

## **Effective English Language Instruction: A Guide for English Language Partners (ELP)**

### **Introduction**

This guide was developed under the auspices of HIAS HQ in the Washington, DC, metropolitan area and is meant to be a quick reference tool for volunteers who work as English Language Partners (ELPs). ELPs work weekly with clients who want to learn or improve their English. ELPs work with these clients in one-on-one conversations to enable them to communicate with their neighbors, employers, and service providers. Most of the content in this guide is relevant for ELPs across the country. However, ELPs in other parts of the country may want to supplement these resources with other geographically relevant materials.

In this guide, we suggest resources for those wishing to augment their approaches and methodologies. We provide current websites that we believe contain relevant methods and tools for new English speakers, along with a brief description of their content so that the ELPs can quickly hone in on the materials they will need. We also provide some background material that may be helpful in working with our clients. Please note that there are many more resources that we have not mentioned here.

As you prepare to work with clients, please be aware that HIAS clients have different types of immigration status. This website provides relevant information. [Glossary of Immigration Terms](#)

If you have any questions or concerns, please reach out to [caroline.wolinsky@hias.org](mailto:caroline.wolinsky@hias.org) and/or [lizzie.edwards@hias.org](mailto:lizzie.edwards@hias.org).

### **General Advice**

HIAS provides this general advice to [ELPs](#):

#### Be Flexible

- It is important to remember that you do not always have to follow your lesson plans rigidly. Clients and their language abilities can surprise. The way one best learns, how long a given assignment will take, and what topics are interesting, vary from person to person. In addition, be sensitive to how a client is feeling on a given day and try to adapt accordingly. The efficacy of some lessons and methods can depend on factors such as whether a client is tired, energetic, or frustrated.

#### Be Patient

- Language acquisition can take time and can be very challenging for some; it is therefore essential to be patient with clients. At the same time, try to

remain creative and energetic.

### Encourage Clients

- Especially in light of the challenges of learning a language, encouragement is often crucial for clients' progress and motivation. Praise good work but be aware of what could become a patronizing tone.

### Be Honest About Your Knowledge

- It is okay to not have all the answers. It is better to give accurate information later on than to feel rushed and instead give incorrect information that is detrimental to the clients' learning.

### Correct Mistakes

- Correct mistakes so that the clients do not make a habit out of certain errors. However, be cautious not to correct so much that they lose confidence. Be perceptive about what mistakes offer a teachable moment, and what mistakes do not require urgent attention.

### Be Aware of Lesson Pace and Speaking Speed

- Be conscious of how slow or fast your lesson is moving. Take the time, if appropriate, to stop, ensure comprehension, and let the clients know about new words or grammatical concepts. Furthermore, remember to speak slowly and clearly when appropriate for the clients' level, but again, be aware of what could be patronizing.

### Use Accessible Language

- Particularly with beginners, be cautious about using too many idioms or too much slang in your speech. While teaching colloquial speech is a key part of effective language instruction, too much obscure language early on in a client's learning process can cause confusion. As clients progress however, learning culturally appropriate idioms and phrases can be a great way to develop their English expression.

### Start Lessons with an Icebreaker

- An icebreaker could be a conversation starter (i.e., the weather); game; or anything else that might help ease into the lesson, as opposed to immediately starting with the core of the lesson.

### Have Access to and Use Other Resources

- Such tools as magazines, worksheets, colored pencils, and games can all help with adapting to the range of learning styles clients might prefer.

### Be Yourself

- Putting up too many walls between you and your clients can limit their comfort in the session. Demonstrating your own comfort, such as by bringing humor into your teaching, can in turn make your clients more comfortable. Greater comfort can then build the confidence that allows them to be okay with making mistakes.

Other resources have suggested the following:

- Don't put clients on the spot. Find a way to make them comfortable in answering even if they are uncertain of their response.
- Repetition is the key to remembering.
- Make your lessons participatory. Use props when you can (e.g., chef or bus driver hats). You can, for example, make plays about home activities or going to the store. Role-playing is useful and successful.
- Laugh with your clients as they learn.
- Realize that speaking out loud is one of the hardest obstacles clients face. It is often embarrassing to them (regardless of their background or ability).
- Be adaptable.

## **Preparing to Teach HIAS Clients**

First-time ELPs must anticipate some hurdles to address when they first meet their students. Specifically:

### Online teaching

- If you are teaching remotely, you and your clients need to use online meeting resources. For both tutor and client, [Literacy Minnesota](#) offers instructions for using Zoom, WhatsApp, and Google Meet platforms for remote teaching.

