



Brunswick County Literacy Council



English for Speakers of Other Languages Workshop

Opportunities for Independent Learning (OIL)

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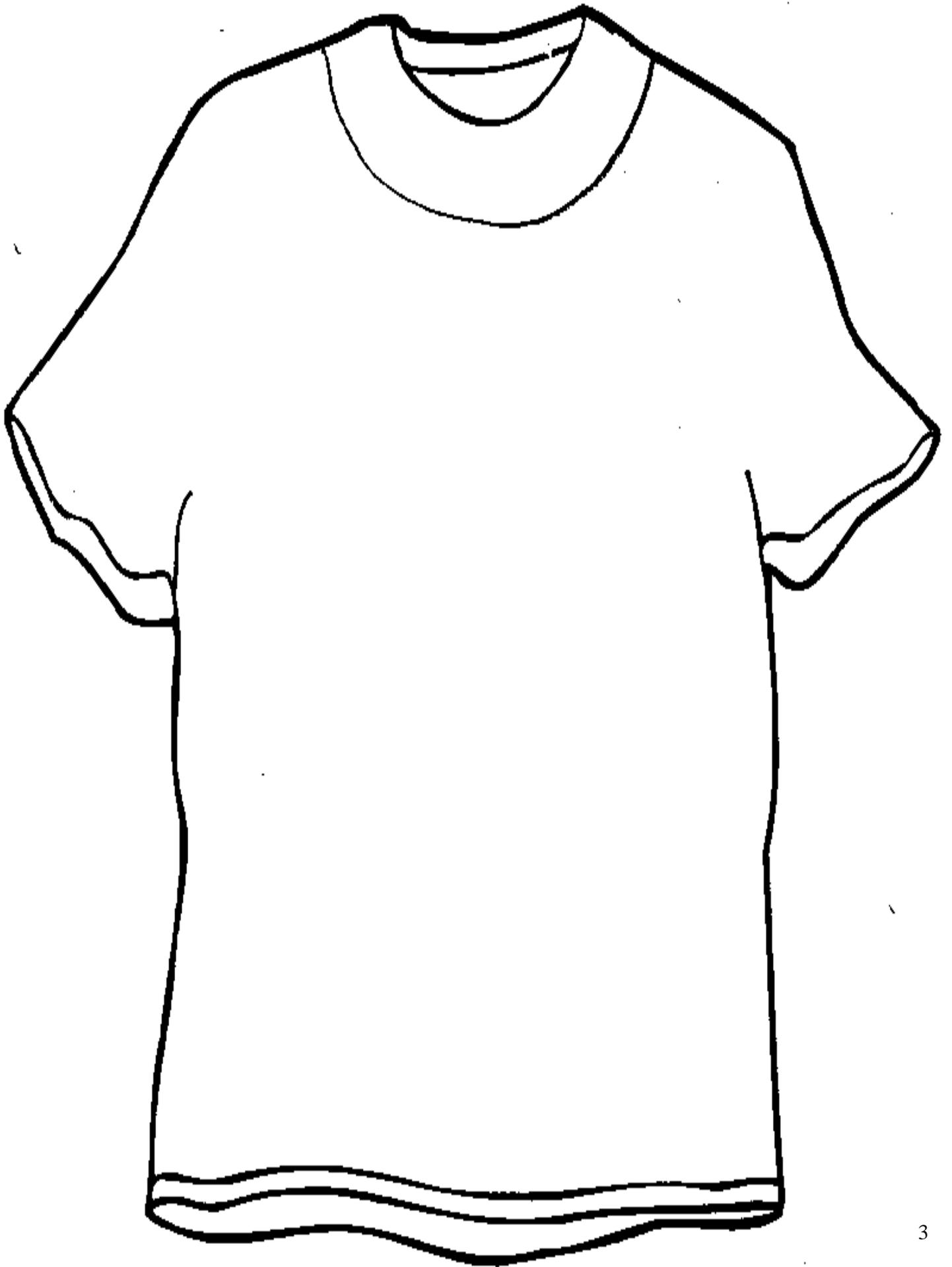


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The English Language?

