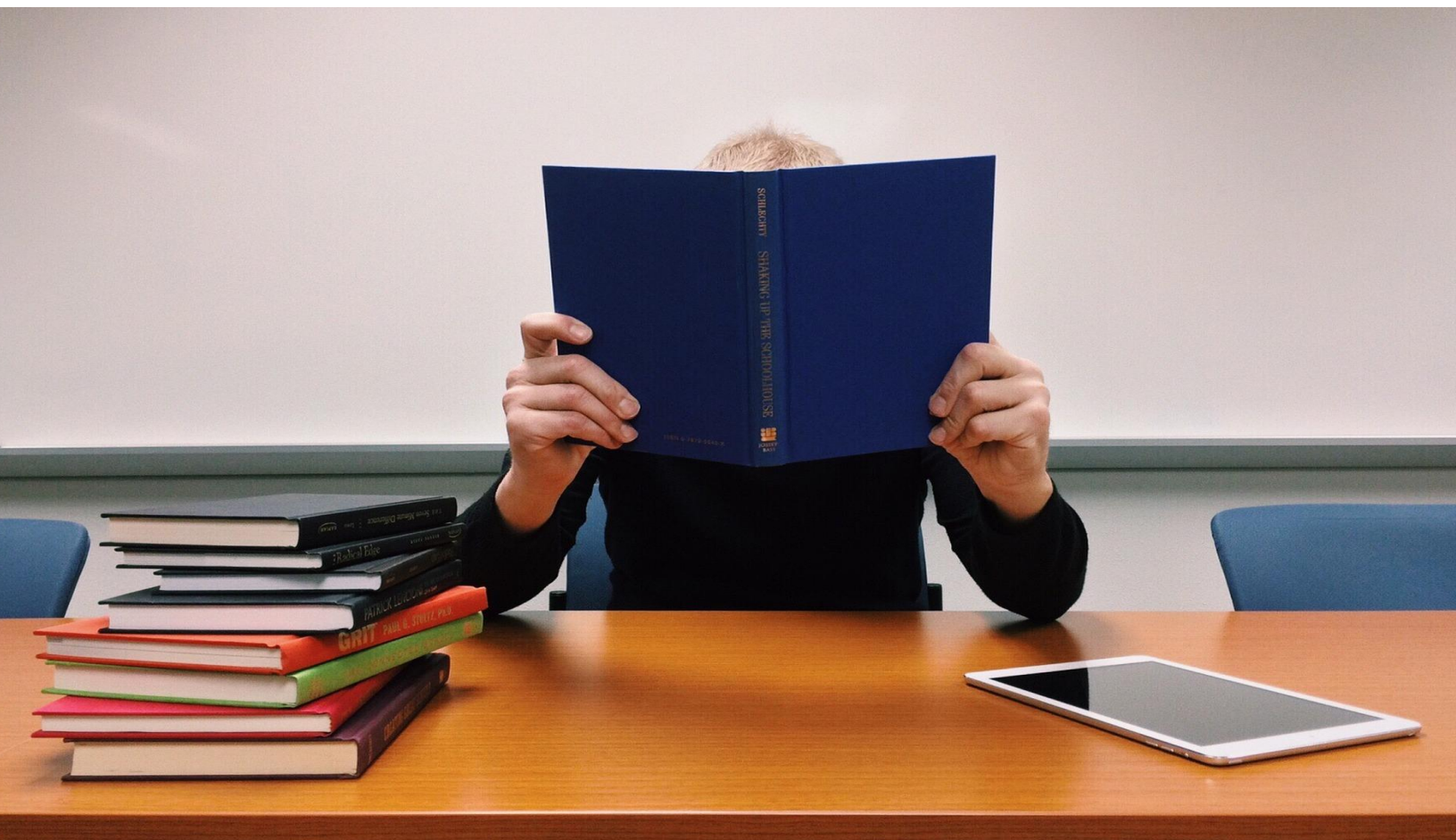


Meeting Language, Literacy, and Career Needs of Adult English Language Learners



Meeting the Language Needs of Today's Adult English Language Learner: Issue Brief



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Introduction: The Case for Increased Rigor in Adult English Language Instruction

Careers and educational opportunities in the United States today require an understanding of more complex language, higher reading levels, stronger communication skills, and more critical thinking skills than ever before. For example, employees are expected to solve problems, understand and produce complex written communications, and apply concepts to new contexts (Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006; Trilling & Fabel, 2009). At work, adults may need to read charts, forms,

and work instructions, which all require the use of different reading strategies (Parrish & Johnson, 2010). In order to succeed in any postsecondary setting or work-related training, adult English language learners (ELLs) need to read and comprehend complex nonfiction texts and write reports or research papers.

