

HELP!

They Don't Speak English

Starter Kit

for Teachers of Young Adults

**The HELP Starter Kit
is a resource guide
for
educators of
limited English proficient migrant students**

June 1993

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HELP Starter Kit for Teachers of Young Adults

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INTRODUCTION

The HELP Starter Kit for Teachers of Young Adults is a resource targeted toward any student of adolescence or older who is not in public school. Its focus is on Survival English. Topics such as "Food" and "Clothing" have been chosen with ideas for lessons as well as sample activities for each.

Survival English includes lesson samples arranged alphabetically which come from a variety of survival English texts at various difficulty levels.

Teaching Techniques includes specific instructional strategies that are particularly useful with limited English proficient students.

The Assessment section contains some examples of assessments for determining levels of English language proficiency.

Culture presents some informed observations about the Mexican-American and Haitian cultures.

Resource Agencies provides names, addresses, and telephone numbers of agencies that offer teaching services and materials for limited English proficient students.

The Bibliography is an annotated list of texts available to supplement the HELP Starter Kit.

Dropouts: Ways to Retrieve and Help Them includes strategies for finding this hard-to-reach population and recommendations for continuing their education.

Additional Readings

This resource book should be used flexibly as you discover the needs and interests of your students. Topics are arranged alphabetically since we intend no specific order of lessons. However, we suggest that you introduce the lessons on "First Essential Phrases" and "Personal Information" while you and your students get acquainted.

Our intention in writing the HELP Starter Kit is to guide teachers with essential methods and materials. We have included some helpful tips based on teaching experience and a summary of adult second language acquisition.

THE ADULT MIGRANT AS STUDENT

Who are our students?

1. They are agricultural workers who may have spent the whole day engaged in strenuous physical activity. They may or may not have had time for a shower, or even their evening meal.
2. They are adults who have experience and knowledge. They have adult responsibilities and they have adult reasons for wanting to learn English. They are looking for the tools of independence in a new society.
3. Some are immigrants who have come to the United States to make a better life for themselves and their families. No doubt they have already encountered difficulty with the English language, and also with the American culture. We as teachers may be their only link to understanding Americans and the United States. We need to be aware that there are cultural differences in gestures, politeness, personal space, male/female roles and we must help our students become aware of those differences to avoid cultural miscommunications.
4. They are learners. They have discovered by experience that they need to learn English. Their levels of commitment to learning probably vary as do their levels of literacy in their native languages and their styles of learning. But all will learn best when their lessons are useful, meaningful and communicative. They will learn if they feel comfortable, relaxed, and confident that they can learn; and they will gain that confidence from their teacher's encouragement and respect.

Our respect for our students will be a prime motivation in their learning experience. If you as a teacher have ever had the experience of trying to "get along" in a foreign language/culture/country you probably are aware of the feelings of frustration, self-doubt, and even stupidity that they are struggling with. After all, many were functional citizens in their own country. We respect their desire to participate here as well.

Our best preparation as teachers is to be aware of our students. Why are they in class? How are they feeling physically, emotionally? What are their needs, and are we meeting those needs? Student feedback is essential to find out if we are on target, but may be very difficult to get because of cultural feelings regarding teacher respect, and/or language barriers.

We also need to be aware what we say is only a part of what we communicate to our students. Our tone of voice, our gestures and our body language reveal our feelings and also our culture as Americans. We need to be aware that gestures and body language vary from culture to culture and if we meet resistance or produce a reaction we don't expect, we may need to examine our cultural communication and/or get some feedback from a student or someone of the student's culture. (See "Culture" for cultural information)

ADULT LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

Why do people learn languages? TO COMMUNICATE That is the primary focus of Young Adult HELP, and the goal of young adult migrant ESL instruction.

How do people learn languages? Language Acquisition and Language Learning.

No one really knows how people learn languages. ESL research indicates adults can best learn a second language in the same way children acquire native language skills. Two separate and distinct approaches to learning a second language have been isolated:

Language Learning in the ESL classroom is a process of effortless internalization to gain particles of language. Oral language learning often starts with short phrases and works up to more complex sentences. Most vocabulary, conversations and dialogues are examples of language learning.

