

Standards for Adult Education ESL Programs in Wyoming Spring, 2008

Introduction

The standards should provide a series of objectives that, if attained, will prepare students for work, school, and life in the United States. We hope these standards will help Wyoming's adult ESL instructors guide students toward state-recognized benchmarks for English language achievement.

These standards are intended to help busy Wyoming teachers instruct ESL students of all levels. Most of our ESL programs currently use the Basic and Basic plus assessments to place students and to show an increase in SPLs (student performance levels) in reports to the state. We hope that these standards will help students achieve higher scores on the state assessment test. Note that the benchmarks in bold directly relate to the BEST Plus and Best Literacy.

Difference between an ABE and ESL student

ESL students differ from ABE learners. First, many ESL students are already literate (some highly educated) in their first language, so they need to acquire English language skills, not basic skills. Second, students who are not literate in their native tongue have to learn both the basic components of literacy and English as a second language. To best serve these students, Wyoming's ESL teachers should have an understanding of the underlying principles of adult language learning.

Adult Language Acquisition

Based on research in second language acquisition, the underlying principles of adult language learning differ from those associated with children learning a second language, in a few ways distinct ways. First, contrary to popular belief, adults are not necessarily at a disadvantage when learning a second language. It has been found that adolescents learn a new language most quickly, followed by adults and then children. Adults can grasp grammatical concepts and use vocabulary in varied situations faster than a child can. On the other hand, children can acquire native-like pronunciation, whereas adults typically do not (Ellis, 1994).

Below is an outline of some well-researched principles that ESL teachers should keep in mind.

- **Emphasize real situations and background knowledge.** Research indicates that adults learn best when the lesson emphasizes the use of English in real situations. It is also important to draw on, and validate, the background knowledge and experiences adult students bring with them into the classroom. Involve critical thinking in all levels of study.

- **Linguistic framework.** Adults can understand lessons about how a language works much better than children can. Adult students need linguistic frameworks, even simple ones, to help guide them (e.g. directly explaining the difference between perfect tense, *have studied*, compared to simple past, *studied*).
- **Relevance.** Students learn more rapidly when the content is relevant to their lives (see needs assessments below).
- **Recycle.** Information needs to be recycled in a variety of contexts. An adult English learner also tends to learn best when instruction integrates the four key language skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking), providing an experience where one skill reinforces the others (Brown, 1994).
- **Drive and commitment.** It has been found that adults may need 120 to 235 of study to move up one SPL (Grognet, 1997). There is a normal gap between conversational English, which can develop in just a few years, and academic, non-contextualized English, which develops very slowly. It is important to show adult students their gain in these areas.

Needs assessment

Two well-used tools of student evaluation are needs assessment and learner self evaluations. Needs assessments can help the teacher be more responsive to the needs of the students. This type of assessment reveals the specific contexts in which students wish to use English; the teacher can then make the classes more relevant to the students' lives and practical needs. Students can write down or discuss their goals at the beginning of the class and refer to them at different stages throughout the course. Needs assessment is an ongoing and evolving process throughout the instructional program, and it can help guide student placement, materials selection, curriculum design, and teaching strategies.

Types of Need and goal assessments

- Questionnaires
- Checklists
- Interviews and/or class discussions
- Timelines to express learners' short-term and long-term goals

Lesson Planning

Having a standard model for an ESL lesson plan can reduce the time a new teacher needs to put into planning for each class. A good lesson plan can ensure that class time is effectively used to help the students achieve their goals. A good lesson plan stems from learning objectives based on assessments of student needs, state standards, and program curricula. There are many ways to plan a lesson, and every good teacher will find the method that works best for her. There are, however, five elements that can be found in every good lesson plan (CAELA, 2007).

Topic: Based on a real life context taken from the students' needs assessments.

Going to the grocery store

Lesson objective: A well-written objective tells what students will be able to do at the end of the lesson (not what they will know).

The students will be able to ask grocery store personnel where to find a certain item.

Enabling skills: These are the skills that will be used to accomplish the lesson objective (ie. vocabulary, grammar, reading, writing, pronunciation).

