

**A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO
TEACHING
ESL
LITERACY**

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Abstract

Adult ESL literacy learners are simultaneously developing literacy for the first time and learning a language. They have a wide range of knowledge, strengths, and experiences; they also have specific learning needs that set them apart from other adult learners.

In this book, we introduce the Framework of Literacy Skills for Adult ESL Literacy Learners, which presents the required skills and strategies for the development of literacy in the context of adult ESL literacy. The Framework of Literacy Skills for Adult ESL Literacy Learners is discussed in Chapter 2.

The skills are:

- [1] Availability for learning
- [2] Oral language to support reading and writing
- [3] Knowledge and experience
- [4] Textual awareness
- [5] Phonological awareness
- [6] Decoding / Encoding
- [7] Comprehension / Composition
- [8] Fluency

We also explore effective approaches to teaching adult ESL literacy learners. We discuss creating an effective learning environment, planning instruction, teaching oral language skills, teaching literacy skills, and materials and resources. These approaches are explored in detail in Chapters 3-7.

There are six key considerations to effective approaches to ESL literacy instruction:

- [1] Choose approaches that create an effective and supportive classroom environment.
 - using trauma-informed practice
 - setting up a classroom that emphasizes respect, dignity, and humanity
 - building community
 - establishing routines

- [2] Choose approaches that allow learners to develop oral language and which use oral language for the development of literacy.
 - Total Physical Response (TPR)
 - singing
 - dialogues, interviews, and sharing
 - discussion
 - games
- [3] Choose approaches that allow learners to do a lot of meaningful reading and writing.
 - reading for pleasure (extensive reading)
 - focused reading (intensive reading)
 - dialogue journals (extensive writing)
 - formal writing (intensive writing)
- [4] Choose approaches that integrate the development of literacy skills into reading and writing whole texts.
 - whole-part-whole
 - using invented spelling
 - dialogue journals
 - scaffolding
 - project-based learning
- [5] Choose approaches that allow learners to work at their instructional or independent level.
 - Language Experience Approach (LEA)
 - dialogue journals
 - scaffolding
 - reading for pleasure
 - focused reading
- [6] Choose approaches that allow learners to develop strategies for learning, reading, and writing.
 - focused reading
 - formal writing
 - think alouds
 - establishing routines

Adult ESL literacy learners bring many benefits to Canada; they increase diversity and bring understanding, skills, and experiences. Support and effective instruction in language and literacy help adult ESL literacy learners to reach their goals in settlement, employment, and further education.

Introduction

Adult ESL literacy learners are a diverse group of people who bring a wide range of skills, needs, strengths, experiences, and goals to the classroom. These learners, who generally have fewer than nine years of formal education before coming to Canada, are building both their language and their literacy skills. They are learning to speak and understand English; they are also learning to read and write for the first time, and they are doing this in a language they are in the process of learning.

Adult ESL literacy learners have unique learning needs that set them apart from other adult language learners and adult literacy learners. Non-literacy adult ELL learners, who have completed a formal education before arriving in Canada, already have a complex set of literacy skills which they can apply to their learning of English. They already know what text is. They know how to make meaning through reading and express themselves in writing; they need to learn English. On the other hand, adult literacy learners, in adult basic education classes, already speak English fluently; they are developing literacy but bring native understanding of the sounds and patterns of the language to their learning. Adult ESL literacy learners, however, are tackling two challenges, simultaneously learning to speak English and to read and write, and they are doing all of this in a new language, while they build lives for themselves in a new country.

Adult ESL literacy learners are found in many different educational contexts in Canada: some are in LINC (Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada) classes; some are in provincially-funded ELL classes; others are in programs that combine language and literacy learning with the development of employment skills, settlement, or family literacy. Some learners are in specially dedicated ESL literacy classes while others are blended together with non-literacy ELL learners. Some learners are grouped into specific levels, while others are in multi-level classes. No matter the context or how they are grouped, adult ESL literacy learners will need intentional support in developing their oral English language and in building the complex set of skills and strategies that comprise literacy.

ESL or ELL?

Names and acronyms change over time. In keeping with current practice, throughout this book we use ESL (English as a Second Language) to refer to ESL literacy learners and we use ELL (English Language Learning) to refer to non-literacy language learners.

Our intention for this book is to give you, as instructors, tools to meet the needs of your adult ESL literacy learners. In this book we present the Framework of Literacy Skills for Adult ESL Literacy Learners. We drew on research, practice, and practical teaching experience to design a framework of skills and strategies that describes the process of developing literacy and outlines the skills that are required to become a proficient reader and writer. This Framework, organized as charts of skills and strategies, was designed by instructors for instructors; it gives the theoretical background to developing literacy and is intended to inform ESL literacy instruction.

The Framework looks specifically at the context of learning to read and write as adult ESL literacy learners. It breaks reading and writing into eight separate skill areas and discusses individual skills and strategies for each area. The skills are listed in order of increasing complexity as best as possible to show the progression of skills. The Framework also looks at the development of the eight literacy skills over time.

In this book we also look at the diversity of adult ESL literacy learners, explore adult ESL literacy as a field, and discuss effective teaching approaches for adult ESL literacy learners. We examine creating an effective learning environment, planning instruction, and approaches to building oral language skills and literacy skills. We also look at materials and resources for the classroom. The book is supported with practical examples from the classroom, ideas for integrating ESL literacy instruction with the Canadian Language Benchmarks, and the work of educators and researchers.

This book draws on research into adult ESL literacy instruction, but because there is a gap in the research on what it means to learn English and learn to read and write as an adult, the book also draws on research into ESL literacy instruction for children and the development of literacy skills for native speakers. The book is also heavily supported by applied research at Bow Valley College into teaching practice and by classroom experience in teaching adult ESL literacy learners. The Framework of Literacy Skills for Adult ESL Literacy Learners is a synthesis of research into the development of literacy and classroom experience in the effective teaching of adult ESL literacy learners. The book is intended for anyone who works in adult ESL literacy instruction and particularly for classroom instructors. It is intended both for ESL literacy instructors and for ELL instructors who have adult ESL literacy learners in their classes.

At Bow Valley College, we have been working with adult ESL literacy learners for many years and have had dedicated ESL literacy programs since the 1990s. This book has its roots in an earlier book, *Learning for LIFE: An ESL Literacy Handbook*. In *Learning for LIFE*, adult ESL literacy learners are framed as LIFE, or Learners with Interrupted Formal Education. *Learning for LIFE* discussed best practices for teaching ESL literacy learners. At the time, the Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks

(CCLB) was using the document *Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000: ESL for Literacy Learners*, which divided ESL literacy education in Canada into four phases: Foundation Phase, Phase I, Phase II, and Phase III. In 2016, the CCLB published *Canadian Language Benchmarks: ESL for Adult Literacy Learners*, changing the way

The development of literacy for our learners has the potential to transform their lives, their families, and their communities.

that ESL literacy learners are benchmarked and ending the use of literacy phases to describe levels. With the shift away from the literacy phases, there was a need to rework the content of *Learning for LIFE*, the result of which is this new book. This new book still has a focus on effective approaches to teaching adult ESL literacy learners, but instead of dividing ESL literacy learners into levels, it presents the Framework of Literacy Skills.

Adult ESL literacy learners have unique needs and a challenging task ahead of them; Ontario Literacy Coalition (2007) even calls their task “seemingly superhuman” (p. 10). They also bring a wealth of experience, knowledge, abilities, and understanding about the world to our classrooms and to our country. Most learners are highly engaged and motivated to learn. Denied education for a variety of reasons, many of these learners have been waiting a long time to be able to go to school, and it is our hope as instructors that we can build effective teaching practice and develop classrooms that meet their needs so that they can meet their goals. The development of literacy for our learners has the potential to transform their lives, their families, and their communities.

Chapter 1

Adult ESL Literacy

In this chapter we explore:

- definitions of ESL literacy and challenges in making definitions
- the diversity of learners' educational experiences
- the task of ESL literacy learners: developing language, literacy, and knowledge
- key publications in the field of adult ESL literacy instruction in Canada

Although immigrants and refugees in Canada have always had diverse educational backgrounds, the field of adult ESL literacy is relatively new. The field was developed in recognition of the needs of learners who are both learning to speak English and building literacy for the first time, while they settle into a new country. Adult ESL literacy learners have a unique set of learning needs; they are different from non-literacy ELL learners who can draw on their previous education and their experience with literacy in another language. They are also different from adult literacy learners who speak English fluently and are only learning to read and write. They are substantially different from young learners, both in terms of needs and in terms of the experiences they bring to the classroom, although we can draw on the research into the development of literacy for children to help inform our understanding of learning to read and write.

There is a lot of diversity within the field of adult ESL literacy. Our learners come from many different countries, speak many different languages, and are from both urban and rural environments. They are men and women of all ages and all faiths. They have had a huge variety of life experiences and there are many learners who have experienced trauma. They also have a lot of diversity in their educational backgrounds and the reasons why they did not complete a formal education before coming to Canada.

Our classrooms are very diverse and there are many different ways in which adult ESL literacy learners are taught. Many of our learners are taught within language classes and a significant number of those are in LINC (Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada) programs; some are in specialized streams specifically for ESL literacy while others are blended together with non-literacy ELL learners. Some are in programs that combine the development of language or literacy with employment preparation, family literacy, or settlement. Classes can be part-time or full-time and funded in a variety of ways. Some learners are very recent arrivals in Canada and others have been here for years.

Despite this diversity, all of our learners are focusing on the same tasks: developing language and literacy skills and, as they do this, necessarily building their knowledge about the world. In this chapter we will discuss the field of adult ESL literacy; we will examine definitions of adult ESL literacy and the diversity of learners' experience. We will look at adult ESL literacy in terms of the development of language, literacy, and knowledge and we will also look at other skills that learners are likely building: numeracy, financial literacy, and digital literacy. We will then discuss some of the key publications in adult ESL literacy in Canada and examine literacy learners within the context of the Canadian Language Benchmarks.

1.1 Defining adult ESL literacy

Adult ESL literacy learners have the task of developing literacy for the first time in a language they are in the process of learning to speak. They are doing this as adults with little experience with formal education and few learning strategies, while they build lives for themselves and often their families in a new country. This task seems impossible, yet so many learners are successful, and this success can be seen in many ways: better settlement in Canada, increased independence, less isolation, better access to resources and services, better employment, increased family literacy, support for children in schools, and the ability to advocate for themselves, their families, and their communities. For some learners it also means that they are able to move on to further education or career programs.

Adult ESL literacy learners are different from other adult learners because they are learning both language and literacy at the same time. This sets them apart from non-literacy ELL learners, who are learning English but already have a wide range of literacy skills and strategies that they can transfer to their new language. It also sets them apart from other adult literacy learners who are building literacy skills in a language that they already speak. Ontario Literacy Coalition (2007) sums up these differences:

ESL literacy is different from adult literacy wherein learners already speak a language and are just learning its written form. ESL literacy is different from ESL learning in that adults with literate experience are able to transfer some of their prior knowledge (both from schooling experience and written language use) of reading and writing to the new language. The ESL literacy learner faces the daunting task of acquiring the oral second language (L2) and written L2 language, while functioning in the new L2 – a seemingly superhuman task. (p. 10)

It can be difficult to define adult ESL literacy in Canada, mostly because there is so much diversity in the field. Adult ESL literacy learners are a diverse group of people with different needs, experiences, abilities, and goals. They have literacy skills that fall anywhere on a continuum of literacy development and an even wider range of speaking and listening skills in English. They can also have many other needs outside of language and literacy building, such as settlement, preparation for employment, or further education. The field is further complicated because our learners' lives are complicated; they are adults living in a new country, learning a language, and building lives while they develop literacy for the first time. They often have many responsibilities and challenges outside of school. Sue Folinsbee (2007) sums up the difficulty of creating a definition for adult ESL literacy:

Overall, there is not a complete or common understanding of who might be considered an ESL literacy learner. Nor is there systematic, detailed, and formalized knowledge about immigrants and refugees with low education and literacy in their own language in Canada. Most information about this group is very general and informal, with only small pockets of information about their demographics and experiences. (p. 12)

There is also a lot of variation in adult ESL literacy education. While the Canadian Language Benchmarks outline the learning of language in Canada, there is no standard curriculum or set of outcomes for the development of literacy as adult ESL learners. Adult ESL literacy programming varies widely. Classes can be part-time or full-time, single-level or multi-level, and combined with non-literacy ELL learners or solely focused on ESL literacy. ESL literacy is also taught within different contexts such as language development, employment skills, or family literacy.

Despite the diversity in learners and programming, there is a growing understanding of ESL literacy learners and a strong sense that they have a different task ahead of them than other language learners, with a different set of needs. Adult ESL literacy learners can also be defined in terms of their skills, abilities, and knowledge, which are often considerable. There have been studies done to recognize the strengths that immigrants bring to their new countries. Martha Bigelow and Robin Lovrien Schwarz (2010) describe these studies: "Research has been done on the strengths of immigrant families, many with limited formal schooling. Some of these studies are called 'funds of knowledge' research, which seeks to uncover the knowledge and skills immigrant families possess, rather than focusing on what they lack." (p. 3).

While there is a lot of diversity, what we can say is that adult ESL literacy learners bring a wealth of knowledge, experience, and strength to Canada, and they are in the process of learning a language, developing literacy, and increasing their knowledge and understanding of the world.

Defining adult ESL literacy remains challenging, especially as the demographics of our learners shift from year to year or decade to decade, bringing with them different experiences and different learning needs. While there is a lot of diversity, what we can say is that adult ESL literacy learners bring a wealth of knowledge, experience, and strength to Canada, and they are in the process of learning a language, developing literacy, and increasing their knowledge and understanding of the world.

1.2 Diversity of learners' experience and formal education

In trying to meet the needs of a group of learners it can be tempting to draw conclusions about who the learners are, but we need to be careful to recognize and respect the great diversity of adult ESL literacy learners in Canada. Our learners are a diverse group of people and there are many pathways that can lead a person to sit in our classrooms. Many learners come from cultures that are pre-literate, with languages that do not have a written form. Other learners, however, come from cultures with a rich tradition of literacy but have not had the opportunity for a formal education. Learners are also culturally diverse, speak many different languages, and have different religions. They can be all ages, men and women, and can be diverse in terms of the expression of gender and their sexual preference.

It is even difficult to make generalizations about adult ESL literacy learners and their educational background. Generally speaking, learners can have up to nine or ten years of formal education and still have literacy needs, which is a huge range. In order to understand this we need to consider:

- what it means to develop literacy
- the differences in educational systems
- the reasons why learners may have an interrupted formal education
- the impact of previous formal education on learners in the classroom

Literacy – like all forms of education – is not a switch that you can flip on or off. Literacy skills are on a continuum, developed over time. There is a point when learners no longer need to focus on the development of literacy skills and instead can use their literacy to acquire new learning; learners stop *learning to read* and start *reading to learn*. In the current Canadian educational system, children generally spend kindergarten to grade three learning to read and grade four onwards reading to learn. Many adult ESL literacy learners have more than four years of education and are still learning to read, however, due to differences in education systems and experiences. Depending on the circumstances, a learner with fewer than nine or ten years of formal education before coming to Canada will benefit from ESL literacy instruction. In more practical terms, adult ESL literacy learners will benefit from ESL literacy support until they have the literacy and language skills to reach their language, education, settlement, and employment goals.

It is difficult to say exactly how many years of education helps someone to develop literacy because education varies widely in the world and focuses on different things. It is also challenging to compare learners who may have had very different educational experiences. Schools can focus on any number of things, such as the

development of critical thinking, the acquisition of knowledge, the understanding of religion, or the building of specific skills, and learners will develop different skills and expectations for education in each of these contexts. The resources available to schools to educate learners can also vary considerably around the world. Some schools have well-educated and well-trained teachers, with small class sizes and access to all kinds of resources to support learners, while others have very little access to books or materials. Some schools may be held when possible with as many learners who can attend each day. Some schools are excellent by any standards but there are many barriers to learners attending.

The reasons that adult ESL literacy learners do not finish their formal education before coming to Canada can also vary and these reasons impact learners' experiences and the skills they bring to our classrooms. There are many possible reasons for an interrupted education. Perhaps the most common reason is poverty; learners cannot attend or cannot finish school because their families cannot pay for it or because they need to work to help the family. Another common reason is the discrimination against groups of people based on culture, language, religion, or sex. There are also languages in the world that do not have a written form and it is not always common for children who speak these languages to be formally educated. When they are educated, it usually costs money and they are educated in a second language. Another very common reason for an interrupted formal education is war; schools may be bombed, families may have to flee their homes, or it may simply no longer be safe to send children to school each day. It is more common for girls to be denied education than boys; UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, 2012) notes that there are more girls of primary school age than boys out of school and that "two-thirds of the 774 million illiterate people in the world are female."

It is therefore very difficult to make generalizations about learners' educational backgrounds. Some learners may not have been able to attend school at all. Some learners may have had an effective education that was interrupted. Others may have attended school sporadically. All of these learners will bring different skills and needs to their current learning. It is even more difficult to make generalizations about their oral language ability in English. Some learners speak no English at all when they start adult ESL literacy classes while others speak English very well. Learners may have just arrived in Canada or they may have been living in Canada for years before they come to class. They may also start and stop classes depending on situations in their lives.

Learners' previous formal education has an impact on their experience in your classroom. Although educational experiences vary widely, we can make some generalizations about the skills, experiences, strategies, and learning needs that learners may have based on how many years of education they have had.

Years of previous formal education: Impact on learning in the adult ESL literacy classroom		
0-2 years of education	3-6 years of education	7-9 years of education
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • little classroom experience • classroom experience was likely many years ago • few formal learning strategies • likely very unused to sitting at a desk for long periods • likely many gaps in knowledge and concepts • may be working on these literacy skills: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fine motor skills • awareness that print has meaning • directionality • awareness of the sounds of language and ability to split a word into sounds • tracking • visual discrimination • letter knowledge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • some classroom experience • classroom experience was likely many years ago • some formal learning strategies • likely many gaps in knowledge and concepts • may be working on these literacy skills: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • phonics (matching letters to sounds) • decoding strategies • encoding strategies • sight words • spelling patterns • comprehension strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • more classroom experience • classroom experience may have been many years ago • more formal learning strategies • likely some gaps in knowledge and concepts • may need to build a wider range of vocabulary, including academic language • may be working on these literacy skills: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sight words • spelling patterns • morphology (word parts) • comprehension strategies • composition strategies • reading and writing fluency

The diversity of ESL literacy learners is likely to extend to your classroom. Some classes are multi-level by design or need, but even single-level classes will have multiple levels. It is very probable that your learners will have different literacy levels or different listening and speaking levels, or both. Learners are usually placed in classes based on either their literacy skills, which means they may speak a wide range of oral English, or their oral skills, which means they may have a wide range of literacy skills. When you add to this the fact that ESL literacy learners can have gaps in their learning of any kind, it is likely that you will be teaching a very diverse group of people, from many different places, with many different experiences, and at different levels.

One of the most effective strategies to teach a class like this is to recognize, respect, and embrace diversity, treat learners as individuals, be prepared for learners to read and write at their own instructional level, and have a toolbox of different teaching approaches. We can educate ourselves and work to improve our own intercultural competence, which is the set of attitudes, knowledge, skills, and behaviours to be able to effectively and appropriately work with people from different cultures than our own.

1.3 The development of language, literacy, and knowledge

Despite all of the diversity of experience, adult ESL literacy learners have some things in common, in particular their learning task: they are learning a language and developing literacy at the same time. They are also building their knowledge about the world. These three strands, language, literacy, and knowledge, make up the core learning for adult ESL literacy learners.

The development of oral language

Probably the most important of the three strands is the development of oral language. Being able to speak and understand English will likely have the most immediate impact on learners as they settle into lives in Canada. Oral language allows learners to function outside of their homes; they can interact with people, attend appointments, access resources and services, and advocate for themselves and their families. Being able to speak and understand English also plays a very strong role in breaking down isolation; many newcomers report feeling very isolated until they can speak English.

Literacy is utterly dependent on language.

Oral language is also critical learning because it supports the development of reading and writing. Learners will not be able to learn to read English beyond what they can already speak and understand; approaches to building literacy all rely on oral language skills. Literacy is utterly dependent on language. For more information on the connection between oral language and literacy, please see Chapter 2.5.2. For more information on approaches to teaching oral language to adult ESL literacy learners, please see Chapter 5.

The development of literacy

The second strand is the development of literacy, which is a complex topic. Literacy is a set of skills and strategies that allows us to read and write with fluency, accuracy, and automaticity (the ability to use a skill without giving it conscious effort). Literacy means that we can make meaning from a wide variety of texts in many different contexts; we can approach different kinds of reading and know what to expect and which strategies to use. We can synthesize the information that we are reading and make connections with what we already know. Literacy also means that we can write; we can produce a wide variety of texts for different purposes and we can express ourselves clearly. None of these skills exist in isolation; nor is there a dichotomy between illiterate and literate. Literacy skills are on a continuum and all of us, no matter what our educational experience is, have the capacity to continue to build our literacy skills. There is no end point to this learning.

In more practical terms, however, there is a point when learners no longer need to explicitly learn reading and writing skills and instead can use their reading and writing for further content learning. This is commonly called the point when you stop *learning to read* and start *reading to learn*. Once learners build enough literacy skills, they will continue to develop their skills on their own, each time they read and write.

In order to understand what literacy means and how to teach it to adults who are also just learning to speak English, we lay out the Framework of Literacy Skills for Adult ESL Literacy Learners. There are eight literacy skills explored here:

- [1] Availability for learning
- [2] Oral language to support reading and writing
- [3] Knowledge and experience
- [4] Textual awareness
- [5] Phonological awareness
- [6] Decoding / Encoding
- [7] Comprehension / Composition
- [8] Fluency

For more information on these skills, please see Chapter 2. Each of these skills are important parts of learning to read and write and, depending on their level, learners will benefit from direct instruction and support in developing each skill. Some of the skills should be taught at specific stages of the development of literacy, while others are always important to focus on. For more information on effective instructional focus over time, please see Chapter 2.2.

The development of knowledge

The third strand of learning for adult ESL literacy learners is the development of knowledge about the world and the recognition and integration of experience. Learners come to our classrooms with a huge variety of life experience and knowledge; they may also have gaps in their understanding, including basic, foundational knowledge about the sciences, social sciences, and humanities. Although most ESL literacy classrooms do not have a focus on building content knowledge, learners can also have gaps in what is often considered general knowledge.

There are many reasons why it is important to develop basic knowledge about the world and learn to integrate new learning with your own knowledge and experiences. Knowledge affects learners' lives; it allows them to make informed choices. However in the context of an ESL literacy classroom, there is one key clear reason to support the development of knowledge, even when it may extend beyond the mandate of curriculum. What you know about the world affects reading comprehension and writing. It is very possible for learners to develop enough language and decoding skills to be able to read and still not be able to comprehend what they are reading because they do not have the background knowledge and don't understand the context. If adult ESL literacy learners are going to learn to read, they need enough context to develop reading comprehension. Learners may also have great difficulty moving beyond learning concrete language without understanding the concepts behind abstract language. If we do not work to build some of this understanding, we are limiting how much language and literacy our learners will be able to develop. For more information on knowledge and experience, please see Chapter 2.5.3.

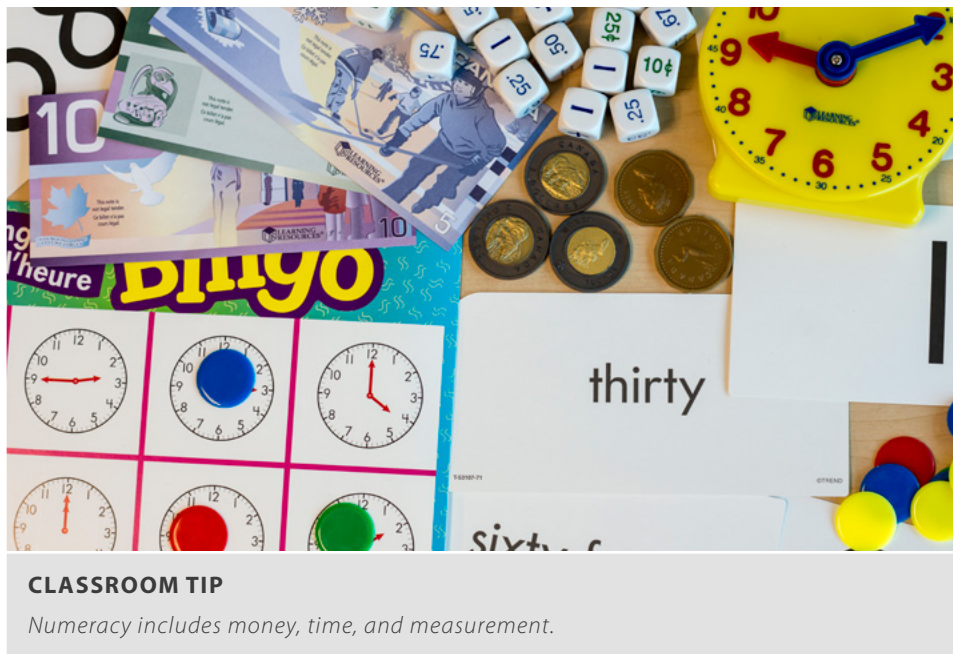
1.4 The development of numeracy, financial literacy, and digital literacy

In addition to language, literacy, and knowledge, many ESL literacy learners have needs in numeracy (math), financial literacy, and digital literacy. These are all very important topics but are complex – developing numeracy is just as complex as developing literacy – and they are outside the scope of this book.

Numeracy

Numeracy includes foundational mathematical skills such as counting and number sense; it also includes operations, money, time, measurement, estimation, logical thinking, patterns, fractions, decimals, and problem-solving skills. Even learners who

are very skilled in math in their own languages will need the language of math in English, but most learners with literacy needs also have numeracy needs. One important thing to note is that learners do not necessarily have the same level of literacy and numeracy. Depending on their experience, some learners have stronger numeracy skills than literacy skills and others have stronger literacy skills than numeracy skills. This adds a further dimension of complication to creating levels in a class; learners do not usually have consistent language, literacy, and numeracy skills, so depending how you place your learners you will have very different levels in the other two skills.



CLASSROOM TIP

Numeracy includes money, time, and measurement.

There is a strong case for including basic numeracy in ESL literacy programs. First, it is critical for settlement, including managing time and money. Financial literacy, which is also critical for settlement, requires a good foundation in numeracy; learners need competent skills in number sense and operations, as well as an understanding of decimals and percentages, before they can understand most financial literacy. Second, numeracy affects reading comprehension. Numbers are frequently represented in reading texts and contribute a lot to the meaning of the text. These representations of numbers include:

- times, dates, and years
- amounts
- measurements
- prices
- statistics, represented as fractions, ratios, and percentages

All of these examples affect how you understand a text and can deeply affect meaning. Without much number sense, for example, it is very difficult to understand chronology or to pick up on clues to sequence events. It is difficult to reason which amount is larger and to draw logical conclusions based on numerical information. Numeracy also heavily affects reading comprehension of most formatted or functional text, such as schedules, time tables, or calendars. For more information on numeracy, you can see the resource *ESL for Adult Literacy Learners (ALL)*.

Financial literacy

Financial literacy is also very important for adult ESL literacy learners – and for all people – and is built on a foundation of basic numeracy skills. Financial literacy has a big impact on people’s lives and on their ability to plan, live securely, and reach their goals. Adult ESL literacy learners have the responsibility for navigating their new financial lives in Canada but do not necessarily have much experience in financial literacy or in the foundational numeracy skills.



CLASSROOM TIP

Numeracy materials should be hands-on and relevant.

Financial literacy includes a set of knowledge, skills, and strategies to allow you to make sensible financial decisions for yourself and your family. It includes:

- **earning money:** understanding wages or salary, deductions, pensions, vacation pay, taxes, and payment options (direct deposit, pay cheques, and “under the table” payments)
- **spending money:** understanding purchases, currency and coin values, making change, debit cards, sales, comparing prices, paying bills, and unit price

- **saving money:** understanding budgeting, short-term and long-term financial goals, prioritizing needs and wants, bank accounts, TFSAs, RRSPs, and RESPs
- **borrowing money:** understanding credit cards, loans, high-interest loans, lines of credit, mortgages, down payments, interest rates, late penalties, fines, minimum payments, and the consequences of borrowing money
- **running out of money:** understanding late fees, NSF charges, increased interest rates, payment plans, and bankruptcy
- **transferring money:** paying bills online and understanding international money transfers and email money transfers
- **investing money:** understanding investments, return on investment, and long-term financial planning

Some elements of financial literacy listed here may be very complicated for beginning ESL literacy learners, but others will impact their lives right away in terms of understanding their financial situation and being able to make sensible, informed choices about their money. For example, learners may not have the skills to create a budget for themselves so that they know they have enough money to pay bills and rent and buy a bus pass and food for the month. They may not have the numeracy to be able to calculate less expensive ways to make purchases or the consequences of compound interest. And they may be at risk of being cheated, by employers, landlords, or people who are selling them things. For more information on financial literacy, you can see the resource *The Financial ESL Literacy Toolkit*.

Digital literacy

Digital literacy is the set of skills and strategies to be able to use technology to do what you need to be able to do. Digital literacy includes using computers, cell phones, and tablets; the skills to navigate the internet; and using all kinds of machines such as ATMs, parking meters, or automatic ticket machines. It is increasingly important to life in Canada as more and more things are done online. It is now very difficult to find out information or access services without the internet. Applications can be found online for all kinds of things, including government services, banking, and employment. Digital literacy instruction also includes privacy and internet safety. Learners will also need digital literacy skills to be able to transition to any kind of further education or career program. Digital literacy is increasingly becoming an essential set of skills and strategies for life in Canada in the 21st century and the divide between those who have digital literacy and those who do not is only getting larger. For more information on digital literacy, you can see the resource *ESL for Adult Literacy Learners (ALL)*.

1.5 Adult ESL literacy instruction in Canada

In general there is a gap in research and writing on adult ESL literacy and specifically in adult ESL literacy in Canada. There is more research out of the United States, but much of this research is on same language groups, which does not reflect the diversity of Canadian ESL literacy learners. Many researchers, educators, and writers in this field note the absence of significant research into adult ESL literacy learners. In their state of the field report on adult literacy in Canada, Benjamin Allan Quigley, Sue Folinsbee, and Wendy Kraglund-Gauthier (2006) note that there is clearly “an absence of literature on second language speakers who have literacy challenges in their own language” (p. 24). Sue Folinsbee (2007) sums up the situation, writing that “overall there has been very little Canadian research on connections between literacy and ESL in the last decade” (p. 9). However, this situation is slowly changing and there have been a number of publications that have reflected on and shaped the field of adult ESL literacy in Canada. There have also been a number of publications, such as this one, that focus on teaching adult ESL literacy.

In this section, we will discuss:

- [1] *IALS and IALSS*
- [2] *ESL Literacy and the Essential Skills*
- [3] *An Investigation of Best Practices in the Instruction and Assessment of LINC Literacy Learners in Ontario*
- [4] *Creating a Bridge: A Snapshot of ESL Literacy in Ontario*
- [5] *Learning for LIFE: An ESL Literacy Handbook and Learning for LIFE: An ESL Literacy Curriculum Framework*
- [6] *Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000: ESL for Literacy Learners and Canadian Language Benchmarks: ESL for Adult Literacy Learners*

1.5.1 IALS AND IALSS

The first two of these publications are the *International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS, 1994)* and the *International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey (IALSS, 2003)*, both conducted by Statistics Canada. *IALS* was the world’s first survey that compared literacy skills across several nations and *IALSS* was a follow-up survey that included literacy and numeracy skills. Both of these surveys reported similar findings on the state of adult literacy (not just ESL literacy) in Canada, and both made connections between immigrants and the lowest-levels of literacy among Canadian adults.

IALSS places respondents in five levels of literacy with Level 3 as “the desired threshold for coping with the increasing skill demands of a knowledge society.” (Statistics Canada, 2005, p. 2). The survey found that approximately 60% of immigrants scored below level 3 in prose literacy, compared to 37% of the Canadian-born population. It also found that immigrants of all educational levels scored significantly lower than the Canadian-born population with the same educational background (Statistics Canada, 2005, p. 4). The survey, however, is conducted in English or French, and language difficulties can account for some of these results. Still, *IALS* and *IALSS* have helped to support the finding that there are a significant number of ESL learners in Canada with literacy needs.

1.5.2 ESL LITERACY AND THE ESSENTIAL SKILLS

The Government of Canada, along with a number of national agencies, has identified nine key literacy and essential skills. Employment and Social Development Canada (n.d.) write that the Literacy and Essential Skills “are needed for work, learning and life; are the foundation for learning all other skills; and help people to evolve with their jobs and adapt to workplace change.” The Literacy and Essential Skills give a picture of the necessary skills for working in Canada and are scaled across five levels. TOWES (Test of Workplace Essential Skills, n.d.) writes that “at minimum, Canadians require skills at Level 3 or higher to handle the demands of work and everyday life; it is considered the ‘desired level’ for safe and productive work in a knowledge-intensive society.” The five-point scale can be used to measure an individual’s skill levels; it can also be used to measure the requirements for a task or a job.

The Literacy and Essential skills are:

- Reading
- Document use
- Numeracy
- Writing
- Oral communication
- Working with others
- Thinking
- Computer use
- Continuous learning

The CCLB has developed two documents that align the CLBs with the Essential Skills, *Relating Canadian Language Benchmarks to Essential Skills: A Comparative Framework*, and *Essential Skills Primer: CLB Stage 1*, which specifically aligns the Essential Skills with CLB 1-4.

The second of these two documents, *Essential Skills Primer*, connects the Essential Skills to the benchmarks that are within range of adult ESL literacy learners. Note that while the Essential Skills are about the development of literacy skills, the *Primer* only aligns CLB 1-4 with Level 1 of the Essential Skills. Level 3 of the Essential Skills is the level at which people are considered to have the skills to meet the literacy demands of life in Canada, so there is some way to go before ESL literacy learners have reached this point.

1.5.3 AN INVESTIGATION OF BEST PRACTICES IN THE INSTRUCTION AND ASSESSMENT OF LINC LITERACY LEARNERS IN ONTARIO

In 2006, Jill Cummings, Mark Jacot, and Adriana Parau produced *An Investigation of Best Practices in the Instruction and Assessment of LINC Literacy Learners in Ontario*, commonly referred to as the Jangles Report. It reports on the findings of a research project launched by Citizenship and Immigration Canada (what is now called Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada) and ORLAC (Ontario Region LINC Advisory Committee) into the best practices in teaching LINC learners in Ontario with literacy needs.

This report presents a core recommendation and a series of main findings regarding best practices in ESL literacy instruction. Their core recommendation is “that Citizenship and Immigration Canada formally recognize that literacy learners... comprise a separate and unique stream of ESL learners who require specialized classes and services in order for them to realize their settlement potential. Furthermore, that CIC develop a clear policy statement to this effect.” (p. 22). They also make a series of findings regarding class size, child care, transportation, stable funding for programming, increased materials designed specifically for adult ESL literacy learners, and professional development opportunities for instructors. The Jangles Report outlines both the needs of instructors in the field and best practices in serving adult ESL literacy learners.

1.5.4 CREATING A BRIDGE: A SNAPSHOT OF ESL LITERACY IN ONTARIO

In 2007, Ontario Literacy Coalition published *Creating a Bridge: A Snapshot of ESL Literacy in Ontario*. This report includes both a literature review to examine the state of the field and the findings of a web discussion forum, interviews, and surveys conducted over the summer of 2006. They write that “the purpose of the study is to provide a current picture of ESL literacy in Ontario, its activity and nature. What are its issues? Who are its learners? Who are its practitioners?” (OLC, 2007, p. 1). They summarize the state of the literature at that time, identify gaps in the literature, and make a series of recommendations in four different areas:

- Program development
- Training / Certification / Qualifications
- Policy
- Research

Their recommendations, many of which are very similar to the Jangles Report, include a separate stream of classes for ESL literacy learners, limited class size, the inclusion of a family literacy framework, and increased professional development and training opportunities for instructors.

1.5.5 LEARNING FOR LIFE: AN ESL LITERACY HANDBOOK AND LEARNING FOR LIFE: AN ESL LITERACY CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK

In 2009, Bow Valley College published *Learning for LIFE: An ESL Literacy Handbook*. *Learning for LIFE* discusses best practices in ESL literacy instruction and looks at adult ESL literacy learners as LIFE, or Learners with Interrupted Formal Education. The first section of the handbook focuses on program considerations. It includes needs assessments, developing program outcomes, and supporting learners in the program. The second section focuses on strategies for the classroom, which includes teaching methods, teaching materials, theme units and projects, and assessment. The third section of the handbook focuses on levels of ESL literacy, which are based on the phases in the document *Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000: ESL for Literacy Learners*. This section explores each of the former CLB literacy phases and includes lesson plans and unit plans. *Learning for LIFE* also includes an ESL literacy toolbox with sample tasks, a literature review, and an annotated bibliography.

In 2011, Bow Valley College published *Learning for LIFE: An ESL Literacy Curriculum Framework*, which outlines a process for developing ESL literacy curriculum in different educational contexts. The Curriculum Framework discusses five stages of curriculum development:

- [1] Understand needs
- [2] Determine focus
- [3] Set learning outcomes
- [4] Integrate assessment
- [5] Demonstrate accountability

It looks specifically at four different contexts for ESL literacy instruction: community orientation and participation ESL literacy, family ESL literacy, employment ESL literacy, and educational preparation ESL literacy.

Both *Learning for LIFE: An ESL Literacy Handbook* and *Learning for LIFE: An ESL Literacy Curriculum Framework* have received attention and implementation; however as the CCLB has moved away from the literacy phases and is now integrating ESL literacy instruction within the CLBs, there was a need to update *Learning for LIFE: An ESL Literacy Handbook*. This current book is that updated version, with a focus on the Framework of Literacy Skills for Adult ESL Literacy Learners and effective ESL literacy instruction.

1.5.6 CANADIAN LANGUAGE BENCHMARKS 2000: ESL FOR LITERACY LEARNERS AND CANADIAN LANGUAGE BENCHMARKS: ESL FOR ADULT LITERACY LEARNERS

The Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks (CCLB) has officially recognized that ESL literacy learners have separate learning needs since 2000, when they published *Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000: ESL for Literacy Learners*. This document outlined four phases of literacy development, Foundation Phase, Phase I, Phase II, and Phase III. Each phase was further divided into initial, developing, and adequate stages. The document discussed language and literacy competencies at each phase, outlined conditions, and gave sample tasks and examples.

This document was adopted to varying degrees by ESL literacy programs across Canada. It was widely recognized in some places and less so in others; The Jangles Report (2006), for example, included the document in their core recommendation for best practices in teaching ESL literacy to LINC learners in Ontario: “That Citizenship and Immigration Canada formally recognize that literacy learners (as described in the publication, *Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000: ESL for Literacy*

Learners) comprise a separate and unique stream of learners..." (p. 22). In their handbook *Learning for LIFE: An ESL Literacy Handbook*, Bow Valley College based the levels of ESL literacy on the phases of the CLB 2000 document.

In 2016, the Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks published *Canadian Language Benchmarks: ESL for Adult Literacy Learners (ALL)*, effectively replacing the older document. With *ESL for ALL*, the CCLB has moved away from the literacy phases and instead has recommended using regular Canadian Language Benchmarks for ESL literacy learners with an "L" following their reading and writing benchmarks, indicating that they are at this benchmark and have literacy needs. *ESL for ALL* is a companion document to *Canadian Language Benchmarks: English as a Second Language for Adults* and is meant to be used in conjunction with the standard CLBs to support instructors in teaching ESL literacy learners in the context of the CLBs. It provides a profile of ability for literacy learners at each level, gives examples of skill-building activities, outlines conditions for learning for literacy learners, and explores sample tasks. *ESL for ALL* also includes sections on learning strategies, numeracy, digital literacy, and sociocultural understanding. Each of these areas is broken down into skills at the levels of emerging, building, and expanding.

The final section of *ESL for ALL* is a Continuum of Literacy Skills which discusses the development of nine different literacy skill areas in reading and writing. Each of these skill areas is discussed across five stages of development, from emerging to expanding. The Continuum of Literacy Skills highlights the need for ESL literacy instruction to include specific, concrete teaching in literacy skills. The CCLB published *CLB: ESL for ALL Support Kit* in 2017, which provides information for instructors on planning and assessment, supporting ESL literacy learners, and resources for the classroom.

1.6 Adult ESL literacy and the Canadian Language Benchmarks

The Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks (CCLB) outlines 12 language benchmarks in four different strands as a way to measure language learning in Canada. The strands are reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Within each strand, the CCLB identifies four competency areas: interacting with others, comprehending/giving instructions or reproducing information, getting things done, and comprehending/sharing information. The CCLB also gives a profile of ability for each strand at each level and outlines features of communication. The CLBs are competency-based and task-based. They are a means of describing communicative competence but they are not a description of "the discrete elements of knowledge and skills that underlie communicative competence (such as specific grammatical

structures, elements of pronunciation, vocabulary items, micro-functions, cultural conventions)" (CCLB, 2012, p. v). Nor are the CLB curriculum or assessment; they are a means of measuring language ability.

Currently, while the CCLB recognizes that ESL literacy learners have different learning needs, they use the regular Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLBs) for ESL literacy learners and recommend designating an L following an ESL literacy learner's reading and writing benchmarks. In their publication, *ESL for Adult Literacy Learners (ALL)*, they discuss five levels: Foundation L, 1L, 2L, 3L, and 4L. It is important to note that these designations only occur in reading and writing benchmarks. Neither of the CCLB documents discuss listening and speaking for ESL literacy learners. The L indicates that a learner has this benchmark in reading or writing and has literacy needs.

It is important to note that an ESL literacy learner must have fully achieved the benchmark in order to receive it. When you are assigning benchmarks to ESL literacy learners, consider the features of communication that are outlined in *Canadian Language Benchmarks: English as a Second Language for Adults* and the conditions for learning that are outlined in *ESL for ALL*. A learner may accomplish the language task with a great deal of scaffolding and support; however this support should be taken into consideration when giving benchmarks. Scaffolding is a highly effective approach to teaching ESL literacy learners, but it is one stage in the learning. The use of scaffolding is followed by a gradual release of support as learners become more skilled and are able to accomplish the task with increasing independence.

Many ESL literacy learners in Canada are in Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) programs and receive CLBs. They may be working in combined classes together with non-literacy ELL learners; they may also be in designated classes for ESL literacy learners. As instructors it is important to meet the literacy needs of the learners in our classes and to recognize that they will need direct, explicit instruction and support in the development of literacy skills in order to be able to successfully accomplish language tasks and to progress through the benchmarks.

Many tasks that are designed for a LINC classroom require that the learners have a full set of literacy skills and strategies, and ESL literacy learners are often in the position of not being able to complete a task not because of their language ability but because they don't have the required literacy skills. Perhaps this is clearest when the task requires decoding abilities beyond what the learner can accomplish, but many tasks also have less obvious literacy skills, such as an assumption of background knowledge, numeracy, or comprehension skills. This is even true of listening and speaking tasks, which often embed and require reading and writing skills. For example, there are many listening assessments which require learners to

read a set of questions, listen to a text, and then answer the questions in writing. Assessments of listening and speaking are more accurate when they are oral. For more information on understanding the literacy requirements of CLB tasks, you can see the publication *CLB: ESL for ALL Support Kit*, which includes a selection of tasks from Foundation L to CLB 4L. The tasks also include a think aloud, which identifies the literacy requirements for each task.

There is also a point in the CLBs when the tasks move beyond the personally relevant and familiar and become more abstract and increasingly academic in nature. This step is generally around CLB 5 (which is also the first CLB that does not have an L as a literacy designation; learners can receive a CLB 4L but there is no CLB 5L). ESL literacy learners often struggle to move beyond CLB 4, even if they have become quite proficient in communicating in English, because they do not have the knowledge and experience and the literacy skills to be able to accomplish more abstract tasks. Even for learners who have come through a literacy program and learned a great deal, there is often a big jump to move into a non-literacy ELL class, both in terms of content and pace. This highlights the importance of including knowledge and experience and the development of CALP (Cummins, 1979, 1981), or Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency, in ESL literacy instruction, and especially in higher-level ESL literacy instruction. For more information on knowledge and experience, please see Chapter 2.5.3. For more information on CALP, please see Chapter 5.9.

In order for ESL literacy learners to be successful in LINC programs, they need direct instruction and support in developing not just their language skills but also their literacy skills. The Framework of Literacy Skills for Adult ESL Literacy Learners outlines the progression of skills for the development of reading and writing and is focused on the context of adult ESL literacy learners. You can use the Framework to inform instruction in literacy skills. You can also use the Framework to help you to understand a language task and the literacy skills that might be required in order to accomplish the task successfully. This book can also help you to better understand the learning needs and strengths of adult ESL literacy learners and to design scaffolding and support. For more information on the Framework of Literacy Skills, please see Chapter 2. For more information on scaffolding, please see Chapter 4.2.3.

Chapter 2

The Framework of Literacy Skills for Adult ESL Literacy Learners

In this chapter we explore:

- what it means to read and write
- eight key skills for the development of reading and writing
- how learners develop literacy skills over time

The Framework of Literacy Skills for Adult ESL Literacy Learners, developed by Bow Valley College, outlines eight key literacy skills specific to the context of developing literacy as an adult in a second language:

- [1] Availability for learning
- [2] Oral language to support reading and writing
- [3] Knowledge and experience
- [4] Textual awareness
- [5] Phonological awareness
- [6] Decoding / Encoding
- [7] Comprehension / Composition
- [8] Fluency

The Framework gives the theoretical background of the development of literacy and explores the critical skills needed to learn to read and write. Each skill area in the Framework is further divided into individual skills and strategies which are organized in order of increasing complexity and challenge. The skills are also laid out to show the development of literacy over time. The goal of the Framework is to give you a picture of what the development of literacy looks like so that you can effectively plan instruction and support your learners.

The Framework of Literacy Skills for Adult ESL Literacy Learners was developed out of both research and classroom experience. It was designed by instructors for instructors with two purposes in mind. The first purpose is to increase understanding of literacy skills: what is involved in learning to read and write? How is that different for adults who are learning to read and write in a language they are also in the process of learning to speak? The Framework is a tool to help lay out the key literacy skills and demonstrate their progression over time. The second purpose of the Framework is to inform teaching, so that instructors can build the development of literacy skills into their teaching of language and literacy. Both of these purposes help to meet the needs of adult ESL literacy learners so that they can meet their learning and life goals.

This chapter will explore the Framework of Literacy Skills for Adult ESL Literacy Learners. We begin with the Framework of Literacy Skills in chart form. Then we will discuss the creation and background of the Framework, including its roots in both research and practice. We will discuss the development of literacy skills over time. We will look at what it actually means to read and write: what are the skills and strategies that proficient readers and writers are using? This will be followed with a detailed discussion of the Framework with examples of activities that support the development of each skill.

The literacy skills in the Framework are not designed to be taught in isolation, but rather as part of an approach to teaching language and literacy, integrated into lots of meaningful reading and writing of whole texts. For further information on integrating literacy skills into teaching approaches, please see Chapter 6.

THE FRAMEWORK OF LITERACY SKILLS FOR ADULT ESL LITERACY LEARNERS

Availability for learning

Does the learner have the right frame of mind for learning?

- [1] being in a calm state: feeling safe and free of anxiety, fear, or worry
- [2] nutrition, sleep, and health care
- [3] enough income to cover basic needs and a stable home
- [4] time to learn
- [5] safety and stability for family and access to quality childcare
- [6] access to appropriate programs
- [7] motivation
- [8] resilience
- [9] a sense of belonging
- [10] access to screening for vision, hearing, and learning disabilities

Oral language to support reading and writing

Does the learner know the vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar?

- [1] vocabulary
- [2] listening comprehension
- [3] expression of ideas
- [4] pronunciation
- [5] grammar
- [6] every day and academic language

Knowledge and experience

What understanding does the learner bring to reading and writing?

- [1] experience
- [2] social and cultural context
- [3] content knowledge
- [4] learning strategies

Textual awareness

Does the learner understand the purpose of print and how it works?

- [1] visual literacy
- [2] awareness that print has meaning and different purposes
- [3] orientation of pages and books
- [4] directionality: left to right, top to bottom

Phonological awareness

Can the learner hear the sounds in a word?

- [1] concept of a word
- [2] onset and rime
- [3] phonemic awareness

<p>Decoding</p> <p>Can the learner translate symbols into meaning?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> [1] tracking [2] visual discrimination [3] concept of a word (1:1 correspondence) [4] letter knowledge [5] phonics [6] sight words [7] spelling patterns [8] decoding strategies 	<p>Encoding</p> <p>Can the learner translate meaning into symbols?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> [1] tracking [2] visual discrimination [3] fine motor skills [4] making meaning with objects [5] concept of a word (1:1 correspondence) [6] letter knowledge [7] letter formation [8] writing on the line and making spaces between words [9] phonics [10] sight words [11] invented spelling [12] spelling patterns [13] encoding strategies
<p>Comprehension</p> <p>Can the learner understand what he or she reads?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> [1] using knowledge of oral language: vocabulary and grammar [2] using knowledge of punctuation [3] awareness of context [4] awareness of purpose [5] awareness of format and genre [6] inference [7] comprehension strategies 	<p>Composition</p> <p>Can the learner write with meaning?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> [1] thinking about content [2] using knowledge of oral language: vocabulary and grammar [3] using knowledge of punctuation [4] organizing writing [5] awareness of purpose [6] awareness of format and genre [7] awareness of audience [8] creativity, expression, and voice [9] composition strategies
<p>Fluency</p> <p>Can the learner read and write with accuracy and expression?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> [1] reading / writing rate [2] using punctuation [3] accuracy [4] chunking [5] expression [6] automaticity 	

2.1 The creation of the Framework of Literacy Skills for Adult ESL Literacy Learners

The Framework of Literacy Skills for Adult ESL Literacy Learners comes out of two sources: research into the development of literacy and years of classroom experience teaching adult ESL literacy learners. It has not been proven in research trials and it does not claim to be exhaustive. It is a working document, designed by instructors for instructors with the aim of breaking down the complex act of literacy development into component skills specifically in the context of adult ESL literacy learners, so that instructors can understand what learners need to be able to do to develop literacy. The goal of the Framework is that it can help instructors to better understand literacy skills so that we can better teach our learners.

The Framework of Literacy Skills for Adult ESL Literacy Learners comes out of two sources: research into the development of literacy and years of classroom experience teaching adult ESL literacy learners.

The Framework draws on thorough research into the development of literacy: what does it mean to learn to read? What does it mean to learn to write? This research includes as much research as possible into adult ESL literacy learners; however there are many gaps in this field. This does not mean that there are not people who have considerable knowledge about the instruction of adult ESL literacy, though, and in an effort to draw on this knowledge we also expanded our research to include less traditionally academic sources such as handbooks for instructors. We have also drawn on classroom experience with the idea that classroom instructors often develop a deep understanding of the learning needs of their learners and what works in terms of meeting these needs.

We have collected and in some cases created the reading and writing strategies included in the Framework. We have also organized the strategies. The reading strategies are divided into decoding and comprehension strategies. The writing strategies are divided into encoding and composition strategies. Each strategy is also organized in terms of whether it is used before reading or writing, while reading or writing, or after reading or writing, and is generally scaled in terms of complexity.