Language Acquisition is for the most part unconscious. When children learn language they aren't aware of grammar rules. They listen. Their attention is focused on trying to understand what is being said. They may not understand every word, but their skills increase as they strive to understand the general messages. They acquire grammar skills by being exposed to language in real communication situations.

The process of language acquisition for children shows us some routine, universal stages:

1. There is a silent period (which can last days, weeks or even months) before speaking.
2. Children choose when they will speak and they should receive ample praise for any attempt to communicate.
3. Parents (their language teachers) focus only on communication, not on form (grammar rules).
4. Errors are a natural part of language acquisition.
5. As children are exposed to more language they figure out the rules by themselves and produce increasingly complex and correct speech.

Some researchers suggest that adult language acquisition can and should contain these same elements. They call it "The Natural Approach to Language Learning." They recommend surrounding students with natural English in a meaningful context, focusing on communication rather than grammar rules. If the general meaning is clear, adults will internalize the language, discover the rules for themselves, and produce the new language with increasing degrees of complexity and correctness. Researchers also suggest that acquisition is much faster than learning.

There are two important elements at work in the Natural Approach to Language Learning:

Comprehensible Input. Communication means that what is said is comprehensible and has some new material in it. When we expose students to natural English settings, we must be sure what we say is both understandable and challenging.

Affective Filter. Students learn language more quickly in a low stress environment. The words "affective filter" describe the effects of stress on a student's performance. When the students feel nervous or threatened they are less able to soak up new language. Stress filters out comprehensible input. When the students are relaxed and secure their "affective filtration" is low and they can absorb language and learn faster.

Application to the Adult ESL Class

Though the silent period may not be as long for adults as for children, adults can benefit from the natural approach as much as children and can be expected to progress through much the same process. However, many language "bits" are worth learning through gentle "internalization." In our classes we can use both learning and acquisition:

- S** use learning to teach useful words and phrases students need today.
- S** use acquisition to increase listening comprehension and build a foundation for future communication skills.

In all lessons we need to:

- focus on communication
- create an environment using real objects and situations to make meaning clear
- select a small amount of useful language to learn
- expose students to natural English spoken at normal speed, but controlled for vocabulary and grammar complexity
- create a comfortable, non-threatening learning environment in which students and teacher can relax and enjoy the learning process.

ESL TEACHING METHODS

Listening, speaking, reading, writing - which ones and how much?

The first decision regarding how to teach will be what to teach. Ask your students what they want to learn!

Input from students will define which of the four skill areas of listening, speaking, reading and writing to include, and the teacher will decide how much emphasis to place on each in lesson planning. Students' immediate needs may be listening and speaking with reading and writing to come later, or the majority of students may want all four areas. To decide the balance of skills to teach:

- S** assess student skills and needs (See "ASSESSMENTS" Section)
- S** get feedback from students regarding your decisions
- S** plan each lesson with a clear focus on skills according to needs assessed
- S** be prepared to adjust as student needs evolve.

Guidelines for lesson planning

1. Decide the goal of the lesson based on student need, considering levels, content area, and skills to be taught.
2. Choose the key vocabulary and phrases or sentences, by levels, needed for the tasks of the content area.
3. Write down the exact vocabulary to be used in class and internalized by students.
4. Re-evaluate after class to see if all needs have been met, if further class

Learning Styles:

You may already be aware that there are different styles of learning for different people, just as there are different styles of teaching. Some people learn best by hearing information - they are oral/aural learners; some need to see information before then can absorb it - they are visual learners. Some need lots of structure, some need freedom in learning situations to "do their own thing." Being aware of these differences helps us realize that our styles need to reach all kinds of learners, so we must be sure to vary the tasks and situations to suit a variety of learning needs.

Use: Small group learning for: problem-solving, producing a group product, (sketch, play, student-made games, etc.) discussions of either facts or opinions, interviews or dialogue practices

Individual seat work for: reinforcing, following directions, writing practice

Large group for: oral repetitions of dialogues, presentation of new material, presentation of new material, presentation of previously practiced role plays

All kinds of groups for: games

What do our students want and need to learn?

