

# Prior Learning Assessment & Recognition (PLAR) Manual



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**Manitoba**   
*Building for the Future*

## PLAR at Adult Learning Centres

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## What is PLAR?

PLAR is the process that involves the identification, documentation, assessment and recognition of the learning you have acquired through formal and informal study. The process of recognizing and giving credit for knowledge, skills, and competencies that have been acquired experientially, that is, through work experience, unrecognized education or training, self study, volunteer activities, and hobbies.

The type of learning known as prior learning, may occur:

- On the job
- In volunteer activities
- Through a hobby or interest
- In military service
- Through travel
- On training courses
- Through independent study
- Through family and life experiences

PLAR is a process that can be used to look at what you know and what you can do. PLAR can be used to get some form of recognition for what you know and what skills you have.

We live in a society that values a balance of both credentials and experience. The ever-changing job market, the lack of employment security, the speed of technology development all require adults to re-skill and re-train more frequently than ever before. Employers and post-secondary institutions must meet the needs of employees and learners who require skills upgrading and/or are going back to college or university with a wealth of prior learning experiences.

## **What are the benefits of PLAR for individuals?**

### **1. Eliminates duplication of learning.**

Learners should not have to re-do courses they already know. For most adults, this shortens the route to accreditation. At the same time, the individuals are not forced to re-take courses or information that they already know and can do.

### **2. Increases self-esteem and self-confidence.**

PLAR advances and enriches an adult's learning through the promotion of self-esteem, self-discovery, and the mobilization of resources toward self-actualization.

### **3. Validates learning through work and life experiences.**

Too often in our society, the only learning that is valued is that gained through formal learning experiences. The PLAR process allows individuals to recognize and validate prior learning achieved through work and life experiences.

### **4. Identifies areas requiring further study.**

Individuals are not always aware of what skills they do and do not possess. By helping individuals pin point their areas of strengths and weaknesses, the PLAR process allows individuals to self-determine what further work will be needed in order to challenge successfully for credit.

### **5. Gains an understanding of personal strengths and likes.**

Through the PLAR process individuals do a great deal of self-reflection and identification of interests and abilities. They set goals and determine their wants and needs in a wide range of areas of their lives. This helps them clarify where they want to go and how to get there.

### **6. Encourages learners to pursue education.**

PLAR can give a learner a base from which to pursue further education. Individuals can develop goals from their prior learning, knowledge, and skills. Life long learning is validated and offered as a possible goal.

## **7. May reduce the cost of education.**

The individual may benefit financially because she will pay only for the learning that is required in college or university. Not all learners may save money, however, since most institutions charge assessment fees for the PLAR process or award “advanced standing” only.

## **8. Increases access.**

Adult learners who might not come back for further or higher education may be attracted to pursue credentials through PLAR. PLAR shows individuals that they do possess the necessary qualifications to complete college or university programs.

## **9. May shorten the time to complete.**

When individuals are assessed for their prior learning they can receive credits for courses, parts of programs, or a number of credits. Assessment may allow learners the chance to demonstrate skills and knowledge through a portfolio, challenge exams, skill demonstrations, projects, interviews, or simulations.

## **10. Provides career development.**

Individuals who do PLAR can expect to identify career goals, career objectives and avenues to job advancement. When individuals clearly understand their skills, knowledge and abilities, they identify routes to gaining credentials and also a better understanding of the requirements of different job categories. PLAR can prepare individuals to challenge employers for job promotions and/or career development opportunities.

## **11. Eases transition to post-secondary institutions.**

The PLAR process helps individuals prepare for entry into post-secondary institutions. As people identify their learning and develop documentation to verify their learning, they feel more comfortable with entering the post-secondary system. As learners they perceive of themselves as being successful and able to complete their course of study.

