There is not one single cause for why adults have difficulty with literacy. The reasons are as varied as the individuals themselves, and depend upon past experiences, life situations, and personal strengths, challenges, and interests.

**Home and Family**
Home environment is a large factor in a child's development of literacy skills, and his or her future abilities as an adult. Many adults with literacy difficulties were not exposed to the building blocks of literacy (books, magazines, crayons, paper, etc.) within the family circle when young. Social issues also play a role. For example, poverty can result in a lack of access to resources that promote literacy, while poor nutrition can cause health issues that make it more difficult to learn. Violence in a home can mean a child focuses on survival rather than school work. Low literacy is often intergenerational.

**Schooling**
Some adults didn't have the educational opportunities of others. They may have left school early for any number of reasons, including having to support their family financially. They may have been absent due to prolonged illness, or moved frequently, resulting in a disruption of learning. Others may not have “fit in” to a traditional school setting, and didn't get the learning support they needed. They may have experienced a poor quality of teaching, and missed crucial steps in building a comfort and ease with literacy. Undiagnosed vision and hearing problems can also have contributed to literacy difficulties.

**Learning Styles**
Learning styles are ways of learning – how we, as individuals, take in and process information. One popular way of categorizing learning styles is whether a person is a visual, auditory or tactile learner. People who read and write well have integrated the various learning styles. People with literacy challenges often depend upon one dominant learning style. At school, their teachers might not have taught them by appealing to their specific learning style.
WHAT ARE THE CAUSES OF LOW LITERACY?

Multiple Intelligences
We each are a mixture of different cognitive strengths and challenges. As a result, some tasks we accomplish easily; others take us longer, and don’t come easily. For example, some people may excel in fields outside of math and language, and have difficulty with linguistics and other areas related to literacy skills.

Learning Difficulties
Some people have learning difficulties or disabilities that prevent them from mastering literacy skills in a specific way or through a specific sense. For example, adults with visual perception disabilities may be unable to distinguish differences in the shapes of letters of the alphabet. Adults with auditory perception disabilities may be unable to read using primarily phonics. Learning disabilities can’t be “fixed” or cured. Instead, accommodations “bypass” or “work around” the difficulties. Learning disabilities are not intellectual disabilities.

Physical Difficulties
Some people have physical difficulties or disabilities that made literacy challenging for them as children, or that make it challenging for them now as adults. For example, they might experience problems with hearing or vision. Some adults might have an injury or condition that makes it difficult to sit in one place for long stretches of time, or a physical disability that doesn’t allow them to manipulate a computer mouse, use a keyboard, turn a page of a book, or to talk. Physical disabilities are not intellectual disabilities.

Intellectual Difficulties
Some people have intellectual limitations or disabilities that made literacy challenging for them as children, or that make it challenging for them now as adults. These limitations may affect reasoning, learning, and problem-solving. Often, adults with intellectual disabilities have not received the learning supports they need to develop their literacy skills to their full potential and abilities.