

Activities for Tutoring a Pre-literate Student

The most important thing you can do to help a pre-literate student is to make reading *meaningful*. What matters to your student?

Language develops more quickly and deeply if students get a chance to talk about things that matter to them.

—Heide Spruck Wrigley

Vocabulary

Show me/Point to

Use props or picture cards. Ask the student to point to various items. This is easier than naming them.

What's in the hat/bag?

Put props or picture cards in an opaque bag. The student takes them out, one at a time, and names each one.

Verbal Fill in the Blank

Give the student a sentence starter and ask the student to fill in the sentence with all the vocabulary words that he/she remembers. For example, "I am wearing ____"

Total Physical Response (TPR)

The idea behind TPR is to associate physical movement with language. First select a set of actions and language to go with them. Most likely, the language will be in command form. For example: *Get out your paper. Pick up your pencil. Put down your pencil. Put away your paper.* Here are the steps to follow:

1. Demonstrate the actions and say the language as you demonstrate (don't say anything other than the commands)
2. Repeat step one a couple more times
3. Say the language as the student performs the actions with you
4. Repeat step three a couple more times
5. Mix up the order of the actions to check comprehension
6. The Student can give the commands or to you (optional)

Miming actions with imaginary objects and picture cues is also an option.



The teacher is wrong!

Say some sentences that the student is familiar with and purposely make some mistakes. Plan these mistakes ahead of time. The student taps on her desk when she hears a mistake and then gives you the correction.

Picture Flash

Very briefly show the student a picture of something they are familiar with and related to the day's lesson. There should be several items of interest in the picture. A room in a house, a park, or people shopping all make good choices. If using a projector, cover the picture and then uncover it briefly—don't turn the machine on and off because you may damage the bulb. The student says what he saw in the picture. Show the picture again and the student adds to what he saw. Show the picture one more time so the student can see what he missed.

Six Boxes

Create a grid with six boxes in it, numbering each one. Give the student a set of picture cards. Call out a number and a word. The student puts the correct picture in the correct box. Repeat until all six boxes have pictures in them.



Photo credit: Dr. Patsy Vinogradov

Meaning Based Reading

Language Experience Stories

The student tells the tutor about an experience. The student repeats the story and the tutor writes it down, one line at a time. The tutor repeats each line to confirm that he/she wrote it the way the student intended. Then the tutor uses it as reading material in the lesson.

Picture Stories

The tutor uses a sequence of pictures to teach the student some vocabulary and to find out what the student already knows about the topic. The student decides what order the pictures go in and then uses the pictures to tell the tutor a story. The tutor writes the story and then uses it as reading material in the lesson.



Listen and Point

The tutor reads the text aloud while the student listens and follows along with a finger, pointing to what the tutor is saying.

Echo Reading

The tutor reads a line of text and the student repeats the line. Continue until the story is complete.

Choral Reading

The student and tutor read the text at the same time.

Partnered Reading

The tutor reads some of the text and then student reads some of the text and so on. The student decides how much each person will read.

Sequencing

The tutor makes words cards or sentence strips with words from a text. The student reads each one individually and then puts them in order to create a sentence or a longer text.

Checking Comprehension

Yes/No Questions

Ask yes no questions about the text, such as, “Is she at the store?”

Either/or Questions

Ask questions that give the student choices, such as “Is she at the store or at the school?”

Read familiar texts
aloud repeatedly.



Photo credit: Dr. Patsy Vinogradov



Pattern Based Reading

Letter Recognition

Circle the Words with...

Ask the student to circle all the words in a text that start with a particular letter (or end with that letter). Use labels, junk mail, etc. to learn to recognize a variety of fonts.

4 Squares

The student draws a grid with four squares in it. The tutor assigns a different letter to each square. The student finds words from a text that start with the letters and writes them in the correct squares.

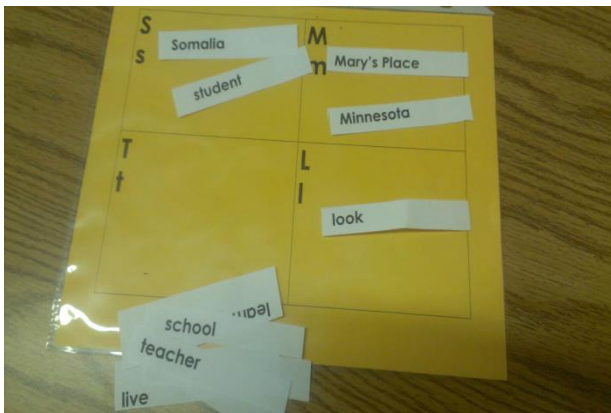


Photo credit: Dr. Patsy Vinogradov



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Letter Matching

b | p d b g

Phonemic Awareness

Phonemic awareness is the understanding that words are made up of basic sounds.