These increased language demands can be particularly challenging for adult ELLs, many of whom may have low literacy levels, limited formal schooling, and limited English language skills. In fact, according to the National Commission on Adult

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Literacy (2008), it has been estimated that, of the nearly 2 million immigrants entering the United States every year, close to half have limited access to citizenship, jobs and job training, or other postsecondary education because of these limited skills. Furthermore, many adult English language acquisition or ELA programs (known typically as English as a Second Language or ESL programs)¹ have traditionally focused largely on life skills such as banking, shopping, or enrolling a child in school. Although programs designed to help ELLs transition to college and careers are not new to the field (Mathews-Aydinli, 2006), those programs have typically targeted learners who are already at an intermediate to advanced level of English proficiency. Rigorous instruction in academic and career readiness skills can start from the very beginning levels of adult English language instruction.

Increased rigor in ELA programs is not necessary only for work or school readiness; it is also needed for performing everyday literacy tasks. For example, adult ELLs need to read mail selectively, listen and take notes if they receive important phone messages, or assist their children with homework. They may want to attend neighborhood meetings or interact with teachers at school conferences, which may require using higher order listening and communication skills in English. They need to make decisions about services in their communities, such as health care, which will require print and digital literacy as well as critical thinking skills. This issue brief is a part of the LINCS ESL Pro suite of resources on Meeting the Language Needs of Today's Adult English Language Learner. The purpose of this Issue Brief is to provide an overview of the need for increased rigor in *all* English language acquisition programs, whether in a literacy level class for newcomers or a contextualized career pathways program. It is intended to provide a broad background for additional in-depth resources for teachers and administrators. Although this Issue Brief provides links to resources that help illustrate rigorous instruction practices, it is not intended to be a comprehensive instructional overview. There are two related resources that provide comprehensive, targeted information available from the [ESL Pro landing page](#) of the LINCS Resource Collection on Adult ELLs:

- *Meeting the Language Needs of Today's Adult English Language Learner: Professional Development Module*. This online, self-access module on meeting the language needs of adult ELLs in today's world provides in-depth information for teachers as well as administrators.
- *Meeting the Language Needs of Today's Adult English Language Learner: Companion Learning Resource*. This resource, written specifically for teachers, provides a practical, comprehensive instructional resource on increasing the rigor of instruction for adult ELLs.

Context: A Changing Landscape in Adult English Language Instruction

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA, 2013–2014) emphasizes the need to prepare all adults, including English language learners, for employment in high-demand industries and occupations that lead to economic self-sufficiency. There is a direct correlation between educational attainment and the well-being of adult immigrants and refugees and their families. In 2011, those without a high school diploma were nearly twice as likely to be unemployed compared to those with at least some college (Foster, Strawn, & Duke-Benfield, 2011). In 2014, earnings for those with some postsecondary education were over 50% higher than for those without a high school diploma (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015). According to analyses of data for immigrants in the United States from the Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), a low skill level in the areas of literacy, numeracy, and digital technologies is correlated with low-skilled jobs. Furthermore, immigrants with low skills in these areas are far less likely to access training programs (Batalova & Fix, 2015). These data speak to the power of education and the dire need to provide instruction that helps adult ELLs achieve their educational, professional, and personal goals.

Another factor contributing to the urgent need for more rigorous instruction in adult English language programs is the introduction of the College and Career Readiness (CCR) standards in adult education. These standards are meant for *all* students. The introduction of CCR standards has prompted some key instructional advances for preparing learners for the demands of postsecondary training and work, and these advances can inform English language planning and instruction.

¹ The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act uses the term *English Language Acquisition* (ELA) to describe English language instruction for non-native English speakers rather than the traditional ESL or ESOL terminology.

These advances are: (1) giving learners practice with complex texts and the academic language in those texts; (2) reading, writing, listening, and speaking grounded in evidence from a text; and (3) building learner content knowledge through the use of content-rich, nonfiction texts (Pimentel, 2013). These advances can pose particular challenges when working with adult ELLs. For example, texts found in U.S. school and work contexts may assume prior content knowledge (e.g., the Civil War, a prominent U.S. historical figure) that is unfamiliar to adult ELLs. Adult ELLs may come from educational systems that advocate a didactic, teacher-centered approach to schooling, where testing on factual information is emphasized. Some ELLs may not have formal classroom experiences that required them to analyze text, infer meaning, or look for evidence to support a claim.