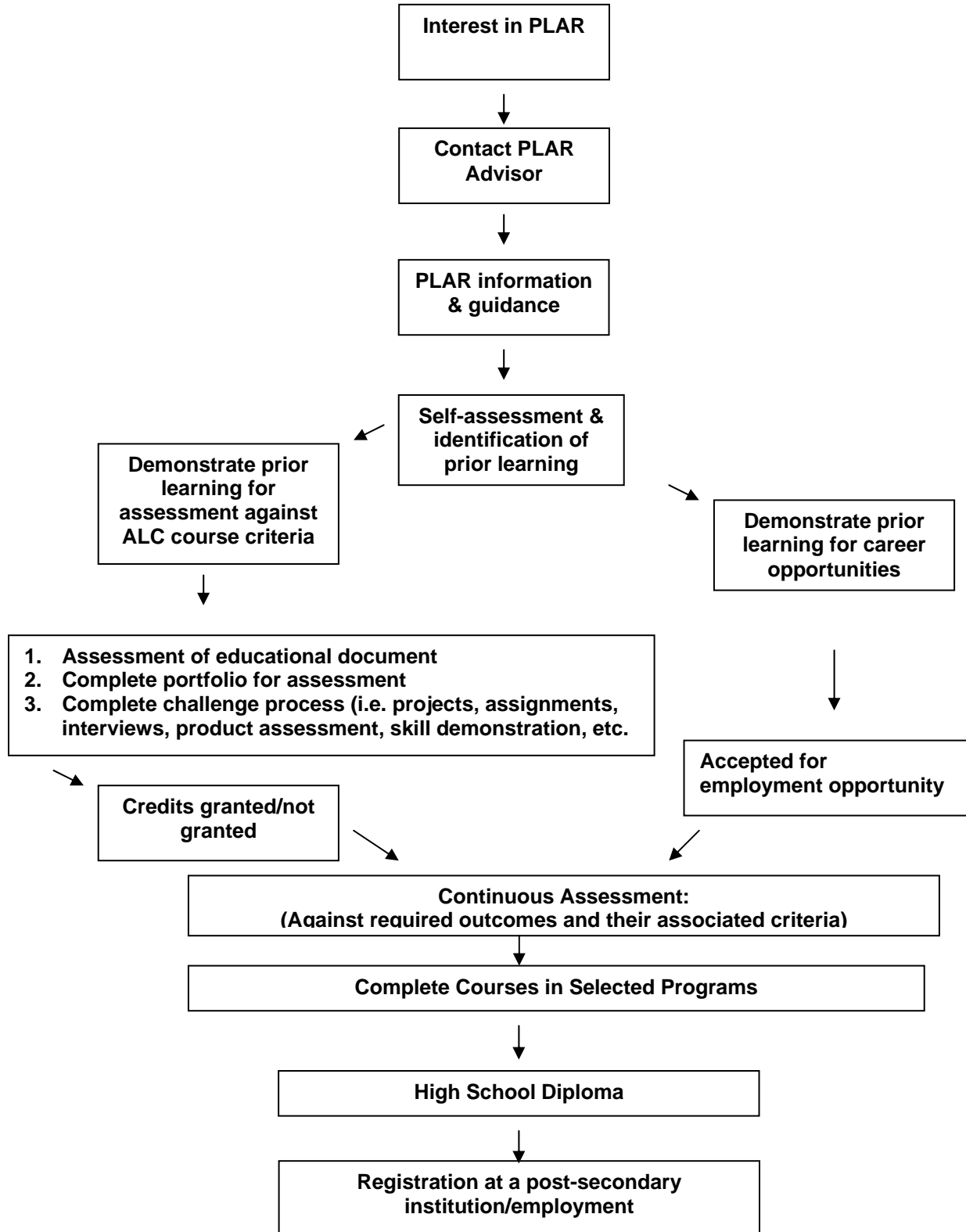
## PLAR Model

### Steps

- ❖ **Pre-entry:** Learner investigates PLA at college/university. Institutions distribute information on PLA.
- ❖ **Advise Learner:** Learner establishes goals. Learner meets with institutional advisor. Learner may/may not enroll in portfolio development course.
- ❖ **Prepare, Gather Information:** Learner prepares for assessment/interview by collecting and organizing documentation, preparing for assessment. Institution supports learner through the availability of print materials, workshops, etc.
- ❖ **Assessment:** Learner submits portfolio, writes challenge examination, demonstrates, practical skill, etc.
- ❖ **Credit Acknowledgement:** Credit posted to learner's record.
- ❖ **Review Career and Education/Training Plan:** Learner re-visits plan. May revise as necessary.

*Adapted from Susan Simosko and Cathy Cook. Applying APL Principles in Flexible Assessment: A Practical Guide. London, England. Kogan Page, 1996.*

## Procedures for PLAR



## How is Prior Learning Assessed?

PLAR recognizes that your learning has been developed in a variety of learning situations and life experiences. Therefore, a number of methods exist which allow for flexible and effective assessment of your learning.

These methods include:

1. **Assessment of Educational Documents for Transfer Credits**  
This method is used to assess courses you may have taken at a recognized post- secondary institution to determine their equivalency to a program in another post-secondary institution. Transfer of credit decisions are made by teachers in the program area you are seeking credit. You would be required to submit documentation that teachers would use in the assessment process.
2. **Portfolio Assessments**  
A portfolio is a detailed document in which you articulate and provide proof (documentation/verification) of your prior learning.

Where the human resources and expertise exists, learners develop portfolios on their own with the assistance of teachers or advisors. The portfolio is submitted to the program for assessment by teachers who are knowledgeable of the learning outcomes of a particular course. Most often, this would be the faculty member who teaches the course. If the learning you have documented is equivalent to the learning outcomes of a particular course, you would be granted credit.

