



# Show-Me

The "Official" Newsletter of Literacy in Missouri

FEBRUARY 2011

ISSUE NO. 186

Literacy...

## ESL Placement

All credits to Adult Education ESL Teachers Guide, Adult Education Center, Texas A&I University, Kingsville, Texas. Written and produced by C. Ray Graham and Mark M. Walsh

The last important step in being a successful adult education ESL teacher is student assessment and placement. It is critical that adult students be properly placed otherwise they will quickly lose interest and drop out. If the material you present in any level ESL class is too easy, students will become bored. If it is too hard, they will not return for the second class.

Regardless of the placement technique used for adult students, the first impression is an important one. Many adult students come to the ESL classroom with a lot of fears. In some cases their last experience with school was a negative one (e.g. they may have left school as teenage drop outs). Consequently, it is very important that the teacher establish a friendly, enthusiastic rapport free of any academic pretense. This friendly social approach is especially important for the more undereducated adults. Even though their fear level is very high, it can be broken down by a friendly smile and pleasant small talk.

### How do you place adult students according to oral ability?

The most common method of assessing adult students' oral proficiency in order to place them in appropriate classes is to engage them in a brief oral interview. For non-literate students this approach is particularly valuable. The following questions are appropriate for this interview:

1. What is your name?
2. Where do you live?
3. Are you married?
4. Do you have any children?
5. Where were you born?
6. What day is it today?
7. Where do you work?
8. What kind of work do you do?
9. How long have you lived in this city?
10. What do you need the most help in? Speaking, reading, or writing?
11. Why do you want to study English?
12. What do you like to do for fun?
13. Tell me something about you family.

At all times be relaxed and friendly with the students. Make them feel comfortable. Reassure them that this is for placement purposes only and it is **not** an examination. Repeat the question or statement if necessary. You may clarify a response or even prompt the student to help them feel more at ease. If they give a correct and clear answer in English, give them two points for each item. If they give an unclear, inappropriate answer give them one point. For no answer give them a zero. Add up their points for a total score.

# Oral Assessment

## Sample Oral Test Instrument

Introduce yourself, engage your students in If the student responded correctly friendly conversation before you begin. Explain enter a "2" on the blank space that the purpose of the assessment is placement for an incomplete answer "1" and not an examination. or no answer a "0"

B 1. What is your name? \_\_\_\_\_

E

G L 2. What is your address? \_\_\_\_\_

I E

N V 3. Are you married? \_\_\_\_\_

N E

I L 4. How many children do you have? \_\_\_\_\_

N

G 5. Where were you born? \_\_\_\_\_

(Write in Country)

I 6. What day is today? \_\_\_\_\_

N

T 7. How long have you lived in this city? \_\_\_\_\_

E L

R E 8. Do you have a job? Where do you work? \_\_\_\_\_

M V

E E 9. What kind of work do you do? \_\_\_\_\_

D L

I 10. What do you need to study? \_\_\_\_\_

A (Check the appropriate items)

T Speaking English \_\_\_\_\_

E Reading English \_\_\_\_\_

Writing English \_\_\_\_\_

A 11. Did you attend school in your native country? \_\_\_\_\_

D L How long? \_\_\_\_\_

V E (Write in years)

A V

N E 12. Have you studied English? \_\_\_\_\_

C L How long? \_\_\_\_\_

E (Write in years)

D

13. Why do you want to study English? \_\_\_\_\_

14. What do you do in your spare time? \_\_\_\_\_

15. Tell me something about your family \_\_\_\_\_

## Literary Assessment

In addition to oral assessment and placement, it is very important to assess the literacy skills of your adult students. There are two aspects to this assessment, first determining if the student is literate in his native language and second finding out if the student has some writing skills in English.

To assess the literacy skills of the individual you are interviewing, simply ask them to write the answers to the questions that appear on the reverse side of the placement instrument (see the samples in Appendix A.) Encourage the students to write their responses in either English or their native language whichever they find easiest. (You may need interpreters to assess the level of your students' native literacy.) Again, make your students feel comfortable. Repeat the fact that the purpose is only to place the student in an appropriate class. Encourage them to answer as many as possible. NOTE: Be sure that the students write their own answers to the questions on the page. Sometimes the relatives or friends may want to help the student. Obviously this totally defeats the object of the assessment process.

