



Visual Arts Academy®

*Learning a Living:
A BLUEPRINT FOR HIGH
PERFORMANCE*

Visual Arts Academy® and the SCAN Skills (SCANS)

Toward High Performance

In 1991, the **Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS)** published its report commissioned by the United States Secretary of Education Lynn Martin. Composed of 30 individuals from the worlds of business and education, the Commission was directed "to advise the Secretary on the level of skills required to enter employment" and improve the quality of the labor force. Outcome: A high-performance workplace requires workers who have a solid foundation in the basic literacy and computational skills, the thinking skills, and in the personal qualities that make workers dedicated and trustworthy. High-performance workplaces also require competencies: the ability to manage resources, to work amicably and productively with others, to acquire and use information, to master complex systems, and to work with a variety of technologies.

Today's Schools

The SCANS competencies and skills are not intended for special tracks labeled "general" or "career" or "vocational" education. All teachers, in all disciplines, are expected to incorporate them into their class work. The challenge here is to teach the know-how that young people need as an essential element of learning across the curriculum, including the five core subjects.

- Students will find the content more relevant and challenging.
- Teachers will find their classes more attentive and interested.
- Employers and college officials will be delighted with the results because the curriculum will be tied to real things in the real world.
- Communities will be enriched by better-equipped, focused youth that have been exposed to concepts and experiences that, hopefully, will prepare them to take on active, community-building roles.

Today's Schools & Youth-strengthening Organizations

SCANS believe that teachers, schools and youth-strengthening organizations/practitioners must begin early to help students see the relationships between what they study and its applications in real-world contexts. It is not true that everything we need to know we learned in kindergarten; it is true, however, that we can begin early to learn what life requires.

- Students do not need to learn basic skills before they learn problem-solving skills; the two go together; they are not sequential but mutually reinforcing;
- Learning should be reoriented away from mere mastery of information and toward encouraging students to recognize and solve problems; and
- Real know-how, foundations, competencies, cannot be taught in isolation; students need practice in the application of these skills.

LifeSupport USA's Visual Arts Academy aids schools and youth-serving organizations in preparing youth for high performance futures. SCANS competencies and foundations are a vital part of an excellent education.

A Three-Part Foundation

Basic Skills

- A. **Reading** - locates, understands, and interprets written information in prose and in documents such as manuals, graphs, and schedules.
- B. **Writing** - communicates thoughts, ideas, information, and messages in writing; and creates documents such as letters, directions, manuals, reports, graphs, and flow charts
- C. **Arithmetic/Mathematics** - performs basic computations and approaches practical problems by choosing appropriately from a variety of mathematical techniques
- D. **Listening** - receives, attends to, interprets, and responds to verbal messages and other cues
- E. **Speaking** - organizes ideas and communicates orally

At first glance, the Basic Skills seem to parallel the core courses that students take throughout their journey through elementary and secondary schools: English, Math, Social Studies, and Science. But on closer examination, it becomes apparent that there is a difference. The Basic Skills, at least those recommended by the SCANS, have two major focuses: communication and mathematics. The Commission undoubtedly made the assumption that if a person can communicate through the spoken and written word and can perform mathematical computations, he or she has the basic tools to learn the content in almost any discipline. It is important to note that the Commission recognized the increasing dominance of the spoken word in today's multimedia culture and added speaking and listening to their list of Basic Skills.

Thinking Skills:

- A. **Creative Thinking** - generates new ideas
- B. **Decision Making** -- specifies goals and constraints, generates alternatives, considers risks, and evaluates and chooses best alternative
- C. **Problem Solving** - recognizes problems, devises and implements plan of action
- D. **Visualizing** - organizes, and processes symbols, pictures, graphs, objects, and other information
- E. **Knowing How to Learn** -- uses efficient learning techniques to acquire and apply new knowledge and skills
- F. **Reasoning** - discovers a rule or principle underlying the relationships between two or more objects and applies it when solving a problem

Personal Qualities:

- A. **Responsibility** - exerts a high level of effort and perseveres towards goal attainment
- B. **Self-Esteem** - believes in own self-worth and maintains a positive view of self
- C. **Sociability** -- demonstrates understanding, friendliness, adaptability, empathy, and politeness in group settings
- D. **Self-Management** - assess self accurately, sets personal goals, monitors progress, and exhibits self-control
- E. **Integrity/Honesty** - chooses ethical courses of action

Many citizens and educators argue that the qualities outlined in this section are not the responsibility of the schools; they believe these are values that the home, the church, and other social and cultural agencies must imbue. In past generations, this argument was relatively valid. Unfortunately, we are not living in the past, and the world has changed.

The American family structure has changed and is continuing to change. In many areas of the country, churches do not exert the influence they once had. Social and cultural norms, like all of our society, are also changing. Many children simply do not have access to a strong and stable group of adults who can help them develop these essential personal qualities.