Vocabulary: cashier, aisle, dairy, deli; Grammar: where is/ are, and count/ non-count nouns;
Pronunciation: ai.

Materials: Anything that is needed to execute the lesson should be identified and secured before class time, including visual aids, handouts, books, CD player, etc.

Map of a local grocery store

Most lessons include a series of stages to help students achieve the lesson objective. Most lessons include an introduction, a presentation, practice time (working on form), an evaluation, and application stages (communicative work). Below is an outline of the stages of a lesson from CALEA guide for adult ESL Trainers (2007).

Stages of a Lesson

Warm-up and Review	At this stage the instructor makes use of students' prior knowledge and previews or reviews material related to the lesson.
Introduction	The instructor establishes the purpose of the lesson by focusing students' attention on that purpose (for example, by asking questions or using visuals).
Presentation	New language and concepts are taught, and comprehension of the new information is checked sometimes through simple drills in a text or worksheets.
Guided Practice	This stage provides highly structured activities that help students work with the new language.
Communicative Practice	Activities at this stage allow students to integrate the new language with their previously acquired language, usually in an interactive setting.
Evaluation	The teacher and students assess students' achievement

	of the lesson objective.
Application Tasks	This stage reflects real-life applications of the lesson objective.
Closing	The whole class reconvenes with an activity that reestablishes class community.
As teachers plan for a class they can add their own activities for each stage.	

Multileveled Class

For classes with more than one level, the instructor needs to alter the lesson plans. The class can begin with a warm-up together and then the instructor can present a new language presentation followed by a guided practice and then a second presentation followed with guided practice for the second group (and so on). The whole class can then participate in communicative practice and the rest of the lesson plan together.

Teaching Reading

Adult education programs serve both native and non-native speakers of English, yet we cannot teach reading to these two groups in the same way. Non-native students actually learn reading differently than native adult learners. The information below is based on the research findings of Kruidenier (2002) who looked at reading research with English speaking adults compared to various research based on non-English speaking adults.

- Pre-teach vocabulary in a reading passage
- Limit the number of vocabulary items that must be pre-taught,
- Select reading passages that are only slightly above the level of the student.
- Teach high frequency words first
- Provide learners with multiple exposures to specific words in multiple contexts.
- Avoid presenting synonyms, antonyms, or words in the same semantic set together.
- Teach students to use both monolingual and bilingual dictionaries.
- After reading, students should write sentences in which they use specific words and grammatical forms.

Also, when teaching NNS it is important to remember that cultural issues may impede text comprehension. Here are some suggestions that might remedy this:

- Find out what students know, need to know, and want to know and then build on this; select readings that the students are familiar with.
- Pre-teach vocabulary and unfamiliar ideas
- Use visual aids to help learners build background knowledge, for example, by having the students predict what topic lesson will be about.

Teaching Listening

It is said that listening is used far more than any other single language skill in normal daily life. On average, we can expect to listen twice as much as we speak, four times more than we read, and five times more than we write (Rivers, 1981). Thus, it is important to show students that listening is not a passive skill, but a skill that needs special attention. Good listening can increase a student's positive experience with the language by teaching them to listen for grammatical nuances (e.g. *Do you like peanut butter?* versus *You don't like peanut butter, do you?*) and it can also aid pronunciation of the new sounds not found in the students' first languages (e.g. difference between *rip* and *lip*).

Principles for listening comprehension in the classroom (Wilcox-Peterson, 2001).

- Use listening before other activities, before the student is asked to speak, read, or write about a topic.
- Include both global (main idea, setting, situation) listening and selective (details, focus on accuracy).
- Use discussion to call up students' background knowledge before students listen to a particular text.
- Help learners develop conscious listening strategies. Do this by raising their awareness of particular text features (transition words, hedges, etc.)

Instructional models (Morley, 1991).