I take it you already know
Of tough and bough and cough and dough?
Others may stumble, but not you
On hiccough, thorough, slough and through.
Well don't! And now you wish, perhaps,
To learn of less familiar traps.
Beware of heard, a dreadful word
That looks like beard but sounds like bird.
And dead: it's said like bed, not bead,
For goodness sake don't call it deed!
Watch out for meat and great and threat
(They rhyme with suite and straight and debt).
A moth is not a moth as in mother
Nor both in bother, nor broth in brother,
And here is not a match for there,
Nor dear and fear, for bear and pear.
And then there's dose and rose and lose –
Just look them up – and goose and choose
And cork and work and card and ward
And font and front and word and sword
And do and go, then thwart and cart,
Come, come! I've hardly made a start.
A dreadful language? Why man alive!
I've learned to talk it when I was five.
And yet to write it, the more I tried,
I hadn't learned it at fifty-five.

Author Unknown



Practitioner Toolkit: Working with Adult English Language Learners

http://www.cal.org/caela/tools/instructional/prac_toolkit.html

Teaching for Communicative Competence

<http://netcommunity.proliteracy.org/training/toolkit/download/Teaching%20for%20Communicative%20Competence.pdf>

Total Physical Response

http://www2.vobs.at/ludescher/total_physical_response.htm#Background

How to Use Total Physical Response in ESL Instruction

<http://www.proliteracy.org/downloads/oic/how%20use%20total%20phys%20resp%20fs.pdf>

Lesson Planning for ESL Instruction

<http://www.proliteracy.org/downloads/oic/lesson%20planning%20for%20esl%20fs.pdf>

Practitioner Toolkit: Working with Adult English Language Learners

http://www.cal.org/caela/tools/instructional/prac_toolkit.html

Tutoring Tips

Having a good lesson plan is a starting point. How successful your lesson is will be determined by how you implement your plan. Consider using some of the suggestions below:

- Speak at a relaxed pace, but not unnaturally slow.
- Use the correct intonation.
- Do not speak too loudly.
- Do not over articulate (unless you are teaching pronunciation and are drawing attention to a specific sound).
- Monitor your sentence length. Try not to speak in long sentences.
- Use complete sentences. Do not say anything to your learner that you would not say to anyone else. It is not in the learner's best interest to hear questions like, "You go movie?"
- Use linguistic cues such as "look" and "listen" to emphasize important points.
- Use visual aids such as objects, pictures, and maps.
- Draw or sketch whenever appropriate.
- Act (especially for things such as verbs).
- Use facial expressions to help you communicate.
- Use methods that emphasize all learner preferences.
- Use audio aids (taped dialogues) when appropriate.
- Try not to use too much filler when first starting with a beginner student. "Filler" refers to words that have no real meaning. Example: And, uh...let's see here...hmm...yeah, now...this is an...uh...apple.
- Paraphrase what our learner has said when you do not understand. Restating what your learner has said will give her an opportunity to clarify what she has said to you. It also allows her to see how a native speaker is interpreting her message.
- Check to see that our learner understands what you are saying. Learners can be very polite and may not want to interrupt you while you are speaking. Ask your learner to paraphrase what you have said or ask questions to get feedback.
- Repeat when necessary but repeat your sentence using slightly different words. Do not repeat the exact same sentence over and over again. Find other ways to express your idea. It may be one or two words in your sentence that are causing difficulties for your learner.
- Make the environment as stress-free as possible. Consider how the noise and lighting in the area could affect the learner.
- Show genuine interest in the learner. This will make her more comfortable.
- Encourage the learner to take risks practicing her English.
- Allow your learners to make errors without correction – communication is the goal, not perfection.
- Let your learner know that making mistakes is a natural part of learning a language; she should not feel embarrassed about errors!
- Reinforce learner progress.
- Let learners feel their culture is valued; have them bring cultural artifacts to the session.
- Be flexible and change your lesson plan whenever necessary.
- Respond to questions that the learner asks and, whenever necessary, adapt lesson plans to reinforce the answers to their questions.
- SMILE! It may seem like a small thing, but smiling can put a learner at ease and help him perform better.

