English at Home
ESL Training Manual

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Introduction

Thank you again for your interest in our program! Teaching English can seem like an overwhelming task, especially if you’ve never had any training or experience. Where do you start? What do you do? What materials do you use? How do you plan? What do you do if they don’t understand you, or if they ask a question that you don’t know the answer to, or you feel like they’re not making any progress? In this manual we attempt to address all of these concerns and provide you information to help you feel more equipped, prepared, and confident as you enter your time of service as a volunteer ESL tutor.

Remember – no one expects you to be an expert (unless you actually are one, and in that case, we welcome your feedback and expertise!). We do not expect you to become a grammar wiz, an all-wise teacher, or a linguist in order to help your refugee or immigrant student learn English. You already bring with you the experience of speaking a language and living in a context that’s totally new and unfamiliar to them, but which they desperately need to learn, and coming alongside them as an encouraging friend and mentor is one of the most helpful services you can provide.

The English at Home team is always here to support you! We are more than happy to schedule a time to meet with you for questions, feedback, and additional training, and we maintain a resource library at the New American Pathways office that is available for your use. We also have an English at Home board on the New American Pathways Pinterest account, where you can find tips, free printables, games, activities, articles, and videos about teaching ESL: (https://www.pinterest.com/NewAmPaths/english-at-home/).

Questions for Consideration:

- How do you feel about teaching English to an adult learner?
- Have you ever taught English before?
- What are you most nervous about? What are you most excited about?
Knowing Your Student

One of the most important things you can do as a teacher of English is to know your student – to know his or her educational background, learning style, language level, and motive for studying English, as well as getting to know him or her as a person. The English at Home team attempts to provide as much of that information as possible to you either ahead of time or during the initial assessment, but some things you will learn as you interact with your student.

One important thing to keep in mind is how your student’s refugee status affects his or her learning process. While the term “refugee” refers to an individual’s legal status and does not comprise his or her sole identity, the status is telling in the fact that it describes a person who has had to flee his or her native country because of persecution or fear of persecution. Due to poverty, war, fleeing persecution, living in refugee camps, and other reasons, many refugee adults have never been to school, or had to drop out at a young age. Many of these adults are either completely unable or have very limited ability to read and write in their own native languages, making the thought of learning English that much more daunting. Others may have been educated in their native languages, but never in English, while others may have studied English either in school or personally. Others were doctors, lawyers, engineers, even interpreters for the U.S. military, so a refugee adult may be anywhere from absolute zero to one hundred percent fluent on the scale of English ability.

In the English at Home program, we use three broad categories for referring to a client’s English level:

- pre-literate to semi-literate
- high beginner to intermediate
- advanced

“Pre-literate” is how we refer to those clients who cannot read or write in their native language, much less in English. “Semi-literate” refers to clients who can read and write in their native language and usually know at least a few words in English, as well as those who can speak, read, and write a little English. Typically, you’ll need to keep a slow, repetitive pace in your lessons for these students. Words and concepts can be difficult to grasp and need lots of patience and repetition. But, every letter and word learned is a huge milestone for students at this level, since they’re usually starting from ground zero or nearly zero. They also usually benefit from a lot of encouragement and praise, as many are embarrassed at their lack of education or ability to speak. I personally find this group to be fun and exciting to teach, because you may be their very first English teacher and you get to help introduce them to the language. You also really
don’t have to worry about complicated lessons or grammatical structures at this level! Learning mostly consists of alphabet, phonics, numbers, and key words and phrases, with lots and lots of repetition and practice.

**High beginner to intermediate** refers to the clients who can speak, read, write, and understand at least some English. Some of these clients may be more advanced in speaking and poorer at reading and writing, while others may excel at reading and writing but struggle with speaking and listening. This category is particularly broad and may refer to a wide spectrum of learners, so getting to know your particular student and her current grasp of English is especially important. It’s key to acknowledge and build upon what these learners already know in English, and thereby help them feel valued and engaged in the learning process. Incorporating small dialogues that your student can memorize and continually practice will help him feel more comfortable in expressing himself in English.

**Advanced** clients are those who can competently carry on conversations in English, but who are not yet fluent. They usually have very specific goals for their language study, such as passing the driver’s license exam, studying for the citizenship exam, improving their listening ability, building up their language skills to get a better job, etc. You will probably help these students polish their pronunciation and the structure of their sentences, and as such, it will help you to know/learn more grammar as you prepare your lessons. Providing conversation practice is also very important for these students, as some may have advanced head knowledge of English but may be poor at actually using it, especially if they haven’t had previous opportunities to practice. You may use different games and activities that prompt discussions on particular topics; use recordings, songs, videos, etc. to give them practice in listening to and understanding native speakers, especially different dialects; assigning them topics for brief essays and helping them edit and learn from mistakes, etc.

It also helps to remember that these adults are typically motivated to learn English because of their immediate need – living in an English-speaking country in which nearly all day-to-day tasks must be performed in the English language. While that is the overarching need, your student may have other personal goals for learning which vary according to his or her interests, ability, and needs. Discovering these goals and structuring your lessons around them helps your student feel valued and like an active participant in the learning process.

