

# ESL Volunteer Guide

A resource packet  
For Tutors

Massachusetts Institute of Technology  
ESL for Service Employees

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## Note to MIT volunteers

Thank you for volunteering in the MIT ESL for Service Employees Program. This guide presents basic strategies for teaching ESL as well as further resources to facilitate positive experiences with your student. This guide is addressed to volunteers without a background in education and especially those who may have received little or no training to work with adult ESL learners. This guide is adapted with permission for MIT use from materials created by Colorado State, which can be found at:

[http://writing.colostate.edu/guides/teaching/esl/link\\_list.cfm](http://writing.colostate.edu/guides/teaching/esl/link_list.cfm)

If you find any problems or have any suggestions, please contact Laura Mali-Astrue at [LMaliAstrue@alum.mit.edu](mailto:LMaliAstrue@alum.mit.edu) or through [esl-admins@mit.edu](mailto:esl-admins@mit.edu).

## ESL Learners: Getting to Know Your Student

ESL learners represent a wide diversity of cultural backgrounds and language skills, but our students are all eager to build relationships with their tutors and develop their skills in English. It takes time to build trust and understanding, but the more you know about your learners, the better you will be equipped to meet their needs.

Consider the following questions when you first meet your student:

- **What language skills are already present?** Can the student hold a conversation in English but not read and write, or vice versa? Some Asian countries are known for teaching written English and grammar while oral skills lag behind. On the other hand, immigrants who have learned most of their English on the street may have little or no competence with written English. Some students may appear fairly fluent when you meet them, but communication may break down quickly when the topic changes. Or you may meet a student who appears to have minimal speaking skills and discover later that the silence was due to shyness rather than a lack of comprehension. Of course, students who are not literate in their own language will need a different approach to ESL than those who are.
- **Where will English be needed?** Several possibilities: work, job interviews, housing, helping children with school work or speaking with teachers, public services, friends, social gatherings, television. In some cases, time spent with you may be the only time all week that the student speaks English.
- **What do you know about the learner's home country or culture?** Learn about the cultural attitudes and values your learner is likely to embrace. Also try to find out if there are cultural taboos that may save you or your student from embarrassment or unintentional offense. For example, pointing the bottom of your shoe toward someone is a vulgar gesture in Ukraine. The Internet and local library are excellent resources for specific cultural information, and you can learn a lot from your student, too. Ask questions!
- **Are there any potentially uncomfortable topics requiring extra sensitivity?** Consider political trauma a student may have experienced. Will someone who recently fled to the U.S. in fear be uncomfortable giving a description of his or her native home? Will a student trying to resolve immigration issues be reluctant

to answer personal questions such as birthplace? Religious practice is another area that may need special consideration. For example, if you talk about food or grocery shopping, will any of your students need to know how to determine if a product contains pork?

Keep in mind that your student may have personal challenges that may affect his attitudes, attendance, or ability to focus on English. It may take time for you to become aware of the following types of issues:

- **Culture Shock and Homesickness:** Almost all foreigners will experience culture shock and homesickness to some degree. See further discussion in the Cultural Bridges section below.
- **Life Experiences:** Immigrants from countries ravaged by political unrest may have traumatic memories and resulting fears or insecurity. Others may have held prestigious jobs in their home countries and now face the frustration of being unable to work in their field of expertise. Settling for a low paying labor job just to survive can take a toll on self-esteem and confidence.
- **Family Dynamics:** You may never be told about difficulties in your student's personal life, but issues such as strained marriage, problems with children, alcoholism, or other difficulties in the home are likely to affect a student's performance. Loneliness is often an issue for students who live by themselves.
- **Financial Concerns:** Limited income may force families to live in impoverished housing, forgo medical or dental care, or compromise nutrition. Many immigrants sacrifice sleep and work two jobs to make ends meet.

## Building Cultural Bridges

Developing friendships with your learners can be one of the most significant influences in their adaption to a new culture. However, ways of thinking or cultural values that vary from your own can be a source of tension, misunderstanding, or even mistrust. An open mind and a basic understanding of some common cultural differences can save you from many potential problems as well as deepen your relationships with your learners.

In her book *Foreign to Familiar*, Sarah Lanier describes categorical differences she has observed between cultures she labels "cold-climate," such as Europe and most of the United States, and "hot-climate" cultures such as South America, Africa, and most of Asia. She has also observed that in any country, urban areas tend toward cold-climate traits, and rural areas toward hot-climate traits. The following table summarizes many of these differences. Keep in mind that these are general observations and individual students and/or countries may not fit these tendencies. Most will probably represent a mix of these values weighted toward one side or the other.

"Cold-climate"/Urban	"hot climate"/rural	Classroom Application
<b>Task and logic oriented</b> , communication gives accurate information, respecting efficiency and time shows respect for people.	<b>Relationship and feeling oriented</b> , communication seeks a feel-good atmosphere over accuracy, people are more important than efficiency and time.	Start on time and keep the lesson moving along, but allow for brief departures from the lesson to build relationships and let students express themselves even if it seems off-topic.
<b>Direct communication</b> , 'yes' and 'no' are taken literally, and honest, polite words are usually not taken personally.	<b>Indirect communication</b> , 'yes' and 'no' are not always literal, direct questions or statements may be rude or embarrassing.	Avoid direct yes/no questions except on objective topics; avoid correcting a hot-climate student in front of others.
<b>Individualistic</b> , value own identity, individuals speak for themselves, taking initiative in a group is encouraged, one person's behavior does not necessarily represent the group.	<b>Group oriented</b> , value group identity (belonging), taking initiative in a group is largely determined by roles. One member's behavior reflects on the whole group.	Provide roles for group work; when asking a class for a vote, realize that one hot-climate student's vote may stand for his same-culture classmates but a cold-climate student's vote is only his own.
<b>Private</b> , value personal time and space, ask permission to borrow things or interrupt, respect personal possessions, acceptable not to include everyone in invitations or plans.	<b>Inclusive</b> , being left alone is undesirable, individuals welcome to join conversations or group activities without asking, possessions freely shared, rude not to include everyone in activities.	Balance individual and group work; teach students when and how to ask permission to speak, borrow things, or join an activity (such as joining a group at a table.)
<b>Hospitality is planned.</b> Host usually requires advanced notice and makes special preparations. Guests pay for many of their own expenses such as transportation.	<b>Hospitality is spontaneous.</b> Invitations are not required and preparation is not expected; host takes care of all needs and expenses of the guest. Host may expect a gift.	Students may appreciate your help beyond the classroom; if you are given a gift, the student probably does not expect a gift in return.
<b>Time oriented</b> , make plans and schedules, value saving time, expect events such as meals or meetings to begin at the time announced, chat before or after events	<b>Event oriented</b> , relatively unstructured, value experiencing the moment over saved time, less emphasis on the clock, flexible, chatting is part of an event.	When planning social events, allow time for hot-climate students to arrive later than cold-climate students and plan something to do while waiting.

Remember that although none of these cultural values can be called “right” or “wrong,” your learners will need to adapt to the cultural expectations of the communities they live in. The southern United States exhibits many hot-climate attitudes while the rest of the country generally holds cold-climate values. So what should your learners expect when they visit an American home? Can they express individual opinions? Should they make small talk at a store? How important is it to be on time for different types of events? It is certainly appropriate to clarify to your learners the cultural values you and your community hold, which they may interact with daily.

## The Basics of Teaching

The following principles apply to almost any kind of teaching. Some of these points may seem like common sense, yet these are the types of issues professional teachers spend years learning and perfecting. Many of these ideas are adapted from *Teaching By Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy* by H. Douglas Brown and *How to Teach English* by Jeremy Harmer.

- **Make Lessons Interesting**

Bored students won't remember much of the lesson. Don't talk for long blocks of time. Instead, keep students involved and interacting with you in English. Vary the types of skills you practice, add games, and bring in real-life objects like a telephone, cookbook, or musical instrument. Vary your own dress or behavior patterns for a day. Keep in mind, though, that some degree of predictability and structure will give your students a feeling of safety.

- **Make Yourself Understandable**

Keep any instructions simple and logical. Simplify your vocabulary, grammar, and speaking speed to the degree necessary to be understood. Instead of slowing all of your words equally, use short, simpler sentences and increase pauses between sentences. “Chunk” your ideas, and leave processing time for comprehension.

As your student's English ability increases, so should the complexity and speed of your English. Some of your interaction at an intermediate level and most of it at an advanced level can use natural grammar and speed, but make sure you slow down or repeat any highly important points. Teach your learner how to ask for clarification when he needs it. Try to anticipate unknown vocabulary and be prepared to explain it. Appropriate language modification gets easier with practice.