Reading and Writing about Writing

Written Language

- Written has to be just as you want your message communicated
- Tutors will want to create an environment that helps the new writer develop a positive attitude about writing and build on existing skills
- It's important to provide the learner with lots of opportunities to write without being corrected

Steps in the Writing Process

1. Rehearse: Decide what to write about
2. Draft: Get it down on paper without worrying about being correct
3. Revise: Clarify and expand the content
4. Edit: Make final improvements or corrections
5. Publish: Share the writing with others

What Helps People Learn to Write?

- Models: seeing others write
- Purpose: having a reason for writing
- Confidence: believing that they can learn
- Writing: seeing writing used for many purposes; lots of models
- Support: getting encouragement and reinforcement from others
- Teaching

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- Reflect on the information above
 - Capture your thinking/learning with five (5) different sentences
 - Have the sentences start with “W” “R”, “I”, “T” and “E”

Teaching Strategies

- Orient the student to what s/he will be doing (and WHY). Reduce orientation and directions to what is essential. Be specific about what you are asking the learner to do
- Present information in small, logical steps. Build on what is already known. Relate new material to student's everyday lives. Make connections to previous lessons
- Be concrete; give examples

- Use all kinds of aids to help the learner retain information including flash cards, word and number games, crossword puzzles, maps, color-coding, etc
- Instead of asking "Do you understand?", ask students to demonstrate understanding
- Use organizational aids such as 3-ring binders, calendars, folders, etc
- Slow down. Reduce stress by setting a slower pace
- Avoid distractions; meet in a quiet place
- Provide frequent and focused feedback

- It is very important to slow down enough. While it is important to have high expectations and make demands, student's progress should set the pace
- Sometimes quiet can be a distraction. You and your student will work this out as you work together
- Don't always say, "Great Job" just to be saying something. Be specific with your feedback
- If after you work with your learner for a while, you have serious concerns about his/her ability to learn, discuss it with the Program Coordinator

- **Think back on your learning with "Teaching Strategies"**
- **In "light" of your thinking what is one thing you will "STOP" doing?**
- **What is one you will "CONTINUE" to do?**
- **And what is one you will "START" doing?**



American Gestures

Common Gestures

1. In the touch/not touch orientation, Americans are not touch oriented.
2. In normal social situation, Americans generally stand about 30 inches apart from one another, which is also considered their personal “comfort zone.”
3. At sporting events or the theater, Americans usually slide into a crowded aisle while facing forward, not toward the seated people.

Gesture	Meaning
American shake hands, and from an early age they are taught to do so with a firm, solid grip	To greet one another
American children are taught to look others directly in the eyes	To greet and converse with one another. If not, means shyness or weakness
Arm raised and the open hand “waggles” back and forth	To signal “hello” or “goodbye” or try to get someone’s attention
Americans will often wave to another person and then turn to make hand scoop inward; or raise the index finger, palm toward one’s face, and make a “curling” motion with that finger	To beckon or summon another person
Palm facing out with the index and middle fingers displayed in the shape of a “V”	“Victory” or “Peace”
Thumb and forefinger form a circle with the other three fingers splayed upward; it is used frequently and enthusiastically.	“OK”, meaning fine or “yes”
Thumb up with a close fist	Means support or approval, “OK” or “Good going!” or “Good job!”
Nodding and shaking the head	Yes and No

Universal Gestures

Hand Gesture	Meaning
I am tired	Pressing the palms together and resting the head on the back of the hand while closing the eyes as if sleeping
I am hungry	Patting the stomach with the hands
After eating, I am full.	Taking the hand and making a circular motion over the stomach.
I am cold, or it’s cozy or a sign of eager anticipation	Rubbing the hands together

RIGHT, WRONG OR RUDE

BECKONING – Beckon with index finger: means “come here” in the US. Europeans and Asians raise the arm, palm facing down, and make a scratching motion with fingers. In Australia and in Indonesia, curling the index finger is used for beckoning animals. To motion with the index finger in order to call someone is insulting, or even obscene, in many cultures.