- What information do you think is important for you to know about your student?
- What are you looking forward to learning about your student?
- Is there a particular level that you feel more interested or comfortable in tutoring?
Communicating Across Language Barriers

One aspect of teaching English that seems to intimidate a majority of volunteers is the question of how to communicate with someone who doesn’t speak the same language. How do you get them to understand what you mean? Should you use Google translate or rely on an interpreter?

Thankfully, you don’t have to know your student’s language to be able to communicate with him or her. The following tips can help you learn to effectively transcend the language barrier and get your point across:

- **Use clear and consistent hand motions.** I can’t emphasize enough how helpful this has been to me as an ESL teacher. I devised simple hand motions for key words that I needed my students to understand, such as “repeat,” “same,” “not the same,” “listen,” “read,” “write,” “speak,” etc. I then used these same motions repeatedly while using the words, and my students very quickly caught on and even used the motions when saying those words. The key is consistency – your hand motion for “repeat” should be the same every time you use the word.

- **Teach your student the words YOU need/use the most.** These might be words related to your lesson schedule, or directions for lessons such as those mentioned above. Use hand motions, pictures, and objects to teach and practice these words until your student is familiar with them. For example, you may teach your student the phrase, “I come 2:00 Saturday” word by word with hand motions and pictures. If you feel comfortable doing so, you can even write these words out for your student and indicate that you will send those words in a text message to your student’s phone before you come. You could also teach “I am not coming” in case something comes up and you have to cancel last minute. Also, teaching the words that you will use in your lessons such as “repeat,” “listen,” “speak,” etc. can go a long way in helping make your lessons more effective and enjoyable.

- **Simplify your language.** There may be times where you don’t even speak complete sentences to your student because it would be too much for her, and that’s okay. The goal is for you and your student to understand one another, and if you have to sacrifice a preposition or article to attain that, so be it. Your student will learn proper language through your lessons, but she may quickly become frustrated and feel like it’s a lost cause if she can’t even understand the directions you are giving her.

- **Draw/use pictures.** A picture really is worth a thousand words! Keep paper and a pen and your smartphone handy for doodling and searching pictures to communicate what you need.
- **In a pinch, use a translation app.** If the concept you’re trying to communicate is too abstract for a picture or hand motion, you can try using a translation app such as Google Translate. This particular app allows you to write or speak a word or phrase and read and hear that word or phrase in another language. If your client is literate in her native language, you can type in an English word and translate it into her language and show it to her. If your client is illiterate in her native language, you can have the app say the word in her language. But keep in mind that not every language spoken by our clients is available on these apps, and that these apps are not 100% accurate all the time. They should be used with discretion and more as a supplement than something you are entirely dependent on.

Sometimes you may feel silly acting things out, speaking word by word, or doodling pictures, but **keep in mind that you are demonstrating care and respect for your student by doing whatever it takes to help him understand.** As you continue working with your student, you’ll probably find that these practices quickly become more comfortable and natural, which will help put both of you at ease and open up the lines of communication. And when all else fails, remember this simple truth:

*We all smile in the same language.*

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**Questions for Consideration:**

- Does the thought of teaching someone with whom you don’t share a common language intimidate you?
- What can you do to help prepare to communicate effectively with your student?
Teaching English as a Second Language (ESL)

Teaching English as a volunteer tutor to refugees means that you will be much more focused on teaching survival English skills rather than academic English. The tutoring model also means that you will be teaching English in a more informal, real-world context rather than in a formal, academic context, as in the classroom model. You aren’t teaching students who want to learn English in anticipation of an upcoming vacation or extended stay in an English-speaking country; you’re teaching adults who have already arrived in an English-speaking country and need communication skills to survive and thrive in their new life and environment. As a result, unless you happen to be tutoring a student who wants to get his or her GED, you won’t be focusing as much on complex grammatical structures, jargon such as “nouns” and “prepositions,” and so forth. You’ll be modeling and providing practice opportunities on practical vocabulary and phrases pertaining to everyday life in the U.S. Bearing this in mind will help you understand what to prioritize as you work with your student.

It’s also helpful to remember that adults learn best when the content and the way it is presented is relevant to them and helpful in their current life circumstances. Shirley Brod of the Spring Institute for International Studies puts it this way: “We know that adults learn more effectively when they are working with information that is relevant to their lives, reflects authentic contexts, and is responsive to their needs. (Grognet et.al. 1997) Yes in many adult ESL literacy classes, students spend time learning the alphabet before doing any reading, and when they do begin reading, often the sentences contain vocabulary and ideas not relevant to their lives. Reading, “The little pup sat on the rug” does not meet the students’ critical need to read the following:

STOP Take two tablets twice a day. POISON. Help Wanted.

“If we want our students to stay in class long enough to acquire the skills – and the self confidence- to become self-sufficient, productive employees, family members, and participants in their communities, we need to streamline our approach to ESL literacy to enable them to learn quickly, to see frequent proof of their progress, and to have input into what is being taught.” (What Non-Readers or Beginning Readers Need to Know: Performance-Based ESL Adult Literacy. Spring Institute for international Studies ELT Technical Assistance for English Language Training Projects. 1998-1999.)