### Different Learning Styles

- Clients have different learning styles. [BusyTeachers](#) identifies seven different types of learners: 1. visual/spatial, 2. bodily/kinesthetic, 3. Aural, 4. verbal/linguistic, 5. logical/mathematical, 6. solitary/intrapersonal, and 7. social/interpersonal. The site provides details on each of these styles, hints on how to connect with these learners, and offers some resources for teaching, such as flashcards. Note, however, that this site charges for its products.

### Clients with Little or No Education in Their Native Language

- Pre-literacy learners have little or no education in their native language, which means that they have limited classroom experience. In [“Working with Pre-Literate and Nonliterate Learners,”](#) Colleen Shaugnessy offers tips for working with these types of clients and notes that it is important for teachers to see “what they bring to the classroom (wisdom, perseverance....), not what they lack (language, formal schooling skills...).”

### Working with Trauma in Lesson Planning

- ELPs need to be sensitive to the life experiences of their clients. Most have witnessed or have been subjected to traumas just to be in this physical and emotional location today. Be aware that clients’ behavior may seem different from what you are used to in your daily life and that your lessons may unexpectedly derail. As a volunteer, you should be prepared for these possibilities and continue to provide the best support you can. Because most of us are not professional social workers or therapists, remember that you can contact HIAS if you need additional support or help in addressing clients’ trauma. Listed here are several websites that offer guidance in working with clients after trauma.
  - Let the conversation arise naturally. It is important to let clients initiate any trauma-related conversation and share only what they feel comfortable discussing. We want to create an open environment where they feel comfortable discussing their experiences without feeling like they are being scrutinized or judged.
  - Validate their emotions. Discussing past trauma is a deeply vulnerable thing to do. We want to make sure clients feel it is appropriate or justified to feel the way they do about their trauma.
  - Make their emotional state a priority. If clients are noticeably distressed while discussing trauma, ensure they have moved to a clearer headspace before attempting to continue with the lesson. Even after continuing with the lesson planning, periodically check-in with your clients to make sure they are relaxed and focused.
  - Don’t hesitate to elevate your concerns. If you notice a consistent pattern of trauma-related conversations with a client, or if you feel lessons cannot continue without disruption, please let your supervisor at HIAS know. It is important to work with HIAS staff to ensure the client is receiving the best possible support strategy for their goals.
  - Be aware that you may not even know what triggers trauma. Even a smell may unknowingly rekindle trauma, and the client may stop coming to

lessons. Also impaired attention and memory are two documented effects of trauma on second language acquisition so that the client may become frustrated and feel like giving up.<sup>1</sup>

- The National Council on Mental Wellbeing offers Five Ways to Support Someone Who Has Experienced a Traumatic Event provides specific suggestions for engaging with a client who has experienced trauma. The Council offers other information for mental health crises (i.e., depression, anxiety) that a client could be experiencing.
- Building Trauma-Conscious and Person-Centered Rapport with Clients provides information specifically for building trauma-conscious rapport with our client population.
- If clients are noticeably distressed while discussing trauma, ensure they have moved to a clearer headspace before attempting to continue with the lesson. Even after continuing with the lesson planning, periodically check in with your clients to make sure they are relaxed and focused.
- General Resources for Working with Traumatized Individuals
  - Share resources. While ELPs can be great sources for emotional support for our clients, many organizations and websites are dedicated to dealing with trauma. Give your clients additional resources to help them tackle any concern they may have. It is a good idea to ask if they would be interested in seeing the resources before offering them.
  - [Healing Voices: Interpreting for Survivors of Torture, War, Trauma, and Sexual Violence](#) provides a training guide for language interpreters for survivors of torture, war, trauma, and sexual violence. Some content in this guide can be very specific for administrator-interpreter organizational strategy, but there are some tips for interpreters dealing with trauma in conversations.
  - Relaxation Techniques. Show your clients quick muscle relaxation exercises.
    - Close your eyes and concentrate on your breathing. Slowly

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<sup>1</sup> Examples of additional reading on this topic may be found

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<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1363461515612933?icid=int.sj-abstract.citing-articles.16>

<https://serranovillageconversation.weebly.com/uploads/2/9/3/0/29308213/borrell.pdf>

breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. Make a fist, squeezing your hand tightly. Hold this for a few seconds, noticing the tension. Slowly open your fingers and feel the difference – notice the tension leaving.