Gaps exist between what is traditionally taught in adult ELA classes and the actual language demands of work, further education, and training. In a study of the alignment between practices in adult education and community college, Johnson and Parrish (2010) surveyed 45 instructors in Minnesota from each setting and found that adult English language instructors tend to focus on narrative texts on personal topics (holidays, family, etc.). They also tend to provide limited practice with synthesizing information from multiple sources, minimal instruction in digital literacy, and limited focus on listening and note taking—all of which were deemed very to extremely important to the community college faculty surveyed in their study (also see *Integrating Digital Literacy Into English Language Instruction: Issue Brief*, available from the [ESL Pro landing page](#) of the LINCS Resource Collection). Life skills curricula that focus on the language needed for common, everyday situations, such as shopping or going to the doctor, are important for newcomers, but they may not adequately address these more complex language and critical thinking skills. It can take ELLs, especially those with limited formal education, many years to acquire such skills (Collier, 1989; Cummins, 2000). Therefore, we need to imbed these higher order, more complex academic and career-readiness skills early and often at all levels of adult ELA instruction.

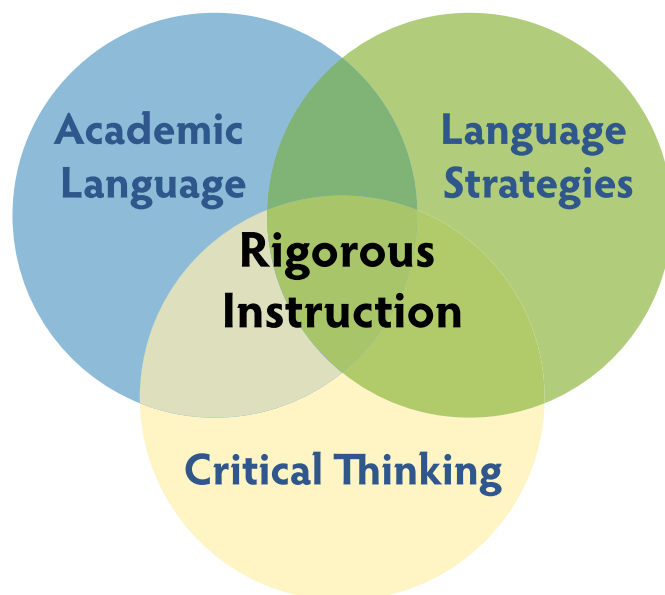
Key Considerations: Making Instruction Rigorous Right from the Start

The Language Needed for Success in Today's World

This section outlines the key areas that need to be included in adult ELA programs to promote success for adult ELLs in today's world: academic language, listening and reading strategies, and critical thinking.

Academic language and access to opportunities. Academic language contains complex features of English required for the completion of higher education, access to meaningful employment, and the opportunity for professional advancement and rewards (Scarcella, 2003). Zwiars (2014) defines academic language as "... the set of words, grammar, and discourse strategies used to describe complex ideas, higher-order thinking processes, and abstract concepts" (p. 22). In the realm of K–12 education, command of academic language allows young ELLs to access and develop content knowledge along with their mainstream peers in K–12 schools. In the case of adults, it is language that can be used in more complex interactions in work, community, and school contexts (e.g., the actual phrases used for building on another's ideas in a discussion, such as *Another thing to consider is...*). (For practical suggestions on teaching academic language to adult ELLs, see also Unit 2 of *Meeting the Language Needs of Today's Adult English Language Learner: Professional Development Module*, available from the [ESL Pro landing page](#) of the LINCS Resource Collection.)

Language strategies for accessing complex written and oral texts. Adult ELLs need proficiency in document and informational literacy, and they need to be able to read a variety of text types, media, and formats, such as charts, graphs,



or web pages (Parrish & Johnson, 2010; Wrigley, 2007). Skilled readers use a variety of strategies to access these complex written texts. Some are bottom-up strategies, such as decoding words, and many are top-down strategies, such as drawing on expectations and making assumptions, using visual cues to aid comprehension, and drawing on prior knowledge (Burt, Peyton, & Van Duzer, 2005). When following complex instructions at work or listening to lectures, skilled listeners listen selectively for particular words or phrases, monitor their comprehension, and determine what listening strategies are best suited for a particular situation (Graham, Santos, & Vanderplank, 2008). ELLs need explicit practice with these reading and listening strategies to develop more automatic use of them at work, school, and in their communities. The following table presents a number of language strategies for accessing complex oral and written texts; these strategies need to be developed at all levels of instruction. (For practical suggestions on teaching reading and listening strategies to adult ELLs, see also Unit 3 of *Meeting the Language Needs of Today's Adult English Language Learner: Professional Development Module*, available from the [ESL Pro landing page](#) of the LINCS Resource Collection.)

Strategies for Accessing Complex Oral and Written Texts

Strategy	Description
Drawing on prior knowledge	Make use of background knowledge to understand new information.
Drawing on expectations and assumptions	Draw on previous experience with similar texts.
Using context clues	Look at pictures, titles, subheadings, and captions in a reading; take note of facial expressions, body language, or other visual supports while listening.
Drawing inferences	Interpret and make inferences; make logical connections between ideas.
Summarizing and synthesizing information	Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas; draw on information from multiple sources, oral and written.
Analyzing relationships between sets of ideas	Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of written or oral language.