Pre-testing will provide us with a few indicators of literacy and language levels. The units provided in Young Adult HELP may become the core of your lessons, but ultimately student needs are our primary concern - ask them what they want and need to study and go by that. Pre-test for each unit to see what your students already know so their time is valuably spent. Get feedback to find out what kinds of activities they prefer, which exercises helped most, and find out their specific needs: Do they need to tell the time in English, or just understand what someone else says? Do they need to fill out a form themselves or just answer the questions while someone else writes the information down. The more exactly you determine the vocabulary and structures needed to accomplish their goals, the more likely it is that your students will retain and use them.

(See "ASSESSMENTS" Section for test samples and names of recommended published tests.)

Language Learning and Language Acquisition in the Classroom

Language Learning

Both language learning and language acquisition have a role to play in the Adult ESL classroom, but are used for different purposes. Polite phrases, personal identification, content vocabulary, a conversation requesting and giving directions, question words and danger warnings are examples of language worth learning. They will help students in immediate situations to communicate in English. These are the language particles students will take home with them, practice among themselves and feel successful mastering and using.

These kinds of activities will probably take up a major portion of class time. They are structured and group oriented so they provide an opportunity to speak up without being heard, a chance to make mistakes that don't count.

It is as important in language learning as in language acquisition to keep the learning environment relaxed and non-threatening.

Language Acquisition in the Classroom

When planning the balance of time allotted to skills in each lesson, some time should be devoted to providing comprehensible input to students - natural language, in a context in which they can understand what's being said, but in which they won't be asked to reproduce the language.

Listening activities with no request for speech production allow the students to internalize new language. New language presented several times in successive classes prepares students for future reproduction, and future demonstration of understanding.

Classroom language--"Open the door," "Turn on the light,"--are simple ways, with actions to reinforce them, we can begin to present natural language in a context easily understood. We are also telling students that learning English is useful and that we think they can learn it. It's very important even if you speak their language, that you use English with them on every possible occasion, including informal discussions before and after class. "That's a pretty dress," with the appropriate gestures sets the stage for future compliments on the part of the students.

In future lessons you may want to "check" comprehension of classroom language by demonstration of an action - "I'm turning on the light," --your action could be followed by "Did I turn on the light" and students answering "yes" by nodding their heads, and then when they are ready, asking, "Juan, please turn on the light," followed by Juan's action to show he understood.

Comprehension should not be checked by asking "Do you understand?". Inevitably the student will nod his head to show he heard you, but may not know what you said. (Please see "TEACHING TECHNIQUES" for an article on "The Natural Approach in the Classroom").

Presenting and Practicing English

The words you present in class must have meaning that is easily understood in context. Here are a few techniques to help both in listening comprehension settings (acquisition) and in language modeling settings where students are going to reproduce the language immediately (learning):

Total Physical Response or TPR - uses commands and physical movements to acquire language. James Asher who developed this technique, believes that students learn faster when they move their bodies in response to the language they are hearing. They remember new language more easily and retain it longer when they are actively responding to it. Students seem to really like this technique, as it provides lots of good comprehension practice within the security of the group. (See "TEACHING TECHNIQUES" for "Suggested Methods in Teaching Through Total Physical Responses.")

Realia - In order to establish meaning, it is often helpful to bring everyday items into the classroom. The direct experience allows students to handle the objects - get more involved with them.

Pictures - can provide a very meaningful context for a lesson. Pictures of a doctor's office and examination room could start off a lesson about health. Sources of pictures are everywhere, but they take time to gather, so be on the lookout constantly for the pictures worth a thousand words. Also, don't be afraid to use your own drawings, even if you're not an "artist." Students can laugh with you and appreciate your efforts to give them understanding.

Games - a wide variety of games can be used to learn vocabulary such as picture bingo, picture cards for "go fish" in small groups, or create your own games: put content area objects in the center of a circle of students, then have them close their eyes while you remove one or more of the objects. See if they can name the missing object(s). Language learning can and should be relaxed and fun.

Communication is our goal. We want students to be able to **use** English. Students need a chance to practice expressing their own ideas in a safe environment. Some students will naturally try to speak out, others will hang back. By using some simple techniques you'll make sure everyone gets a chance to speak out in a sheltered environment, or in a creative way, using skills they've learned. These techniques are listed in order from a very narrow focus, to a less controlled setting.