In some cases, learners enrol in a Portfolio Development Course to complete a portfolio, which can be assessed for credit. Upon successful completion of the Portfolio Development Course, you will have the tools required to develop additional portfolios or to update an existing completed portfolio.

It is important that you provide proof that *learning* has taken place. Credit is granted for the learning gained from experience and is not granted for experience alone. The process of portfolio development is a useful self-assessment tool that can assist you in making effective decisions and choices. It may also be used to seek employment, set goals, build on an existing career, and/or identify your personal strengths and interests.



### 3. **Challenge Process**

These are methods of assessment developed and evaluated by program faculty to measure a learners prior learning as it relates to the learning outcomes of a specific course in a program. The methods include:

#### 3.1 **Challenge Examinations**

*(i.e. oral/written tests, projects, assignments, interviews)*

These are tests or projects based on the learning outcomes of a specific course, which have been designed by program faculty to assess learning. If you believe that you have prior learning that is equivalent to a particular course, you will be provided with a course outline and have access to appropriate texts and other learning materials to prepare for these challenge examination(s). As a learner, you are required to demonstrate through the challenge examinations that you have equivalent learning. If you are successful in the challenge processes, you will be granted credit for the course.

#### 3.2 **Skill Demonstrations**

*(i.e. practical examinations, skill demonstrations, product assessments and simulations)*

This method involves practical examinations, skill demonstrations and simulations in which you actually demonstrate your prior learning as it relates to the learning outcomes of a course(s). In this situation, you are provided with course materials such as course outlines and performance checklists, in addition to texts and other course resources. Program faculty assesses the specific learning outcomes and performance standards. If you are successful in the challenge processes you will be granted course credit.

It is important to note that the challenge process for a particular course may include a combination of challenge examinations (i.e. oral/written tests, projects and assignments) and skill demonstration methods. Teachers determine, develop and administer the combination of challenge methods that will allow an individual to demonstrate prior learning in the best way possible.

## Assessing Prior Learning

Learning outcomes provide guidance to the assessor in making judgments and to the students who must aim to prove their knowledge, skills, and judgments.

The assessor should fit the assessment method to the learner and use techniques that are appropriate to the background and characteristics of the learner.

Assessments should always include feedback for the learner.

Self-assessment is crucial part of PLAR.

## Assessment Process

1. **Define Criteria:** Assessor defined standards against which the evidence presented by the student is to be judged.
2. **Select Assessment Method:** Which type of assessment procedure is most appropriate?
3. **Structure the Assessment:** The structure of the assessment process will vary according to the situation. In most cases it is the assessor who decides which methods will be used in the assessment. (Review of material in a portfolio, an oral interview, a written exercise, etc..)
4. **Adapt the Assessment:** Use of the fairest and most relevant techniques for the demonstration of a student's learning.
5. **Observe the Assessment:** Observation of a student's behavior against established performance criteria.
6. **Judge the Learning:** The act of judging or quantifying the student's learning against the established criteria and recording the results.

## Canadian Labour Force Development Board (CLFDB) National PLAR Standards\*

1. PLAR must be accessible and relevant to people as individuals. It must focus on the unique needs and abilities of the individual.
2. Assessment recognition must be of learning (knowledge, skills, and judgement acquired through study or experience) not of experience.
3. The PLAR process must be fair and equitable. It must be barrier & bias free.
4. The PLAR process must be efficient. It must make the best use of resources for the individual.
5. The PLAR process must be effective. It must provide the opportunity for recognition of prior learning, but it must not hold out false promises.
6. The PLAR process must be transparent. The individual must know the criteria and standards used to assess his or her skills and knowledge.
7. The assessment must be reliable. The criteria and standards must be recognized and respected by all the labour market partners. This principle applies to occupational and skill standards, the learning outcomes stated for a specific course or training program, and the credentials required for a specific job or occupational group. (i.e. it must be against criteria that is recognized and respected by all the labor market partners.)
8. The assessment tools and their PLAR application must be valid. They must be recognized and accepted by all the labour market partners.
9. Individuals assessing prior learning must be trained to perform this task.
10. The assessing organization must provide a number of ways to carry out an assessment. Individuals should have the opportunity to choose how their assessment will be done. They should receive help in making their choice.
11. Recognition awarded through PLAR should be considered equal to recognition awarded in the traditional manner.
12. Recognition awarded through PLAR should be transferable between organizations, provinces, and territories.
13. PLAR must be an option or opportunity, and not a mandatory process.
14. If a person is not satisfied with the PLAR assessment, an appeal procedure must be available.

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\* Adapted from "Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition", CFLDB # 35, January 1997.

## **Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) Ten Standards for Assessing Prior Learning**

### **ACADEMIC STANDARDS**

1. Credit should be awarded only for learning not experience.
2. College credit should be awarded only for college-level learning.
3. Credit should be awarded only for learning that has a balance, appropriate to the subject, between theory and practical applications.
4. The determination of competence levels and of credit awards must be made by appropriate subject matter and academic experts.
5. Credit should be appropriate to the academic context in which it is accepted.