In order to develop a fuller understanding of the research into the development of literacy, we also drew on the extensive research that has been done into the development of literacy in young learners, usually between kindergarten and

grade three, both in young native speakers of English and young English language learners. This research helps to identify what literacy is – and why some children struggle to learn to read, which can also be informative – but we needed to adapt it to the context of adult ESL literacy learners.

While all learners, whether they are children learning to read in their first language or adults learning to read in a second language, need to develop some of the same skills in order to learn to read and write, there is considerable difference between young learners in their first language and adult ESL literacy learners, and this Framework represents the specific skills needed for adult ESL literacy learners.

The skills in the Framework of Literacy Skills for Adult ESL Literacy Learners are:

- [1] Availability for learning
- [2] Oral language to support reading and writing
- [3] Knowledge and experience
- [4] Textual awareness
- [5] Phonological awareness
- [6] Decoding / Encoding
- [7] Comprehension / Composition
- [8] Fluency

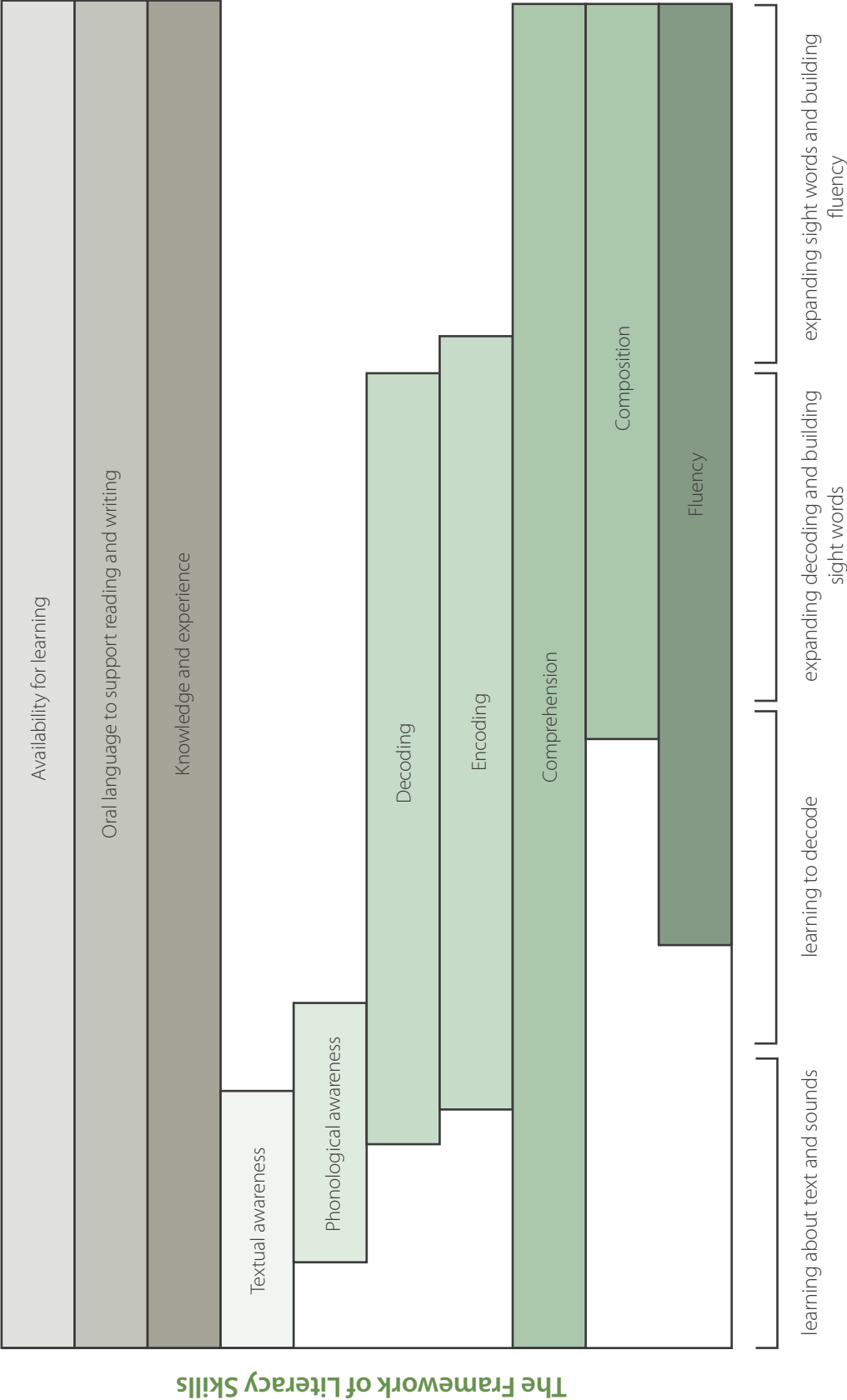
The first three skills listed here do not specifically involve interacting with text but are critically important to recognize in the development of literacy skills for adult ESL literacy learners. Children in Canada generally begin their formal education in kindergarten and grade one, which is when they will likely encounter formal teaching in reading and writing for the first time. However, most children will already have the first three literacy skills listed here in place. They will hopefully have their basic needs met and will be available for learning. The children who speak English as a first language will already have very fluent oral language to access and support their literacy development and will likely have between 5,000-7,000 words in their receptive vocabulary (Lems, Miller, & Soro, 2010, pp. 119-120). Additionally, children will be supported in the development of content knowledge as they learn to read.

For the sake of accuracy, it is important to recognize that not all children in school in Canada have their basic needs met; nor are they all native speakers of English; nor do they all come from homes that support literacy development. For the children that do not have these skills, extra support will often be needed to help them learn to read and write.

Adult ESL literacy learners, however, do not usually have the first three literacy skills in place. They are facing the challenges of living as adults in a new country; they are responsible for supporting themselves and often their families and they have many other things to consider beyond their own education. They are also in the process of learning to speak English. They generally do not have even close to the same vocabulary in English as a child starting out in kindergarten; nor do they have the same ability with the structure and pronunciation of English. The third skill, knowledge and experience, varies considerably depending on the learner. Adult ESL literacy learners have a range of knowledge, experience, and strengths as learners, but they have not had the same opportunities for formal education and are likely to have gaps in their content knowledge about the world. Most ESL literacy programs are not designed to be basic education programs and do not focus on building content knowledge. These gaps, including knowledge about the sciences, social sciences, humanities, and numeracy, affect reading comprehension.

Effective adult ESL literacy instruction includes recognition and support in the first three areas of the Framework of Literacy Skills for Adult ESL Literacy Learners: availability for learning, oral language to support reading and writing, and knowledge and experience, as well as intentional instruction in the remaining five skills.

THE FRAMEWORK OF LITERACY SKILLS: DEVELOPMENT OVER TIME



Development of Literacy Over Time

2.2 The Framework of Literacy Skills for Adult ESL Literacy Learners: Development Over Time

Learning to read and write, alongside the development of language skills, is a process that takes time and looks a little different at different places along the way. As learners increase their abilities they will master the earlier skills and be able to integrate them into their reading and writing. They will be ready to move on to the next steps in the building of literacy. The Framework of Literacy Skills: Development Over Time, shows the typical progression of the development of literacy skills.

The Framework of Literacy Skills for Adult ESL Literacy Learners outlines eight key literacy skill areas and explores individual skills and strategies within each area. These individual skills and strategies are listed in order of increasing complexity. For example, decoding is a critically important skill, which can be further divided into tracking, visual discrimination, concept of a word, letter knowledge, phonics, sight words, spelling patterns, and decoding strategies. These individual skills are as best as possible arranged in order of increasing complexity, followed by a list of strategies. Phonics is a more challenging skill than visual discrimination. Spelling patterns are more challenging and build on a knowledge of phonics.

The eight skill areas are also arranged in order of increasing complexity, although it is important to note that even the more complex skills, such as comprehension or fluency, should be taught with texts at an appropriate level as early as possible in the teaching of literacy. Some of the skills on the Framework will always be relevant to the development of literacy, although they will increase in complexity as learners get better at reading and writing. Other skills on the Framework are critically important for a period of time, then are mastered, integrated into the learner's reading and writing, and the learner moves on to new skills.

These skills on the Framework are always important, no matter the level of literacy development of the learners:

- Availability for learning
- Oral language to support reading and writing
- Knowledge and experience
- Comprehension

These skills on the Framework are important for a period of time, depending on the literacy level of the learners:

- Textual awareness
- Phonological awareness
- Decoding / Encoding
- Composition
- Fluency

The chart, The Framework of Literacy Skills: Development Over Time, shows the progression of the literacy skills. The chart divides the development of literacy into four stages:

- learning about texts and sounds
- learning to decode
- expanding decoding and building sight words
- expanding sight words and building fluency

These four stages are not to be confused with class levels or with the Canadian Language Benchmarks. Class levels are determined by individual programs or institutions based on many possible criteria and the CLBs describe language ability, not literacy ability. Even within the strands of reading and writing, they describe reading and writing tasks and conditions; they do not describe the development of literacy skills. However the four stages described here can help you to understand the general literacy ability of your learners and gain a sense of what literacy skills they need to work on.

Learning about texts and sounds

When learners are learning about texts and sounds, they are in the beginning stage of developing literacy. They may or may not recognize a few letters and they do not yet have the skills to match letters to sounds or to decode. As they are learning about text and sounds they are laying the foundation for approaching text and decoding; they are building their textual awareness and their phonological awareness, or their sense of the sounds of English. Both of these are fundamentally critical skills for the development of literacy. They can also be beginning to learn basic decoding skills, such as tracking and visual discrimination, and they can begin to build letter knowledge. At the same time, these learners can build their comprehension skills with texts that are read out loud to them. As their instructor, you can read a text out loud and discuss the meaning with your learners. You can examine the pictures together. You can ask comprehension questions.

Learning to decode

When learners are learning to decode, they are developing the basic but essential skills for translating symbols into meaning. They learn to follow text with their eyes from left to right. They are learning to match letters to sounds and are developing their first sight words, the words they can decode with automaticity. Learners are also beginning to write their first letters and words. They no longer need much work with textual awareness or phonological awareness (unless you have learners with gaps in their literacy background). Instead they can begin fluency practice with texts that are at independent level, or texts they can read with 99% accuracy. For more information on independent reading level, please see Chapter 4.2.2. This can include very basic texts with one word and a picture per page. They are also continuing to work on comprehension; this is still done orally with the support of the instructor. During this stage it is also likely that learners will develop some basic, personally relevant sight words, even before they have the decoding skills. These words usually include their name, as well as important words they encounter frequently, such as the name of their train station or school.

Expanding decoding and building sight words

When learners are expanding decoding and building sight words they have an increased ability to read some texts on their own. They become more competent with decoding strategies and have a larger bank of sight words to draw on. Learners can also begin to compose their own writing, stringing together words or sentences, thinking about what they want to say. Learners continue to develop comprehension and work on fluency with texts at independent level.

Expanding sight words and building fluency

When learners are expanding sight words and building fluency, they are putting their literacy skills together. They now can decode and encode with greater ease and are expanding their bank of sight words. The number of sight words needed in order to independently read a text varies depending on the text and the study; David Hirsch and Paul Nation (1992) find that knowledge of 5,000 word families is sufficient for reading simple authentic novels. In this case a word family means a base word plus all of its inflections, so *hope*, *hopes*, *hoped*, *hopeful*, *unhopeful*, *hopefully*, etc. are all in the same word family. Batifa Laufer and Geke C. Ravenhorst-Kalovski (2010) find that 4,000-5,000 word families is minimal for most reading and 8,000 word families is optimal. Reading gets easier but the texts also get more challenging; there is an increased focus on comprehension skills and strategies. Learners also can write more and need more focus on composition. Fluency development continues to be important.

Eventually, literacy learners will move beyond this chart in their reading and writing abilities. They will have integrated these skills into their reading and writing and can use them with automaticity. This is the point at which learners are no longer learning to read and can now read to learn; they can use their literacy skills to acquire new knowledge. This does not mean that literacy learning is over; learners will continue to practice and refine their reading and writing skills every time they read and write and they will likely continue to improve their skills each time they tackle a slightly more challenging text or write something a little different. However they will no longer need specific support in developing literacy. They will have the skills and strategies to read and write independently.

2.3 What is reading?

In order to understand what ESL literacy learners are working towards – acquiring language and literacy skills – it is important to know what reading and writing actually are. We need to break these processes down into individual skills and strategies that learners can develop. Proficient readers and writers often find it difficult to imagine the complexity of reading and writing since they routinely do it with near complete automaticity. Most proficient readers are unable to explain how they read as well as they do; it feels like a seamless, effortless activity. Reading, however, is a highly complicated coordination of many skills, done with sufficient fluency to be able to construct meaning, and writing is just as complicated, if not more so.

Reading is a highly complicated coordination of many skills, done with sufficient fluency to be able to construct meaning, and writing is just as complicated, if not more so.

Not only is reading a highly complex process, but it seems to be an unnatural one; our brains are not designed to read. In her book, *Proust and the Squid: The Story and Science of the Reading Brain*, Maryanne Wolf (2007) argues that “there are few more powerful mirrors of the human brain’s astonishing ability to rearrange itself to learn a new intellectual function than the act of reading” (pp. 4-5). Learning to read actually changes the way our brains work: “when reading takes place, that individual brain is forever changed, both physiologically and intellectually” (p. 5).

There are a number of models of reading, nearly all in the context of learning to read as a young learner in your first language. In 1986, Philip B. Gough and William E. Tunmer developed the *simple view of reading*, in which they argue that reading comprehension comes from a combination of decoding (translating symbols into meaning) and listening comprehension. The theory has the enticing balance of a mathematical equation:

$$\text{reading comprehension} = \text{decoding} + \text{listening comprehension}$$

This view of reading has received a lot of focus and it certainly highlights the critical importance of listening comprehension to reading. As Kristin Lems, Leah D. Miller, and Tenena M. Soro (2010) write in their book *Teaching Reading to English Language Learners: Insights from Linguistics*, “the simple view of reading implicitly accepts the idea that oracy is the foundation for literacy. It also helps explain why ELLs need to have listening vocabulary in place before they can comprehend text” (p. 52). This connection between the importance of oral language and the ability to learn to read is very important and has a big impact on instruction for ESL literacy learners. However, as a reading theory, it does not give an adequate picture of the complexity of reading.

When you are reading, you are doing many things:

- You build a lot of meaning before you even start to read the first word, including the genre of what you are reading, the purpose of the text, and your own reasons for reading it.
- You use information from the layout, title, and pictures to inform meaning.
- You locate where to begin reading on the page which depends highly on what you are reading.
- You rapidly recognize the sequence of letters for sight words.
- You translate letters into sounds in order to decode unfamiliar words.
- You hold the meanings of the words in your memory long enough to construct the meaning of the sentence.
- You use your knowledge of morphology (word parts) to understand new words.
- You monitor your comprehension and check the presumed meaning of the words and sentences against the context, constantly checking whether it makes sense and rereading if it doesn't.
- You connect the meaning of the sentences to the rest of the text.
- You continually connect the meaning of the text to what you already know and often form an opinion about what you are reading.
- You use a wide range of reading strategies for approaching unknown words and building comprehension.

- You interpret the tone and intention of the author of the text.
- You attain automaticity with reading skills and strategies: you do all of this quickly and fluently enough to be able to comprehend what you are reading.

Reading is truly a remarkable process and what is even more remarkable is that proficient readers can perform this act with little effort. Two particular concepts help us to understand how readers can put all of this information together in any kind of sensible way, and similarly why it is challenging for beginners to learn to read: **the limits of working memory** and the development of **automaticity**.

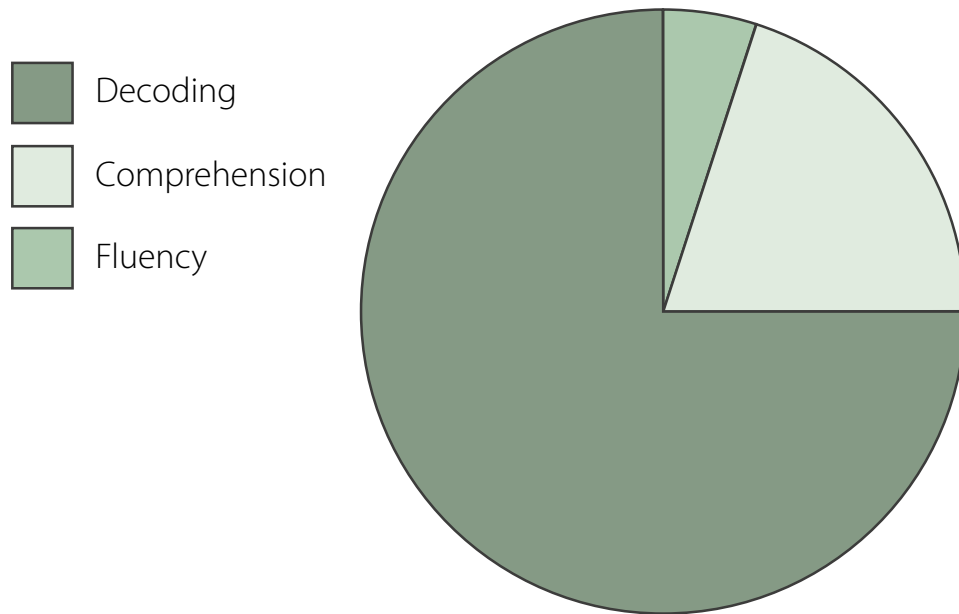
The limits of working memory refer to how much information you can store in your memory at one time before starting to forget pieces of it. Your working memory, also known as short-term memory, is designed to hold information for short periods of time before your brain has integrated it into what you already know and transferred it into long-term memory. The limits of working memory are very important to understanding the process of reading because texts contain a huge amount of information. This is especially true for beginners, who must consider each piece of information separately. Beginning readers spend a lot of cognitive energy on the process of decoding; for a beginner, the meaning contained in each letter must be considered and put together with the meaning of the other letters in order to recognize words, and the meaning of the words must be held in working memory long enough to put together the meaning of the sentence.

This process is not nearly as arduous for proficient readers because they are able to decode with automaticity. This means that decoding has become an automatic process which requires very little concentration or energy. It also drastically reduces the number of individual pieces of information the brain is coping with at one time; a proficient reader generally reads words, not letters. Proficient readers have an enormous number of sight words or words that are familiar enough that the reader recognizes the combination of letters and decodes them automatically. They also have a wide range of strategies for decoding unfamiliar words and for building comprehension.

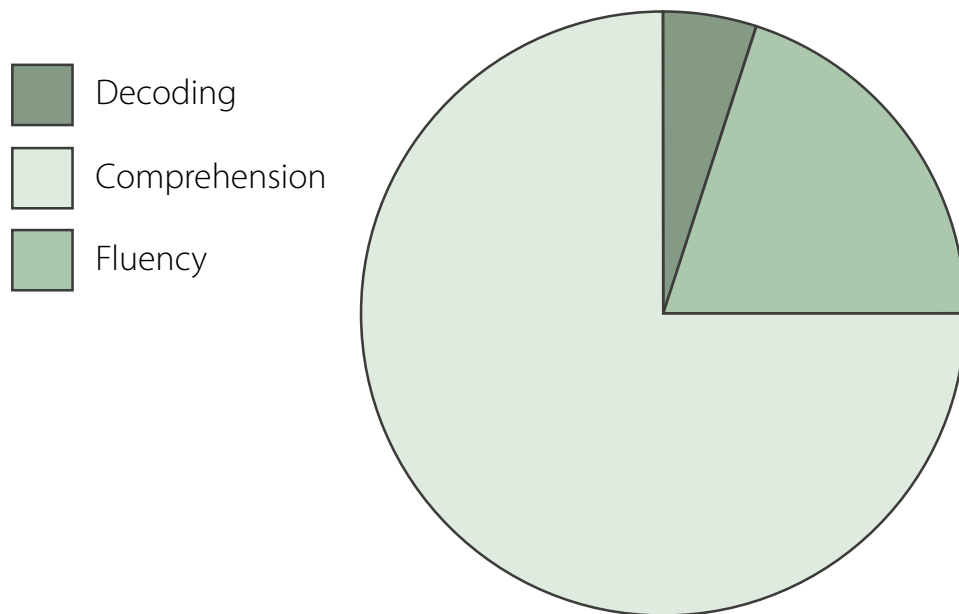
Developing automaticity is one of the goals of learning to read. Readers who can decode and use reading strategies with automaticity can spend nearly all of their cognitive energy on comprehension. They can think about what they are reading, learn from it, consider it, form an opinion about it, and connect it to what they already know.

Consider the act of reading for a beginning reader and for a proficient reader. The beginning reader spends a large portion of his or her cognitive energy on decoding, with little left over for comprehension and fluency. The proficient reader, on the other hand, spends very little energy on decoding. Proficient readers can use their cognitive effort to comprehend the text, connect it with what they already know, form opinions or questions, and read with fluency.

COGNITIVE EFFORT OF A BEGINNING READER



COGNITIVE EFFORT OF A PROFICIENT READER



With this understanding of the different aspects of the process of reading – and how complicated reading is – we can see the need for the Framework of Literacy Skills to help understand what learners need to be able to do as they develop literacy. The Framework explains what it takes to learn to read and is focused specifically on the context of adult ESL literacy learners, who have different learning needs than other literacy learners as they are also developing oral English and often have many responsibilities outside of learning and few resources.

2.4 What is writing?

Writing is just as complicated a process as reading and perhaps more so, although there have been educators and researchers who include writing as a core skill of reading, rather than a separate function (Lems, Miller, & Soro, 2010, p. 4). This is because of the intertwined nature of the processes of reading and writing and because through writing we become much better readers. Every time you write a word, you reinforce the connection between sounds and symbols, spelling patterns, and the making of meaning through text. When learners write, they are also supporting the development of reading.

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Writing is a process that involves its own separate skills and strategies, however. There is an enormous overlap between reading skills and writing skills, but not a complete one. Nearly every reading skill is also a writing skill, but there are writing skills that are not necessary for reading. Another way to say this is that every writer is a reader, but not every reader can write.

Writing is a complicated process that involves many things:

- Before you begin to write, you decide the reason for what you are writing (information, inquiry, entertainment, persuasion, expression, building personal connection, etc.).
- You decide on the genre of what you are writing (note, email, letter, form, list, etc.).
- You plan what you are going to say.
- You hold a pen or pencil, form letters, plan spacing, and write on the line or in the space.
- You use your bank of sight words to write familiar words.

- You use your knowledge of phonics (sound-letter correspondence), spelling patterns, morphology (word parts), and other encoding strategies to write words you do not know how to spell.
- You use your knowledge of oral language to create meaningful speech which you transcribe into writing.
- You use your knowledge of language structure and syntax (word order) to put together meaningful sentences.
- You use a wide range of composition strategies to write longer pieces of writing.
- You write with clarity and expression.
- You use the writing process to generate ideas, plan, draft, revise, edit, and share your writing.
- You do all of this fluently enough to construct meaning.

The limits of working memory and automaticity are two factors that play a large role in being able to read effectively. These are a little less important in the process of writing but are still in play. The limits of working memory help to understand the effort involved for beginning writers. Writing one word may take up such effort that the learner cannot remember what he or she intended to write next, but there is the previous word on the page to point the direction. Early writers should be encouraged to think of what they want to “say” and then write it down as a form of transcription of oral speech. This will help learners to understand that writing is connected to spoken language. They also need to rely on their oral understanding of grammar (what sounds right) rather than an analysis of the patterns of language.

Writers do reach the point where they can write with automaticity, but the act of writing is never as automatic as the act of reading because writers are more actively engaged in creating meaning. Writers will be able to write individual words with automaticity, but the process of putting together sentences to make meaning will always require thought and planning. Even (or perhaps especially) very skilled writers see writing as a process and expect to think carefully about what they want to write, revise their writing, and edit their writing, before it is ready to be shared.

2.5 A detailed exploration of the Framework of Literacy Skills for Adult ESL Literacy Learners

Reading and writing are complex processes and this fact shows the need for ESL literacy instructors to understand the component skills and strategies for developing literacy in order to best teach our learners. The Framework of Literacy Skills for Adult ESL Literacy Learners explores the development of literacy in terms of eight literacy skill areas.

In this section, we look at each of the literacy skills in detail and explore the development of these skills. Each skill area is divided into individual skills and strategies, which, when possible, are listed in increasing order of complexity. The skills are discussed in terms of what they are and why they are important in the development of literacy. They are also illustrated with sample tasks that build these skills.

The literacy skills are on a continuum and as learners improve these skills they become increasingly proficient with literacy. It is important to note that learners may be at different places in the development of literacy. They may also have different levels of oral skills and literacy skills: some learners have high oral skills and low literacy skills; others have low oral skills and higher literacy skills, and so on. Finally, because adult ESL literacy learners have had such a diversity of experience in their educational backgrounds, learners may have gaps in their literacy skills. Some learners may have some decoding skills but still lack phonological awareness; others may have gaps in their comprehension skills or lack sight words.

These skills are not intended to be taught in complete isolation, but rather to be integrated into lots of practice in reading and writing whole, meaningful texts.

When thinking about the development of literacy for adult ESL literacy learners, we need to consider these eight skills. We can use the Framework of Literacy Skills to think about what our learners can do and what they need to work on. It is a tool to support you as you design tasks and plan instruction for your learners. These skills are not intended to be taught in complete isolation, but rather to be integrated into lots of practice in reading and writing whole, meaningful texts. For further information on integrating the instruction of literacy skills into teaching approaches, please see Chapter 6.

2.5.1 AVAILABILITY FOR LEARNING

Availability for learning

Does the learner have the right frame of mind for learning?

- [1] being in a calm state: feeling safe and free of anxiety, fear, or worry
- [2] nutrition, sleep, and health care
- [3] enough income to cover basic needs and a stable home
- [4] time to learn
- [5] safety and stability for family and access to quality childcare
- [6] access to appropriate programs
- [7] motivation
- [8] resilience
- [9] a sense of belonging
- [10] access to screening for vision, hearing, and learning disabilities

Availability for learning, the first literacy skill in this Framework, does not appear to have anything to do with learning to read or write, but it is critically important, especially in the context of adult ESL literacy learners. Availability for learning refers to a state of mind in which a learner has his or her basic needs met and has the time, energy, focus, and motivation to be able to learn. It is difficult to learn if you are afraid, hungry, or worried about your family. It is difficult to learn if you have headaches or recurring memories of traumatic experiences. It is difficult to learn if you are not sure whether you can pay your bills or if you worked all night and you are exhausted.

The reality is that many adult ESL literacy learners face barriers to learning, which are often called affective barriers. As Sue Folinsbee (2007) writes, “the available literature indicates that low literacy in one’s own language compounds the issues that immigrants face, such as racism and discrimination, poor housing, lack of access to health care services, unemployment, and overall quality of life” (p. 37). This becomes a vicious cycle in which low literacy skills create or compound challenges, which in turn become further barriers to developing literacy. Some of these barriers are financial, some are related to the past experience of trauma, and some are a question of access to appropriate programs. They can all get in the way of learning and make it difficult to develop skills or to progress in education.

Availability for learning is not so much a literacy skill as a co-requisite for the development of literacy. Note that each of these areas may change over time for learners; sometimes learners are in stable situations which deteriorate and sometimes learners are struggling and then their living conditions improve. These areas of availability for learning are related to basic physical and emotional needs,

access to appropriate educational programs, and access to screening and support for vision, hearing, or learning difficulties. They also include safety and stability for the learner's family. Any of these barriers that can affect learners can also affect their families, which will in turn affect the learners as well.

Availability for learning also includes the idea of resilience. Resilience is the ability to persevere despite facing difficulties and has been identified in many different places as a critically important skill in life. Many adult ESL literacy learners demonstrate huge amounts of resilience. It is important to recognize and celebrate resilience in our learners, but it is not appropriate to expect or try to teach resilience. We cannot tell a learner to be more resilient. Many learners have experienced trauma and it is impossible for an instructor to know the past experiences or current conditions of our learners' lives. Resilience may also look different for different people, and people who appear to be very resilient in the face of extreme challenges may waver in that resilience from day to day.

Availability for learning cannot really be taught, but it can be supported. We can educate ourselves as instructors and develop our own intercultural competence, which includes cultural knowledge, an awareness of our own assumptions, and a set of effective and appropriate attitudes, knowledge, skills, and behaviours. We can specifically learn about the culture and the current situation of our learners; this can be very helpful in understanding barriers to learning if, for example, there is a war in a learner's country, or if learners are refugees. We can build our awareness of the conditions of our learners' lives and the resources that are available in our communities. We can help to support learners and to connect them with resources when possible. We can also use trauma-informed practice with our learners. For more information on trauma-informed practice, please see Chapter 3.2.1. Another thing we can do as instructors is to advocate for our learners within our own communities, organizations, or institutions, and we can work to teach them effectively. The development of language and literacy is a powerful way for learners to impact their own lives and to help their families and communities.

Activities and approaches for supporting availability for learning

- educate yourself about intercultural competence and develop your intercultural competence skills
- view learners and instruction holistically
- raise your awareness of barriers to learning
- know the resources available at your school or in the community
- refer learners when possible
- use trauma-informed practice: for more information, please see Chapter 3.2.1
- take care of yourself, know your boundaries, and access help when you need it
- create a classroom that emphasizes respect, dignity, and humanity: for more information, please see Chapter 3.2.2.

2.5.2 ORAL LANGUAGE TO SUPPORT READING AND WRITING

Oral language to support reading and writing

Does the learner know the vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar?

- [1] vocabulary
- [2] listening comprehension
- [3] expression of ideas
- [4] pronunciation
- [5] grammar
- [6] every day and academic language

Oral language is one of the three core sets of skills that ESL literacy learners are developing, along with literacy skills and the building of conceptual knowledge. Oral language in this context is the ability to speak and understand English and it directly impacts learners both in terms of settlement and the development of literacy. Oral language helps learners to independently navigate life in Canada; they are better able to speak for themselves, access services, attend appointments, negotiate education and employment, and advocate for themselves, their families, and their communities. Oral language is also the necessary first step in the development of literacy in English.

Because reading involves decoding symbols in order to access meaning, it is not possible to learn to read words if you do not know what they mean. When a learner successfully decodes a word and recognizes the meaning, connections are built in the brain, the process of decoding is reinforced, and the next time the word or these letters are encountered it will be slightly easier to decode. When a learner attempts to decode a word but cannot access meaning, the process of decoding is not reinforced and no literacy learning occurs. Similarly it is impossible to write words that you do not know.

Oral language is also the necessary first step in the development of literacy in English.

Thomas G. Sticht and James H. James (1984) call the level of oral English that native speakers attain before they begin to develop literacy their “reading potential.” For children beginning kindergarten, this is on average 5,000 – 7,000 words (Lems, Miller, & Soro, 2010, pp. 119-120), not to mention a fluent and innate sense of English syntax and word endings as well as native pronunciation, which allow them to make syntactic and semantic predictions while reading. Most adult ESL literacy learners, tasked with learning to read and write in a language they are still learning to speak, do not have even close to this grasp of oral English when they begin language and literacy classes. This means that their “reading potential” is far lower until they increase their knowledge of English.

This is not to say that ESL literacy learners cannot begin to develop literacy skills until they speak English fluently, but it does mean that language instruction should come slightly ahead of literacy instruction. In practical terms, one of the major tasks of the ESL literacy instructor is to build vocabulary and listening comprehension. This need is also recognized by the Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks (CCLB), who list oral communication to support reading and writing skill development on the Continuum of Literacy Skills in their document *CLB: ESL for ALL*.

Vocabulary

Vocabulary is absolutely critical to the development of literacy. Lems, Miller, and Soro (2010) call vocabulary “the bottom line for reading in any language” (p. 119). They write that “educators have looked at the relationship between reading comprehension and vocabulary for many years and found it to be a strong one” (p. 119). They argue that “it stands to reason that the more word meanings one knows, the more easily one can construct meaning through reading” (p. 120). This makes sense at a very intuitive level; no matter how well learners decode, if



CLASSROOM TIP

A word ring supports sight word development and all kinds of matching and sorting activities.

they don't know the meaning of the word, they can't understand what they are reading. The development of vocabulary, like so many things, is a continuum. Even the knowledge of a single word exists on a continuum; there are many layers of understanding we can have about a word, moving from a sense of general meaning to a deeper understanding of usage and how the word relates to other words. The question of how much vocabulary learners need depends on the context and the study. Adults working in different fields will use and require different vocabulary. With this in mind, Hirsch and Nation (1992) found that knowledge of 5,000 word families was sufficient to read short unsimplified novels. Laufer and Ravenhorst-Kalovski argue that the minimal threshold for reading comprehension is 4,000-5,000 word families and the optimal level is 8,000 word families. By the time native speakers of English graduate from high school, however, they have knowledge of 40,000 word families (Graves, August, & Mancilla-Martinez, 2013, p. 13). In this context, word family means a word and all its inflected forms; *friend*, *friends*, *friendship*, *friendly*, and *unfriendly* are all in the same word family; it is also important to note that for learners to be able to make the connection between words in a word family they need to have an understanding of morphology.

Vocabulary knowledge includes:

- **Connecting words to objects, actions, or pictures:** This is often a first step in learning concrete vocabulary, such as *chair*, *book*, or *table*, (nouns); *walk*, *eat*, or *sleep* (verbs); or *red*, *blue*, or *yellow* (adjectives). It becomes more challenging to attach pictures or objects to abstract vocabulary, usually at higher levels, such as *justice*, *truth*, or *health* (nouns); *realize*, *apply*, or *wish* (verbs); or *thoughtful*, *curious*, or *embarrassed* (adjectives). Learners at this level need to have enough words to be able to explain the meaning of new words, even if it is with the aid of a picture or action.

- **Connecting words to meanings:** At this stage, learners are able to translate the word into another language or explain the meaning of a word using other words. The learner is essentially using the definition of a word, but keep in mind that traditional dictionary definitions, including learner dictionary definitions, are often more challenging to understand than the word itself.
- **Synonyms, antonyms, and homonyms:** Synonyms are words that have similar meanings, such as *big* and *large*. Antonyms are words with opposite meanings, such as *close* and *far*, and homonyms are words that sound the same but mean something different, such as *pear* and *pair*. They also include homographs, which are spelled the same but have different meanings, such as *bat* (sports equipment) and *bat* (animal). Knowing synonyms, antonyms, and homonyms for a word help a learner to understand the word in relation to other words in the language. Knowledge of synonyms usually come first, before antonyms or homonyms, and it is more useful to teach synonyms together rather than antonyms (teach *big* and *large*, not *big* and *small*), so that the meanings do not become confused.
- **Collocations:** Collocations are words that are often used together. Collocations help learners to use chunks of language and to make their language sound more fluent and natural. For example, you can *have deep admiration for someone*, you can *expect heavy snow*, and something can *have a strong smell*. Collocations also include phrasal verbs, which is a verb plus a preposition that changes the meaning of the verb. For example, you *fill out* an application, *fill up* your car, and *fill in* for a co-worker. Collocations are often learned as meaningful chunks of language.
- **Parts of speech:** Parts of speech are the syntactical function of the word (noun, verb, adjective, adverb, preposition, etc.). This knowledge can also include whether the word has forms in other parts of speech. For example, the word *think* is related to *thinker*, *thought*, *thoughtful*, and *thoughtfully*. When learners understand parts of speech, they will be able to know how to use a word in a sentence. When they understand that words can have different forms with different parts of speech, they will exponentially expand their vocabulary. Parts of speech are challenging for lower-level ESL literacy learners; you can begin small and slowly build this knowledge over time, for example by colour-coding word cards for nouns and verbs (things and actions).
- **Morphology:** Morphology is the meaning of different parts of words, such as stems, prefixes, and suffixes. Examples include the *-er* in *teacher*, *learner*, *baker*, or *worker*, the *-tion* in *vacation*, *relation*, *imagination*, or *inspiration*, or the *un-* in *undo*, *untie*, or *unhappy*. A knowledge of morphology can help a reader to access a lot of meaning in a word, giving clues as to meaning, part of speech, and grammatical information (past tense, plural, and so on). Knowledge of morphology can be quite complex for ESL literacy learners, but early stages of morphology include recognizing that *-s* means more than one and *-ed* means it happened in the past.

All of this knowledge about vocabulary, starting with the ability to match a word to an object, helps learners to navigate the meaning of words when they read and to choose the most effective word when they write. Learners build the different layers of understanding about vocabulary over time, often a long period of time. Beginning ESL literacy learners will likely only reach the stages of connecting a word to an object or a meaning, but this is a very important first step.

Listening comprehension and expression of ideas

Listening comprehension and the expression of ideas, the building blocks of fluent oral English, are very important to the development of literacy. Listening comprehension is particularly important to the development of reading. The expression of ideas, or speaking, is very important to the development of writing. In Gough and Tunmer's *simple view of reading* (1986), reading comprehension is made up of a combination of decoding and listening comprehension. While there are more reading skills than just decoding, this view still emphasizes the importance of listening comprehension to reading. Readers decode the words on the page and then listen to them, whether they are saying them out loud or not. This process is exaggerated for beginning readers, who often do read out loud to themselves so they can hear the words and actively use their listening comprehension to create meaning.

Similarly, speaking is key to being able to write. A writer thinks about what he or she wants to say and then writes it down. ESL literacy learners (and probably all writers) should use their knowledge of speaking to write meaningfully. Once they have written something, they should be taught the strategy of reading their writing out loud to hear if it sounds right. Even very proficient writers benefit from using this strategy. There are some differences between spoken and written English, but these differences can be examined at a much later stage in education, once a learner has already developed literacy.

Pronunciation

Pronunciation is also very important to the process of learning to read and write. Pronunciation is the ability to produce the sounds of a language in a fluent and understandable way. Pronunciation can be divided into segmentals, or the individual sounds (phonemes) in words, and suprasegmentals, or the sound features of clauses and sentences, such as stress and intonation. Pronunciation is critical to learning to read because of two things: phonological awareness and one particular aspect of decoding, called phonics.

Phonological awareness is the ability to hear the sounds of a language. One aspect of phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, is the ability to break a word down into its sounds or to go from a series of sounds into a word. Phonemic

awareness helps learners to identify the sounds in a word. Phonics, the relationship between letters and sounds, helps learners to represent each sound with a letter. Phonemic awareness and phonics also help learners to encode, or to write; they can say a word slowly to hear the sounds and then write down a letter for each sound. Pronunciation is key here because being able to distinguish and produce the sounds of English is very important to these processes. If a learner struggles to distinguish the sounds, he or she will likely also struggle to match the sounds to letters. At a later stage of learning to read, difficulties in pronunciation can make it difficult to distinguish one word from another, for example the difference between *many* and *money*. If a learner cannot hear the difference, the meanings will likely also be confused.

In the development of pronunciation, learners will first become aware of the sound. Next they will be able to distinguish it from other sounds when they hear it. The next step is being able to produce the sound in isolation and the final step is being able to produce the sound in the context of other sounds.

An effective approach is to practice grammar orally until it sounds right, using dialogues, chants, songs, interviews, and other activities.

Grammar

Grammar is often thought of as the “rules” of language, although in truth grammar is more descriptive, describing what people say and write, rather than prescriptive, and the grammar of a language changes over time as usage changes. Grammar is made up of two aspects: syntax, or word order, and morphology, or the endings added to words. In English, both syntax and morphology are important to the meaning of a sentence. Word order matters a lot to indicate who did what to whom. Standard word order in an English statement is subject-verb-object: *William caught the ball (the ball didn't catch William)*. Word endings also carry a great deal of information, particularly indications of parts of speech, plurals, and verb tenses. ESL literacy learners do not usually benefit from being taught grammar as a set of abstract rules that can be analyzed and then applied to language. A more effective approach is to practice grammar orally until it sounds right, using dialogues, chants, songs, interviews, and other activities. Grammar is clearly important to writing accurate, clear, fluent English, but no matter what you do as an instructor, the grammar of your learners' writing is likely to never be better than the grammar of their speaking. One of the advantages of writing is that you can spend time re-reading and editing what you have written, but ESL literacy learners are unlikely to apply grammatical rules in writing that they don't use in their speaking.

An understanding of grammar is also helpful to accessing meaning in reading. Word order tells us a lot, of course, but so do other grammatical features, which can tell us details about how many, or connect pronouns to real people. Verb endings give a lot of information about when something happened. Depending on how you define tense, English has twelve or thirteen different verb tenses which can be in both the active and passive voice, giving many different possibilities. This precise information about when something happened is shown by a combination of auxiliary verbs and verb endings. This is an overwhelming amount of information for a beginner speaker and reader, but a good starting point is to teach learners to look for endings that show something happened in the past or present.

Every day and academic language

Oral language to support reading and writing also includes different types of spoken and written English. Jim Cummins developed the idea of BICS and CALP (1979, 1981) to describe the difference between every day spoken English and the particular academic English used in higher-level content-driven discussion and writing. BICS, or Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills, is every-day spoken English. BICS can be acquired both in an educational setting (such as a language class) but also through daily interactions. CALP, or Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency, can only be learned in a formal educational setting and generally takes much longer to learn than BICS.

At lower levels of ESL literacy instruction, the focus is entirely on BICS (everyday language) because this is what is most immediately relevant to learners' lives and necessary for settlement in Canada. Often, however, when higher-end ESL literacy learners transition into basic education classes, non-literacy ELL classes, or career programs, they run into challenges with reading comprehension because they do not have enough academic English, or CALP. Instructors, especially in higher-level ESL literacy classes, need to consider helping their learners to develop the basics of CALP as well as BICS. For more information on BICS and CALP, please see Chapter 5.9. For more information on developing oral language with ESL literacy learners, please see Chapter 5.

Activities and approaches for building oral language to support reading and writing

- Total Physical Response (TPR)
- build routine language around the day, weather, and agenda
- work with pictures and real objects
- clap syllables
- oral substitution exercises
- practice receptive language before productive language: stand up if you hear _____
- use singing and chanting
- dialogues, interviews, and sharing
- phonemic awareness tasks: which sound is different, tap which sound you hear, work with onset and rime word families
- sort words based on sound
- hold guided class discussions

2.5.3 KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE

Knowledge and experience

What understanding does the learner bring to reading and writing?

- [1] experience
- [2] social and cultural context
- [3] content knowledge
- [4] learning strategies

ESL literacy learners are in the process of developing English language, literacy skills, and knowledge about the world. This content knowledge is usually not addressed in ESL literacy programs, which are often offered as specialized language classes rather than a form of basic education. However, the development of content knowledge is important for learners to be able to increase their reading comprehension and bridge the gap between ESL literacy classes and whatever their next steps are, whether that is basic education, non-literacy ELL classes, career programs, employment, or increased participation in Canadian society.

Knowledge and experience should be considered in ESL literacy programs for three reasons. First, adult ESL literacy learners often do not have the opportunity to

develop the content knowledge that is built through formal education, including the content knowledge that is often built in the first few years of formal education (kindergarten to grade three). Depending on the learner's background and on what kind of programming is available, adult basic education classes may not start low enough. Gaps in their background may mean that learners cannot successfully transition into further education, even basic education.



CLASSROOM TIP

Create models to make learning concrete.

Second, developing learning strategies will help ESL literacy learners to successfully build their oral language and literacy skills. For more information on learning strategies, please see Chapter 6.5.

And third, knowledge and experience play a very big role in reading comprehension. What you know and what you have experienced affect how you understand what you read. As learners develop literacy, they will also need to develop conceptual knowledge about what they are reading. It is entirely possible for ESL literacy learners to develop very proficient decoding skills but to struggle with reading comprehension because they do not have enough of a background about the topic. Knowledge and experience will also help with writing, speaking, listening comprehension, and settlement, such as accessing health services.

Depending on your teaching context, you may or may not be in a position where you can build content or conceptual knowledge with your adult ESL literacy learners. But even if there is no space in your curriculum for content knowledge, you can still recognize the importance of this knowledge to the development of language and literacy. You can also build the development of content knowledge

into the discussion of vocabulary and reading, making sure that learners have the foundational understanding that will support the language they are learning or the texts they are reading.

Experience

ESL literacy learners arrive in our classes with a wide range of knowledge and experience, which can include:

- traditional stories and songs
- knowledge passed on through family and community
- life experiences
- agricultural knowledge
- cooking and baking
- raising children
- knowledge about the trades or working with your hands
- knowledge about crafts or making things
- experience working in a shop or market
- knowledge in a specific job or trade
- religious knowledge
- experiences in leaving a country and coming to new countries as refugees or immigrants
- periodically interrupted formal education
- formal education which was quite consistent but ended before they finished school
- additional languages

Adult ESL literacy learners are often assessed by what they **cannot** do, measured on a deficit model, but the truth is that there is a huge number of things which they **can** do. They have lived in very different contexts (and also a wide range of contexts from each other), they have often survived very difficult experiences, and they have successfully negotiated the challenges of moving from one country to another, sometimes more than once. Learners, however, are diverse, and each learner may have very different experiences and very different knowledge about the world. When possible, tap into your learners' strengths as you teach them. If you have learners who are skilled with crafts, such as sewing, beading, or fine leatherwork, then they may be able to transfer their fine motor skills to holding a pen or pencil and forming letters. Learners who have been able to quickly learn to communicate in a variety of dialects can use these skills to develop oral English. Learners who have learned to rely on community (and to help community in turn) can be an enormous support for each other in their new classroom in Canada. Learners who have some

knowledge in content areas can use this to help with reading comprehension. Learners who are used to moving all day, rather than sitting, will likely learn better when you incorporate movement into your classes.

Social and cultural context

What we know about the world, or what we even think of as knowledge, depends on our social and cultural context: who we are, our experiences of the world, our expectations, and where we come from. This comes particularly into play when adult ESL literacy learners are developing literacy in English in Canada, rather than in their own languages in their own countries. The conventions of text, the expectations of so-called general knowledge, and the context here may be very different than what our learners are used to and would be exposed to if they were able to attend school in their own cultures.

*Adult ESL literacy learners are often assessed by what they **cannot** do, measured on a deficit model, but the truth is that there is a huge number of things which they **can** do.*

As an instructor, you are unlikely to be able to change this situation. Learners do need the skills and strategies for life in Canada; they may also come from very different places from each other so you may have a lot of diversity in your classroom. What you can do is be aware of social and cultural context. Build your knowledge of intercultural competence. Challenge yourself to become aware of your own assumptions and expectations and be willing to listen to your learners when they talk about their context, their lives, their experiences, and what they want to learn. You can also recognize and respect the huge amount of experience and knowledge that learners bring to the classroom and to Canada.

Content knowledge

Adult ESL literacy learners may have gaps in the content knowledge that is generally developed through formal education. If they have not had the opportunity to have much formal education, there may be many areas that are unfamiliar to them. These areas can include:

- humanities
- social sciences
- sciences
- numeracy

Depending on the learners and their background, they may have a very wide range of knowledge in these content areas, anywhere from very little awareness to deeper understanding. The development of content knowledge strongly benefits learners:

- It can help learners to bridge the gap between ESL literacy instruction and further education.
- It can help learners to develop learning strategies.
- It can help learners to develop reading comprehension.

However we need to recognize that content knowledge, although it is usually assumed to be fact, is culturally informed: what is considered content knowledge in the western world may be different from other places, and even ESL literacy learners who have had some formal education may have had a different experience of developing content knowledge. Learners may also come from cultures which transmit a huge amount of knowledge (such as history) orally. As instructors we can recognize and value different types of knowledge and different ways of learning and knowing as we support our learners in developing content knowledge.

The development of literacy includes the building of knowledge and experience. As you work with your learners, it is important not to make assumptions about what they know or do not know about content knowledge, or any kind of knowledge or experience, including traditional knowledge. For example, young adult refugees may have spent their lives in refugee camps in third countries and have very little experience in their own countries.

Learning strategies

Learners who have not have much opportunity to attend school in their own countries may not have developed many learning strategies. Learning strategies must be explicitly taught for learners to be successful in an educational setting; for more information on learning strategies, please see Chapter 6.5.

Learning strategies include:

- organizational strategies
- classroom strategies
- time management strategies
- goal-setting
- reflection

Activities and approaches for building knowledge and experience

- avoid assumptions about knowledge
- create a classroom environment that supports curiosity and inquiry
- explore concepts as you develop language
- let learners be the expert and share something they know or can do
- remember that ESL literacy learners are *learning to read* not *reading to learn*, which means they do not yet have the skills to acquire new knowledge from text
- approach new knowledge orally, with pictures, discussion, videos, and hands-on experiences
- recognize that the idea of knowledge, and even what you might consider to be indisputable fact, is culturally constructed
- use project-based learning, which allows learners to explore concepts and build their knowledge-base: for more information, please see Chapter 6.12

2.5.4 TEXTUAL AWARENESS

Textual awareness

Does the learner understand the purpose of print and how it works?

- [1] visual literacy
- [2] awareness that print has meaning and different purposes
- [3] orientation of pages and books
- [4] directionality: left to right, top to bottom

Textual awareness is the understanding that print, whether it is letters or pictures, has meaning. Textual awareness also includes the ability to recognize a variety of types of images and symbols. Textual awareness is the first step toward developing literacy that actually involves interacting with text. The first three literacy skills listed in this book, availability for learning, oral language to support reading and writing, and knowledge and experience, all provide foundation and ongoing support for the development of literacy. The remaining five literacy skills are direct parts of the processes of reading and writing.

Visual literacy

The first element of textual awareness is visual literacy, which is the ability to recognize and interpret pictures. People who have not had much experience with pictures will struggle at first to understand what the images are supposed to represent. There is a progression of the development of picture literacy. Colour images are easier to understand than black and white images, and in general, the closer the image is to reality, the easier it is to understand. Learners usually develop visual literacy in this order:

- [1] photographs
- [2] realistic drawings
- [3] line drawings
- [4] stylized images
- [5] symbolic images

If learners are first developing visual literacy, begin with photographs that clearly show what you are trying to represent. Talk with learners about what they see and work to match photographs to real objects, such as a photograph of an apple to an actual apple. A camera is also a powerful tool in an ESL literacy classroom; you can take pictures of the room, your school, your community, what you are working on as a class, and, with permission, your learners, to incorporate into your teaching.

If learners are first developing visual literacy, begin with photographs that clearly show what you are trying to represent.

Once learners are familiar with photographs, you can move to drawings, first very realistic drawings and then increasingly more stylized images. It can be useful to compare a line drawing to a photograph so that learners can see how the lines represent the object. There are computer programs that can take a photograph and turn it into a drawing. Stylized images such as cartoons can be very challenging and require a lot of visual discrimination to be able to interpret. Even once learners can recognize a cartoon figure as a person, it can be difficult to tell that it is the same person (or different people) because the differences are subtle.

Be aware that artistic conventions are not universal and symbolic images will need to be taught and discussed. Your learners may learn some very common symbolic images early on, depending on their experience and what you teach. These can include:

- a stop sign
- an exit sign
- a sign for a washroom
- certain repeated, familiar symbols you use in class, such as a pencil to indicate they should write

These symbols become familiar to learners through repetition and because they directly impact their lives. Other symbolic conventions are not so common and may have little meaning or be directly misleading for learners until they are familiar with them. These symbolic conventions include:

- lines in a drawing to indicate movement
- speech bubbles
- thought bubbles
- *zzzzzz* to indicate that someone is sleeping
- a question mark to indicate that someone doesn't know something
- musical notes to indicate someone is singing
- size of print to indicate the volume (small print can indicate whispering while large print indicates shouting)

There are also symbolic conventions used within text, such as bolded words, italics, and the use of all uppercase for emphasis, which will need to be explicitly taught.