- **Motivate with Encouragement**

Learners will truly want to learn when they perceive a personal reward. To boost internal motivation, remind them of the benefits English can provide, such as English-speaking friends, better job opportunities, easier shopping, or less stress at the doctor's office. Teach language that will bring them closer to those

benefits. Motivation can be hindered by over-correction, or by teaching a topic that the learner will not use in daily life. Motivation can be boosted externally by praise and encouragement. Keep the ESL Program Coordinators and your student's supervisors apprised of progress so that they, also, can be specific in their encouragement.

- **Provide a Useful Context**

Learners will remember material better and take more interest in it if it has relevant contextual meaning. Arbitrary rote learning (word lists and grammar drills) may be useful in solidifying language forms, but vocabulary and expressions with real-world application will be more easily remembered and used.

- **Remember that Native Language Affects English Learning**

A learner's native language will provide a basis for figuring out how English works. Sometimes the native language can affect English production. For example, the Japanese language does not use articles (a, an, the) so correct article usage is frequently difficult for Japanese learners. Spanish uses idioms such as "I have thirst" or "I have sleepiness," so Spanish speakers may forget to use "I am..." with an adjective instead of a noun. Chinese does not conjugate verbs for tense, so Chinese speakers often use the present tense form for past and future expressions.

Most ESL teachers have little if any understanding of their students' native languages. While a familiarity with the native language may shed light on certain errors, it is certainly not essential. In fact, intermediate and advanced students are often able to tell you whether a specific error is related to their native language. If you engage your intermediate or advanced student to explain how a construction differs in his native language, it may help him remember the English idiom.

- **Don't Assume All Errors are Bad.**

Native language interference contributes to a gradual process of learning in which language is refined over time to become much more like natural English. For example, a learner may progress through phrases such as "no I like peanuts," "I no like peanuts," and finally "I don't like peanuts." Teachers must not get discouraged watching students exchange one error for another; this process is a natural part of language learning. Selectively choose errors to work on rather than trying to fix everything at once. *Give priority to problems that hinder communication.* With gentle corrective feedback, students will keep improving.

- **Encourage Learners to Think in English.**

Unlike very small children, adults are accustomed to using complex ideas and structures in their native language. Unfortunately, adult ESL learners often get stuck in the habit of thinking in their native language, and then mentally trying to translate what they want to say or write into English. This is time consuming

and also leads to confusion when direct translation is not possible, or when the original idea is too complex for the student's English ability. Encourage students to simplify their ideas before trying to express them. Teach useful words, phrases, expressions and structures so that students can use these building blocks to express original ideas without focusing too much on language rules or translation.

While it's unreasonable to expect beginning ESL learners to avoid all language translation, one way you can minimize it is to explain new vocabulary using pictures, drawings or gestures. Allow dictionary look-ups only as a last resort. You might ask intermediate and advanced students to speak for several minutes without stopping. As students develop more "blocks" of English, particularly on familiar topics, mental translation will become cumbersome and learners should begin developing an ability to use English independently from their native language.

- **Build Confidence in Your Students**  
Learners must believe in their own ability to complete a task. Without self-confidence, they are unlikely to take risks, and risk-taking is necessary in language learning. Learners need to feel that it's safe to make mistakes. By trying out new or less familiar language, they may find that they are indeed capable of more communication than they thought. Try to reduce feelings of embarrassment when mistakes are made, and give far more compliments than criticisms. Make some tasks easy enough that everyone is guaranteed success.
- **Account for Different Learning Styles**  
Some people are hands-on learners. Some like to watch. Some like to have detailed explanations. Some people learn better visually, others audibly. Some like to work in groups. Some work better individually. Vary your activities to fit the learning style of your student, if you can.
- **Know your Student**  
Build trust with your students by building relationships and being approachable. Learn how to pronounce their names (or ask for easier nicknames) and remember to use them.

The following guides offer additional information for new teachers about how to teach ESL.

[www.Escort.org/young-adult-helpkit](http://www.Escort.org/young-adult-helpkit)

"Help! They don't Speak English" starter kit. Focuses on migrant students and young adults of adolescent age who are not in public school. Includes principles of adult learning, printable handouts on 16 topics.

[www.tefl.net/teaching/teaching-tips.htm](http://www.tefl.net/teaching/teaching-tips.htm)

Liz Regan's 20 teaching tips and further links to topic-based worksheets.

## Keeping the Focus on Communication

While vocabulary lists and grammar exercises are often helpful, remember that every language lesson should prepare your students for real-world communication in some way. Where possible, use tasks and activities that require the student to produce meaningful and useful communication – called the “communicative approach” – rather than rote learning. Here are some tips for making your lessons communicative:

- **Teach Clarifications Skills**

When communication breaks down, native speakers usually clarify unclear items by *asking questions*, and *offering explanations*. They ask for *repetition* or more information, *confirm* that the other person has understood, *expand* on words or topics, or repeat back a *paraphrase* of what they heard to confirm they got it right. These are important communication skills, but they can be difficult and ESL learners need to be taught how to do this in English.

Teach your students how to ask for clarification in oral interactions. Make sure they can confirm what they heard and get the information they need. The following phrases are a starting point, and can be expanded or adapted to an appropriate language level:

- do you understand?
- Excuse me / Could you repeat that?
- Once more, / one more time.
- Please speak more slowly
- How do you spell that?
- Did you say \_\_\_\_\_?
- What does \_\_\_\_\_ mean?
- How do you say \_\_\_\_\_ in English?
- I don't know
- I don't understand.

- **Make Your Teaching Interactive**

While you are teaching, you don't need to do all the talking. Involve your student by asking him for related vocabulary words, the spelling of a word he suggests, the past tense of verbs, etc. Draw out what he already knows and connect it to his life experience outside the text. For example, if your text contains the word “allergy,” and you aren't sure if the student understands it, don't simply teach “an allergy is....” and move on. Ask if he knows the meaning and can explain it. Find out what types of allergies he can think of, and whether he knows people with an allergy. Determine if he knows the spelling of the plural, “allergies.” While they can become time-consuming, these personal digressions are often the most useful learning moments and are well suited for one-on-one tutoring.

- **Develop Presentation Skills**

Not all communication is interactive. You can have your student give a speech, write a letter, or tell you an extended story. As long as they are producing original language to convey their own thoughts, they are practicing communication.

- **Balance “Authentic Production” with Other Tasks**

Some elements of your lesson will probably not be “communicative.” For example, vocabulary lists, reading practice, listening tasks, grammar structures and pronunciation practice do not require any original language to be produced by the learner, yet they are all valuable building blocks for communication. As a teacher, you should be aware of the difference between what is communicative and what is not, and balance the two.

## Teaching Adults

Adults bring life experience and a level of maturity into the classroom that children and adolescents do not. Their expectations and motivations reflect this. Here are several keys to keep in mind when teaching adults:

- **Adults respond well to knowledgeable, enthusiastic teachers**

You must be comfortable with the subject matter you are teaching and communicate enthusiasm for the subject matter and for your role as a teacher. This will help you gain respect and is especially important if you are younger than your students. If you must teach material which is challenging for you, try not to communicate a negative attitude about the material to your students. If a student asks a question which you cannot answer, don't be afraid to say, “I don't know, but I'll find out for you.”

- **Adults are not too old to learn a second language well**

Although native language learning and literacy are best accomplished in childhood, research has shown that adolescents and adults outperform children in many ways when learning a second language. One of the reasons children appear to acquire a second language faster than adults is simply that they get a lot more practice with other children and have lower inhibitions, but many adults have attained a high level of fluency in a second language.

- **Adults need a comfortable and safe learning atmosphere**

Trial and error should be encouraged in language learning. Adults will take more risks in an environment where it's safe to make mistakes without embarrassment. You may want to minimize public reading and writing until your learners gain confidence, especially if literacy skills are deficient.

- **Adult learning is transformative**

Learning in childhood is said to be formative, when skills and concepts are formed for the first time. Adults, on the other hand, are extending and refining their

knowledge based on existing knowledge and beliefs. They are changed or transformed by learning experiences.

- **Adults need repeated practice of a concept or skill**  
Adults generally need patience and repetition to solidify new language concepts or skills. If adults have already developed bad habits with English errors, these will take time and effort to break. Adults also tend to have a lot on their minds and limited time to practice English outside the classroom.
- **Adults learn well with question asking and answering, and problem finding and solving.**  
These activities require mature thought processes that stimulate and motivate adult minds.
- **Adults want practical, real-life contexts**  
The more relevant and useful the subject matter, the more motivated your learners will be. Adults enjoy materials that relate to their personal experiences and interests, and they want to be able to apply what they're learning in the real world.