The literacy assessment instrument is not to be used as a diagnostic tool; rather its purpose is to distinguish the literate adult student from the totally non-literate student. ESL curricula for these two very distinct groups must be developed to meet their specific needs.

## How do you place more literate students?

Once you find out that you have a group of students somewhat literate in English, then you may need to evaluate their literacy level. There are a number of ways to do this. You may want to administer a cloze procedure, or a dictation test.

### A CLOZE TEST

One test that has proven successful in determining written English ability is the cloze test. This test consists of a written passage that has missing words. The student is asked to supply the missing words.

Choose a passage of 100-150 words from the text that you commonly use for beginners in your classroom. Try to get a passage that does not use many uncommon words or many proper nouns (names of specific people, places, etc.). A paragraph from the *Reader's Digest* or a 7th or 8th grade textbook might be appropriate if you choose an article that deals with a subject most adults would be acquainted with. Leave the first sentence of the passage as it is, but eliminate every seventh word in the rest of the passage and put a blank of standard length wherever a word is eliminated. Put a number in each blank. (See [Appendix B](#) for an example.)

Have students read the entire passage silently without writing anything. Then have them read the passage again and write a word by each number on their paper that would be appropriate for the blank with that number. After they have done this, they read the passage again to themselves with the words they have chosen and then hand in their papers. When you correct these papers, give one point for every word that the student supplies that is identical to the missing word from the original passage. Other words may seem appropriate to you, but experiments have shown that your placement will be essentially the same if you only accept the original word. Scores should be computed and the students divided into groups according to scores. Those with low scores would form the beginning group. Those with perfect or nearly perfect scores should be screened out to form a more advanced class.

## A DICTATION TEST

Choose a passage of about 100 words from a commonly used text in your classroom. Tell your students to listen carefully. Read the passage out loud to them at a normal speaking rate to give them an overview of the passage. After this first reading, let students ask questions about the passage and write one or two of the most unfamiliar words on the board. Now, tell your students to write what you read. Tell them that you will read slowly, but that you will not repeat anything. Read the passage again pausing every 5-9 words (at places for normal speech pauses, such as at the end of phrases) so the students have time to write. Do not repeat any phrases. Finally, read the passage a third time at a normal speed and have the students make any corrections or additions they desire and then have them turn in their papers. To score the papers, simply put a check for every word left out, every error in grammar. Count the number of checks and give the paper that score. You can then divide the class according to scores. Those with the most checks would be in the beginning group. Those with fewer checks would be in the intermediate group. Any with very few or no errors would be in an advanced group. (Quite often you will discover that the students fall very naturally into groups.) If you are offering more than one class, you can divide the students into separate classes. If not, you can simply use the scores to help you make grouping choices within the same class. (This does not always mean that you automatically put the beginners with beginners and the advanced with advanced. It is often to the advantage of all to have mixed groups of higher and lower ability students.)

### **What other ways of deciding on placement are there?**

There are several other methods that you may wish to use for placing students in different groups instead of the tests listed in the previous pages. For example, many school districts have standard ESL tests that you could use. (See the annotated bibliography in Section V for a list of these tests.) Another possible grouping can be based on occupational interests (e.g. mechanics, nurses, aides, etc.). Students with similar interests will be grouped accordingly.

If the age range of your students is very wide, it also might become the basis for grouping. Students under 30 usually get along all right together. There is usually not too much difference in students from 30 to 50 or 55 so they might form a group. Students over 55 can also usually be grouped together (although this group shows more individual variation in language learning ability than other groups).

# Using Hip Hop as a Teaching Tool

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Using HipHop to reach students is not a new topic in education. However, it might be new to teachers of Adult Education in the state of Missouri. Teachers from the boot heel to the Iowa border, have issues relating the importance of reading comprehension to students dealing with real life issues. Songs provide culturally relevant material that will get students (particularly young students) interested in learning. When you use HipHop you are taking something that they are already familiar with and showing them how it relates to what it is we are trying to teach them. Don't believe me lets take a look at a few songs.