Awareness that print has meaning and different purposes

Textual awareness also includes the evolving awareness that print exists, it has meaning, and it can have different purposes. Beginning ESL literacy learners may not be very aware of the print around them and once they are aware of it, they may still need to understand that print represents language: text can be read out loud and what we say can be written down. They will also need to understand that print has many different purposes. A cereal box is very different from an application form, which is very different from a medicine bottle, a bus schedule, a note from a child's school, a text message from your friend, a closed sign on a store, or a contract for a cell phone.

Orientation of pages and books and directionality

Textual awareness also includes the orientation of books and pages and the directionality of text. Beginning learners will need lots of experience with holding books and pages the right way up; even more advanced ESL literacy learners will need specific guidance to write on the “front” of a piece of paper, especially if they have had experience with language and text with right-to-left directionality, such as Arabic. English directionality is left to right, top to bottom, and learners will need practice to identify the start of a word, or to look at a page in the correct order. As learners advance, they will learn to skim and scan when needed, which breaks the expectations of directionality as we sweep our eyes over a whole page to look for specific information.

Activities and approaches for building textual awareness

- look at environmental print on a community walk
- point to words as you read aloud to learners
- discuss what is on the page
- have learners put cards on spaces in a grid, responding to your oral prompts
- record learners’ words exactly when you write down their stories (Language Experience Approach)
- have learners touch words when you read them
- match photographs to objects
- match drawings to photographs

2.5.5 PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS

Phonological awareness

Can the learner hear the sounds in a word?

- [1] concept of a word
- [2] onset and rime
- [3] phonemic awareness

Phonological awareness is the ability to hear the sounds of a language. Phonological awareness includes the more specific skill of phonemic awareness, or the awareness of individual sounds (phonemes). Learners with phonemic awareness can hear the individual sounds of a word: they can split *cat* into /k/, /a/, and /t/. This has a direct bearing on a learner's ability to read and write: putting sounds together to make words (and splitting words into sounds) is an underlying skill for decoding and encoding. Many researchers and educators identify phonemic awareness as a key predictor for success in learning to read.

Many researchers and educators identify phonemic awareness as a key predictor for success in learning to read.

Concept of a word

Phonological awareness begins with the concept that language is made up of words. Learners who are first developing literacy may not think of their own speech as a series of words and may not have connected these spoken words to printed words, or a set of letters on the page with space on either side. Additionally, learners with beginning language skills in English may hear English speech as a constant stream of sounds rather than a series of words. Not surprisingly, lower-level ESL literacy learners often struggle with the concept of a word because of both their literacy skills and their beginning language skills in English. However, understanding language as a series of words is foundational to learning to read.

Onset and rime

Another important feature of phonological awareness that supports the development of literacy is onset and rime. The onset of a word is the beginning sound or blend of sounds in a word. The rime of a word is the remaining sounds in the word. You can use onset and rime to help learners in several ways. Onset and rime allow you to focus on the initial sound of a word, which is a key starting point in developing awareness of sounds, in recognizing that words start on the left, and in decoding. Onset and rime are also excellent for language learners because they allow you to focus on sound and pronunciation.

Onset and rime are a particularly effective way to analyze words because they help you to teach your learners word families, which are groups of words that have different onsets with the same rime. Word families allow learners to expand their vocabulary and are a powerful decoding tool, because learners can begin to decode sequences of letters rather than one letter at a time. For more information on decoding, please see Chapter 2.5.6. Learners can also learn to compare a word to a familiar word in the same family in order to read it or figure out how to spell it.

When you are using word families, make sure you only use examples that are meaningful to your learners. In each of the following examples, which increase in difficulty from left to right, learners would have to know all the words in the family orally and understand their meanings for this to be an effective learning tool. The words here are possible suggestions depending on your learners; there are less common words that fit into each family (*splat*, *array*, *sake*, and *plight*) but these are not meaningful examples for most ESL literacy learners and will turn your onset and rime lesson into a discussion of uncommon vocabulary.

Examples of word families using onset and rime			
rime: -at	rime: -ay	rime: -ake	rime: -ight
hat cat sat	say pay may play	bake take rake lake cake	night sight fight right light tight might

Phonemic awareness

A critically important part of phonological awareness is phonemic awareness, or the awareness of the individual sounds in a word. English has approximately 44 phonemes, or sounds (and 26 letters, a fact which significantly complicates reading and writing). Phonemic awareness is the ability to split a word into individual sounds, or to blend sounds together to make a word. This is an absolutely foundational skill for the development of reading. Linda Diamond and Sheila Mandel (1995) write that “research has identified phonemic awareness as the most potent predictor of success in learning to read” (p. 3) and Martha Bigelow and Robin Lovrien Schwarz (2010) argue that “phonemic awareness, which requires being aware of sound segments at the sublexical level, is considered critical to reading in an alphabetical language such as English” (p. 15).

Phonemic awareness is so important to learning to read because English (more or less) works on an alphabetical principle: sounds are represented by letters. Learners who can hear the sounds of a word are ready to connect those sounds to letters (a process called phonics), which is one of the basic decoding skills. Most people are familiar with this strategy as sounding out a word, or making the sound of each letter in order from left to right and blending them together to make the word. There are (many) common English words which are difficult to sound out, such as *laugh*, *right*, *phone*, and *know*, and there are other necessary decoding strategies, but this ability to break words into sounds and to represent those sounds with letters is critical to reading in English.

Children who are learning to read in their native language often develop phonemic awareness in their pre-school years through songs, nursery rhymes, games, and word play. ESL literacy learners will not have had this opportunity in English and perhaps not in their first language. Learners who do not have phonemic awareness will greatly benefit from direct instruction before or while they begin to learn decoding skills. There are several phonemic awareness skills:

- [1] distinguishing / producing 44 English phonemes
- [2] splitting a word into syllables
- [3] blending sounds to make a word
- [4] segmenting a word into sounds

The first skill, the ability to distinguish and produce the sounds of English, will be a necessary starting point for ESL literacy learners because they are also developing their language skills; they will not always know or be comfortable recognizing or making all the sounds of English. This can be particularly challenging for any sound in English that is not found in a learner's first language. As Jean Marrapodi (2013) writes, "for beginning language learners, hearing the differences between new sounds not found in their native tongue is very challenging; reproducing them is even more complex" (p. 11). Learners can also learn to split words into syllables through clapping, which will help in pronunciation as well as reading and writing.

The last skills are blending sounds to make a word and splitting a word into sounds. There is a progression of these skills:

- [1] initial sound
- [2] final sound
- [3] medial sound
- [4] blends

It is easiest to identify the first sound of a word, followed by the last sound. The sounds in the middle are more challenging and blends (such as /bl/, /sp/, and /str/) and even harder. Vowels are also more difficult than consonants in any of these positions, and unstressed sounds are more challenging than stressed sounds. Once learners have developed phonological and especially phonemic awareness, they are in a much better position to learn to attach these sounds to letters and begin to decode or encode.

Phonemic awareness: How easy is it to identify a sound?	
easier sounds	harder sounds
initial sound stressed sounds consonants	medial sound consonant blends (such as /pr/, /gl/, /str/) unstressed consonants stressed vowels unstressed vowels

Activities and approaches for building phonological awareness

- use songs or chants to teach rhyme
- raise your sign if you hear the sound...
- give learners chips and have them line up one chip for every sound they hear in a word
- sort words by initial sound
- begin sound work with very different sounds together, such as /m/ and /d/ or /k/ and /s/ rather than sounds that are often confused depending on first language, such as /p/ and /b/ or /r/ and /l/
- clap syllables
- walk words: take small steps for unstressed syllables and long steps for stressed syllables
- build word families using onset and rime
- play bingo with sounds instead of words

2.5.6 DECODING / ENCODING

Decoding	Encoding
Can the learner translate symbols into meaning?	Can the learner translate meaning into symbols?
[1] tracking	[1] tracking
[2] visual discrimination	[2] visual discrimination
[3] concept of a word (1:1 correspondence)	[3] fine motor skills
[4] letter knowledge	[4] making meaning with objects
[5] phonics	[5] concept of a word (1:1 correspondence)
[6] sight words	[6] letter knowledge
[7] spelling patterns	[7] letter formation
[8] decoding strategies	[8] writing on the line and making spaces between words
	[9] phonics
	[10] sight words
	[11] invented spelling
	[12] spelling patterns
	[13] encoding strategies

Most literacy skills support reading and writing in the same way; learners need oral language, textual awareness, phonological awareness, and fluency no matter whether they are reading or writing. The processes of interpreting meaning from text and producing text are a little different from each other, however.

Decoding and comprehension are reading skills. Encoding and composition are writing skills. In this section, we will focus on decoding and encoding, the skills for reading and writing words and short pieces of text. In the next section, Comprehension / Composition, we will focus on the skills for understanding and producing connected text.

Decoding

Decoding

Can the learner translate symbols into meaning?

- [1] tracking
- [2] visual discrimination
- [3] concept of a word (1:1 correspondence)
- [4] letter knowledge
- [5] phonics
- [6] sight words
- [7] spelling patterns
- [8] decoding strategies

Decoding is the stage of reading that involves translating symbols (letters) into meaning. It involves recognizing individual letters or combinations of letters and attaching them to sounds and then blending the sounds together to recognize the word. Most people are familiar with the idea of decoding as *sounding out a word*, and may think of this process as “real” reading, although there are underlying skills to reading, such as textual awareness and phonological awareness, and there are comprehension and fluency skills as well that move from decoding into making sense of the connected text. Decoding, however, remains essential to reading. It focuses on the process of recognizing words from a string of letters.

Tracking

In order to be able to decode, learners need to be able to track their eyes along a line of letters, from left to right, focusing on each letter in turn before moving to the next letter. You can help learners by giving them a strip of card to place under the line of text. You can also give them a grid and ask them to place cards in the grid in the order you name. Although skilled readers track with total automaticity, it is not as easy as it sounds for beginners, and at that level working with text can be exhausting for the eyes. Therefore it is important to practice tracking in short bursts. Tracking can also be developed in other ways:

- stringing beads
- lining up magnetic letters or letter tiles
- creating a pattern out of stones or other small objects
- lining up stones or other small objects along a line
- using markers, paint, or crayons to create lines
- cutting along a line with scissors
- crafts such as sewing, knitting, or building

Visual Discrimination

Learners will also need visual discrimination, which is the ability to locate small details in order to tell the difference between two things. The goal of visual discrimination is that learners can tell the difference between letters and recognize that letters have orientation and direction, but you can use other objects besides letters to develop visual discrimination too. You can examine photographs with learners and learn about details. You can work with shapes and colours. You can ask learners to find objects that are the same or different. And you can work on letters themselves.

When you begin working with letters, work with letters that are visually distinct from each other, such as *m* and *k* or *p* and *s*. Once learners are familiar with the letters, they will need to be able to tell similar letters apart, such as *t* and *f*. They will need to be able to recognize the right direction for letters, and learn that *S* is not *2*. This can be initially challenging for people who have spent their lives believing that an object is the same no matter which way it is facing – a cow is a cow whether it is pointing to the left or the right. Some letters are especially challenging because they are similar except for their orientation and direction, such as *b*, *d*, *p*, and *q*, and learners will need to learn to see the differences between these letters.

Concept of a word and 1:1 correspondence

Learners will also need to develop the concept of a word, just as they do in the development of phonological awareness, and they will need to learn that one spoken word is represented by one written word. This idea is called 1:1 correspondence: each word on the page represents one spoken word. Some learners in early stages of reading development tell a story based on what they can understand from the pictures and the words they can decode, but what they say out loud does not exactly match what is on the page. This is a valid, important stage of reading development and shows that the learner has reading comprehension (and oral language) but not full decoding skills. If a reader is at this point, work on 1:1 correspondence. Point to words as you say them out loud. Ask the learner to show you which word says ____.

Letter knowledge

Letter knowledge is an important stage of decoding and can be learned alongside visual discrimination. Letter knowledge is the knowledge about each of the letters of the alphabet: its name, what it looks like in its upper case and lower case forms, how it looks on the line, and whether it is a regular, tall, or hanging letter. When your learners are developing letter knowledge they can also work on visual discrimination, by focusing on the small differences between letters, and phonics, or the sounds that each letter makes. Magnetic letters and letter tiles are very useful

tools for teaching about letter knowledge because it allows learners to work with letters without needing to produce them yet. When learners are first developing letter knowledge, it is best to work with fonts that have an *a*, *g*, and *q* that resemble hand printing.

Phonics

Phonics is the correspondence between letters and sounds. Phonics has had a rocky history in the teaching of reading; as methods in education have changed over time, so has the role of phonics. In the past, phonics was considered crucial to learning to read, then it was pushed aside in favour of the look-say (or sight word) method, then it was used again, then dismissed in favour of whole language methods, and then it was embraced as a form of back-to-the-basics.

Both Australia and the USA have convened national panels on the teaching of reading with an effort to understand the role of phonics in learning to read. Most current thinking favours balanced literacy and places phonics as one important part of learning to read but not the only skill necessary. However, there have been a number of studies that have demonstrated that a clear and systematic approach to phonics is a very valuable tool for people who are otherwise struggling to learn to read, which suggests that it can also be particularly useful for adult ESL literacy learners. Phonics is an important stage in learning to decode and direct instruction is helpful for a period of time, as learners first build decoding skills. However phonics should always be taught in conjunction with lots of opportunities for meaningful reading and writing in context and alongside reading comprehension strategies.

Phonics allows a learner to match the letters of a word to the sounds of language and encourages learners to sound out a word by making the sounds of each letter, from left to right, blending them together until the learner recognizes the word. Help becomes /h/, /e/, /l/, /p/, and the hope is that when the learner says these sounds in sequence, he or she will recognize the word and understand the meaning. Phonics is an effective tool because it teaches learners to approach words letter by letter, left to right, connecting them to sounds, and giving them a strategy for approaching unknown words. Phonics also has a drawbacks, because not all English words are spelled phonetically, including many of the most common words (such as *the*, *be*, *to*, *as*, and *she*). When you are working with adult ESL literacy learners, it is important to recognize that phonics only works as an approach if your learners can:

- recognize and produce the sounds of English (phonological awareness)
- break a word into sounds and blend sounds into a word (phonological awareness)
- recognize the word once they have gotten close to sounding it out (oral language to support reading and writing)

This last step, the ability to recognize the word from the sounds you are making, is very important because many words that are spelled phonetically and are readily decodable using phonics are still not an exact match for the sounds each letter makes. Sounds affect each other, especially vowel sounds: the *a* in *car* makes a different sound than it does in *cat*. Learners will need to get close enough with the sounds to recognize what they are saying; this will also help them when they are decoding longer words with many more sounds. As with so many ESL literacy skills, this ability to recognize a word from sounds relies on oral language skills. It is not possible to learn to decode if you are trying to learn with unfamiliar words.

Sight words

Another important decoding skill is the development of sight words. Sight words are words that a learner can decode with automaticity. This means that the learner can decode the word quickly and easily, with very little cognitive effort, recognizing the combination of letters and accessing the meaning. Sight words are absolutely crucial to the development of reading; without sight words, no one would be able to read fluently. The ultimate goal of teaching learners to decode is actually to build their sight word bank (and to give them strategies for approaching unknown words) so that eventually they do not need to rely on phonics or give decoding much thought at all.

The ultimate goal of teaching learners to decode is to build their sight word bank so that eventually they do not need to rely on phonics or give decoding much thought at all.

A proficient reader has an enormous bank of sight words and does not spend any effort on decoding unless he or she comes across a highly unusual word. Proficient readers use all their energy on comprehension and fluency. Beginning readers, on the other hand, have few sight words, and will need to build this bank before they can read fluently. Sight words are sometimes called high frequency words, and certainly many high frequency words must be learned as sight words because they are not possible to decode using phonics (such as *the*, *be*, *to*, *as*, *she*, and so on). Not all sight words are high frequency, however. Sight words are different for each learner; they usually include the words that are frequently encountered and personally relevant, which means that any learner might have some common words as sight words, as well as a few personally relevant words that are more challenging. Different learners may recognize *Abdurezak* (a name), *Somerset-Bridlewood* (a train station in Calgary), or the name of the company where they work. A young reader might know *pterodactyl* before he or she knows *dog*.

In her book *Becoming Literate: The Development of Inner Control*, Marie M. Clay (1991) writes about the importance of sight words:

The complex, integrated sequences of behaviours in reading are controlled by particular features in the text that are recognized. At first, amid varying degrees of uncertainty, [the reader] locates islands of certainty. (p. 172)

These islands of certainty are the first moments of confidence in reading; as learners develop more sight words, decoding becomes an easier process and they have more cognitive energy to devote to comprehension. Eventually learners will have a large bank of sight words and will no longer spend much time or energy on decoding.

Spelling patterns

Recognizing spelling patterns is also a part of learning to decode. Once learners have the basics of phonics, they will need to recognize common spelling patterns that do not follow the rules. A good approach to learning spelling patterns is to learn groups of words with similar spelling patterns as word families, such as *saw*, *jaw*, and *law*, or *read*, *meal*, and *lean*. These spelling patterns include:

- letter combinations: *th, sh, ch, qu, wh, aw, ew, ow, kn, ph*
- a final -e follows a long vowel: *make, sale, hide, hope, cute*
- common prefixes and suffixes: *pre-, co-, de-, un-, -ing, -ed, -ize, -ous, -ive, -ese, -tion*
- common vowel combinations and what sound they make: *ea, ee, ie, oa, oo, ou*
- double consonants after short vowels before adding an ending: *stop → stopped, cut → cutting*

Reading Strategies		When do you use the strategy?			How complex is the strategy?		
		Pre-reading	During reading	Post-reading	Beginner	Intermediate	Advanced
Decoding strategies	use the pictures		×		×	×	×
	use the first letter		×		×	×	×
	use sight words		×		×	×	×
	sound it out (use phonics knowledge)		×		×	×	×
	use onset and rime (word families)		×			×	×
	compare to a similar known word		×			×	×
	use spelling patterns		×			×	×
	break compound words into composite words		×			×	×
	break into syllables		×				×
	use morphemic (word part) knowledge		×				×

Decoding strategies

Learners will also need to know decoding or word attack strategies for when they come across a word they do not recognize. These strategies give learners a selection of possible ways to respond. As you teach decoding strategies to learners, you can also show them that different strategies work for different words. When you teach strategies:

- [1] Recognize and point out the strategies learners are already using.
- [2] Name the strategy you want to teach.
- [3] Explain when we use the strategy and why we use it.
- [4] Model the strategy (use a think aloud).
- [5] Practice the strategy together.
- [6] Build the strategy into your class routine.

Decoding strategies give learners options: they can attempt to sound out the word letter by letter, they can see if the word looks like another word they already know, and they can try to break the word into smaller pieces.

The first strategy, use the pictures, encourages learners to use all the information in the text to try to figure out the word. This strategy is a critically important reading strategy because it teaches learners that meaning can be made from more than just the letters on the page. The next strategy, use the first letter, is a very beginning decoding strategy. You might prompt your learners: *We need a word that starts with r. What makes sense here?* Using sight words is fairly straightforward; these are the words that learners can recognize with automaticity. Sight words are what Marie M. Clay (1991) calls “islands of certainty” in the text (p. 172). Sounding it out encourages learners to use their phonics knowledge, or the correspondence between sounds and letters.

The remaining strategies help learners to compare the word they are trying to read to words or parts of words they already know, by looking for familiar patterns of letters that may belong to a word family, a spelling pattern, a smaller word within a compound word, or a word part. Using morphemic knowledge means recognizing parts of words that may be familiar, such as *-ing*, *-tion*, *-ment*, and so on. For more information on decoding strategies, please see Chapter 6.6.

As learners become more practiced with decoding, they will be able to decode words more quickly and accurately. They will also increase their number of sight words, which will make reading even faster, and they will build up a toolbox of decoding strategies. Reading will become easier and more fluent and they will have more energy to dedicate to comprehension.

Activities and approaches for building decoding

- match word cards to pictures
- create a print-rich environment
- teach phonics one letter at a time (and do not teach similar letters together)
- sort pictures by first letter
- sort words into categories based on initial sound, or, later, final sound or word family
- model decoding letter by letter
- teach word families
- read to your learners
- choral read as a class
- support extensive reading

Encoding

Encoding

Can the learner translate meaning into symbols?

- [1] tracking
- [2] visual discrimination
- [3] fine motor skills
- [4] making meaning with objects
- [5] concept of a word (1:1 correspondence)
- [6] letter knowledge
- [7] letter formation
- [8] writing on the line and making spaces between words
- [9] phonics
- [10] sight words
- [11] invented spelling
- [12] spelling patterns
- [13] encoding strategies

Encoding is the skill of picking up a pen or pencil and forming letters in order to create words or sentences. It is at the heart of writing, although it is not the only writing skill necessary. There are underlying skills required for writing, such as oral language, textual awareness, and phonological awareness, and there are skills needed to compose longer texts or write with fluency. Still, encoding is a critical step toward building literacy.

Reading and writing are highly related processes and some of the skills of encoding are also needed for decoding:

- tracking
- visual discrimination
- concept of a word
- letter knowledge
- phonics
- sight words
- spelling patterns

These skills are described in detail in the decoding section.

Fine motor skills

Many of the early skills for encoding do not actually involve writing, but are necessary to develop before a learner can pick up a pen and make letters. Learners will need to develop tracking and visual discrimination, just as they do when they are learning to decode. They will also need to develop the fine motor skills required to form letters with a pen or pencil. There are not many adult ESL literacy learners in Canada who cannot form letters at all; most learners have some literacy skills although they still need support to develop their reading and writing. Learners who are absolute beginners with writing, however, will need to develop these pre-writing skills. Writing requires a lot of finger and hand strength, manual dexterity, control of fine movements, and hand-eye coordination. Beginning writers will likely find writing physically (and mentally) exhausting and will only be able to practice for short periods of time. They can also develop their fine motor skills in other ways:

- working with dough
- cutting with scissors
- building with blocks
- painting, colouring, or gluing
- lacing
- stringing beads
- sewing, knitting, or building
- using word tiles to spell their names
- writing on unlined paper (which is easier than lined paper)

Making meaning with objects

Learners can also work on writing before they are able to form letters by using pictures or objects to tell a story. Learners who are comfortable drawing may also tell a story this way; however, many adult ESL literacy learners who are beginning writers also have very little experience drawing and will likely find drawing as exhausting as writing. Making meaning with objects is an early stage of writing and lays the foundation for later writing. There are many benefits because learners are able to:

- learn that they can tell a story
- develop the oral language necessary for writing
- connect oral language to visual images
- sequence objects or pictures to tell a story

Even when learners are able to write a few words, they can still use objects or pictures as a starting point for their writing. They may select and organize pictures (or draw them) and then write a word or two as a caption for each picture.

Letter formation, writing on the line, and making spaces between words

When learners are developing letter knowledge they can practice forming letters. Learners can make marks of all kinds, using pens, pencils, crayons, markers, or paint, and they can practice all kinds of lines and shapes. They can practice letters by writing in air or in sand trays with their fingers. They can also trace, copy, or write



CLASSROOM TIP

A popsicle stick can help learners make spaces between words.

on their own. They will need to learn to write on a line and to plan the size of their writing with the amount of space they have. As they begin to write more than one word, teach them to leave spaces. One technique is to put down your finger at the end of the word to make the space. You can also use a popsicle stick; some instructors draw a picture of an astronaut on the stick and call him “Spaceman.”

Invented spelling

When learners move from the stage of copying letters and words to producing their own text, they will pass through a critical point of writing development: invented spelling. Invented spelling is when learners do their best to write a word by writing down the letters for all the sounds they can hear. Invented spelling usually develops in this order:

- [1] initial consonants
- [2] other stressed consonants
- [3] unstressed sounds, consonant blends, and vowels

Invented spelling does not always lead to easily readable text; it often requires you to be an active and sympathetic reader to figure it out (and if you get stuck you can always ask your learner to read to you). However invented spelling is very productive for learners. When they use invented spelling they are actively developing several key literacy skills:

- They are building phonological awareness (splitting a word into sounds).
- They are building phonics (connecting sounds to letters).
- They are forming letters (encoding).
- They are making meaning with text (encoding).

Learners will need lots of opportunities to use invented spelling in order to practice these skills. Invented spelling is also a valuable tool for you as an instructor because it gives you insight into what your learners are hearing in a word. This is particularly important as ESL instructors because you can see if a learner is hearing the right sounds. You can tell if a learner is distinguishing between challenging sounds such as /p/ and /b/ or /r/ and /l/. You can also see if your learner is hearing unstressed sounds. Invented spelling is a very good diagnostic tool for planning further instruction in speaking, particularly pronunciation, and listening.

Invented spelling should be encouraged; however, many ESL literacy learners seem reluctant to try to use invented spelling. This could be because they lack the phonological awareness to be able to break a word down into sounds and identify those sounds. Remember that both invented spelling and phonics are entirely dependent on a learner having phonological awareness and the oral language to both produce the sounds of English and to recognize a word from the sounds. The development of phonological awareness and oral language are absolute priorities in an ESL literacy classroom.

Learners may also be reluctant to use invented spelling because, as adult learners, they would like their writing to be “perfect.” Many learners reach a stage when they will ask you for help with spelling for all words; while this attitude generally stems from a desire to produce “correct” text, it can actually get in the way of learning. You can explain to learners why invented spelling is important – it helps you learn the sounds and letters of English. You can help learners to use other sources for spelling: *Is that word in our picture dictionary? Can you see that word on our word wall?* Another approach you can take to encourage invented spelling is to allow learners to ask you to spell three words and then after that they need to try themselves. Dialogue journals are an excellent approach that support free writing and invented spelling; for more information on dialogue journals, please see Chapter 6.11.

Writing Strategies		When do you use the strategy?			How complex is the strategy?		
		Pre-writing	During writing	Post-writing	Beginner	Intermediate	Advanced
Encoding strategies	use sight words		✗		✗	✗	✗
	sound it out (use phonics knowledge)		✗		✗	✗	✗
	use a source (list, word bank, card, dictionary)		✗		✗	✗	✗
	use invented spelling		✗			✗	✗
	use onset and rime (word families)		✗			✗	✗
	compare to a similar known word		✗			✗	✗
	use spelling patterns		✗			✗	✗
	break compound words into composite words		✗				✗
	break into syllables		✗				✗
	use morphemic (word part) knowledge		✗				✗

Encoding strategies

As learners become writers they will also need to build up a bank of encoding, or spelling, strategies. These are strategies that help learners approach writing a word they do not know how to spell. The strategies are a toolbox of possibilities; they also encourage independence, production, and fluency. When you are teaching strategies:

- [1] Recognize and point out the strategies learners are already using.
- [2] Name the strategy you want to teach.
- [3] Explain when we use the strategy and why we use it.
- [4] Model the strategy (use a think aloud).
- [5] Practice the strategy together.
- [6] Build the strategy into your class routine.

Many of the encoding strategies are also decoding strategies, but some are specific to the process of encoding. The first of these is to use a source, such as a list, word bank, card, or dictionary. This is a very important strategy for writing, especially in early stages. Note that it is easiest to use a source that is immediately next to where you are trying to write. Sources that are further away (such as the board) are more challenging. In order to be able to copy from a source, a learner has to be able to track back and forth between two different places as well as recognize and form the



CLASSROOM TIP

Magnetic letters on a cookie sheet can be used for all kinds of matching activities.

letters. When learners have progressed enough, using knowledge of word families, spelling patterns, and morphemes (word parts), are faster encoding strategies than using a source, because learners break words into pieces rather than individual letters.

Using invented spelling is also a strategy that is specific to encoding, although it helps learners to develop their decoding skills as well. There is more information on invented spelling earlier in this chapter. The rest of the encoding strategies listed here are also decoding strategies; they are explored more fully in the decoding section. For more information on encoding strategies, please see Chapter 6.7. Learning to encode takes time and practice, but it is a critically important step in the development of writing and the building of literacy. Even when learners are able to write several words, and then several sentences, and then connected paragraphs, they will still need practice with encoding skills and strategies because the language they are using in their writing will also continue to develop. For adult ESL literacy learners, developing both decoding and encoding is an ongoing process because they are also learning oral language at the same time; as they learn more language, different structures, and more complicated and precise vocabulary, they will continue to learn how to read and write this language as well.

Activities and approaches for building encoding

- use pictures or objects to tell stories or experiences
- develop fine motor skills through cutting, stringing beads, and working with dough
- write in sand trays with your finger
- practice making shapes
- teach phonics one letter at a time
- encourage invented spelling
- assemble cut up sentences
- write captions to pictures
- fill in basic forms
- copy, label, write names, and use dialogue journals

2.5.7 COMPREHENSION / COMPOSITION

Comprehension	Composition
Can the learner understand what he or she reads?	Can the learner write with meaning?
[1] using knowledge of oral language: vocabulary and grammar	[1] thinking about content
[2] using knowledge of punctuation	[2] using knowledge of oral language: vocabulary and grammar
[3] awareness of context	[3] using knowledge of punctuation
[4] awareness of purpose	[4] organizing writing
[5] awareness of format and genre	[5] awareness of purpose
[6] inference	[6] awareness of format and genre
[7] comprehension strategies	[7] awareness of audience
	[8] creativity, expression, and voice
	[9] composition strategies

Decoding and encoding are the literacy skills for making meaning from or with the letters on the page. This is not the end of reading and writing, however. Many learners can decode but can still not make sense of what they are reading. Many learners can put together words or sentences but cannot write anything longer. In order to understand a text, a learner needs the skill of comprehension. In order to produce connected text, a learner needs the skill of composition.

Comprehension

Comprehension

Can the learner understand what he or she reads?

- [1] using knowledge of oral language: vocabulary and grammar
- [2] using knowledge of punctuation
- [3] awareness of context
- [4] awareness of purpose
- [5] awareness of format and genre
- [6] inference
- [7] comprehension strategies

Comprehension is the skill of understanding what you read. In order to comprehend text, readers need to be able to decode words quickly enough to be able to hold the meanings of the words in their working memory so that they can process the meaning of the sentence. They need to use clues from grammar and punctuation. They need awareness of context and the purpose of the text. Readers need to be able to connect what they are reading to what they already know. Comprehension is also based on effectively using a series of comprehension strategies.

You can begin to work on comprehension skills before learners can decode much on their own; read texts or stories out loud to learners and discuss together. As learners build their decoding skills, they can start to work on the comprehension of what they read. Initially the texts will be short, and the learners will be supported with pictures and textual features such as a large font, lots of white space, and no wrap-around text. As learners progress, the texts can include smaller font and wrap-around text (sentences that go over more than one line).

Using knowledge of oral language: vocabulary and grammar

One of the key skills of reading comprehension is knowing the meaning of the words you read. This may seem self-evident, but it demonstrates once again the critical importance of the development of oral language and vocabulary to the development of reading. Adult ESL literacy learners are building literacy for the first time in a language that they are in the process of learning to speak. This complicates the development of literacy; learning to read alters the function of your brain, but this only happens if you are successful in accessing meaning, and in order to get to meaning you need to know the words.

The development of vocabulary is more than just connecting words to definitions; there are many layers of knowledge you can have about a word, including synonyms, parts of speech, morphology, and collocations, and each layer adds to your comprehension of what you read. For more information on vocabulary and reading, please see Chapter 2.5.2 and Chapter 5.

Oral language also includes the grammar of the language. The word “grammar” can feel loaded to instructors at times because it is often perceived as the traditional instruction in “rules.” Grammar, however, simply refers to the structure of the language; it is part of every language and plays an important role in reading comprehension. Grammar is made up of two things: syntax, or word order; and morphology, or word endings. In English both word order and word endings are important to the meaning of the sentence. As learners develop reading comprehension, they will need to use clues from word order and from word endings to understand subtleties about what is happening and when it is happening. Effective grammar instruction for adult ESL literacy learners is relevant, contextualized, and oral. For more information on grammar, please see Chapter 2.5.2 and Chapter 5.

Awareness of context

Another key reading comprehension skill is the awareness of context. Learners must learn to make connections between what they are reading and the rest of the text. Understanding context involves two strategies in particular: finding context clues and self-monitoring. Finding context clues is the strategy for understanding unknown words by finding explanations within the text. This is a very important strategy, but it only works if you understand nearly all of the remaining text. For more information on instructional level of reading, please see Chapter 4.2.2. Learners will also need to self-monitor effectively in order to understand what is going on and apply context to what they are reading. Self-monitoring is the process of being aware of what you are reading and whether you understand it. In order to use context, learners need to know that they understand what is happening and keep connecting the parts back to the whole text. They also need to be aware when they stop understanding. Some instructors describe this as having a conversation about the text in your head while you read.

Part of the context of the word are the other features on the page, including things like the title (which usually indicates the main idea of the text), the format of the text, and the pictures. Encourage learners to examine any pictures carefully to see if there is a clue that can support their reading.

Using knowledge of punctuation

Readers also use punctuation clues to build meaning from the text. Punctuation allows readers to break strings of words into meaningful chunks. One of the greatest roles of punctuation is to help us to identify sentences. We can also further identify special types of sentences: questions, which are always followed by a question mark, and exclamations, which are followed by an exclamation point. This allows readers to readily identify meaningful clauses and to more easily connect subjects, verbs, and objects to form standard English word order. Commas are also used in a number of roles, including to break up clauses or separate items on a list. Dashes and brackets can show extra information or asides (which may also contain context clues), apostrophes show possession or contractions, and quotation marks tell us that someone is speaking. All of these marks make it significantly easier to understand a text; just think how challenging it is to read a text with no punctuation.

Learning to read alters the function of your brain, but this only happens if you are successful in accessing meaning, and in order to get to meaning you need to know the words.

Awareness of purpose and awareness of format and genre

Readers also take meaning from the purpose of the text, the format, and the genre. We read mystery novels differently than biology text books and we approach a bus schedule differently than a recipe. An application form for a school field trip is different than a contract with a utilities provider, a safety notice posted at work, a love letter, or a birthday invitation. Readers will need to learn that text has different purposes and to identify the purpose of what they are reading. They will need to know how to approach different formats of text (formatted and unformatted, functional, fictional, or non-fictional) and they will need to learn when to read deeply and when to scan.

Question types

When building reading comprehension, it is important to consider how you are asking your learners to demonstrate their understanding. Different types of questions ask learners to interact with a text in different ways. They require learners to do different types of thinking and give different responses. T.E. Raphael (1984, 1986) developed a theory around Question-Answer-Relationships and identified four different question types. The CCLB (Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks) also recommends using both literal and interpretive questions when demonstrating comprehension.

There are several different question types:

- **Right There (also called Literal Questions):** The answers to these questions can be found directly in the text. They are usually questions that ask who, what, where, or when and can be answered with short, factual answers. They do not require inference or interpretation.
- **Think and Search (also called Interpretive Questions):** These questions ask learners to think about the text and synthesize information from different places to respond. They are questions that may ask how or why. They require interpretation and may require inference.
- **Author and Me:** The answers to these questions are not in the text. The learner has to combine his or her own knowledge with information from the text to give an answer.
- **On My Own:** These questions ask learners to make connections between the text and their own background knowledge or experiences. These are questions such as *What do you think...*, *Have you ever...*, or *What would you do if you were...*

It is a good idea to ask a variety of question types to ESL literacy learners of all levels in order to develop reading comprehension skills, even if you are working with a text that you have read out loud to your learners. An effective approach is to ask reading comprehension questions orally; learners will be able to respond to these questions orally far before they will be able to compose written responses. One of the best questions you can ask a learner is *how do you know?*

Inference

Another important comprehension skill is inference, or the ability to understand meaning that is implied rather than overtly stated. Inference is a challenging skill but it can be taught from the very beginning of literacy development. As with so many things, inference should be taught to ESL literacy learners orally first, in a group setting, with a familiar context, before learners can be expected to apply it to their independent reading. A good starting place for inference is when studying photographs together. You can ask your learners questions such as:

- What is she thinking?
- What is he doing?
- What do you think the weather is like?
- What does he feel right now?
- What do you think is about to happen?
- How do you know?

Inference should be taught to ESL literacy learners orally first, in a group setting, with a familiar context, before learners can be expected to apply it to their independent reading.

These questions are wondering, interpretive, and inquisitive in nature, looking under the surface of what is happening, asking about *why* and *how do you know*. Ask the same sorts of questions when you read a text aloud to your learners. Teach learners to ask and respond to these questions long before they are able to form their responses in writing; they can develop reading comprehension long before they can demonstrate this comprehension in writing.

Reading Strategies		When do you use the strategy?			How complex is the strategy?		
		Pre-reading	During reading	Post-reading	Beginner	Intermediate	Advanced
Comprehension strategies	preview	✗			✗	✗	✗
	predict and check	✗			✗	✗	✗
	activate background knowledge	✗			✗	✗	✗
	make connections to things you know		✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
	self-monitor		✗		✗	✗	✗
	re-read		✗		✗	✗	✗
	visualize		✗			✗	✗
	retell the story			✗		✗	✗
	find the main idea		✗	✗		✗	✗
	skim	✗	✗	✗		✗	✗
	scan	✗	✗	✗		✗	✗
	find context clues		✗				✗
	find the pattern of organization		✗	✗			✗
	use a graphic organizer			✗			✗
	summarize			✗			✗

Comprehension strategies

Comprehension strategies are a key part of making meaning from a text. The strategies on this chart are divided into beginner, intermediate, and advanced. This does not mean that proficient readers no longer use beginner strategies, however; proficient readers use a wide range of reading strategies with automaticity. These strategies all intentionally help learners to make meaning. A few of the strategies, such as using a graphic organizer or summarizing, are usually only used in an

educational context. The rest of the strategies are automatic, and often unconscious, habits of proficient readers. ESL literacy learners, however, cannot be expected to discover reading strategies on their own; they must be intentionally and explicitly taught. When you are teaching reading strategies to your learners:

- [1] Recognize and point out the strategies learners are already using.
- [2] Name the strategy you want to teach.
- [3] Explain when we use the strategy and why we use it.
- [4] Model the strategy (use a think aloud).
- [5] Practice the strategy together.
- [6] Build the strategy into your class routine.

There are a number of reading strategies that can be introduced to beginning readers, although not all at the same time. Previewing is the act of looking at a text before you read it to see what kind of information you can get from the title, pictures, lay out, and so on. Predicting and checking encourage learners to actively engage in reading; they are strategies that help learners to monitor their comprehension of the text. Activating background knowledge helps learners to make connections between the text and what they already know; it also gives the text some context. Making connections to things you know goes hand in hand with activating background knowledge; it is the process of finding a connection between what you are reading and what you already know. Self-monitoring is the process of actively paying attention to your own experience as you read: does it make sense? Many early readers do not have enough overall comprehension to really notice when a text stops making sense to them. Encourage learners to self-monitor; tell them it is like having a conversation in your head about the text while you read. You can also model self-monitoring by using a think-aloud. Re-reading is a fix-up strategy that often goes with self-monitoring; if you didn't understand something, try reading it again.

As learners progress with their reading, they are ready for more challenging reading strategies. Visualizing is the process of seeing in your head what is happening in the text; visualizing works well when you are reading fiction. You can explain it to learners that it is like making a movie in your head. Once learners are finished reading, they can try to make sense of the text by retelling the story. They can also find the main idea. This is a more challenging reading strategy because it involves not just comprehending the information but categorizing it in terms of what is most important. Learners can begin by looking at the title; it is usually related to the main idea of the text.

Skimming and scanning are both reading strategies to move through a text quickly for either a general impression (skimming) or for specific information (scanning). Learners will need to know how to skim and scan; they will also need to know when it is appropriate to skim and scan (such as a bus timetable) and when it is appropriate to read deeply (such as a letter from the government).

More advanced reading strategies include finding context clues, finding the pattern of organization, using a graphic organizer, and summarizing. Finding context clues is a higher-level reading strategy that teaches learners to look for clues for the meaning of words they do not understand. Context clues are often introduced by a comma following a word, with further information, or by the words *or*, *which means*, or *in other words*. Finding the pattern of organization is a good way to understand how texts, especially informational texts, are put together. This is also a very good strategy for improving composition. Learners can also use a graphic organizer to help to understand the meaning of the text. Graphic organizers, which are usually created by the instructor for the learners, help learners to pull out relevant information from the text. Another high-level comprehension strategy is to summarize the text. For more information on reading strategies, please see Chapter 6.6.

More so than any other reading skill, the formation of reading comprehension is an ongoing, life-long process.

More so than any other reading skill, the formation of reading comprehension is an ongoing, life-long process; as learners develop their language and their decoding skills and as they become more proficient with reading comprehension they will tackle more challenging texts and learn to make meaning from these as well.

Activities and approaches for building comprehension

- use a think aloud to show how you use a reading strategy
- teach reading strategies explicitly and often
- ask interpretive and inferential questions orally from the very beginning
- discuss what you read
- ask *How do you know?*
- use focused reading: for more information, please see Chapter 6.8

Composition

Composition

Can the learner write with meaning?

- [1] thinking about content
- [2] using knowledge of oral language: vocabulary and grammar
- [3] using knowledge of punctuation
- [4] organizing writing
- [5] awareness of purpose
- [6] awareness of format and genre
- [7] awareness of audience
- [8] creativity, expression, and voice
- [9] composition strategies

Composition is the skill that allows learners to write connected text beyond the level of word or sentence. With composition learners can produce written communication (letters or email) and reports; they can produce longer formatted text such as invitations, resumes, and more involved applications; they can write expressively and creatively; and they can apply composition strategies to a better understanding of the purpose of all writing.

There is a large overlap between reading and writing skills and some of the skills of composition are also needed for comprehension:

- using knowledge of oral language: vocabulary and grammar
- using knowledge of punctuation
- awareness of purpose
- awareness of genre and format

These skills are described in detail in the comprehension section.

Thinking about content

The first step in composition is thinking about content: what do you want to say? In nearly all levels of ESL literacy development, the topic of writing should be familiar and relevant to the learner; indeed, in the Canadian Language Benchmarks writing topics are familiar and personally relevant until learners reach CLB 5. However, even for presumably familiar topics, ESL literacy learners will still need to practice generating ideas for writing and drawing on what they know, and before they do

either of these things they need to recognize that they can have a written voice and their ideas, experiences, and stories can be the topic of writing. Learners need to see themselves as writers. A good first step to teaching learners that they can be writers is through using the Language Experience Approach to generate stories in the classroom. For more information on LEA, please see Chapter 6.4.

There are two more things to consider with the content of writing. The first is that topics have to actually be personally relevant and this can be difficult given the possible gaps in learners' experience and knowledge about the world. Many writing topics assume a body of "general knowledge" (which is a socially constructed and highly context-informed concept), but this knowledge is far from general for all people. This means that you need to be careful to let your learners develop writing by writing about topics that are actually familiar and personally relevant. The other thing to consider is that learners will eventually need to be able to write more formally or academically if they are to transition to basic education, non-literacy ELL classes, further education, or career programs. Higher-level ESL literacy classes should lay the foundation for different forms of writing including more formal academic writing.

Organizing writing

Composition also involves organizing your writing. In the western world, the organization of writing typically reflects a form of linear logic in which writing is laid out in an expected structure and systematically leads the audience from the beginning to the conclusion. Writing is typically organized in one of several different ways:

- **sequentially or chronologically:** telling a story or narrative in the order of when the events happened, including instructional text (explaining how to do something)
- **description:** systematically describing the subject
- **cause and effect:** showing the relationship between things
- **comparison and contrast:** showing how two things are similar and different
- **problem and solution:** outlining a problem and giving solutions
- **opinion and supporting reasons:** stating an opinion and giving examples or reasons to persuade the audience

No matter how the writing is organized, there are expectations for the structure of nearly all writing. The assumption with connected text is that there will be an introduction, middle, and conclusion, and that each paragraph will focus on one main idea with clear explanations and examples. This is true whether you are writing an essay, a letter, a report, an outline of a process, or even a fictional story. In order to organize ideas and writing in these ways, learners will need to be able to sort, categorize, and recognize relationships between ideas.

Awareness of audience

Learners must eventually find a sense of the audience for their writing. This is a fairly abstract idea which can be difficult for most adult ESL literacy learners. You can teach learners about audience by providing them with an actual, real-live, non-abstract audience, so they can think about the purpose of their writing and who they are writing to in a very real way, not as an academic exercise. Ideas for real audience for your learners include:

- you, their instructor
- each other
- learners in a different class
- new learners entering the program
- the coordinator / director of your program
- a guest to the classroom
- someone who works at a place you are going to visit, such as a library, community program, or museum
- a member of government
- a member of the community, such as a journalist or business owner

As learners develop an awareness of audience they learn about the tone and purpose of their writing. They develop skills for how to approach someone, ask for something, or persuade someone. They also can learn chunks of language that can be useful for their writing, such as how to express gratitude (*Thank you very much; I really appreciate your kindness.*) or request a follow-up (*I look forward to hearing from you soon.*).

Creativity, expression, and voice

Another important skill in composition is creativity, expression, and voice. As learners develop fluency in their speaking they can begin to transfer this fluency to their writing. They will be able to think about not just what they want to say, but how they want to say it. They can learn to put together language in many different ways to communicate their thoughts, ideas, and feelings. Creativity, expression, and voice are complicated topics in writing; however they still have relevance for learners who are just beginning the skill of composition. Adult ESL literacy learners will need to make the connection that literacy is something they are able to develop. They need to learn that they can be writers, they can express themselves in writing, and their writing is worth reading. It is difficult to teach creativity, but we can create environments where learners can explore, play, and express themselves. We can teach learners that creativity is something we all are born with, we can express creativity in different ways, and we can bring our creativity to our writing. All of these skills – creativity, expression, and voice – are ultimately about feeling confident with your grasp of oral English and feeling confident as a writer.

Writing Strategies			When do you use the strategy?			How complex is the strategy?		
			Pre-writing	During writing	Post-writing	Beginner	Intermediate	Advanced
Composition strategies	The writing process	brainstorm	✗				✗	✗
		outline	✗					✗
		write		✗		✗	✗	✗
		revise			✗			✗
		edit			✗		✗	✗
		publish			✗	✗	✗	✗
		read your writing out loud			✗	✗	✗	✗
		find a better word		✗	✗		✗	✗
		use an example		✗			✗	✗
		use descriptive language		✗			✗	✗
		use connecting words		✗				✗
		use transition words		✗				✗
		be specific		✗				✗

Composition Strategies

There are also a range of composition strategies that help learners to be better, more effective writers. These composition strategies include the writing process, which guides writers through the stages from generating ideas to finally publishing or sharing finished work. It is important to teach learners about the writing process because it lets them know that writing is something that happens in stages, which carries with it a powerful underlying message: it doesn't have to be perfect from the beginning. This realization can help learners to put pen to paper and start writing. The writing process is explored in detail in Chapter 6.10.

When you teach strategies to your learners:

- [1] Recognize and point out the strategies learners are already using.
- [2] Name the strategy you want to teach.
- [3] Explain when we use the strategy and why we use it.
- [4] Model the strategy (use a think aloud).
- [5] Practice the strategy together.
- [6] Build the strategy into your class routine.

There are also other composition strategies that can help us to become better writers. One of the best composition strategies you can teach your learners is to read their writing out loud to hear whether it makes sense. You can also encourage learners with higher oral language skills but lower writing skills to point to each word as they say it out loud; they are more likely to notice errors this way if they say it correctly and realize that is not what is on the page. Finding a better word is a strategy that encourages learners to use a wider vocabulary in their writing. Learners can be encouraged to find a more specific word, a more engaging word, or a more varied word. Learners can also use examples to improve their writing. A very good, straightforward prompt when you are reading learners' writing is *Can you think of an example?* Depending on the type of writing, learners may need to use more descriptive language. You can play with adjectives and encourage learners to appeal to sight, sound, smell, touch, or even taste.

As learners begin to write longer pieces of writing, they will also need to use connecting words. These can be very simple, such as *and*, *or*, *but*, *so*; they can also be more complicated such as *however*, *yet*, *despite*, *in spite of*, and so on. Learners will also need to use transition words to move from one idea to the next. Using transition words is a higher-level strategy; it goes hand in hand with organizing writing and with writing more than one paragraph. Both using connecting words and transition words can substantially improve a piece of writing. These are also strategies that need to be intentionally taught, and without them learners are

unlikely to be able to write effective texts longer than a few sentences. The last strategy on this chart is to be specific. This is also a higher-level strategy because it requires having enough oral language to be able to choose your words. It also involves understanding the concepts of general and specific. For more information on composition strategies, please see Chapter 6.7.

Activities and approaches for building composition

- use a think aloud to show how you use a composition strategy
- choral write as a class
- use dialogue journals: for more information, please see Chapter 6.11
- give learners level-appropriate models of effective writing
- support all forms of learner writing

2.5.8 FLUENCY

Fluency

Can the learner read and write with accuracy and expression?

- [1] reading / writing rate
- [2] using punctuation
- [3] accuracy
- [4] chunking
- [5] expression
- [6] automaticity

Fluency is the ability to do all of the other literacy skills quickly, accurately, and with automaticity, so that you can focus on expression. As Timothy V. Rasinski and Nancy D. Padak (2013) write, “fluency is the bridge between word recognition and comprehension. It is marked by quick, accurate, and expressive oral reading that the reader understands well.” (p. 70). Fluency is the final skill explored here, but it is not the end-goal of literacy instruction; readers at quite low levels can develop fluency as long as they are engaging with texts at their independent level. This means that they can read the text with 99% accuracy. For more information on reading levels, please see Chapter 4.2.2. Rasinski and Padak (2013) note that “fluency is a relative concept – all readers are more or less fluent depending on the nature and difficulty of the text being read” (p. 79). Fluent readers, no matter their level, can decode a level-appropriate text with ease, comprehend what they are reading, and read the text accurately and with expression. They do not need to spend much cognitive

energy on any of these skills, so they are free to use their minds to wonder about what they are reading, learn from it, be entertained by it, and integrate it into what they already know.

Fluency for writers looks a little different. Developing fluency in writing is an on-going task; even highly skilled writers still struggle with expression with each new text they write. Fluent writers can encode with ease and are comfortable with a lot of composition skills, so they can spend their cognitive energy on content and making their writing as clear, effective, and well-organized as possible, but they will still need to think about what they are writing. Writing is a different skill than reading; since writing is productive, it will never be as automatic as reading.

Reading / writing rate

Your reading rate is how quickly you can decode. Readers need to be able to read quickly enough so that they can store words in their working memory to be able to assemble the meaning of the sentence. If a reader is too slow, he or she will likely forget the beginning of the sentence before reaching the end and comprehension will suffer. Reading rate alone, however, is not useful; readers need to read quickly enough but also with comprehension and expression. Writing rate is less of an issue because learners generally do not write under a time constraint (except for situations such as exams). As long as learners can write quickly enough to be able to express themselves then writing rate is not an issue.

Using punctuation

Punctuation carries a lot of meaning and needs to be explicitly taught. Fluent readers and writers both make use of punctuation. Writers use punctuation in order to clearly express meaning and readers use punctuation to interpret meaning. Readers also use punctuation clues for expression. Punctuation gives readers many clues:

- **Periods, commas, and semi-colons** indicate meaningful chunks of text, showing which words are grouped together and when to pause while reading.
- **Question marks** indicate questions and fluent readers change their intonation at the end of a question (raising the pitch of their voices).
- **Exclamation points** indicate emphasis and fluent readers respond by intensifying the expression in their voices.
- **Quotation marks** often indicate direct speech, which fluent readers respond to with a shift in expression and intonation.
- **Brackets and dashes** indicate extra information and fluent readers change the expression in their voices to show that it is an aside.

