

**Service Sector Workers' Skills:  
Findings from PIAAC and Implications for Educators**  
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**Research questions**

- What is the incidence of low literacy, numeracy, and digital skills among service-sector workers?
- What are the skills that workers need to use on the job?
- What percentage of workers are attempting to upskill or pursue additional education?

**Findings and discussion**

- Overall, 62% of service-sector workers in the target occupational categories have limited literacy skills, and 74% have limited numeracy skills. Seventy-three percent (73%) lack digital problem-solving skills, not including the workers who declined to take the technology portion of the test.
- Among workers with low skills, a majority (61%) are women. Nearly half (46%) are white, 20% are black, 26% Hispanic, 5% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 4% report their race or ethnicity as other. A quarter (25%) are immigrants, and 75% are **over** the age of 25.
- Despite their low skills, many of these workers regularly need to use literacy and numeracy skills at their current jobs: 73% need to read directions; 55% use computers; 50% calculate prices, costs, and budgets; and 36% **write** letters, memos, and e-mails. More than half (55%) are actively engaged in **learning** new things in their current jobs, and 38% are **teaching** others on the job. Nearly one in four (23%) are **supervisors**.
- Some low-skilled workers had recently demonstrated interest in upskilling: 27% had pursued a formal degree or certificate program in the past year.

**Policy/practice implications**

- Employers can address upskilling needs by: 1) Participating in industry sector partnerships to identify talent gaps and meet training needs; 2) serving as the employer partner for registered apprenticeship programs; 3) partnering with training organizations and community colleges.
- Policymakers can address upskilling by: 1) Investing in adult education and workforce development programs; 2) investing in sector partnerships; 3) incentivizing private investment in upskilling through employer tax credits and other mechanisms; 4) implementing proven models such as Integrated Education and Training.