CRAZY – In Argentina, it means you have a telephone call.

DIRECT EYE CONTACT – Asians, Puerto Ricans, West Indians, African Americans, Native Americans consider it to be rude, or disrespectful, or intimidating, or may indicate sexual overtones.

HANDSHAKE – Although generally adopted around the world, Southeast Asians press hands together; Japanese bow; Middle Easterners and many Asians favor a gentle grip.

NODDING AND SHAKING THE HEAD – Opposite meaning in Bulgaria, parts of Greece, Yugoslavia, Turkey, Iran, and Bengal.

THE “OK” GESTURE – In France it means zero. In Japan it means money or coins, in Brazil, Germany, and the former USSR, it is an obscene gesture.

PASS AN ITEM WITH ONE HAND – very rude in Japan; must use two hands. Middle and Far East; your left hand is unclean; do NOT touch with the left hand.

PAT A STUDENT ON THE HEAD – upsetting to someone from Asia. Anyone influenced by Buddhism would not like this as the head is the repository of the soul.

POINTING AT SOMETHING – it is impolite to point with the index finger in the Middle and Far East.

SITTING WITH SOLES SHOWING – sends a rude message in many cultures. Disrespectful. You are exposing the lowest and dirtiest part of your body; insulting.

THUMBS UP – In Nigeria it is a rude gesture. In Australia, if pumped up and down it is an obscene gesture. In Europe and Japan, it is the signal for one.

“V” FOR VICTORY – In England, palm facing inward toward face is an obscene gesture.

WAVING – means “No” to most Europeans. Europeans raise the arm and “bob” the hand up and down at the wrist. It’s a serious insult in Nigeria if hand is too close to another’s face.

WHISTLING – Throughout Europe whistling at public events is a signal of disapproval, even derision.

Who are Our Learners?

There is no “typical ESL learner.” Learners can vary in age (from 16 to 90) and will come from a variety of different ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. Your learner may have a lot of formal education or very little. She may be fully literate in many languages or may have only a basic knowledge of reading and writing in her first language.

Characteristics of the Adult ESL Learner

ESL Learners:

- are creative and adaptable
 - have a great range of life experiences
 - experience stress in their new surroundings
 - are highly motivated but may be apprehensive about learning English
 - learn best when the information is linked to something they already know
 - want practical lessons that are relevant to their own goals and needs
 - like to learn things they will use immediately
 - may have uneven learning: learners will not progress in a uniform manner; they may have “good” and “bad” “English days”
 - have a multitude of outside responsibilities (family, home, job)
-

General Guidelines for Teaching Adult Learners

- Create an atmosphere where the learner is actively involved
- Have learners choose what they want to learn
- Have learners set their own goals
- Use activities in the lessons to help learners achieve their goals
- Start lessons with what learners already know and build on their strengths
- Encourage learners to judge what helps them learn and what does not
- Design a program that changes when learners’ needs change

Teaching ESOL

Accelerators

It's easier when...

- The purpose of using language –reading, writing, speaking and listening – is real and natural.
- The focus is on communication.
- Talk is about interesting topics.
- Mistakes are part of learning.
- Language is used or studied within a context.
- Concepts and activities are relevant to the learner.
- Sufficient time is provided

Roadblocks

It's harder when...

