

Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

?? Where this week did you use the English language, written and spoken, to accomplish tasks?

Immigrants and **refugees** come to the United States for a variety of reasons. Most all – adults and children – are **English Language Learners**. Many have come here to flee from troubles of all kinds, or to join family already here, or for their career. Learning English is often the most pressing concern to those not born in the US. The lack of opportunity to learn and practice is often the biggest challenge they face.

Building a Relationship



<http://opengecko.com/interculturalism/visualising-the-iceberg-model-of-culture/>

A core tenet of teaching English is knowing that, by doing so, we are building a relationship with someone who brings a rich background and set of experiences to our community (and *to you*). While learning English and becoming a US citizen may be common goals of many immigrants and refugees, there is an endless set of topics to explore and discuss. Family, culture, food, travel, and occupations are all of great interest to *everyone*, and are great to explore to build relationships. **English is never taught as an end, but rather it is the tool to accomplish a goal:** to express oneself, to solve a problem, to ask for clarification, to make requests, to get to know each other better, and to advocate for oneself and one's family in any setting. We call this **teaching English in context**. We can draw people to learning English if the content is meaningful, useful, related to authentic experiences, and can be applied in everyday life.



?? What contexts do you think are important for adults learning English?

Components of Learning a Language

Reading: Acquiring written language. The goal is comprehending what you read. Includes understanding alphabets and vocabulary, and fluency.

Writing: Producing written language. Accuracy, proper writing conventions, and legibility are the goal.

Listening: Acquiring spoken language. Comprehending is the goal. Includes listening for information, interpersonal skills (idioms, expressions), determining roles (how we talk to different people), following instructions, and interpreting meaning.

Speaking: Producing spoken language. The goal is being understood. Includes choice of words (grammar, meaning, and appropriateness), pronunciation, rate, speed, volume, pitch, and stress.

Grammar: Rules for how a language is structured. We *think* in our home language's structure, and we are inclined to learn languages through this structure. Grammar can be explicitly taught, and acquired through continued exposure and proper use.

Vocabulary: Simply the meaning of words. Tier I: Can be visualized (e.g., apple, fall, think). Tier II: Requires context, nuance, and abstraction (e.g., ponder, consider, calculate, propose, publish). Tier III: Specialized language (e.g., astrophysics, accretion, etc.)

Home Language Interference is the phenomenon of language learners mixing up the rules of two languages: their home language and the target language (English). If we all tried to learn Swahili, we would think in English and try to make Swahili fit into what we already know about communicating through language. English Language Learners can try to fit English *into* their existing framework and also try to produce language *through* their home language. It's often fun to learn about a learner's home language, which can also help you point out the differences between that language and English. Many learners often don't know they are making mistakes since they are producing English in a familiar manner, so we need to decide when and how to make the errors known and seek correction.

We're Not All the Same

Many institutions follow a "scale" of "levels" of language competency. Here are the details of the levels of English found in most ESOL programs around the country:

Beginning Literacy: Focus on recognizing and writing letters and numbers and using very basic survival English, as well as understanding signs and symbols.

Beginning ESL: Basic communication skills for everyday situations, like greetings, simple instructions, and simple sentences. Can understand many Tier I vocabulary words in order to engage in important situations, like going shopping and visiting a doctor.

Intermediate ESL: More complex understanding of language rules, forming complete sentences, basic grammar, and holding down conversations. Can communicate in familiar contexts, ask and answer questions with confidence, and understand main ideas in short texts.

Advanced ESL: Refined and expanded grasp of English for more complex and abstract communication, including nuanced vocabulary, advanced grammar, and understanding idiomatic expressions. Can engage in detailed conversations, write coherent paragraphs, and understand longer and more complex texts.

Adult Secondary Equivalency +: Ability to read, write, listen, and speak at a high-school level of competency or higher. Fluency becomes nearer at this level, and bold college and career goals can be realistically set, pursued, and accomplished.