- [Butterfly Hug](#) - Quick self-relaxation technique to teach your clients if they become anxious or distressed while discussing trauma.

## Lesson Planning

- Start with an introduction and a smile, and begin by acquainting yourself with your clients.
- Get to know your clients' abilities, specific needs, and goals with this [Worksheet to Identify Current Knowledge, Challenges, and Needs](#). HIAS also has a [mentors' checklist](#) that provides questions for mentors to consider before, at, and after the first meeting.
- Make a lesson plan after assessing your clients' needs and goals. It is best to make a plan for every lesson to help you address your lesson objectives, keep on track during class, and teach through constructive and engaging activities. Several lesson plan formats are available, and with experience you will be able to adjust your plans as you teach.
- Use a [Basic Lesson Plan Template](#) to identify objectives, clients' profiles, and potential problems, and then follow through with an agenda of activities to engage the clients and achieve the lesson objective.
  - Here is a [Sample Lesson Plan](#) based on the template for the future simple to discuss what you think will happen in the future.

## Creating Lesson Plans According to Clients' Understanding of English

There are generally [five standard proficiency levels for English language learners](#) (This is adapted from <https://www.learninga-z.com/site/products/ell/proficiency-levels>.) Clients do not always fit exactly in one of the five levels (for instance, clients may mostly know single words (Level 1), but also be able to understand some, but not all, individual sentences (Level 2). Also, ELPs may work with students who face challenges because they are not literate in their native language.

- Level 1 — Absolute Beginner. This general category includes clients who do not know any words in English and who do not even know how to introduce themselves. It may also include clients who are illiterate even in their native language. Lessons for clients at this level will focus on visual worksheets and

simple activities—such as learning the English language alphabet.

- Activities for tutoring pre-literate clients:
  - [Absolute Beginner Example Curriculum](#)
  - [Activities for Tutoring A Pre-Literate Student](#)
- [Sample Lesson Plan 1](#) for clients with no English ability to learn how to introduce themselves, say where they are from, and learn a few basic words.
- Level 2 — Beginner. This category includes clients who know only a few words of English. Lessons will include simple games and continuous interaction.
  - Useful resources include:
    - [Example Beginner Curriculum](#)
    - [Activities for Beginner Learners](#) (from: <https://enchantedesl.com/9-efl-esl-speaking-games-activities-perfect-for-beginners/>)
  - [Sample Beginner Lesson Plan](#) for beginner clients to express that they “can” or “can’t” do something.
- Level 3 — Intermediate. This category includes clients who are able to use and understand a series of related sentences in conversation. Activities involving conversation, grammar exercises in the use of basic tenses, simple reading comprehension, and writing short paragraphs would be helpful for these clients. Lessons can be more complex for higher-level intermediate learners.
  - Some useful resources include:
    - HIAS’ sample of an [intermediate level curriculum](#). This sample provides an assessment tool and suggested topics for vocabulary building and grammar lessons.
    - HIAS’ [Sample Vocabulary Homework](#)
    - Here is one sample [exercise/worksheet](#) for simple present and present continuous.
  - [A sample of an intermediate lesson plan](#) that focuses on health problems to be discussed with a healthcare professional.
    - Materials that could accompany this lesson plan include:

- [I have a sore throat](#) from [ESL health lesson](#).
  - [At the doctor's office](#).
  - An [intermediate lesson plan](#) that focuses on introductions and habitual interactions in the past and present tenses.
- [Level 4 — Advanced Intermediate](#). This category includes clients who can use and understand a variety of sentences in conversation. Tutors of these clients may want to focus on topics like prepositions, various uses of the phrase “used to,” possessive adjectives before gerunds (some and any), and frequency adjectives (yet, still, already, never, ever).
  - Some useful resources include:
    - [Advanced Intermediate Curriculum](#)
    - [Activities](#) for Advanced Intermediate clients
    - Sample [Lesson Plan](#) for Advanced Intermediate Level for using “used to” to refer to something a client once did but no longer does.
- [Level 5 — Advanced](#). This category includes clients who can use and understand a variety of complex sentences in conversation. Tutors of these clients may want to focus on challenging topics, like phrasal verbs or colloquialisms, so that the clients can understand them when they hear them in conversations. These clients may also benefit from activities that challenge them to engage in debates.
  - Some useful resources include:
    - [Advanced Curriculum](#) Provides an assessment tool, suggested topics and grammar objectives.
    - [Sample Homework Advanced Level](#) Focuses on using correct tenses.
    - [Sample Advanced Lesson Plan](#) for learning phrasal verbs with the word “get.”
      - [Phrasal verbs with get - Examples and Exercise](#)
    - [Example of a lesson plan](#) that prepares clients for job interviews



and writing a resume. It can be modified to fit an individual client.