- The reasons given or situations created for using language are artificial.
- The focus is on the form, not communicating.
- Talk is dull and uninteresting.
- Mistakes are bad, and it's more important to get it right than to get a message communicated.
- Language is studied out of context.
- The particular use of language studied or assigned is irrelevant for the learner.
- Students are pressured to complete work or make progress.

Four stages of culture shock

1. Honeymoon

The honeymoon phase takes place when people first arrive. There is genuine excitement about the new place, and a belief that life in the new region is an adventure.

2. Hostility

This generally takes place four to six months after arrival when the newcomer realizes the limitations of the new environment. For example, she may not be able to get the food she likes or may find it difficult to participate in many of the activities that are important to her. If your learner is suffering from culture shock in this stage you may notice that she may:

- complain about a variety of things, perhaps even claiming to hate the new environment.
- want to go home regardless of her previous situation
- spend more time with people who speak the same language.

3. Humor

In this phase, the learner has resolved or is in the process of resolving negative feelings about the new culture. She may have found new friends and has tried to come to terms with both the “old” and “new” way of living.

4. Home

Acceptance of the new home; the learner feels that she is here to stay!

Helping someone with culture shock

Everyone experiences culture shock in different ways, to different degrees. One person may adjust with relative ease, whereas another person may suffer from more pronounced culture shock. Regardless, it is important to support your learner to the best of your ability (even when she is critical of the new environment.) Let the learner know that feeling this way is natural. Adjusting to a new place takes time and patience. Getting through difficulties will require persistence and a willingness to learn (but not necessarily assimilate).

Sometimes, learners will need additional support. Depression may be an issue and learners may have difficulty moving from stage 2 of culture shock (hostility) to stage 3 (humor). If you are concerned, please refer your learner to a professional organization for additional support.

Suggestions for a visual learner

- Use pictures or other visual aids (graphs) to help explain what you are saying
- Have a paper and pencil ready
- Write down instructions
- Ask the learner to write down new words
- Teach words or word parts by sight first
- Make sure there is no background noise

Suggestions for an auditory learner

- Use your voice as much as possible
- Give oral instructions whenever possible
- Use tapes, radio and discussions
- Read aloud to learners
- Have learners listen to a tape while reading
- Do not crowd information onto a page

Suggestions for a tactile learner

- Help a beginning learner to make letters and sounds by tracing them on a rough surface such as sandpaper
- Use typewriters, computers and other audio/visual equipment

Suggestions for a kinesthetic learner

- Allow the learner to be physically involved in her learning. Create activities connected to what she is learning. For example, act out information that is read or encourage hand/body movements during explanations.
- Put words on separate cards for the learner to make sentences.
- Put word parts (prefix, root and suffix) on separate cards so the learner can make words.
- Take a walk with your learner. Use the print you see on your walk (store signs, advertisements on billboards, movie posters) as the basis for future lessons. For example, the learner could write down key words on the walk and use these key words in a story later.
- Have the learner beat out syllables so she can feel the “rhythm of the word.” This can be useful when the learner is having pronunciation difficulties.

Sample Questions for “Question Strips-Getting Acquainted” Activity

- Who is a famous person you would like to meet? Why?
- What is your favorite song?
- If you could go back in time, what time would you like to visit?
- Do you like sports? Which ones?
- Would you call yourself an indoor or outdoor type?
- What kind of music do you like? What kind do you dislike?
- What is something new and good in your life right now?
- What is your favorite food? Is there a food you do not like?
- Name a movie you have seen recently. Did you like it? Why or why not?
- What is your favorite color? Does this color make you feel a certain way?
- If you could live anywhere in the world, where would that be?
- How do you like your eggs cooked?
- Which book would you recommend that the president read?
- What would you say is the greatest advantage to having a big family?
- What’s your favorite piece of furniture in your house? Which piece would you most like to replace?
- Where do you concentrate the best?
- Which music lyrics do you find the most inspirational?
- If you were to write about something you know, which magazine would you try to publish it in?
- What time of day are you at your best? Your worst?
- What is your favorite dessert? Do you know how to make it?
- What is your favorite season of the year?
- What is something that you can do better than the average person?
- What is your favorite television show? What is your least favorite?
- Do you remember a favorite toy or game you had as a child? Why did you like it?
- Who is your best friend? Why do you like this person?
- Do you like to shop? Why or why not?
- Who is your greatest hero?