It is important to consider the experiences that adults had growing up and living in their home country before coming to the United States. Every adult has a different educational background, and often the number of years of school does not equate to how educated someone is. War, famine, imprisonment, trauma, travel on foot, living in camps and in the wilderness are all probable experiences of immigrant adults. These experiences shape not only their educational background, but also how they learn now as adults. Here are some categories that language teachers use to better understand learners and how to respond as instructors:

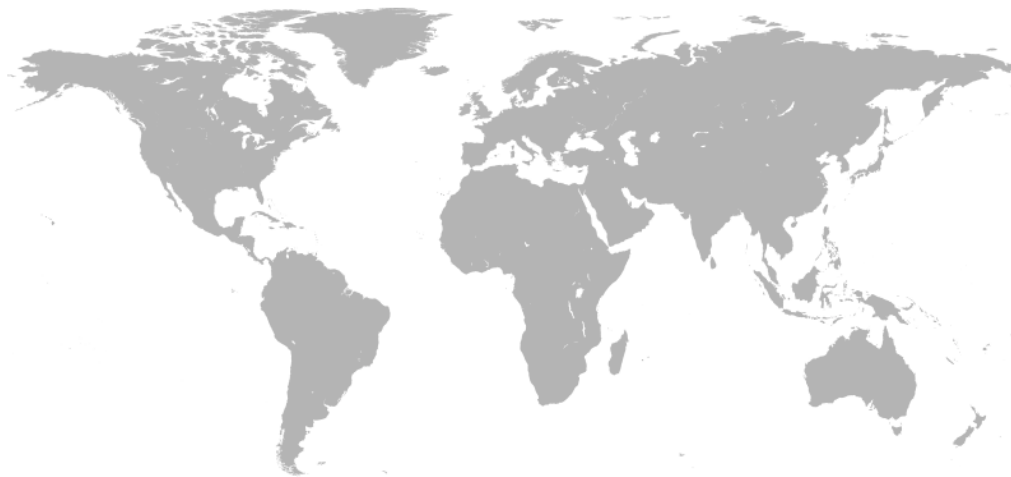
Preliterate: These adults come from societies and languages that do not have a writing system. In other words, their language was never written down or has only recently been transcribed. Some examples are the Bantu from Somalia, Jarai and other Montagnard groups from Vietnam, and Dinka from South Sudan. They often learn through visuals, interaction, and narrative, as reality is grounded in orality. Structured lessons in books and on paper are of little benefit *at first*. Pictures are very useful.

Nonliterate: These adults *do* come from societies with written text, but were unfortunately not able to take advantage of formal education. Only focus on grammar and alphabets when ready and willing, and at a comfortable pace.

Semi-literate: These are adults who attended some school, maybe 3rd to 9th grade equivalent. They may have some existing knowledge of language mechanics, and can more easily adapt to classroom culture. They do well with a mix of hands-on activities and structured curricula.

Literate: These adults have a high school education equivalent or higher. They have existing study and self-learning skills. They do well when given lots of written resources to learn a new language. An Arabic-to-English dictionary, for example, goes a long way. Leverage their existing skillset to learn English.

Note on non-Latin alphabets: There are adults whose home language is written in a script other than Latin (e.g., Chinese characters or Arabic script). Their existing home language literacy level will shape how much of a struggle it will be to learn written English, which uses the Latin alphabet.



?? Think about what you know about the citizenship interview. Understanding What might it take to be prepared to pass the interview, and what challenges might different English Language Learners face?

Making Learning Relevant: The Power of Stories and Pictures

We've already explored the components of the citizenship interview and what would need to be taught to prepare learners for success. We've also discussed other areas of life that are important for English Language Learners, and why they must learn English to navigate society and care for themselves and their families. We can now begin to look at **methodology**, how to teach the language content needed for everyday life.



