

Elementary English Conversation Class for Adult Learners

Introduction

How can tutors help adult language learners engage in meaningful conversations in English? The complexities of grammar, vocabulary, and culture can be daunting to students and teachers alike. This curriculum was designed to help tutors introduce basic English through topics that are useful to adult learners. We hope it will also serve as a model that tutors can use to develop subsequent lessons for their students.

Course Design

The curriculum consists of two two-hour lessons per week over a ten-week period. Tutors can adjust this schedule by stretching or condensing the content and by cutting or adding material to suit students' needs. The lessons can also be adapted for individual tutoring.

Topics were selected for general usefulness and appeal to adult language learners. They include greetings, schedules and calendars, families, clothes and supermarket shopping, rooms and buildings, health, and jobs. Objectives for each week cover vocabulary and activities relevant to each week's topic and grammatical structures for beginning language learners. While the grammatical structures in the curriculum are elementary, they increase in complexity from week to week. (A detailed list of topics and objectives, by week, appears below.)

Each lesson presents multiple activities for students to practice listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills, supported by pictures, props, maps, and homework. An effort was made to encourage student activity, facilitated but not dominated by the tutor.

Lesson Structure

There are two lessons for each week. Each lesson includes:

- list of objectives
- recommended materials
- welcome and review activities
- a series of whole class and pair or group activities
- review sheet with homework
- handouts and pictures

Icons

Several icons appear throughout the lessons to:



offer suggestions



indicate board work



present pair/small group activities with instruction for teachers



show review and concluding activities



provide a lesson review and homework for the next class

Tips

All tutors know that learning a new language, especially as an adult, can be difficult or even intimidating. You should adjust your lessons to the pace and needs of your specific group. It is highly unlikely that you will use this curriculum exactly as written. Please regard it as a series of suggestions, subject to continual adjustment through your own observations, experimentation, and creativity. The most important tip is to get students involved and talking as soon and as frequently as possible, even if you cover less material and omit some activities.

Repeat, repeat, repeat

The Japanese have a saying, “Repetition is the Mother of Knowledge.” This is especially true for language learners. Students have to hear standard pronunciation many, many times before they can even start to produce the correct sound. Also, by repeating, the tutors give students **TIME** to assimilate information. A rule of thumb is, say **EVERYTHING** three times. If students struggle at all, then repeat again.

Time

Similarly, it is important to give students adequate time to respond. Often tutors will feel uncomfortable with periods of silence in a lesson, but in language learning settings, “Silence is Golden.” Tutors need to discipline themselves **NOT** to fill silences and not to immediately rephrase the information. Students can often figure out what is going on if given enough time.

Gestures and props

Teachers must ensure that students understand the content of every lesson. Often the best way to do that is to use a picture, prop, or action. Many pictures are provided in the curriculum, but teachers can add those that are specific to the students' experience. Props are even better than pictures. For example, teachers can bring in items of clothing and use those instead of pictures. Here students can help by bringing in clothing from their respective cultures. Gestures are also wonderful tools but be careful – a gesture in our American culture might have a different meaning in another culture. Also, using gestures for teacher commands, instead of words, can reduce the amount of teacher talk.

Opportunities to share

Teachers should encourage students to take part in lessons, not only by learning content, but also by bringing in possible teaching materials. In fact, their materials might improve the lesson. (Again, all content in this curriculum does not have to be covered.) By giving students some responsibility to provide content, you show that their ideas have value.

Avoid teacher-centered communications

Remember that the most important people in the class are the students, not the teacher. Follow the common saying, "Be the Guide on the Side, not the Sage on the Stage." Students need to learn to understand a variety of speaking styles and accents. Having them talk to each other will provide many different voices. In addition, teachers do not need to respond to every comment; the other students can do that. Teachers' goals should be to talk less than 50% of the time.

Teaching Dialogs

1. Through pictures, gestures, or prior learning, ensure that students understand the dialog.
2. Read through all parts of the dialog, using natural intonation, rhythm, and maybe even speed.
3. Pick a few key words of the dialog and ask students about the meaning. If any words are new, write these words on the board.
4. Read and repeat the first line of the dialog several times. (If possible, use a picture or gestures to indicate who in the dialog is talking.) Then ask the students to repeat the line.
5. Move on to the next line and repeat step 4.
6. Continue until the dialog is completed.
7. Take one role and ask the students to take the other. If students have trouble with a line, help and/or point to key words on the board.
8. Switch roles.
9. Ask students to practice the dialog in pairs.

It is important to listen for errors and correct them by saying the correct line. Usually, it is best to keep the error in context rather than single it out. For example, if a line is "What time are we eating dinner?" and the student omits the word "are," just repeat the entire sentence giving a little emphasis on "are." If the student says, "I'm in the kishen," say "in the kitchen? Yes? in the kitchen, in the kitchen," and gesture for the student to repeat the phrase correctly. This process might need to be repeated several times before the student uses the correct pronunciation.