Blend the Word

Review vocabulary from a text by sounding out the parts of the word and have the student guess the word. (s-t-or... What is it?) As an expansion, have the student find a picture of the word that you sound out.

Same First Letter Sound

Choose a vocabulary word from a text and ask the student to name other words that start with the same sound as that word. As an expansion, ask the student to name words that start with all of the sounds in the word.

Does it Rhyme?

The concept of rhyme can be confusing because often the emphasis is on the letter-sounds in the beginning of a



word. It might be helpful to show the rhyme is at the end of a word by pointing to the ends of words when you do this activity. There are several options for this activity.

- Have the student listen to three words and identify the one that doesn't rhyme
- Give the student pictures, say a word, and they find the picture that rhymes with the word
- Identify rhymes in a song or chant

Where is the Sound?

- 1) Prepare three cups. Write Beginning, Middle and End on the cups. Find a game piece, coin, etc.
- 2) Say a familiar word.
- 3) Say one of the sounds in that word. Put the game piece in a cup to show where in the word the sound belongs. Repeat a few times with different sounds in the same word.
- 4) Repeat the steps with the student listening and placing the game piece in a cup.
- 5) Repeat with a few more words.



Sound Chain

- 1) Say a familiar word. Ask the student what the last sound is.
- 2) Say a word that begins with the last sound.
- 3) The student says a new word that begins with the last sound of your word.
- 4) Continue the chain until the student gets stuck and then start a new chain.

Example: red—desk—keep—pen—new



Phonics

Phonics is the understanding of which sound (or sounds) a symbol represents.

Same or different?

Write two words on the board and ask if they have the same sound or different sounds. Specify which part of the words you are asking about.

Odd one out

Write three words on the board. Two words have the same sound and one is different. The student crosses out the different one.

Circle the Word

Give the student a worksheet that lists 3 word options. Call out a word and the student circles the word he/she hears. Example: sister son student

Move the Sound

- 1) Prepare an index card with a word on it and find a game piece, coin, etc. Draw a box around each sound in the word.
- 2) Put the game piece in the first box and say the sound. Move to the next box and repeat until you say all the sounds in the word. Then move the game piece through all the sounds again as you blend the sounds together. Say the word.
- 3) The student repeats several times, as long as there is interest.

Trace the Sounds

- 1) Prepare an index card with a word on it. Make or find letter tiles that match the letters in the word.
- 2) Trace the first letter on the card and say its sound. Find the matching letter tile. Trace it and say the sound again.
- 3) Place the matching letter tile on the first letter.
- 4) Repeat the steps with the other letters in the word.
- 5) Say the word.
- 6) Remove the letter tiles and the student repeats the steps several times, as long as there is interest.

Dictation

Connect oral language with written language by having students try to write the words you call out. New readers can write the first sounds of the words. Encourage inventive spelling.