QUESTION HIERARCHY METHOD

| 1) Yes / No | 2) Either / Or | 3) WH- | 4) Personal | 5) Open ended |
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| Ask yes/no questions to assess knowledge | Provide two choices to assess knowledge | Ask WH questions: Who, What, Where, When, How? | Ask questions that draw from experience | Ask deeper <i>why</i> questions or questions that require opinion or argument |
| “Is this a man?” “Are they inside?” | “Is this rice or corn?” “Is this a shirt or a jacket?” | Where are they? What are they doing? How are they carrying the rice? | Have you ever harvested rice? Do you like rice? Do they grow rice in your country? | Why aren't they using machines? Are they paid fairly? Why are they so happy looking? |

This method can be used with *anything*: a picture, a written or oral story, a retelling of an experience, and what you have in front of you and what you are doing right now. This method is very helpful to carry with you through all of your teaching. If your student is struggling, move backwards along the hierarchy until you find a comfortable place to learn. If your student is getting everything right, increase the difficulty by moving up the method until there is an adequate amount of “struggle”. Remember this formula: “What my student already knows” + 1 = comfortable zone of learning.

You can decide that the goal of your class is to teach 12 words about cooking, 8 nouns and 4 verbs. Show some pictures of people cooking and use the question hierarchy method to assess how much students know, then introduce unknown words. Follow up by providing a cooking lesson while using target words.

?? How might you apply this method to teaching citizenship material?

LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE APPROACH (LEA)

This is a proven method to improve the reading and writing skills of English Language Learners by leveraging *their own English language production*. This approach can be easily explained like this:

- 1) Pick a photograph, draw a picture, or provide an *experience* (e.g., cooking, a walk around the block, make holiday greeting cards, etc.).
- 2) Ask students to tell you verbally about whatever it is you chose. Their responses will be their own and won't be corrected.
- 3) Transcribe on paper or on a whiteboard exactly what the students say, including all word choices and grammatical errors, but with proper spelling.
- 4) Use any number of activities from here:
 - Read the produced content aloud to students a few times, pointing to each word, asking that they only read and listen. This promotes the ability to read, in English, one's own words. Then ask them to repeat after you, a few words at a time, or a sentence at a time. Finally, have students read without your support.
 - Have students point to or circle the words that you say in the passage.
 - Write the story on paper then cut it into sentence strips. Mix the strips up and have students arrange them into the correct order. You could also cut up the passage word by word.
 - Introduce *one* grammar topic or vocabulary word at a time. This honors the language they produced while also providing the next steps to polishing their language production. We want to avoid red-inking student's work, as this can increase anxiety.



?? Having discussed the Question Hierarchy Method and LEA, what items, photographs, experiences, and activities could we prepare as learning content for those who come into our church?

TIPS

- Inject **dictation** as an activity into lessons. Speak the content, then students write it down.
- Make copies of pictures, use labels where possible. You and your students can draw, too!
- Generate picture stories. Tell the story first, then have students retell. Then write it down.
- Retell stories with CLOZE activities (blanks where key vocabulary should be).
- Limit words to learn to 8-12 a session. Try to limit grammar or other rules to 1 or 2 points.
- Don't be afraid to provide gentle corrections and effective feedback. Limit the amount, though.

SPEAKING AND LISTENING

The goal of effective listening is not only understanding what you hear, but also making meaning out of and responding to what you hear. Many conversations require this to take place quickly, requiring a speaker to think on their feet. Conversations can lead to multiple outcomes, many of which will have drastic implications in the lives of the speaker and their family.

We want to help English learners feel confident in tricky situations, and have enough language skills to adapt in the flow of conversation. **Dialogues** and **Roleplays** are a perfect pair of activities to help build confidence to meet an intended outcome in a conversation.

Dialogues are *prepared* teaching materials that are brought to class or written out on paper or a whiteboard during class. Their primary purpose is to introduce and new language to use in particular situations. Dialogues can be between 2 or more speakers. They are a great means to increase vocabulary, confidence in speaking, and navigating everyday life with speech. Ask yourself: what is the intended outcome of the conversation, and what is the functional task being accomplished? A few examples are: telling your landlord about a leaky toilet, filling a prescription, telling your child’s teacher that your child is sick, asking a grocery clerk the difference between bleached and unbleached all-purpose flour, and sharing insurance information at the site of a car accident.