## Understanding Language Levels

What do the terms beginner, intermediate and advanced really mean? Unfortunately the definitions vary among institutions. The following guide for oral communication ability, though subjective, may be useful. Variations of these definitions can also be used to describe written language levels.

- **True Beginner**
  - Very limited communication in English
  - Uses gestures and 1-3 word sentences
- **Beginner**
  - Communicates with difficulty and many errors
  - Very simple, unelaborated answers
  - Many hesitations
  - No ability to extend conversation
  - Uses simple grammar and vocabulary.
- **Low Intermediate**
  - Communicates understandably with some errors
  - Simple answers and little elaboration
  - Attempts interactive conversation
  - Attempts more complex grammar
- **High Intermediate**
  - Communicates fairly well

- Some elaboration, especially on familiar topics
- Can converse with errors and some hesitations
- Uses more complex grammar and vocabulary
- **Advanced**
  - Communicates well with only occasional errors
  - Converses with lots of elaboration
  - Errors don't hinder communication
  - Uses advanced grammar and vocabulary

Remember that a student may have strong oral comprehension, but have a more limited ability to formulate responses. There may be a large difference between your student's oral level and his ability to read or write.

## **Focus on the Four Language Skills**

The four basic language skills are listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Of course other skills such as pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary and spelling all play a role in effective English communication. The amount of attention you give to each skill will depend on both the level of your student and on his situational needs. Generally beginners benefit most from listening and speaking instruction, with relatively little work on reading and writing. As fluency increases, the amount of reading and writing in your lessons may also increase. With advanced learners, up to half of your lesson time can be spent on written skills, although your learners may wish to keep their focus weighted toward oral communication if that is a greater need.

### **(1) Teaching Listening**

Of the four language skills, listening is by far the most frequently used. Listening and speaking are often taught together, but beginners, especially non-literate ones, should be given more practice listening than speaking. It is important to speak as close as possible to natural speed, although with beginners some slowing is usually necessary. Without reducing your speaking speed, you can make your language easier to comprehend by simplifying your vocabulary, using shorter sentences, and increasing the number and length of pauses between phrases and sentences.

There are many types of listening activities in textbooks and on the Internet. They are designed to replicate real life situations. You can design your own activities to fit the needs of your student.

The easiest activities for students are those that don't require the student to answer verbally. Examples are commands that require a physical response – “open the door,” “point to the window,” “circle the picture of the dog,” “show me where you keep the paper towels.” Physical response activities are useful for beginning students, but they can also be used with intermediate students when presenting new vocabulary or words

with tricky pronunciation. They allow students to focus their energy on listening, rather than on producing language. More advanced listening activities that involve physical response include following multi-step directions, like how to get to a certain location, cooking directions, or any job directions. (“get a new box of XXX from the supply closet; take it to the second floor of building \_\_\_; refill the dispenser...etc.”)

More complicated listening tasks require a student to use and produce language in reply, like taking notes, writing a response, or answering comprehension questions. The most advanced listening tasks incorporate other skills, like problem solving or participating in real-time conversation.

Regardless of the type of listening activity you choose to use in your lesson, you can help your student be a better listener by structuring your lesson, and teaching listening strategies.

**Before the specific activity:**

- Set the stage. Introduce the topic and find out what your student already knows. Brainstorm the types of vocabulary he might expect to hear. Provide new vocabulary or expressions that will be key. Remember that in oral language, pronunciation may be slurred. Prepare students to expect contractions like “What-cha think?” “I da know,” and fillers like “um” and “un-huh.” For video clips, you can preview the clip with the sound off. Have the student predict what the audio will include.
- Be specific about what the student needs to listen for. Does he need to notice specific details (a phone number, an address), general content, or the emotional tone of the speaker? Does he need to write anything down? Let him know how many times the segment will be repeated so he will not be anxious about missing information the first time.

**During the activity:**

- Close doors or windows to reduce outside noise.
- Read the text (or play the tape or video segment) two or three times. Leave a pause between repetitions, but don’t “fill” the pause with other words like directions. Let the student focus on the listening task itself.

**Immediately after the activity:**

- Touch base with the student. Did she understand all, some, or none of the important information? If the task was easy, extend the topic with more vocabulary or tie to related topics. Pair the listening activity with a speaking or writing activity on the same topic to help reinforce new vocabulary and expressions.
- If the listening task was difficult, you may need to do some detective work to figure out how to help. The student herself may not know why it was hard, but you can teach her remediation skills for real life situations.

## **Possible problems, classroom solutions, and real life strategies**

The student may think the audio is unclear, or the speaker is talking too fast. She may think the speaker is using too many vocabulary words. Sometimes the student is simply overwhelmed.

For controlled classroom exercises, you should try to avoid these issues. Make sure your equipment works well and distractions are minimized. Introduce vocabulary logically and thematically. Don't throw a lot of new words into a listening exercise without setting the stage. Keep the grammar structures and sentence length appropriate for your student. Pick topics that are interesting or funny or practical in order to make follow up conversation easy and relaxed.

For real-world listening problems, encourage students to practice clarification techniques (see above, page 7) whenever possible. "Can we talk outside? The music/fan is very loud here." "Can you write that number down for me, please?" You may need to teach them culturally appropriate ways to interrupt a speaker. "Excuse me, can you repeat the name of the store?"

For situations when live interaction is not possible (airport announcements, recorded phone messages, TV programs, etc.), work with your student to brainstorm other solutions: can she DVR the show to replay it? Can she find an airport monitor or employee? For phone messages, is there the option to press a certain key to replay the message? You can also help students practice focused listening – listening not to every word, but for the key words. Hint: In English, the critical information is often at the end of a phrase or sentence: "The next station stop is Kendall/MIT. The doors will open on the right side."

### **Some technical hints and reminders:**

- Before your meeting, check your equipment (batteries? Extension cord? Speakers? Internet connection?)
- If you record your own material on tape, copy the same recording 3 times so that the pronunciation, intonation and pace are exactly the same and you can reduce rewinding.
- If using an MP3 player or audio file, make a note of the starting point on the counter or timer to facilitate repetition.
- For on-line materials, always check to make sure the link is still active
- Use different voices (friends, colleagues etc.) on your own recordings, or seek out a variety of voices (young/old; male/female) on audio and video clips.

Here are some websites that offer listening practice:

[www.esl-lab.com/index.htm](http://www.esl-lab.com/index.htm)

Randall's ESL Cyber Listening Lab. Listening quizzes, activities, vocabulary lessons (by topic); language learning and life tips; long conversations with real video.

[www.englishlistening.com](http://www.englishlistening.com)

Thirty free listening clips in 3 difficulty levels for students; more available with a small monthly subscription.

## **(2) Teaching Speaking**

Speaking English is the main goal of many adult learners. Their personalities play a large role in determining how quickly and how correctly they will reach this goal. Those who are risk-takers unafraid of making mistakes will generally be more talkative, but they may make many errors that could become bad habits. Conservative, shy students may take a long time to speak confidently, but when they do, their English often contains fewer errors and they will be proud of their English ability. Neither approach is wrong. Each requires slightly different forms of teacher correction and encouragement, outlined below.

Speaking lessons often tie in pronunciation and grammar (discussed later in this guide), which are necessary for effective oral communication. Sometimes a grammar or reading lesson may incorporate a speaking activity. Either way, your students will need some preparation before the speaking task. You will need to introduce the topic, provide any key vocabulary the student does not already know, and provide a model of the kind of speech they are to produce during the activity.

Typical speaking activities include imitating (repeating) a word or phrase given by the teacher, answering verbal cues, interactive conversation, or an oral presentation. The interactive speaking activities inherently practice listening skills as well. Information gaps are also commonly used for speaking practice, as are taking surveys, group discussions, and role-plays.

Here are some ideas to keep in mind as you plan speaking activities:

### **Content**

As much as possible, the content should be practical and usable in real-life situations. Avoid too much new vocabulary or grammar, and focus on speaking with the language the students have.

### **Quantity vs. Quality**

Address both interactive fluency and accuracy, striving foremost for communication. Get to know your student's personality and encourage quiet ones to take more risks.

### **Conversation Strategies**

Teach and encourage strategies like asking for clarification, paraphrasing, gestures, and ways to interrupt or initiate, like "hey", "and so..." "by the way..."