If these qualities are to be developed and strengthened (as recommended by the Commission), a large part of the burden must fall on the shoulders of educators, for there is no one else who is available on an ongoing basis for many youngsters.

The Five Competencies

The skills related to the competencies are subdivided into five categories: Interpersonal, Resources, Information, Systems, and Technology. Each of the categories has a set of skills, which are described below.

Interpersonal:

- A. **Participates as Member of a Team** - contributes to group effort
- B. **Teaches Others New Skills**
- C. **Serves Clients/Customers** - works to satisfy customers' expectations
- D. **Exercises Leadership** - communicates ideas to justify position, persuades and convinces others, responsibility challenges existing procedures and policies
- E. **Negotiates** - works toward agreements involving exchange of resources, resolves divergent interests
- F. **Works with Diversity** - works well with men and women from diverse backgrounds

Participatory Management Skills

The skills listed in this category reflect many of the principles of participatory management. Based upon its research, the SCANS Commission presented two fundamental recommendations for business and schools in its 1991 report:

- That American businesses adopt high performance/participatory management methods; and
- That American schools teach their students the skills high performance organizations demand, so these future employees will be able to function effectively when they enter the world of work.

Other Participatory Management Skills include:

- A. **Teamwork** - With the increased emphasis on interdepartmental teams and project teams, there is an increased need for employees who can function effectively as a contributing member of a team.
- B. **Teaching** - Rather than relying on their superiors to act as teacher, today's employees are often expected to teach and assist one another.
- C. **Serving customers** - With the emphasis on the customer, there is a need for employees who can interact pleasantly and helpfully with those they serve.
- D. **Leading** - Rather than waiting for someone from management to show up and take control and provide direction, employees at every level of an organization are now expected to assume leadership roles.
- E. **Negotiating** - There is a need for people who can work through differences in a constructive, non-confrontational manner. With the increasing number of teams, there is an increased potential for conflict. In fact, if teams are to be effective, they will produce many different ideas and opinions, many of which will likely be in conflict. To get the maximum benefit from the many ideas, employees need to be able to compromise and negotiate differences.
- F. **Working with Diversity** - Diversity and multiculturalism are absolutes in America, and the need for harmony among the different groups is imperative. Employers need people who can work with and respect others from different racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds.

These skills are not only important in the workplace, but in all aspects of life.

Resources

- A. **Time** - selects goal-relevant activities, ranks them, allocates time, and prepares and follows schedules
- B. **Money** - uses or prepares budgets, makes forecasts, keeps records, and makes adjustments to meet objectives
- C. **Material and Facilities** - acquires, stores, allocates, and uses materials or space efficiently
- D. **Human Resources** - assesses skills and distributes work accordingly, evaluates performance and provides feedback

Being able to make the most of resources is no longer just the task of executives and managers. As individuals and teams are being expected to problem solve and make decisions, they are also being empowered to implement their solutions and decisions. They, not their superiors, need to be able to fully utilize the resources available to them.

Information

- A. **Acquires and Evaluates Information**
- B. **Organizes and Maintains Information**
- C. **Interprets and Communicates Information**
- D. **Uses Computers to Process Information**

Systems

- A. **Understands Systems** - knows how social, organization, and technological systems work and operates effectively with them
- B. **Monitors and Corrects Performance** - distinguishes trends, predicts impacts on system operations, diagnoses deviations in system's performance and corrects malfunctions
- C. **Improves or Designs Systems** - suggests modifications to existing systems and develops new or alternative systems to improve performance

Systems are defined as complex inter-relationships. In a world in which everything seems to be inter-related and interdependent, it is important that students understand the nature of systems, are able to function within that framework, and are able to adapt and develop their own systems to meet the needs of an organization. The ripple effect comes to mind when one thing of a system. One small change in one part of a system can result in multiple changes throughout the system. With change being such a constant companion in today's world of business, it is important to view change from the perspective of an entire system, realizing the possible repercussions small changes.

Technology

- A. **Selects Technology** - chooses procedures, tools, or equipment including computers and related technologies
- B. **Applies Technology to Task** - understands overall intent and proper procedures for setup and operation of equipment
- C. **Maintains and Troubleshoots Equipment** - prevents, identifies, or solves problems with equipment, including computers and other technologies

Many school children today are as comfortable using computers as their parents and grandparents were with pencils and pens. The pervasiveness of technology - and computers in particular - provides the rationale for the recommendations of the Commission that all students be computer literate. The Commission does not call for students to be computer programmers. Rather, the Commission recommends that students be able to select, apply, maintain, and troubleshoot technology. In other words, computers and technology are not viewed as ends themselves, but rather as tools to accomplish other tasks more efficiently.

**** Source: The Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills, What Work Requires of Schools ****