

Reasons for half the working adult population (17 million people) having low numeracy skills comparable to 6-7 year olds or below.

By RVBP 2026

Introduction: for a dyslexic number phobic person, a thought arose, asking if there was any other person like themselves. Several online searches expanded their knowledge base and curious nature as to why so many adults' numeracy skills are sadly lacking. This simple essay is a way to not only highlight the inadequacies in maths, but also how they may be rectified.

Google is a gateway to a plethora of information; quick searches can reveal answers that can assist and educate a person, as well as inform others. But if an adult has low numeracy skills, would they wish to hide this from employers? A search provides several reasons for hiding their numeracy vulnerability. Avoidance of tasks in the workplace that require numeracy skills, the shame, stigma and embarrassment that is associated with this vulnerability. A higher percentage of women (32%) compared with men (18%) was identified, resulting in an avoidance of using numbers. Deception and lying about numeracy skill level is a common problem, as overestimating their ability, approximately 45% of adults rated their numeracy as good when in fact their level was that of a primary school child. Within society, acceptance of people being 'bad at maths' is commonplace, whereas those with low literacy skills hide this issue and prevents them from seeking any help to rectify this matter. Furthermore, a person with low numeracy skills earns £1,600 less a year, 25% of adults are put off from applying for jobs of advancement in their current job due to elements requiring numeracy.

In 1998, the BBC founded 'Bitesize', which states that in excess of 3 million children and parents access the site daily, 1.5 million are students. 82% of secondary school pupils access the site. Does this mean that teachers need to be teaching in a way similar to Bitesize? The free access is crucial to families on a low income, who could never afford a private maths tutor for their children. GCSE and Nationals content is extremely useful for revision or finding another way to understand content taught in schools which was not grasped during lessons. Many pupils use bitesize to check their knowledge as opposed to merely reading. Subjects like trigonometry and vectors are popular on the site.

Pupils can access revision podcasts on their way to school, and utilising the site is a quick way to help with homework. Teachers can find current content for teaching, as well as home educators who can ensure they are covering national curriculum standards. Bitesize is developed by experts, whom users of the site can trust; furthermore, the contextual learning aspect relates to how maths is used in daily life. 14-16 year olds search for algebra, graphs and geometry, whereas 5-11 year olds search for KS1 and KS2 maths, with 8 out of 10 pupils using the site. Does the site need to be split and advertised for low numeracy level adults? Bitesize does have a 'maths for adults' area, covering ratios, percentages and fractions. The BBC states '8 million adults in the UK have a numeracy skill equal to a 9-year-old'. Skillswise, also provided by the BBC, is an adult platform, promoting functional everyday maths, but is this promoted in all workplaces or on television? Sadly, the BBC does not break down the statistics for adult numeracy in relation to the usage of the site, but states, 'Skillswise aims to support a significant portion of the 17 million adults with low numeracy skills'.

The BBC advocates adults use the site for a daily, non-pressured and free access site for functional maths skills as well as Sudoku. They also discuss that adults use the site to improve their numeracy, whilst the 'Maths for Adults' area specialises in; percentages,

numbers, fractions, calculations and everyday skills for help, but again, is this heavily advertised in all workplaces or on the television?

The 17 million UK adults with low numeracy skills highlight negative educational experiences, a lack of workplace application and cultural attitudes. There is a belief that the 'maths gene' exists; this myth stipulates that those who are good at maths have the gene, whereas in reality, maths skills can be improved with effort. 35% of adults are anxious about doing maths, 20% of adults are physically sick with the fear of maths; this is obviously a learning barrier. Socially, poor literacy and numeracy are stigmatised; adults hide this fact to prevent any ridicule.

Any disruption in a child's education, such as a difficult home life, illness resulting in absences (bullying also contributes to absences) have a negative effect, resulting in pupils leaving school with gaps in maths, etc. Adults with low confidence and traumatic experiences within a maths class at school set a pattern for adult life, along with a child losing interest in maths during a lesson, possibly due to the complex nature and understanding of various mathematical skills.

Interestingly, there is a 52% gap between qualifications and real-world skills. Many hold a pass in maths, but lack functional real-world application. There is a shortfall in the number of specialist teachers particularly in maths and especially in further education, thus having a negative impact on those re-taking a maths qualification.

A parent or guardian who dislikes maths imbues this stance upon the children in their care; similarly, those families in deprived areas have low numeracy levels.

Finally, many adults fail to recognise the maths they use in daily life, preferring to label this type of maths as common sense. In conclusion, this essay may not be Harvard referenced, nor in line with the complicated, long-winded, highly elaborated language essays which are usually submitted to this competition, however; however, it does highlight the growing need for the gap between adults having and not having adequate numeracy skills. There is a real need for all work places, dentists, gp surgeries and hospitals to advertise the BBC's websites, which could help, assist and enhance low numeracy level adults, with the resources to be able to remove any stigma, fear, and anxiety from their lives, just by chancing upon a small poster, guiding them to maths for adult learners.

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