Personal Goal Setting

TASKS	Can do (date)	Work on now	Work on later	Not interested
<i>At home</i>				
Write shopping list				
Read labels on food packages				
Read mail such as bills and advertisements				
Look up phone numbers				
Take a phone message				
Follow directions (i.e. recipes or directions for assembly)				
Read a lease/rental agreement				
Fill out application forms				
Read/write letters or notes				
Read newspapers and/or magazines				

Personal Goal Setting

TASKS	Can do (date)	Work on now	Work on later	Not applicable
<i>Banking</i>				
Open an account				
Fill out blank forms				
Write checks				
Keep bankbook				
<i>Shopping</i>				
Read signs and labels				
Compare prices				
Request items at store				
Ask about prices and discounts				
Count money				
Order something by mail/online				
<i>Health</i>				
Request an appointment				
Fill in health questionnaire				
Discuss health with doctor				
Read medicine labels				

Personal Goal Setting

TASKS	Can do (date)	Work on now	Work on later	Not applicable
<i>Employment</i>				
Read information about training programs				
Make an inquiry about a job				
Read job applications				
Fill out job applications				
Prepare resume				
Write cover letters				
Read/write job-related memos				
Read pay check/stub				
Read contract				
Read work orders				
Read safety information				
Take/leave messages				

Personal Goal Setting

TASKS	Can do (date)	Work on now	Work on later	Not applicable
<i>Getting Around</i>				
Read street names				
Read a map				
Program GPS/Navigation				
Ask for directions				
Write down directions				
Read public transportation schedule				
Read a menu				
Order food in a restaurant				
Make a reservation				
Confirm a reservation				
Take a driver's test				
<i>General</i>				
Read short stories				
Write stories				
Read stories to grand- children				
Keep a diary				
Read the newspaper				
Write a letter to the newspaper				
Write email				
Navigate the Internet				
Write paragraphs				
Write essays				
Use grammatical forms correctly				

From the "English-as-a-Second-Language Tutor Training Kit" ©2003, Regina Public Library Literacy Unit, Regina, Saskatchewan

Interest Inventory

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. I like to read about...
2. I like to write about...
3. I wish I could...
4. On the weekend, I...
5. I'm at my best when...
6. I often worry about...
7. When I have to read, I...
8. I am really interest in learning about...
9. My idea of a perfect day is...

Checking Progress (weekly/monthly)

This learner questionnaire can be used for:

- Examining the tutoring process and learner experiences outside the tutoring sessions.
- Redefining short-term goals

1. This (week/month) I studied...

2. This (week/month) I learned...

3. This (week/month) I liked...

4. This (week/month) I did not like...

5. This (week/month) I used my English in these places...

6. This (week/month) I spoke with these people...

7. This (week/month) I had difficulties with...

8. I would like know/work on...

9. My learning and practicing plans for next week are...

Learner Profile #1

Name	Chun-Yun Wang
Homeland	China
How long in US	Five months
Family	Husband: graduate student One child: 5-year-old boy
Job in US	Not working outside the home
Work experience in homeland	Doctor (for 13 years)
Education	Graduated from Hunan Medical College
Personal interests	Sewing, traveling, singing
Goal	To practice medicine in the US
Reasons for learning English	To feel a part of the community. This is very important to her. Chun does not want to be so dependent on her husband to translate and to take care of tasks that require English. To fulfill her goal of practicing medicine in the US
English ability	Chun is a lower-beginning English speaker. She knows a few phrases, but understands very little spoken English except those everyday phrases that she has heard repeated many times – for example, “How old is your son?” Her reading and writing skills are a bit better because she studied some English in middle school in China. Her pronunciation is surprisingly good for such a beginner. She has made a point of working on her pronunciation of English.

