

LITERACY (from AMES)

Teaching literacy is an issue for many of our tutors who have students that are illiterate in their own language or in English. This poses many challenges for the student in learning English. You can imagine how lost you would be if you didn't have the ability to read street signs or any kind of information. It's understandable that many illiterate students don't have the confidence to leave their home very often.

There are 2 challenges for tutors of illiterate students – improving speaking and listening skills, and teaching the student to read & write. There are many different opinions on whether it is more beneficial to teach reading or writing first, or focus on speaking and listening skills. This is up to you and your student's needs. We would recommend focussing on improving your students speaking & listening skills to begin with so that they can converse on a basic level, and then reading & writing as a secondary focus. Ideally we would encourage all our illiterate students to attend some sort of classroom based learning to work on their reading and writing skills so that you can focus on speaking & listening skills. Some options for this will be outlined below which you can discuss with your student.

Some ideas to improve your students Speaking, Listening & Writing skills:

Activity 1

Take along a box of materials from around your house to each visit with your student. This could include things like clothing, items from the kitchen, study or bathroom. Follow these simple steps with your student:

1. Display the materials and tell them what it is called
2. Ask them to repeat the word
3. If practical, demonstrate what the item is used for
4. Clearly write down the word for your student
5. Demonstrate phonetics and pronunciation of the word
6. Ask your student to repeat the word

If your student can already write the alphabet continue with these steps:

7. Ask your student to copy the word, assisting with each letter if they have difficulty.
8. Once you have gone through each item pick out random items from the box and ask the student to name the item and write down the word.
9. Practice this activity numerous times and again at the end of the lesson to see if your student has remembered the word
10. At each lesson bring back 1 or 2 items from the previous lesson to see if they are retaining the information. If not, lessen the amount of items you bring and repeat the same ones on numerous occasions until the information is retained.

This activity can also extend to items from around the student's home so include a chair, table, window, door etc focussing on common items they would use.

Useful Resources:

Face To Face: A Resource for Volunteer Adult Literacy Tutors

www.lg.tafensw.edu.au/facetoface

This resource is focussed towards those that have a small amount of English, however, it is a very useful read for those with students at all levels of literacy.

Making It Real: Teaching Pre-literate Adult Refugee Students can be downloaded

<http://www.literacynow.info/PDF/prelit.pdf>

This resource is American but very useful if your student is completely illiterate and you are starting from the beginning. Make sure to read the introduction first – this resource attempts to cover some of the questions posed below.....

“Pre-literate learners may not recognize common pictorial representations that teachers often use to represent objects with literate learners. Pre-literate learners may not have handled books and papers or be familiar with the cultural expectations in the classroom. Where and how do you start teaching these learners? What do you need to teach them? What do they need and want to know?”