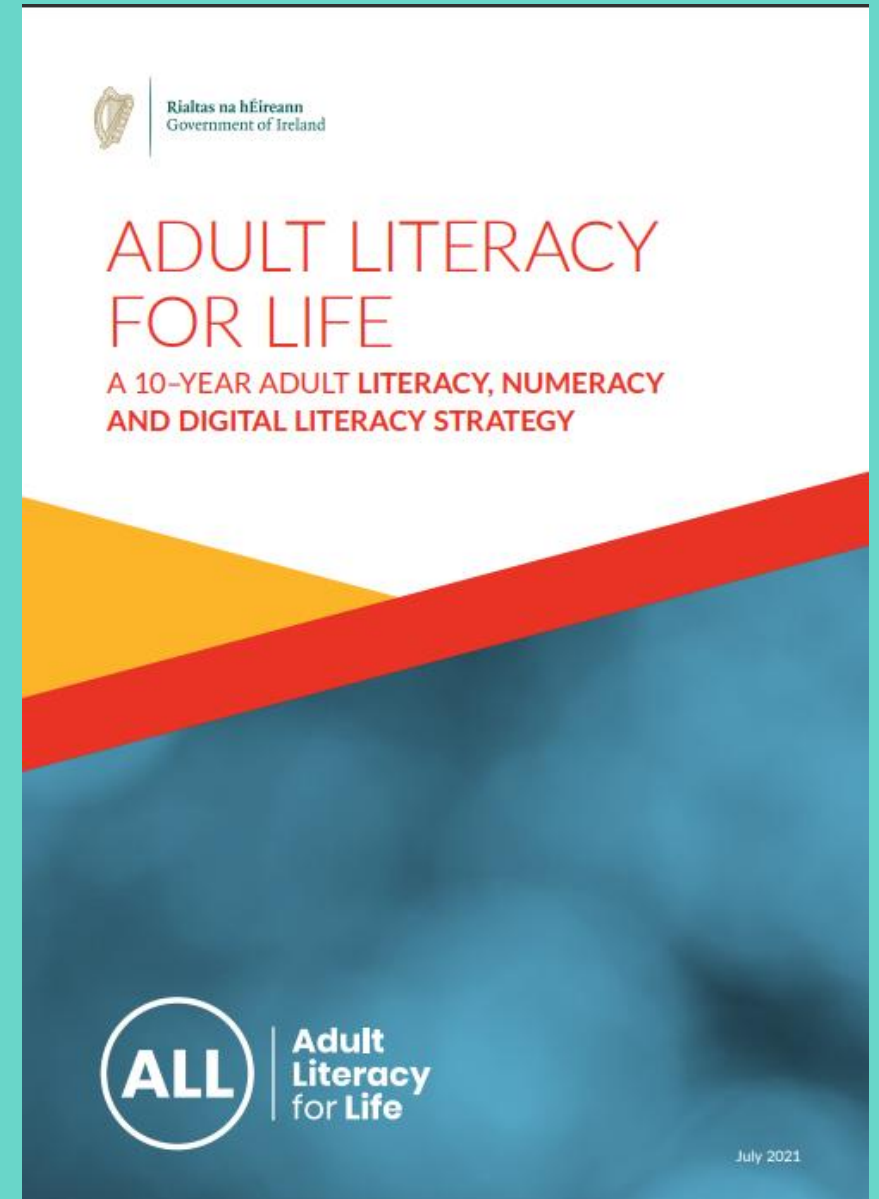


Local adult literacy services

- Delivered through the 16 **Education and Training Boards (ETBs)**.
- Free and confidential.
- Small groups and one-to-one tuition.
- Delivered by trained tutors.
- Can work towards QQI awards.

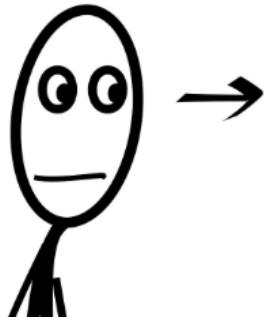
Adult Literacy for Life

- [10-year government strategy](#)
focused on the furthest behind first
- [16 Regional Adult Literacy Coordinators](#)
- [Collaboration and Innovation Fund](#)
- [Online courses](#)



Promote literacy friendly approaches

1. Look out for barriers



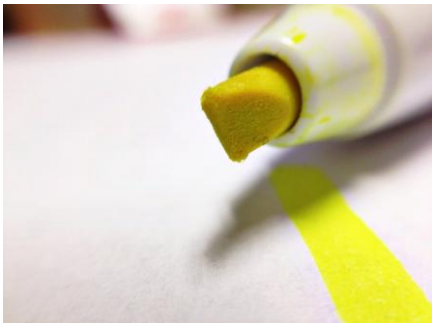
2. Speak up



3. Think before you speak



4. Highlight literacy needs



5. Ask why



6. Avoid jargon



Join NALA as a member today!

National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) members:

- receive regular updates about literacy in Ireland and our activities;
- can vote at our Annual General Meeting;
- get a 10% discount on our plain English editing and training service (Organisational members only);
- support our work and advocacy; and
- give us insights and feedback to inform our work.

[Join now](#)

You can get in touch:

Aoife Crawford

Email: acrawford@nala.ie

Derv Ryan

Email: dryan@nala.ie

Phone: (01) 412 7900

Website: www.nala.ie