That’s why we strongly encourage you to teach and practice in ways that are meaningful and engaging for your adult student. The curriculum is set up to deliver important language for newcomers to the U.S. to help them more readily adjust to their new environment.
For lower level students (pre-literate to high beginner, which is the majority of our clients), language study usually takes the form of learning essential vocabulary for everyday life tasks. But what’s the most effective way to teach vocabulary?

Suppose you were beginning to study Russian with a tutor. The tutor wants to teach you a new word, холодильник. She says, “Наше слово сегодня - холодильник. Это прибор на кухне, в которой пища остается холодной. Так, повтори слово за мной – холодильник,” and looks at you expectantly.

Do you understand what she is asking you to do? Did you learn the new vocabulary word? What if she tries a different tactic – she shows you this picture:

She points to the picture and says, “Холодильник.” She gestures for you to repeat the word after her, breaking it apart sound by sound until you can correctly say the word on your own.

What does “холодильник” mean?

If you answered “refrigerator,” it was a successful Russian lesson.

What made the first lesson ineffective? Part of the problem is that the tutor tried to teach you a new word by explaining that word to you using other words that you don’t understand. If you were only hearing what she said and not seeing the words in print, you might not have even understood which of those strange words you were supposed to be learning. When teaching a language, grading your language to your student’s level and needs helps reduce confusion and promote comprehension and retention of vocabulary. What we mean by that is reducing what many ESL institutions refer to as “teacher talk” – those filler words and sounds that aren’t really a part of the vocabulary you are teaching in that moment. You also want to use words that are appropriate to your student’s language level.

In the above example, the teacher first introduces the word by saying, “Our word today is refrigerator. It’s an appliance in the kitchen where food is kept cold. So, repeat the word after me – refrigerator.” In this particular language lesson for beginning learners, every other word in those sentences except for the vocabulary word, “refrigerator,” is a needless filler word. Teacher talk can actually function as a barrier to the student’s learning ability by causing confusion and frustration as the student is attempting to follow along with every sound coming out of your mouth.

Here are some other examples of “teacher talk”:

- “Well, today we are going to learn about...”
- “So then, if you could just repeat that word after me...”
- “Now we are going to take a look at this handout...”

When you grade your language, you learn to edit out the unnecessary or confusing “extra” words and simplify. Remember, when it comes to giving instructions, definitions, etc. in a language lesson, **less is better**.

Another reason for the effectiveness of the second method of teaching the Russian word was that it incorporated **visuals**. Instead of using more unknown words to explain the meaning of an already unknown word, the tutor used a picture to connect the new word with an image in the learner’s mind, enabling the learner both to quickly understand the word and to remember the word by associating it with a picture. The tutor also could have touched the refrigerator in the kitchen of the student’s home as she used the word, and had the student touch the refrigerator as he repeated the word. This is called using **realia,** or real life objects to teach vocabulary words. Both visuals and realia are highly effective tools in teaching new vocabulary as they give the student a concrete visual or object with which to connect the new words.

For lower level learners (pre-literate to high beginner), a good, standard format for an ESL lesson includes the following:

1. *(if applicable)* **review** vocabulary words from previous lesson using visuals, realia, games, dialogue, etc.
2. choose a few **key vocabulary words** in a particular theme (“family,” “introductions,” “foods,” “jobs,” etc.)
3. teach the **meaning** of the words incorporating visuals and/or realia
4. teach the **pronunciation** of the words by demonstration and drilling
5. provide **practice** with the words using visuals, realia, and controlled dialogue
6. teach the **written form** of the word using a pictograph
7. provide instruction and practice in **writing** the word using a handout

We’ll look at each of these steps more in-depth:

1. **Review** – Regular, structured review is vital to successful acquisition of a new language. Review, review, review, and review again! Give your student plenty of practice in using the new vocabulary, phrases, dialogues, etc. in your lessons. This especially is where optional outings and ‘field trips’ are extremely helpful – **the more your student can practice language in a real-world context, the better**! Regular review helps your student become more comfortable and confident in the language, and helps you identify progress. You can use any number of methods for review – flashcards, quizzing with correctly identifying visuals, games, handouts, etc.
Continually add new words to the review while retaining old words, which allows both you and your student to actually see his/her vocabulary grow.

2. **Key Vocabulary Words** – Limit your number of new words in a lesson in order not to overwhelm your student. Depending on your student’s level, **3-5 words** is usually a good target range. More than this can quickly overload and frustrate your student. The vocabulary words for each lesson should **all be related to one another** in a clear, logical way for better comprehension and retention. That’s why the curriculums we provide have a theme for each lesson, and also why we clarify that you should spend several sessions on each theme, depending on your student’s level and pace of learning. If you are teaching the unit on “introductions” to a pre-literate or semi-literate student, you might start with the words “my,” “name,” “is,” “what,” and “your.”