Learner Profile #2

Name	Minh Doan
Homeland	Vietnam
How long in US	2 ½ months
Family	In US: mother and father, two brothers, one sister In Vietnam: one older brother, two older sisters Minh is single
Job in US	None. Minh is a student studying English.
Work experience in homeland	Cashier in store
Education	High school graduate
Personal interests	Singing – sings in his church choir
Goal	To go to college and study biology
Reasons for learning English	To be able to enter college
English ability	Minh is an upper-beginning learner. He studied English in Vietnam, but this was mostly written, not oral. His reading and writing abilities are much better than his speaking, although he does have a fairly good grasp of English grammar. He can understand some basic everyday English and can carry on a conversation around daily needs and everyday topics. His pronunciation is very poor, however. In addition, he is soft-spoken, which also makes him difficult to understand.

Learner Profile #3

Name	Jose Pantoja
Homeland	Puerto Rico
How long in US	Four months (mainland)
Family	Jose's parents are in Puerto Rico. His father is disabled due to an industrial accident Jose is single.
Job in US	Industrial mechanic – repairs equipment in an industrial laundry
Work experience in homeland	Industrial mechanic in the irrigation industry
Education	High school graduate – some college
Personal interests	All sports, especially running and swimming
Goal	To spend four or five years working in the US. After that time he will return to Puerto Rico and find work as an industrial mechanic.
Reasons for learning English	To be better able to work with English speakers in Puerto Rico, i.e. those who own houses and run factories
English ability	<p>Jose is an upper-beginning to low-intermediate speaker of English. He understands English well. His speech is quite fluent, but is marked by lots of errors. He is good with languages because he is unafraid to make mistakes when speaking. He has picked up a lot of English in the short time he has been here because he speaks with speakers of English every day.</p> <p>Jose reads and writes some English and is studying to improve, but his oral ability is better than his written ability. His pronunciation and intonation are not very good, although his speech is understandable.</p>

Learner Profile #4

Name	Widens Noralusun
Homeland	Haiti
How long in US	Two years
Family	<p>Mother and father in Haiti Eight brothers and sisters in Haiti One sister in the United States</p> <p>Widens is not married, but his girlfriend and their three children live in Haiti with his parents.</p>
Job in US	He has worked full-time at a furniture factory for 1-½ years. He operates a sanding machine
Work experience in homeland	Taxi driver in Port-au-Prince, Haiti
Education	<p>High school graduate</p> <p>Widens applied to college in Haiti, but did not attend. He is now a full-time student at a US community college</p>
Personal interests	Bowling, movies, music, bicycle riding, walking
Goal	To finish college so he can get the power he needs to help others as well as himself
Reasons for learning English	Widens wants to improve his English so he can continue on in college. He has improved quite a bit since he came to the US but wants to increase his English skills so he can be more independent.
English ability	Widens is an intermediate to advanced ESL learner. He speaks and understands English well, although his pronunciation still needs improvement. He reads and writes English well enough to attend community college and get good grades.

Anecdotes to Illustrate Cross-Cultural Misunderstanding

Anecdote #1

“I was teaching ESL in Texas to a group of young adults from various countries. They were intermediate-level students who could speak English fairly well. I wanted them to gain some experience in speaking in front of a group, so I asked for a volunteer to give a three-minute talk on the subject of his or her choice. I said that I would help the volunteer prepare, and that the talk would not be graded. The point would be simply to have and enjoy the experience. No one volunteered.

“At the next class meeting, I repeated my request. Again, no one volunteered. The next time we met I finally got one volunteer, an Iranian student. He and I agreed to meet before the next class to discuss the task. He failed to show up before class. Later he apologized and said he would come early next time. Next time, however, he still did not show up early. After class we talked about it. He gave an excuse. We discussed his speech, and he agreed to give it next time. But at the next class, he said he was not prepared. As it turned out, he never did give the speech.