## Correcting Errors

You need to provide appropriate feedback and correction, but don't interrupt the flow of communication. Focus on errors that impede comprehension. If you interrupt, think of your correction as a nudge in the right direction. Don't turn it into a lecture.

Rather than stopping a sentence and pointing out an error, try restating the element correctly in the conversational flow:

T: What did you do yesterday?

S: I go to the supermarket...

T: You went to the supermarket? What did you buy?

S: I bought a chicken...

Some hesitant students will pause, expecting correction every third word. Don't comment verbally on every usage. Use non-verbal cues – nodding, smiling, and 'un-huh!' – to encourage them to keep talking. If there is a mistake at the pause, prompt only as much as necessary:

S: I went to the store. (pause) I buy... (pause)?

T: You bought... (smile, wait for student to resume)

S: I bought chicken.

Some students, particularly at advanced levels, actually DO want an explanation of why certain expressions are not correct. If they ask, of course you should always explain. Keep in mind, however, that while you are explaining a grammar rule, that's not speaking practice for the student.

When students are telling a story or giving a presentation, it's often better to take notes of any small errors in pronunciation, grammar or vocabulary and address them together afterwards: "I understood everything you said very well! Nice job. You said 'I go often to the movies.' We would probably say 'I often go to the movies' or 'I go to the movies a lot.'"

If you are having difficulty finding something to get your student talking about, check out these resources:

<http://www.eslconversationquestions.com>

ESL conversation questions, arranged by topic and also by grammar form.

### (3) Teaching Reading

*NOTE: This guide does not cover instruction for learners with little or no literacy in their native language; you will need to work intensively with them at the most basic level or letter recognition and phonics. More information on teaching literacy can be found at ProLiteracy Worldwide:*

<http://www.proliteracy.org/members/information-center>

*or through the Department of Education, National Institute for Literacy:*

[https://lincs.ed.gov/publications/pdf/teach\\_adults.pdf](https://lincs.ed.gov/publications/pdf/teach_adults.pdf)

*For more links, and helpful hints, see the Learning Disabilities Association of America section on adult literacy reading programs.*

<http://ldaamerica.org/adult-literacy-reading-programs/>

Written language comes in many forms – articles, stories, poems, announcements, letters, labels, signs, bills, receipts, schedules, questionnaires, cartoons, and many more. Literate adults recognize the distinctions of various types of texts. You should include all types of reading materials in your activities.

Finding authentic reading material may not be difficult, but finding materials appropriate for the level of your learner can be a challenge. Especially with beginners, you may need to modify the texts to simplify grammar and vocabulary. When choosing texts, consider what background knowledge may be necessary for full comprehension. Will students need to “read between the lines” for implied information? Are there cultural nuances that you will need to explain? Does the text have a meaningful connection to the lives of your learners? Consider letting your student bring in a text he would like to study. This could include a telephone bill, letter, job memo, want ad, or the back of a cereal box. Motivation will be higher if you use materials that interest your learner.

As with listening comprehension activities, reading lessons should begin with a warm-up activity to introduce the topic and make sure students have enough vocabulary, grammar, and background information to understand the text. Be careful not to introduce too much new vocabulary because you want your students to respond to the text, and not expend too much effort analyzing the language. After the reading activity, check comprehension and engage the learners with the text, soliciting their opinions further with conversation or a writing task.

Consider the following when designing your reading lessons:

**Purpose:**

Your students need to understand ahead of time why they are reading the material you have chosen.

## Reading Strategies

For faster and better comprehension, choose activities before and during your reading task that practice the following reading strategies:

- *Prediction*: give your students hints by asking them questions about the cover, pictures, headlines or format of the text to help them predict what they will find when they read it.
- *Guessing from context*: guide your students to look at contextual information outside or within the text. Outside context includes the source of the text, its format, and how old it is; inside context refers to topical information and the language used (vocabulary, tone, grammar) as well as illustrations. If students have trouble understanding a particular word or sentence, encourage them to look at the context to try to figure it out.
- *Skimming*: this will improve comprehension speed and is useful at the intermediate level and above. The idea of skimming is to look over the entire text quickly to get the basic idea. Give your students 30 seconds to skim the text and tell you the main topic, purpose or idea. They will then have a framework to understand the reading when they work through it more carefully.
- *Scanning*: this speed strategy is useful with intermediate level students and above. Students must look quickly through a text searching for a specific piece of information. This is most useful with non-continuous texts such as recipes, forms, or bills (look for an ingredient amount, account number, date) but scanning can also be used with newspaper articles, letters or stories. Ask your students for a very specific piece of information and give them just enough time to find it without allowing so much time that they will simply read the entire text.

## Silent Reading vs. Reading Aloud

Reading aloud and reading silently are really two separate skills. Reading aloud may be useful for reporting information or improving pronunciation. Reading aloud can also be used as a speaking exercise to practice intonation and stress. But a true reading lesson should focus on silent reading. When students read silently, they can vary their pace and concentrate on understanding the more difficult portions of the text. They will generally think more deeply about the context and have greater comprehension when reading silently. Try extended silent reading and you may be surprised at how much your learners can absorb when they study a text uninterrupted at their own pace. Very important: *when introducing extended texts, work with materials at, or slightly below, your student's level.* A long text filled with new vocabulary or complex grammar is too cumbersome. Students will get caught up in details, rather than understanding the text as a whole.

Many MIT service employees prefer to use their meeting times to focus on oral communication. They may have time to read materials at home, and you can use meeting times for pre-reading strategies, post reading clarification, and discussion. Other students have no time outside the class schedule to do homework. In this case, short silent reading activities can be done in class. Be sure to mix other communicative activities with reading during your sessions.

ESL textbooks are a good place to look for reading activities that include pre- and post-reading exercises. If you need some help with ideas for reading activities, the following sites may be helpful.

<http://www.english-to-go.com/index.cfm>

English to Go has 5 free reading lessons with pre- and post- activities. There are more activities available for a fee, but the free ones will give you some good ideas to start with.

<http://www.onestopenglish.com/skills/reading/topic-based-lesson-plans/>

One Stop English has many topic-based reading plans. These are available by subscription, but you can get a 30-day free trial to check it out.

## **(4) Teaching Writing**

Good writing conveys a meaningful message and uses English well, but the most important element of good writing is clarity. If you can understand the message, or even part of it, your student has succeeded in communicating on paper and should be praised for that.

Many adult ESL learners will not write much outside your class, so you should consider their needs and balance your class time appropriately. Others will need to send emails and complete forms for work. Many adults who do not need to write will enjoy it for the purpose of sharing their thoughts and personal stories. Writing may allow them to revise their work into better English more easily than would be possible if they were sharing the same information orally.

Working with your student, you should select writing tasks that fit his writing goals. Here are some types of writing you can ask your students to do. Note that the activities require different amounts of additional skills – vocabulary recall, grammar usage, and abstract thinking.

- Copying text word-for-word
- Writing what you dictate
- Filling in blanks in sentences and paragraphs [“cloze” exercises]
- Taking a paragraph and transforming certain language, for example changing all the verbs and time references to the past tense.
- Making a list of items, ideas, reasons, etc. (words or sentences)
- Completing forms and work documents
- Writing short text messages or notes to colleagues, supervisors, etc.
- Writing letters (complaint, advice, to friends, etc.). You can make this more interesting by providing note cards, post cards or stationery. You can also use this to teach how to address an envelope.
- Organizing information, for example making a grid of survey results, or writing directions to a location using a map.
- Summarizing a story text, video, or listening clip.

- Reacting to a text, object, picture, etc. This can require individual words or whole written paragraph, depending on the level of the student.

**Things to keep in mind when assigning a writing task:**

- **Format:** Clarify what you are looking for. For an essay, you may specify that you want an introduction, main ideas, support and a conclusion. For a list or a story, etc. the format will vary, but make sure your student knows what you expect.
- **Model:** Provide a model of the type of writing you want your student to do.
- **Editing:** Consider giving students a checklist of points to look for when editing their own work. Include such things as clear topic sentences, introduction and conclusion, verb tenses, capitalization, spelling, etc.
- **Correction:** Minimize the threatening appearance of correction. Instead of red pen, use green or blue or pencil. When possible, go over a students work orally. Don't rewrite the "correct" sentence yourself, but work with the student to edit and correct his own errors. Don't forget encouragement, and notice nice phrases, too.

**Practicing longer writing tasks**

Two writing strategies you may want to use with intermediate and advanced students are *free writing* and *revised writing*.