Word Families

Photo credit: Dr. Patsy Vinogradov

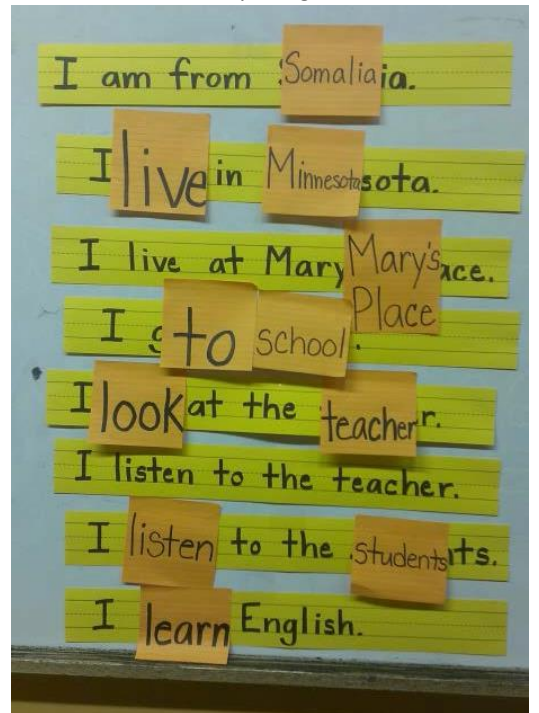


Photo credit: Dr. Patsy Vinogradov



Photo credit: thepetersonparty.blogspot.com

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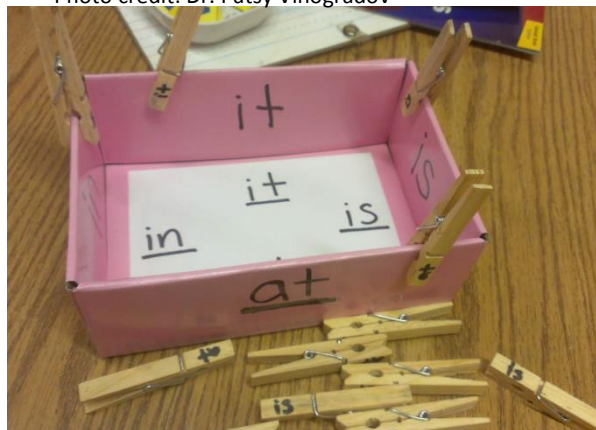


Sight Words

Photo credit: Dr. Patsy Vinogradov



Photo credit: Melissa Culver



Writing

Mixed up Letter Tiles

Give the student a set of letter tiles, or dictate the letters and the student can create the letter tiles on scraps of paper. Call out a word and the student spells the word using the tiles.

Tracing

The student can trace letters with a pencil, with their fingers or in sand. Make sure that the words/letters they are tracing are meaningful to them.

Student Dictates to the Tutor

A student can dictate what they want to write to the teacher, the teacher can write it, and then the student can copy it.

Picture Journal

Tie or staple together several sheets of construction paper to make small books and give one to the student. They can choose a picture for the front and write their names.

The student searches through magazines, catalogues, etc. to find pictures that relate the lesson's topic. The student glues a picture onto a page and writes a word, a phrase, a sentence, or a few sentences about the picture or about what she learned in class. If the student chooses a picture not related to class, allow her to do so, as long as she feels inspired to write about it.

9 Patch (also a listening activity)

Give the student a table/grid with 9 (or 6) large boxes. Help the student to number each box. Tell the student a box number and a vocabulary word and the student writes the word in the correct box.

1	2	3
4	5	6
7	8	9



Caption writing/labeling

Students can label objects in a picture of a place (school/home/work), label newspaper photos, caption pictures from a picture story...

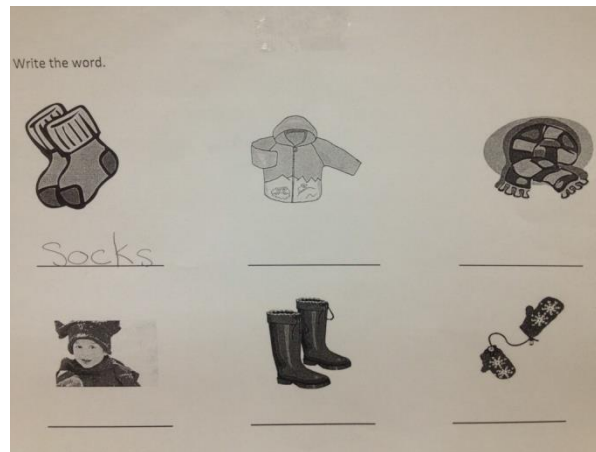


Photo credit: Dr. Patsy Vinogradov

Fill in the blanks

This can be from a reading or dialogue you already did in class. Type the story again with several words missing or write the story on scrap paper. To make it easier, have the student fill in missing letters instead of words. For more challenge, the student can fill in missing phrases.

Resources

Free Online Course

Literacy Level Adult ESL Instruction
online.themlc.org

Teaching literacy level students is a rewarding experience, but many instructors lack confidence in their ability to teach literacy level adults. In this course you will learn about the needs of literacy level students and effective teaching strategies.

Free Online Book

Making it Real: Teaching Pre-literate and Adult Refugee Students by Alysan Croydon is a wonderful book for anyone who works with literacy level adults. A free pdf version of this book is available at <http://www.literacynow.info/pdf/prelit.pdf>

Article about Reading Instruction

Trupke-Bastidas, Julie and Andrea Poulos. (2007). "Improving Literacy of LL1 Non-literate and L1 Literate Adult English as a Second Language Learners." *MinneWITESOL Journal* Volume 24.

Available at <http://minnetesol.org/journal/articles/improvingliteracy.html>



ELL 0 Online Activities

Created by Amy and Tim Reisdorf, this website covers 16 topic areas with interactive activities especially geared toward Level 0 learners. <http://ell-level0.themlc.org/>

A Handbook for Tutors Working with Adult ESOL Learners

Written by Margi Felix-Lund, a recent graduate with a Master's Degree in TESOL from Portland State University. <https://sites.google.com/site/margifelixlund/home>