3. **Teach the Meaning** – As mentioned in the prior example about learning the Russian word for refrigerator, teaching the meaning of a vocabulary word is effectively done using **visuals and/or realia**, as well as **hand motions/gestures** and **Total Physical Response (TPR)**. TPR is a method in which vocabulary is taught and reviewed through movement. For example, you might teach the word “run” by running in place as you say the word, and have your student run in place as s/he repeats. Hand motions and gestures are also extremely effective means of communicating meaning, as mentioned in the section about “Communicating Across Language Barriers.”

4. **Teach the Pronunciation** – Just understanding the meaning of a word isn’t enough; if the student cannot correctly pronounce the word, he or she cannot effectively communicate. Effective means of teaching pronunciation involve **demonstrating the pronunciation** (say the word clearly at a normal speed, and then more slowly for the student to repeat after you), and **“drilling” the pronunciation** – have the student repeat the word over and over in a variety of patterns. For example, you might point to yourself and say the word slowly, and the point to your student for him to repeat the word, then to yourself again, then to the student, etc. You might say the word loudly, have the student repeat at the same volume, and then softly and have the student repeat at the same volume, etc. If a word is particularly long or tricky, **breaking it apart into separate sounds** may be helpful. Some students will struggle more with pronunciation than others due to a variety of factors – the structure of their native language, their proclivity to learning a language, how they may have previously been taught to pronounce English words, etc. For example, native speakers of tonal languages (such as Karen, Chin, and the many other peoples of Burma/Myanmar) often struggle with leaving off the endings of English words, because words in their language may only end in vowels, never consonants. Two
particular English sounds that are difficult for many speakers of other languages are the voiced and unvoiced sounds of “th.”

5. **Provide Practice** – It’s true what they say – “Practice makes perfect.” Give your student plenty of different activities and contexts in which to practice the new words. Practice is similar to review in that you can use a variety of activities – flashcards, games, songs, handouts, dialogues, etc. Different practice activities are provided for you in the curriculums, and you are also welcome to come up with your own. The practice activities should have clear, simple instructions and be tailored to your student’s level. They should not include lots of unknown words or concepts, and for lower level students, abstract, open-ended questions or simulations are not the best option as the students may not yet be capable of producing language to that degree. Again, **as much practice as possible in real-world contexts is best!**

6. **Written Form**: There are different theories as to whether speaking and reading English should be taught one at a time or all at once. We favor the integrated model of teaching them together in English at Home due to the fact that your time with your student is limited and you are usually helping them acquire basic survival skills rather than masterful proficiency. A very effective way to introduce the written word to very low level students is through the use of **pictographs**, in which the written word contains a picture illustrating the meaning of that word. (Examples and details about the pictograph method are included in the pre-literate/semi-literate curriculum.) See a sample image below:

![Pictograph Image]

To teach the written form of the word “where,” you would first show the top card containing the picture, and use the hand motion/gesture you used in teaching the word orally (similar to the pose of the stick figure in the picture). Have the student
repeat the motion and look at the picture and word as s/he repeats the word. Have the student identify each letter in the word one by one and then repeat the word as a whole. **Drill and review often** until the student can correctly say the word when shown the card. Then use the other card without the picture, showing that they are the same, and review until the student can identify the word without the pictograph.

Again, **patience and lots of practice and review are key**, especially for those students who cannot read or write in any language. Written language can be very intimidating, so introduce it slowly and at a pace suitable for your student. We also recommend teaching the alphabet this way, if your student has not yet mastered it – teach them to speak relevant words first, and then teach the student the letters of those words as you teach them the word.

7. **Writing the Word** – Writing can be a very difficult and intimidating skill for lower level students, especially those who cannot write in their own languages. LOTS of practice, patience, and review are necessary for helping the student become comfortable with writing. It’s also important for a student to be able to comfortably identify and pronounce the word before learning to write the word. The pre-literate/semi-literate curriculum includes handouts for writing letters. Some students may even need to first trace the letter in a substance like sand or sugar and/or form the letters out of objects like beads or beans before even beginning to write the letters. Tracing and copying should be used liberally when teaching lower level and even intermediate level students how to write. As with the experience as a whole, tailor it to your student’s level, comfort, and goals. Some students may pick up on writing quickly, while for others it may be a painstaking struggle. It’s okay! Even if your student is “only” able to write the alphabet and his/her name after 3 months of study, that’s still a major achievement and something to be very proud of, especially considering this student might have never had the opportunity to learn to write before.

It helps to **sketch out the timing for each piece of the lesson** so that you don’t either overload the time with too much to accomplish, or plan too little and have lots of leftover time with nothing to do. For example, you might start every lesson with 10-15 minutes of review of the previous lesson with games, flashcards, handouts, etc.; then 45 minutes introducing the new vocabulary or concepts of the day and providing practice opportunities; short break; 25 minutes reviewing the alphabet and phonics using the new words from the lesson; 25 minutes learning to write the words and practicing writing; 5 minutes to assign homework (as desired). As you become more experienced with tutoring and get to know your student and his strengths and weaknesses, you’ll adjust the projected time for activities based on what you observe is feasible for your student.
This same framework can be used for intermediate students, but of course with more expansion according to their abilities and interests. You might be teaching phrases in addition to words, practicing whole dialogues instead of only words or phrases, and reading and writing sentences or even paragraphs. The framework gives you a place to begin and a structure to follow for effective language teaching. If your student is literate (in her own language and at least to some degree in English), you don’t have to wait to show her the written word until after she’s learned to say it – you can show the word as you introduce it.