### **ADMINISTRATIVE STANDARDS**

6. Credit awards and their transcript entries should be monitored to avoid giving credit twice for the same learning.
7. Policies and procedures applied to assessment, including provision for appeal, should be fully disclosed and prominently displayed.
8. Fees charged for assessment should be based on the service performed in the process and not determined by the amount of credit awarded.
9. All personnel involved in the assessment of learning should receive adequate training for the functions they perform, and there should be provision for their continued professional development.
10. Assessment programs should be regularly monitored, reviewed, evaluated, and revised as needed to reflect changes in the needs being served and in the state of the assessment arts.

*Whitaker, Urban (1989). Assessing learning: standards principles and procedures. (pp. Xvii). Philadelphia, PA: Council for Adult and Experiential Learning*

# **PLAR at Adult Learning Centres**

## **Forms**

**Intake Form  
Prior Learning Assessment & Recognition (PLAR)**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Last Name First Name

Mailing Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ Prov. \_\_\_\_\_ Postal Code \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Ext. \_\_\_\_\_ Fax \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

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**Background Information About You**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Academic Achievements (i.e. college, university, other post-secondary institutions)**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Employment History**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Community/Volunteer/Family Experiences**

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**Self-directed Learning Experiences (books, resources, conferences, non-credit courses)**

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**Courses/Learning Outcomes to which Prior Learning may apply**

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**To be completed by PLAR Advisor/Teacher:**

**PLAR Action plan**

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Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: Teacher \_\_\_\_\_

Learner \_\_\_\_\_

**Prior Learning Assessment  
Assessment of Educational Documents for Course Credit Transfer**

An official transcript and detailed course outline/course objectives must be attached for EACH course.

- The transferred grade must meet or exceed the grade required for a pass in the program.
- The length of time since the course/program was taken will be a factor considered in the granting of credit.

**To be completed by the learner:**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Student Number: \_\_\_\_\_

I am requesting evaluation for transfer of credit for the following courses:

Name & Number of Course	Name of Institution	Course Name/Number That Credit Transfer Is Requested For	Credit Awarded Yes or no
<i>Example: Introduction to Computer Based Systems</i>	<i>University of Winnipeg</i>	<i>Introduction to Microsoft Office</i>	

Student Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**To be completed by Adult Learning Centre Education Director:**

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_



**Prior Learning Assessment & Recognition (PLAR)  
Application for Portfolio and/or Challenge Process Assessments**

1. Credit will be awarded only for the learning which is equivalent to high school level learning and the standards of attainment will be equal to the standards required by the program in which credit is sought.
  2. Learners may be required to provide additional demonstration of learning.
  3. Names of references or employers may be requested to verify your learning.
  4. Learners will be notified in writing of the outcome of their assessment(s).
  5. The learners certify that all of the information/documents provided to support the request for credit are authentic, accurate and true.
- 

**To be completed by the learner:**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Student Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

**I am requesting assessment of prior learning for the following courses:**

Course Name	Course Number

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Signature

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Date

**Prior Learning Assessment & Recognition (PLAR)  
Results of Portfolio and/or Challenge Process Assessments**

To be completed by the Education Director and Assessor

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Student Number: \_\_\_\_\_

**Credit awarded: Demonstration of prior learning is complete and credit is awarded for the course(s).**

ALC Course Code	ALC Course	PLAR Assessment		Transcript Grade
		(Credit)	(Partial)	

<b>Assessment Process:</b> Explain assessment process.	
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**Credit not awarded: Demonstration of prior learning is incomplete and credit is not awarded for the course(s).**

ALC Course Code	ALC Course Name

**Comments:**

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\_\_\_\_\_  
**Education Director  
Signature**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Assessor Signature**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

**Assessment Record**

<b>Learner:</b>	<b>ALC:</b>
<b>PLAR Advisor:</b>	<b>PLAR Assessor:</b>
<b>Course:</b>	<b>Course Code:</b>

**1. Assessment process:**

**2. Evidence provided:**

**3. Learning outcomes achieved:**

**4. Learning outcomes that have not yet been achieved:**

**5. Assessor's Recommendations:**



\_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of Learner:**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Date:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Education Director  
Signature**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Assessor Signature**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

## Assessment Plan

Learning Outcome: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Evidence of Performance:

- a) \_\_\_\_\_
- b) \_\_\_\_\_
- c) \_\_\_\_\_
- d) \_\_\_\_\_
- e) \_\_\_\_\_

Knowledge and Actions Discussed/Observed	Evidence	Comments

## Assessment Plan

Name of Course: \_\_\_\_\_

Assessment Criteria: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Evidence Provided	Comments	Additional Evidence Required	Comments	Results