Attendance

Students' lives are very busy and very complicated, and sometimes they cannot come to every class. However, regular attendance is necessary for progress. Unlike a conversation group, the goal of this curriculum is to build basic skills. For that reason, material builds from one lesson to the next. Each lesson begins with a review of the previous material through homework assignments, and vocabulary and structures are repeated throughout the curriculum. These aspects help those who missed a lesson get the information they need to move forward.

What to do about home practice

Each lesson provides a handout of key vocabulary and notes that students can use for review. At the beginning of the curriculum, the practice is fairly easy, but becomes more creative (and demanding) in later lessons. Meeting once or even twice a week, without some out-of-class practice will not be enough to build necessary language skills. Students often neglect at-home practice, but the curriculum tries to provide relevant and creative tasks to reinforce skills. We hope these will entice students to practice. The key is to call on students to present their completed at-home assignment to the class. In fact, each lesson begins with time to go over these assignments.

Have Fun!

Many tutors have shared funny experiences from their lessons. These should be looked for and enjoyed. Our students are not required to come to us, and our tutors are not getting paid, so why not have some fun! Tell stories, share jokes, keep your sense of humor.

Topics and Objectives, By Week

Week 1-- Greetings and Personal Information

Objectives – Students will:

- introduce themselves and each other
- answer questions about basic information (name, address, phone number, native country)
- use the alphabet and numbers to count items and to provide addresses and telephone numbers
- use singular pronouns
- begin to use the verb *to be* and the contraction *it's* for *it is*

Week 2 – Time, Clocks, and Daily Activities

Objectives – Students will:

- study vocabulary relating to clocks, including cardinal numbers from 1 to 60
- read analog and digital clocks
- say the time
- discuss daily activities
- use plural nominative pronouns
- use the present continuous tense

Week 3 – Schedules and Calendars

Objectives – Students will:

- read calendars and schedules
- create a personal schedule
- make inferences from student interviews
- say dates using ordinal numbers
- write dates in four different ways
- use the simple present tense

Week 4 – Families

Objectives – Students will:

- study words about families and relatives
- use plural pronouns
- use *to be* and *to have*
- hear about the use of the articles *the*, *a*, and *an*
- talk about family trees and their own families

Week 5 – Clothes and Clothes Shopping

Objectives – Students will:

- study words about types of clothing, colors, and sizes
- practice shopping for clothing and asking about prices
- learn to pay for purchases in cash or by check
- begin to use contractions (*I'm*, *you're*, *he's*, *she's*, *it's*, *we're*, *they're*)

Week 6 – Supermarket Shopping

Objectives – Students will:

- learn words about food
- express food preferences
- learn about supermarket layout
- study how to ask about the location and prices of food items at a supermarket
- study food prices and a supermarket receipt
- learn to pay for groceries by credit or debit card

Week 7 – Rooms in a House

Objectives – Students will:

- learn vocabulary for rooms in a house, furniture, and functions
- practice prepositions (*in*, *on*, *under*)
- review sentence structure (capital letters, periods, question marks)
- continue to use contractions (*don't*, *where's*, *isn't*)

Week 8 – Buildings, Neighborhoods, Directions

Objectives – Students will:

- learn vocabulary for neighborhood locations
- read simple maps
- follow and give directions
- learn additional prepositions (*at*, *across from*, *next to*, *around the corner from*, *between*, *behind*)
- continue to use contractions (*what's*)

Week 9 – Your Health

Objectives – Students will:

- identify major parts of the body
- learn vocabulary for common ailments and remedies
- practice going to a pharmacy and asking about medications
- learn to make medical appointments and talk to a doctor
- use the modal verb *should*

Week 10 – Jobs

Objectives – Students will:

- learn the names of various jobs and professions
- talk and write about current jobs and past job experience
- discuss how to solve common problems at work
- use the past tense of regular verbs and of the irregular verbs *to be* and *to have*
- use additional contractions (*wasn't, weren't, didn't*)

Resources

To make Bingo cards:

<https://eslactivities.com/bingo.php>

To make word puzzles:

www.puzzlemaker.com

To find pictures:

<https://images.google.com>

<https://www.gettyimages.com>

To find or create a variety of learning tools:

<https://quizlet.com>

To see the complete 10-week curriculum:

<https://literacynj.org/resources/tutor-resources>

Authors' Biographies and Contact Information

Since 2007, Phyllis Frakt has volunteered at Literacy NJ (Mercer) as a tutor, tutor trainer, board member, intake administrator, and conversation class teacher. She has prepared innovative lessons, a series of short stories from the news, and simplified texts, from *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* to *The New Jersey Driver Manual*. Before coming to Literacy NJ, she held positions on the political science faculty and academic administration at Rider University.

Contact information: frakt@rider.edu or (609) 737-8704

Catherine Mitch earned a Master's Degree in Multicultural/ Multilingual Education from Florida State University and has taught both in the US and abroad. She worked her way up through the ranks of Literacy New Jersey and is currently serving as the Program Director for the Mercer County Program. She enjoys working with new and experienced tutors to find the best ways to help students improve their literacy skills.

Contact information: cmitch@literacynj.org or (609) 587-6027

December 2018