For advanced students learning specialized vocabulary, such as words for the driver’s license exam, job interviews, the GED, etc., the same method of introducing and practicing vocabulary can be used and adjusted up to their abilities and interests. Providing real-world listening and conversation practice is usually extremely helpful for students at this level – they may speak English rather well, but understanding everyday “rapid-fire” English in the dialects and slang of those around them can be very intimidating. Short videos, audio recordings, songs, and dialogue practice are great elements for structuring your lessons.

At the intermediate and advanced levels, students are also capable of giving more input on what they are interested in learning. If you need resources for a topic requested by your student, please let us know and we’ll be happy to help.

Remember, every person teaches differently, and every student learns differently. Do what works for you and your student! Adapt and adjust as necessary, and know that you can always come to us for help or advice. If you have studied another language before, think about what was most and least helpful for you in the learning process, and realize that it’s probably the same for your student.

Questions for Consideration:

- What part of teaching is most confusing or intimidating for you?
- Do you feel like this framework is helpful in preparing you to teach?
- What other information would you like to know about teaching English?
General Guidelines and Best Practices

There really isn’t one “perfect” way to teach English since each teacher and each student is a unique individual, so one of the best things you can do for you and your student is **value what each of you bring to the table** – your personality, your experiences, your knowledge, and your student’s personality, experiences, and knowledge. Don’t feel like this is a sterilized academic environment in which you have to be stiff and formal – have fun and be yourself! **Get to know your student, laugh at your own mistakes, and enjoy the process.**

Here are some other things to keep in mind to help you on your way:

- **Be patient.** Be patient with your student and with yourself. Language learning is a beautiful, intricate, and crazy process, and there will be many mistakes along the way. Your student may not pick up on things as quickly as you envision, or you may not be able to communicate as effectively as you hoped. It’s okay! **It’s a process, not a snap of the fingers.**
- **Celebrate achievements.** Always remember that you are helping an adult who is trying to learn a new language in a new context – how overwhelming is that for that adult? **Every step forward, however small, is a victory and should be celebrated.** Encouraging your student and recognizing her achievements boosts her confidence and her belief that she can, in fact, learn, in spite of age, lack of previous education, current circumstances, cultural stigma, and whatever other barriers are standing in her way. Celebration can be as simple yet meaningful as a smile and gestures and words of approval, to stickers, certificates, cards, cupcakes – however you feel like making your student feel like a success!
- **Prepare.** Preparation helps you feel calmer and hopefully more excited than nervous or stressed about tutoring, and will also help put your student at ease. Read the curriculums, make notes, review your lesson plans, gather materials, and even practice before you go for a tutoring session.
- **Review, review, review…and review again.** Never stop reviewing previous lessons and vocabulary. You’re building your student’s memory, vocabulary, and confidence in the language, and helping keep yourself on track and focused with your lessons.
- **Be consistent.** Be consistent in your scheduled tutoring times, but also with your lessons – don’t feel like you have to introduce a new activity or method with every single new word or unit, or that you have to teach each lesson in a different order and a different way. Maintaining a regular structure to your lessons will help your student become more comfortable and focused in the learning process.
- **Get creative.** Use whatever resources, objects, pictures, materials, outings, etc. you can think of to help make your lessons engaging and relevant to everyday life. We also
have a list of “Cultural Activity Suggestions” that we send to all our tutors for ways to incorporate outings and real-life situations into your English lessons. If you are unsure of whether an activity is effective or appropriate, just ask! We’ll be happy to help.

- **Keep it simple.** Don’t stress yourself out trying to plan overly complex lessons, even for advanced level students. We know that you are volunteering your time and you have other commitments and obligations, so hours of lesson planning is usually just not feasible for you. **Remember, you are not expected to help your student achieve fluency overnight, or even within a 3-month period.** Use the resources we’ve given you, add in whatever you like of your own, and focus on helping your student acquire essentials of language for his or her level and goals.

- **Allow for accents.** Your student’s English pronunciation will be affected by his native language and culture. That’s completely normal. Don’t feel like you have to correct and shape your student’s accent to be “American” (and which American accent would you choose, anyway?). A good rule of thumb when working on pronunciation is to make sure that the way your student pronounces words is intelligible rather than perfect. Communication, not identical imitation, is the goal. If you cannot understand your student when he speaks English, it’s appropriate to gently and respectfully correct his pronunciation by demonstrating and drilling.

- **Take small breaks.** Language learning can be mentally exhausting for both the student and the teacher. For a 2 hour tutoring session, you might want to take a 5 minute break halfway through, or offer small breaks throughout the lesson, especially if you notice that your student is getting overwhelmed or frustrated with a particular word or concept. If your student doesn’t want to take a break, that’s fine! Just know that it’s a good practice for you and the student if it’s something you need.