“Sometime later a colleague of mine offered a cultural explanation for what had happened: The Iranian student had never intended to give the speech. But he *was* trying to help me. When I made the call for volunteers, he was concerned that no one was volunteering. He wanted to ease my discomfort. That’s why he volunteered. In his culture, agreeing to do something holds a different meaning than in ours. In his culture, it is a sign of respect to say ‘yes’ to a request even when one does not intend to follow through. The important thing is the offer. In this case, the offer was being made to save me from being embarrassed.”

Anecdote #2

“During a trip to India, I made an appointment with the Immigration office to discuss a extension of my visa. When I arrived at the appointed time, 9:00 a.m., I was told to be seated. Minutes passed, then an hour. Another hour passed, then another. AS each hour went by, I tried to find out the reason for the delay. Each time I was told I would be seen shortly. Eventually, I left for lunch. I returned. I was finally taken care of around 2:00 p.m. Later, after several similar experiences in India, I realized that the people had an attitude toward time and punctuality different from mine. To them, it would be perfectly normal to arrive at any time in the morning (not necessarily 9:00 and be prepared to wait for quite some time to be served. They thought my insistence on being served promptly was unusual!”

Anecdote #3

“At an American university several years ago, I met two Arab men from Egypt. We would occasionally have coffee together when we ran into each other on campus. Soon we began to refer to each other as friends. They began inviting me to various functions and stopped in at my house regularly. Soon I began to realize that they were trying to involve me in their lives in a deeper way than was the case with even my very closest friends. Somehow this behavior did not seem appropriate, given the level of what I perceived to be our actual relationship.

“Eventually I felt the need to talk to the men about this. When I told them what was on my mind, they seemed surprised. Then they told me in a somewhat exasperated tone that there was something they found strange about Americans. We seem to make friends with people very easily. We quickly invite them into friendly conversations and do things with them and even refer to them as friends. But we do this without really intending to treat them as such. In their culture, on the other hand, when someone behaves in a friendly manner, it’s an unmistakable signal that this person would like to spend lots of time with you and come to know you very well. They said they were having trouble understanding why ‘friendly’ Americans don’t take their friendships very seriously at all.”

Anecdote #4

“I was planning to leave in four months for my first trip to Italy. I knew only a few words in Italian. A friend told me about a woman named Anna who was from Sicily. Anna was taking an ESL class to learn English but was frustrated because she had no English-speaking friends to practice with. I called her, introduced myself, and proposed that we get together. I told her that I’d be glad to speak English with her if she would help me with my Italian. She thought that was a great idea. The first afternoon I went to her house, we had coffee and talked in English for awhile. Just as we were about to start working on Italian, Anna’s brother, with whom she lived, came downstairs. He worked nights and had a few hours before he had to get ready. Anna introduced him and poured him a cup of coffee. He pulled up a chair and joined us. I thought he would leave when he finished his coffee since he knew why I was there. But he never did, and Anna and I never got to the Italian lesson.

“The next time I called Anna, I asked if we could meet in the evening. I figured that her brother would be at work and we would have some privacy. Anna said that would be just fine. As we started to work, there was a knock on the door. Her aunt, her cousin, and her cousin’s two-year-old son (who lived just down the street) had come for a visit. Anna was obviously glad to see them, introduced them to me, explained what we were doing, and invited them to join us. They were all very friendly and enthusiastic about speaking English with me. But the noise, the lack of privacy, my embarrassment at trying to speak Italian with all of these people watching, and Anna’s seeming reluctance to ask them to come back later made for an impossible situation. Finally, I gave up and just joined in the general conversation. We talked about families, and they were appalled to find out that none of my family lived in the area and that I only got to see them a couple of times each year. After many visits with Anna, I came to realize how important the family is to Sicilians. It would never have occurred to her that it might be inappropriate to have family members present at certain times.”