Accuracy

One of the key skills of fluency is accuracy; without accuracy, speed and expression alone are not very effective. Note that readers of all levels can be developing their reading fluency as long as they are reading texts that are independent level, which is to say that they can understand 99% of the text. In fact, Timothy Rasinski (2004), who has written widely on reading fluency, argues that “an accuracy level of 90-95 percent is usually considered adequate” (p. 47) when assessing reading fluency. Accuracy indicates that a learner is able to decode the text comfortably; if the learner is less than 90-95% accurate then more work on decoding is needed. Another way of looking at this is that the text is not at the learner’s independent level and is not suitable for fluency practice.

Accuracy in reading means reading what is actually on the page, including inflected endings and function words. It is often more challenging for ESL literacy learners to notice and read unstressed elements of a sentence, such as the function words (words such as auxiliary verbs, like *are*, *is*, *have*, or *were*, or prepositions, such as *in*, *on*, *to*, and *for*.) However these words play a critical role in the overall meaning of the text. As learners become more proficient with reading, they will make fewer errors as they read. A learner will also gain the ability to self-correct, which is evidence that he or she has on-going reading comprehension and is self-monitoring and noticing when something doesn’t make sense. Self-correction should be encouraged, celebrated, and taken as evidence of progression in reading skills. When you are monitoring a learner’s accuracy, it is important to make a distinction between errors that make no sense (such as mistaking *house* for *hammer*) and errors that, while still decoding errors, fit with the overall meaning of the text (such as mistaking *house* for *home*). This second type of error indicates that while an error was made, the learner still has reading comprehension.

Accuracy in writing is also important to produce clear, meaningful text. Although beginning writers will go through a period of using invented spelling and the grammar of their writing will reflect the grammar of their speech, at the stage in which learners are producing fluent writing, they must also be paying attention to accurate writing, including syntax (word order), word endings, spelling, and punctuation. These kinds of errors can get in the way of meaning. However grammar, spelling, and punctuation are not the only thing to consider in fluent writing. A list of three-word sentences that are all grammatically correct may not sound very fluent. Learners must also be able to choose effective vocabulary, use description, find examples, connect their ideas together, and indicate transitions from one idea to the next. These ideas are all explored as composition strategies. For more information on composition strategies, please see Chapter 2.5.7 and Chapter 6.7.

Chunking

Chunking refers to the ability to divide a text into meaningful units. These units can be phrases, clauses, or sentences. Fluent readers read chunks of text rather than word by word. They are able to decode quickly enough and have enough experience with oral language to be able to anticipate the next few words and put meaningful chunks together, pausing at natural places. Readers who are chunking will sound natural, with appropriate sentence stress and intonation; readers who are not chunking tend to sound mechanical, with equal emphasis on each word.

Expression

Fluency also includes expression, which is also referred to as prosody. In reading, expression is the ability to read aloud and sound natural. Readers who are using expression are responding to both grammatical clues and to the meaning of the text. Expressive readers will decode accurately and pay attention to punctuation clues and chunking. This will give their reading accurate sentence stress and intonation. Expressive readers will also respond to the meaning of what they are reading, reflecting emotions in their voices. Expression is not solely for reading out loud; fluent readers will also “hear” the expression of what they are reading when they are reading silently. Expression is part of reading all kinds of texts, both fiction and non-fiction, and even formatted texts, as it leads to a natural intonation. Expression can make it more enjoyable to read, but it is also an effective way to demonstrate ongoing reading comprehension. If learners can use accurate expression when they are reading, they clearly understand the text.

In writing, expression is the ability to effectively say what you want to say, transmitting not just the general content of your message, but also more subtle messages of tone. Expressive writing is about not just *what* you are writing, but also *how* you are writing it, so that the reader does not just understand the content, but also how you as the author feels about the content. This skill is explored more thoroughly as a composition skill. For more information on expression in writing, please see Chapter 2.5.7 and Chapter 6.10.

Automaticity

The final fluency skill is automaticity. Automaticity is the ability to perform most literacy skills with ease; it is the ability to put it all together so that you can quickly and effectively understand meaning when reading or create meaning when writing. Automaticity is often used in connection with decoding, because readers who decode easily can use their energy for comprehension. Rasinski (2004) writes that “readers need to expend as little mental effort as possible in the decoding aspect of reading so that they can use their finite cognitive resources for meaning making” (p. 46). Readers who can decode with automaticity have likely built a very large bank

of sight words and have also internalized decoding strategies, leaving them with plenty of cognitive energy for comprehension. However, aspects of comprehension can also be performed with automaticity, such as comprehension strategies. Previewing, predicting, activating background knowledge, self-monitoring, visualizing, and making connections are all strategies that proficient readers use with complete automaticity. They may not even be aware that they are doing it because they do it so seamlessly and effortlessly.

Automaticity is the ability to perform most literacy skills with ease; it is the ability to put it all together so that you can quickly and effectively understand meaning when reading or create meaning when writing.

It is challenging to build automaticity in writing because writing is such an active process. While it is possible to learn to encode with automaticity and it is possible to internalize some composition strategies, writing will always involve more active engagement than reading. Learners who can write with automaticity likely have a large bank of sight words that they can spell with ease. They will also have internalized encoding strategies to help them spell. They will have enough oral language to support their writing, including a wide vocabulary and a competent use of grammar. They will use punctuation to help construct meaning and they will organize their thoughts. They will also think about composition strategies, working to actively make effective word choices, connect ideas, find examples, or signal transitions.

When learners reach the level of being able to both decode and use comprehension strategies with automaticity, they will have transitioned from *learning to read* to *reading to learn*. They will no longer need to actively work on developing literacy skills; instead they will join the ranks of life-long readers. Similarly, when learners can encode with ease and are familiar with composition skills and strategies they will be writers.

Activities and approaches for building fluency

- work with texts at independent level: for more information, please see Chapter 4.2.2
- read aloud to learners while they follow along
- teach the purpose of punctuation
- choral reading
- repeated reading
- dialogue journals
- dictations

Chapter 3

Creating an effective learning environment

In this chapter we explore:

- creating an effective learning environment
- trauma-informed practice
- building community
- establishing routines

The first component in the Framework of Literacy Skills for Adult ESL Literacy Learners is availability for learning. Availability for learning speaks to the barriers to learning that many adult ESL literacy learners face, including poverty, transportation, lack of childcare, work schedules, and past or current experiences of trauma. It also speaks to the frame of mind that people need to have to be able to learn effectively. It is difficult to learn when you are hungry, exhausted, or anxious. It is difficult to learn when you don't have access to programs, you don't have time, or you don't have childcare. It is difficult to learn when you don't have enough income to cover your basic needs. It is difficult to learn when you don't have safety or stability for yourself or your family.

As an instructor you cannot eliminate all barriers to learning for your learners, but you can work to create a learning environment that responds to the needs of learners and helps to support the right frame of mind for learning. This learning environment includes the physical space: your classroom, how it is arranged, and the resources you have available. It also includes the expectations and attitudes you have towards learners: how do your learners feel when they are in the classroom? How can you foster a classroom environment that is respectful and supports learning?

In this chapter we will explore effective approaches to creating a learning environment. We will look at best practices as well as practical considerations. Some aspects of the learning environment may be outside of our control as instructors, but there are many things that we can do. We may not be able to add windows to our room or plant a garden outside our door, but we can work to make resources accessible, build community, and create routines, and what we can do can have a great impact on learning.

3.1 Physical space

The physical space around you – the classroom and the other spaces in your institution or organization – is one factor that contributes to the learning environment. Physical space is an important part of the environment, but it may be a factor that is more or less outside your control. Every instructor likely has a dream of what the ideal classroom environment looks like but works with the reality of what is available. Still, there are considerations we should be aware of when designing physical space, both in terms of what we can practically create in our classrooms as well as what we can advocate for when considering best practices for teaching adult ESL literacy learners.

3.1.1 ACCESS TO RESOURCES

One of the most important things to consider when designing a classroom for adult ESL literacy learners is access to resources. These resources can include:

- learning resources
- supportive resources
- settlement resources

For many adult ESL literacy learners, your classroom will be their main avenue of access to resources for learning. These resources can vary depending on your program and the level of your learners. Learning resources can include:

- **teaching supplies that support a variety of learning activities:** magnetic letters or letter tiles, word cards, photographs, pocket charts, stones or blocks, sand trays, games, calendars, clocks, play dough, and play money
- **a collection of high interest books or texts at independent and instructional level for your learners:** books, magazines, flyers, instructor-made books, and LEA stories
- **school supplies for your learners:** paper, pens, pencils, erasers, pencil sharpeners, binders, scissors, glue, markers, crayons, coloured pencils, paint, and magazines or other sources of images for creating collages
- **music and videos to support learning:** a collection of music and videos or access to music and videos over the internet
- **technology:** computers, phones, tablets, and cameras
- **storage space:** a place to keep all of these things as well as a place for learners to store their jackets and personal possessions

There are other supportive resources that can help your learners. The first of these resources is access to green space. There is a good deal of evidence to suggest that spending time in nature is beneficial to all people; in particular for learners, spending time in nature lowers stress and anxiety, which helps to lower barriers to learning. As an instructor, you are not likely to be able to add green space to where you teach; you either have it or you don't. However, you may be able to bring some green into your classroom in the form of plants – you can even have your learners grow plants as an excellent piece of project-based learning – or take your learners on a field trip to a park or wild area. A ten-minute walk in the neighbourhood around your school, organization, or institution can help. Other supportive resources include access to a kitchen, a place to relax and gather, a gym, a library, or a place to get support in doing homework.

Another thing to consider in your physical space is access to windows. Windows provide natural light and a connection to the outdoors; generally any learner will benefit from being in a classroom with windows. However there is a special case for adult ESL literacy learners to be in a space with windows. There is a significant number of adult ESL literacy learners who have experienced trauma in their lives; many have been refugees and some may have had the experience of being detained, imprisoned, or tortured. Windowless rooms can be a powerful trigger for trauma, causing anxiety or possibly panic in some learners. If possible advocate for your learners to have access to rooms with windows. For more information on trauma-informed practice, please see Chapter 3.2.1.

You can also help your learners with access to community or settlement resources. Some programs or institutions have counselors to help with personal issues or advisors to help navigate education in Canada. You can build your own awareness of the resources available in your community such as food banks, low-income access to programs and services, the distribution of winter clothing, programs for victims of trauma, and other settlement supports. You can have a notice board for community notices and contact information for programs, services, and supports.

3.1.2 PRINT-RICH ENVIRONMENT

ESL literacy learners at all stages of literacy development will benefit from a print-rich environment. Practically this means that you need to put up print on your walls that is relevant, clear, level-appropriate, and supports learning. At the lowest levels of literacy development the print-rich environment helps learners to develop textual awareness, build some of their first sight words, and support oral language. At higher levels, the print-rich environment supports the development of learning strategies and organization; it also provides models for learners to use. It also gives

At the lowest levels of literacy development the print-rich environment helps learners to develop textual awareness, build some of their first sight words, and support oral language. At higher levels, the print-rich environment supports the development of learning strategies and organization; it also provides models for learners to use.

you an opportunity for easy review and reminders, making connections between what is new and what is known, and can support learners in reflection. The recognition of the value of a print-rich environment to the development of literacy is not new; elementary school classrooms, which specialize in teaching literacy, are often extremely print-rich. As Timothy V. Rasinski and Nancy D. Padak

(2013) write, “a classroom that fosters word learning looks the part. Words are everywhere – labels, children’s writing, chart stories, and other displays. Sometimes children’s attention is purposefully drawn to all this print. Other times, the print is a literate backdrop while children engage in other activities.” (p. 142). A print-rich environment is equally important for ESL literacy learners in an adult setting. As instructors we want to transform our classroom walls into tools to support oral language, literacy, and the literate backdrop for learning.

The print that you choose will depend on the level of your learners and the outcomes of your class. Suggestions for environmental print include:

- **environmental print that supports class routine:**
 - today’s date
 - clock
 - daily agenda
 - class schedule
 - calendar
 - today’s weather
 - classroom agreement
- **environmental print that supports vocabulary and language development:**
 - alphabet
 - labels of classroom objects
 - north, south, east, and west
 - word wall
 - word cards with photographs
 - target phrases
 - routine language
 - common phrases for the classroom
- **environmental print that supports strategies:**
 - poster of target reading strategy: what it is and how it works
 - poster of target writing strategy: what it is and how it works
 - reminder of learning strategies
 - poster of the writing process
- **environmental print that gives models:**
 - effective examples of what you are currently working on

- **environmental print that celebrates achievement:**

- examples of learner work

- **environmental print that gives information:**

- community notices
- upcoming events
- resources
- contact information for key settlement agencies

The print in your classroom is most effective if it routinely engages your learners' attention. You can do this by keeping your environmental print tidy and up to date and by referring to it often. You can build a lot of environmental print into your class routine; you can start each class with today's date, a look at the weather, and the daily agenda. You can routinely post your current vocabulary words so that learners can refer to them during class. You can make posters for the reading strategies you are teaching and refer to them each time you use the strategy. This kind of environmental print builds routine and provides opportunities to recycle language and scaffold activities.

3.1.3 SEATING ARRANGEMENTS

There are many different ways to arrange tables or desks in a classroom. Traditional classrooms typically have desks in rows; this arrangement works well when an instructor is primarily lecturing and the learners are taking notes. However this is not the most effective arrangement for adult ESL literacy learners. It is more effective to choose tables, clusters of desks, or a u-shape with all desks facing the centre. When you arrange your classroom, consider supporting:

- movement
- working in different group sizes
- trauma-informed practice

Adult ESL literacy learners – and probably all learners – learn best when they can move. Your classroom arrangement should allow for free movement so that you can do a variety of learning activities. Your learners will also need to keep their own things organized in the class so that they are not tripping over each other's belongings. Being able to keep your possessions in order in a classroom is a learning strategy; not all adult ESL literacy learners have developed this strategy yet and some learners may spread their possessions out around them. You can help

learners to build this strategy by giving them places for their jackets and personal belongings. You can also keep learning materials in a consistent, organized place.

You will want your learners to be able to work in a variety of group sizes: individually, in partners, or in larger groups. You may also want to be able to create reading groups or learning stations as a routine part of your teaching. You will also want to move around the classroom yourself, working with learners, answering questions, and providing support. This means your seating needs to have some flexibility. Rows of desks generally do not support group work very well. Tables or clusters of desks are a better solution.

Trauma-informed practice also plays a role in seating arrangements in your classroom. Some educators who work specifically with learners who have experienced trauma recommend arranging desks in a u-shape. For more information, please see Chapter 3.2.1. Arranging desks in u-shape is also good practice for any learners who are Deaf or hard of hearing because it makes it easier for them to locate who is speaking.

3.2 Expectations and attitudes to learners

The classroom, or the physical environment, is not the only factor in creating a learning environment. Another important consideration is how the space feels to learners. The first literacy skill discussed in this book is availability for learning. This is the most fundamental of the literacy skills because if learners are not available for learning – if we do not address barriers to learning – then no matter how effective our teaching is, they are not going to be able to develop their language and literacy skills. Learning can only really take place when learners feel safe. We also want our learners to feel engaged, curious, and relaxed. You can help to shape and guide the learning environment with your expectations and attitudes to your learners.

It is worth noting that some expectations for behaviour are different in different cultures. How people show respect to each other can change in different cultures. Examples of cultural differences surrounding behaviour include attitudes towards time and punctuality, how or whether we make eye contact, how we show respect to people of different ages, and our expectations for comfortable personal space. As instructors we can build our awareness about our own cultural expectations, educate ourselves about intercultural competence, and work together with learners to create a productive, respectful, engaging learning space.

3.2.1 TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICE

Adult ESL literacy learners tend to be a very diverse group of people. They come from many different countries in the world and from both urban and rural communities; they speak many different languages, they have different faiths, they range in age, and they include men and women. There are lots of paths that can lead a learner to sit in an adult ESL literacy classroom in Canada. Demographics of learners also change over time, with an influx of learners coming from one place or another. However, despite this diversity, a significant number of adult ESL literacy learners have experienced trauma in their lives and as instructors we need to be aware of trauma-informed practice.

The Alberta Government defines trauma-informed practice in the educational setting. They write: “trauma-informed practice is about creating a school environment where every student feels safe and supported and where staff understand how trauma affects behaviour and emotions” (Alberta Education, n.d.) In trauma-informed practice, as an instructor you are aware of the possibility that your learners have experienced trauma and you take steps to educate yourself and build your awareness of how trauma can affect learning.

There are no studies or statistics for the number of adult ESL literacy learners who have experienced trauma, but many of the reasons that learners are not able to access or complete formal education can also mean that they are exposed to dangerous situations or traumatic experiences. These reasons include poverty, discrimination, war, and famine. Learners may have had experiences such as violence, sexual violence, witnessing violence, being forced to perpetrate violence, imprisonment, torture, loss of loved ones, the separating of families, missing loved ones, being forced to flee their homes, loss of income and possessions, delayed medical care, and many other things.

Many learners who have experienced trauma show tremendous resilience, which is one of the skills in availability for learning. Resilience, the ability to persevere through challenges, is something that we can recognize and celebrate. It is also something that we can have enormous respect for, but it is not something that we should expect from our learners. Instructors should never be in the position of telling learners to be more resilient, for we cannot possibly know what they have experienced, or even what resilience looks like for them. And resilience does not replace the need for support or trauma-informed practice. It is also important to know that resilience can look different for different people and that people who seem very resilient one day may struggle the next.

Another thing to consider is that many of our learners have families or communities that have also experienced trauma, so they are living not just with their own experiences, but also supporting spouses, parents, brothers, sisters, children, or friends as they work to build lives in Canada.

The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture (1998), in Australia, has laid out recovery goals for people with trauma (pp. 73-95):

- [1] Restoring safety, enhancing control and reducing fear and anxiety.
- [2] Restoring attachment and connections and overcoming grief and loss.
- [3] Restoring identity, meaning and purpose.
- [4] Restoring dignity and value.

These goals are critically important but they fall outside of the responsibilities of ESL literacy instructors. We can have a positive impact on the lives of our learners but our goals are educational and we have responsibility to all learners in our class. We need to recognize the difference between trauma treatment and trauma-informed practice. As Joan Miles and Mary-Catherine Bailey-McKenna (2016) argue, “trauma-informed practice is categorically different than trauma treatment” (p. 118). Trauma-informed practice means creating a safe and effective learning environment and using effective teaching strategies.

A safe and effective learning environment for learners who have experienced trauma actually looks very similar to a safe and effective learning environment for all adult ESL literacy learners, and many things in this section about creating a learning environment also apply to working with learners who have experienced trauma. When you are developing a learning environment, consider:

- access to resources
- a print-rich environment
- seating arrangements
- building community
- setting up a classroom that emphasizes respect, dignity, and humanity
- routines
- creating a classroom agreement

Chapter 3 looks at each of these topics in turn. There are two differences to consider when working with learners who have experienced trauma, however. The first difference is in seating arrangements. There are a number of effective seating arrangements for ESL literacy learners, such as clusters of desks or tables, but there is more to consider with learners who have experienced trauma. Some learners may want a clear line to the door and may feel trapped if there are too many things in their way. Some learners may feel unsafe or anxious if they have someone sitting

behind them. One way to handle this is to arrange the desks in a u-shape, facing the centre, so that everyone can see everyone, although the u-shape may not be as effective for group work. Certainly it is good practice, whenever possible, to let learners select their own seats so that they feel comfortable.

The second difference to think about when working with learners who have experienced trauma is environmental triggers for anxiety. There are predictable triggers for trauma that can be found in many learning environments (adapted from CBE, 2016; BC Ministry of Education, 2015):

- dark hallways
- the sound of boots
- fire alarms
- school bells or buzzers
- lock downs or emergency procedures
- changes in routine
- windowless rooms

These can be powerful triggers for trauma for some learners. It will not always be possible to eliminate these triggers but we can work to advocate for our learners with our organizations or institutions, we can minimize the triggers when possible, and we can prepare our learners as best as we can. Some of these triggers can be

It is also good practice to take a few moments, perhaps at the beginning of every class, to situate your learners in the space.

controlled; for example, we can advocate for our learners to be placed in rooms with windows if possible and we can ask for advanced warning for fire alarms or emergency procedures practice. The intent of practicing emergency procedures is to prepare and teach people, not to traumatize them, and a little advanced warning means that we can talk with our learners calmly about what is going to happen. It is also good practice to take a few moments, perhaps at the beginning of every class, to situate your learners in the space. Listen to the sounds around you as a class and identify them: *That is the sound of the class next door. I can hear the children playing on the playground outside. That sounds like a truck on the road.* See what you can see out the windows or even around your room. Take a few deep breaths together.

The effects of trauma on learning

Trauma can have a big impact on learning. The effects of trauma include (adapted from QPASST, 2001, and BC Ministry of Education, 2015):

- difficulty concentrating
- difficulty remembering things
- difficulty sleeping
- tiredness or exhaustion
- nightmares
- headaches, stomach aches, or vomiting
- irritability
- hyper-alertness
- exaggerated startle responses
- persistent memories of traumatic events
- pervasive fear or anxiety
- survival behavior that is not appropriate in the context they are now in
- lasting medical issues
- reluctance to take risks
- pervasive worry about loved ones

In addition to creating a safe and effective learning environment, there are also teaching strategies that can help learners who have experienced trauma. Effective teaching strategies work for learners who have experienced trauma because they promote respect, dignity, and humanity; they recognize that learners are individual humans with individual needs; and they return responsibility and control to learners over their own learning (and lives). These strategies include:

- **Connect learning:** Like all adult learners, learners who have experienced trauma will benefit from clear, transparent communication around their learning. In particular, goal-setting is effective for these learners. Goal-setting works because:
 - It encourages learners to think beyond the immediate present.
 - It affirms that the future will be different than today.
 - It returns power to learners to impact and shape their own lives.
 - It lays the foundation for realistic understanding of pathways in Canada.

- **Differentiate instruction:** Often people who have experienced trauma have been treated as if they are less than human. Differentiated instruction helps to meet individual learning needs but it also helps to establish respect and humanity. Differentiated instruction respects and promotes:
 - decision-making, allowing learners to regain control and be responsible for their own learning
 - goal-setting and reflection, allowing learners to think toward the future again
 - well-being, allowing learners choices if they are feeling anxious, tired, or scared
 - connection, allowing learners to be treated as individual humans

- **Encourage creativity:** Creative activities are particularly effective for learners who have experienced trauma. Creativity allows expression and the opportunity to make something that wasn't there before. It can be very freeing to work creatively if you focus on process rather than product. Creativity also generally lowers affective barriers; learners are less worried about getting it right and more interested in what they are doing. Many researchers and educators who work with refugees recommend encouraging creativity and engaging in creative activities with learners, including Language Instruction Support and Training Network (LISTN), in their publication *Beyond Trauma: Language Learning Strategies for New Canadians Living with Trauma* (2016), and The Queensland Program of Assistance to Survivors of Torture and Trauma (QPASST, 2001).

- **Choose themes and topics intentionally:** There are themes or topics that can be triggers for learners who have experienced trauma and some of these are very common topics in ELL classes, such as *My family* or *Why I came to Canada*. These can be very difficult emotionally for someone who has lost family members or come to Canada because they weren't safe. Be very intentional when you choose themes or topics; allow learners choice in their writing and never require learners to tell their stories. If you do need to teach a topic because of curriculum, one way to approach it is to tell a story (*This is the story of Adam. Adam moved to Canada. Adam moved to Canada because...*) or to talk about yourself and your own experiences (*Here are pictures of my family. This is my mother. She lives in Winnipeg. These are my children.*) These approaches give learners a little distance between what they are learning and their own experiences. They allow learners to choose whether they want to talk about themselves or not. And talking about yourself as their instructor shares your own story and teaches your learners based on their connection with you.

- **Apply classroom rules with compassion and understanding:** Instructors or programs often have rules in the classroom around attendance, punctuality, leaving the classroom, and using cell phones. These rules are there for a reason but when dealing with learners who have experienced trauma (and likely with all learners) it is a good idea to apply rules with compassion and understanding. There are many reasons why an adult ESL literacy learner may be late or absent from your class; depending on your program you may need to report on attendance, but that doesn't mean that you can't show understanding to your learners. Teach them to come in quietly if they are late and use absences as an opportunity to show caring: *"We missed you yesterday!"* Learners may also need to leave the classroom because they are feeling anxious or scared and it is never a good idea to make them feel like they are not allowed to leave. Similarly, learners may want to opt out of a learning activity or may not feel comfortable if you choose their groups for them for group work. As best as possible, allow your learners choice. The last rule is around cell phones; cell phones certainly can be an interruption to class but learners who have experienced trauma often have a lot of anxiety about family members and taking away their cell phones is not going to make them focus better. Try to find a balance with your learners about cell phones; one solution that works for many classes is to allow cell phones to be on the table if they are on silent.

Trauma-informed practice can help to create an effective learning environment for people who have experienced trauma. There are no easy solutions to working with learners. People are different from one another, they are complicated, and teaching requires sensitivity and balance, but if we can base our teaching on a place of compassion and respect we have the possibility of really helping our learners. Trauma-informed practice is not the same thing as trauma treatment, but it can make it possible for learning to take place, and education in language and literacy can be powerful, transformative tools in our learners' lives.

One more thing to consider with trauma-informed practice is that these strategies for teaching and for creating a learning environment do not just help learners who have experienced trauma; they are helpful for everyone. They are good teaching practices for all adult ESL literacy learners and probably for all learners. Since it is not possible for us to always know what our learners have experienced in their lives, it is always a good idea to approach a class with trauma-informed practice and to know that you are making learning easier for all your learners.

3.2.2 SETTING UP A CLASSROOM THAT EMPHASIZES RESPECT, DIGNITY, AND HUMANITY

One of the most important things you can do as an instructor to create an effective learning environment is to build your class on the values of respect, dignity, and humanity. Many adult ESL literacy learners have been denied education in their lives because of who they are, based on their sex, faith, language, ethnicity, or cultural group. Others have not had the opportunity for education because of poverty, and others have had their education interrupted by conflict or war. In all of these situations people may not be treated with respect, dignity, or humanity. In many of these situations these things are stripped away. Treating learners with respect, dignity, and humanity goes toward supporting their availability for learning. It specifically fosters a calm state of being, motivation, and a sense of belonging.

As an instructor you will play an important role in setting the tone of your classroom. You can emphasize respect as a foundational value of your class – the respect you have for your learners, the respect they have for you, and the respect you ask them to have for each other, and at the same time recognize that respect might look different to different people and in different cultures. You can work together with your learners to discuss what respect means to each person in the class and to build consensus around how you would like to treat each other in the classroom. One strategy for having this discussion is to create a classroom agreement. For more information, please see Chapter 3.2.5.

As an instructor you can show respect to your learners in the way you speak to them and, perhaps even more importantly, the way you listen to them. You can educate yourself about barriers to learning and about other cultures; you can also educate yourself about intercultural competence.

Mutually Adaptive Language Paradigm (MALP)

The Mutually Adaptive Language Paradigm (MALP) was developed by Andrea DeCapua and Helaine W. Marshall (2011), researchers and educators in the United States. MALP was designed for working with ESL literacy learners which they call SLIFE (students with limited or interrupted formal education). MALP is an approach that recognizes that culture affects our expectations for school and the ways in which we learn; it recognizes that SLIFE often struggle with learning in their new country because they have different expectations and their learning needs are not being met. DeCapua and Marshall (2011) argue that for learners to be successful in school in their new country, they will need to learn the new educational expectations, but for this to happen the instructor will also need to recognize his or her assumptions and the ways in which the learners learn. In MALP both the instructor and the learners adapt to each other and learn from each other. There is a strong focus on building relationships and creating a classroom environment of mutual respect.

There are three components to MALP (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011):

	Learners' paradigm	Instructor's paradigm
Component A Instructor accepts learners' conditions for learning	immediate relevance interconnectedness	
Component B Learners and instructors combine processes for learning from both paradigms	shared responsibility oral transmission	individual accountability printed word
Component C Learners adapt to classroom activities		academic tasks

You can also teach and model respectful, level-appropriate language in English. Although Canada is a large, diverse country, you can teach learners about some of the expectations and social conventions they might encounter in the school, community, or workplace. For example it can be helpful to share expectations around punctuality or what they can do if they are going to be absent from school or work. You can give learners language for expressing opinions and politely disagreeing with someone. You can also share with learners the expectations for

behaviour in your program or institution. In order to build a respectful classroom environment for all learners, it can be helpful to teach that all people have strengths and challenges in learning (including instructors), all learners have something to contribute and something to learn, all learners have a right to be in the class, and that it is okay to respectfully disagree with each other.

Dignity and humanity are not as easy to explain to your ESL literacy class; instead, you can bring these values into the classroom in the form of the decisions you make about how you teach and how you treat your learners. Strategies for building your classroom on dignity and humanity include:

- Treat all learners fairly.
- Treat yourself fairly; know and respect your own boundaries.
- Model fairness and respect to all, regardless of sex, gender identity, sexual preference, ethnicity, culture, religion, language, or age.
- As best as you can, listen to all learners; when a learner asks something that you can't answer at the moment make an arrangement to discuss it later.
- Speak to learners about issues privately, never in front of the class.
- Speak to learners privately if there is a repeated issue about coming in late, missing class, or not doing homework.
- Be consistent with class rules as best you can but show compassion and understanding to learners.
- Be transparent with what you are teaching and why you are teaching it.
- Give learners many chances to experience success.
- Choose stories and examples that reflect diverse lives.
- Differentiate learning when you can to respect individual learning needs.
- Use a variety of group sizes to suit the needs of different learners: individual work, pair work, and group work.
- Assess what you teach with conditions that support your learners.

Intercultural Competence

As ELL and ESL literacy instructors, we work with people from many different cultures. There is a lot of diversity in our classrooms: learners can be men or women of all ages and have different languages, cultures, religions, ethnicities, sexual orientations, and gender identities. As instructors, we can work to improve our intercultural competence.

Intercultural Competence is a set of attitudes, knowledge, skills, and behaviours to be able to effectively and appropriately work with people from different cultures and experiences than our own. Darla K. Deardorff (2015) writes:

This, then becomes the agreed upon definition of intercultural scholars, that intercultural competence is the *effective* and *appropriate* behaviour and communication in intercultural situations, with *effectiveness* being determined by the individual and the *appropriateness* being determined by the other person(s) in the interaction. Effectiveness (the degree to which one achieves one's goals) is only half the intercultural equation with appropriateness being the other half. (pp. 142-143)

Deardorff (2015) writes of the essential elements of intercultural competence:

- **attitudes:** respect, openness, and curiosity / discovery
- **knowledge:** cultural self-awareness, culture-specific knowledge, deep cultural knowledge, and sociolinguistic awareness
- **skills:** the processing of knowledge, including observing, listening, evaluating, analyzing, interpreting, and relating
- **internal outcomes:** flexibility, adaptability, an ethno-relative perspective, and empathy
- **external outcomes:** visible behaviour and communication of the individual in an intercultural situation

For further information on intercultural competence, you can see resources such as the self-guided professional development materials *Enhancing Intercultural Communicative Competence*, developed by ATESL (Alberta Teachers of ESL).

3.2.3 BUILDING COMMUNITY

Building community is an excellent way to develop a learning environment. This community includes you and your learners as well as other people in your organization, institution, or community. Adult ESL literacy learners often feel isolation in their new lives in Canada; they do not necessarily know many people and because of both their language and literacy skills they are in danger of not being aware of or not being able to access resources around them that could help them. Building community is effective because it breaks down this isolation. This is particularly important in the classroom because while most adult ESL literacy learners are very motivated to learn, they may not yet feel that they belong in school. Including them in a community is a strong way of saying that they are a part of the class and reinforcing that they have a right to be there, they are valued, and they have something to contribute.

Community is also important in an adult ESL literacy classroom because of the different roles of community in different cultures. While community is important to most people in Canada, Canadian culture can be seen as focusing on individuals rather than groups. Many of our learners, however, come from cultures that emphasize the group over the individual.

There are many ways to build community in a classroom:

- demonstrate and encourage respect
- encourage discussion
- model and teach respectful ways to speak: taking turns, agreeing, disagreeing, or asking questions
- use different groups sizes: individual work, pair work, group work, full class work
- use different methods of pairing learners: same ability level and different ability level
- use cooperative learning activities
- play games
- use gentle humour
- encourage learners to help each other from their places of strength
- encourage learners to seek out other people who can help them in the organization or community
- use project-based learning
- encourage friendships
- allow learners to have a say in the topics you teach

- create opportunities for learners to be experts and share their knowledge
- create opportunities to share food together
- celebrate progress together

All people benefit from belonging to respectful communities, but these benefits are especially important in an ESL literacy class because they address the development of language and availability for learning. Learners who are in a classroom community will have more opportunities to speak to each other and develop their language skills. They will also be able to support each other by sharing resources, contacts, and information. They may have languages other than English in common which will let them help each other in a way that you may not be able to do.

Gentle humour can play an effective role in building community. Humour is a wonderful tool in the classroom and the word gentle suggests that it is never intended to hurt anyone; it is never used as a weapon. Humour is effective because it breaks down barriers between people and creates a common (and pleasurable) experience. Humour also catches and engages learners' attention. Like creativity, humour lowers affective barriers, or the barriers to learning. When learners are laughing and having fun they are less worried about getting it right and better able to try, to experiment, to play, and to learn. Humour, when it is authentic and gentle, can also restore a little bit of light-heartedness to a world full of challenges and it can help us to see past difference to the humanity in each other, to make connections with each other, and of course to feel good.

Gentle humour can play an effective role in building community.

There are many ways to incorporate gentle humour into your classroom. Humour is not really something that you can plan but you can recognize and enjoy it when it happens. You can tell stories, watch videos, or listen to things that express a wide range of emotions, including humour. You can intentionally create space for humour by playing games. You can also react to funny things that happen in the class; while it is never a good idea to laugh at learners, you can be willing to gently laugh at yourself, especially if you forget something or make a mistake. Learners can see that you are human too.

3.2.4 ESTABLISHING ROUTINES

Routines are a consistent, predictable rhythm to what you do in class and how you do it. Routines can govern repeated activities, such as how you begin each day. They can determine when we do an activity. They can also help us to learn how we approach a task. Routines are a strong part of a learning environment because they allow us all – instructor and learners – to spend less time on instructions and transitions and more time on learning. There are many benefits to building routines into your classroom, including lowering anxiety, teaching learning strategies, and making it easier to plan.



CLASSROOM TIP

Use weather and date cards each class to build textual awareness, routine language, and sight words.

The strongest reason to build routines, especially for adult ESL literacy learners, is because they lower anxiety; when people have consistent expectations they can predict what is going to happen next. This creates a feeling of safety. It creates predictability for people who may have unpredictable lives. Adult ESL literacy learners generally have not had much experience in formal educational settings. Most things that happen in class are new for them, including basic administrative tasks like taking attendance or handing out papers. There are a lot of new activities and information to take in, along with the new language and the new literacy skills they are developing. Routines will give your learners a chance to rest their minds. As they get to know the routines of the classroom they have little pools of familiarity in their day. They know what to expect. Routines will also give your learners many opportunities to feel successful and over time learners can take on more and more of the responsibility for the class routine. A learner can volunteer to write the date

and weather on the board. A learner can hand out the picture dictionaries. A learner can post the vocabulary words on the wall. A learner can help to support a new learner in the class.

Routines are also an excellent opportunity to teach learning strategies, especially around organization and time management. You can post a calendar, a weekly schedule, and a daily agenda in your class. Depending on the level of your learners, you might want to use clear, repeated symbols or pictures along with a word to show what you are doing. You can also write down the date and weather on the board at the beginning of each class. These routines give you daily opportunities to work on calendar and schedule-reading skills. You can write your agenda for the day on the board and have a learner cross off each item as you complete them, allowing you to work on textual awareness, sight words, and sequencing as well as the learning strategy of planning and checking things off a list.

Following routines are also effective because they make it easier for everyone to plan, including you. Routines give you times in the class that are planned and consistent approaches to tasks; you do not have to constantly invent everything from scratch. This also makes it easier for your learners to plan and over time you can teach them to be prepared for what is happening next: *It is Monday, so let's get out our journals!*

There are many ways to build routines into your class. Anything that you want to consistently do becomes part of your class routine. In particular, consider building routines around:

- **Beginnings, transitions, and endings:** Find consistent ways to begin and end your class and to signal transitions between activities. Beginnings and endings are good places to do routine administrative and scheduling tasks and give opportunities for building routine language.
- **How to approach tasks:** Try to approach tasks in consistent ways so that learners can learn how to do something. You can also spend less time on modeling instructions and more time on teaching this way. If you are developing a reading or writing strategy, build it into your reading or writing routine.
- **Organizing materials:** Build routines for organizing learning materials. This can include where you store books, picture dictionaries, supplies, and so on. Teach your learners to get these resources and return them to the right spot. It can also include learners organizing their own papers in their binders. When you have completed a task, teach your learners where the papers belong, how to put them there, and give them time to do it.

- **Calendars, schedules, and agendas:** Let learners know what is happening in class and when it is happening. Model using these tools every class; work together as a class and work orally and over time learners will develop an understanding of calendars, schedules, and agendas.
- **Learning goals and reflection:** Build learning goals and reflection into your daily routine. This will help with transparency and also with developing goal-setting and reflection skills. Start with very short-term goals. You can write the learning goals for the day on the board, connect each activity to a learning goal as you go through class, and recap them at the end of the class.
- **New words:** Develop a place where you record and examine new words as they come up in class.

3.2.5 CREATING A CLASSROOM AGREEMENT

The learning environment is not something that is solely determined by the instructor. In part, this is simply the way it is because you are one person in a room full of people. You can only help to create an environment. Learners also bring their experiences, behaviors, and personalities to the class and these things are beyond your control. The learning environment also should not be entirely up to the instructor. Learners have a right to help shape their own learning space. There are many ways to involve learners in building the learning environment and the more they are heard and the more input they have, the more likely they will be to engage in the environment and make it their own.

One tool for eliciting learner input in the classroom environment is to create a classroom agreement together. This works with learners who have enough oral language to be able to talk about what they would like for their learning space. A classroom agreement is a set of guidelines for how people will behave in class. It is authored by the entire class and is signed by every member of the class, including the instructor. The idea behind a classroom agreement is not to make a list of rules so much as to express the collective values for the classroom. It is best if it is done in positive language, rather than a list of what not to do. A classroom agreement can also be a way of teaching some classroom expectations, such as bringing your books every day or taking turns.

Some examples of things that may be on a classroom agreement include:

- listen when other people are speaking
- call the instructor if you are late
- keep our classroom tidy
- respect each other
- ask if you have questions
- bring your binder every day
- tell the instructor ahead of time when you have to leave early
- work with other learners

At low levels, a classroom agreement can be written in the first person and made into a poster with visuals:

- I come to school at 9:00.
- I bring my pencil.
- I bring my binder.
- I bring my glasses.

Chapter 4

Planning Instruction

In this chapter we explore:

- connecting learning to outcomes, needs, and assessment
- making learning relevant and authentic
- goal-setting, reflection, and pathways
- connecting instruction to the level of the learner: cognitive load, instructional level, scaffolding, and differentiation

Effective instruction for adult ESL literacy learners does not happen in isolation and teaching is never something that solely rests with the instructor. As instructors we can work to improve our understanding and our practice and we can learn effective approaches, but good teaching is always a conversation between the instructor and the learners and is always related to the context of the learning.

Good instruction is connected to the outcomes of the course, level, or program, and considers how these outcomes are going to be assessed. Effective lesson and unit planning begins with the outcomes and works backwards through assessment to what you are going to teach and how you are going to teach it. Good instruction is also responsive to the learners, to their needs, interests, questions, and abilities.

This means that we need to make sure that we connect our instruction to outcomes and assessment; it also means that we need to consider learner needs in designing those outcomes and choosing how we are going to reach them. We also need to connect our instruction to goal-setting, reflection, and an awareness of pathways for our learners and we need to work to be transparent with our learners so that, as best as possible, they know what they are learning, why they are learning it, and what it will help them to do. It is worth noting that many of these concepts may be challenging for ESL literacy learners, especially at lower levels, and transparency is only effective if it is understandable. You may need to work on goal-setting, reflection, and transparency over time as your learners develop their language and literacy abilities.

Good instruction is also connected to the level of individual learners. In order for learning to take place, learners need instruction that is targeted at the right level for their skills and abilities. While this is good teaching practice for all learners, it is especially true for ESL literacy learners because they do not have the literacy skills to acquire knowledge independently through reading. Hitting the right level in learning to read is critically important; learning can only happen with texts that are within range of the learner's ability.

In this chapter we will discuss connecting instruction to needs, outcomes, assessment, and goals; we will also discuss making learning relevant and authentic, transparent, and connected to future pathways for learners. We will then talk about connecting instruction to the level of your learners, including an exploration of cognitive load, reading at instructional level, scaffolding, recycling, and differentiating instruction.

4.1 Making instruction intentional

ESL literacy learners come to our classrooms as adults, with a wide range of knowledge and experience behind them. Our learners have often had experiences that we have not had, have been to places that we have never seen, and speak languages that we do not speak. We may also share a lot in common with our learners; one of the delights of working as an ESL literacy instructor is to find common ground with people from very different places.

ESL literacy learners also have a large learning task ahead of them. They are learning to speak the English language, develop literacy skills, and build their knowledge and understanding of the world. And they are doing this as adults, with adult responsibilities to themselves, their families, or their communities, as they build lives in a new country. This is a challenging task and it is very important, as learners develop language, literacy, and knowledge, that we connect this learning to their lives so that it is meaningful and helps them to reach their goals. Learning is not a string of unrelated facts; it is a connected and inter-dependent set of skills and strategies with real impact on learners' lives.

The content of what you teach in class should be connected to three different things:

- the outcomes of your level, class, or program
- the needs of your learners
- how you are going to assess the outcomes

You want your teaching – the choices you make every day, the learning activities you do, the scaffolding you design, and the skills and strategies you teach – to be intentional. They should all fit together to reach the outcomes, with enough wiggle room to respond to your actual learners, the people who are in front of you.

Once you have achieved a balance between the outcomes of your class and a needs assessment of your learners, you have worked together to incorporate their interests into the classroom, and you have planned your assessment, you need to connect the teaching you do every day to these needs and outcomes. Plan with the end in mind; begin with the outcomes and then decide how you can best reach them. You want your teaching – the choices you make every day, the learning activities you do, the scaffolding you design, and the skills and strategies you teach – to be intentional. They should all fit together to reach the outcomes, with enough

wiggle room to respond to your actual learners, the people who are in front of you. Making your instruction intentional also means making your teaching relevant and authentic and transparent to your learners so that they know what they are learning and why they are learning it; they can develop an understanding of goal-setting and reflection, and they can see how their learning fits into future pathways.

4.1.1 CONNECTING LEARNING TO OUTCOMES

Outcomes are the learning goals of a course; they are a description of what your learners should be able to do once they have successfully completed the level. Some instructors are in contexts where they can choose what they are teaching in class; if this is your situation, you can assess the needs of your learners, design language and literacy outcomes, and choose how you will assess the outcomes. This gives you a large amount of freedom in your classroom but can be a little daunting. For support in designing outcomes for ESL literacy learners, you can work with the Framework of Literacy Skills for Adult ESL Literacy Learners. You can also see *Learning for LIFE: An ESL Literacy Curriculum Framework* (Bow Valley College, 2011) for information on connecting learning to outcomes and you can work with the Canadian Language Benchmarks for language outcomes.

Most instructors, however, do not have control over the outcomes of their class; these outcomes, and often the curriculum, are determined for them. If this is your situation, you still need to connect the activities you do each day with these outcomes and what your learners need to work on. Effective instruction means an intentional connection between the needs of the learners, the outcomes of the class, what you teach each day, and how you assess it.

4.1.2 CONNECTING LEARNING TO NEEDS

Learner needs are a complicated topic. Often curriculum is designed for the benefit of learners without engaging them in the process of deciding what they need to know. Traditionally, a learner arrives in a class and meets an instructor who has already laid out a set of outcomes, a curriculum, and learning materials for the course. However there have also been movements in the field of education to include learners in determining and building their own curriculum, responding to questions they have, situations they find themselves in, or challenges they face. One of the key figures in these movements was Paulo Freire (1970, 1981), a Brazilian educator who argued that traditional approaches to adult literacy education perpetuated a marginalization of the learner by maintaining the instructor as expert and literacy as something chosen by others and imposed upon the learners. Instead,

he engaged learners in discussion around difficulties in their lives and worked with them to develop the literacy skills to be able to challenge their circumstances and improve their living conditions. He encouraged the view of literacy as a means for social change.

This movement to include learners in creating curriculum has continued. Another approach is emergent curriculum. *In Making Meaning, Making Change: Participatory Curriculum Development for Adult ESL Literacy*, Elsa Roberts Auerbach (1992) builds on Freire's work and argues for participatory curriculum, in which "the curriculum emerges as a result of an ongoing, collaborative investigation of critical themes in students' lives" (p. 22). In this approach, curriculum is built together with learners over the course to help with challenges they are facing. Literacy skills are developed as tools in response to learners' lives. More recently in the public K-12 school system in Canada there has also been a movement to include learners as curriculum-builders with a shift toward inquiry-based learning.

The responsibility for the determination of curriculum and outcomes cannot be entirely shifted to learners, however. While learners may come to class and be able to articulate how they would like to use literacy, they are not likely to be able to tell you *what* they need to know in order to do that. Learners simply do not have the basis for analyzing literacy skills. Some of the immediate literacy goals of learners may also be quite out of reach; a learner can come to class with the goal of writing an email to his landlord but might still be at the level of copying letters. He can reach his goal, but he needs to do a lot of literacy development before he gets there. As an ESL literacy instructor, your task is to understand the process of developing language and literacy skills for adult ESL literacy learners so that you can guide your learners along their path, helping them to develop the skills and strategies so that they can reach their goals.

Another way to recognize learner needs is to conduct a needs assessment. Needs assessments can take different forms. Sometimes needs assessments are done on a community of potential learners in order to recognize needs and identify gaps in currently available programs, with the purpose of designing programs to meet those needs. Learners are also often given assessments in order to place them in language or literacy classes. Effective placement assessments can give you a picture of where a learner is in his or her development of language and literacy, but they are not needs assessments in the sense that they rarely ask learners what they want to learn or how they want to use language and literacy in their lives. Placement assessments are often connected to a particular program or institution and are implemented with the goal of finding the right class for the learner, not to design curriculum.

Instructors may also give their learners needs assessments, either at the beginning of the class or related to a particular learning task as a form of pre-test to help determine what you are going to teach. In Portfolio-Based Learning Assessment, a national standard in Canada, instructors must conduct needs assessment. In their publication *Portfolio-Based Language Assessment: Guide for Teachers and Programs* (2014), the CCLB write that needs assessments are “fundamental to the PBLA approach” and recommend that they are revisited periodically to “monitor progress and capture new needs.” They state that the results of needs assessments of the individual learner and the class belong in the portfolio “as a basis for discussions throughout the term about how their needs are being met in their class” (pp. 25-26). However, as Auerbach (1992) points out, most of these needs assessments “very often **follow** the formulation of the syllabus” (p. 21, emphasis added). Developing outcomes and planning curriculum before conducting a needs assessment makes it more difficult to incorporate the needs of the learners into the course material.

In an effective ESL literacy classroom, there should be a balance between the planning and experience of the instructor and the knowledge, strengths, experiences, and needs of the learners.

This should not undercut the importance of recognizing your learners’ needs and responding to their challenges, interests, and curiosity. However, if you are doing a needs assessment in class, you should know what you are asking, why you are asking it, and how you intend to use that information to inform your teaching. In an effective ESL literacy classroom, there should be a balance between the planning and experience of the instructor and the knowledge, strengths, experiences, and needs of the learners. Instructors bring the understanding of the development of language and literacy, as well as the readiness to discuss content such as settlement issues, culture, history, and other things learners might want to investigate. There must also be room in the curriculum for the needs of the learners as well as their interests. There should be space not just to react to challenges in learners’ lives, but also for wonder and curiosity.

In the classroom: Completing a needs assessment with ESL literacy learners

Li teaches a class of ESL literacy learners in a LINC program. His learners have CLB 2-3 in speaking. They are learning to decode and are developing their first sight words. Li completes a needs assessment with his learners every term. While the outcomes for his class are set by his program, he has some room in his planning to respond to his learners' needs and curiosity. Li finds that curiosity is a powerful tool for learning.

Li begins the needs assessment by asking his learners to tell him where they need to use English. Li writes their ideas down on the board. He then shows them a slideshow he has made with pictures and names of places where learners need to use English. He has places like the doctor, school, grocery store, and so on. Most of his learners' suggestions are in his slideshow, but there are a few ideas Li hasn't thought of. Li then hangs up posters he has made around the room. Each poster has a picture and name from the slideshow. He also has a couple of blank posters and he writes down any suggestions from the learners that were not in his slideshow. Li has his learners write their names on three sticky notes. The learners walk around the room and put their sticky notes on the three posters that are most important for them.

Li hands out worksheets he has made with the pictures and names from the slideshow. He has his learners cut the pictures out. They find the three that are most important to them and glue them onto their own sheet of paper. At the top of the sheet of paper it says: *I need English for*

Li helps his learners to file their needs assessment in their PBLA (Portfolio-Based Language Assessment) binders. He looks around at the posters and sees which are the most popular topics. He uses this information to help plan his instruction and spends more time on the topics that interest his learners the most.

4.1.3 CONNECTING LEARNING TO ASSESSMENT

Outcomes and learning activities must also be connected to assessment. When you are teaching an outcome you should already know how you are going to assess it. What defines success? Think about what you would like your learners to be able to do and under what conditions. Adult ESL literacy learners do not have a lot of experience with formal education and similarly with traditional forms of assessment, such as tests. Assessment plays several roles; it allows you to measure learning, but

it also teaches learners a range of learning strategies, including what assessment is, how to prepare for assessment, how to correct mistakes, how to read questions, and how to organize information.

Adult ESL literacy learners generally have difficulty with transferring knowledge from one context to another. This is likely because transference involves a level of abstraction and generalization that usually comes with further education and because the cognitive load of what they are doing is already extremely high; tasks they do in school involve new literacy skills in a new language. There is already so much to remember that it is very difficult to complete a task under new conditions or using different language.

When you are assessing your ESL literacy learners, consider the following:

- **Assess your outcomes:** The assessment should match the outcomes of your program, class, or level.
- **Assess what you teach:** The assessment should match your teaching, what you have been doing with your learners in class.
- **Assess a familiar task:** The assessment should match the tasks you have been practicing, including the language, format, pictures, and literacy skills. At lower levels, the assessment may match practice tasks exactly. At higher levels, you may change the order or use slightly different (but still equally familiar) language.
- **Provide the same level of scaffolding:** The assessment should be completed under similar conditions and have the same level of scaffolding as the practice task.
- **Record the conditions of the assessment:** In order to build an accurate picture of what your learners can do, record the conditions of the assessment, including any scaffolding, along with the results of the assessment.
- **Set learners up for success:** The ultimate goal of ESL literacy instruction is the development of literacy and language skills, not the achievement of a specific grade. Help learners to keep assessment in perspective as a learning tool; focus on what can be learned from an assessment and give learners opportunities to repeat assessments if possible or necessary in order to reach a point of success.