- **Keep learning.** Teachers are also students - we are always learning about the education process and the best ways to help our students learn. As you can, read articles about teaching ESL, attend workshops and seminars, network with other tutors and teachers, come talk to us with questions, etc.

**Questions for Consideration:**

- Think about your own education and/or language learning experiences. Who were some of your favorite teachers, and what did they do that makes them stand out to you?
Using a Curriculum

The English at Home program has two standard curriculums for the first two broad language level categories: pre-literate/semi-literate and high beginner/intermediate. These curriculums were developed specifically for refugee adults and endeavor to provide you with the materials you need to teach lessons based on survival skills English for those integrating into a new life in the United States. That being said, these curriculums are by no means comprehensive of everything a refugee adult needs or wants to learn, and are open to adaptation according to the needs and desires of your student and you as a tutor.

The first thing you should do with your curriculum is to read it – the whole thing. It may sound simple, or it may sound burdensome and unnecessary, but reading the curriculum will give you a much better grasp of the general format of the next three months of study with your student, and gives you guidance on where to start, what to teach, and how. If you try to use the curriculum in a lesson without having read it beforehand, it can be very confusing for both you and your student. Read it well ahead of your first lesson, take notes, make plans, gather resources, and ask questions.

Remember also that the curriculum is just a suggestion, and no one curriculum will perfectly fit the needs and learning styles of every student (or the teaching styles of every teacher). You may find that your student already knows some of the material, or that your student struggles with a particular concept and needs to continue studying it longer than just one lesson, so that you don’t progress in regular increments through the curriculum. That’s completely normal and expected. We say this often to our tutors because it’s true – do what works for you and your student. You aren’t being graded as a tutor; you’re appreciated for the time and effort you are giving as a volunteer, and you’re making a difference in the life of an adult who needs to learn a language. So take the curriculum as an offering of assistance and guidance for your time as a tutor, and jump right in!

The pre-literate/semi-literate curriculum is unique from the others in that it’s designed not to be progressed through unit by unit, but for the first three units to be used continually throughout the other lessons. For example, you may start a lesson by teaching the first 5 letters of the alphabet, and then transition to teaching your student how to say “My name is __. What is your name?” in the same lesson. When your student is ready to see those words in written form, have him identify the letters that you taught earlier in the lesson. In the next lesson, you might review the first five letters and then teach the next five, and so forth.

The advanced level does not have one curriculum because at this level, what a student studies is much more dependent on his/her personal goals. An advanced student may wish to study for the GED, in which case you will be provided with GED
materials. Another advanced student may want to study to get a driver’s license, and so we will provide you with those materials. As with the other curriculums, these materials are adaptable to your student’s needs and to your style as a tutor.

Questions for Consideration:

- What information do you think would be useful to include in a curriculum?
- Do you think you’ll want to use the curriculums we provide, or do you have other materials in mind?
 Games and Activities

The following are suggestions for different games and activities that you can incorporate into your lessons to give your student meaningful and engaging practice with the English language. The games and activities are categorized by the four language skills and by language levels, with the exception of the first, which we believe is so important and effective that it deserves its own paragraph – the Language Experience Approach.

**LEA (Language Experience Approach) [pre-literate-advanced]**

In this activity, the student produces the content to study, making the learning much more student-centered and meaningful. The activity is also simple and requires almost no preparation on the part of the teacher (yay!). Choose a topic relevant to your student – family, home country, goals, hobbies, etc. Ask the student to talk about this topic as much as s/he can. Ask questions as necessary to prompt more information. As the student is speaking, write down exactly what s/he says in the exact way that s/he says it. For lower-level students, try to get 3-5 sentences. For higher level students, try to get at least a good paragraph or two.

After the student finishes speaking, show him/her the transcript and read it out loud, allowing the student to correct information as necessary. Then go over the transcript together and correct any errors, like making complete sentences or arranging word order. Read the corrected script aloud, and then ask the student to read the script, correcting pronunciation as necessary. Then have the student write down a copy of the script in his/her notebook. Assign the student the task of saying and writing the script over and over again for homework, and have him/her read, recite, and write it in future lessons. This process can be repeated over and over to generate more stories that can be used for speaking, reading, listening and writing practice, with vocabulary and phrases that are naturally relevant and meaningful to the student.

**Speaking**

- **Five (or Ten) Finger Sentences [beginner-intermediate]** – This activity helps your student learn to speak in complete sentences. Come up with a few sentences that contain either five or ten words. Say the sentence for your student, counting each word on a finger as you say it. Have the student repeat and mimic your finger gestures. This activity can also be expanded and added to other activities – question and answer, describing things, memorizing and reciting, etc. The tactile and visual element of using fingers helps the student think about what she is saying, the order in which she says it, and how to increase her use of her vocabulary by challenging her to use at least 5 or 10 words in each statement.
*You can expand this activity to include writing by having the student write down her sentence after she says it correctly.