*Free writing* directs students to simply get their ideas onto paper without worrying much about grammar, spelling, or other English mechanics. In fact, the teacher can choose not to look at free writing pieces. To practice free writing, give students 5 minutes in class to write about a certain topic, or ask them to write weekly in a journal. You can try a dialogue journal where students write a journal entry and then give the journal to a partner or to the teacher, who writes an entry in response. Journal writing is usually done at home. The main characteristic of free writing is that few (or no) errors are corrected by the teacher. This relieves students of the pressure to perform and allows them to express themselves more freely.

*Revised writing*, also called extended or process writing, is a more formal activity in which students must write a first draft, then revise and edit it to a final polished version. Often the final product is shared publically (a letter is mailed, an article is published, etc.). You may need several classes to accomplish this.

- Begin with a pre-writing task such as free-writing, brainstorming, listing, making a time line, or making an outline. Then give the student clear instructions and ample time to write the assignment. (As with reading activities, short writing activities can be done in class, but many students prefer to write at their own pace at home.)
- Once a rough draft is completed, the student can discuss it face to face with you to receive constructive feedback. Make sure to address the ideas and content first. Correcting the English should be secondary.
- Finally, ask the student to rewrite the piece. She should use the feedback to revise and edit it into a piece she feels good about.

**Tactful correction:**

Written correction is potentially damaging to confidence because it's very visible and permanent on the page. Always make positive comments and respond to the content, not just the language. Focus on helping the student clarify the meaning of the writing. Especially at lower levels, choose selectively what to correct and what to ignore. Spelling should be a low priority as long as words are recognizable. To reduce ink on the page, don't correct all errors or rewrite sentences for the student. Make a mark where the error is and let the student figure out what's wrong and how to fix it. At higher levels, you can tell students ahead of time what kinds of errors (verbs, punctuation, spelling, word choice) you will correct. Be sure to respond orally to your student's writing, making comments on the introduction, overall clarity, organization, and any unnecessary information.

**Language Elements that Cross all Skills**

Listening, speaking, reading and writing are considered the four basic language skills, but many distinct elements are present in each form of communication. These elements (grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, spelling, etc.) can be taught separately, but they are best practiced in conjunction with a communicative learning activity.

**Teaching grammar**

Many ESL volunteers anticipate difficulties teaching grammar. American schools don't teach English grammar patterns the way foreign language teachers do, so native speakers may not be familiar with technical terms like "modal auxiliaries." But you do NOT have to be a grammar specialist to teach good usage! If you are a thoughtful native speaker, you know when something sounds "wrong." You know a better way to say it. And there are lots of different resources available to help you identify and explain all types of grammar patterns, with or without technical jargon.

**Small Corrections vs. Grammar Lessons**

How you teach grammar will depend on your student's needs. Many students will use a textbook that includes structured grammar lessons, terms, and examples in each chapter. These are a great place to start. The ESL program has many different texts available for your use, including Raymond Murphy's *English Grammar in Use* and texts in the *Ventures* series. Many ESL teachers also refer to the *English Grammar* series by Betty Azar when planning lessons, because she includes very detailed explanations that you may never have learned in school!

Often, however, a grammar question will pop up out of context. Your student will produce an awkward sentence and you realize the problem is a wrong tense, or a non-standard word order, or a misplaced agreement.

*Step one – small corrections or re-stating*

Where possible, restate the phrase with the correct form without making a big deal out of it:

S: Yesterday, we was going to work when...

T: we were going to work...

S: yes, we were going to work when we saw...

### *Step two – quick explanations*

IF the student seems confused or makes the same mistake repeatedly, a small explanation may help:

S: Yesterday, we was going to work when...

T: we were going...

S: Huh? Why not 'we was'?

T: 'I was going, you were going...' uses the same forms as the simple verb 'to be.' So just like with adjectives (I was hungry, they were hungry) we say I was going, I was waiting, I was eating, but we were going, we were waiting, we were eating.

These small explanations aren't really a lesson. They should not take over the primary activity (conversation practice, listening activity, vocabulary explanation, etc.). Sometimes you may not even know the grammar rule that applies. Feel free to say "A better way to say it is 'xyz.' I'm not sure what the rule is, but I'll find out."

### *Step three – the mini-lesson*

If you have promised to find out about a grammar rule, or if your student makes the same mistake repeatedly, or if she is simply ready to learn a new way to say something using a new structure, a mini-lesson is in order.

When setting up any grammar lesson, remember the following:

- **Find good lesson plans**

It's difficult to make a good grammar lesson from scratch, so any searching you do for appropriate grammar lessons in textbooks or on the Internet will be time well spent. In addition to your student's textbook, some places to start include:

Using English: <http://www.usingenglish.com/teachers/lesson-plans/>

5 Minute English: <http://www.5minuteenglish.com/grammar.htm>

and Dave's ESL Café: <http://www.eslcafe.com/grammar.html>

Additional sources are listed in the appendix, and on the MIT Stellar site.

- **Make the examples meaningful**

The sentences you use to teach and practice should not be random. Choose material that is relevant. If possible, bring in real-life, authentic texts to illustrate your points.

- **Acknowledge your role**

As a volunteer, you are not expected to be a grammar expert. Share handouts you get from grammar texts and websites, but always focus on clarity and real communication. Yes, there are grammar lessons that teach "to whom shall I address the letter?" but really, most Americans say "who should I address it to?" Use common sense and simple explanations.

- **Teach basic grammar words**

Although you need not be fluent in grammar jargon, it's a good idea to teach at least some vocabulary (noun, verb, past tense, etc.) to help you explain things. Intermediate and advanced students may be familiar with many such words already.

- **Keep the lesson fairly short**

Never make a grammar lesson take up your whole session. Present the pattern. Show examples. Compare and contrast with other patterns if that helps. But spend most of your time using new patterns. The resources will have oral and written activities you can do with your student. Or you can brainstorm together to find relevant and meaningful examples.

The links below are for *your* reference. They will help you understand and explain various grammar points.

Grammarly Handbook: <https://www.grammarly.com/handbook>

EduFind: <http://www.edufind.com/english-grammar/english-grammar-guide/>

Just google "English grammar" and you will find many resources. There's even an *English Grammar for Dummies* "cheat sheet." It's not that bad.

<http://www.dummies.com/how-to/content/english-grammar-for-dummies-cheat-sheet0.html>

Finally, the University of Chicago Writing program has a nice website with links to many other sources:

<http://writing-program.uchicago.edu/resources/grammar.htm>

## **Teaching pronunciation**

Pronunciation involves more than individual sounds. Word stress, sentence stress, intonation, and word linking all influence the sound of spoken English. To make things harder, we often slur words and phrases together in casual speech. "What are you going to do?" becomes "Whaddaya gonna do?" It may not be realistic for learners to eliminate all traces of non-English accent, but improving pronunciation will boost self-esteem, facilitate communication, and possibly lead to a better job or more respect in the workplace.

Sometimes, a student's first language interferes with English pronunciation. For example, /p/ is aspirated in English but not in Spanish. When a Spanish speaker pronounces 'pig' without the puff of air on the /p/, an American may hear 'big' instead. Sometimes students have difficulty hearing certain English sounds that their native language does not contain. The Japanese are known for confusing /r/ and /l/ as their language contains neither of these, but has one sound somewhere between the two. Sometimes students will be able to identify specific problem sounds and sometimes they won't. You will need to observe them over time and make note of problem areas.

Descriptions of sounds and mouth positions can help students increase their awareness of subtle sound differences.

Effective communication is the goal, so focus first on problems that significantly hinder communication and let the rest go. Remember that your students also need to learn strategies for dealing with misunderstandings, as even native speakers from different areas of the English-speaking world face confusions and miscommunications.

Here are some ideas for focusing on specific pronunciation features:

- **Voicing**

Voiced sounds make the throat vibrate. For example, /g/ is a voiced sound while /k/ is not, even though the mouth and tongue are in the same position for both sounds. Have your students touch their throats while pronouncing voiced and voiceless sounds. They should feel the vibration with the voiced sounds only.

Voiced/unvoiced pairs include:

/b/ and /p/

/v/ and /f/

/d/ and /t/

/z/ and /s/

/g/ and /k/

/zh/ (the sound in pleasure and equation) and /sh/

- **Aspiration**

Aspiration refers to a puff of air released when a sound is produced. Many languages have far fewer aspirated sounds than English, and students may have trouble hearing the aspiration. The English /p/, /t/, and /ch/ are commonly aspirated, especially at the beginning of a word. To illustrate aspiration, have your students hold a piece of facial tissue a few inches away from their mouths. When they pronounce a word with an aspirated consonant, they should see the tissue move with the puff of air.

