

Audio Self-Study Guide for Low Level ESL Learners: TEACHER'S NOTES

Project Motivation

Jessica: My ESL classroom is comprised of 12-14 learners ranging in ability from pre-literate learners to advanced beginning level readers. The idea for this project came from an Oromo student in his 60s who was anxious to learn to read but had not yet mastered the names (let alone the sounds) of the English alphabet. During a class trip to the public library, this student pleaded with me to help him find an "ABC tape." Although the library did have several nice English language learning programs on tape as well as many children's books on tape, none of these materials were basic enough to have engaged this particular learner. So I left the library promising my student an "ABC tape." What he got was a cassette of my voice reading each letter and letter sound on tape along with a simple printout of the alphabet. He was delighted. What's more, as he continued to listen to the tape at home over the next two months I saw a marked improvement in his ability to recognize letters and associate them with individual sounds.

Heather: In my ESL work at Foundation for Immigrant Resources and Education (FIRE), I have encountered an increasing number of orally proficient learners who cannot read nor identify the simplest of letters and sounds. They have repeatedly asked me for a tape or video they might take home to review the written vocabulary they already comprehend. Additionally, at Cedar Riverside Adult Education Collaborative (CRAEC), recent budget cuts have forced students of several levels (CASAS level 1- 4) to merge into one class. Learners who are testing at a low-beginning level and still struggling with basic survival vocabulary face challenges of reading worksheets in class and effectively reviewing or strengthening their literacy skills at home. As a result, they are often all too dependent on their teachers to acquire basic literacy and language skills. This grant has provided a wonderful opportunity to put time and resources toward making relevant educational materials low-level learners. We'd like to thank the Minnesota Literacy Council for providing opportunities for instructors to bring innovative concepts forward, generated out of their personal experiences in ABE classrooms.

We hope that the **Audio Self-Study Guide for Low Level ESL Learners** will delight and engage your learners as well. We're also confident that you'll find new and creative ways to utilize this tool. As you use these materials with your learners please take a few minutes to share your experience with us:

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Teacher Tips and Ideas to Support the Use the Self-Study Guide

1. Introduce the Audio Guide in class first.

Pre-literate learners and learners without prior formal education may lack the technology and self-study skills to use a CD or cassette player and follow along with the written materials. For these learners we recommend spending some time in class introducing the necessary technology and practicing how to use the materials before handing them out for independent study.

The written materials are designed with a consistent and repetitive visual pattern, including very basic written and spoken directions (“listen, point, say”). With some initial assistance, most learners will eventually develop the independent study skills necessary to use the audio guide on their own. And learners who use the audio study guide regularly will be able to quickly assist other learners in the class.

Observing students use of the materials in class will give you insight as to what study skills they may need before using the materials at home. For example, students may need help recognizing the patterns in the materials and how to recognize the end of an audio track/vocabulary unit. You may also find that students require in-class modeling to understand when they should rewind and review vocabulary and when it is okay to go on to the next lesson.

Click Here to see a video clip of a low-level ESL classroom engaged in learning about audio players and the self-study guide.

Click Here to download the “play,” “rewind,” “fast-forward,” “pause,” and “stop/eject” flashcards to assist your learners with CD and cassette player use.

2. Create a listening lab for learners to use before or after class.

Encourage learners to arrive early and practice by listening and repeating the vocabulary independently. We suggest CDs or tapes of 1-2 audio tracks at a time for learners’ independent study (*see “Technical Instructions”*). Choose vocabulary that can serve as a warm-up or review of class content for the week. Set aside a couple of cassette or CD players and headphones along with copies of the audio tracks and corresponding listening handouts. You may also want to have copies of the supplemental writing materials available for them to reinforce letter formation and spelling.

3. Great Teacher Tip: Teaching the concept of letter sounds.

Step 1: print or cut out pictures of 5 easily recognizable animals. Put a pack of alphabet cards behind your stack of animal photos.

Step 2: Introduce the first picture to your class. Ask them to give the *name* of the animal. After they answer, ask them “what is the animal’s sound?”

Review the animal cards by asking these two questions until students are clearly able to distinguish the difference between “*name*” and “*sound*”.

(Students may also enjoy hearing how different cultures depict animal sounds.)

Step 3: When the name and sound relationship is cemented, introduce one of the alphabet cards. Start with an easily pronounced consonant such as B, D, T, S, etc. Avoid vowels and consonants with multiple sounds at first. Now repeat the earlier questions with reference to these letters. You will notice that this concept quickly translates to letters and will assist you in building a foundation of literacy for pre-literate learners in the classroom.

4. Give each student a study guide for home use.

Motivated learners at the pre-literate or beginning reader stages are often frustrated by their inability to study on their own. Without the most basic of reading skills, most worksheets and picture dictionaries are useless tools outside of a teacher-led classroom. We recommend making copies of all of the audio tracks on CD or cassette (see “*Technical Instructions*”). But give learners the paper handouts for only a limited number of audio tracks. Providing additional handouts should be contingent on learners’ ability to prove mastery of the new vocabulary.

This serves three purposes: First, it ensures that the student focuses on repeating a small number of new vocabulary words. Second, by providing these listening and writing handouts in measured amounts, it provides an incentive for the student to learn the new words and return to class. Third, it protects the instructor from making endless copies for learners who only attend the program for a few days or weeks.

5. Use the writing handouts to supplement your lesson plan.

The audio tracks and handouts in this study guide correspond to common units and themes in the ESL classroom. Research supports the idea that language acquisition (new vocabulary) and literacy skill-building such as letter recognition, need to go hand-in-hand to create an effective ESL literacy program. As students develop the concepts of letter and sound relationships, students need a robust vocabulary in order to recognize the words they are decoding.

Using the Audio Guide in a Multi-Level Classroom

1. Pair Work Activities

- Have a higher-level student operate the technology and follow along with their lower level peer on the listening handouts, repeating the words together as warm-up to class instruction or as independent study or review.
- The technology can be turned off, the word covered up, and the higher-level learner can say each word asking their partner to repeat the word after them.
- Cut up the words and the pictures into squares and use them in a memory game. The preliterate learner looks either for the picture or the word and their higher-level partner helps find the match.

2. Dictation Exercise

- **Use each listening handout as the week's spelling test.** Incorporate the words into a simple, multi-level dictation and develop a teacher sentence key. Create 3 simple worksheets: one for pre-literate learners that is missing only the spelling word used in each sentence, another for intermediate learners who have a few more missing words per sentence, and the final worksheet for advanced learners, which is blank.

Teacher Says: "The pharmacy is on Cedar Street."

1. Worksheet for pre-literate student: The _____ is on Cedar Street.

(Preliterate- "pharmacy" missing) *The students use a handout to copy word.*

2. Worksheet for intermediate student: The _____ is on Cedar _____ . (Intermediate- word "pharmacy," and "street" missing)

3. Worksheet for advanced student: _____
(Advanced – unprompted, only a blank line)

3. Listening Game

- **Cut the pictures out of the worksheet.** Make a set for each learner or pair. Have a higher-level learner read each word. The learners have to locate the picture and hold it up to illustrate understanding.
- **Friendly Competition!** An adaptation of this game would be to play in teams. Determine whether your class is practicing word identification or listening for comprehension of the vocabulary. Announce the vocabulary word. Each team works to locate the word or visual as quickly as possible after it is announced. For example, the teacher or learner would pick a word studied, like "pharmacy" and the two teams would choose the word or picture, depending on the skill being practiced, and hold it up first to get the point.