- **Visual Thinking Strategy (VTS) [high beginner – advanced]** – Show the student a picture. It can be a photo or a painting. The more interesting and complex, the better (think National Geographic). Start by asking your student the 3 core VTS questions –
  1. “What is happening in this picture?”
  2. “What do you see that makes you say that?”
  3. “What more can you see?”

  Encourage and prompt the student to describe the picture to you, giving as many details as possible. Ask additional questions as desired – “What colors do you see?”, “What do you think happened before this picture?”, “What do you think will happen next?” Write down a transcript of the student’s description of the picture exactly as she says it, and after she is finished speaking, show her the transcript and together correct mistakes and make the words and phrases into complete sentences. Have your student memorize this monologue for homework and practice it throughout future lessons. You can then take those learned sentences and trade out subjects, verbs, etc. to teach new sentences, and continually build from there.

  *You can expand this activity to include writing by asking the student to write a paragraph describing the picture.

- **Describe and Draw [high beginner – advanced]** – Give the student a stack of pictures and instruct him to choose one, but not to show you which one he chose. Ask the student to describe the picture to you, and as he talks, you draw a picture of what he is describing. The student should be as specific as possible to help you understand what is in the picture, where things are in the picture and in relation to one another, etc. When finished, compare your drawing to the picture.

  *You can expand this activity to include listening by switching roles and describing a picture to your student for him to draw.

- **Memorize and Recite [beginner-advanced]** – Have your student memorize a short children’s poem, a small paragraph, etc., and recite it back to you. First, select the piece you want your student to memorize based on your student’s level and interests. Then decide which vocabulary needs to be pre-taught before the student memorizes the piece. Try to choose something that contains related words. Teach the student the vocabulary, and then read the poem or paragraph. Help your student work through the piece and quiz her on it regularly until she can say it from memory. This is also a good
time to work on pronunciation. For lower-level students who cannot yet read, you might only say the piece to them without showing it. For higher-level students, incorporate reading by showing them the piece.
*You can also expand this activity to include writing by having the student copy the piece and learn to write it as well as say it from memory.

- **Guess Who? [high beginner-advanced]** – If you have this board game, it’s actually great practice for English! First teach vocabulary related to physical appearances – hair/eye color, hat, glasses, facial hair, jewelry. Then teach your students the concept of a “yes or no” question and the structure – “Does your person have (wear) ____?” or “Is your person a man (woman)?” Modify it according to your student’s level – for lower level, your student may not yet be able to ask and answer in complete sentences, but could say “Glasses?”, “White hair?”, etc.

- **Substitution Drills [semi-literate-advanced]** – Teach your student a sentence that corresponds with a picture, such as “The man walks to the store.” Then trade out the word ‘store’ for other locations, such as post office, library, office, school, hospital, etc., with corresponding pictures for each of these locations. Guide the student to say the starter sentence when you show the picture, and then to keep saying it using the appropriate location words as you show pictures of those locations. For example: [picture of a man walking to a store] “The man walks to the store.”
  [picture of a library] “The man walks to the library.”
  [picture of an apartment] “The man walks to the apartment.”
You can also change out the subject – “The woman walks to the apartment,” “the girl,” “the boy,” “the dog,” etc.

**Listening**

- **Listen and Sort [beginner]** – Collect objects and/or pictures of vocabulary words that you have taught your student. Spread them out on a table and indicate that your student should pick up the object you name and put it in a box/bag/etc. Promotes tactile learning for kinesthetic learners, and connects words to objects. You can also say the words more quickly and change out objects to vary things up.

- **Describe and Sort [high beginner-advanced]** – Collect objects and/or pictures of vocabulary words that you have taught your student. Spread them out on a table (or to make it more interesting, scatter them around the room). One by one, describe the object using words that you have taught – colors, size, function, etc. The student should pick up the object you describe and put it in a box/bag/etc.
• **Songs and Pictures** *(high beginner-advanced)* – Choose a song in English with vocabulary appropriate to your student’s level (for high beginner to intermediate students, you might choose a short, simple children’s song; for an advanced student, choose a more complex song). Choose key words from that song (8-10) and find pictures for each word. Spread the pictures out on a table and review the pictures to make sure that your student knows the words. Tell your student that you will play the song, and when your student hears one of the words shown in the pictures, the student should point to the correct picture.

• **Song Gap Fill** *(intermediate-advanced)* - Choose a song in English with vocabulary appropriate to your student’s level. Make a handout with the lyrics to the song, but take out several words of the song (8-10) and replace them with blanks. Try not to choose words like “a,” “the,” etc. Allow the student to read over the lyrics first, and then tell the student that you will play the song and the student should listen for the missing words. When he hears them, he should write them in the blanks.

• **Following a Recipe** *(high beginner-advanced)* – Choose a recipe and select key vocabulary words from the recipe to teach your student (nouns and verbs). Use actual objects (such as butter, oil, eggs, rice, etc.) and motions to teach the words. When your student is comfortable with the vocabulary, tell your student that you are going to read the recipe to her, and she will follow your directions to make the food item.

*Can be adapted to a reading/speaking activity by switching roles and having the student read you the recipe. Cook several items together, some from your culture, some from your student’s culture.