## Other Resources for Teaching English

The information below is a sample of the many resources for teaching English as a second language

- Teacher Training and Materials.
  - [English Language Training NY Program](#) This site provides a short powerpoint with general tips.
  - [HIAS English Mentor Handbook \(NY\)](#) General tips on assessment, goals, and best practices.
  - [Literacy Minnesota](#) is dedicated to promoting adult literacy. It has many resources, including curriculum plans for various levels of ESL speakers.
  - [Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages](#) is the main professional organization in the U.S. for ESL teachers. It provides, for example, teaching tools, tips, lesson plans, and tips.
  - [The Center for Applied Linguistics](#) promotes language learning and cultural understanding through research, resources and policy. Its [ESL Volunteer Guide](#) is a general training guide for volunteers.
  - [Virginia Adult Resource Learning Center](#) has resources for teaching ESL, including materials for English conversation classes and activities and an ESOL literacy toolkit.
  - [Using English.com](#) provides additional tools and resources.
  - [Debra Garcia's Teaching ESL to Adults](#), is a website with various tips and resources, including links to other websites. She has a two volume set of worksheets for teaching verb tenses, volume one is free.
  - [Dave's ESL Cafe](#) is an international forum for English language teachers that has an assortment of teaching tips, classroom lesson plans, and other resources.

General Resources for Teaching Conversation, Grammar, Listening, and Reading and Writing

- English conversation starters:
  - [Conversation starters](#), but many of them are for higher-level

learners and some may be inappropriate for this audience.

- [Basic questions for beginners.](#)
- Basic [conversation starters](#) for beginners.
- Grammar resources:
  - [Grammar tools](#), including quizzes.
  - Beginning [grammar worksheets](#).
  - Verb tenses [worksheets](#).
  - Present tense [worksheets](#).
- Listening resources:
  - A [plan for creating a listening lesson](#).
  - [Listening lessons](#).
  - Listening and [read-along slides](#).
- Reading and Writing
  - For advanced ESL clients, learning to read a newspaper.
  - Some [reading activities](#).
  - Short [powerpoints for high beginner learners](#).
- Other resources and activities for tutors and students
  - [Practice conversations](#) for typical activities like going to the doctor.
  - [Vocabulary builder activity](#).
  - [Lessons at all levels](#).
  - [Useful vocabulary words](#).
  - [Live worksheets](#) free worksheets for grammar, reading, vocabulary, and general knowledge.
  - [Games for Learning English](#) has a number of games; activity videos, and vocabulary flashcards for teaching ESL.

- [Improving Listening Skills.](#)
- [Audio and visual listening practice.](#)
- Flashcards
  - [General and game-based quizzes.](#)
  - [Job-related](#)
  - [Feelings-Basic](#)
  - [Numbers 10-1000](#)
  - [Numbers 1-12](#)
  - [Numbers 13-24](#)
  - [Common Home Problems](#)
  - [Numbers 1-20](#)
- [Role Playing](#)

## **Appendix A**

### **U.S. and Foreign Language Resources for Refugees**

- [Multilingual Resource Center](#) is prepared by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. It provides information on numerous topics related to citizenship, employment verification, fraud, and humanitarian programs.
- Spanish Resources
  - [Spanish version of Multilingual Resource Center](#)
  - Vera Institute of Justice – [Glossary of Legal Spanish](#)
  - Cuban American National Council, US Dept of Education, National Council for Community and Education Partnerships - [Postsecondary Education English-Spanish Glossary](#)
  - US Social Security Administration – [English-Spanish Wordbank Glossary](#)
- French Resources
  - [USCIS Welcomes Refugees and Asylees \(French\)](#)
  - [USCIS Information for Asylum Seekers.](#)
  - [Legal vocabulary](#) in the court system from the State of Maryland.
  - Conseil canadien pour les réfugiés – [Un Glossaire Terminologique](#)
  - Canada Public Works and Govt Services – [Immigration and Refugee Protection Vocabulary](#)