There are three different kinds of assessment to consider. The first is summative assessment, which is also known as assessment **of** learning. Summative assessment is the kind of assessment that measures how much a learner has learned and what a learner can now do. It usually comes at the end of a class or learning unit. Summative assessment includes tests or exams, but it can also take the form of a task.

The second is formative assessment, or assessment **for** learning. Formative assessment is the sort of assessment that tests what learners already can or cannot do in order to plan further instruction. Formative assessments can be tests or tasks; they can also be checklists, needs assessments, less formal oral discussions, class brainstorm about a topic, or something like a KWL (Ogle, 1986). A KWL is a chart that has three columns: Know, Want to Know, and Learned. Learners (individually, in groups, or as a class) fill in what they already know about a topic, what they want to know, and then, afterward, what they have learned.

The third type of assessment is self-assessment, or assessment **as** learning. In this type of assessment, learners reflect on their own work and look for places for improvement. Assessment as learning can include checklists or other forms of guided reflection.

Portfolio-Based Language Assessment is a national standard for the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLBs). This means that learners in Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) classes, or any learners who receive CLBs, must have a portfolio. Each portfolio has information including an autobiography (which can also be pictorial), a needs assessment, and initial language samples. The portfolio also includes artifacts for listening, speaking, reading, and writing. These artifacts are evidence of learning and can include assessments or tasks. It is important that the artifacts demonstrate learning so they must include a description of the task and the conditions under which the task was performed. Artifacts in PBLA do not need to be tests; they can be an assortment of tasks which the learner has completed. One of the goals of PBLA is transparency so that both instructors and learners can see what the learner is able to do. A minimum of eight to ten artifacts per strand is considered sufficient to demonstrate that a learner has completed a benchmark.

PBLA can also work for ESL literacy learners who receive CLBs, with the same principles: the portfolio contains a collection of artifacts to demonstrate learning. Because of the higher level of scaffolding for ESL literacy instruction, it is particularly important to record the conditions of the assessment. You may also want to include photographs in the portfolio as many tasks in ESL literacy classrooms are not paper-based. You can also include audio and video recordings in order to demonstrate learning. It is important to note that PBLA is designed to measure progress with the development of language, not literacy skills; however you may find it helpful both to you and your learners to describe the literacy skills that are embedded in the tasks in order to measure literacy learning.

As you consider assessment, criteria for success, and conditions of an assessment, also think about the amount of scaffolding (support) that you have built for your learners. This should be reflected in the assessment as part of the conditions and over time you should be working to gradually remove the scaffolding so that

learners can achieve the outcome independently. This is not a fast process and you should not rush to remove scaffolding, but until the point that learners are truly working independently the support needs to be recorded under the conditions of the assessment. For example, if your learners are working with a word bank or sentence stems, this should be recorded as a condition. For more information on scaffolding, please see Chapter 4.2.3.

In the classroom: Creating a portfolio with ESL literacy learners

Anne teaches CLB 1 in a LINC program for ESL literacy learners. Her learners have a PBLA (Portfolio-Based Language Assessment) binder to record their progress in language development. Anne likes the idea of creating a portfolio with her learners to demonstrate their learning and wants the portfolio to be a rich collection of artifacts. She also wants the portfolio to be meaningful both for the learners and for future instructors.

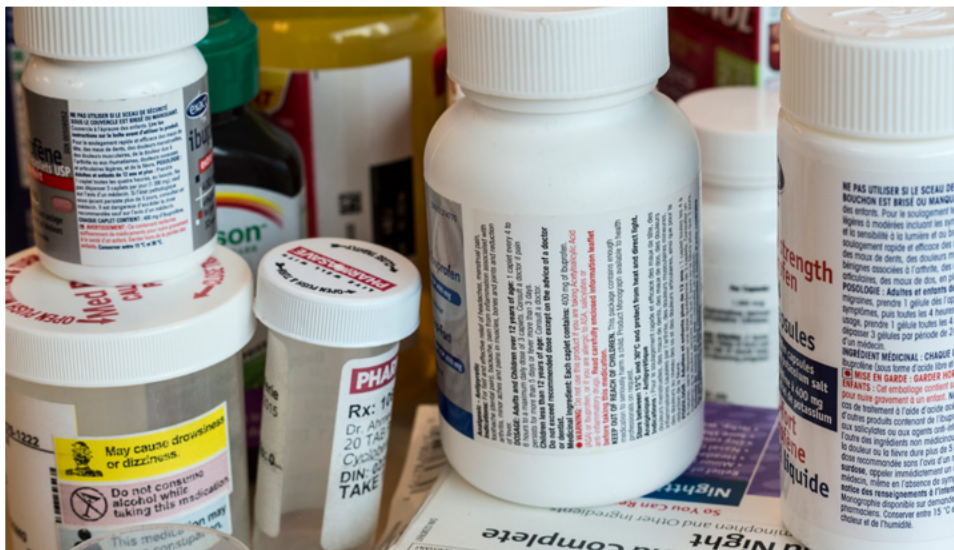
Anne does a wide range of tasks and learning activities with her class. Some of the tasks involve reading and writing. Many of the tasks, including literacy tasks, involve movement, singing, and working with real objects. Anne creates two kinds of documents to record artifacts and helps her learners to file these documents into their PBLA binders.

The first kind is for paper-based activities. At the bottom of each artifact, Anne lists the outcomes, the conditions of the task, the criteria for success, and the learner's grade. This information is helpful for future instructors and to support decisions about assigning benchmarks. Anne also gives the learners feedback in a way that is meaningful to them. In her class, this means that she speaks to the learners while they are doing the task.

Anne also creates another document for non-paper-based tasks and activities. This document has space for a description of the task, the outcomes, the conditions of the task, the criteria for success, and the learner's grade. She then finds a way to record her learners' work. Often this means that she takes a photograph. This works especially well for tasks involving movement and objects. It also really helps her learners to remember the task when they look at their portfolios. She also does audio or video recordings. She has a few options for these types of artifacts. She can keep them on her work computer and access when needed; she can also create a memory stick for each learner and keep it in their PBLA binder.

4.1.4 RELEVANT AND AUTHENTIC LEARNING

Classroom learning must be connected to the needs of the learners, the outcomes of the class, and assessment. It should also be connected to the lives of the learners. Effective ESL literacy instruction is relevant and, as best as possible, authentic. Many researchers cite the importance of motivation in adult ESL literacy education and argue for relevant learning tasks as a key factor in building and maintaining motivation. Learners need to see that literacy is for them, that it meets their needs, and that it has a useful purpose. Often learners begin ESL literacy classes with high motivation. They may have been waiting a very long time to have the opportunity to go to school and the realities of life in Canada with limited English and literacy skills are very challenging. Many learners maintain a high level of motivation throughout their education. For some, though, motivation can wane as they begin to realize that learning a language and developing literacy will take time and other demands on their energy take over. If learners can stay in ESL literacy classes, the benefits to themselves, their families, and their communities are high, but they often have many immediate responsibilities beyond their own education. Relevant and authentic material can help learners to see why literacy will be personally meaningful to them.



CLASSROOM TIP

Using authentic language in a supported environment can help learners connect learning to their lives.

The skills in the Framework of Literacy Skills are relevant in the sense that they are the tools of learning to read and write, but it is easier to demonstrate their relevance to learners when they are connected to a relevant task or relevant content. Some reading and writing tasks are immediately useful to adult ESL literacy learners, such

as reading a calendar or a schedule, reading directions on a medication bottle, filling in a permission form for your children's school, or finding your healthcare number on your card. Another way to demonstrate relevance is in the content of the reading or writing task. Work with language that your learners need right away. Develop the vocabulary for housing, health care, children's schools, employment, or citizenship. The content of your teaching can also be a way to incorporate what you learn on a needs assessment from your learners. For more information on needs assessments, please see Chapter 4.1.2.

It is also important to consider learning tasks and material that are authentic. Authentic material is material that you will find in the real world. It has not been adapted for learners. Examples of authentic material include:

- housing ads
- a credit card statement
- a phone bill
- an invitation
- a form from school
- a notice at work
- a schedule
- a bus timetable
- a medication bottle
- maps of the city, province, or country
- weather page on an app or website

Learners benefit from exposure to authentic materials because they see things as they really appear in their lives, which helps to make learning relevant. Learners can see the connection between what they are learning in class and how they can use it. However there are many challenges to using authentic materials. The level of language, the formatting, and conventions such as abbreviations can all be far above the level of the learners. In order for learning to happen, learners need to be working at instructional level, which means they can read 95% of the material.

Using authentic material

Authentic material is often too challenging. One way to address this and still incorporate authentic material into your teaching is to use the materials as a jumping off point for a lesson or a unit. For example, if you are teaching a unit on reading a phone bill, over a number of days or weeks, you can:

- begin with a selection of authentic phone bills from different providers spread out on a table
- ask learners what they know about phone bills
- elicit key language about phone bills
- examine the authentic bills and generate questions to explore
- develop oral language and vocabulary
- work on literacy skills using adapted, level-appropriate phone bills
- assess learning based on the adapted, level-appropriate phone bills
- return to the authentic bills and identify some key information together as a class

4.1.5 GOAL-SETTING AND REFLECTION

Goal-setting and reflection are both essential parts of learning, but they need to be explicitly taught and then modelled in an ESL literacy classroom. Goal-setting and reflection help to support learners to engage in learning; they are a process of both looking forwards and backwards in time, measuring progress, making choices, adjusting course, and celebrating achievement. Goal-setting and reflection help learners to connect learning to what they want to achieve in their lives and to what they have already learned. Goal-setting and reflection can also allow learners to feel in control of their learning, although the development of this sense requires support and time.

ESL literacy learners have had a variety of experiences in life. Many have experienced poverty, war, displacement, and violence; many have had to focus on daily survival, often for years and years, with little power to change their situations or the lives of their families. When you live by trying to survive from moment to moment, active plans for the future fade in the face of immediate need and deep uncertainty about tomorrow. This means that ESL literacy learners do not always have experience with goal-setting and reflection and particularly how they can be used as an active part of learning.

Goal-setting and reflection have many benefits for learners:

- They encourage learners to think beyond the immediate present.
- They affirm that the future will be different than today.
- They return power to learners to impact and shape their own lives.
- They demonstrate that learning is a process that takes time.
- They help learners to measure their progress and reach new places in their learning.
- They help learners to celebrate success.
- They lay the foundation for a realistic understanding of pathways in Canada.

There are criteria for effective goals; a good goal is something that you can achieve within a set period of time. It is also specific enough that you will know when you have achieved it. It will take time and support for learners to learn how to phrase their goals in ways that are specific enough to measure and achieve. *Getting better at reading* is a common goal for ESL literacy learners, and understandably so, but it is not a measurable goal. How will you know when you get there? What will success look like? *Reading Goodnight Moon to my daughter at bedtime* is a more specific, achievable goal. So is *Reading my own schedule at work and knowing when my shifts are*. These goals are specific, they are within reach (depending on the level of the learner), and you know when you have done them.

First goals should be:

- relevant to the learner
- relevant to the learning
- concrete
- specific
- achievable
- very short-term
- posted in a clear place
- referred to frequently

When you are teaching goal-setting, begin with very short-term goals. You can start by setting learning goals for the class for the day. You can write the goals in a corner of the board and refer back to them during the class. At the end of the class, lead your learners in an oral reflection. What were the learning goals for today? Did you achieve them? How did it go? When learners begin to understand the idea, you can elicit goals from them instead. Eventually you can support learners to choose a

short-term goal for themselves and help them to follow up and reflect on whether they achieved their goal. First short-term learning goals will depend on the level of your learners, but ideas include:

- match all of my vocabulary words to the pictures
- speak in class three times today
- write my name without copying
- read a whole book during pleasure reading
- write two sentences in my dialogue journal
- score 8/10 on a spelling test
- bring my binder to school every day this week
- read a story to my partner

Learners at higher levels will be able to handle more goal-setting on their own, but this should still be a supported process, not only to meet the literacy needs of your learners, but also because goal-setting is most effective when we are accountable to each other. You can choose a time in class for setting a learning goal for the week, discussing the goal with a partner, and reflecting on the learning goal from last week. Remind learners of their goals frequently; check back in and reflect on the process.

Learners will also set goals that are long-term. It is important for adults to have long-term goals. They can include goals that are:

- financial (*I want to buy a home*)
- educational (*I want to get my GED*)
- civic (*I want to become a citizen*)
- related to settlement (*I want to get my driver's license*)
- related to family (*I want my children to finish school, or I want to sponsor my brother*)
- related to employment (*I want to be a mechanic or I want to get a job as a cashier*)

Continue to work on short-term learning goals with your learners, but encourage them to think about the future and help them to break long-term goals down into steps. They will need to know realistically what it takes to reach these goals so that they can plan. Sometimes learners will have what may appear to be a very unrealistic goal, such as *I want to be a doctor*. It is never your place as an instructor to challenge someone's dreams. Try discussing the goal with the learner and find out what part of the goal they really like. There may be ways to achieve a similar feeling with a related goal. For example, someone who wants to be a doctor may really want to help people and work in a hospital or a clinic. There are other ways to do

that. You can also help your learner to understand the steps in reaching that goal and the length of time it will take. Then refocus on short-term learning goals. The rest is up to them. For more information on pathways, please see Chapter 4.1.7.

Reflection is an essential part of goal-setting and the learning process. Reflection is the act of looking at what you have done and evaluating what was successful and what you could improve or do differently next time. It is a way of measuring your own learning and it has many benefits. Reflection teaches learners to:

- think about criteria for success
- evaluate what they have achieved
- realize that there are different aspects to a task
- identify things they can improve
- recognize that learning is a continuum
- think about the next steps in learning
- recognize strengths and challenges
- celebrate achievement

For learners who are not familiar with reflection, it can be a complicated process at first, because it involves unpacking the different aspects of a task, identifying the criteria for success for each of these aspects, and measuring your own achievement against those criteria. That is a lot. Start reflection together as a class and do it orally. How did that go? What was easy? What was hard? What did you do well? How can you make it better? They also need to know that mistakes are part of the learning process, which leads to two very important questions in reflection:

- What will you do the same next time?
- What will you do differently next time?

In this way, reflection is a critical part of goal-setting; reflection allows learners to evaluate their learning goals and to set new, relevant goals. Over time, as learners improve their literacy skills and their reflection skills, you can ask more specific reflection questions about the task and you can have learners write their reflections. Scaffolding such as sentence stems or pictures can make it easier for learners to write their reflections.

In the classroom: Goal-setting and reflection

Etienne teaches a CLB 2 class that has a lot of ESL literacy learners in it. He thinks that goal-setting and reflection are an important part of learning for all of his learners, both non-literacy ELL learners and ESL literacy learners. His learners do not have much experience with goal-setting so he begins with daily goals for the class. At the beginning of every class he writes two or three daily learning goals in a corner of the board. This also helps him to clarify for himself and for the learners the point of what they are doing each day. As they work on each activity, he asks the learners which goal they are working towards. At the end of the day, he goes over the learning goals with his class. This is a good time to review and to reflect on how the class went. As his learners grow more confident with goal-setting, he begins to elicit goals from them. About half-way through the semester they start to choose personal weekly learning goals.

Etienne is also working on reflection. His learners do not have very high oral skills and cannot complete written reflections. He uses a simple red-yellow-green system with his learners. Each learner has a red, yellow, and green card in a pocket in the front of their binders. Etienne frequently asks learners to reflect on their understanding: Red means they don't understand at all. Yellow means they still need help with this. Green means they feel confident about this. Etienne and his learners use this system all the time: for reading texts, writing tasks, vocabulary, listening, and so on. Soon the language of red-yellow-green creeps into the classroom and Etienne hears things like, *Teacher, help me, I'm red* or *Etienne, I'm green on this, what's next?*

4.1.6 TRANSPARENCY

Transparency is the practice of clear and open communication between the instructor and learners about the learning in the classroom. It is an important part of building connections in learning because it lets learners know what they are learning, why they are learning it, how it is being assessed, and how it is connected to the outcomes of the course, to past learning, and to their own lives. Transparency will look different at different levels of language and literacy; it is a little easier to be transparent with learners with higher language skills and higher literacy skills. However you can also teach the lowest levels of language and literacy classes with transparency in mind and find opportunities to be clear about what you are learning and why.

There are many different ways to build transparency into your teaching. Ideas for transparency include:

- **Be intentional in your teaching choices:** Know why you are doing what you are doing. Know why an activity is important and what skills and strategies you are building. Use class time wisely and effectively.
- **Be clear about outcomes:** List outcomes in an accessible place in the classroom in learner-friendly language. These can be phrased as I can statements, such as *I can write a list* or *I can read instructions*. Read the outcome you are working on out loud to learners. Write the outcome on the bottom of each paper-based activity you do. Refer to outcomes when you reflect as a class after an activity.
- **Be prepared to explain:** Adult learners will want to know what they are learning and why. Be prepared to take these questions seriously and give them a thoughtful response. Some ESL literacy learners have not had any experience in a classroom so they will not know what to expect or why an activity is important. Other learners may have had experiences in very different educational settings. If they have not been asked before to work in groups, play games, go on field trips, or work with hands-on materials they may not see this as “serious” learning. Be prepared to explain the purpose of what you are doing.
- **Build making connections into your classroom routines:** However you choose to build connections with your learners, whether it is goal-setting, reflection, transparency, authenticity, and so on, make it a part of your classroom routine. You may not be able to incorporate all ideas for building connections at once; instead, choose a few approaches that work for you and your learners and do them well. Making something part of your consistent classroom routine will help learners to understand its importance.

- **Tell learners how you will assess them:** Explain what you are looking for. Show them models of an effective task before they do the task and while they are doing it. Point out what makes it successful. This can be done with all kinds of tasks, whether or not they are written down.
- **Elicit task criteria from learners:** Once learners become familiar with a task, you can ask your learners how it should be assessed. What are you looking for? What do they need to remember to do? What makes it effective?
- **Explain the requirements for success in the class and let learners know how they are doing:** Let learners know what they need to be able to do to move to the next level. Check in with learners periodically to let them know how they are doing. Give them concrete feedback. Explain that language and literacy learning take time.
- **Use descriptive feedback:** When you respond to your learners' work, give them concrete, specific, descriptive feedback on what they did well and what they can improve. Avoid flat, vague responses such as "good work!" With ESL literacy learners, give most feedback orally.
- **Help learners understand learning as a process:** Help learners to understand the pathways ahead of them. Explain the levels of classes in your program and what they can expect when they finish. Let them know the choices they have. Be prepared to return to these conversations many times as learners develop their understanding.

4.1.7 AWARENESS OF PATHWAYS

As you build connections with your learners you also need to be aware of pathways beyond your ESL literacy class. Developing program goals, pathways, and exit points is usually the responsibility of a program coordinator, not individual instructors; however, instructors should be aware of pathways and the placement of their particular class in those pathways. In an effective ESL literacy program the ultimate goals of the program are clear to all involved and when possible there are connections to next steps in learning.

Common next steps for ESL literacy learners can include:

- transitioning into another school or a community program
- transitioning into non-literacy ELL classes
- transitioning into basic education or upgrading classes
- transitioning into a career program
- transitioning into employment (this could also mean a better job, better hours, or keeping the job for a longer period of time)

An ESL literacy program has clear learning goals and a sense of what learners can do when they complete the program. Some programs have articulation agreements with non-literacy ELL classes, basic education, or career programs, so that learners who successfully complete the program can move into the next step. Some programs are designed to include ESL literacy and language development with the development of other skills, such as family literacy or workplace programs. Some programs support learners with employment skills such as job-seeking, resumes and job applications, interviewing, and keeping employment.

One of the underlying questions to determining program goals and the development of pathways is how we define success for ESL literacy learners. This is not an easy question to answer, because while some benefits of ESL literacy education are easy to identify and measure – moving into non-literacy ELL classes, basic education or upgrading classes, successfully completing further programs, or finding or retaining employment – other benefits are not so easily measured. This does not mean they are less valuable.

As learners develop language and literacy skills, there are many benefits to themselves, their families, and their communities:

- **increased ability to access services independently:** go to the store, go to the doctor, go to government appointments, act without translators, fill in your own forms, help others in your community
- **increased self-confidence:** recognize your achievements, see yourself as someone with education, feel more confident speaking English, feel more able to tackle day to day living in Canada, feel more confident to deal with challenges
- **better settlement:** have a better understanding of what it means to live in Canada, have a better understanding of housing, education, healthcare, shopping, and jobs
- **increased ability to engage in children's education:** speak with teachers, attend parent-teacher conferences, fill in forms, read with children at home, recognize the importance of children's education, support children's education
- **better civic engagement:** have a better understanding of the Canadian government and services, have a better ability to get Canadian citizenship
- **increased ability to advocate for yourself, your family, and your community:** have a better ability to recognize your needs and rights, be able to access services and advocate for yourself, your children, and your community

Your role as an instructor in pathways is to understand the ultimate goals of the program you are teaching in, connect your teaching to these goals, and help learners to understand the pathways ahead of them and their options. As an

instructor you may not be able to set program goals (although you can advocate for them) and you probably will not be able to create articulation agreements with other programs in your area. However, you can teach your learners about pathways and help them to understand learning as a continuum. You can teach them goal-setting and help to break their goals down into manageable steps in a plan.

You can also make sure that you and your learners understand the benefits of ESL literacy education. Draw attention to what they have already achieved and celebrate their success. Ask them about how they are using their learning outside of the classroom. Encourage them to learn from each other. Build an understanding of the importance of the development of literacy and how it can impact their lives.

For further information on planning, needs assessments, goal setting, and learning reflections within the context of the Canadian Language Benchmarks, you can see Chapter II of *CLB: ESL for ALL Support Kit*.

4.2 Connecting instruction to the level of the learner

When learners are placed in your class it usually means that they have already been assessed and their level has been determined, at least roughly. In most cases, you will also have a set of outcomes for your class and a sense of the level that you are trying to teach. This does not actually mean that all learners in your class are at the same level. No two learners have exactly the same set of skills or learning needs, nor do they bring the same understanding or experience to your classroom.

ESL literacy classrooms can be especially multi-level because learners are likely to have different levels in literacy, language, and in their knowledge and understanding. Some classes are multi-level by design or programming need. But even single-level classes are in reality multi-level. If learners are placed in your class based on their literacy skills, they will likely have a wide range of listening and speaking skills. Similarly, learners placed on listening and speaking might have a wide range of reading and writing skills. And even if learners have been assessed at the same level of reading, they might have different individual literacy skills. Some are better at decoding but lack comprehension; others struggle with phonological awareness while others are very good at phonics.

Your challenge is to sort out the strengths, experiences, and needs of the learners in your class and do your best to pitch your teaching at the right level for each learner. You may also have responsibilities to your school, program, or institution to maintain the standards of the class you are teaching. While this is an added layer of challenge

for many instructors, the focus of this book is the effective teaching of ESL literacy learners, so we'll discuss how to meet the needs of the learners in your class rather than the needs of the program.

Meeting learners at the right level is critically important for learning, growth, and development to occur. There are a number of theories about target level in the field of education and they generally say the same thing: tasks have to be hard, but not too hard. In order for learning to happen, learners need to be presented with material that is just above their current level. Lev Vygotsky (1978, 1986) writes about the **zone of proximal development**, arguing that the most growth occurs when a learner is exposed to learners who are slightly further along in their learning. Stephen Krashen (1985) writes of **comprehensible input +1**: language learning occurs when a learner is exposed to language that he or she can understand but finds slightly challenging. The idea in both of these theories is that we can rise to the next level if it is just above where we currently are. If material is too easy, we are not required to develop our skills, and if material is too challenging we are not able to make the leap to comprehension.

In order for learning to happen, learners need to be presented with material that is just above their current level.

Teaching at the right level is even more important for ESL literacy learners. ESL literacy learners have often had little experience with formal education and do not necessarily have strategies for organizing learning. Put simply, they do not always know what they don't know. They have not constructed a framework for new knowledge and so they have nowhere to put information that is too far ahead of them.

It will be challenging for you to hit the right level in all areas at all times for each of the learners in your class. Learners are inevitably at different points in their learning from each other, and depending on your teaching context, you may be teaching a multi-level literacy class or a class of non-literacy and literacy learners mixed together. The needs of these learners will be very different. Additionally, ESL literacy learners are likely to be at very different points in some areas (listening and speaking) than others (reading and writing) and are also inconsistent with their learning from one day to the next.

It is still very important to aim your teaching at the right level in order for learning to happen. There are a number of things to consider and teaching strategies to support you when you are trying to hit the right level for the learners in your class.

In this section, we will discuss:

- [1] cognitive load
- [2] reading at instructional level
- [3] scaffolding and the gradual release of support
- [4] recycling and spiraling
- [5] differentiating instruction

4.2.1 COGNITIVE LOAD

Cognitive load is the amount of mental energy you can devote to one thing at any time. Learners can only take in so much new information at once. When learners are learning something brand new, most of their energy is devoted to understanding the new language or developing the new skill. When you are designing tasks for your learners, think about cognitive load. How much are you asking your learners to do at one time?

Even a task that appears quite simple can have many layers of complexity for an ESL literacy learner. Each of these aspects of a task can add to the cognitive load:

- new vocabulary
- new language structures
- new reading text
- new literacy skill or a familiar skill at an increased level
- new format
- new task instructions
- longer task
- less support or scaffolding
- more distractions

A very good rule when you are thinking about cognitive load is to only introduce one new thing at a time. Choose which outcome you are working towards and intentionally design your task to focus on that outcome. All other aspects of the task should be familiar to learners. For example, if you are developing new vocabulary words, then the language structures, format, and even activity should be familiar. If you want to practice a new literacy skill, use a familiar reading text. A special caveat

to cognitive load is that ESL literacy learners must ALWAYS be familiar with language orally before they encounter it in print. It is not possible to develop literacy skills with unfamiliar language.

Cognitive load – or what takes up space in the working mind – will change over time as learners develop their skills. Beginning readers will devote nearly all mental energy to decoding, with very little left over for comprehension. Similarly, for learners with beginning speaking and listening skills, simply processing and making sense of the oral English will take a huge amount of effort.

Strategies for managing cognitive load

- Be intentional with what you are teaching; know how your task supports developing a skill or meeting an outcome.
- Focus on the target skill, language, or outcome and keep as many other parts of the task as consistent or familiar as possible.
- Whenever possible, use the same format for paper-based tasks. Use the same font and the same page layout. Put your questions in the same place and word them in the same way.
- Spend as much time as possible developing oral language before you present it in print.
- Develop consistent routines with your learners. Routines allow the mind to rest.
- Alternate challenging tasks with familiar tasks and allow for movement and change of focus.
- Create a series of activities that you can use to develop regular, repeated learning, such as vocabulary. Use the same activities with new words; this allows learners to focus on the language rather than the instructions of the task.
- Allow for lots of time to read at independent level, or the level when a learner can accurately read 99% of the text. For more information on extensive reading, please see Chapter 6.9.

4.2.2 READING AT INSTRUCTIONAL LEVEL

Take extra care when you are selecting reading texts for your ESL literacy learners. Learners will only move forward with their reading skills when they are reading texts at an appropriate level. Developing reading skills is best done with a text that is only slightly challenging. If a text is too hard, it will take too much effort to decode and it won't be possible for learners to build understanding. Texts at this level are not helpful. Texts that are “too easy,” on the other hand, still have their place in reading skill development. They are not useful for developing decoding skills, but they can be used for fluency practice and to build confidence. They are also good to introduce a new format.



CLASSROOM TIP

Build a library of pleasure books at a range of levels.

Emmett A. Betts (1946) developed reading levels that we still use today to determine whether a text is appropriate reading material for a learner. There are three levels of text for each learner:

- **Independent level:** learners can read the text with 99% accuracy and 90% comprehension. Texts at independent level are suitable for extensive reading (pleasure reading) and fluency practice.
- **Instructional level:** learners can read the text with 95% accuracy and 75% comprehension. Texts at instructional level are suitable for teaching because with support there is the possibility to develop skills but still comprehend the text.
- **Frustration level:** learners can read the text with less than 90% accuracy and less than 50% comprehension. Texts at frustration level are too difficult to be productive reading.

Independent level, instructional level, and frustration level will be different for each learner and will change over time as learners develop their skills. What might have been frustrating a year ago will suddenly be within reach; what might have been suitable for learning before is now best for fluency practice. The best idea is to have a range of reading texts available in your classroom and to help learners to find suitable reading material. Note that even when ESL literacy learners are reading texts at instructional level, they will still require support and scaffolding.

If you have a text that you need all learners to read, and yet you have learners at different reading levels, it is a good idea to adapt and scaffold the text for the lower levels in your class. Asking learners to read at frustration level is unproductive or worse; as the name implies, learners can become frustrated with the text, with school, with you, or even with themselves. For more information on adapting texts, please see Chapter 7.4.

4.2.3 SCAFFOLDING AND THE GRADUAL RELEASE OF SUPPORT

Another way to reach the right level for your learners is to provide scaffolding, or support, to help learners be successful. Like its counterpart in the construction industry, scaffolding is a system of support that holds you up so that you can complete a task. Scaffolding is an essential part of ESL literacy instruction because it gives learners the support they need in some areas so that they can develop the target skill. Especially in lower levels, most tasks at school are too challenging for ESL literacy learners to attempt without some form of scaffolding. Scaffolding also allows learners to be successful at a task that would otherwise be out of reach.

Scaffolding is an essential part of ESL literacy instruction because it gives learners the support they need in some areas so that they can develop the target skill.

Scaffolding can take many different forms, but it is generally a way of reducing the demands on the learners, or reducing the cognitive load, so that they can focus on the important part of the task. This means that you need to be intentional with your tasks. Identify the key skill you are building. What are you trying to teach? What is the outcome you are trying to meet? You can then choose your task and design your scaffolding to support other areas of the task so that learners can focus on what you are trying to teach them.

Scaffolding can support the language, literacy, or knowledge requirements of a task. You can also use scaffolding to support the learning process, allowing learners to do things that they are not yet ready to accomplish independently.

Examples of scaffolding	
Scaffolding that supports language and literacy	alphabet on the wall generating words together word bank word cards picture cards picture dictionary sentence stems models oral directions using TPR (Total Physical Response) to give instructions practicing as a class
Scaffolding that supports knowledge development	brainstorming as a class activating background knowledge giving examples telling the story of what you are learning using models, objects, and realia
Scaffolding that supports the learning process	modelling the task discussing the task first doing the task as a class doing the task in small groups or pairs coaching in a small group

As you teach your learners to use scaffolding and learning supports, you are also helping them to develop learning strategies. You are teaching them to look for ways to do what they are trying to do and to ask themselves:

- What do I need to be able to do this task?
- Is there something that would help me?
- Where can I find that word?
- Where can I find that information?

As learners learn to use word banks or picture dictionaries, to plan their ideas or think about what they know, to work with a classmate or follow a model, they are developing learning strategies they can eventually transfer to other forms of learning. Be explicit with learning strategies; tell learners what they are and why we do them, and practice them often. For more information on learning strategies, please see Chapter 6.5.

The final step to scaffolding is the gradual release of support. As learners become more proficient with their language and literacy skills, or as they become used to the requirements of a task, you need to slowly pull away the scaffolding so that they



CLASSROOM TIP

Sentence stems provide support to learners who cannot write a full sentence.

can do the task independently. With the gradual release of support, some forms of scaffolding will disappear altogether, while other forms of scaffolding will become automatic learning strategies. For example, over time learners might not need sentence stems to support their writing, so that form of scaffolding is pulled away. However, other forms of scaffolding can help learners to develop learning strategies that they will continue to use in the long term. Learners who have used word banks and picture dictionaries have learned to seek another source to help with vocabulary or spelling. You may no longer give them word banks but you might expect them to continue to use dictionaries. The use of scaffolding helps them to develop key learning strategies.

4.2.4 RECYCLING AND SPIRALING

As you target the right level for your learners, you also need to teach things more than once. Learners need to encounter language, literacy skills, and ideas many times and in different contexts in order to fully understand them and make them their own. One of the goals of ESL literacy instruction is automaticity, so that learners can use language and literacy skills without thinking about it. In order to reach this point learners will need many meaningful encounters with what they are trying to learn.

In order to create these repeated meaningful encounters, you need to **recycle** the language and tasks you are teaching and **spiral** your instruction. Recycling means to use the same language or task over and over again, in different ways, until learners have mastered it, even to the point of over learning. Spiraling is an

approach to teaching skills where you come back to the same skill over and over again, but each time at a slightly higher level. Practically what this means in the classroom is that you need to use the same language in many different activities and practice the same skills in many different ways. This actually makes teaching not only more effective but also a little easier, as there is less to plan and create. Vocabulary is one specific area of learning that will need to be recycled again and again. There have been a number of studies to suggest how many times learners

*In order to create these repeated meaningful encounters, you need to **recycle** the language and tasks you are teaching and **spiral** your instruction.*

need to encounter a word before they have truly mastered it. These studies come up with different numbers but the general consensus is many – at least ten or twelve meaningful encounters over time and probably a lot more. As learners start to learn a word they will go through stages of understanding, from starting to recognize the word, to identifying its meaning, to being able to use it themselves with confidence. These meaningful encounters have to happen over a period of days or weeks and you will still need to come back and review vocabulary that you taught months ago.

It is also important to know that we can understand words in many different ways and are likely to deepen our understanding of a word over time. We can know:

- **meaning:**
 - matching to an object, photograph, or drawing
 - translation (this means x in my language)
 - definition (this means x in English)
- **how to use a word:**
 - part of speech (noun, verb, etc.)
 - whether it needs endings (-s, -ed, -ing)
- **collocations, or which words this word usually goes together with**
- **how this word is related to other words:**
 - synonyms
 - antonyms
 - homonyms
- **morphology, or what parts of words mean**
- **idioms, or how this word is used in ways that are different from its literal meaning**

It is not possible to learn everything there is to know about a word at once; it happens over time with many different encounters with the word. One of your tasks as an instructor is to provide multiple opportunities for meaningful encounters with language in a safe learning environment.

Literacy skills will also have to be spiraled over time. Learners need opportunities to work on their literacy skills and to come back to them again and again. As learners improve their literacy, you can return to practice skills again either at a deeper level or with a more challenging reading text.

Another thing that should be recycled is the reading texts themselves. ESL literacy learners can read a text many times and in many different ways before they have accessed full meaning. And once texts are relatively easy – or learners are reading the text at independent level – they can still be used for fluency practice, to build confidence, to recognize growth, or for pleasure.

4.2.5 DIFFERENTIATING INSTRUCTION

There will be times when teaching your learners at the right level means that you will need to differentiate your instruction. Differentiating instruction is the practice of adjusting what you are teaching for different learners in the same class in order to better meet their learning needs. It is possible to completely differentiate instruction so that a learner has a different task than the other learners. You can also differentiate the requirements of a task or the amount of scaffolding, or you can provide extension tasks for learners who work quickly or are ahead of the rest of the class.

The idea of differentiating instruction can be intimidating and the thought of having all your learners working on different things to learn different skills can be overwhelming. Yet differentiating instruction will be necessary at times to meet the needs of your learners and there are ways to keep it manageable. There are a number of strategies that will make your life a little easier when you are differentiating instruction:

- Keep as many things consistent between learners as possible.
- Develop tracking sheets to know who is working on what task and toward which outcome.
- Plan your learning goals for a unit rather than a single lesson so that learners can be at different stages at the same time.
- Break larger tasks into components so that learners can be working at different stages of the same task.
- Group learners with similar learning needs together.
- Choose approaches which have elements of differentiated instruction built in.

There are a number of approaches which differentiate instruction. Each of these approaches makes it possible to differentiate your instruction at different times in the classroom without completely creating different tasks for each of your learners. These approaches include:

- **Focused reading:** In focused reading, learners are placed into reading groups based on ability and learning needs. For more information on focused reading, please see Chapter 6.8.
- **Dialogue journals:** Dialogue journals allow learners to write at their own level. They also allow you to respond to each learner, which gives you the opportunity to tailor your response to their precise reading level and interests. For more information on dialogue journals, please see Chapter 6.11.
- **Learning stations:** Learning stations can be set up so that learners can work on different things in the classroom. You can create learning stations with:
 - the same task at different levels
 - the same task with different levels of scaffolding
 - different tasks working toward the same skill
 - different tasks working with the same vocabulary
 - different stages of the same task
 - opportunities to focus on areas of need
 - opportunities to catch up on different work
- **Project-based learning:** Projects allow learners to work together from their strengths. Create projects in which every learner can contribute something to the project. For more information on project-based learning, please see Chapter 6.12.

Each of these approaches has an element of differentiated instruction built in, allowing you to work with learners at the right level. Additionally, you can adapt tasks for different learners to meet their learning needs. When you are adapting tasks, you can:

- Create tasks with several different stages. Lower learners can work on the first stage. More advanced learners can go on to the further stages.
- Select different reading texts for different groups of learners so that everyone is reading at instructional level. For more information on adapting reading texts, please see Chapter 7.4.
- Adjust the level of scaffolding for different learners. Some learners may require more support to be successful at the task; other learners may be able to complete the task independently.

- Adjust the requirements for writing for different learners. Some learners may need to copy; some may need sentence stems or word banks; other learners may be able to write sentences on their own. At higher levels, more advanced learners can be encouraged to write more, using more complicated language, or to tackle new forms of writing.
- Find ways to lower cognitive load; lower-level learners can tackle a task using more familiar vocabulary.

For more information on differentiating instruction within the context of the CLBs, you can see Chapter V of *CLB: ESL for ALL Support Kit*, which includes sample reading and writing tasks and think alouds about literacy needs. The tasks are differentiated from Foundation L to CLB 4L.

In the classroom: Differentiating instruction

Alex teaches a multi-level literacy class in a small program. In his program, all the ESL literacy learners are grouped together in one class. This allows him to focus on developing literacy skills as well as language skills, but his learners are CLB 1-5 in speaking and have a wide range of literacy abilities, from just learning about sounds to expanding their sight words. Alex decides that the best way to handle this situation is to differentiate his instruction when possible and within reason. He decides to differentiate instruction in reading and in writing and to work together as a group in listening and speaking.

Alex uses focused reading to differentiate his reading instruction. He creates four different reading groups in his class based on their literacy levels and chooses or adapts a text each week for each group, making sure they are all working at instructional level (they can read the text with 95% accuracy). At the lowest levels, he reads the text to them. While he is working with one group, the other groups write in their journals, read for pleasure, or do other activities they can do independently.

Alex wants to differentiate his writing but it is important to him that everything is connected to the theme and vocabulary they are learning together; he also needs to balance meeting his learners' needs with the amount of time he has to prepare for class. He decides to have all his learners working on the same general writing task but to differentiate the scaffolding for his learners. All of his learners are writing about food. His highest-level learners are writing sentences about their favourite foods. His lower-level learners are writing sentences but are supported by sentence stems. His lowest-level learners are working with magnetic letters and matching a few target letters to their food flash cards.

Alex also uses dialogue journals to differentiate instruction. This allows each learner to write at their level; it also allows him to create a little reading text tailored for each learner. Some of his learners write a few letters that they read out loud to him. Some learners draw a little bit as well. Some learners can write a few words and some write more. Alex uses words and drawings to respond to each learner.

Chapter 5

Approaches to teaching oral language skills

In this chapter we explore:

- building concrete oral language through Total Physical Response, routine language, and working with pictures and realia
- developing oral language without writing: singing, dialogues, interviews, and discussions
- Task-Based Language Teaching and why it is effective for ESL literacy learners
- learning vocabulary from reading and developing academic language

The three core areas of learning for ESL literacy learners are oral language, literacy, and content knowledge. Of these three areas, oral language usually has the most immediate effect on learners' ability to settle in Canada because it allows them to communicate with the people around them, access services, build community, and advocate for themselves and their families. Oral language is also a necessary skill for the development of literacy. Learners cannot learn to read and write in English before they learn to understand and speak English. This does not mean that you should wait to teach literacy until your learners speak fluent English, but it does mean that oral language instruction should lead literacy instruction. It also means you should pay very careful attention to the level and familiarity of the language you are asking your learners to read. They cannot develop literacy skills with unfamiliar language.

The importance of oral English to the development of literacy is true for both native speakers and ESL literacy learners. Thomas G. Sticht and James H. James (1984) call the listening level that native speakers have attained before they learn to read their "reading potential," writing that "when they begin to learn to read, they learn to comprehend by reading what they previously could comprehend only by auding [listening]" (p. 294). Sticht and James argue that you cannot learn to read and write beyond what you can already understand and say. Oral language is therefore critical to the development of literacy. Listening is crucial to the development of reading and speaking is crucial to the development of writing.

Oral language is critical to the development of literacy. Listening is crucial to the development of reading and speaking is crucial to the development of writing.

There are a few specific listening skills that are necessary in order to learn to read:

- learners must develop the concept of a word and hear English speech as distinct words and not a long string of sounds (phonological awareness)
- learners must develop phonemic awareness, or the ability to distinguish the different sounds in a word (phonological awareness)
- learners must be able to understand what they hear (oral language to support reading and writing)
- learners must be able to hear stress patterns in words, phrases, clauses, and sentences (phonological awareness and oral language to support reading and writing)

These oral skills work together when learners begin to read. Learners must resolve the barrage of sounds of English into a series of distinct words and be able to understand what those words mean. Once they have basic listening comprehension, they need to understand that words are made of sounds and that sounds are represented by letters. The ability to hear stress patterns in words, phrases, and sentences will help learners to notice unstressed elements, such as most function words, and transform what they read into meaningful language.

Listening comprehension in particular is critical to learning to decode. You cannot learn to decode a word if you do not have an understanding of what that word means once you have read it. Learning to decode – matching the letters of the word to your understanding of sounds and spelling patterns – only works if the process successfully leads you to accessing the meaning of the word. Listening comprehension plays a key role because it allows learners to recognize the whole word based on the first few sounds they decode. This is very important because English is only somewhat a phonetic language. *Man*, *help*, and *take* follow clear rules for matching symbols to sounds. *Beautiful*, *thorough*, and *initial* do not. Some words are readily decodable and the letters lead you to a direct pronunciation of the word, such as *cat* or *pen*. Other words have more complicated relationships between letters and sound. *Ball* does not rhyme with *pal*, but it does rhyme with the first syllable of *follow*. There are spelling patterns and conventions that help to decode these sorts of words, but ESL literacy learners (like young children learning to read in their native language) first rely on their ability to recognize the word as they are decoding it. This recognition relies on oral language.

A learner with strong oral English will be able to recognize a word as he or she sounds it out. After that point, the rest of the letters merely serve to confirm the initial assumption, or else the learner skips the rest of the decoding process and moves on to the next word. Note that this recognition usually happens from a combination of the initial letters of the word and a good guess of what makes sense in the context (and therefore the learner is using both a top-down and a bottom-up reading strategy). Oral English is crucial to both of these approaches. Without oral English, the learner will not recognize the word and will not have a strong enough comprehension of what he or she is reading to use a sampling of the letters plus context to support a good guess.

Just as listening is critical to learning how to read, speaking is critical to learning how to write. In order to encode (or write), learners will need to be able to say a word and match the sounds they are producing with letters. Initially this process involves *invented spelling*, in which learners produce a series of letters, usually consonants, which match the strongest or most stressed sounds in the word. In a typical progression of invented spelling, initial sounds come first, followed by other stressed sounds, and then by consonant blends and vowels.

Usually first attempts at invented spelling lead to words that are a little difficult for proficient readers (such as instructors) to read; they require a generous, active reader, who is also aware of likely errors learners will make, such as mixing up *p* and *b*. If you get stumped you can also ask your learner to read what he or she wrote to you. As you teach learners about word families and onset and rime (such as *cat*, *hat*, *that*), they will develop a sense of spelling rules and their writing will become more regular. However invented spelling is an important step in writing; learners need to learn to hear the sounds in a word and represent them with the most likely letters. Note this process also strengthens a learner's ability to read.

A little further along in the development of writing, learners will begin to write sentences. They will match these sentences against what they would say out loud, not against a set of abstract grammatical rules. There is no evidence to suggest that standard traditional written grammatical exercises actually help ESL literacy learners to improve the grammar of the writing they produce. A more effective way to teach grammar to ESL literacy learners is to do it orally, with repeated chants and dialogues, singing, or drawing their attention to relevant, meaningful grammatical endings in reading. Encourage learners to read their writing out loud to check if it makes sense or if anything is missing. Ask learners to point to each word as they read it aloud so they can check if the words on the page match the way they say it.

There are many ways to teach listening and speaking to ELL learners. This book will focus on the specific listening and speaking skills that are necessary for the development of literacy and specific approaches to developing oral language that are effective for ESL literacy learners. One of the key factors in these approaches is that they do not rely on literacy skills. Many common approaches to teaching ELL require learners to read things aloud in order to practice speaking or to write down their responses in order to demonstrate listening. ESL literacy learners will not be able to learn English in this way. They need true oral instruction, followed by true literacy skills development. They cannot use literacy skills to learn to speak English; instead they will learn to speak English and then use these oral skills to develop literacy.

5.1 Total Physical Response (TPR)

Total Physical Response (TPR) is an approach to language learning developed by James Asher (1977) and used widely in language instruction. Asher developed TPR based on his observations of interactions between parents and young children. He observed that parents often said something to their children and the children responded with a physical action rather than a verbal answer (*Give me the ball, pick up your cup, point to the kitty*, and so on). From these observations he made three hypotheses on language development:

- language is mostly learned through listening
- language learning must engage the right hemisphere of the brain (which controls physical movement)
- language learning should not involve stress

He also drew the conclusion that learners can understand a great deal more language than they can produce. In TPR, instructors give a series of requests in the imperative and learners respond through action. Learners are not expected to speak until they feel comfortable speaking naturally and they do not receive direct instruction in grammar. TPR is particularly effective for learning concrete vocabulary and actions and works well with ESL literacy learners because it is completely oral.

TPR is a straightforward approach:

- [1] Say the words and model the actions for your learners.
- [2] Practice with your learners.
- [3] Have learners respond independently.

When you are using TPR, decide first which words you would like to teach. Then say the request and model the actions. Do this a few times before you get your learners to do it with you. When your learners are ready, you can check comprehension by giving them the requests without modelling the actions. You can make it more challenging by mixing up the order of the requests.

TPR can be used to teach:

- a wide variety of concrete actions or vocabulary, such as useful classroom actions (*stand up, sit down, look at your neighbour, open your book*)
- body parts (*point to your nose, point to your wrist, point to your foot*)
- feelings (*make a happy face, make a sad face, make an angry face*)
- prepositions (*put the book on the table, put the book under the table, put the book next to the stapler*)

You can incorporate real objects, photographs, or pictures into TPR, which gives you access to a huge amount of language (*point to the apple, point to the pear, point to the melon*). When your learners are beginners, make sure you are using only a few new words at a time and practice frequently. As they learn, you can incorporate familiar vocabulary into new TPR activities, making your requests more complicated: *put the book on the shelf, put the pencil on the table, put the eraser on the teacher's desk or colour the house brown, colour the flowers red, colour the sky blue, colour the grass green*.

5.2 Building routine language

Another good approach to developing oral language is to build certain language patterns into your classroom routine. These are excellent opportunities to practice language in repeated low-stress situations. A good place to start is with greetings. You can greet each learner as they come into class. You can repeat these greetings once everyone is sitting down. Once your learners feel comfortable with basic greetings (*Good morning*), try variations or expand your greetings (*Hello, how's it going this morning?* or *Good morning, how are you today? I am fine, thanks, how are you?*). You can add to your morning routine with talking about the date and the weather, and later you can begin each class by asking a learner to say today's date and the weather. You can have your learners greet each other and ask each other how they are feeling today.

Take any opportunity you can to build routine language. This can be done at greetings and partings, as well as any time you do a routine action, such as starting an activity (*Now it's time for pleasure reading*) or going to another part of your school or institution (*Let's go to the library*). Routine language allows learners to build very useful vocabulary and phrases with lots of opportunity for repetition. Eventually this language is familiar and becomes safe, comfortable, and predictable for learners, lessening overall cognitive load and allowing them to rest their minds and feel successful.

5.3 Working with pictures and realia

Pictures and realia (real objects) are effective tools to build oral language in an ESL literacy classroom. They are authentic and allow learners to not only hear information, but also see it and feel it. The more senses you can engage, the better chance you have to remember what you are learning. If learners can see something rather than just hear it, it is so much easier to learn. If they can touch it, manipulate it, or even smell it, all the better. In this sense, real objects are the most effective. If you are learning about food, making a fruit salad together is more meaningful than a set of flashcards. If you are learning about winter clothing, it is more effective to feel the fabric in your hands and learn words such as *wool* or *mitten* or *wind-proof*. There are obvious practical considerations about using real objects in your classroom; sometimes it is just not possible. Pictures can provide access to a huge range of language. Remember when you are selecting pictures that learners will need to build their visual literacy and will not necessarily recognize stylized drawings or conventions such as speech bubbles or lines to indicate movement.

**CLASSROOM TIP**

Real objects carry more meaning than pictures. They support concepts, vocabulary, categorization, and sight words.

Learners generally develop visual literacy in the order of:

- [1] photographs
- [2] realistic drawings
- [3] line drawings
- [4] stylized images (such as cartoons)
- [5] symbolic images (such as speech bubbles, movement lines, and so on)

For more information on the development of visual literacy, please see Chapter 2.5.4. You can also refer to the Continuum of Literacy Skills in the Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks document *ESL for Adult Literacy Learners (ALL)*.

There are many different activities you can do with pictures or real objects in your classroom. You can begin by seeing what your learners already know. See which objects they recognize and can name. Ask them if they can tell you anything about the pictures on the table. You can use TPR to build listening comprehension and vocabulary. For more information on TPR, please see Chapter 5.1. Once learners can recognize and manipulate the pictures or objects, they can use the names orally. You can play matching and naming games. You can use the pictures or objects to have your learners talk about themselves, such as naming their favorite foods. You can have them organize cards into sentences. The possibilities are endless.

Initially when you are using pictures, try to use the exact same picture every time you use that word. It will be much easier for learners to learn the vocabulary and later recall it if the picture is consistent. Once learners are familiar with the vocabulary, you may choose to show them multiple pictures of the same thing

to demonstrate that not all things look exactly the same. This can be helpful with ideas of same and different, which can be different in different cultures. In some languages there are distinct separate words for objects which are considered examples of the same thing in other languages. A classic example of this is how many words there are for *snow* in Inuktitut. Other languages will make distinctions where English does not; English also has more synonyms than many other languages.

This is also a good opportunity to build some learning strategies such as sorting and ordering. You can teach learners basic concepts around sorting using pictures. Once they are familiar with the vocabulary, you can ask learners to sort their cards into categories. Begin with very obvious differences, such as food and clothes, before moving onto closer distinctions like fruit and meat. You can also teach order: learners can arrange cards to show what they do in the morning (get up, get dressed, eat breakfast, brush your teeth, and so on), or for processes such as making tea, washing dishes, or buying a bus pass.