**Reading**

• **Initial Sound Sorting** *(beginner-high beginner)* – Collect pictures and/or objects of words that you have taught your student. Spread alphabet cards across a table. Choose one object at time and hold it up for your student. She should say the name of the object, take it, and put it under the letter that the word begins with.

• **Find the Word** *(beginner-high beginner)* – Choose a vocabulary word that you have recently taught your student to read. Write this word on an index card. Type up a paragraph or two of sentences frequently using this word throughout. Put the handout in front of your student and the index card with the word on top. Direct her to take a pencil and circle the word every time she sees it in the story. Expand it by asking her to circle other words that she knows and/or by asking her to find certain letters.

• **Words in Order** *(beginner-intermediate)* – Take a phrase that you’ve taught your student, such as “My name is,” or “Where are you from?” Write each word of the sentence on a separate card. Give the cards to your student out of order and direct her to put the cards in the correct order. Expand the activity to include questions and
answers (“What is your name? “My name is”), and have her both put the words in the correct order and match the question and the response.

- **Word Sorting [high beginner-advanced]** – Think of categories of words that you have taught your student, such as family, food, jobs, colors, etc. Write these category words on index cards. Write words from each of those categories on index cards. Give the words to your student to read and sort into the appropriate categories.

- **Story and Picture Matching [high beginner-advanced]** – Find or write several short stories appropriate to your student’s level and that use vocabulary that you have taught your student. Find pictures that correspond to the main action of the story. Have your student read the stories one by one and match the story to the correct picture.
  *Expand it to a listening activity by reading the story to your student (not showing him the text) and having him choose the correct picture that correlates with the story you are reading.

- **Story Sequencing [high beginner-advanced]** – Give your student a short story to read appropriate to her level. Have her read the story, and then give her a stack of pictures that correspond to the main actions of the story. Direct her to put these pictures in the order that they happened in the story.

**Writing**

- **Letter formation [beginner]** – Pour sugar into a flat tray or shallow box. Trace a letter in the sand and have your student copy (you may have to guide her hand at first). Continue tracing letters until you think your student is getting comfortable with the shape of them. You can also have your student form letters using beads, beans, pipe cleaners, and other tactile objects.

- **Identify and write [beginner-intermediate]** – Choose letters or words appropriate to your student’s level and from what you’ve taught your student. Say the word or show a picture or object and have your student write the correct word. *Also includes listening skills.

- **Picture and Write [high beginner-advanced]** – Choose a picture that could be described using vocabulary that you’ve taught your student (a person, a place, objects, etc.). Have your student look at the picture and describe it to you, and then have her write down her description of the picture. Go over the writing together and give praise for correct items and feedback for incorrect ones.

- **About Me [intermediate-advanced]** – Find a free “About Me” printable suitable for your student’s level from our Pinterest board or on the internet. First have your student read over the information and discuss the answers with you (speaking). Then have her fill in the information about herself. You can expand it for higher level students to writing a paragraph or an essay based on the information.
**Resources**

- New American Pathways English Resource Library – Schedule a time with the English at Home team to come into the office and look at the resources we have, and check out the books and items you would like to use for a limited time.
- *Making it Real: Teaching Pre-Literate Adult Refugee Students* by Tacoma House Community Training Project- a handbook and curriculum for teaching pre-literate/low level refugee adults. Request a copy from the English at Home team and we will email you the PDF.
- Literacy in Life: A Handbook for Volunteer Literacy Tutors by Literacy Network of Washington – a handbook for teaching literacy to adults. Request a copy from the English at Home team and we will email you the PDF.
- Best Practices for Adult Refugees in the ESL Classroom: [https://sites.google.com/site/bestpracticesforadultrefugees/](https://sites.google.com/site/bestpracticesforadultrefugees/) - Resources and tips for teaching English to adult refugees.
- [http://www.kids-pages.com/worksheets.htm](http://www.kids-pages.com/worksheets.htm) - free printable worksheets on a variety of subjects (beginner-advanced)
- [http://www.englishmaven.org/index.html](http://www.englishmaven.org/index.html) - free online English activities on a wide variety of topics from grammar and vocabulary to citizenship (beginner-advanced)
- [http://bogglesworldesl.com/](http://bogglesworldesl.com/) - free printable worksheets
- [http://www.lakeshorelearning.com/general_content/free_resources/teachers_corner/flashcard/flashcardmaker.jsp?f=m](http://www.lakeshorelearning.com/general_content/free_resources/teachers_corner/flashcard/flashcardmaker.jsp?f=m) – free flashcard maker (all levels)
- [http://esl.about.com/od/teachingbeginners/a/ab_beg_intro.htm](http://esl.about.com/od/teachingbeginners/a/ab_beg_intro.htm) – a 20 point program for teaching beginners; includes syllabus/curriculums, tips, resources, and lessons. (beginner-high beginner)
- [http://www.colorcutandcreate.com/i_print_to_read.php](http://www.colorcutandcreate.com/i_print_to_read.php) - free short stories to print and read. (high beginner)