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| <p><u>Steps to Completing a Dialogue Activity</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Introduce the dialogue 2. Use pictures and drawings if possible 3. Model the dialogue 4. Conduct a comprehension check, repeat if needed 5. “Repeat after me”, drill each line, repeat if needed 6. Practice taking roles 7. Switch up content of the dialogue to build confidence | <p>Robert speaking</p> <p>Hi, Robert. This is Lu in room 2C. I have a problem with my sink.</p> <p>What’s the problem?</p> <p>It’s dripping underneath. Everything is wet.</p> <p>Did you tighten the fitting?</p> <p>I don’t know how to do that. I need your help.</p> <p>Okay, I’ll be right over.</p> <p>Thank you, Robert. I’ll be here.</p> |
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Roleplays are the logical evolution of dialogues. The premise of a roleplay is to put aside all reading material, and to act out a scenario. The goal remains, however: to use spoken language to reach an intended outcome of a conversation, and/or complete a functional task. Roleplays are much easier to prepare as a teacher, but require high levels of confidence with the student. A typical roleplay involves the teacher setting the stage with a scenario, choosing roles, and identifying an intended outcome. This can be done verbally, or with cards or papers that prompt the dialogue. Below is an example of a roleplay using three sets of parameters to help mix up the activity, thereby allowing for multiple versions of the dialogue to help build confidence and not have the student rely on rehearsed language:

| Body Part | Level of pain | Description of pain |
|---|---------------|--|
| Back molar, chest, lower back, elbow, neck, abdomen, knee | 1 - 10 | Dull, sharp, random, shooting, throbbing, only in the morning, only when lying down, when lifting, when eating |

Share how you might prepare a lesson with dialogues and roleplays, and what your student will be able to accomplish with newfound spoken English.

DRILLS

Like many things in life, we become more competent and confident with another language with intentional repetition, and with minor variations. Our brains pick up on patterns. Drills help with recall, and can easily make substitutions for words and phrases when in different situations. They can also be used to emphasize language structure, syntax, and building meaning.

Substitution Drills

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| <p>These drills focus on using accurate language structure and syntax.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Choose a particular sentence for your student. For example, "I'm washing the vegetables." You may write these down or stick to spoken language only. 2) Say the sentence, have your student repeat. 3) Replace one word in the sentence 4) Continue replacing that word, or target other words in the sentence 5) You may use pantomiming to support building meaning. (e.g., using a knife to express cutting vegetables) | <p>Teacher: I'm washing the vegetables. Student: I'm washing the vegetables. Teacher: cutting Student: I'm cutting the vegetables. Teacher: seasoning Student: I'm seasoning the vegetables. Teacher: frying Student: I'm frying the vegetables.</p> |
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Response Drills

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| <p>These drills support the student's ability to respond to questions.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Choose a sentence that will become answers later on in the exercise. 2) Teacher models the entire script first. 3) Teacher and student take their roles. 4) Teacher substitutes answer with appropriate question. 5) Student responds with answer. The teacher may use hand gestures to help. 6) Repeat the conversation with pre-selected substitutions. | <p>Teacher: I'm walking to class. Student: I'm walking to class. Teacher: What are you doing? Student: I'm walking to class. Teacher: What are you doing? (pantomimes driving) Student: I'm driving to school. Teacher: What are you doing? (pantomimes waiting impatiently) Student: I'm waiting at the bus stop.</p> |
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Transformation Drills