When learners are familiar with the oral language, you can use the same pictures and objects in literacy activities. Depending on what skill you are building and the level of the learners, you can consider different possibilities, including:

- sorting picture cards by initial sound (find all the cards that start with *m*)
- matching picture cards to words
- playing matching games such as Memory, Go Fish!, or Read and Keep (for more information on games, please see Chapter 7.5)
- copying picture and word cards to fill in sentence stems
- arranging picture and word cards to make a sentence
- organizing picture cards to tell a story and then writing a caption for each picture
- organizing picture cards to show a process and then writing down the process

For more information on using pictures and objects to teach literacy, please see Chapter 6.3.

In the classroom: Building vocabulary

Jo works in a local community college. Her learners are CLB 2 in listening and speaking. They have mixed literacy needs. Most are learning to decode but some have good decoding skills and are expanding their sight words. Jo knows that in order to progress with their reading and writing, her learners will need a lot more vocabulary. When she builds vocabulary in class, she begins with receptive vocabulary (listening), and then moves to productive vocabulary (speaking), before presenting the vocabulary in print, first reading and then writing.

Jo begins a unit on health and the human body. She starts by eliciting language about the body from her learners. They stand up together in class. She points to her head, arms, legs, hands, and feet, and asks them if they know the English word. She then uses Total Physical Response (TPR) to teach a selection of body parts. *Point to your leg. Point to your nose. Point to your elbow.* Over the next week, they return to this activity many times, first expanding the number of body parts and then expanding the requests: *Clap your hands. Lift your foot. Tap your nose. Close your eyes.* Jo and her class also look at pictures of internal organs and practice tapping their bodies to show where their heart, lungs, stomach, and kidneys are.

Jo and her learners begin to use the vocabulary in speaking. Sometimes learners get to call the requests in TPR. They learn a short dialogue between a woman and her doctor. They do several interviews with each other with one or two questions each time. They watch a video about visiting a clinic.

Jo also makes a set of flashcards for her learners with pictures and words. They do many different activities with these cards. They sort them in many different ways: by first letter, by number of letters, and by number of syllables. They match the cards to a larger drawing of a person, putting each card in the right spot. They start to work with flash cards where the word is on a different card from the picture. They use these to play Memory, trying to find a pair. They match them together. They begin to use the cards to write and do many different work sheets. Finally they complete a large diagram of a person, writing in the labels.

Jo creates many opportunities for her learners to interact with vocabulary, receptive first and then productive, supported by images and movement.

5.4 Singing and chanting

You can use music in your classroom to teach your learners a lot of language. Singing or chanting can be a very effective approach to learning language with ESL literacy learners. It works because:

- Singing and chanting do not rely on literacy skills to teach speaking and listening.
- Singing and chanting are fun and low-stress (and therefore lower affective barriers to learning).
- Songs are usually repetitive.
- Songs are easily memorized and retained.
- Songs and chants contain meaningful chunks of language and language patterns that can help with phrases and structures.
- Songs are meant to be sung over and over and so you can do a lot of practice without your learners feeling bored.
- Songs can be combined with actions, engaging more senses and gaining some of the same benefits as TPR.
- Many ESL literacy learners are skilled with singing or come from traditions where singing is important, so they are working from a place of strength.

When you are singing with your learners, try to find songs that have vocabulary you are working on or themes that are meaningful to your learners. You can use TPR or picture cards to help build vocabulary and comprehension before or while you learn the song. Practice together over the course of a few days and review old songs periodically. Many instructors like to have a set time each class or each week for singing.

If you do not feel that you are skilled musically, you can still use singing or chanting in your classroom. You can sing along to a recording. This is also an opportunity to allow learners to be stronger at something than their instructor. You can show them that everyone has strengths and challenges and even though you may not be very good at something at first you are willing to try and learn. That is a powerful message and is even more powerful when you show it with your own actions.

Singing can also be used if you are working on content knowledge with your learners. There are many, many songs that teach concepts in history, science, or math such as shapes, animals, life cycles, the water cycle, Canadian currency, and so on. Many of these songs are available online with videos. Often they are written for children who are native speakers, so preview them to make sure they are appropriate for your class as adult ESL literacy learners.

5.5 Dialogues, interviews, and sharing

If you teach learners who can speak a little English, you can use dialogues, interviews, and sharing with your learners to expand their language. These are all effective techniques because they offer some control of the input – the language that learners hear – and give scaffolding to support learners in their speaking. For more information on scaffolding, please see Chapter 4.2.3. When you are using any of these activities, begin with developing vocabulary. Introduce the activity by modelling it first for the learners, then practicing it together, before you expect them to try it independently. Dialogues, interviews, and sharing all allow you to focus on accuracy in speaking and you can correct learners as you feel is appropriate so that they are using the language patterns correctly.

Dialogues

A dialogue is a set exchange or conversation which learners can practice. The theory behind a dialogue is that it gives learners effective chunks of language they can use in a different context. Dialogues generally incorporate authentic language and reflect typical situations of living in Canada, such as a conversation between a shopper and a store clerk, a customer and a bank teller, a parent and a teacher, two employees, a patient and a doctor, and so on. When you teach dialogues to non-literacy ELL learners, you usually give them a written copy of the dialogue to work from. This will likely not be possible with your ESL literacy learners, so you might need to use shorter dialogues that are easily remembered and use objects or a series of pictures as visual clues. It can be very helpful if you have someone else with you to model the dialogue, such as another instructor, a volunteer, or a more advanced learner. If not, use pictures and try to show that this is a conversation between two people.

Dialogues can be difficult for some ESL literacy learners because they are fictional.

Before you begin the dialogue, activate what your learners already know. If you are working on banking language, ask them why they go to the bank. Ask them who works at a bank and what you might ask that person. Then model the dialogue several times, using pictures, objects, or possibly single written words to trigger memory. You can practice the dialogue together a few times and then ask a learner to do it with you for the class before learners split into pairs and practice on their own. When you have learners perform the dialogues, you can ask learners with

higher oral skills to perform first so that the learners with lower oral skills have many opportunities to hear the language. Dialogues can be practiced and repeated over days. Dialogues can also be a spring board for getting learners to create their own dialogues for a situation.

Dialogues can be difficult for some ESL literacy learners because they are fictional. Many ESL literacy learners are very concrete and literal and struggle with fiction and pretending to be someone they are not. You might get a lot of learners patiently trying to explain to you that they are NOT bank tellers so this doesn't make sense. You can try to get around this by claiming this was a real dialogue between your friend and someone else, or you may choose a different approach if your learners really struggle with the idea. Eventually as learners develop their literacy skills they usually become more comfortable with the idea of pretending.

Interviews

Another good approach, and one that does not require learners to pretend, is to have learners conduct interviews with each other. This is an excellent way to teach grammatical structures such as asking questions and verb tenses. Create a basic interview with one or more questions that use the same sentence structure, such as *What did you eat for supper?* Model the question and ask a learner in your class. Help him or her rephrase the answer correctly if needed. Practice together as a class and then have your learners interview each other. They can report back to the class what they heard. This lets you focus on pronouns and subject-verb agreement, which should be taught orally and practiced until they sound right, rather than taught as an abstract rule that you apply while you analyze language.

Be careful when you are doing interviews that you are controlling the level of the language and the cognitive load for the learners. If you are focusing on a new structure of questions and answers (for example a new verb tense or a different kind of question word), then use a familiar topic and vocabulary. If you want to focus on new vocabulary, make sure the structure of the language is familiar. You can turn oral interviews into a literacy activity by having learners complete sentence stems or charts to record their responses.

Sharing

Another good approach to developing language skills is to have your learners share information. Like interviews, this can also be combined with level-appropriate written language to make it into a literacy activity. A good example of a sharing activity is a gap-fill, where learners each have some information about a topic and need to speak with a partner to get the rest of the information. You can do a gap-fill with words, but you can also do it with pictures, maps, or prices. You can also give learners photographs and then ask them to describe (not show) their photographs

to each other in order to find the matching photograph. As with dialogues and interviews, sharing information is most effective when it is connected to the theme you are teaching. Teach vocabulary ahead of time and use this as an opportunity to practice specific language or skills.

5.6 Sounds: Building pronunciation and phonological awareness

One of the key predictors of success in learning to read is phonological awareness, which is the ability to hear the sounds of language. Phonological awareness includes the concept of a word, the ability to distinguish phonemes (sounds), and onset and rime (different initial sounds with the same final sounds, such as *right*, *night*, and *sight*). Phonological awareness is key to learning to read because it allows learners to make the connection between the letters on the page and the sounds of the word. If a learner cannot break a word down into individual sounds, he or she is going to really struggle to work from letters back up to a word.

Children who are developing literacy in English as their native language typically learn phonological awareness through rhymes, songs, and games. They have an advantage over adult ESL literacy learners, however, because they usually already have budding native fluency and pronunciation in English. It is easier for them to learn to break a word into its sounds because they can already recognize, distinguish, and produce all of those sounds, although there are some exceptions to this, just as there are children who struggle to learn to read in their native language. ESL literacy learners will need support in pronunciation as they build phonological awareness.

Pronunciation and developing literacy

Pronunciation can be broken down into segmentals, which are the individual sounds of a language (such as consonants, blends, and vowel sounds), and suprasegmentals, which are the speech features that affect larger chunks of speech, such as stress, rhythm, and intonation.

Both segmentals and suprasegmentals affect the development of reading skills. Segmentals have the most effect on phonological awareness and decoding skills. Suprasegmentals, whose combined features can be called prosody, have the most effect on reading fluency.

When you are teaching pronunciation and are developing phonological awareness with your ESL literacy learners, keep your instruction as oral and as meaningful as possible. Contextualize your teaching and make sure you are always using examples that make sense to your learners. Showing the difference between the minimal pair of sheep and ship is only going to work if your learners already know what a *sheep* and a *ship* both are. Otherwise it is a meaningless string of sounds and the intent of your lesson will be lost. Remember too that at this point you are teaching sounds, not spelling, and that the same sounds may be spelled in many different



CLASSROOM TIP

Use magnetic letters on a cookie sheet to work with letters and sounds.

ways. It is best to work orally first. When your learners are comfortable with hearing and producing the sounds, then you can connect the sounds to letters and teach decoding.

There are many different approaches to teaching phonemic awareness (the ability to hear the sounds of a word) and not all tasks are as easy as others. Phonemic awareness tasks, in increasing order of complexity and challenge, include:

- [1] oddity tasks (distinguishing which sound is different)
- [2] syllable splitting (clapping out the syllables of a word)
- [3] phoneme blending (taking sounds and making them into a word)
- [4] phoneme segmentation (splitting a sound from the rest of the word)
 - a. initial sound
 - b. final sound
 - c. medial sound
 - d. blends

- [5] adding, deleting, or moving phonemes (if you take the /r/ out of *brake* you get *bake*; if you take the /b/ out of *brake* you get *rake*)

Not all of these tasks are equally necessary to be able to learn to decode. It is most important that a learner can distinguish the sounds of English, split a word into its sounds, and go from sounds back into a word.

Activities for teaching pronunciation and phonological awareness

There are many different activities to teach pronunciation and phonological awareness. Examples include:

- having learners repeat after you
- using chants, rhymes, and songs to teach rhyming and vowel sounds
- using singing, dialogues, and interviews to practice stress and intonation
- having learners practice sounds in front of a mirror
- taking short and long steps as a class to mark stress in a word (*vacation* is one short step, one long step, and then one short step)
- recording learners and playing it back to them so they can hear what they are saying
- clapping the sounds of words or names to practice phonemic awareness
- using oddity tasks to get learners to identify which word starts/ends with a different sound
- playing sound Bingo; learners put a chip on their cards when they hear a word that contains the right sound
- finding words that begin or end with a sound in an Language Experience Approach (LEA) story
- sorting words based on initial, final, or medial sound

5.7 Discussions

Discussions are a kind of free speaking in class and they are often used with learners who have some basic or intermediate speaking ability. Discussions are an opportunity to build fluency (rather than accuracy) in speaking. Learners can put together their ideas, make connections, find words, and hopefully express themselves. Discussions can be done as an entire class, with the instructor taking the role of facilitator, or they can be done in small groups. Sometimes you might consider truly unstructured discussions, which is essentially allowing your learners

to chat with each other in English. This has a role in the classroom; chatting is usually very low-stress and learners build fluency and also community. Both are very important. However, most class discussions have some form of guidance and often include scaffolding to support learners.

Discussions are an opportunity to build fluency rather than accuracy in speaking.

Guided discussions can take a number of forms, including:

- **A class discussion to activate knowledge before learning:** The instructor usually starts by asking questions and leading learners to express what they already know about a topic. The instructor acts as guide and elicits information from the learners, often helping them to make connections.
- **A discussion in response to discussion questions:** The instructor gives out a set of discussion questions to groups. Each group discusses the questions and usually reports back to the class afterward. For this kind of activity, the learners need enough literacy to be able to read the questions. The questions are open-ended and have many possible answers. The focus is on the process of discussion and reasoning rather than getting a correct answer.
- **A discussion of reading comprehension questions:** After reading a text, an instructor might include discussion questions as a form of comprehension activity. It is very important that discussion questions are not more challenging than the reading text itself. Even at low levels, discussion questions should ask learners to do more than just copy direct information from the text. They should encourage learners to show true comprehension and to build their inference skills. At low levels, this is best done as part of focused reading, with the instructor there as guide. You can ask questions such as: *How did the character feel? How do you know? What do you think he/she should do? Why?* You can also include the pictures of a text in your discussion of the text.

Even though discussions focus on fluency over accuracy, you can support your learners with scaffolding. A good example of scaffolding for a discussion is to review a list of helpful phrases before the discussion. Start with a few phrases and add to this list over time. Make sure you teach the language of discussion as well as the language of the topic. Learners will need to know how to introduce what they are saying, how to respond, how to add information, how to give an example, how

to agree, and how to disagree. These phrases can include sentence stems to get learners started. The discussion questions are also a form of scaffolding; help learners to respond to questions by rephrasing the question as the start of their answer. You can also listen for common grammar needs as you walk around the room and address one or two points with the whole class following the discussion.

Discussions can be a very effective teaching approach, especially as learners develop more oral proficiency, but there are a few challenges to be aware of. The first is the focus on fluency over accuracy. Generally when a learner is contributing to a discussion, he or she is trying to find the words to express an idea. The focus is on getting that idea across, not on perfect grammar. Most instructors do not correct their learners during discussions because they do not want to interrupt the thinking process. You can choose to support a learner who is stuck or who is looking for a particular word in order to keep the flow going. This kind of practice helps to develop fluency but not necessarily accuracy in speaking. If you want to work on accuracy, consider approaches such as dialogues, interviews, and sharing. For more information on these approaches, please see Chapter 5.5.

The next challenge in discussions is in working together with learners to identify how you would like to treat each other. You can emphasize respect as a key value in your classroom and recognize that different people may have different ideas of what respectful behaviour looks like. At the beginning of a class, you can work together to create a classroom agreement. Depending on the language level of your learners you can discuss as a class how you would like to treat each other, including in classroom discussions. The classroom agreement can be revisited anytime. You can also teach learners polite language in English for how (or when) to correct someone, how (or when) to interrupt someone, how to agree, how to disagree, and how to compromise. For more information on respect in a classroom environment, please see Chapter 3.2.2.

The final challenge of class discussions is how to ensure that all learners participate. Some learners will be very willing to speak in class while others are not. Sometimes this is related to a learner's ability (or perceived ability) to speak; this challenge is amplified when you have a class of mixed speaking ability, which is very common in an ESL literacy classroom. Often it is also a matter of confidence or personality. Not everyone is comfortable speaking in group situations. Encourage learners as best you can and try to make class discussions as low-stress as possible. Sometimes shy or introverted learners speak more when they are working with one other learner they feel comfortable with rather than a larger group. It is also a good idea to use a mix of approaches for developing oral language to meet the needs of all the learners in your class.

5.8 Task-Based Language Teaching

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is an approach to language learning (not specifically the development of literacy) that emphasizes using language to accomplish a task. This is familiar to many ELL and ESL literacy instructors in Canada because the CLBs are task-based. The Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks (2012) writes that “the notion of the language task – a communicative ‘real world’ instance of language use to accomplish a specific purpose in a particular context – is central to the CLB.” (p. IX). Task-based language teaching is also an effective way to develop language ability with ESL literacy learners.

In Task-Based Language Teaching, learners are encouraged to use as much language as they can from the very beginning and to use it in a meaningful context for real communication. Kris Van den Branden (2016) traces the beginnings of Task-Based Language Teaching to the 1980s and sees it as a reversal of the traditional method of teaching language at the time, in which learners were taught grammar and vocabulary first and communication second. They were taught language as a set of individual rules, patterns, and words that were learned in isolation and practiced as fragments outside of a meaningful context. Learners were expected to perfect fragments of language, such as individual verb tenses, before attempting to meaningfully communicate. In TBLT, on the other hand, this process is reversed. Learners begin with meaningful communication, errors and all, towards the goal of accomplishing a task, and along the way they encounter the language they will need.

Van den Branden (2016) writes:

In natural, non-classroom-based processes of language acquisition... people do not first acquire metalinguistic information about the elements of a language; rather, from the early developmental stages onwards, they intend, and therefore try, to comprehend and produce meaningful messages in the target language to achieve particular goals, many of which will be non-linguistic. (p. 239)

The theory behind TBLT is that learners will learn a language more effectively through real communication. What this practically means in the classroom is that you give learners tasks to accomplish and support them with scaffolding so that they can use language meaningfully. Van den Branden defines a task as “a goal-oriented activity that people undertake and that involves the meaningful use of language.” (p. 240).

In TBLT, there are clear criteria to a task. In his book *Task-Based Language Learning and Teaching*, Rod Ellis (2003) argues that a task must:

- involve a work plan
- have a primary focus on meaning
- include real-world processes of language use
- use any of the four language strands (listening, speaking, reading, or writing)
- engage cognitive processes
- have a clearly defined communicative outcome

In TBLT, learners are presented with a real-world task to accomplish, which may be modified and scaffolded to support learners. Van den Branden (2016) writes of a three-stage model with pre-task activities, the actual task, and post-task activities. Before the task, you can introduce the topic, activate learners' background knowledge, preview helpful vocabulary or language, and organize the task. You can also discuss strategies with learners. During the task, learners work on the task individually or in groups and deal with any obstacles they meet. While they are working, you support learners and they support each other. The interactions they have with each other and with you while trying to accomplish the task are the heart of TBLT. After the task is completed, you discuss the task and the outcomes and reflect on what was learned.

After the task there is also an opportunity to embed what Michael Long (1985) calls *focus on form*. This is an opportunity to draw learners' attention to specific aspects of language that were needed for the task. You can reflect on language patterns, word endings, specific vocabulary, or phrases. Long writes that "research shows that a *focus on meaning* alone is insufficient to achieve full native-like competence, and that such a focus can be improved upon...by periodic attention to language as object." (p. 179). He argues for "a *focus on form* – that deals with the second language as object, including grammar, but within an otherwise communicative classroom." (p. 180).

TBLT is an effective approach to developing language with ESL literacy learners for two clear reasons. The first is that the language used in TBLT is whole and meaningful with a focus on communication first. Accuracy in grammar and the development of vocabulary is embedded within this meaningful communication. This approach is similar to approaches to developing literacy skills, in which the literacy skills are developed in the context of reading and writing whole, meaningful texts. Individual aspects of language, the *focus on form*, are also addressed, but within a larger meaningful context. As Van den Branden (2016) writes, "a considerable body of empirical evidence has built up over the past twenty years that indicates that explicit teaching aids language learning, particularly when

it is skillfully integrated with the performance of holistic, situated, purposeful and meaningful activity” (p. 241). This aspect of TBLT, embedding focus on form within a whole, meaningful context, is similar to the whole-part-whole approach to developing literacy. For further information on whole-part-whole, please see Chapter 6.2.

The second reason that TBLT is effective with ESL literacy learners is that it focuses on authentic learning; tasks are real-world and are ideally connected to real need in learners’ lives. As Van den Branden (2016) writes, this authenticity and connection to learners’ lives in TBLT can be realized in different ways, such as “incorporating authentic language material in the classroom, involving the students in negotiating the curriculum, [and] working with semi-authentic tasks.” He goes on to write that “ideally, a fully developed TBLT programme would be structured via a full-blown needs analysis of the language tasks that learners need to be able to perform” (p. 241). This focus on authenticity and relevance to learner lives helps to support ESL literacy learners in their development of language; for more information on relevant and authentic learning, please see Chapter 4.1.4. For more information on connecting learning to needs, please see Chapter 4.1.2.

5.9 Learning vocabulary from reading

The development of literacy is a continuum and ESL literacy learners at all points in this continuum will need direct instruction in literacy and support in order to develop their skills. Learners at the higher end of the literacy continuum are able to read connected text (at an appropriate level). They may have reasonably proficient decoding skills but are still working on developing comprehension skills and fluency skills, and at being able to read longer and more challenging texts. Once learners reach this point, they have the opportunity to learn new vocabulary, expressions, and language structures from their reading.

Learners may learn new vocabulary and language structures from the texts they read at instructional level as part of your reading program (texts they can read with 95% accuracy). As you teach these texts, you will build vocabulary and draw their attention to the language features you are focusing on in the class. This is all explicit and intentional teaching and this form of reading is intensive reading. However, learners can also learn new vocabulary from their extensive reading and the texts they read at independent level (texts they can read with 99% accuracy). For more information on reading levels, please see Chapter 4.2.2.

In order for learners to learn new vocabulary from the texts they read at independent level, several things need to be in place:

- Learners truly need to be reading at independent level and are choosing texts they can read with 99% accuracy.
- Learners truly need to be reading extensively, frequently engaging with texts at independent level.
- Learners need to be able to self-monitor (a reading strategy that allows you to register whether you understand what you are reading or not).
- Learners need to be able to use context clues (a reading strategy that allows you to figure out the meaning of a word based on the context).
- Learners need multiple meaningful exposures to the new word.

An early stage of learning new vocabulary from reading is when learners come to you (or use a word list, picture dictionary, or learners' dictionary) when they come across a word they do not know. This is a helpful step as long as it does not interrupt the flow of reading too much or too often. Some learners tend to become "word collectors" and frequently come to you with a list of words they have encountered in their daily life. Word collecting, which appears to be based on a mixture of need and curiosity, can be a very effective way of building vocabulary. A benefit of this stage is that it demonstrates that the learner is self-monitoring and recognizes when he or she doesn't know something, which in turn demonstrates that there is comprehension up until that point. If it happens too frequently, though, it may be a sign that the learner is not reading at his or her independent level. Model self-monitoring for your learners and explicitly teach reading strategies for what to do when they come across a word they don't know. If they are at a high enough level, they can use a context clue, re-read, or skip the word and see if they can still make sense of the text, all before they try to ask you or check a dictionary.

As learners become more proficient readers and especially as they read extensively, they will start to figure out words from context on their own, particularly after seeing the word multiple times and in multiple ways. This is one of the strong benefits of extensive reading. For more information on extensive reading, please see Chapter 6.9.

5.10 Every day and academic language

BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills) and CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency) are concepts developed by Jim Cummins (1979, 1981). Cummins noticed that young ELL learners who appeared to speak English fluently were having difficulties when they started more complicated reading texts in higher grade levels. He hypothesized that there are two different types of English, BICS, which he also calls “conversational English,” and CALP, which he also calls “academic language proficiency.” He found that learners could be proficient in every day English, but not at all proficient in academic English, and this interfered with their reading comprehension skills when they encountered more challenging texts.

As you build oral language skills with your learners, you need to be aware of BICS and CALP, which is to say that you need to be aware both of every day and academic language, especially with higher level ESL literacy learners. When learners are first developing oral English, the focus is generally entirely on BICS (every day language) because this is what they need in order to settle into their new lives in Canada and survive on a daily basis. However, as learners develop their literacy skills they will also need direct experience with and explicit instruction in CALP (academic language).

It is possible to develop BICS through every day interactions with others and learners have the opportunity to practice their every day language every day. However it is not possible to pick up CALP through general interactions; CALP is only developed over time in educational settings. For ESL literacy learners, who have had an interrupted formal education, it is possible (and likely) to eventually appear to speak very fluent oral English (BICS) but not have very much academic language at all (CALP). At the higher levels of ESL literacy instruction, this lack of academic English will seriously limit a learner’s reading comprehension.

There are many differences between BICS and CALP and these differences are not just in vocabulary. BICS also tends to be context-rich, which is to say that it is highly dependent on the context around it. It is primarily oral language (but can also be written down) and it tends to be focused on topics of personal relevance, with short sentences or clauses, high-frequency vocabulary with general meanings, and verb tenses in the simple or continuous present and past. CALP, on the other hand, uses longer sentences with embedded clauses, abstract and specific vocabulary, and verb forms including a wide range of tenses, modal verbs, and the passive voice. The content of CALP is not usually personally relevant, but abstract and tied to content knowledge. The development of CALP is necessary for learners to be able to read past a certain level of text and to be able to write formally (rather than personally). The tendency for ESL literacy instructors is to focus on the immediate needs of their learners and assume that they will develop CALP once they have BICS in place, and

possibly once they have transitioned to an academic upgrading program. As Kristin Lems, Leah D. Miller, and Tenena M. Soro (2010) write, however, “exactly the opposite is true. It is never too early to introduce CALP language and skills, even when students are not totally proficient in BICS, and even if they are not fluent decoders. CALP skills can involve oral analysis and listening vocabulary as well as written words.” (p. 40). Lems, Miller, and Soro are writing in the context of young ESL learners in the school system, and introducing CALP to low-level adult ESL literacy learners will likely be very challenging; however, as soon as you possibly can, start to build your learners’ language for discussion and analysis. This also means that you need to help them to develop the thought processes behind this language.

One of the first places you can start with the development of CALP is by inviting true comprehension of the reading texts. Don’t just ask learners to demonstrate reading comprehension by copying relevant parts of the text (generally questions of who, what, when, and where). Also ask your learners *why* and *how* something happened, and perhaps most importantly of all, *how do you know?* This can be done at very low levels of reading, before learners are even decoding on their own. Read stories aloud and examine the pictures of a story together. Ask your learners what they think the character is feeling and why. Ask why characters do what they do. Note these questions can all be discussed orally, with the guidance of the instructor, long before learners can answer them in writing. But the thinking and engagement should be taught from the very beginning.

Thinking and engagement should be taught from the very beginning.

As your learners progress in their literacy skills, continue to develop academic language as well as everyday language with a variety of tasks. CALP includes the language of how we learn and demonstrate knowledge, so you can teach learners not only to *answer* questions, but also to *analyze, interpret, compare, contrast, select, categorize, or demonstrate*. Learners will likely need scaffolding and support at first, but over time this can be withdrawn and learners will be able to achieve more difficult tasks independently and have a greater chance of success in their next steps in their pathways.

CALP and academic thinking are not always included in adult ESL literacy classes. However, when we consider the full pathways of ESL literacy learners and their need to be able to transition to programs beyond ESL literacy, we can see that it is necessary to give learners the skills and knowledge they will need for success in the

future. There is nearly always a large gap between ESL literacy programs and the next steps in pathways for learners; the jump in language and literacy skills required is usually quite big and it is often only the most proficient ESL literacy learners who can make this jump and be successful at the next levels. Unfortunately, the learners who do not successfully make the transition often become invisible to program developers because they are no longer in the system. When we consider what ESL literacy instruction means, and we look at the full continuum of ESL literacy, from the very beginning to the ability to transition into next steps, we can see that learners need the development of oral language, literacy skills, and knowledge. CALP is a part of this.

Chapter 6

Approaches to teaching literacy skills


In this chapter we explore:

- integrating individual skills into working with whole, meaningful texts: whole-part-whole
- creating texts together: Language Experience Approach
- the development of learning, reading, and writing strategies
- the importance of intensive and extensive reading and writing


Helping learners build literacy skills is one of your core tasks as an ESL literacy instructor. This section focuses on key approaches to that task. The literacy skills your learners are developing are laid out in the Framework of Literacy Skills for Adult ESL Literacy Learners:

- Availability for learning
- Oral language to support reading and writing
- Knowledge and experience
- Textual awareness
- Phonological awareness
- Decoding / Encoding
- Comprehension / Composition
- Fluency

Chapter 2 describes these skills in detail and gives examples of individual activities that help to build each discrete skill. In this chapter we focus on larger key approaches you can use in your classroom to develop these literacy skills. These approaches can form the core of an ESL literacy class. They help learners develop their language abilities and both build and integrate their literacy skills. The approaches can be tailored for different levels of ESL literacy learners and can be used in different learning contexts.



*The way to become a reader is to read;
the way to become a writer is to write.*



Of all the approaches to learning to read and write, the most important thing is for learners to engage in plenty of meaningful reading and writing at their instructional and independent level (texts which they can read with 95-99% accuracy). For more information on instructional and independent levels, please see Chapter 4.2.2. The way to become a reader is to read; the way to become a writer is to write. You can read to your learners at all levels; as early as possible, learners should also be encouraged to engage in independent reading for pleasure as well. There is a very high correlation between how much we read and how well we learn to read.

As early as possible, learners also need to engage in meaningful writing in which they are producing their own text, using invented spelling, even if they are only writing a word or two. Before learners are able to write, they should be encouraged to select and organize objects or pictures to tell a story, or if possible by drawing

(although most adult ESL literacy learners who are unable to write likely have very little experience with drawing). Engaging in meaningful writing clearly helps learners to develop their writing skills; it also helps learners to become better readers.

The approaches discussed in this chapter integrate instruction in individual literacy skills with the reading and writing of whole, meaningful texts. Some of the approaches explored in this chapter, such as using objects, movement, and speaking and listening to teach literacy and LEA are particularly effective for lower levels of ESL literacy learners, because they provide learners with both language and beginning literacy skills; they also help you to control the language level of the text and produce texts that are at instructional level for even the lowest literacy learners. Other approaches, such as whole-part-whole, focused reading, reading for pleasure, formal writing, dialogue journals, and project-based learning help you to integrate the learning of language and literacy skills with whole, meaningful texts. There is also a discussion of teaching learning strategies, reading strategies, and writing strategies: these are the automatic habits of proficient readers and writers.

6.1 Learning to read: Bottom-up or top-down?

Most of the research currently available on learning to read is focused on children learning to read in their native language. In the absence of sufficient research on adult ESL literacy learners, and faced with the practical need to teach our learners right now, this research on children can be used to inform our teaching with some adaptations. We can examine the research and see how it applies to the context of adult ESL literacy learners. Over the years there have been a number of different ways to teach children how to read. Two core approaches were developed and became very popular.

The first approach is **phonics**, in which children are formally taught the relationship between letters and sounds. Children are then encouraged to decode a word letter-by-letter, combining the sounds of the letters to produce the word. Most of us are probably familiar with this approach as “sounding out” the word. Because phonics relies on working from individual letters to understand words and then sentences, it is called a “bottom-up” approach. Phonics is effective because it gives readers the tools they need to tackle unfamiliar words. Criticism of phonics includes the idea that phonics instruction focuses on rote drills, phonics teaches reading outside of context which surely must miss a lot of meaning-making, and while English is somewhat a phonetic language, there are many, many examples of words that do not follow the sound-letter rules. Consider the sound /sh/ and how it is represented in the following words: *ship, initial, sugar, ocean, issue, suspicion, conscious, and nauseous*.

The second approach is the **whole-language** approach. It emphasizes that a lot of the meaning of a text comes from the whole text; readers create meaning not just from the letters but also from looking at the pictures, working with context, and accessing what we already know about the topic. Because this approach starts with the whole text to create meaning, it is called a “top-down” approach. Whole-language is effective because it encourages readers to recognize the wide range of ways that we make meaning and it encourages comprehension strategies. Whole-language is usually criticized, on the other hand, for not teaching learners the rules, and for the fact that some learners do not seem to learn to read this way, which generally led to arguments for going “back to the basics.”

From the 1950s to the 2000s, peaking in the early 1990s, there was a lot of discussion about the “right” way to teach reading in schools. Some argued for phonics while others argued for whole-language, giving rise to the “reading wars,” a strong and vocal debate with educators and researchers on both sides. A series of studies and reports were commissioned in order to settle this debate and provide the best literacy education possible. In 1990, Marilyn Jager Adams wrote *Beginning to Read: Thinking and Learning about Print*, in which she systematically works through study after study, drawing conclusions on the role of phonics in effective reading practice. In 1997 in the United States, Congress convened a National Reading Panel to examine the research available on learning to read and make a decision on the best approach to teaching reading. A similar study was commissioned in Australia, called the National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy, and a report was published in 2005: *Teaching Reading: Report and Recommendations*.

Effective literacy instruction requires a balanced, or eclectic, approach which combines both top-down and bottom-up reading strategies (both whole-language and phonics).

While there has been some criticism of these reports, especially in the practice of how studies were chosen to be included, they have given balance to the reading wars and some clarity on the importance of both phonics AND whole-language strategies. Essentially, we have come to the point in education of recognizing that both approaches are valid and effective, especially when they are combined with each other. We also recognize that not all learners will learn to read in the same way, and so flexibility is required to meet the needs of your learners. There is also significant evidence to support the conclusion that the quality of the teaching is more important than the method chosen. One thing that truly matters in building literacy is the amount of time spent engaged in actual reading and writing.

Much current research draws these conclusions:

- Effective literacy instruction requires a balanced, or eclectic, approach which combines both top-down and bottom-up reading strategies (both whole-language and phonics).
- While learners who are learning to read with some ease can thrive in a learning environment that focuses on whole-language strategies, explicit instruction in phonics is necessary for learners who are struggling to learn to read.

These conclusions can significantly help in designing the instruction of adult ESL literacy learners. They demonstrate that both phonics and whole-language approaches are effective and necessary parts of literacy instruction. They also suggest that anyone who is struggling to learn to read (and many adult ESL literacy learners will fall into this category) will benefit from direct, explicit instruction in phonics as well as whole-language strategies.

So, in addition to developing oral language and knowledge and understanding, our learners will need instruction in:

- strategies for textual awareness, comprehension, and fluency (whole-language)
- strategies for phonological awareness and decoding (phonics)

The **whole-part-whole approach**, a key approach to literacy instruction for ESL literacy learners, combines top-down and bottom-up strategies, which is to say whole-language and phonics, in order to give our learners a range of strategies for reading and making meaning.

6.2 Whole-part-whole

Whole-part-whole is an overall approach to reading instruction which can also incorporate writing instruction. It is an approach to reading a text in which you first focus on comprehending the whole text, then move to focusing on one or more parts of the language in the text, and then return to the whole text again. Whole-part-whole is a good answer to the reading wars; it combines top-down and bottom-up approaches to learning to read, giving learners a range of reading strategies and an understanding that the meaning of the text comes from the individual letters (bottom-up) but also from the way they are combined together to make a text (top-down). Whole-part-whole is a balanced approach to literacy development.

Whole-part-whole was first developed as a model for adult learning by Malcolm S. Knowles, Elwood F. Holton III, and Richard A. Swanson in their book *The Adult Learner* (1973). This approach has been developed for ESL literacy learners by many researchers and educators, including Julie Trupke-Bastidas and Andrea Poulos (2007) who study whether “phonemic awareness and decoding are improved when using a whole-part-whole instructional method that combines a focus on higher and lower-level skills” (p. 1). Patsy Vinogradov has also written on whole-part-whole for ESL literacy learners, for example in her article “Balancing Top and Bottom: Learner-Generated Texts for Teaching Phonics” (2009).

In whole-part-whole, you begin with approaching a text in its entirety, using pre-reading comprehension strategies such as looking at the title and the pictures, making predictions, and activating what we already know about the subject. You also read the text for general meaning and overall impressions. You then move on to a study of some of the parts of the language. This focus on the parts is best when it is connected with what you are currently studying in class. You can look at the language you have been developing (vocabulary or structure) or practice literacy skills you are focusing on. You then return to the whole text again, applying what you now know to deepening your understanding of the text. During this second look at the whole text, you can also focus on comprehension strategies, you can use it as a jumping off point for writing, and, if learners are reading the text well enough, you can work on reading fluency.

The exact activities you choose to do in whole-part-whole will change depending on the level of your learners, but the general idea is that you begin with the whole text, then focus on specific aspects of language and literacy development with parts of the text, and then return to the whole text again. Depending on the level of your learners, you may choose to read the text to them or with them at first before having them read it themselves.

Remember, as with all ESL literacy instruction, your learners should be reading texts at **instructional level** that use language they already know orally. It is not possible to develop literacy skills with unfamiliar language. For more information on instructional level, please see Chapter 4.2.2.

What happens in the whole-part-whole approach		
Whole	Part	Whole
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • look at the pictures • look at the title • What do we know about this topic? • What do we know about this kind of text? • use prediction • read for general meaning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • practice decoding skills • find examples of specific language you are studying (plural endings, helper verbs, target vocabulary, describing words, etc.) • recognize sight words • do phonemic awareness tasks • work with onset and rime 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • apply what we learned to build understanding • re-read for meaning • focus on comprehension strategies • write • read for fluency development • read for pleasure

In the whole-part-whole approach you work on a wide range of reading strategies with your learners and you read the text a minimum of three times (and in practice, many more times than that). Learners have the opportunity to develop many different skills from the Framework of Literacy Skills. Different literacy skills can be tackled at different stages of the approach:

Whole-part-whole and The Framework of Literacy Skills		
Preparing for literacy	Availability for learning	Does the learner have the right frame of mind for learning?
	Oral language to support reading and writing	Does the learner know the vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar?
	Knowledge and experience	What understanding does the learner bring to reading and writing?
Part	Textual awareness	Does the learner understand the purpose of print and how it works?
	Phonological awareness	Can the learner hear the sounds in a word?
	Decoding / Encoding	Can the learner translate symbols into meaning and meaning into symbols?
Whole	Comprehension / Composition	Can the learner understand what he or she reads? Can the learner write with meaning?
	Fluency	Can the learner read and write with accuracy and expression?

In the classroom: Whole-part-whole

Margaret teaches in a community program for ESL literacy learners. Her learners all have low literacy skills; they are learning about text and sounds and a few are starting to learn to decode. They have between CLB 2-4 in speaking and listening. Margaret spends a lot of time with her learners developing their oral language. She also spends a lot of time on sounds, letters, and textual awareness, and she integrates this skill development with reading whole, meaningful texts together.

They spend about two weeks reading a story about a man named Ahmed who is struggling with money. They begin with the whole text. They look at the title and the pictures. They can see from the photographs on each page that Ahmed is unhappy and it is connected to money. They talk about their own experiences with money. Many learners (and Margaret herself, in her past) know what it is like to not have enough money. Margaret then reads the story to her learners. The learners have a few questions and Margaret reads the story again, stopping a few times to discuss things with her learners. She reads the story through again and this time she has a few learners with higher speaking skills retell the story. Learners who are watching call out suggestions. Margaret talks to the learners about the story. She is careful to ask interpretive questions as well as literal questions: *How do you think Ahmed feels? Why does he feel this way? How does he feel in this picture? How do you know?*

Once the learners are familiar with the story, they start to work with parts. They have been learning about sounds and letters and right now they are working on /m/, /k/, and /r/. They look at the story together and find words that start with each of these sounds. Margaret makes up cards for these words and the learners try to match the cards to the text. They start with one /m/ word, one /k/ word, and one /r/ word. Later she adds another word for each sound and they start to look at the whole word, not just the first letter. Even though her learners are just learning about sounds and letters, Margaret also knows it is important to have a few early sight words. Her learners know the word *money*. She copies the story onto the board and reads it aloud. She gives a learner a fly swatter and asks her to hit the word money when she hears it. She also has a learner in her class who is named Ahmed as well. She has the real Ahmed circle every time it says *Ahmed* in the story.

After working with the story for a few days, Margaret and her learners return to the whole text. She reads it to her learners again and then she has them read along with her (choral reading). They work on comprehension of the whole text. She has a few learners retell the story. They look at the pictures again and identify different feelings: *happy*, *worried*, and *sad*. Finally, Margaret has her learners give suggestions for how Ahmed can save money. She writes these suggestions down on chart paper and they become the source for another set of activities.

6.3 Using objects, movement, and speaking and listening to teach literacy

The process of learning to read and write usually conjures up ideas of activities using books, pens, and paper. However, just as learning language uses approaches involving movement, objects, and lots and lots of speaking, so does developing literacy. For learners who are just beginning to read and write, each separate literacy skill can add a lot to cognitive load: deciding what to write, thinking of the words, holding a pen correctly, forming letters, writing on the line, spelling, and so on. Even if learners can do this work, it is exhausting and they cannot sustain it for long. Similarly, just the process of decoding involves such effort that learners will not be able to read for any length of time. As learners develop their literacy skills it will become easier and they can focus longer on pen and paper activities. Beginning ESL literacy learners, however, will need plenty of opportunities to build literacy using objects, movement, and speaking and listening, and more advanced ESL literacy learners will still benefit from these kinds of activities.

Objects

Objects are all kinds of physical things that you can touch or manipulate with your hands. They can include realia (real objects), such as an apple, a hammer, or a toque; representational objects such as stones, chips, counters, letter tiles, or blocks; or cards with letters, words, or pictures. There are many ways to use objects to develop oral language and vocabulary, but they can also be used to develop literacy skills:

- chips, counters, or stones can be used in activities to count syllables or sounds
- letter tiles can be used to match letters to sounds or to spell words
- realia or photographs can be used to organize ideas for writing
- cards with letters, words, or pictures can be arranged to write without using a pen
- word cards can be sorted by sound, topic, first letter, number of letters, or number of syllables

Especially at the beginning of literacy development, learners will need lots of opportunities to write without using a pen and paper. This reduces the cognitive load and effort involved and allows learners to focus on individual skills. Learners can develop encoding skills like finger strength, hand-eye coordination, and tracking by activities such as stringing beads, working with dough or clay, cutting with scissors, or finger painting. Learners can also “write” by arranging letter tiles, pictures, or word cards. They can then read or talk about what they have written.

**CLASSROOM TIP**

Letter tiles reduce the cognitive effort of working with sounds, letters, or words.

Even “actual” writing (as opposed to arranging letter or word cards) does not need to involve a pen; holding a regular-sized pen takes a lot of finger strength at first and can be exhausting for early writers. You can let learners write by tracing a finger in the air, water, or a sand tray, using paint or finger paint, or using fat markers or pencils.

Movement

ESL literacy learners, and probably all learners at all levels of language and literacy development, will need lots of opportunity for movement. Our brains work together with our bodies and movement can allow us to relax, help us focus, and be a powerful trigger for learning and building memory. Physical movement is connected with our ability to relax, which has clear benefits for an ESL literacy classroom. When learners are more relaxed their affective barriers (the barriers to learning) are lowered and it is easier to learn. Anyone who has had to sit still for too long can also appreciate the distracting feeling of being fidgety; our bodies are not really intended to be still for great periods of time. Responding to this physical need and allowing learners to move helps them to be able to focus.

Both of these reasons – being able to relax and focus – are compelling grounds for building movement into your teaching, as they make it easier to learn, but movement can also be a way not just to allow learning to happen but to intentionally learn literacy. Movement is connected to learning and the building of memory. When we engage as many of our senses in learning as possible we have a better chance of remembering what we are learning and integrating our new knowledge and skills. For more information on movement and learning language, please see Total Physical Response (TPR) in Chapter 5.1.



You can use movement in different ways in your classroom. You can break up stationary, pen-and-paper activities with activities involving movement in order to give your learners a break and make more effective use of class time. For example, you can alternate reading or writing activities with language-building activities that involve movement and you can also use movement to build literacy skills.

Literacy activities that involve movement

- acting out a word
- acting out what you just read
- acting out a story while someone reads it out loud
- songs with actions
- reading directions and following them physically
- writing by arranging word cards in a pocket chart or using magnets on the board
- tapping words, letters, or sounds on the board with a fly swatter
- physically matching a word card to a word or picture on the board
- having learners respond to questions by moving to different parts of the room
- having learners respond to questions by moving to signs posted around the room
- having learners physically organize themselves depending on cards they are holding (days of the week, months, ordinal numbers, birthdays, and so on)
- running dictations
- giving each learner a word from a story, reading aloud and having them stand when they hear their word
- giving each learner a word from a sentence and having them arrange themselves to make the sentence
- giving learners word or picture cards and having them move around the room talking to each other to find their match
- going on a community or school walk and reading signs
- going to the board to do an activity

Speaking and listening

Learners will also need to lots of opportunities to speak and listen as they develop their literacy skills. This is not just to improve their language abilities; speaking and listening are a necessary part of literacy activities as learners will need to make the connection between written text and oral text. Including speaking and listening as a part of literacy activities teaches learners two very important questions necessary for meaningful reading and writing:

- Does that sound right?
- How do I say that?

The first question will allow learners to check what they just read against their knowledge of English. Remember that ESL literacy learners can only read things they are already familiar with orally. When learners are taught to ask if it sounds right, they are checking their decoding skills against their comprehension skills, working both bottom-up (combining the letters to make words and sentences) and top-down (using the greater context to make meaning). Combining these two skills is crucial to competent reading. For more information on bottom-up or top-down reading approaches, please see Chapter 6.1.

The second question, how do I say that?, helps learners to write. They will need to learn that writing is the same as speaking, just written down; a distinction between the finer differences of oral language and written language can come much later in education. Learners should rely on how they say things in order to determine what to write. This is also the way to improve grammar in the writing of ESL literacy learners. Teach learners grammar orally and practice it enough so that it sounds right. Then teach learners to match what they write with what they say.

Including speaking and listening as a part of literacy activities teaches learners two very important questions necessary for meaningful reading and writing: Does that sound right? How do I say that?

Games

One approach that combines objects, movement, and speaking and listening with literacy development is to use games in your classroom. Games are also effective because they are fun. When learners are having fun they lower their affective barriers to learning, freeing them up to read and write with fewer worries about making mistakes. There are many different games that can help learners to build literacy skills. You can also make games that are tailored to your learners and what they are learning. Ideas for literacy games include:

- **Bingo:** Play with pictures, letters, numbers, or words.
- **Board games:** You can use commercially available board games if they are at an appropriate level or you can create your own board game by making a track around a page and marking in different pictures, letters, words, questions, or activities to read or complete when you land on that square.
- **Flash card games:** Make a set of word cards and matching picture cards to play Go Fish!, memory, or matching games.

- **Read and keep:** Make a set of word or sentence cards. Learners take turns turning over a card. If they can read the card, answer the question, or do the activity on the card they keep it in their pile.
- **Charades:** A learner reads a card (silently) and acts it out so that the class can guess what it says.
- **Draw and guess:** A learner reads a card (silently) and draws it on the board so that the class can guess what it says.
- **Who am I:** Learners get a card taped to their backs which they cannot see. They walk around the class and other learners read the card and give them clues so they can guess what it is.

An effective ESL literacy classroom is an active space.

For more information on games as learning resources, please see Chapter 7.2. An effective ESL literacy classroom is an active space. Learners are developing their language skills which means there will be lots of speaking and listening, music, and movement. They are also developing literacy; this means there must be time for pen-and-paper activities and books as well as lots of activities that use objects, movement, and speaking and listening.

6.4 Language Experience Approach (LEA)

The Language Experience Approach (LEA) is an approach to teaching literacy that uses the language of the learners as a source text for further literacy activities. LEA involves transcribing what learners say and using that text as the basis for literacy skills development. LEA works on the principle that you can learn to read what you just said.

When you do an LEA story:

- [1] Have a group experience, such as an activity, field trip, etc.
- [2] Discuss what happened.
- [3] Ask learners to tell you the story of what happened.
- [4] Write down what they say in large letters on the board or chart paper.
- [5] Use this text as the basis for further literacy activities.

LEA was first developed in the 1960s for Maori-speaking children in New Zealand and has since been used widely in both non-literacy ELL and ESL literacy instruction (CAELA, 2017). LEA is effective, especially with learners at low levels in either speaking or reading and writing skills, because:

- it ensures that language will be familiar
- it demonstrates the connection between spoken language and written language
- it values learners' own experience and language as a source of learning

Language is guaranteed to be familiar to learners in LEA because it comes directly from them. What they want to say and how they say it is recorded faithfully to make a reading text. This tackles the very real problem of trying to teach people to read for the first time in a language they do not fully speak. It is not possible to learn to read words that you do not know. Even if you successfully decode the word, how would you recognize what you have read in order to access the meaning? And similarly, this lack of recognition means that the decoding process is not reinforced. In LEA, however, the language is familiar because it comes from the learners themselves. This means that the subject of the story is also familiar. They already know what it is going to say and they know both the vocabulary and the structure used to say it. This familiarity makes it possible for learners to decode the text successfully. The familiarity with the language also reduces the overall cognitive load of the activity and learners can focus entirely on the literacy skills. If you want to emphasize the familiarity of language:

- choose topics for LEA stories that are related to what you have been learning in class (for example, a field trip to a local grocery store if you have been learning about food)
- work to develop relevant vocabulary with your learners in the week(s) before the LEA story
- discuss the experience fully with the learners before they tell you the story
- develop personal LEA stories for each learner

LEA is also effective with low-level learners because it demonstrates (or later, reinforces) the connection between spoken and written language. Low-level ESL literacy learners may not know that writing is the same as speaking, just on paper. When you transcribe what learners say, and then read it back to them, and then read it back with them, and then later have them read it themselves, you are showing them that written words are the same as spoken words. LEA also helps learners to develop the concept of a word (that a group of letters, with space around it, is connected to one thing that I say) and 1:1 correspondence, which is to say that for every word on the page there is one word that you say. If you want to emphasize the connection with spoken language:

- transcribe what the learners say exactly (including errors)
- point to words as you read them out loud
- after you have read the story to your learners a few times, ask a learner to take over as pointer
- give learners a fly swatter and ask them to hit a chosen word when you read it aloud (this works well with repeated sight words)

LEA tackles the very real problem of trying to teach people to read for the first time in a language they do not fully speak. It is not possible to learn to read words that you do not know.

LEA is also an effective approach because it values the learners themselves: what they have to say and how they say it. It shows them that their experiences and their words are valid subjects for learning; it also connects literacy to their own experiences. LEA stories are personally relevant and authentic, and this supports learners and makes it easier and more engaging for them to learn. If you want to emphasize relevant and authentic stories with your learners:

- allow learners to choose the topic of the story
- make an LEA story for each learner
- record their language exactly (including errors)
- build further connection by adding photographs of your learners (with permission) or allowing learners to take pictures or draw pictures for the story

There is some debate among instructors about whether you should write down exactly what learners say during an LEA story, including language errors, or whether you should correct language as you go. There is no clear cut response to this debate; it really depends on the learners, their level, and the purpose of the story. If you are trying to teach low-level learners that their spoken words can be transcribed to make writing, then write down exactly what they say. You should also transcribe exactly what they say if you want to show learners that their own language has real value.

On the other hand, some instructors do not want to use a story over and over again if it contains language errors (and thus reinforce the errors). You may find that during an LEA you have the opportunity to connect the language to something you have been teaching in class: for example, if you have been working on plural endings, you can elicit the –s ending. As long as it is not disruptive to the process of telling the story, a little correction will not detract from LEA.

Once you have created the LEA story, there are many things you can do with it to develop literacy skills:

- read the story to your learners
- read the story with your learners (choral reading)
- have learners read some or all of the story themselves
- type out the story and add photographs to make a picture book
- ask learners to act out the story while you read it out loud

For many instructors, LEA is the cornerstone of what they do in class. It allows you to create accessible, meaningful, and authentic reading texts for very low-level learners, which can form the basis for a wide range of reading and writing activities.