Drills are narrowly focused fragments of language practice primarily with the intention to internalize the phrases. "How are you today?" "Fine, thank you." is an example of a drill if used over and over until it comes out easily. Drills are often used as precursors to dialogues.

Dialogues build on an initial set of vocabulary. They contain structured sentence patterns in usable conversation form. They are easily learned in a short time, but can be applicable to many situations students encounter. (See "TEACHING TECHNIQUES" for **Dialogues**.)

Exercises primarily focus on communication rather than on form. Students are encouraged to talk about an idea in whatever way they can. Some examples are:

Focused topic: The teacher introduces topic and some key vocabulary and sentence structures, then asks students to tell about a part of the topic. If the section on personal information is being used for a focused topic, the teacher could start by telling the class about his/her family while pointing to the picture of the family provided in "PERSONAL INFORMATION." "I have a son and a daughter. I have a mother and a father. My father's name is Joe," etc. Then pass the picture to a student and have them tell about their family.

Information gap: Like 20 questions, students seek to find out some piece of information by asking questions.

Role plays: These are the least controlled of all language exercises, so they are often used as the last step in a particular lesson. Role plays most closely parallel the real world. An example might be, "Pretend you are in the grocery store. You want some milk, but you can't find it. Ask the clerk."

Errors

Errors are part of language acquisition. When students make an error, the teacher must decide whether to correct it, then decide how to correct it. Regarding whether to correct, ask yourself if the error interfered with communication, and then how the student will react to correction. No error is important enough to sacrifice self-confidence. If a student is trying, praise whatever comes out. The best way to reduce errors is to build self-confidence. If you decide to correct, you can rephrase the sentence correctly or make a mental note of the error and plan a lesson around it later.

Questions

When you ask the class a question, give plenty of time for students to answer. If no one answers, rephrase the question. When someone makes an attempt, help him feel successful even if he doesn't have the right answer. But be sure you ask the class questions you know they can answer.

One listening technique that has proven effective for many teachers is known as "active listening." When listening to a student, occasionally restate or summarize what you think he or she is saying. This allows you to check to see if you are following him/her. It also provides feedback for the student on whether his/her message is coming across. Finally, it tells the student that you are truly listening and trying to understand.

Pronunciation

If accent doesn't interfere with communication don't spend time on pronunciation. If it does interfere, see if students can hear the sound they are having trouble with. Show them where the tongue is placed when making the sound. Model the sound and have them repeat it. Also, listen to see if the sound is a problem in other parts of words, - at the beginning, in the middle or at the end.

LAWS and PRINCIPLES of ADULT LEARNING

A number of basic psychological laws control and affect adult students in the learning process. The teacher of adults should understand these laws if he is to make learning experiences effective, lasting, and enjoyable for his/her students:

The law of effect - People tend to accept and repeat those responses which are pleasant and satisfying and to avoid those which are annoying...in short, "nothing succeeds like success." Students should experience personal satisfaction from each learning activity and should achieve some success in each class period by mastering some new idea or operation.

The law of primacy - First impressions are the most lasting. This means that those first classes are all important. The teacher should arouse interest, create a sense of need for the subject matter, and ensure that the students learn it right the first time.

The law of exercise - The more often an act is repeated, the more quickly a habit is established. Practice makes perfect -- if the practice is the right kind....

The law of disuse - A skill not practiced or a knowledge not used will be largely lost or forgotten. The teacher should recognize the value of repetition in the classroom for reinforcing newly-gained knowledge or skills....

The law of interest - A vivid, dramatic, or exciting learning experience is more likely to be remembered than a routine or boring experience....

Some of the principles considered essential to effective learning are:

- ! The adult learner must see immediate benefits to himself.
- ! The adult must want the instruction; he must be motivated.
- ! The adult wants specific, concrete, practical, lifelike situation.
- ! The adult requires participation in classroom activities.
- ! The adult has experiences and interests to which new material should be related.
- ! The adult requires subject matter adapted to his individual objectives, needs, and capabilities.
- ! The adult must enjoy the instruction.
- ! The adult learns best when the teacher shows a personal interest in him.
- ! The adult learns best when several senses are involved. A teacher should choose

Language Acquisition as a Spiral

After exposure to a particular chunk of language, students digest it and are able to use a small portion. As they gain confidence and are re-exposed, the useable portion grows. Re-expose them to important language structures often and they'll carry more away with them each time.