- **Mouth Position**

Make sure students can clearly see your mouth while you model sounds. Have students use a mirror to see their mouth, lips, teeth and tongue while they imitate you. Draw simple diagrams to show the position of the tongue inside the mouth, especially when it hits different parts of the teeth or roof of the mouth. There are several websites listed below that have graphics and diagrams that may help your student find a more effective mouth position for difficult sounds.

- **Intonation**

Word or sentence intonation can be mimicked with a kazoo, or by humming. This will take students' attention off the meaning of the word or sentence and help them focus on intonation.

- **Linking**

We pronounce phrases and whole sentences as one smooth sound instead of a series of separate words. “Will Amy go away?” is rendered “willaymeegowaway?” To help learners link words, try starting at the end of the sentence and have them repeat a phrase, adding more of the sentence as they can master it. For example, “gowaway,” then “aymeegowaway,” and finally “Willaymeegowaway” without any pauses between words.

- **Vowel Length**

You can demonstrate varying vowel lengths by stretching a rubber band on the longer vowels and letting it contract on shorter ones. Then let the students try it. For example, the word “fifteen” would have the rubber band stretched for the ‘ee’ vowel, but the word “fifty” would not have the band stretched because both of its vowels are spoken quickly.

- **Syllables**

Illustrate syllable stress by clapping softly and loudly corresponding to the syllables of the word. For example, the word ‘beautiful’ would be loud-soft-soft. Practice with short lists of words with the same syllabic stress pattern (‘beautiful,’ ‘telephone,’ ‘Florida’) and then see if your student can list other words with that pattern.

Have your student count syllables in a word, or place objects on the table to represent each syllable.

- **Specific Sounds**

- Minimal pairs, or pairs of words that differ by only one sound, (bit/bat; bit/pit; big/bid) are useful for helping students distinguish similar sounds. They can be used to illustrate voicing (‘curl/girl’) or commonly confused sounds (‘play/pray’). Remember it’s the sound you are focusing on, not the spelling!
- Tongue twisters are useful for practicing specific target sounds, plus they are fun! Make sure the vocabulary isn’t too difficult.

Here are some resources for teaching pronunciation:

**ESL Your Dictionary.com:** a very clear outline of important features of teaching pronunciation, including the role of phonemes, language rhythm and stress, intonation, and what you need to focus on when teaching. This is NOT an academic article, but is a good place to start. There are also links to other materials

<http://esl.yourdictionary.com/esl/esl-lessons-and-materials/tips-resources-for-teaching-esl-pronunciation.html>

**Busy Teacher.** 6 exercises you can use in your session today (or not)

<http://busyteacher.org/14916-improve-esl-pronunciation-6-fun-exercises.html>

ESLFlow.com: many different pronunciation lesson plans, organized by topic and by specific sound patterns, with links to pronunciation guides, teaching tips, tongue twisters and other activities:

<http://www.eslflow.com/pronunciationlessonplans.html>

Dave's ESL café, main pronunciation page. Links to many activities:

<http://www.eslcafe.com/idea/index.cgi?Pronunciation:>

## Teaching spelling and vocabulary

English is not a phonetic language, meaning that pronunciation cannot be reliably predicted by spelling and vice versa. In the sentence "Her first nurse works early," the /er/, /ir/, /ur/, /or/ and /ear/ are all pronounced the same. In the sentence "Jim brought rough dough through the door," the /ough/ is pronounced four different ways. English has a lot of spelling rules, and a lot of exceptions! The good news is that generally in adult ESL, with the exception of advanced students and those who need to write on the job, spelling can take a back seat to overall communication. If words are recognizable and don't obscure the meaning, you may choose to focus on the content and let the spelling go. You will probably see your learners' spelling improve as they read more, and you can encourage them to use a dictionary for words they are unsure about.

One spelling web page I have found useful:

ESL Your Dictionary – teaching spelling strategies

<http://esl.yourdictionary.com/lesson-plans/Teaching-Spelling-Strategies-to-ESL-Students.html>

A single vocabulary word can carry a lot of meaning, and all other factors being equal, enlarging vocabulary will increase a student's communicative ability. Even at a survival level, communication can occur with a string of vocabulary words independent of grammatical form. Make time to teach and practice new words, associating them with a meaningful context.

Bilingual dictionaries, especially easy-to-use electronic ones, can become a crutch that doesn't aid students in internalizing the meaning of a word, so discourage overuse. Instead, try to help students guess the meaning of unfamiliar words from context. If they can't figure it out, encourage them to ask in English what it means. You can provide simple definitions, or drawings, or pantomime. Be sure not to use equally challenging vocabulary in your answer! If students are trying to express an idea and lack an English word, teach them to describe it before reaching for a dictionary. For example, a student who doesn't know the English word "hammer" could say "what is nail-hit-thing" while gesturing as if hammering.

Learning roots, prefixes and suffixes will help students guess the meaning of unfamiliar words.

Vocabulary resources:

Everything ESL: an overview of some vocabulary teaching tips:

[http://www.everythingsl.net/in-services/vocabulary\\_instructi\\_language\\_80932.php](http://www.everythingsl.net/in-services/vocabulary_instructi_language_80932.php)

5 Minute English – some quick vocabulary lesson ideas:

<http://www.5minuteenglish.com/vocabulary.htm>

Vocabulary learning techniques for ESL students:

<http://esl.about.com/od/engilshvocabulary/ht/htvocab.htm>

(yes, really, engilsh spelled wrong...)

## **Non-verbal communication**

A great deal of communication takes place at the non-verbal level. This encompasses symbolic gestures (shoulder shrug, nod, crossed fingers), polite behavior (hand shake, pointing), facial expressions (smile, scowl), posture (tired slouch, personal space), and even mime (hammering a nail) or gift giving. These vary between cultures, sometimes quite dramatically. For example, the American “OK” symbol of a thumb and index finger in a circle is very similar to a Japanese gesture meaning “money.” In Bulgaria, a side-to-side head shake means ‘yes’ and a nod means ‘no.’ You should spend some time discussing American non-verbal communication, especially symbolic gestures and polite behavior. You can probably think of many physical gestures Americans use. Demonstrate them and ask your students what they think the gestures mean. They can also teach you gestures from their own cultures.

## **Life Skills**

There is a growing trend in adult ESL to focus on specific life skills, also referred to as competencies, as the context for practical English instruction. These include such things as filling out medical history forms, giving or following directions in the workplace, and comparison shopping. They extend beyond English language skills in that many require critical thinking as well as some knowledge of American culture.

Over 200 competencies are listed at the site below. You can use these as ideas for selecting useful teaching topics.

<https://www.casas.org/docs/pagecontents/competencies.pdf?Status=Master>

## **The Basics of Lesson Planning and Preparation**

Lesson planning and preparation can take an hour or more for every hour of teaching, but the time required will be reduced as you gain experience, plan lessons that carry over week to week, and find good teaching materials such as textbooks or online lessons.

A good ESL book is one of the best foundations for lesson planning and an excellent source for activities. If you don't have access to a textbook or want to take a break from it, the Internet offers a wide variety of ESL lesson materials and activities. The websites below on page 34 all offer free ESL lessons plans suitable for adults. Although some are intended to experienced teachers, most of the lessons include some teaching instruction or are easy to present. In addition, several useful sites are listed elsewhere in this document under specific topic headings, like pronunciation or listening.

Whether you follow a textbook chapter or design your own session, the basic steps to lesson planning are:

1. Set your goals for the session
2. Decide what types of activities will help present, practice or reinforce your goals.
3. Assemble materials to support your activities
4. Plan your time and write your lesson plan

### **1. Set your goals**

Decide which communication skill you wish to develop. Will you focus on reading? Writing? Listening? Speaking/pronunciation? A combination of these? Think about the context of the communication. Consider a useful application, using the post office, or interviewing for a job. These types of specific skills are sometimes referred to as 'competencies.' Seemingly non-interactive themes like gardening or holidays are fair game, as long as you integrate communicative activities.

- **Assess Needs**

Stay focused on your particular learner's needs. Think about cultural factors, as well as language deficiencies, as you prioritize what you choose to study. What kind of language skills might make his life/job/personal interactions easier? Try asking the student himself what he would like to learn.

- **Build on Previous Material**

Make sure your student has the opportunity to practice material you have covered recently. It's often possible to teach the same theme several classes in a row using different types of activities, which can help reinforce vocabulary and concepts. The specific goals for each session should relate to overall goals, and may be similar week to week.