- use the whole-part-whole approach with the story to tackle any number of literacy skills
 - find words that begin with the same sound
 - find words that contain the same sound
 - find words that belong to the same meaningful category (e.g. food, clothes, weather)
 - make picture cards and have learners match the pictures to words in the story
 - make word cards and have learners match the cards to words in the story
 - make word cards and have learners arrange the cards to make a sentence from the story
 - have learners retell the story orally
 - use the story as a starting point for writing
 - block out some words to make a cloze exercise
 - have learners copy words or a sentence from the story to match pictures
 - using scaffolding such as familiar sentence stems, have learners write their own sentences on the same topic as the story
- once the story is completely familiar, use to practice reading fluency and share with other classes

For many instructors, LEA is the cornerstone of what they do in class. It allows you to create accessible, meaningful, and authentic reading texts for very low-level learners, which can form the basis for a wide range of reading and writing activities. It also allows you to integrate listening, speaking, reading, and writing together. LEA stories can be used again and again for any number of different activities and tasks, and once your learners can read them independently, they can become a strong part of your classroom library for fluency practice and pleasure reading.

The cut-up sentence

The cut-up sentence is an excellent activity to build a variety of literacy skills for learners, depending on their level and need (adapted from Marie M. Clay, 1993). In this activity, learners assemble sentences from their own language that have been cut up to emphasize different elements.

When you work with a cut-up sentence:

- [1] The learner dictates a sentence; this ensures the language is authentic, relevant, and familiar to the learner.
- [2] You cut up the sentence into phrases (easier) or words (harder).
- [3] Determine where you cut the sentence depending on what you are teaching. Examples include:
 - cut to separate sight words
 - cut single letters from the beginning of words
 - cut onset from rime in familiar word families (m/ake or th/at)
 - cut 2-syllable words into syllables
 - cut compound words
 - cut endings off words (-ed, -ing, -er)
 - cut punctuation marks
- [4] The learner reassembles the sentence; this supports the development of self-monitoring.
- [5] The learner can reassemble the sentence:
 - directly on top of a model of the sentence (easiest)
 - below a model of the sentence (middle)
 - without a model of the sentence, by listening to the sentence (hardest)
- [6] The learner reads the reassembled sentence (with pointing to each word if you want to work on 1:1 correspondence).
- [7] You can prompt the learner: *Something is not right.*
- [8] You can store cut-up sentences in an envelope with the model written on from. A collection of these sentences can be used for independent practice as learners progress.

6.5 Learning strategies

Learning strategies are the set of attitudes, habits, or behaviors that successful learners use automatically to organize and integrate their learning. Learning strategies include organizational strategies, classroom strategies, time management strategies, and strategies that integrate learning such as goal-setting and reflection.

Learning strategies are not innate behavior. They are a set of strategies that are learned, culturally informed, and in part dependent on the development of literacy. You can teach learning strategies to your learners over time:

- [1] Recognize and point out the strategies learners are already using.
- [2] Name the strategy you want to teach.
- [3] Explain when we use the strategy and why we use it.
- [4] Model the strategy (use a think aloud).
- [5] Practice the strategy together.
- [6] Build the strategy into your class routine.

When you teach a learning strategy, you need to do it explicitly, review it frequently, and practice it often. One of the best ways to teach a strategy is to model its use. This means that you show learners how to do the strategy (for example, keeping your important papers in one place). Once learners are familiar with the strategy, build it into your class routine. If you want learners to keep papers in a binder, make it a practice to file papers into binders every time you get a new piece of paper. If you want learners to know what you are doing each class (your agenda), write it on the board and refer to it often during the class. Depending on the level of your learners, it can take time for learning strategies to become independent and automatic.

ESL literacy learners will bring different experiences with school and learning itself to your classroom as well as different levels of understanding of learning strategies. Generally speaking, learners with less experience in schools and with formal education will have fewer formal learning strategies. Even learners who have been to school for nine or ten years, at the other end of the literacy continuum, may not be familiar with the learning strategies often expected of learners in a Canadian classroom and will benefit from explicit review of or instruction in learning strategies. They may also use learning strategies that are less emphasized in Canadian education, such as memorization, which can be a strong asset.

Learning Strategies	
Organizational strategies	bring materials such as binder, glasses, books, and pencils to class each time
	keep important papers in a safe place
	keep a card with important information that you can use to copy
	write on the “front” of the paper
	put your name on a paper
	keep your papers clean and tidy
	keep papers to refer to later
	put papers in order in a binder
	sorting and categorization
Classroom strategies	sit so that you can see and hear the instructor
	listen when the instructor or other learners are speaking
	recognize repeated writing in the classroom
	wait your turn to talk or put up your hand
	work with a partner or group when asked
	identify where classroom materials and learning resources are stored
	ask questions when you don’t understand
Time management strategies	come to class on time
	come to class each time
	stay in the classroom for the whole class
	remember when you have to do something
	hand in forms or homework on time
	follow a schedule
	use a calendar

Goal-setting	set short-term goals
	set realistic goals
	set goals that are achievable and measurable
	reflect on goals and set new goals
	set mid-term goals
	break goals into steps
	set long-term goals
Reflection	recognize how you did on a task or piece of learning
	ask yourself what you did well
	ask yourself what you can do better
	set goals based on your reflections

What begins as scaffolding in your class can also develop into learning strategies. When you provide learners with word banks you are teaching them to use sources to find vocabulary and spelling; when you provide models you are teaching them to learn from reading texts; when you work together as a class you are teaching them to access the people around them for support. For more information on scaffolding, please see Chapter 4.2.3.

Habits of Mind

When we think about learning strategies, we try to identify the attitudes, skills, and behaviours of successful learners. One approach to this are the Habits of Mind, developed by Arthur L. Costa and Bena Kallick (2000). The Habits of Mind are a set of sixteen problem-solving life skills. Costa (n.d) writes: "we are interested in observing how students produce knowledge rather than how they merely reproduce knowledge. The critical attribute of intelligent human beings is not only having information, but also knowing how to act on it. A 'Habit of Mind' means having a disposition toward behaving intelligently when confronted with problems."

The Habits of Mind are:

- [1] Persisting
- [2] Managing impulsivity
- [3] Listening with understanding and empathy
- [4] Thinking flexibly
- [5] Thinking about your thinking (metacognition)
- [6] Striving for accuracy
- [7] Questioning and problem posing
- [8] Applying past knowledge to new situations
- [9] Thinking and communicating with clarity and precision
- [10] Gathering data through all senses
- [11] Creating, imagining, and innovating
- [12] Responding with wonderment and awe
- [13] Taking responsible risks
- [14] Finding humour
- [15] Thinking interdependently
- [16] Remaining open to continuous learning

6.6 Reading strategies

Like learning strategies, reading strategies will need to be taught explicitly to ESL literacy learners. Reading strategies are part of the comprehension and decoding skills in the Framework of Literacy Skills. These strategies are the habits or behaviors that competent readers use automatically in order to access meaning in text. Most adept readers use a wide array of reading strategies with automaticity, and often with little awareness. As Kristin Lems, Leah D. Miller, and Tenena M. Soro (2010) write, “better readers in any language use more strategies and use them better” (p. 172).

The reading strategies that are included in the Framework of Literacy Skills for Adult ESL Literacy Learners and are outlined in the table that follows were collected, organized, and in some cases created by our writer and researcher. The reading strategies are divided into decoding and comprehension strategies and are organized in terms of pre-reading, during reading, and post-reading strategies. They are also generally scaled by the complexity or challenge of the strategy. This does not mean that beginner strategies are no longer needed by more advanced readers; all proficient readers use a wide variety of reading strategies with automaticity. It simply means that the strategy is suitable for teaching to beginning learners.

You will need to explicitly and frequently teach strategies to your ESL literacy learners, with clear models and lots of time for practice, both supported and independent. Some approaches to teaching ESL literacy, such as focused reading, have explicit strategy instruction built in. You will need to build strategy instruction into other approaches.

When you are teaching reading strategies:

- [1] Recognize and point out the strategies learners are already using.
- [2] Name the strategy you want to teach.
- [3] Explain when we use the strategy and why we use it.
- [4] Model the strategy (use a think aloud).
- [5] Practice the strategy together.
- [6] Build the strategy into your class routine.

Pointing out when learners are successfully using strategies is as important as teaching new strategies. Learners will need to become aware of reading strategies: what they are, how they can help us read, and how we use them. Make sure you recognize when learners are successfully using reading strategies and help them to recognize it too.

One of the best ways to teach a reading strategy is to model its use with a **think aloud**. This means that you read a text in front of your class and talk about what is happening in your head while you read it, at a level that is appropriate for your learners. Once you have modelled the strategy a few times, practice it together with your learners. You can also choose (or create) reading texts that support target strategies. For example, if you are trying to teach learners to be aware of context clues, then you can create a text that uses lots of context clues. When learners are familiar with the strategy, build it into your class routine. It can become one of the tools in their toolbox for decoding and comprehension; refer to strategies often and continue to practice them together. You can also create posters or lists of strategies on your classroom walls.

From the beginning of literacy development, learners will need to develop reading strategies for both decoding and comprehension.

Reading strategies are ways to make meaning out of text. There are many of them, and there is overlap between reading strategies, learning strategies, and strategies for developing language (such as vocabulary building strategies). Reading strategies can be divided into decoding strategies, or word attack strategies, and comprehension strategies. From the beginning of literacy development, learners will need to develop reading strategies for both decoding and comprehension.

The following table outlines reading strategies from the Framework of Literacy Skills, including both decoding and comprehension strategies. It can help you to determine when to introduce different reading strategies to your learners.

Reading Strategies		When do you use the strategy?			How complex is the strategy?		
		Pre-reading	During reading	Post-reading	Beginner	Intermediate	Advanced
Decoding strategies	use the pictures		✗		✗	✗	✗
	use the first letter		✗		✗	✗	✗
	use sight words		✗		✗	✗	✗
	sound it out (use phonics knowledge)		✗		✗	✗	✗
	use onset and rime (word families)		✗			✗	✗
	compare to a similar known word		✗			✗	✗
	use spelling patterns		✗			✗	✗
	break compound words into composite words		✗			✗	✗
	break into syllables		✗				✗
	use morphemic (word part) knowledge		✗				✗
Comprehension strategies	preview	✗			✗	✗	✗
	predict and check	✗			✗	✗	✗
	activate background knowledge	✗			✗	✗	✗
	make connections to things you know		✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
	self-monitor		✗		✗	✗	✗
	re-read		✗		✗	✗	✗
	visualize		✗			✗	✗
	retell the story			✗		✗	✗
	find the main ideas		✗	✗		✗	✗
	skim	✗	✗	✗		✗	✗
	scan	✗	✗	✗		✗	✗
	find context clues		✗				✗
	find the pattern of organization		✗	✗			✗
	use a graphic organizer			✗			✗
	summarize			✗			✗

Decoding strategies

Decoding strategies are the strategies learners use to read individual words. They can be practiced during reading (for example, during the part section of whole-part-whole). Teach decoding strategies one at a time and practice them frequently with your learners. You can slowly add additional strategies. Eventually learners will have a number of decoding strategies they can choose from. At this point, you can encourage learners to choose an appropriate decoding strategy when they get stuck on a word. Different strategies are needed for different words and one of the aspects of learning a strategy is recognizing when it can be used. For example, some words can be readily sounded out, such as *cat*, *think*, or *let*. Other words cannot, such as *bright*, *she*, or *where*. A different decoding strategy will be necessary to decode these words.

You can incorporate onset and rime and spelling patterns into your ongoing teaching. Onset, the initial sound of a word, and rime, the remaining sounds of a word, can be used to group words together into word families, such as *can*, *man*, *pan*, or *cat*, *hat*, *mat*, *that*, or *fight*, *light*, *might*, and so on. Learners who develop a sense of onset-rime and word families can begin to use analogy in their reading and writing, asking themselves, *Does this word look like a word that I know?*

Remember, as always when teaching ESL literacy, learners need to know language orally before they encounter it in print. This is true in word families as well. Make sure that each of the words you include in the word family is meaningful to your learners. Using unfamiliar vocabulary to teach literacy will mean that not only will learners not understand the text, but they will also not be able to successfully use the reading strategy and are therefore unlikely to learn the strategy. For more information on decoding strategies, please see Chapter 2.5.6.

Comprehension strategies

Comprehension strategies, or the strategies used to make meaning from the whole text, can be practiced during the whole sections of whole-part-whole. With learners of any level you can start to practice pre-reading strategies every time you read a text together. Make it a habit to preview the text together, activate background knowledge, and make predictions about the text. With low-level learners, practice comprehension strategies as a class while you read out loud to them. When you are reading to learners, you can stop and ask them what they think is going to happen next and check back on the predictions. You can draw their attention to photographs or pictures in the story. You can also practice comprehension strategies during the second whole of whole-part-whole. This is a time to practice retelling the story (at lower levels) or even summarizing the story (at higher levels). For more information on comprehension strategies, please see 2.5.7.

In the classroom: Building reading comprehension

Lily teaches a class of higher-level ESL literacy learners. Her learners are CLB 5-6 in listening and speaking and are expanding their sight words and building fluency. They decode well but struggle with reading comprehension. Most of her learners want to transition into a high school upgrading program, but Lily knows that they do not yet have the literacy skills to read authentic books independently. She chooses a range of different texts for them to read, including functional text, fiction (both short stories and a novel), and non-fiction. They are doing well but Lily knows they have a long way to go before they can read the texts in a high school program.

Lily and her learners spend a lot of time on vocabulary development but they also spend a lot of time building strategies. Her learners need a lot of synonyms for common words; they also need more academic and abstract language. Lily knows that she can't teach them every word; her learners also need strategies for learning vocabulary on their own.

Lily also works hard to develop higher-level reading comprehension skills with her learners. She uses focused reading in her class. Her learners are at a similar level in reading, but she likes the small group instruction because it really lets her guide them through building comprehension strategies. They often use graphic organizers to help them categorize the ideas or elements in a text. They also look at different kinds of comprehension questions and decide what kind of response is required. They do a lot of work with interpretive questions and Lily frequently asks them *How do you know?* They do this work together, orally, in small groups, before they try to write their responses.

Lily and her learners also develop – and demonstrate – comprehension in many different ways. They are reading a series of short stories together. To work on comprehension, they create posters for each of the main characters. They make a collage of what they think the setting looks like. They do reader's theatre, which allows them plenty of fluency practice as well. Lily has them write a letter to a character to give her advice. She also creates the type of comprehension assessment they might see in the future, with different question types including true and false and multiple choice. Lily wants her learners to understand what they read; she also wants them to be able to demonstrate this understanding in many different ways.

6.7 Writing strategies

Writing strategies are ways that writers can create meaning through text. Writing strategies can be used during the process of writing individual words, or encoding. They can also be used to make meaning on a connected textual level during composition. At lower levels of literacy development, writing strategies will mean encoding strategies, which are often called spelling strategies. At higher levels of literacy development, as learners are able to write several sentences of connected text, writing strategies shift to composition strategies. How do we say what we want to say? How do we plan our ideas? How do we connect our text?

The writing strategies that are included in the Framework of Literacy Skills for Adult ESL Literacy Learners and outlined in the table that follows were collected, organized, and in some cases created by our writer and researcher. These strategies are divided into encoding and composition strategies and include the writing process as a composition strategy. They are also organized in terms of pre-writing, during writing, and post-writing strategies and are listed as best as possible by the complexity or difficulty of the strategy. This does not mean that beginner writing strategies are only useful for beginning writers; it just means that they are suitable to teach to beginning writers. All proficient writers use a wide range of strategies when they write.

As with reading strategies, effective writers use plenty of writing strategies and use them well, often with automaticity. However, while good readers may use strategies so automatically that they are unaware of them, good writers tend to know which strategies they are using, as even at the best of times writing is less of an automatic process than reading.

When you are teaching writing strategies:

- [1] Recognize and point out the strategies learners are already using.
- [2] Name the strategy you want to teach.
- [3] Explain when we use the strategy and why we use it.
- [4] Model the strategy (use a think aloud).
- [5] Practice the strategy together.
- [6] Build the strategy into your class routine.

You will need to explicitly teach writing strategies to your ESL literacy learners, with clear models and lots of time for practice, both supported and independent. The goal is to create a toolbox for learners to draw on when they are writing, so that they can write more, more quickly, with increased accuracy, and eventually with clearer voice and expression.

The following table outlines writing strategies from the Framework of Literacy Skills, including both encoding and composition strategies. It can help you to determine when to introduce different writing strategies to your learners.

Writing Strategies		When do you use the strategy?			How complex is the strategy?		
		Pre-writing	During writing	Post-writing	Beginner	Intermediate	Advanced
Encoding strategies	use sight words		✗		✗	✗	✗
	sound it out (use phonics knowledge)		✗		✗	✗	✗
	use a source (list, word bank, card, dictionary)		✗		✗	✗	✗
	use invented spelling		✗			✗	✗
	use onset and rime (word families)		✗			✗	✗
	compare to a similar known word		✗			✗	✗
	use spelling patterns		✗			✗	✗
	break compound words into composite words		✗				✗
	break into syllables		✗				✗
	use morphemic (word part) knowledge		✗				✗
Composition strategies	The writing process	brainstorm	✗			✗	✗
		outline	✗				✗
		write		✗	✗	✗	✗
		revise			✗		✗
		edit			✗	✗	✗
		publish			✗	✗	✗
		read your writing out loud			✗	✗	✗
		find a better word		✗	✗	✗	✗
		use an example		✗		✗	✗
		use descriptive language		✗		✗	✗
		use connecting words		✗			✗
		use transition words		✗			✗
		be specific		✗			✗

At lower levels, teach encoding strategies when learners are writing. Begin with one or two strategies and slowly add more over time. Practice the strategies each time you write. As learners are able to write sentences, begin to work on composition strategies, but continue to use encoding strategies as necessary. You can lead your learners through the writing process, explaining why we do each step. At first, simplify the writing process to brainstorming, writing, and publishing. As learners become better writers, you can add in more stages of the writing process. You can also start to introduce other composition strategies to create clearer, more effective, more connected writing. The writing process is discussed in detail in Chapter 6.10. For more information on writing strategies, please see Chapter 2.5.6 and Chapter 2.5.7.

Prompts to help learners develop reading and writing strategies

You can help your learners develop reading strategies with how you respond to their errors (adapted from Marie M. Clay, 1993). It is most effective to give ESL literacy learners feedback orally.

To help a learner decode:

- *Is there a picture on the page that helps?* (develops strategy: use the pictures)
- *Do you know a word that starts with those letters?* (develops strategy: use the first letter)
- *Do you know a word that ends with those letters?* (develops strategy: use onset-rime)
- *Do you know a word that looks like that?* (develops strategy: compare to a similar known word)
- *Are there words you know inside that word?* (develops strategy: break compound words into composite words)
- *What do you know that might help?* (higher-level prompt)
- *What could you try?* (higher-level prompt)

To help a learner recognize errors:

- *You wrote _____. Does that look right?* (for errors in letters, punctuation, or spelling)
- *You said/wrote _____. Does that make sense?* (for errors that affect meaning)
- *You said/wrote _____. Does that sound right?* (for errors in grammar)

6.8 Intensive reading: Focused reading

In order to develop literacy skills, it is helpful to study reading and writing both intensively (deeply) and extensively (widely). An excellent approach to intensive reading instruction is focused reading, also called guided reading. Focused reading is an approach that allows you to teach at the right level for your learners and explicitly teach reading strategies. Focused reading is also compatible with a whole-part-whole approach. For many instructors, focused reading is the cornerstone of teaching formal reading.



CLASSROOM TIP

During focused reading learners practice reading strategies together or in small groups guided by the instructor.

There are several guiding principles to focused reading:

- learners are placed into small reading groups (three to five learners) based on similar level or learning needs
- learners read texts at instructional level
- the instructor explicitly models a reading strategy or literacy skill and then guides learners as they try the strategy or skill
- the instructor works individually with each group

Place your learners into reading groups based on similar level or learning needs. You can base your groups on level. This works especially well if you have a very mixed-level class or if you have literacy learners together with non-literacy ELL learners. You can also base your groups on similar learning needs.

You can create groups based on many skills, including:

- vocabulary
- oral language
- phonological awareness (awareness of sounds) and pronunciation
- format of text
- target reading strategy
- knowledge of punctuation
- decoding skills
- comprehension skills
- fluency

The theory behind focused reading is that you can better meet the needs of individual learners in small groups. In small groups you are more likely to notice if a learner is lost or struggling and you can make sure that your learners are reading texts at instructional level. You can track their progress; get to know their strengths, abilities, and challenges; and help them to develop their skills. Remember that a text is at instructional level if a learner can read it with 95% accuracy. Anything below that is frustration level, which is not suitable for focused reading or indeed any kind of reading practice. For more information on instructional level, please see Chapter 4.2.2.

Focused reading is perhaps easiest to do with learners who can already read a short, basic text. Learners at this level and beyond are able to read some text independently and truly benefit from the small group focus, the texts at instructional level, and the explicit instruction in reading strategies. For learners below this level, who are still developing basic decoding skills, you may choose to use the Language Experience Approach instead of (or in addition to) focused reading. However you can still do focused reading with low-level learners and they will also undoubtedly benefit from small group instruction. As with the higher levels, you need to make sure that the text (or words) you are working with are at instructional level for each group of learners. You may choose to work on a reading strategy or to focus on a particular literacy skill. You can also choose to read to your learners, read together with your learners, or support more independent reading.

In a focused reading lesson:

- **before the lesson:**

- organize your learners into reading groups based on similar abilities and needs
- select, adapt, or create a reading text that is at instructional level for each group (the text may be different or adapted for each group)
- consider cognitive load for the learners (don't try to do too many new things at once)

- **during the lesson:**

- work with one group at a time
- teach a reading strategy or literacy skill by explaining, modelling, and doing a think aloud
- lead your learners through pre-reading strategies
- read the text, either together or individually depending on level
- lead your learners through practicing the reading strategy or literacy skill
- read the text again, either together or individually depending on level
- discuss the text, the strategy, and reflect on what you learned

Notice that a focused reading lesson follows the principles of whole-part-whole.

One of the challenges with focused reading is what to do with the rest of your class while you are working with one group of learners. Some instructors have access to other instructors, a teaching assistant, or volunteers. Other instructors need to find ways to handle the entire class while focusing on one group. Depending on your learners, you may find that you can have the rest of the class reading for pleasure, writing in their journals, or working on another activity that they can complete independently or in small groups.

In the classroom: Focused reading

Jane works in a LINC program in a mid-sized town. Her learners are CLB 4 in listening and speaking and CLB 3-4 in reading and writing. About half of her learners are non-literacy ELL learners, who completed school before coming to Canada, and the other half are ESL literacy learners. Even though her literacy learners have CLB 3-4 in reading and writing, she has noticed that they do not seem to learn in the same way as the non-literacy learners. They take much longer to complete tasks and seem to get confused by instructions. While they seem to understand the texts they are reading in class, they struggle to respond to comprehension questions. Many of her ESL literacy learners copy large parts of the story to answer a question. Others answer out of their own ideas, not from the ideas in the text.

Jane decides to bring in focused reading to her classroom three times a week. She creates reading groups for her learners based on their reading level and learning needs. Before class, she finds texts that are at the instructional level for each of her groups. She has her learners work on the same text for a week; this way they read it several times and are able to focus on different aspects of the text or do different tasks with the text each time. Some weeks she is able to use the same text for all groups as long as she adapts the comprehension questions or task. Some weeks she finds a different text for her literacy learners.

The biggest challenge for Jane is how to organize class time so that she can sit with each group. She finds that her non-literacy groups are better able to work independently; she commits to sitting with each non-literacy group one time a week and the other two times she gets them started and then they work independently. She commits to sitting with each ESL literacy group three times a week. While she is working with a reading group, she has her other learners working on tasks they can do on their own or with limited help. For her literacy learners, this is usually writing in their journals, working with their vocabulary, or pleasure reading. For her non-literacy learners there are a few more options.

It takes some organization but Jane and her learners are happy with their progress in reading. The higher level learners feel challenged and are excited to tackle more difficult tasks. All learners are getting the support they need. The lower-level learners are learning reading strategies and can move at a pace that is appropriate to their learning.

6.9 Extensive reading: Reading for pleasure

Extensive reading is just as important to learning to read as intensive reading, if not actually more important. Extensive reading allows learners to read widely at a comfortable independent level, preferably for pleasure. Extensive reading is often used in the school system, sometimes called Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) or Drop Everything and Read (DEAR). The benefits of extensive reading, of the practice of reading widely for pleasure, are far-reaching:

- learners begin to see reading as pleasurable
- learners increase confidence in their reading skills
- learners integrate their literacy skills and practice them in a non-threatening, low-risk environment
- learners develop far more sight words
- learners have many, many opportunities to practice decoding
- learners encounter far more vocabulary words
- learners have opportunities to learn through reading
- learners may find books they can share with younger family members, increasing family literacy
- learners are far more likely to continue to read outside of school for pleasure
- learners may adopt reading for pleasure as a life-long activity

Extensive reading is just as important to learning to read as intensive reading, if not actually more important.

Unlike intensive reading, which is done with texts at instructional level, extensive reading is done with texts at independent level. This means that learners can read the text with 99% accuracy. When you are reading a text with 99% accuracy, decoding does not take up much cognitive load and you are free to spend your mental energy on comprehension, curiosity, and enjoyment.

Extensive reading is not difficult to integrate into your teaching. Set up a time in your class for extensive reading, preferably every class. Collect a variety of texts at independent level for your learners; this will necessarily mean that you have texts at a number of different levels. Try to find high-interest texts for adult ESL literacy

learners. Texts may be fiction, poetry, articles, biographies, or other forms of non-fiction, preferably with photographs or illustrations, on a variety of topics. Make your book display as inviting and accessible as possible. It is best if learners can see all the texts, for example fanned out on a table or leaning against the board.



CLASSROOM TIP

Give learners lots of opportunities for extensive reading done at their independent level.

Help your learners to find texts that are at independent level for them. If they stumble on more than one or two words out of every hundred words, the text is too hard for extensive reading; encourage learners to set aside a more challenging text to read on a different day and find something they can read easily. Once learners have texts, the only thing left to do is read. Encourage your learners to read to themselves for a level-appropriate length of time. At low levels this may be ten minutes. At higher levels, you can let your learners read for half an hour or longer. At lower levels you may find that your learners want or need to read together in pairs. Although it is tempting to use the time your learners are reading to mark, prepare, or take care of administration, this is an excellent time to gather one of your reading groups for focused reading, to model good practice and read for pleasure yourself, or to sit with individual learners and listen to them read.

Extensive reading can be more challenging for low-level readers, but it is still possible. You just need to collect very low-level, high interest books. Grass Roots Press, out of Edmonton, Alberta, has a collection of low-level books with Canadian content for adult literacy learners. Bow Valley College has the ESL Literacy Readers,

written at seven different levels and targeted specifically to adult ESL literacy learners. You can also add stories that you write together as a class during LEA to your pleasure reading library. For more information on LEA, please see Chapter 6.4.

You can include a few children's books in your pleasure reading library as well, but there are a few things to keep in mind. The first is that some adults will not want to read children's books, even if the level is appropriate for them, and in these cases it is very important to respect your learners as adults. You can suggest a different text instead, or suggest that the children's books are there in case anyone wants to practice a book they could later read with their children. Another thing to keep in mind is visual literacy; not all children's books are illustrated in ways that are immediately understandable to ESL literacy learners. Cartoons are particularly challenging. For more information on visual literacy, please see Chapter 2.5.4. The third thing to think about is the level of the language in the texts; since many picture books are intended to be read aloud to children who are native speakers, they actually use quite unusual, high-level vocabulary.

It is not necessary to keep logs, records, or reports of extensive reading, and it is particularly unnecessary to ask your learners to keep records. If a learner wants to talk to you about what he or she is reading, then by all means engage in the conversation; talking about reading can be part of the pleasure of extensive reading. But do not add any requirements to extensive reading other than learners have the opportunity to read widely at independent level.

In addition to extensive reading, you can read aloud to your learners. You can do this at any level and there are many benefits:

- you are modelling fluent, expressive reading
- you can stop and explain things if necessary
- you can practice reading strategies as a class that may be too challenging independently
- you can read texts that are too challenging for learners to read themselves
- your learners may enjoy it

6.10 Intensive writing: Formal writing

Intensive writing, or formal writing, is an opportunity to work with learners in developing their writing in a structured approach with a specific task or type of writing. In the beginning stages of literacy, this will be at the level of learning to make marks on paper. Learners will move on to copying and then writing words, often important personally relevant information such as their name, address, children's names, and so on. As learners develop their writing skills, it is very important that they are exposed to and try many different types of writing, both formatted (such as forms or lists) and unformatted (such as letters, opinions, and stories). The goals of intensive writing are for learners to develop their writing skills, allowing them to express their ideas by writing more, more fluently, and more accurately. When you are designing an intensive writing task, you need to think about:

- the level of your learners
- the outcome of the task
- modelling the task
- scaffolding to support your learners
- teaching writing strategies
- providing feedback to learners on the task

Writing is going to look very different at different levels of literacy development. There are some learners who have never held a pencil in their hands before. Beginning writers will need practice with the fine motor skills, visual discrimination, and hand-eye coordination required to write. This can be exhausting at first, so make sure your writing practice is limited in time. You can also develop these skills (as well as finger strength) with your learners by doing activities such as stringing beads, cutting paper with scissors, working with playdough, arranging small stones or shapes into patterns, and so on.

Learners will need lots of practice making marks. This is best done with something easy to write with, like a fat marker, but can also be done with pencil, pen, or crayon, or in the air or in a sand tray. You can also reduce the effort and the cognitive load of a task by sometimes letting your learners work with letter tiles or word cards, which lets them “write” (make meaning with words on paper) without holding a pencil. As learners are more comfortable with making marks, they will need practice making shapes and then the letters of English. Introduce a few letters at a time, connecting the letters to the sounds they make. It is also a very good idea to teach learners the letters of their name and the names of people important to them.

The next stage of writing development is often copying words, which lets learners practice letter formation and making meaning on paper from a model. It is easier to copy from a source that is directly above or beside you. Copying from sources further away, such as the board, is more challenging. At this point, you can also start to encourage learners to write their own words using invented spelling, although this is very challenging for ESL literacy learners with low writing skills. The emphasis here is not on making comprehensible writing, but on building phonological awareness (the sounds of a word), phonics (the connection between sounds and letters), and the idea that you can use writing to express yourself.

One activity is to ask learners what they did on the weekend and have them write a word or two in response. Encourage them to say the words slowly and write down as many sounds as they can hear. Learners are likely to begin with initial consonant sounds only; then they will be able to write down other stressed sounds in the word. Consonant blends and vowels will come later, as will unstressed sounds. Every letter that is written at this stage is a success. As learners begin to write letters and basic words, they will need to know about writing on the line, sizing their writing to the space provided, and making spaces between words. All of this happens over time with practice.

When learners can write down a few words or sentences, it is time to think about a wider range of writing. Common writing outcomes, arranged more or less in order of increasing difficulty, include lists, directions, warnings, emails or letters, descriptions, comparisons, and opinions.

An important part of intensive writing is modelling. It is very difficult to learn to write something that you have never seen before.

An important part of intensive writing is modelling. It is very difficult to learn to write something that you have never seen before. When you introduce a writing task to your learners, show them a model of a completed task. Examine it together and notice the features. What does it look like? What makes it a good example? What makes it effective writing? You can then move to creating something together as a class with you as the scribe. This helps learners to practice composition skills. It also gives you many opportunities to elicit vocabulary and structure from them: *What is a good word we can use here? What goes at the end of our sentence?*

Once you have modelled a task and written together, it is time for learners to write more independently, but they will still need support. You can use scaffolding to support your learners' writing. Scaffolding will reduce the overall cognitive load of the task and make it easier to be successful. Examples of scaffolding for writing include:

- word banks
- sentence stems
- picture dictionaries
- cloze exercises (where you only need to fill in a few words)
- models

For more information on scaffolding, please see Chapter 4.2.3.



CLASSROOM TIP

Magnetic letters support early writing development.

As you teach learners to write, you also need to teach them writing strategies. These include both encoding (or spelling) strategies and composition strategies. As with all strategies, when you teach writing strategies:

- [1] Recognize and point out the strategies learners are already using.
- [2] Name the strategy you want to teach.
- [3] Explain when we use the strategy and why we use it.
- [4] Model the strategy (use a think aloud).
- [5] Practice the strategy together.
- [6] Build the strategy into your class routine.

One of the key composition strategies is the writing process. The writing process formalizes the idea that writing does not spring, fully formed, from the tips of your fingers. There are many stages to writing: brainstorming, outlining, writing, revising, editing, and finally publishing. For lower-level learners you can simplify this process. As learners develop their writing skills, begin to add different steps of the writing process, first doing the steps together as a class (for example a class brainstorm) and later asking learners to complete the steps more independently. Certain parts of the process are more challenging and require higher levels of literacy than others: publishing (or sharing) is straightforward, while outlining and revising seem to be the most difficult stages for ESL literacy learners. Outlining is very challenging because of the level of organization of thought it requires. Outlining is best taught at higher levels with graphic organizers and a lot of support.

The writing process formalizes the idea that writing does not spring, fully formed, from the tips of your fingers.

Revising is also a little harder; it is generally more challenging than editing. The need for editing is usually easier for learners to accept: there might be errors in the writing in spelling, punctuation, and grammar that need to be fixed. Revising, however, is the idea that your writing might not say what you want it to say. Revising includes the ability to read and evaluate your own writing. When you are teaching revising, encourage learners to read their writing aloud so they can hear it. At higher levels, you can also give learners a revision checklist for key things you would like to see in their writing. This will depend on the level and the writing task, but it can be a good basis for revisions, for example *My writing has an introduction*, *My writing has an example*, or *My writing has transition words*.

The development of the writing process				
writing	writing publishing	brainstorming writing publishing	brainstorming writing editing publishing	brainstorming outlining writing revising editing publishing

The last thing to consider in intensive writing is what to do with your learners' writing once they have written it. How do you provide effective feedback to learners? Traditionally, feedback means getting out a red pen and marking all the errors in the writing. Sometimes it is left at this; sometimes learners are then encouraged to rewrite the piece of writing with the corrections. However, this form of correction can be overwhelming to learners and ineffective in improving learner writing. Effective feedback depends on what you are trying to respond to:

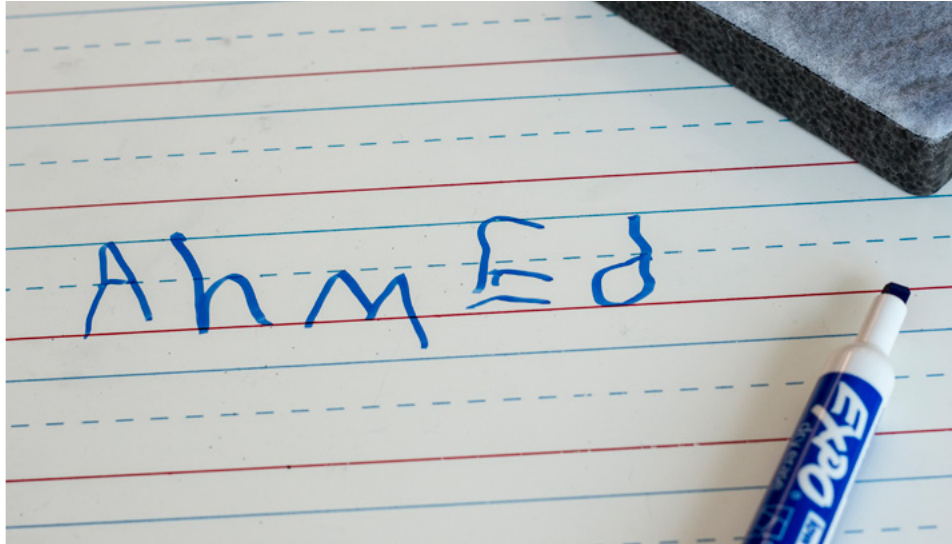
- **To respond to the content:** Speak to your learner. Tell him or her what was effective and make one specific, concrete, achievable suggestion for an improvement.
- **To respond to the spelling:** Develop a level-appropriate routine. Highlight spelling errors of words they should know for their level and encourage them to check sources (word bank, word list, picture dictionary) and recopy the word accurately. Some instructors have their learners keep personal spelling dictionaries.
- **To respond to the grammar:** Work on grammar orally. This is the most effective way to improve ESL literacy learners' grammar in writing, because they write the way they speak. If you have been teaching a grammar point in class, you can develop a level-appropriate routine for correcting grammar. Highlight the error and elicit the correction from the learner. Only tackle one or two types of errors at a time in this way.

Effective feedback does not only mean correcting errors; make sure you always point out what a learner is doing well. Learners are not always aware of what is working in their writing. They need to know when they do something well so that they can increase their confidence and so that they will know to do it again.

There is a movement in education to only teach adult ESL literacy learners the types of writing that they are "likely" to need to know for settlement and employment. The push behind this movement is to keep writing instruction relevant and authentic, but the practical application is often a focus on filling in forms or other types of functional or formatted text, with a move away from unformatted or prose writing. While learners will certainly need the skills to fill in forms, this approach to teaching writing is problematic.

First, it is not easy to predict what kinds of formatted writing learners will encounter. Actual authentic forms vary widely and can be very complex, so it is unrealistic to believe that you are setting up your learners for success in this task. It is not unusual for adults in Canada to need help filling in forms, even if they are educated native speakers of English. Forms for school, work, insurance, banking, health care, housing, contracts, and so on tend to be very challenging to understand.

Second, learners who do not learn to write connected text (sentences or paragraphs) are severely limited in the kinds of writing they can do, which further limits the ways in which they can participate in their community, schools, and employment.



CLASSROOM TIP

A whiteboard allows learners to take more risks. Mistakes can be easily corrected or erased.

Third, the development of writing greatly helps the development of reading. Writing and reading go hand in hand; as learners work to express themselves, they are accomplishing a number of literacy tasks. They are organizing their thoughts and encoding these thoughts into symbols that can be understood by others. As they do this, they are also strengthening their reading skills in textual awareness, phonological awareness, decoding, comprehension, and fluency.

And fourth, teaching learners to write what they want to say – messages to friends, cards to family, a story from their childhood, a note to their children's teacher, email, a cover letter for a job application – affirms both the value of literacy and the value of their thoughts, feelings, and opinions. It is important that writing instruction is relevant; it is also important that it acknowledges the essential role writing plays in the development of literacy.

6.11 Extensive writing: Dialogue journals

Just as extensive reading (reading for pleasure) is an important part of learning to read, extensive writing is also an important part of learning to write. Learners need intensive writing; they need formal instruction in writing skills and strategies, practice with explicit tasks, exposure to a wide range of types of writing, and specific feedback on their writing. But learners also need time to write widely, to attempt things in a low-risk environment, to develop their fluency, and to have real communication. They need extensive writing.

The idea of a dialogue journal is that it is real communication, in writing, like a conversation.

A very good approach to extensive writing is dialogue journals. A dialogue journal is a journal that both you and your learner write in. It is like a regular journal in the sense that the learner chooses the topic and writes freely. The difference is that you respond to what the learner writes and write as much (or nearly as much depending on the level of your learner) in response. The idea of a dialogue journal is that it is real communication, in writing, like a conversation. There are several key features to a dialogue journal:

- The learner writes as much as he or she comfortably can and the instructor responds by writing as much as the learner.
- The focus is on content and communication, not vocabulary, spelling, or grammar, although you can help your learner to find words and you can model back correct spelling or grammar.
- Both the instructor and the learner can share, bring up new topics, ask or respond to questions, or choose not to respond and change the subject instead.
- It is a low-risk space to practice writing and is not assessed, corrected, or graded.
- It can contain drawings as well as writing.

Dialogue journals are usually scribblers or notebooks. They are easy to implement in class. Find time as often as you can manage for your learners to write in their journals. It is best if this writing is done in class time; this gives you the chance to observe your learners as they write and to guide the process as needed. If a learner asks for help, encourage them to use invented spelling as best they can or access the resources around them, such as word banks, word lists, and picture dictionaries. Learners can also draw if they like.

When you respond to your learners:

- Share as much as you feel comfortable with.
- Try to write as much as they do (with higher-level literacy learners this may not be possible).
- Write real content; avoid flat responses such as *good job*.
- Try to follow their interests as best you can.
- Write at the learner's reading level.
- Model words and structures that they are attempting.
- Feel free to draw if it is helpful.

There are many benefits to dialogue journals:

- They are a low-risk space and so learners can feel free to attempt new words, spelling, or structures without fear of making a mistake.
- They demonstrate that writing is real communication.
- They teach learners to write more and faster over time.
- They give you the chance to create short reading texts targeted directly for each learner.
- They allow you to get to know your learners.
- They can inform future instruction.

Dialogue journals demonstrate to learners that writing is real communication.

Engagement tends to be high because learners usually want to communicate with their instructor. The journals provide the space both to write freely and with real purpose. In this space, over time, learners can make real strides forward with their writing. They learn to write more and more quickly and they learn to find the words that they need to say what they want to say.

There are a few things to keep in mind with dialogue journals. The first concern that instructors may have is how much time it takes to respond to the journals. It is certainly a time commitment; however the benefit to the learners is high. Dialogue journals are the main way that you are responding to your learners in writing. They also allow you to target your response to the level, needs, and interests of each learner, giving your learners regular individualized reading texts. Remember that you do not correct the journals; you simply write a response.

It is also important to have a sense of boundaries with dialogue journals. Be aware of how much you are comfortable sharing with your learners and do not get pushed past that point. Your learners may also choose to share something personal with you; if you do not feel comfortable, you can gently steer the conversation in a

direction that you prefer. If you have any concerns about something your learner has written in the journal, or you have concerns about the learner in general, it is always best to deal with this by speaking directly to the learner. ESL literacy learners cannot be expected to understand tone in writing and the key feature of dialogue journals is that they are a safe space. If you have something you need to say to a learner, do it in person instead of in the dialogue journal.

6.12 Project-based learning

Project-based learning is an approach that combines many different elements of literacy and language learning into one larger project. There are a number of reasons why project-based learning can be a very effective approach. It allows learners to be involved in every stage of the learning process, it allows learners to work at different levels, and it involves the integration of many different skills. Projects can vary widely but there are some general principles of project-based learning:

- there is a driving question to the project
- learners work together in pairs or small groups
- each learner contributes to the project
- the project involves some form of learning or investigation
- the project involves the creation of a product
- the learners present or talk about their project once it is complete

Project-based learning has been around for quite a while and has been used in many different educational contexts. In their book chapter “Pervasive Management of Project Based Learning: Teachers as Guides and Facilitators,” John R. Mergendoller, Thom Markham, Jason Ravitz, and John Larmer (2006) trace the roots of project-based learning to three sources. The first is John Dewey, in 1929, who argued for using “intellectual and practical problems as the vehicle for teaching and learning” (p. 584). The second is the cognitive and constructivist theorists of the 1970s-90s who suggest that “knowledge and strategies acquired in the process of solving a problem are learned more easily, retained longer, and more frequently applied to future problems than the same knowledge and strategies taught in the abstract” (p. 584). The third is the medical school at McMaster University who implemented project-based learning in 1968 in order to increase learner engagement.

A project usually begins with generating a driving question and then designing a project to explore the question. Once the learners have the question, they need to decide on the learning they will do for the project and how they will present this

learning or what they are going to create. Driving questions and projects will vary depending on the level of your learners, their interests, and what you are learning in class. There are endless possibilities in project-based learning.

Ideas for project-based learning		
Driving question	Investigation (how you answer the question)	Product (what you create)
What advice can I give someone who is new to Canada?	Ask my classmates what they learned in their first months in Canada.	a poster with advice and pictures
What did I learn in my first month in Canada?	Ask each learner to write down something he or she learned and take a photograph, cut out a photograph, or draw a picture.	a book that can be used for pleasure reading
What does winter look like in Calgary?	Go for a walk in the community. Take pictures of signs of winter. Look at magazines. Cut out winter clothes.	a collage of pictures
What do learners like to do when they are not in school?	Make a survey. Ask my classmates.	a project board with a chart and pictures
What food do we like to eat?	Write down your favorite food and how to make it. Take a picture.	a cookbook with favorite foods from each learner in the class
How can I save money?	Ask my classmates for ideas.	a pamphlet about saving money
How can I help people in my community?	Collect bottles from people at the school and donate to a chosen charity or program.	write a letter to the charity

Learners can be involved in every stage of the learning process in project-based learning, from the creation of the driving question to the assessment at the end. Projects are most effective when they interest and engage the learners; they are

also a great opportunity to respond to learner needs while developing literacy skills. For more information on needs assessment, please see Chapter 4.1.2. When you are doing projects, try to strike a balance between supporting your learners and allowing them to do as much of the work on the project as possible themselves. You can help guide learners by leading brainstorms and discussion; you can also support with scaffolding that will allow them to complete their investigation. This might be sentence stems for questions in a survey, a template for making a graph, or a word bank. You can also help learners to develop their product by printing pictures or supplying poster paper and other materials.



CLASSROOM TIP

A group project promotes learning through working together, problem solving, and creating.

Another key support you can provide is a model to work from. It is much easier to create something if you know what it is supposed to look like. In her book *Making Classroom Assessment Work*, Anne Davies (2011) argues for "beginning with the end in mind." She writes, "it seems obvious that reaching a destination is easier if you know where or what it is" (p. 25). Davies advocates for describing the learning destination, writing that "teachers find that a description of what needs to be learned helps students learn more" (p. 27).

Models are very effective teaching tools; they provide the "learning destination." As you look at a model with your learners, you can ask them what makes the model effective. What do they like about it? What are the most important parts of the project? This will help learners to understand what they are trying to make. With more advanced learners, you can elicit the criteria for assessment. Examine the model together and ask them how you should assess the projects. What will a successful project look like?

Project-based learning is effective because it allows learners to work at their own level. You can differentiate learning during projects by helping learners to find which part of the project they can do. Effective projects allow each learner to contribute something and learn something; they allow all learners to work at their instructional level. Projects also address different learning styles; there is often room within a project to do different kinds of work:

- work with your hands
- work orally
- work with people
- work in writing
- work with numbers
- work creatively
- work with design

Models are very effective teaching tools; they provide the “learning destination.”

When you are creating groups for your projects, you can use two different approaches. You can intentionally group learners with mixed abilities together, with the idea that they will learn from each other and each learner will be able to do something. If you take this approach, make sure that the projects have tasks that are at the right level for each of the learners. The other approach is to group learners with similar abilities together and differentiate the projects so that everyone is working at instructional level.

Projects are also effective because they allow learners to integrate a number of skills together. Learners will need to work together and speak together in order to complete the project. This will involve discussion, negotiating, and likely some compromise. Projects also involve logical thinking and some form of reading and writing skills. They can involve numeracy and they require learners to think creatively and to present their work visually. Learners will also need to present or talk about the project at the end. In these ways, a project can integrate work in listening, speaking, reading, writing, numeracy, digital literacy, and group work skills.

In the classroom: Project-based learning

Henry teaches in a program for immigrant and refugee youth with literacy needs. His learners are expanding their decoding skills and building sight words and have CLB 3-4 in listening and speaking. Henry and his learners work on a project every semester. This semester they are learning about seasons and weather. Many of the learners have lived in Canada for less than a year and some have not yet experienced spring.

They brainstorm what they would like to learn and choose a driving question: what are the signs of spring in their community? They decide to visit a local park each week for four weeks and record their observations by writing, drawing, and taking pictures. As a final product they will make a poster of the signs of spring and present it to a lower-level class.

Before his learners begin their projects, Henry makes a poster of his own as a model. They examine it together and discuss what makes it effective. Henry draws his learners' attention to features that he would like to see in their work: a clear title and labels.

Henry puts together an observation book for his learners. They work together to build vocabulary for the park and for making descriptions. They collect words on a word wall in the classroom. The learners work together in groups. Each week they look at what they have recorded and discuss. They start to compare changes from week to week. Some groups decide to organize their poster by week, to show the changes. Some groups decide to group the drawings, writing, and photographs together. Once they have completed the posters, they share them with each other. They have the chance to share many times before they invite a lower class to be their audience.

Finally, Henry and his learners reflect on the project, orally first and then in writing. Henry asks each learner to identify something they learned and a challenge they overcame. Some learners comment on the words they learned. Some comment on learning how to print the photographs from the computer. Some comment on how nervous they were to present a project. For some, it is the opportunity to learn more their new community.

Chapter 7

Materials and resources

In this chapter we explore:

- the importance of reading materials at the right level
- hands-on materials: learning literacy without a pen or paper
- fiction, non-fiction, and functional texts
- adapting and creating your own materials

Adult ESL literacy learners have unique learning needs that are separate from non-literacy ELL learners (who are not learning literacy skills) and non-literacy adult literacy learners (who are not learning a language). They are also very separate from young learners, who are usually supported in availability for learning, oral language, and knowledge and experience as they develop literacy skills and who may have learned textual awareness and phonological awareness before they begin formal school through early games, songs, stories, and interactions with text.

The unique needs of adult ESL literacy learners can make it difficult to find appropriate learning materials and resources for the classroom.

The unique needs of adult ESL literacy learners can make it difficult to find appropriate learning materials and resources for the classroom. A number of educators and researchers in adult ESL literacy note the general lack of suitable teaching materials; in their report *An Investigation of Best Practices in the Instruction and Assessment of LINC Literacy Learners in Ontario*, Jill Cummings, Mark Jacot, and Adriana Parau (2006) include more materials designed specifically for adult ESL literacy learners as one of their recommendations. It is also challenging to create materials for ESL literacy learners because the demographics of learners can change quite quickly, which also means their experiences, strengths, and needs can change.

The difficulty in finding materials arises from the fact that the materials must be suitable in terms of:

- language
- literacy level
- the adult context
- the learning needs of these specific learners
- the need for material to be personally relevant

Materials created for non-literacy ELL learners often assume high levels of literacy skills; the format, layout, font size, textual features, and the text itself may not be appropriate for literacy learners. Materials created for mainstream adult literacy learners, on the other hand, generally assume that the learners are native speakers and the level of the language, the variety of vocabulary, and the assumed cultural knowledge may not be suitable. Materials for young learners can also be problematic; in general they support beginning readers but the content and images may be childish. It is also very important to make a distinction between books that are written to be read out loud to children and books that are written for young

readers to read themselves. Many picture books are written to be read out loud to children who are native speakers of English and actually contain very high-level vocabulary and challenging words.

The most important factor to consider in choosing (or creating) materials for your learners is that it is at the right level: learners can read texts at instructional level with 95% accuracy and texts at independent level with 99% accuracy. Anything below that is at frustration level and is not suitable. The first section of this chapter discusses reading materials at the right level. It is also very important to remember that oral language, movement, and hands on activities are very important in an adult ESL literacy classroom. In the next section of the chapter we discuss materials that build literacy skills and do not involve books, pens, or paper. The following section discusses different types of reading materials: fiction, non-fiction, and functional texts, and the importance of each one. We then explore ideas around adapting and creating your own materials.

7.1 Reading materials at the right level

Whether you are selecting or producing your own materials, one of the most important things to consider is whether the materials are at the right level for your learners and are targeted toward what you want to teach. Thinking about level for a class of adult ESL literacy learners will likely be challenging, because you will have to consider both oral language and literacy skills. Depending on the context in which you teach, you may also have a multi-level class or literacy learners combined with non-literacy ELL learners. When you are considering level, you can think about the features of the materials, visual literacy, reading level, language level, and whether the material targets the skills and strategies you want to teach.