Make It Real

Our students live and work in the real world. They need to learn in the real world too. The more real our lessons are the more easily students will be motivated to learn and ask questions. A trip to a nearby corner grocery store or supermarket will bring up the need for vocabulary for many tasks and objects. Buy something and then stroll around naming things, discussing packaging, price per pound or bag, or ask for an item and then follow the grocer's directions to find it. When preparing a lesson on clothing bring in items of clothing to discuss, to try on, to feel. Shirts and pants will be too big, too tight, too short, skirts and blouses can be the wrong color, too cool or too dark; the motivation for learning will come from the items and students will become actively involved. Teaching ESL takes lots of preparation and creativity and space in your home or car for the accumulation of teacher "realia." When discussing tools, bring some to class and talk about what they are, what they're used for, made of, etc. If you teach in the camp there will be probably be a washing machine available. Talk about different methods of clothing care at the machine and point out the cycles. Use someone's car to talk about parts of the car or driving skills. Use your creativity, your humor and your common sense.

To Read/Write?

If reading and writing are to be included in your class focus, base it on the oral language presented. We suggest the Language Experience Approach in which students volunteer thoughts and the teacher/facilitator writes down exactly what they say, even if it has some errors. As the teacher reads the text aloud, checking with students to see if what is written is what they intended, students can self correct. Run your finger under the words as you read at a natural speed to facilitate "reading along." This material will already be familiar, practical language, to students and can be used as a reading and writing text. A sight word list might include words from pay stubs, drivers licenses, alien registration cards, food packages, etc. (See "TEACHING TECHNIQUES" for the article on Language Experience Approach).

The Nature of the Adult Learner

- ! The adult is a voluntary student.
- ! S/he is usually a part-time student.
- ! S/he may differ widely in age, ability, job experience, education, and goals from other students in his/her group.
- ! S/he may have been away from school for some period of time, and, upon returning, may feel embarrassed or insecure.
- ! S/he may have had little or no formal schooling.
- ! S/he may have a deep-seated fear of, suspicion of, or contempt for schools.
- ! S/he may wonder if s/he can still learn.
- ! S/he may have to overcome feelings of insecurity and fear of competition with younger people.
- ! S/he may have responsibilities that interfere with his/her attendance and study.
- ! His/her previous school record may affect his/her thinking regarding his/her present abilities.
- ! S/he does not leave his/her personal problems, concerns, feelings, and desires outside the classroom.
- ! Regardless of the impression s/he may give, the adult student believes that s/he has made an important decision in going back to school.
- ! Regardless of the type of course s/he chooses, s/he believes it will help him/her.
- ! S/he has many other demands on his/her time, so it is imperative that his/her education be carefully planned.
- ! His/her frame of reference is not the school; it is his/her job, his/her neighborhood, or his/her family.

Physiological and Psychological Changes

- ! Maximum visual acuity is attained at about eighteen years of age and declines continuously thereafter.
 - ! After the age of thirty-five, people generally show a preference for a bright light for reading. This tendency is especially marked in persons between the ages of thirty-five and fifty, probably because their eyes begin to lose the ability to refract light during this period. Changes in visual acuity can be so rapid during this period that they may need to change corrective lenses often.
 - ! Maximum auditory acuity is attained at about fourteen years of age, after which it declines at a slow rate. Many people find it difficult to follow rapid speech, even though they have experienced little or no hearing loss. As some individuals age, they may suffer marked hearing loss, develop feelings of insecurity and fear, and consequently lose some of their ability to learn.
 - ! Persons generally reach their peak of physical ability somewhere between the ages of twenty and twenty-five.
 - ! Motor reactions begin to decline after a certain age, but verbal reactions do not change significantly with age.
- The Nature of the Adult Learner (cont.)
- ! The power to learn is substantially retained, but the rate of learning slows down.