- 1) *Listening and repeating.* The students are asked to imitate a sentence, phrase, or word pattern, trying to imitate the pronunciation patterns, and memorize them to use in conversation.
- 2) *Listening and Answering Comprehension questions.* The students listen to a text and then answer primarily factual questions. This enables students to recognize important pieces of information and to increase speed and accuracy of recall.
- 3) *Task Listening.* This asks the students to listen to information and then to carry out a task regarding the information.
- 4) *Interactive Listening.* The students are asked to take part in a discussion. In this model the students are to pay attention to more formalized discourse rules such as turn taking, politeness, hedging (using modals such as: maybe and might) agreeing/disagreeing, topic shifting, etc.

Teaching Writing

There are two general types of writing taught in ESL classrooms. The first is often referred to as 'real life' writing such as taking phone messages and writing thank-you notes, lists, letters, and resumes. The second is process writing, which is more academic in nature, for students considering furthering their education.

Even for students whose first language is based on the roman letter system, English presents the learner with unique problems related to the relationship between the sound and spelling of English words. Students often want a consistent letter to sound association, and then become thoroughly frustrated when the connection is not consistent. Therefore, it is a good idea to inform students to the fact that English spelling can be complicated even for native speakers.

Beginning Writing

Beginning writers will initially work with letter sound correspondences, letter combinations, phonics, and word combinations.

Example of Early writing activities (Olshtain, 2001):

- Letter or word recognition through matching tasks and tracing activities.
- Meaningful listing or copying of information.
- Practicing sound-spelling correspondences (eg. Write the missing letters or underline the word the instructor says).

Process Writing

Steps in the writing process

1. A *prewriting activity* in which learners work together to generate ideas about a topic and organize those ideas, perhaps through the use of graphic organizers.
2. Writing a *first draft*, in which the focus is putting the ideas down on paper without concern for grammatical or spelling errors.
3. *Revising* the draft, often done in pairs or small groups, with a focus on the appropriateness of the ideas and the clarity of their organization.
4. *Editing* the draft, with a focus on grammar, spelling, punctuation, transition words (first, next), and signal words (for example, another reason is). The complexity of the concepts and forms to be edited depends on the level of the students and on the elements they know or have studied. The use of an editing checklist for students is recommended.
5. *Publishing* or in some way sharing the work with a wider audience. This may mean the rest of the class, students' families or friends, the wider community, or even an Internet audience. Publishing can take the form of displays on classroom walls; compilations in books, newsletters, newspapers, or posting on Web sites.

Paragraph Components

Topic Sentence	This sentence outlines the main idea presented in the paragraph.
----------------	--

Supporting sentences with details	This part of the paragraph presents details, facts, examples, quotes, and arguments that support the main idea.
Transition sentence	This sentence links this paragraph to the next paragraph.

References

Brown, H.D. (1994). *Teaching by principles*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall Regents.

Center for Adult English Language Acquisition. (2007). *The CAELA guide for adult ESL trainers*. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics.

Ellis, R. (1994). *The study of second language acquisition*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Folse, K. S. (2004). *Vocabulary myths: Applying second language research to classroom teaching*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan.

Grognet, A.G. (1997). *Performance-based curricula and outcomes: The mainstream English Language Training Project (MELT) updated for the 1990s and Beyond*. Denver, CO: Spring Institute for International Studies ELT.

Morley, J. (1991). Listening comprehension in second/foreign language instruction. In M. Celce-Murcia (Ed.), *Teaching English as a second or foreign language* (pp. 81-106). Boston: Heinle & Heinle.

Nation, I. M. P. (2000). Learning vocabulary in lexical sets: Dangers and guidelines. *TESOL Journal*, 9(2), 6–10.
by Joan Morley called *Aural Comprehension Instruction: Principles and Practices*

Olshtain, E (2001). *Functional Tasks for Mastering the Mechanics of Writing and Going just Beyond*. In M. Celce-Murcia (Ed.), *Teaching English as a second or foreign language* (pp. 81-106). Boston: Heinle & Heinle.

Kruidenier, J. (2002). *Research-based principles for adult basic education reading instruction*. Washington, DC: National Institute for Literacy. Retrieved February 8

Wilcox- Peterson, P. 2001. *Skills and strategies for proficient listening*, in Celce-Murcia, M. (ed.) *Teaching English as a second or Foreign Language*.