## **Dirty Money: Coming Home**

"I'm coming home, I'm coming home tell the World I'm coming home. Let the rain wash away all the pain of yesterday. I know my kingdom awaits and they've forgiven my mistakes. I'm coming home, I'm coming home, tell the world that I'm coming. Back where I belong, yeah I never felt so strong. I feel like there's nothing that I can't try, and if you with me put your hands high. If you ever lost a light before, this one's for you, and you, the dreams are for you."

Drawing inferences is an important component of reading comprehension, so students need to be aware of both its benefits and its limitations. Have students draw inferences about the author and apply them as they try to detect the errors in an inaccurate biography of the author. They refine their initial impressions through Internet research and correct the inaccuracies through critical comparison of biographical texts. Students then engage in a similar exercise as they study another author or song writer of their choice, this time creating an author biography with deliberate errors, which will be corrected by a fellow student.

Here is another example: Drawing conclusions is important tool in reading comprehension. So we are going to take an excerpt from a song and have students draw a conclusion about what they are reading based on the relevant details. Some questions I would ask: What has happened in this reading? What do you think, happened next?

## **Eminem – Love The Way You Lie**

"Here we go again. It's so insane, cause when it's going good, it's going great I'm Superman, with the wind at his back. She's Lois Lane, but when it's bad, it's awful. I feel so ashamed. I snap, who's that dude, I don't even know his name, I laid hands on her. I'll never stoop so low again; I guess I don't know my own strength."

This excerpt is not something that should be used on the first day of class, as it goes into a very heavy subject, but it could lead to a powerful conversation about relationships and abuse. It could empower your student to get out of their own harmful relationships.

Hopefully, this gives you some ideas of ways to reach your younger students. There are a lot of songs released everyday. Ask your students what they like to listen to and have them bring in some lyrics. Good luck and have some fun!

**FY 11 Back to School and S-Know Bound Online Calendar**  
**Missouri's AEL Professional Development Center**  
**North Central Missouri College**  
**February/ March**

Tuesday, Feb. 1	Financial Literacy	9-11 a.m.	2
Wednesday, Feb. 2	Employability Skills	1-5pm	4
Thursday, Feb. 3	Learning Styles	1-5 p.m.	4
Tuesday, Feb. 8	Financial Literacy	6-8 p.m.	2
Wednesday, Feb. 9	Writing For Life	6-8 p.m.	2
Thursday, Feb. 10	Cognitive Abilities	6-8 p.m.	2
Friday, Feb. 11	Strategic Planning in the Classroom	10 a.m.-12 p.m.	2
Friday, Feb. 11	Millennials Rising!!	2-4 p.m.	2
Tuesday, Feb. 15	Cognitive Abilities	9-11 a.m.	2
Tuesday, Feb. 15	ACES Reports (for ACES Staff)	2-4 p.m.	0
Wednesday, Feb. 16	ACES Reports (for ACES Staff)	9-11 a.m.	0
Thursday, Feb. 17	Cognitive Abilities	1-3pm	2
Thursday, Feb. 17	Blueprint for Change	7-9 p.m.	2
Friday, Feb. 18	Blueprint for Change	9-11 a.m.	2
Tuesday, Feb. 22	Health Literacy 2	9 a.m.-1 p.m.	4
Wednesday, Feb. 23	Millennials Rising!!	9-11 a.m.	2
Saturday, Feb. 26	Employability Skills	8 a.m. -12 noon	4
Tuesday, Mar 1	Health Literacy 2	1-5 p.m.	4
Wednesday, Mar 2	Employability Skills	1-5pm	4
Saturday, March 5	Financial Literacy	9-11 am	2
Tuesday, March 8	Information Literacy & Technology	5-9 p.m.	4
Wednesday, Mar 9	Math Starters	2-4pm	2
Tuesday, Mar 15	Math Starters	10am-12 noon	2
Monday, Mar 28	Reaching Out To Immigrant Populations	5-9 pm	4

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This publication was produced pursuant to a grant from the Director, Adult Education & Literacy, Missouri Department of Elementary & Secondary Education, under the authority of Title II of the Workforce Investment Act. The opinions herein do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the Missouri Department of Elementary & Secondary Education or the U.S. Office of Education. No official endorsement by these agencies is inferred or implied.