## 2. Choose Activities

Begin with some type of **warm up activity** to help your student focus on English and block out the distractions of daily life. This doesn't need to be connected thematically to the rest of the lesson, but it's nice if it is. Warm ups usually take 5-10 minutes and practice materials the learners already know. Avoid new material in a warm-up because the goal is to diffuse inhibitions and help your student transition into English thinking and speaking. In a group, a game-like atmosphere can help capture student interest. In a one-on-one session, you may choose a conversational warm up about what happened over the weekend or a quick review of the last lesson. Always ask your student what he remembers and then fill in the missing pieces rather than summarizing the last lesson for him.

### Warm-up activities

The following examples have been adjusted for one-on-one tutoring, where a warm up serves as a general transition into your meeting (usually oral) or a targeted way to start a specific activity (either oral or in writing.)

- **Yesterday:** "What did you do yesterday/last week, etc." This is an easy greeting, but also can be used to introduce a past-tense lesson. If your student has another tutor, a helpful warm up question might be to ask what he did with his other tutor.
- **Question of the Day:** Ask one or two more open-ended questions related to the student's interest. Give the student a couple of minutes to answer in a more extended fashion. This can also be done in writing as a warm up to writing practice.
- **Describe the Picture:** Show a picture. Have the student brainstorm as many observations as possible (words or sentences). This can be useful to get a sense of a student's prior vocabulary knowledge before starting a new unit.
- **General Brainstorm:** Give a topic and ask the student to think of anything related. This can be a general warm up, or can be targeted for specific vocabulary like the picture prompt.
- **Show and Tell (needs advance preparation):** Have the student bring in an item from home to talk about. This can also be a way to talk about cultural differences. The teacher may need to model this activity first by bringing in something (kitchen tool, ornament, photograph) and making 3 (or more) statements about it.
- **Mystery Object** (more advanced): Teacher brings in an unusual object. Student describes it and guesses what it is used for. Generally this is done as an observation activity, but you could also use it to practice yes/no questions.

### Core Activities and Games

Focus most of your meeting time on one or two themes. Present new material and give learners a chance to practice it thoroughly using different types of activities. You may want to include silent reading/writing, games, or conversational discussion. Your lessons will be more interesting if you use real life materials to support the text. For example, if the lesson theme is telling time, bring a large clock with adjustable hands to

demonstrate with. Show a video of a job interview, bring in a rental application, play a recorded clip from the radio, share photos of your family. Try to incorporate something outside of the textbook or printed lesson every time you meet.

A certain amount of repetition of activity type will give your session predictability, and may make your student comfortable. While your student may have a preferred type of activity, it is good to mix it up, both to avoid boredom and to provide challenges.

- **Balance the Challenge of Content and Activity Type**  
If your content is challenging, choose activities that are relatively easy to do, like fill-in-the-blank exercises or repetition. If your content is fairly simple, or more familiar, try more challenging activities such as conversations that involve problem solving.
- **Center Lessons around the Student**  
Keep the focus on your learner and pick activities that minimize the time you spend talking as a teacher. Make your lesson as interactive as possible. Focus on communication and the needs of your student.
- **Plan Alternative Activities**  
Always have one or two alternative activities in case the material you've selected doesn't take the time you thought it would.

Some Activity ideas are listed above in the sections that address specific language skills: teaching grammar, teaching listening, etc. (pages 10-23). Other types of activities include the following:

- **Dialogues:** Many textbooks include sample dialogues, or you may write your own. They are not truly communicative because the student is not producing original language, but they can be used to practice self-confidence, illustrate a grammatical pattern, or model frequently used expressions, pronunciation and intonation. Make them more communicative by selectively choosing words or phrases that can be blanked out, and requiring your student to substitute his own ideas or facts in the blanks.
- **Role Plays:** In large classes, students often work together to write or act out scenarios. In one-on-one tutoring, you can help a student anticipate a conversation (with a doctor, landlord, child's teacher, supervisor, etc.) and brainstorm the vocabulary, expressions and grammar he will need. You can then help him practice by role-playing with him. Mix it up by having the student be the doctor or the landlord sometimes, too.
- **Information Gap:** information gap activities are often done with students in pairs where each has partial information about a picture or situation and they need to ask and answer questions to complete their worksheets. You can do information gap activities with your student using pictures, treating it like a game. While you can cover these same skills in general conversation, a game like activity is often a nice change of pace.

- **Sequencing:** In sequencing activities, students put jumbled pieces of information into a logical order. Examples include months of the year, instructions (recipes, craft construction, etc.) and strip stories where a story is cut into separate sentences or paragraphs. This is a reading activity that also requires logical and abstract processing.
- **Fill-in-the-blank (or 'cloze') activity:** Prepare a worksheet containing a text or song lyrics with key words blanked out. Read the text, or play the song, and have the student fill in the blanks. You can focus this activity by choosing certain types of words to blank out or just choose random words. If you choose to blank out too many words close to each other, learners may have trouble keeping up with listening as they write.
- **Reading, oral and silent:** Use oral reading to work on verbal presentation (pronunciation, intonation). Also allow time for silent reading. Remember that reading does not involve only fiction books and newspaper articles. Directions, labels, signs, and forms require reading and can be used as practice items.
- **Freewriting:** give learners 5 minutes to just write their thoughts. You may guide them by providing a topic or question. Make sure they just write without worrying about errors. This can be a warm up for a more formal writing assignment or just a jump-start for thinking and discussing the topic in English. In a one-on-one tutorial situation, this can feel awkward if the tutor is just sitting there while the student writes. Consider stepping away (trip to the ladies room, answer a phone call, etc.) to give the student privacy to brainstorm and write without pressure.
- **Short Composition:** unlike a freewriting exercise, students need to edit short compositions, letters and emails. By allowing a student time to write during class (as opposed to homework) you give him the chance to ask you questions to refine his work during the drafting process. You can customize your topic to concentrate on specific English forms (past tense, future expressions) or to practice specific writing forms that the student needs for work or his personal life. Make this activity very useful by helping your student draft things like sample notes to supervisors, emails to friends and letters to the editor.
- **Flash Cards:** flash cards can be used for simple vocabulary drills or memory games. Avoid using cards that translate English to another language. Instead, choose or make cards that use pictures or symbols. Many flash card games are available as interactive computer games. While you may not want to spend a lot of time using flash cards during your session, it is important to show students how to make them and use them, or how to find the games on the internet, for their own practice.
- **Dictation:** Say a sentence or a phrase at a natural speed and ask your student to write down what you said. You'll probably need to repeat it several times. Don't slow down your speed unless it is absolutely necessary. Then ask him to read it back to you, and finally check the sentence for details like spelling. For a twist, ask your student to dictate a sentence to you.

## **Games**

Many ESL games and activities are designed for groups (eg Pictionary, scavenger hunts, twenty questions, telephone, etc.). They can sometimes be adapted to use with one student, but once you get to know your student you will judge if a game will feel awkward in a one-on-one situation.

Some games are designed to be played on a computer. Your students may enjoy language games as practice between sessions.

## **Closing Activities or End-of-Session Routine**

Plan to end your session by reviewing what was covered and tying it to what the learner already knows, either explicitly or with a review activity. By finishing with something familiar, learners will be more confident. Get a sense of how comfortable your student is with the new information. If he is not confident, make sure to promise to practice and review at your next session. Invite him to ask questions or suggest elements he wants to focus on next time. If he is quite comfortable with the new material, you can tell him what you have planned for the next session, or brainstorm new topics or situations he specifically wants to practice.

When planning your lesson, you may choose to prepare a homework assignment. If you assign homework, be sure to explain how the homework is tied to the lesson you just completed or how it will prepare the student for the next class. [While most MIT service employees do not do written homework between sessions, you might ask them to bring in a family picture for the next meeting, or practice a new expression by using it with three of their colleagues during the week, etc.]

## **3. Select Materials**

When planning your lesson, make note of the basic teaching items you don't want to forget:

- textbook or photocopies of material or activities
- Small white board with pens, if you don't have access to a classroom board
- Blank paper
- Regular or picture dictionary
- tape players, iPads, etc. if needed

In addition, it is helpful to have a collection of ESL resources to make lessons more interesting. Some resources may be very specific to a certain lesson, but many resources can be used over and over for different types of lessons. Consider keeping them in page protectors, or gluing them to card stock or laminating them for multiple uses. Over time, you will build a large collection, so consider getting file box or storage system to keep items easy to find.