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| <p>These drills support students with changing statements into negatives, and statements into questions.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Say the positive statement, student repeats. 2) Say the negative equivalent, student repeats. 3) Say the positive statement again, student repeats. 4) Shake your head to prompt the student to produce the negative statement. | <p>Teacher: The man is sleepy. Student: The man is sleepy Teacher: The man is not sleepy. Student: The man is not sleepy. Teacher: The man is sleepy. Student: The man is sleepy. Teacher: (shakes head) Student: The man is not sleepy.</p> | <p>Teacher: Juan is taking the bus. Student: Juan is taking the bus. Teacher: Is Juan taking the bus? Student: Is Juan taking the bus? Teacher: Juan is taking the bus. Student: Juan is taking the bus. Teacher: (?? shrug shoulders ??) Student: Is Juan taking the bus?</p> |
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Backward Buildup

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| <p>Longer sentences are difficult for students to produce. This activity supports students in producing accurately when there is much meaning to convey. This also helps with teaching proper intonation.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Prepare your sentences beforehand and chop up phrases. 2) In class, write out the last phrase, student repeats. 3) Continue backward from there until complete. 4) Ask a question that prompts the full sentence. | <p>Teacher: for dinner (student repeats) Teacher: to buy beans and rice for dinner. (student repeats) Teacher: to Super G Mart to buy beans and rice for dinner. (student repeats) Teacher: We're going to Super G Mart to buy beans and rice for dinner. (student repeats) Teacher: Where are you going after class? (student answers)</p> |
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DICTATION

Dictation is a great exercise to apply language (written and spoken) that has already been covered. It especially relies on listening and writing skills. The citizenship interview contains a writing portion that is completed by means of dictation.

To complete a dictation exercise, choose one or more words, phrases, or sentences which contain language and meaning previously covered. Ideally, the necessary spelling and writing mechanics have been taught prior to dictation. Provide your student paper or a whiteboard, and simply say out loud the chosen word(s), phrase(s), or sentence(s). Offer gentle corrections and meaningful feedback on your student's written English.

IDEAS FOR MEETING WITH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

- 1. Start with Practical Vocabulary:** Focus on everyday words and phrases that students can use immediately in their daily lives, such as greetings, food, transportation, money, and shopping.
- 2. Use Visual Aids:** Incorporate pictures, realia (real objects), and flashcards to help convey meaning, especially for students with limited literacy.
- 3. Incorporate Total Physical Response (TPR):** Use physical actions to demonstrate words and phrases. For example, act out "open the door" or "sit down." This method helps students learn through movement. Mix up actions and objects for more variety.
- 4. Create a Safe and Welcoming Environment:** Repeat key vocabulary and phrases in different contexts. Consistency helps reinforce learning and builds confidence.
- 5. Connect Lessons to Students' Lives:** Relate lessons to the students' personal experiences and needs. For example, teach vocabulary related to their jobs, health, home country, culture, or children's education.
- 6. Encourage increased engagement:** Encourage students to strike up conversations with neighbors, co-workers, other parents, and clerks at stores. A great homework assignment is writing down unfamiliar words and phrases found at work, on a flyer from their child's school, or on a product they use at home. They can bring it to class and learn it with you.
- 7. Prepare for the citizenship interview:** Use each question on the N400 for practicing conversation, and switch up how you ask. Roleplay being the officer for the student, and use the resources provided to mimic the interview.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- "I Speak English" by Ruth Johnson Colvin, 5th edition text.
- Google: USCIS Study for the Test. to access the N-400 application and the 100 Civic Questions
 - Also, Google "USCIS for the writing test" and "USCIS for the reading test" to access official study materials for reading and writing. See search results for reading tips and writing tips for activities
- Google: Tacoma Community House Education. Click on their page titled "Education", then click on "Literacy Now Downloadable Materials" in their Education Services Offered menu, then click "CLICK HERE FOR ADDITIONAL RESOURCES".
 - These downloadable materials are among the most reputable learning materials available today for ESOL practitioners. Highly suggested: "Teaching English Language Learners: A Handbook for Volunteers", "Making it Real", and "Tales from the Homeland".
- readingconnections.org/remote-instruction/esol-resources/ . This site includes downloadable materials for a variety of instructional scenarios.