

LEARNING ESSENTIAL WORK COMPUTER SKILLS

THE BIG PICTURE

- Care navigators and peer support specialists may be required to use computers and business software as part of their job.
- Most people today know how to use computers for some purposes, such as watching movies or playing games, but not everyone knows how to use business software.
- Free, online training courses to help people learn to use the types of software that they need for work are available.

Most working-age adults today have at least some experience with computers, if only to browse the web, communicate with family and friends, or maybe play games. Using common business applications, however, may not be a familiar experience for people who are new to an office environment. Organized classes teach common office software, but not everyone has access to those classes. Even if local computer classes are available, some people may not have the time or resources to take those classes. The good news is that there are free resources that can help people learn on their own schedules.

EMAIL

Messaging apps are popular for personal use, but email remains the standard method of communication for most businesses, nonprofit organizations, and government agencies. Most modern email systems are web-based, but some organizations still use desktop apps to manage email messaging. Many workers are also able to use an app on their phone or tablet to access their work email.

Most email systems work very similarly to one another. Once a person becomes comfortable with one email system, they are usually able to learn others fairly easily. Free online training courses for email use can be found at SkillSoft (www.skillsoft.com/channel/email-productivity-ce97aa80-f91e-11e6-aad2-6b3c03be7fe8) and GCFGlobal (www.edu.gcfglobal.org/en/topics/emailbasics).

One of the most important things to remember about using email for work is that you should think carefully about what you write and send. While abbreviations such as “C U L8R” are common for messages sent by text or through an instant messaging app, they aren’t appropriate for a work email. Instead, use full sentences and punctuation, such as “I’ll see you later this afternoon when I get back to the office.”

OFFICE APPLICATIONS

The most commonly used business programs are so-called office applications: word processors for writing documents, presentation software for creating and displaying presentations and training courses, and spreadsheets for tracking and managing numbers and financial information. The most widely known office apps are those produced and supported by the Microsoft Corporation. The Microsoft 365 suite includes Word (for word processing), PowerPoint (for presentations), and Excel (for spreadsheets) and can be downloaded onto an individual computer or used through the internet. Microsoft 365 apps connect easily with Microsoft’s OneDrive cloud storage system. This allows users to store their documents online and then access them from any location with an Internet connection.

Continued on reverse

There are several good sources of free, online training for Microsoft 365 apps. Microsoft's official learning center, Microsoft Learn, can be accessed at www.learn.microsoft.com/en-us. Free Microsoft 365 training can also be found on online learning sites such as www.nonprofitready.org/free-courses-business-software-applications and www.GCFGlobal.com.

Another commonly used set of office apps is Google Workspace. Available only as a cloud-based system, it requires an internet connection. The apps available through Google Workspace include Docs (a word processor), Slides (for presentations), Sheets (for spreadsheets), and Drive, which is a cloud-based document storage system.

Like Microsoft, Google provides a free, online learning center for its products. The Google Workspace Learning Center can be found at <https://support.google.com/a/users/?hl=en#topic=11499463>. A four-and-a-half-hour training video for Workspace can be found on YouTube at www.youtube.com/watch?v=oYMrYCs2fU.

Free alternatives to Microsoft 365 and Google Workspace are used by some organizations. These include LibreOffice (www.libreoffice.org), FreeOffice (www.freeoffice.com/en), and WPS Office (www.wps.com). FreeOffice and WPS Office work much like Microsoft 365, so you can learn most of their features by taking Microsoft 365 tutorial classes. LibreOffice tutorial videos are available on YouTube at www.youtube.com/channel/UCbYLBfNNq_BldZ-z4uZ0142w/videos.

COLLABORATION AND REMOTE MEETING SOFTWARE

Collaboration and remote meeting apps are among the most important software applications for many

organizations. Today, many people work from home. Even for those who work in an office, traveling to in-person meetings is becoming less common. Instead, workers use collaboration software like Microsoft Teams to share work documents easily and even to work on the same document together.

Google Workspace provides similar functions. When a meeting is necessary, tools like Zoom, Google Meet, and the remote meeting function of Teams are often used to allow people to join the meeting from their desk—or even from their phone.

Free training for Teams users can be found at <https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/office/microsoft-teams-video-training-4f108e54-240b-4351-8084-b1089f0d21d7>. The short videos available on this site cover the most common functions of Teams. Written instructions are also provided.

Google Meet is part of the Google Workspace suite. Training is available through the Google Workspace Learning Center, discussed in the previous section. Free, online Zoom training can be found in the Zoom Learning Center at learning.zoom.us/learn.

Some organizations use other online meeting and conferencing systems, such as Webex, GoToMeeting, and FreeConference. Online training programs for these products can be found by using your favorite internet search engine.

Using computers for work can be important, but it doesn't have to be hard. Take advantage of free, online training to learn what you need to know about the software that you use at work.

Please follow the QR code at right to access a brief follow-up survey regarding this report; thank you in advance for helping us to improve our services.