Effective textual features for ESL literacy learners change depending on their language and literacy level. At any level, you want your materials to be clear and easy to read; everything on the page should support the reading process. There should not be anything that is unclear, unnecessary, or distracting. Also try to be consistent with the materials you give your learners; it lowers cognitive load for learners if their materials are always laid out in the same way or use the same symbols. Considerations about textual features include:

- **Font:** At low levels of literacy instruction, the font should be as close to hand printing as possible. Look for fonts without serifs (the extra extended lines that can decorate some fonts), with a lower case *a* and *g* that match hand printing. Learners at higher levels of literacy instruction will be able to read most clear, common fonts.

- **Font size:** At low levels, choose a much larger than normal font size (24 point or higher). At higher levels, font size can approach regular size (11 point) as long as the rest of the text supports the level of the learners.
- **White space:** Pages should be clutter-free with plenty of white space so a beginning reader can easily identify what he or she needs to read and is not overwhelmed by text.
- **Wrap-around text:** At low levels, learners are likely to be reading single words. As they move on to reading short sentences, begin with texts that do not wrap around to the next line. As learners progress they can begin to read wrap-around text of a sentence or two per page, and then more wrap-around text.
- **Format:** Text can have many different formats: letters, bills, lists, stories, newspaper articles, labels, instructions, recipes, and so on all have different formats. When you are introducing a text spend time teaching your learners about the format. Try to keep texts of the same type in consistent formats.

Visual literacy is also an important consideration in choosing appropriate and effective reading texts. Learners who have not had much experience with reading or with formal education have also likely not had much experience interpreting pictures. There is a progression of the development of visual literacy, beginning with the most realistic images and moving toward more stylized or symbolic images.

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Visual literacy generally develops in this order:

- [1] photographs
- [2] realistic drawings
- [3] line drawings
- [4] stylized images
- [5] symbolic images

For more information on visual literacy, please see Chapter 2.5.4. Visual literacy is also discussed in the Continuum of Literacy Skills in the Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks *ESL for Adult Literacy Learners (ALL)*.

Make sure that the pictures in the text are clear and comprehensible to your learners whatever level they are at. Pictures should also be reproduced clearly (blurry photocopies are unlikely to help developing readers) and support the reading of the text. Pictures play an important role in the development of literacy. They allow us to approach many reading comprehension strategies; they give clues to the meaning of the text and allow for prediction, but they also invite discussion in their own right. You can practice a lot of inference using the pictures. You can begin a deeper discussion of comprehension when focusing on the pictures. Pictures are the first thing we notice when we see a text and they can play the critical role of sparking interest and engaging curiosity.

It is also very important to choose texts that are at the appropriate reading level for the learners. There are three reading levels for each learner (Betts, 1946):

- **Independent level:** learners can read the text with 99% accuracy and 90% comprehension. Texts at independent level are suitable for extensive reading (pleasure reading) and fluency practice.
- **Instructional level:** learners can read the text with 95% accuracy and 75% comprehension. Texts at instructional level are suitable for teaching because there is possibility to develop skills but still comprehend the text.
- **Frustration level:** learners can read the text with less than 90% accuracy and less than 50% comprehension. Texts at frustration level are too difficult to be productive reading.

Even if you are not teaching an overtly multi-level class, it is unlikely that all your learners are reading at exactly the same level, so it is always a good idea to have a range of levels of text in your classroom. When you are choosing texts for focused reading or other instruction, choose texts at instructional level. This may mean that you have to create reading groups in your class and choose or adapt texts to be suitable for each level. When your learners are reading for fluency practice or pleasure, make sure you have a range of texts available and help learners to select something at independent level. For more information on reading levels, please see Chapter 4.2.2.

Choosing texts at the right level for ESL literacy learners is further complicated not just by their literacy skills but also by their oral English. You will need to consider whether your learners have the oral language to read the text as well as whether they have the literacy skills. The reading levels, independent level, instructional level, and frustration level, also apply to oral language: if a learner cannot read the text with 95% accuracy, the text is at frustration level. It does not actually matter if this is because of their oral language or their literacy skills.

However, the realities of teaching English as well as literacy mean that you will need to spend a lot of time developing vocabulary, listening comprehension, and grammar (word order and word endings) with your learners. Your learners will not yet have enough of a base of oral English to support full literacy development, and it will be difficult to find texts where 95% of the words are decodable for your learners AND recognizable and understood once they are decoded. This means that you will likely need to work on learning the new vocabulary for a text before you read it. For more information on developing oral language, please see Chapter 2.5.2 and Chapter 5.

One tool for creating reading texts at the right level for your learners is to use the Language Experience Approach (LEA). In LEA, you build vocabulary together as a class and then have an experience as a class. You discuss the experience and then have your learners tell you the story of what happened. While they talk, you write down the story as they say it. You can then use this text for a variety of literacy activities. LEA is very effective, especially at lower levels, because the language comes directly from the learners themselves. It is a way of controlling the vocabulary and the structures so that everything is familiar and you can focus on developing literacy skills. LEA stories form the source of reading texts in many adult ESL literacy classes. For more information on LEA, please see Chapter 6.4.

The last thing to consider in choosing the right level of text is whether the text supports the literacy skills and strategies that you are teaching. It is easiest to target specific strategies or language when you create your own reading materials. Then you can build in known sight words for your learners, recent vocabulary you have been developing, and whichever strategies you are focusing on. For example, if you want to teach your learners about context clues, you can write a text that deliberately supports this strategy. It would be a text where all words are highly familiar to the learners except for a few which have built-in context clues.

7.2 Learning literacy without a pen or paper

There are many resources that you can use in your classroom to support the development of literacy that do not involve a pen or paper. There are good reasons to use a variety of learning resources, including objects, games, and realia (real objects):

- They are effective learning tools.
- They can increase learner engagement, interest, and curiosity.

- They allow you to work on specific skills in isolation without constantly asking learners to read and write. Working with pen and paper is quickly exhausting for beginning readers and writers.
- They provide a chance for change and movement for learners who may not have much experience with sitting for long periods of time.
- They allow for hands-on learning and address different learning styles.



CLASSROOM TIP

Jigsaw puzzles help learners develop tracking, visual discrimination, spacing, and problem solving skills.

Non-paper resources are especially helpful in developing textual awareness, phonological awareness, and decoding and encoding skills.

There are also resources you can use which integrate several different literacy skills together, including the development of oral language. Games are a very good example of these resources.

Non-paper resources for developing literacy skills	
Literacy skill	Resource ideas
Textual awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • environmental print and photographs of environmental print • fly swatters: learners tap words as you read them out loud • photographs and drawings: match to objects, discuss to build visual literacy
Phonological awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • chips, tokens, or stones: line up one chip for every sound in a word • picture cards: sort by sound (initial, all words containing a sound, etc.) • signs (can be hand-made using paper and popsicle sticks): raise your sign if you hear the target sound • recordings of nursery rhymes, rhyming poetry, or songs: hear the rhyming words, play with language and sound
Decoding / Encoding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • play dough: develop fine motor skills • scissors and paper: develop fine motor skills and hand-eye coordination • beads: string beads to develop fine motor skills • photographs: arrange to tell a story • sand tray (or sugar or salt): trace letters • letter tiles or magnetic letters: learn the names, find similarities and differences, match to sounds, match to photographs, use to write • word cards: match to photographs, match to objects, sort, use to write

Games as learning resources		
Game	Description	Target skills
Jigsaw puzzles	Put together a jigsaw puzzle; begin with puzzles with very few pieces (4-12).	fine motor skills, visual discrimination, problem-solving
Board games	Usually instructor-made; roll a die, advance, answer a question on the square.	counting, decoding, oral language, vocabulary
Bingo	Can be played with pictures, words, letters, or sounds.	listening comprehension, visual discrimination, scanning, working with charts, as well as target skill: vocabulary, phonological awareness, letter knowledge, decoding
Word Battle	Played like the card game War, using sight word cards; players read each word out loud and say what it means. The player with the longest word keeps the cards. If you have the same number, flip over three cards face down and then another card. Repeat until there is a winner; winner takes all the cards.	decoding, sight words, vocabulary, counting, letter knowledge
Memory	Played with photographs, sight word cards, or a set of each; cards are arranged face down and players take turns turning over two cards. The goal is to make a match.	visual memory, sight words, vocabulary, matching words to photographs
Go Fish	Played with sight word cards or photographs; players deal out five cards each and take turns asking each other for a card. The goal is to match pairs. If you don't make a match, draw one from the pile.	sight words, vocabulary, oral language
Charades	Players read their card (secretly) and then silently act it out. Other players try to guess.	sight words, vocabulary, oral language

Draw and Guess	Players read their card (secretly) and then try to draw pictures. Other players try to guess.	sight words, vocabulary, oral language, drawing, fine motor skills
Who am I?	Players get a card taped to their back which they cannot see. Walk around the room and ask others questions to try to guess your card.	sight words, vocabulary, oral language, reasoning
Scattergories	Players (or teams) get a card with a chart, with letters down one side and categories across the top. Goal is to find a word for each category that starts with that letter. Categories can be topics (animals, food, places) or word families (-ay, -it, -at, -ight).	decoding, oral language, sorting and categorization, onset and rime

Realia, or real objects, can also be powerful learning resources in an ESL literacy classroom. They allow learners to work with their hands and provide memorable experience. Realia can support the development of:

- oral language and specifically vocabulary: food items, winter clothing, tools, kitchen utensils, etc.
- literacy skills: calendars, utility bills, empty pill bottles, empty packaging, etc.
- knowledge and experience: models, maps, globes, etc.

There are also a lot of activities that you can do in class to support language and literacy learning that do not involve objects or paper; for more information on activities to support language development please see Chapter 5.3. For more information on using objects, movement, and speaking and listening to teach literacy, please see Chapter 6.3.

7.3 Fiction, non-fiction, and functional texts

When you are choosing reading materials for your literacy class, work with a wide variety of texts, including fictional, non-fictional, and functional texts. Learners focus on different reading skills when they are working with fiction, non-fiction, and functional texts, and in order to develop their literacy skills to a proficient level they will need experience with all three kinds of text.

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There is a strong emphasis on reading functional texts, rather than fiction or even non-fiction, in most ELL and ESL literacy classes in Canada. Functional texts, often called formatted texts, are texts which you read for a purpose outside of entertainment or learning. They include forms, schedules, labels, packaging, instructions, websites, and so on. They do not include works with continuous text, such as fiction (or drama or poetry) or non-fiction texts with the purpose to teach about a subject. The Canadian Language Benchmarks support this focus on functional text; the four competency areas in reading in the CLBs are:

- Interacting with others
- Comprehending instructions
- Getting things done
- Comprehending information

While there is the possibility of approaching some non-fiction texts under the competency area of comprehending information, there is no space given here to reading for purposes of pleasure or the learning that comes from reading fiction. It is important to note, however, that the Canadian Language Benchmarks were designed to measure language ability, not to teach people how to read. In literacy classes, learners will need to read many types of texts, including fiction, and lots of them.

Most people who develop literacy as children learn to read by reading fiction, but even within the field of literacy education for children there has been extensive debate about reading fiction. This debate has focused on the question of whether children should learn to read using authentic, whole texts with natural language

patterns, or using beginner-specific, highly decodable texts with lots of repetition. Timothy Rasinski and Nancy Padak (2013) sum up this debate (placing themselves firmly on one side):

Some believe structure and control facilitate learning. Others, however (and we include ourselves here), see faults with this “go, Spot, go” type of writing. Simple language patterns are usually unfamiliar to children because they do not represent the natural oral language they hear in daily life; moreover, the vocabulary repetition is unnatural (when was the last time you said, “Look. Oh look, look, look” in conversation?). Stories written to fit a formula with certain words and restricted sentence patterns usually lack literary merit. (p. 59)

What Rasinski and Padak argue for, along with Richard Allington and many other educators and researchers, is reading plenty of authentic texts both for their realistic, varied, and playful representation of language and because they are engaging and worth reading. Rasinski and Padak (2013) conclude, “We recommend good stories and lots of reading for students. Not only do good stories provide students with great opportunities for practicing their word recognition skills and strategies, they also make reading satisfying and exciting for students – they help to get students hooked on reading and hooked on books.” (pp. 70-71).

The same argument for reading fiction can be applied to adult ESL literacy learners, with careful consideration for the development of oral language as well. The benefits of reading fiction to and with your adult ESL literacy learners are extensive:

- Learners hear authentic language and fluent reading modelled every time you read to them.
- They often come from oral cultures where stories are valued.
- They have an opportunity to learn about culture as well as language and literacy.
- They can encounter texts that play with language and sound, allowing them to work on phonological awareness and pronunciation.
- They can read connected text that is likely to contain expression and inference.
- They will encounter a wide range of vocabulary.
- They can take pleasure in reading.
- Fiction often contains rich illustrations.
- Fiction lends itself to rich discussions.
- The quality of writing in fiction is often high.

Perhaps the strongest reason for learners to read fictional texts is because the texts are connected prose and support the growth of literacy skills which are not supported by functional reading. Functional reading does not generally support the building of phonological awareness. Utility bills don't play with language. An email doesn't contain alliteration. Bus schedules don't rhyme. Similarly, they do not support the growth of certain comprehension skills and strategies, such as inference, prediction, or even finding context clues. And finally, functional reading does not support the development of fluency. Fluent readers – at any level – read a text at independent level with accuracy, speed, and expression. Functional reading does not support fluency because it is never read as a stream of connected text.

There are challenges to reading fiction with adult ESL literacy learners as well. The biggest challenge by far is the level of the language; it is far harder to control the level of language in fictional text than in non-fictional or functional text. Authors are notorious for playing with language and selecting precise, evocative, expressive, enjoyable – and often unusual – vocabulary. A man in a non-fictional text walks along the street. In a fictional story, he may walk, but he is more likely to creep, stride, scurry, shuffle, pace, sprint, or wander. At a certain point in language and literacy development, this range of vocabulary is a strong advantage to reading fiction: where else will learners learn these words? However, reading levels apply for language as well as literacy skills: learners in your class should be reading texts at instructional or independent level, which means that they can read with 95-99% accuracy. So there is no doubt as to the benefits of teaching fiction, but finding level-appropriate fictional text will be a challenge.

Fluent readers – at any level – read a text at independent level with accuracy, speed, and expression. Functional reading does not support fluency because it is never read as a stream of connected text.

This challenge also extends to the pictures in the text and the subject matter. You need to make sure that your learners have the visual literacy to understand the pictures in the book, the appropriate oral language level, and the interest in the topic. There are many wonderful picture books with rich illustrations and evocative, playful language, but they are generally written for children who are native speakers of English. What's more is that they are usually written to be read aloud to children; these are rarely the first books that children can read on their own. This means that they often contain language that is challenging to read, vocabulary that is challenging to understand, and lots of wordplay.

You also want to make sure that you are reading books to and with your learners that are relevant and interesting to them; they may not have an interest in dinosaurs, trains, robots, or other topics that might appeal to younger readers. You never want to make your learners feel like you are treating them like children. There is no clear answer to the question of finding appropriate fiction to read with your learners; it remains a challenge, which is one of the reasons that LEA stories are so popular. Keep your learners in mind as you try to find materials: what they can read, what they can understand, what their interests are, and what they need to work on.

Many of the same arguments for the benefits of reading fiction with your learners can be applied to reading non-fiction. Non-fiction usually describes texts with the intent to tell a true story or to teach information. These texts provide many of the same rich opportunities for literacy learning as fiction, likely with more opportunities to consider knowledge and experience and activate background knowledge and fewer opportunities to read with expression. There are also advantages to non-fiction over fiction for adult ESL literacy learners; it is usually easier to find appropriate texts at the right level. Since non-fiction texts usually contain photographs rather than illustrations, visual literacy is a little easier. Also even non-fiction texts intended for children are less likely to be “childish” than fictional texts intended for readers at that level.

There is no doubt as to the benefits of teaching fiction, but finding level-appropriate fictional text will be a challenge.

It is also important to read a wide range of functional texts with your adult ESL literacy learners. These texts provide learners with opportunities to develop literacy skills for reading highly formatted work, such as scanning. They also demonstrate to learners that there are lots of different purposes to reading, and perhaps most importantly they often appeal to adult learners because they look like texts they encounter and need to read in their lives. This makes most functional texts highly relevant and sometimes critically important to learners. However, like fiction and to a lesser degree non-fiction texts, it is not always easy to find functional texts that are at an appropriate level for your learners. Many instructors solve this problem by creating their own functional texts or adapting functional texts for their learners. You can also bring in authentic examples to support learning but still work with adapted versions. For more information on relevant and authentic learning, please see Chapter 4.1.4.

7.4 Adapting materials

There are some excellent materials available commercially and through various institutions and organizations that are specifically designed for adult ESL literacy learners, but there are not a lot of them. There are also many, many resources available for non-literacy ELL learners and many resources available for developing literacy for children; some of these resources may be suitable for your learners and some may work if you adapt them for your learners.

When you are adapting materials, consider what you can do to make the materials work for your learners. You can think about:

- **Textual features:** Font, font size, white space, wrap-around text, and so on.
- **Language level:** Do your learners have the oral language to understand?
- **Literacy level:** Do your learners have the literacy skills to work with this material? Does the material build the skills you want to build?
- **Visual literacy:** Are the images appropriate for your learners?
- **Topic:** Is it relevant and engaging? Does it fit with your theme? Do your learners have the background knowledge to understand?

Some common adaptations to materials include:

- retype a text to adapt the textual features
- rewrite a text in simpler language
- rewrite a text to support target literacy skills or strategies
- use a text as is but adapt or create your own activities
- add images to support the text
- change the images to support your learners
- add in scaffolding to support your learners

The most important thing to consider for your learners is if the material is at the right level for them. For instructional level, they need to read the material with 95% accuracy and 75% comprehension. For independent level, they need to read the material with 99% accuracy and 90% comprehension. You can also consider scaffolding to help your learners complete tasks successfully and to teach them learning strategies. For more information on reading levels, please see Chapter 4.2.2. For more information on scaffolding, please see Chapter 4.2.3. You can also refer to Chapter V of *CLB: ESL for ALL Support Kit*, which discusses selecting, adapting, and creating materials.

Example of adapted material

When you adapt material for lower levels, pay attention to the vocabulary, language structure, and length of sentences, as well as the font size, white space, and wrap-around text. In this example, a text has been adapted for lower learners (lower text is below).

Sadia Can't Pay Her Bills (higher level)

Sadia is 23 years old. She moved to Calgary from Somalia two years ago. Sadia goes to school in the daytime from Monday to Friday. She works at night six times a week. She works in a restaurant downtown.



Sadia is usually happy, but today she is worried.

Sadia Can't Pay Her Bills (lower level)

Sadia is 23 years old.

Sadia is from Somalia.

Sadia moved to Calgary two years ago.

Sadia goes to school Monday to Friday.

She works at night six times a week.

She works in a restaurant downtown.



Sadia is worried.

7.5 Creating your own materials

Many adult ESL literacy instructors create the bulk of their own material. There are two clear reasons for this. The first reason is that there are not enough effective and appropriate materials available for adult ESL literacy learners. The second reason is that the learning needs of a group of adult ESL literacy learners are so specific that it is often most effective to tailor make your materials for your learners. When you create your own materials, you can work with the language that you are developing and the literacy level of your learners. You can also work to make the material relevant and engaging.

One of the most common materials to make for your learners are word / letter / picture cards. These cards are simple to make. You can either hand-make them or print them on a computer; you can use paper or card stock, and you can laminate them to make them hold up a little better. It is often useful to have individual sets for learners and a larger set for you to use for the whole class. You can keep word cards on a ring for your learners. Add new cards as you learn new letters or words; you can also recycle and review old cards. It is best if you continue to use the same image to represent a word each time. Word / letter / picture cards are highly versatile; you can use them for a whole range of activities, including:

- **matching:** match pictures to objects, letters to pictures, words to pictures, words to objects, words to a sentence or simple story
- **sorting:** sort by sound, initial letter, words containing a letter, number of letters, number of syllables, meaning (for example animals and clothing or people and food), part of speech (things and actions)
- **games:** Memory, Go Fish, Word Battle
- **decoding:** read cards together, in groups, or individually
- **telling stories:** arrange to tell a story
- **copying:** copy cards to fill in blanks or sentence stems
- **working with personal information:** copy or sort cards to work on name, country of origin, language, or address
- **assembling sentences:** assemble sentences from cut up words
- **routine language development:** choose the right cards for the weather each day, the date, and the day of the week
- **classroom routine:** create cards for routine activities and tape to the board each class to make an agenda for the day

You can also create paper activities to support your word / picture cards and help to build vocabulary and sight words. There are endless variations around matching, copying, and using words. The source of these words is often the reading that you

want to do with your learners, although usually the words come first in order to help learners to build vocabulary before the reading. Another source is the theme that you are working on, such as clothing, visiting the doctor, school, weather, and so on. However you choose your words, work to recycle them as many times as possible in different ways, using them for speaking, listening, reading, and writing activities.

Other common materials to create are games. You can either use a computer to create a board game board or hand print a board game onto card stock; you can also laminate them to make them last longer. Many instructors create a basic board game (often a path around the board made of squares) and then create cards to draw for each square. This lets you reuse your board for many different kinds of activities. You can use anything for tokens to move around the board; one good idea is the lids off of spent white board markers. Cards could include sight words (*read the card and go forward one more space*); questions (*answer the question and roll again*); content (*name three cities in Canada*); or tasks (*think of three words that start with /t/; name two things you can eat*). You can connect your cards to whatever theme or skill you are teaching. You can also create Bingo cards with sounds, letters, pictures, or words.



CLASSROOM TIP

Once you create a template, you can adapt a board game to focus on different language or literacy development.

You can also create all kinds of materials to help support specific literacy skills and strategies. You can make a word wall in one part of your classroom where you put words that you are currently working on. You can make posters to remind learners of reading or writing strategies. You can also create wheels to help learners with onset

and rime families. When you do this, cut two circles of different sizes and connect them in the centre so that they can spin. On the outer circle, write all the different onsets for the word family. On the inner circle, in one place, write the rime. Learners can spin the circle to match up onsets with the rime and create new words in the word family. You can also achieve the same idea with two Styrofoam cups nestled in each other; write onsets around the rim of the first cup and the rime on the rim of the second cup.

Other common materials to create are reading texts themselves. There are several ways to generate effective reading texts at level for your learners. The first is to write a Language Experience Approach (LEA) story together. There are many advantages to an LEA story. You can also take an LEA story, type it, add images, and turn it into a book for your classroom. For more information on LEA, please see Chapter 6.4. You can also use dialogue journals with your learners. Not only do dialogue journals give learners excellent opportunity for individualized writing practice, they also allow you to create a short reading text tailored for each learner every time you write to them. You can choose your vocabulary, model language use, and match the interests and level of each learner personally. For more information on dialogue journals, please see Chapter 6.11.

The third approach to creating your own reading text is to write a text for the class. There are many benefits to writing your own texts. You can create a text at the language and literacy level of your learners, including specific vocabulary words and even stories of your learners themselves. You can control the textual features and the images; you can also photograph your learners with permission, the activities you do in class, or places in your community. Although creating a text can be time-consuming, it also takes time to find and adapt appropriate reading material. Many instructors create a balance for themselves by creating texts at instructional level for the whole class for focused reading and choosing a variety of commercially available texts at a range of levels for individual learners to choose for reading for pleasure. One approach to writing texts for the class is to tell the story of one of your experiences, such as a trip, illustrated with photographs. Learners are usually interested in hearing about your experiences.

Conclusions: Putting it all together

Adult ESL literacy learners have the challenging task of learning a language and developing literacy at the same time. They bring a wide range of experience, strength, knowledge, skills, and goals to our classrooms and to Canada; they also have specific learning needs that set them apart from non-literacy adult ELL learners (who already have developed literacy in another language) and adult literacy learners (who already speak English fluently). Adult ESL literacy learners need support and direct instruction in the development of both language and literacy. In particular, they need effective literacy instruction that is embedded within the development of oral language and they need teaching approaches that effectively meet their learning needs and give them the skills and strategies to reach their goals.

In particular, learners need effective literacy instruction that is embedded within the development of oral language and they need teaching approaches that effectively meet their learning needs and give them the skills and strategies to reach their goals.

This book presents the Framework of Literacy Skills for Adult ESL Literacy Learners and a discussion of effective teaching approaches. The Framework specifically examines skills for developing literacy as an adult ESL literacy learner. The skills are:

- [1] Availability for learning
- [2] Oral language to support reading and writing
- [3] Knowledge and experience
- [4] Textual awareness
- [5] Phonological awareness
- [6] Decoding / Encoding
- [7] Comprehension / Composition
- [8] Fluency

Each of these skill areas is further divided into individual skills and strategies. This Framework provides the theoretical background for informing ESL literacy instruction. It was developed by instructors for instructors to give an overview of what it takes to learn to read and write. The intention of the Framework is to build understanding of literacy skills and inform instruction.

Several things generally need to happen for a person to learn to read and write. Learners need to be available for learning. They need to have the oral language and knowledge about the world to support literacy development. They need to build discreet skills in textual awareness, phonological awareness, decoding and encoding, comprehension and composition, and fluency. And they need to do all of this in the context of engaging with whole texts. They need lots and lots of experience reading and writing at an appropriate level.

The development of literacy is a continuum that happens over time and learners usually progress in the development of literacy skills in a particular order. This means that the focus of literacy instruction should shift over time as learners develop their skills. They will always need support or instruction in:

- Availability for learning
- Oral language to support reading and writing
- Knowledge and experience
- Comprehension

Depending on their level, they will also need support or instruction in:

- Textual awareness
- Phonological awareness
- Decoding / Encoding
- Composition
- Fluency

In this book we discuss a number of teaching approaches that are effective for adult ESL literacy learners. We discuss creating an effective learning environment, how to connect instruction to learning needs, approaches to teaching oral language skills, approaches to teaching literacy skills, and materials and resources. In order to develop literacy, adult ESL literacy learners need many opportunities to read and write at an appropriate level; this development also needs to be supported by language learning. There are six key considerations when thinking about effective approaches to ESL literacy instruction:

[1] Choose approaches that create an effective and supportive classroom environment:

This consideration speaks to availability for learning. Adult ESL literacy learners often face many challenges outside of the classroom. They may be struggling financially, they may not yet have stable lives in Canada, they may have experienced trauma, or they may be supporting family. Approaches that create an effective and supportive classroom environment include:

- **using trauma-informed practice:** learners are treated as individual people who have possibly had a variety of experiences, including traumatic experiences
- **setting up a classroom that emphasizes respect, dignity, and humanity:** all learners are respected; the class works together to define what respect means for them; dignity and humanity are valued
- **building community:** learners can support each other
- **establishing routines:** learners know what to expect; stress and anxiety are lowered
- **creating a classroom agreement:** learners have a say in shaping the learning environment

[2] **Choose approaches that allow learners to develop oral language and which use oral language for the development of literacy:** The development of literacy is utterly dependent on oral language. Learners will only be able to read or write what they already can say or understand. They will need many opportunities to develop their oral language. Learners will also need to build oral language in a way that is not dependent on literacy skills; for example, they cannot demonstrate listening comprehension by filling in blanks if they cannot read the text or write the words. Oral language can also be integrated into the development of literacy skills. Approaches that develop oral language include:

- **Total Physical Response (TPR):** learners build listening comprehension and oral vocabulary in a low-stress environment
- **singing:** learners practice vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar repeatedly in a low-stress, creative environment
- **dialogues, interviews, and sharing:** learners develop speaking accuracy and practice language patterns
- **discussion:** learners develop speaking fluency
- **games:** learners practice speaking and listening along with literacy skills

[3] **Choose approaches that allow learners to do a lot of meaningful reading and writing:** More than anything, in order to learn to read and write learners will need lots of time spent reading and writing. This allows learners many, many opportunities to practice decoding and encoding skills, to use strategies, to develop comprehension, and to integrate individual skills. Approaches that encourage reading and writing include:

- **reading for pleasure (extensive reading):** learners read texts at independent level (with 99% accuracy) for enjoyment
- **focused reading (intensive reading):** learners are guided through reading texts at instructional level (with 95% accuracy)

- **dialogue journals (extensive writing):** learners write meaningful texts to their instructor and read meaningful responses
- **formal writing (intensive writing):** learners are supported in writing a variety of texts and are guided through the writing process

[4] **Choose approaches that integrate the development of literacy skills into reading and writing whole texts:** Literacy skills are important but they need to be taught within context. Give learners opportunities to work with whole texts and to use whole text strategies as well as to focus on the development of specific skills. Approaches that integrate skills into working with whole texts include:

- **whole-part-whole:** learners work with whole texts, then focus on individual skills, then return to the whole text
- **using invented spelling:** learners develop their knowledge of phonics, phonological awareness, and letter formation to write texts
- **dialogue journals:** learners work on a variety of encoding skills in the context of real communication
- **scaffolding:** learners are supported to be able to work with a text
- **project-based learning:** learners integrate individual skills into a larger project

Literacy skills are important but they need to be taught within context.

[5] **Choose approaches that allow learners to work at their instructional or independent level:** In order to learn, learners need to be working with texts that are at instructional or independent level. Instructional level means that a learner can read a text with 95% accuracy and independent level means they can read it with 99% accuracy. Below that is considered frustration level and is not useful for any kind of reading. Approaches that encourage learners to work at instructional or independent level include:

- **Language Experience Approach (LEA):** learners dictate a text based on a common experience and using their own language
- **dialogue journals:** learners write from their own level and you have the opportunity to write a response geared toward the exact level and interests of each learner
- **scaffolding:** learners have supports in place for their work so that they can be successful

- **reading for pleasure:** learners are supported in finding texts to read at independent level
- **focused reading:** learners read in small groups at their instructional level, with the support and guidance of the instructor

[6] **Choose approaches that allow learners to develop strategies for learning, reading, and writing:** Learners will need to know the habits of proficient learners, readers, and writers. Learning strategies include strategies for organization, working in a classroom, time management, goal-setting, and reflection. Reading strategies include strategies for decoding and comprehension and writing strategies include strategies for encoding and composition. Approaches that explicitly teach strategies include:

- **focused reading:** learners receive explicit strategy instruction as part of focused reading and then practice in small groups with the guidance of the instructor

The Framework of Literacy Skills for Adult ESL Literacy Learners outlines the skills and the strategies necessary for learning to read and write and the approaches discussed in this book give effective ways to teach: to integrate the development of literacy skills into the instruction of language and to meet the needs of our learners.

- **formal writing:** learners are guided through using many writing strategies, including the writing process and composition strategies
- **think alouds:** learners hear you talk out loud about what is going on inside your head while you use a strategy; it is a form of modelling a strategy
- **establishing routines:** learners practice many time management and organizational strategies

The intention of this book is to give instructors the tools so that they can meet learning needs. The Framework of Literacy Skills for Adult ESL Literacy Learners outlines the skills and the strategies necessary for learning to read and write and the approaches discussed in this book give effective ways to teach: to integrate the development of literacy skills into the instruction of language and to meet the needs of our learners. Adult ESL literacy learners are tackling the incredible challenge of building literacy and language as adults in a new country; they have unique learning needs but they also bring a wealth of knowledge, experience, and understanding to our classrooms and to Canada.

Appendices

The background of the page features a series of overlapping triangles in various shades of green and blue, creating a modern, abstract geometric design. The triangles vary in opacity and color, ranging from light mint green to deep forest green and navy blue, arranged in a way that suggests depth and movement.

Glossary

barrier to learning: something that gets in the way of learning. Common barriers to learning for ESL literacy learners include poverty, lack of child care, and needing to work during school hours. Barriers to learning are also called affective barriers.

bottom-up approach to reading: an approach to reading instruction which begins with the smallest units of meaning on the page (letters) and works from there. The focus of bottom-up approaches is the act of decoding. An example of a bottom-up approach to reading is phonics, which teaches sound-symbol correspondence.

choral reading: reading together as a class. Choral reading is more supported and generally less intimidating than reading something on your own.

composition: the writing skill that involves planning the content, organization, and voice of your writing.

concept of a word: the idea that language is made up of individual words (and not a long string of sounds). Learners who are just developing literacy skills will also need to learn that one word on the page represents one spoken word (often called 1:1 correspondence).

context clue: a clue in the text that helps you figure out the meaning of the word.

critical period: a period of time when it is possible to learn something. There is no critical period for literacy. While it is generally more difficult to develop literacy as an adult in a second language, it is possible with support and effective teaching.

decoding: the process of creating meaning from the symbols on the page (one part of reading).

differentiate: to teach different things to different learners in the same class. This can involve adapting a task, text, or requirement to meet the needs of different learners.

digital literacy: the set of knowledge and skills needed to use technology, including the skills to learn new technology.

directionality: the direction that text goes in order to be meaningful. In English, directionality is left to right, top to bottom.

encoding: the process of creating meaning by making symbols on a page (one part of writing).

ESL literacy: the field of teaching English language and literacy skills at the same time to adult learners who have an interrupted education in their own language.

financial literacy: the set of knowledge and skills needed to use money effectively in the long term. Financial literacy can include knowledge about shopping, banking, budgeting, paying bills, saving money, borrowing money, meeting financial goals, RRSPs, mortgages, TFSAs, RESPs, and so on.

fluency: the ability to decode or encode a text with automaticity so that you can read or write easily, with expression, appropriate phrasing, and comprehension / clarity.

graphic organizer: a chart or diagram that helps you to understand a text. Examples include t-charts, Venn diagrams, and comprehension webs.

IALSS: The International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey, a survey conducted in 2003 in seven countries. In Canada, 60% of adults tested as low-literate were immigrants, suggesting a strong need for ESL literacy instruction.

instructional level: a way to measure the difficulty of a particular reading text for a particular learner. Instructional level is when a learner can read a text with 95% accuracy. It is an appropriate level for teaching reading because learners can understand enough of the text to be able to focus on a few new things. Instructional level is different for different learners and changes over time. Independent level is when a learner can read a text with 99% accuracy. Texts at independent level are suitable for pleasure reading or fluency practice. Frustration level is when a learner can read a text with less than 90% accuracy. Texts at frustration level are not suitable reading material.

Language Experience Approach (LEA): an approach to teaching reading that uses learners' own oral language to create a reading text. Generally, a class has an experience together, discusses it, and then the learners tell the story of the experience while the instructor writes down exactly what they say. This text is then used as a reading text for further activities. LEA is very suitable for lower-level ESL literacy learners because it guarantees that the learners have all the oral language of the text so that they can focus on literacy skills. LEA also teaches the connection between spoken language and written language and that learner words and ideas have value.

letter knowledge: the knowledge of the alphabet, including upper and lower case letters. Learners with letter knowledge can recognize, distinguish, and produce all the letters in English.

numeracy: the set of knowledge and skills that is needed to work with numbers and math. ESL literacy learners often also have numeracy needs. Literacy skills and numeracy skills are not necessarily connected and a learner with high literacy skills may have low numeracy.

onset and rime: a way of breaking down a word into its initial sound (onset) and the remaining sounds (rime). For example, *c-at*. Onset and rime allow you to discuss word families, or groups of words with the same rime, such as: *cat, mat, hat, pat, sat*. These can be helpful in identifying similar sounds, decoding similar words, and in developing spelling strategies, such as in the word family *right, might, sight, tight, fight*.

orientation: the way you orient a page or a book so that you can read it. ESL literacy learners may need some help learning to hold books right-side up and turn and read the pages in the correct order.

pathway: a way to reach a long-term goal. Programs should consider pathways for their learners to reach their goals in employment or further education.

phoneme: a sound in a language, not to be confused with a letter. There are approximately 44 English phonemes. They include: /s/, /a/, /ch/, and /sh/. Phonemes can be represented by a variety of combinations of letters in English. Think about the phoneme /sh/ and how it is spelled in these words: *ship, initial, sugar, ocean, issue, suspicion, conscious, nauseous*, and so on.

phonemic awareness: an awareness of the sounds of a language and how they can be combined. Phonemic awareness tasks include distinguishing and producing sounds; determining which sound is different in a group; splitting syllables; blending sounds to make words; breaking words into their sounds; and changing words by adding, deleting, or moving sounds. Phonemic awareness is one of the greatest predictors of learning to read.

phonics: the relationship between letters and sounds. Learners who are taught to read using phonics learn which letters make which sounds and how to decode a word letter by letter.

phonological awareness: knowledge about the sound system of a language, including rhyme, syllables, and onset and rime. Phonemic awareness, knowledge about individual sounds, is part of phonological awareness.

probabilistic reasoning: the ability to predict with great accuracy and automaticity the next likely letters in a word. Proficient readers and writers have developed high probabilistic reasoning.

pronunciation: the ability to make the sounds of a language. Pronunciation includes segmentals, or the individual sounds of a word, and suprasegmentals, which include stress and intonation.

reading comprehension: the ability to read a text and understand its meaning. Reading comprehension includes a knowledge of vocabulary and reading strategies. Readers must be able to decode with some degree of automaticity to have enough mental energy for reading comprehension.

reading strategy: a way that an effective reader approaches a text in order to make meaning. There are many reading strategies, including prediction, activating background knowledge, using context clues, self-monitoring, finding the main idea, and so on. Competent readers use a wide range of reading strategies with automaticity (and often without realizing they are doing it).

recycling: using the same skill or language again in a slightly different way. Since learners need to encounter words, phrases, and skills many times before mastering them, recycling is a cornerstone of effective teaching. Recycling can mean using the same words in a different task, practicing the same skill with different words, or coming back to the same task again after a period of time.

refugee: According to the Geneva Convention, a refugee is a person who “owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.” (UNHCR, 2007, as cited in B.C. Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 7) Many ESL literacy learners are refugees but not all refugees have literacy needs.

scaffolding: a system of supporting learners so that they can complete a task that would otherwise be too challenging. Scaffolding can include word banks, sentence stems, picture dictionaries, models to work from, or approaches such as working together as a class, doing one together before attempting it independently, and so on.

sentence stem: the beginning of a sentence to get you started in writing. For example, “I like food. I like _____. I like _____.” A sentence stem is an example of scaffolding.

sight word: a word that you can decode with automaticity. Competent readers have a huge bank of sight words and do not use very much mental energy on decoding (allowing them to use most of their energy on reading comprehension, thinking about what they are reading, connecting it to what they already know, formulating questions, and so on). ESL literacy learners will need to develop a bank of sight words.

grammar: how a language is put together. English grammar includes word order and word endings.

textual awareness: recognition of text and knowledge about its purpose. Someone with no textual awareness might not even recognize that the symbols on signs around them have any meaning. Someone with a high level of textual awareness can think about genre and the author's intent.

think aloud: a process of demonstrating a strategy to learners by talking about what is going on inside your head while you are reading.

top-down approach to reading: an approach to reading instruction which begins with the whole text. Top-down approaches emphasize the importance of context and a variety of reading strategies to make meaning. An example of a top-down approach to reading is whole language.

tracking: following a line of text with your eyes. Very low-level ESL literacy learners will need to learn tracking (which can be exhausting at first so is best done in very small doses).

visual discrimination: the ability to tell the difference between two shapes or symbols. Learners also need to know that while a cow is a cow no matter what direction it is facing, and a triangle is a triangle even if it is upside down, a letter ONLY has meaning if it is facing the right way. For example, **3** and S.

vocabulary: knowledge of the words of a language. Vocabulary knowledge includes meaning, but also includes synonyms, cognates, grammatical knowledge, and collocations (or how the word is typically connected to other words).

whole-part-whole: a balanced or eclectic approach to teaching reading that combines using whole, relevant texts and a variety of comprehension strategies with focus on individual parts of language, such as phonics, word endings, and so on. In whole-part-whole, you begin by reading the text for meaning using a variety of reading strategies. You then focus on a target part of language or literacy. Then you return to the whole text with this new knowledge to deepen your understanding.

word bank: a list of words that learners can use to complete a task

THE FRAMEWORK OF LITERACY SKILLS FOR ADULT ESL LITERACY LEARNERS

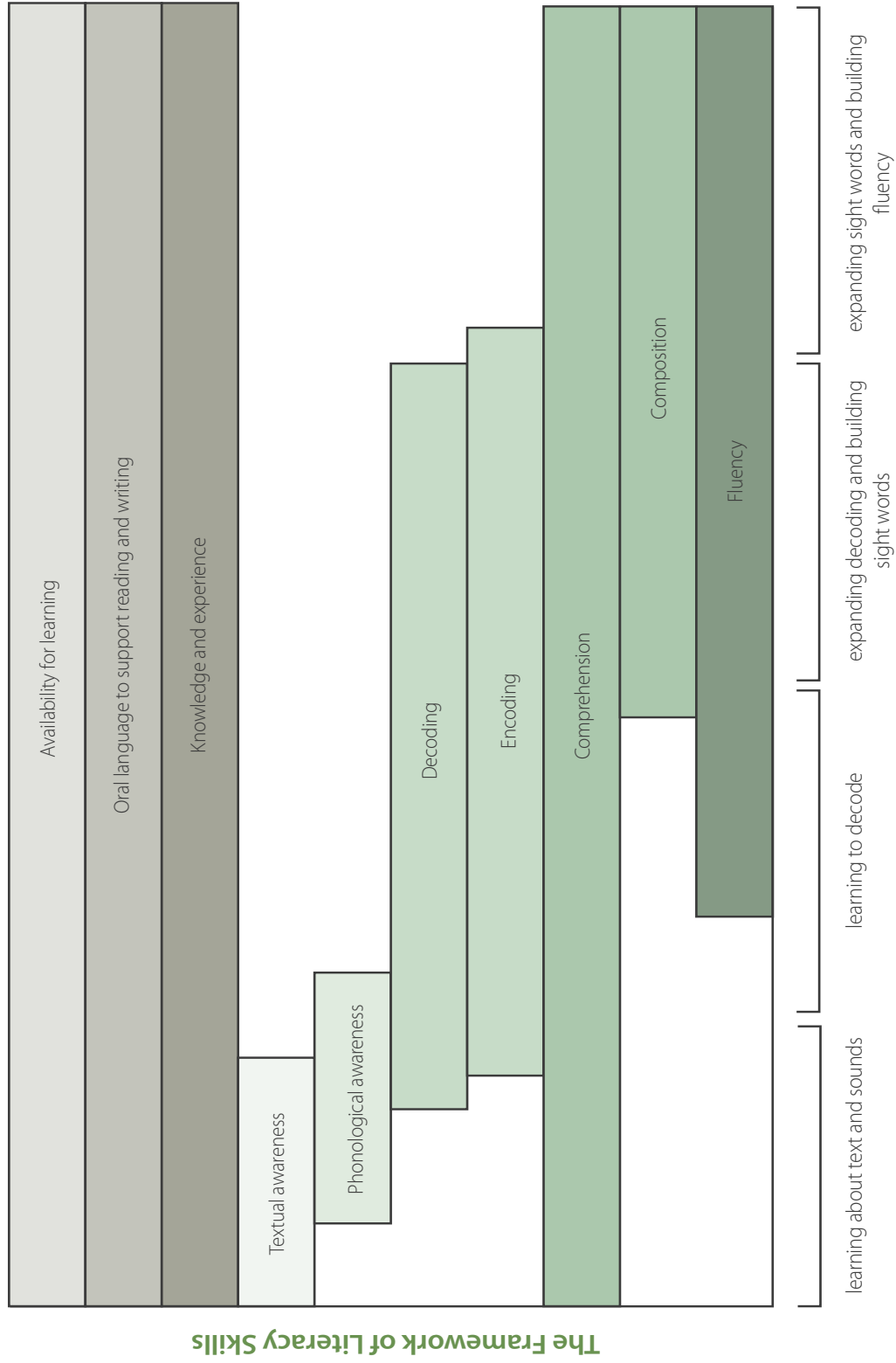
The Framework of Literacy Skills for Adult ESL Literacy Learners describes the skills that learners need to build in order to develop literacy as adult ESL learners. The Framework includes eight skills areas:

- [1] Availability for learning
- [2] Oral language to support reading and writing
- [3] Knowledge and experience
- [4] Textual awareness
- [5] Phonological awareness
- [6] Decoding / Encoding
- [7] Comprehension / Composition
- [8] Fluency

The development of literacy looks a little different at different places along the way and the Framework of Literacy Skills also includes a chart of the typical development of these skill areas over time. Literacy learning can be loosely divided into four stages:

- **Learning about texts and sounds:** learners are developing textual and phonological awareness. They may recognize a few letters or words but do not yet have the skills to match letters to sounds. They can begin to learn some early decoding skills, such as tracking and visual discrimination, and build early comprehension skills with texts that are read out loud to them.
- **Learning to decode:** learners are developing basic skills for translating symbols into meaning. They are learning to match letters to sounds and are developing their first sight words. They are writing their first letters and words and are continuing to develop comprehension skills. They can begin to work with fluency development with texts they can read at independent level.
- **Expanding decoding and building sight words:** learners are expanding their decoding skills and strategies and have an increasing bank of sight words. They are composing their own writing and are still working on comprehension and on fluency with texts at independent level.
- **Expanding sight words and building fluency:** for learners at this stage the process of decoding has become more automatic and they are developing a much larger bank of sight words. There is an increased focus on comprehension and composition skills and strategies as well as fluency.

THE FRAMEWORK OF LITERACY SKILLS: DEVELOPMENT OVER TIME



Development of Literacy Over Time

THE FRAMEWORK OF LITERACY SKILLS FOR ADULT ESL LITERACY LEARNERS

Availability for learning

Does the learner have the right frame of mind for learning?

- [1] being in a calm state: feeling safe and free of anxiety, fear, or worry
- [2] nutrition, sleep, and health care
- [3] enough income to cover basic needs and a stable home
- [4] time to learn
- [5] safety and stability for family and access to quality childcare
- [6] access to appropriate programs
- [7] motivation
- [8] resilience
- [9] a sense of belonging
- [10] access to screening for vision, hearing, and learning disabilities

Oral language to support reading and writing

Does the learner know the vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar?

- [1] vocabulary
- [2] listening comprehension
- [3] expression of ideas
- [4] pronunciation
- [5] grammar
- [6] every day and academic language

Knowledge and experience

What understanding does the learner bring to reading and writing?

- [1] experience
- [2] social and cultural context
- [3] content knowledge
- [4] learning strategies

Textual awareness

Does the learner understand the purpose of print and how it works?

- [1] visual literacy
- [2] awareness that print has meaning and different purposes
- [3] orientation of pages and books
- [4] directionality: left to right, top to bottom

Phonological awareness

Can the learner hear the sounds in a word?

- [1] concept of a word
- [2] onset and rime
- [3] phonemic awareness

<p>Decoding</p> <p>Can the learner translate symbols into meaning?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> [1] tracking [2] visual discrimination [3] concept of a word (1:1 correspondence) [4] letter knowledge [5] phonics [6] sight words [7] spelling patterns [8] decoding strategies 	<p>Encoding</p> <p>Can the learner translate meaning into symbols?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> [1] tracking [2] visual discrimination [3] fine motor skills [4] making meaning with objects [5] concept of a word (1:1 correspondence) [6] letter knowledge [7] letter formation [8] writing on the line and making spaces between words [9] phonics [10] sight words [11] invented spelling [12] spelling patterns [13] encoding strategies
<p>Comprehension</p> <p>Can the learner understand what he or she reads?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> [1] using knowledge of oral language: vocabulary and grammar [2] using knowledge of punctuation [3] awareness of context [4] awareness of purpose [5] awareness of format and genre [6] inference [7] comprehension strategies 	<p>Composition</p> <p>Can the learner write with meaning?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> [1] thinking about content [2] using knowledge of oral language: vocabulary and grammar [3] using knowledge of punctuation [4] organizing writing [5] awareness of purpose [6] awareness of format and genre [7] awareness of audience [8] creativity, expression, and voice [9] composition strategies
<p>Fluency</p> <p>Can the learner read and write with accuracy and expression?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> [1] reading / writing rate [2] using punctuation [3] accuracy [4] chunking [5] expression [6] automaticity 	

Learning Strategies	
Organizational strategies	bring materials such as binder, glasses, books, and pencils to class each time
	keep important papers in a safe place
	keep a card with important information that you can use to copy
	write on the “front” of the paper
	put your name on a paper
	keep your papers clean and tidy
	keep papers to refer to later
	put papers in order in a binder
	sorting and categorization
Classroom strategies	sit so that you can see and hear the instructor
	listen when the instructor or other learners are speaking
	recognize repeated writing in the classroom
	wait your turn to talk or put up your hand
	work with a partner or group when asked
	identify where classroom materials and learning resources are stored
	ask questions when you don’t understand
Time management strategies	come to class on time
	come to class each time
	stay in the classroom for the whole class
	remember when you have to do something
	hand in forms or homework on time
	follow a schedule
	use a calendar

Goal-setting	set short-term goals
	set realistic goals
	set goals that are achievable and measurable
	reflect on goals and set new goals
	set mid-term goals
	break goals into steps
	set long-term goals
Reflection	recognize how you did on a task or piece of learning
	ask yourself what you did well
	ask yourself what you can do better
	set goals based on your reflections

Reading Strategies		When do you use the strategy?			How complex is the strategy?		
		Pre-reading	During reading	Post-reading	Beginner	Intermediate	Advanced
Decoding strategies	use the pictures		×		×	×	×
	use the first letter		×		×	×	×
	use sight words		×		×	×	×
	sound it out (use phonics knowledge)		×		×	×	×
	use onset and rime (word families)		×			×	×
	compare to a similar known word		×			×	×
	use spelling patterns		×			×	×
	break compound words into composite words		×			×	×
	break into syllables		×				×
	use morphemic (word part) knowledge		×				×
Comprehension strategies	preview	×			×	×	×
	predict and check	×			×	×	×
	activate background knowledge	×			×	×	×
	make connections to things you know		×	×	×	×	×
	self-monitor		×		×	×	×
	re-read		×		×	×	×
	visualize		×			×	×
	retell the story			×		×	×
	find the main ideas		×	×		×	×
	skim	×	×	×		×	×
	scan	×	×	×		×	×
	find context clues		×				×
	find the pattern of organization		×	×			×
	use a graphic organizer			×			×
	summarize			×			×

Writing Strategies		When do you use the strategy?			How complex is the strategy?		
		Pre-writing	During writing	Post-writing	Beginner	Intermediate	Advanced
Encoding strategies	use sight words		✗		✗	✗	✗
	sound it out (use phonics knowledge)		✗		✗	✗	✗
	use a source (list, word bank, card, dictionary)		✗		✗	✗	✗
	use invented spelling		✗			✗	✗
	use onset and rime (word families)		✗			✗	✗
	compare to a similar known word		✗			✗	✗
	use spelling patterns		✗			✗	✗
	break compound words into composite words		✗				✗
	break into syllables		✗				✗
	use morphemic (word part) knowledge		✗				✗
Composition strategies	The writing process	brainstorm	✗			✗	✗
		outline	✗				✗
		write		✗	✗	✗	✗
		revise		✗			✗
		edit		✗		✗	✗
		publish		✗	✗	✗	✗
		read your writing out loud		✗	✗	✗	✗
		find a better word		✗	✗	✗	✗
		use an example		✗		✗	✗
		use descriptive language		✗		✗	✗
		use connecting words		✗			✗
		use transition words		✗			✗
		be specific		✗			✗

Suggestions for Further Reading

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