

NAAL Literacy Settings

Adults exercise their literacy skills in a variety of settings. NAAL groups these settings into three broad categories: work, home, and community. Importantly, NAAL defines the settings not by the location in which a literacy activity takes place, but rather by the purpose of the activity. For example, an executive who works at home on a report for her supervisor is using her literacy skills in a work and not a home setting.

Work setting

Work settings are defined by NAAL as contexts in which adults perform work-related literacy tasks. Work-related tasks are those carried out by adults as part of their jobs, or in pursuit of employment. Work-related tasks include not only those performed as part of an adult's primary employment, but also tasks carried out in the context of secondary occupations. For example, a high school music teacher who gives private piano lessons at her home is performing a work-related literacy task when she records payments for lessons in a ledger. Work-related tasks need not be carried out at the adult's place of employment: a salesperson who completes an order form during a visit to a customer is performing a workplace writing task. Conversely, non-job-related tasks performed in the workplace—such as reading and writing personal e-mails at work—are not work-related tasks. Literacy tasks performed for purposes of obtaining a job or advancing in one's job are work-related tasks. Examples include reading help wanted ads, preparing a resume, and taking evening courses at a local college in pursuit of a promotion. Tasks that are indirectly related to a job, but do not have to do with the content of the job, are not considered work-related tasks. For example, reading a bus schedule to decide how to get to work is not a work-related literacy task.

Home setting

Home settings are those in which adults perform literacy tasks related to their personal or family interests, whether these interests are practical, intellectual, or emotional. Examples include reading a recipe, balancing a checkbook, helping children with homework, writing personal e-mails to friends, or reading a novel for enjoyment. Home-related tasks need not be performed at home. For example, filling out a medical history form at a doctor's office and reading a product label in a grocery store are home literacy tasks. Conversely, not all literacy tasks performed at home are home literacy tasks; for example, a teacher preparing lesson plans at home in the evening is performing a work and not a home literacy task.

Community setting

Community settings are those in which adults perform literacy tasks related to their roles as members of local, regional, national, or international communities—that is, roles that reach beyond family, friends, and work. Examples include writing a letter to the editor of a newspaper, reading a newsmagazine to learn about the candidates in a Presidential

election, keeping the financial records of a volunteer community organization, or writing an announcement for inclusion in a neighborhood newsletter.

Hybrid setting

Although most literacy activities fall clearly into a single setting category, some tasks encompass more than one setting. For example, an adult who reads online help information about a word processing program that she uses both at work and at home is performing a task that is both work- and home-related. Similarly, a salesman who reads the newspaper both for entertainment and to assist in making conversation with clients is performing a hybrid work/home task.

Literacy settings and NAAL

NAAL is designed to sample broadly and systematically from the types of functional literacy tasks adults perform in work, home, and community settings. However, NAAL has some unavoidable limitations related to the assessment context. For example, adults—especially those with limited literacy skills—may sometimes succeed at everyday literacy tasks by seeking help, referring to a dictionary, or collaborating with other people (e.g., asking a friend or relative to write a letter, calling a toll-free help number rather than reading a product manual, working with a spouse in filling out a tax form); these sorts of help-seeking and collaboration are not possible in the context of NAAL. Also, whereas assessment tasks are necessarily brief, some everyday literacy activities (e.g., writing a letter) typically extend over longer periods of time. Finally, many work-related tasks cannot be included in a large-scale assessment for the general population because of the specialized knowledge required.