- ! Vocabulary increases with age if new words are put into use.
- ! Being more concerned than children with accuracy, adults take more time on tests, and therefore may make lower scores on timed tests.
- ! The age at which eminent people do their best work does not coincide with their physiological prime. This fact indicates that the human organism, consciously or unconsciously, adjusts to physiological change. Perhaps one of the more subtle adaptations to physiological change is the slowdown in work tempo, which has many implications for adult teachers.
- ! The interests of adults do not tend to change, but the value or depth in interests may vary.
- ! Adults seem to surpass children in their capacity to memorize immediately. However, within a few weeks after the original learning, memory of it declines. Memory is selective even though the ability to remember declines. Those things remembered which are presented with the greatest intensity.
- ! The wide range in age, ability, previous education, experience, and interests emphasizes the important role played in adult education by individual differences.
- ! The most effective learning occurs when adults have sufficient experience and mentality to cope with the subject.
- ! Adults do well with problems that have no one "correct" answer.
- ! Intelligence does not decrease because of aging. A decrease in intelligence quotient (IQ) is, rather, the result of disuse of knowledge at any age.

TIPS FOR NEW ESL TEACHERS

One of the best ways to become acclimated to a new position is to find persons who do it well, watch them, and ask questions. If you can observe several other adult ESL teachers, take advantage of the opportunity. This section provides another way for you to benefit from the expertise of experienced ESL teachers. A group of highly successful ESL teachers and teacher supervisors were asked what tips they would give to a new ESL teacher. These tips represent a combined total of several hundred years of ESL teaching. With an introduction like that, they had better be good!

Tips for the first day include:

1. Learn the students' names and how to pronounce them. Use nametags if possible, to help students learn each other's names as well.
2. Find out something about your students' backgrounds if possible.
3. Create a comfortable, non-threatening atmosphere.
4. Find out students' needs in the four skill areas: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Note: This doesn't mean you must administer a formalized test on the first day. (See "ASSESSMENTS" for some ideas.)
5. Determine some short term goals.
6. Set up a clear system of signals so that the students know when you want them to repeat what you have said.

Other tips include:

1. Speak in a natural tone of voice. Use normal intonation, rhythm, pace, and volume.
2. Teach by topic, situation, or competency. (teach for a purpose).
3. Make sure that your subject matter is relevant. Your students should leave class every day with language they can use.
4. Limit your language in quantity and complexity.
5. Proceed SLOWLY. Don't feel pressured to run through a text.
6. Review every day.
7. Vary activities frequently.

8. Care about your students' lives and show it.
9. Start learning a new language yourself, to see how challenging it is!
10. Give your learners a chance to learn - don't teach everything.
11. Don't correct every error when students begin to speak.
12. Remember: there is no perfect text.
13. Help students to set small goals.
14. Be flexible. The best language lesson may grow from a student's shared experience (an accident, a wedding, anything that is important to the students).
15. Don't allow yourself to be threatened by anything you don't know. As Winston Churchill once said, "It is better to do something than to do nothing while waiting to do everything!" There is a vast array of methods and approaches in ESL. This vast reservoir of possibilities sometimes intimidates new ESL teachers; but if you are committed to helping your students learn English (and you are, or you wouldn't be reading this guide), you will soon develop an approach that works well for you and your students.
16. Make a commitment to growth, both as a person and as a teacher. Trade in "being" for "becoming." What a lively and satisfying way to go!

SUGGESTIONS FOR INSTRUCTION

Opportunities for oral language development are interwoven throughout all academic areas. The key to successful oral language programs is to recognize those opportunities and immediately provide activities or thoughts that will nurture the natural flow of language development.

Reading readiness skills of visual discrimination and auditory discrimination could be readily incorporated into English language activities. Likewise group language experience stories would not only give the student opportunity to learn letter form and copying skills, but provide an opportunity for creative oral and written expression.

What follows is a list of general areas of instruction to use in developing some verbal skills. The areas are listed in a recommended sequence of introduction.

people/family	food/meats--desserts--other
school/items in classroom	people/occupations
colors	clothing shapes
body parts/major	transportation time
numbers/1-20	calendar/days of week
survival information/name	animals/zoo
phone--address--school	numbers/ordinal
animal/pets	house/parts
alphabet	body parts/detail
people/relatives	numbers/100
animals/farm	money
toys--games--sports	house/household/items
food/meals	tools
food/fruits	number/20-100
food/vegetables	