In building your resource box, think about holidays or themes in your textbook, and language goals you and your student have agreed upon. The types of things you might keep in your file box include:

- Cut out magazine pictures
- Select photographs of a vacation, family members, etc.
- Travel brochures and public service pamphlets
- Interesting newspaper or magazine articles
- catalogues
- Cartoons or humorous drawings
- Board or card games
- Real-life handouts (employment applications, recipes, etc.)
- Relevant handouts about vocabulary, grammar rules, etc. from the internet or other textbooks

### **Make your own ESL Materials**

You can also make your own materials to include in your lessons, and keep for later use in your resource box.

- Write simple quizzes
- Write dialogues and role plays
- Write tongue twisters to focus on problem sounds
- Create crossword puzzles using vocabulary words
- Make alphabet or vocabulary flash cards
- Create games, drawings, posters, etc.
- Make craft items with your lesson, such as cutting out snowflakes or decorating Easter eggs.

### **Use available technology**

If you have access to a computer or iPad, use it to bring variety to your lessons. Always be prepared with a non-technical backup activity should your equipment unexpectedly fail.

- show commercials, news clips or YouTube videos.
- Record sections of radio talk or conversation for comprehension and listening practice, using iPhone or other device.
- Record popular songs to play. Make a worksheet of the song lyrics. The worksheet can be complete, or have word blanks for a cloze activity.
- Select websites your student can use for interactive ESL activities

## **4. Plan the Lesson**

Whether you use published ESL resources or plan your lessons from scratch, you will need a basic structure. With some experience, you may only need to jot down a quick list of topics and activities and then gather your materials together, but especially for new teachers, it's helpful to write a complete lesson plan.

### **Lesson Planning Worksheet**

You can use the reproducible worksheet shown on page 33 below to design a thoughtful and complete lesson plan. Other templates and formats are available on line:

Colorado State Lesson Plan Worksheet

<http://writing.colostate.edu/guides/teaching/esl/plansheet.cfm>

Other downloadable templates, with helpful hints

<http://www.class-templates.com/lesson-plan-format.html>

You may choose to omit a section and add activities based on the time you have.

Estimate the amount of time you wish to spend on each section. If you find during the lesson that your estimate was incorrect, you can adjust by adding or cutting another activity.

New teachers often have difficulty estimating the time needed for an activity, so it's wise to have some backup ideas to fill in leftover time. Supplemental activities (or planned activities that you simply don't get to) can also be recycled to the next session as continuation, or revisited later as review.

Write any handouts, equipment, or real-life objects you will need in the "materials/supplies" column.

### **During the Lesson, and Afterwards**

Remember that your lesson plan is a guide. Be sure to take advantage of teachable moments and adjust as necessary. One-on-one tutoring allows a great deal of flexibility to meet the needs of your student, so always be aware of events in your student's life that may call for a change of plan. You may want to include as part of your regular warm up or closing an activity that focuses on "what's new?" to help you focus lesson plans and activities going forward.

Most of all, have fun.

### **Keep a Log**

After each class, write a brief log of what you did. Include notes about what worked or didn't, with ideas for improvement. Write down specific page numbers you covered in a textbook. Be sure to update the coordinators and your student's other tutor(s) with your progress notes. [Please use the Google.docs format shared by the esl-coordinators.] For your own reference, you could keep your lesson plans collected together, making sure to note any modifications made during the session and the success of various activities.

<b>Teacher:</b>	<b>Student:</b>	<b>Date:</b>
<b>Lesson Topic:</b>		
<b>Lesson objectives:</b> By the end of the lesson....		
Main skill / system objective:		
Secondary skill / system objective:		
Textbook pages / Worksheets / etc.		
Materials / Resources / Supplies / Flashcards / etc.		
Songs / Listenings / etc.		

Notes:
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## ACTIVITIES AND FURTHER RESOURCES

This section compiles the web sites and resources listed in the individual sections, above, for easier reference, and also includes some more general sites, which you may find helpful. In addition, please investigate all the sites listed on the MIT Stellar website for the ESL program.

### **General or multiple Lesson Plans and blank planning documents:**

<http://www.esl-galaxy.com>

2368 free printable worksheets for ESL lessons, lesson planning and activities aimed mostly at children, but many appropriate for adults.

<http://ielanguages.com/lessonplan.html>

This calls itself “Free ESL lesson plans to download.” There are several free lessons and printable activities. There are also lesson plans you can buy. Try out the free stuff.

<https://esllibrary.com/courses#ref-title>

This site focuses on lessons at the intermediate and advanced level, with materials on many different topics

<http://writing.colostate.edu/guides/teaching/esl/plansheet.cfm>

Colorado State Lesson Plan Worksheet

<http://www.class-templates.com/lesson-plan-format.html>

Other downloadable templates, with helpful hints

### **Information for new teachers about how to teach ESL.**

[www.escort.org/young-adult-helpkit](http://www.escort.org/young-adult-helpkit)

“Help! They don’t Speak English” starter kit. Focuses on migrant students and young adults of adolescent age who are not in public school. Includes principles of adult learning, printable handouts on 16 topics.

[www.tefl.net/teaching/teaching-tips.htm](http://www.tefl.net/teaching/teaching-tips.htm)

Liz Regan’s 20 teaching tips and further links to topic-based worksheets.

### **Websites that offer listening practice:**

[www.esl-lab.com/index.htm](http://www.esl-lab.com/index.htm)

Randall’s ESL Cyber Listening Lab. Listening quizzes, activities, vocabulary lessons (by topic); language learning and life tips; long conversations with real video.

[www.englishlistening.com](http://www.englishlistening.com)

Thirty free listening clips in 3 difficulty levels for students; more available with a small monthly subscription.

### **Conversation topics for speaking practice:**

<http://www.eslconversationquestions.com>

ESL conversation questions, arranged by topic and also by grammar form.

### **Help with ideas for reading activities:**

<http://www.english-to-go.com/index.cfm>

English to Go has 5 free reading lessons with pre- and post- activities. There are more activities available for a fee, but the free ones will give you some good ideas to start with.

<http://www.onestopenglish.com/skills/reading/topic-based-lesson-plans/>

One Stop English has many topic-based reading plans. These are available by subscription, but you can get a 30-day free trial to check it out.

**Some grammar lesson plan ideas:**

Using English: <http://www.usingenglish.com/teachers/lesson-plans/>

5 Minute English: <http://www.5minuteenglish.com/grammar.htm>

Dave's ESL Café: <http://www.eslcafe.com/grammar.html>

**English Grammar reference for the tutor:**

Grammarly Handbook: <https://www.grammarly.com/handbook>

EduFind: <http://www.edufind.com/english-grammar/english-grammar-guide/>

Just google "English grammar" and you will find many resources. There's even an *English Grammar for Dummies* "cheat sheet." It's not that bad.

<http://www.dummies.com/how-to/content/english-grammar-for-dummies-cheat-sheet0.html>

Finally, the University of Chicago Writing program has a nice website with links to many other sources:

<http://writing-program.uchicago.edu/resources/grammar.htm>

**Resources for teaching pronunciation:**

<http://esl.yourdictionary.com/esl/esl-lessons-and-materials/tips-resources-for-teaching-esl-pronunciation.html>

A very clear outline of important features of teaching pronunciation, including the role of phonemes, language rhythm and stress, intonation, and what you need to focus on when teaching. This is NOT an academic article, but is a good place to start. There are also links to other materials

<http://busyteacher.org/14916-improve-esl-pronunciation-6-fun-exercises.html>

6 exercises you can use in your session today (or not)

<http://www.eslflow.com/pronunciationlessonplans.html>

ESLFlow.com: many different pronunciation lesson plans, organized by topic and by specific sound patterns, with links to pronunciation guides, teaching tips, tongue twisters and other activities:

<http://www.eslcafe.com/idea/index.cgi?Pronunciation>:

Dave's ESL café, main pronunciation page. Links to many activities.

**One spelling web page I have found useful:**

<http://esl.yourdictionary.com/lesson-plans/Teaching-Spelling-Strategies-to-ESL-Students.html>

**Vocabulary resources:**

Everything ESL: an overview of some vocabulary teaching tips:

[http://www.everythingsl.net/inservices/vocabulary\\_instructi\\_language\\_80932.php](http://www.everythingsl.net/inservices/vocabulary_instructi_language_80932.php)

5 Minute English – some quick vocabulary lesson ideas:

<http://www.5minuteenglish.com/vocabulary.htm>

Vocabulary learning techniques for ESL students:  
<http://esl.about.com/od/engilshvocabulary/ht/htvocab.htm>  
(yes, really, engilsh spelled wrong...)