The role of critical thinking in today's world. Expectations for critical thinking in educational and work contexts in the United States can differ greatly from what adult ELLs may be accustomed to from their own cultural experiences (Lun, Fischer, & Ward, 2010). Refugees may be in the United States because of the threat of speaking up or challenging authority in their home country. Prior formal school experiences may have rewarded regurgitation of facts and thwarted attempts to challenge assumptions or "experts" in a particular field of study. However, adult ELLs employ critical thinking skills in their daily lives. Adult ELLs need to engage in classroom tasks that promote critical thinking in school and work settings, such as recognizing and solving problems, analyzing relationships between ideas, evaluating evidence, or applying ideas to a new situation.

Two related considerations are the link between text complexity and critical thinking, and the development of language needed to express critical thinking in both speaking and writing. Adult ELLs need to learn the English phrases used to support ideas (*An illustration of this could be...; In the text it said that...*), or challenge others' opinions (*Another way to look at this could be...*) (Zwiers & Crawford, 2011). Building these critical thinking skills as well as the language needed to engage in critical conversations gives adult ELLs tools for higher levels of independent decision making and analysis for success in today's world. (See Beaumont [2010] for a systematic approach for practicing critical thinking skills using *The House on Mango Street*; see Hughes [2014] for practical suggestions on scaffolding instruction in critical thinking skills.)

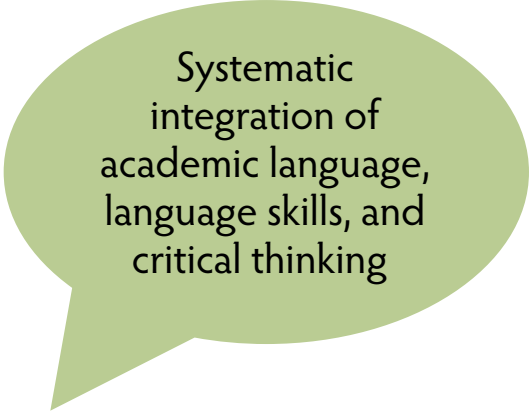
What Does Rigorous Instruction Look Like?

Systematic integration of academic language, language skills, and critical thinking. At all levels of English language instruction, adult English language educators can enhance the rigor of instruction thoughtfully and systematically through the content chosen, skills practiced, and choice of questions asked in class.


Authentic materials and complex, nonfiction texts. Many adult ELA curricula focus on topics that could be considered quite basic, such as places in the community, life experiences, foods and healthy eating, holidays, or school. Within any curriculum, instructors can enhance these topics with content that mirrors what students may encounter in academic settings or at work. Rather than learning about holidays, adult ELLs may be more engaged by learning about differences in deep cultural values and beliefs. Students can explore the connections between cultural beliefs and workplace expectations and practices ([View a listening lesson](#)² that uses short videotaped interviews on cultural expectations and practices). When learning about transportation, have students explore the benefits of public transportation to the community rather than learning only how to read a bus schedule. Teachers can also enhance an existing curriculum with readings or materials on environmental issues, current events, causes of common diseases, mental health issues, cultural norms, values and beliefs, or comparisons of educational systems and practices ([View a reading lesson](#)³ using a text on personality and birth-order theory).

Evidence-based instructional strategies. Adult ELA instruction should focus on content, language skills, and strategies that are representative of work and further training and also help ELLs develop listening and reading comprehension skills along with note taking, data analysis, and critical thinking skills. Ewert (2014) suggests that tasks that promote content learning need to integrate the four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing; include collaboration among participants; and promote thinking on multiple levels—all of which can be achieved through the following practices:

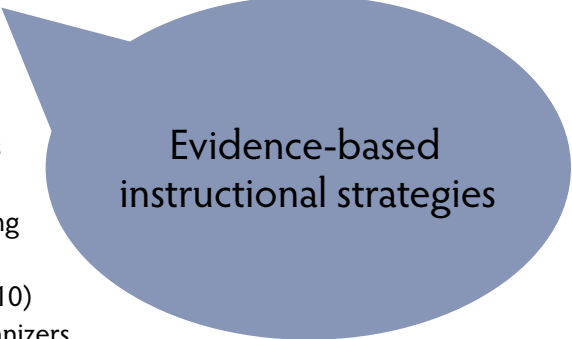
- Use *graphic organizers* as while-reading or while-listening tasks along with informational texts. Have students fill in a grid with information as they listen or read to practice information transfer and graphic literacy. (Indeed, in one study [Jiang & Grabe, 2007], students using graphic organizers as while-reading tasks outperformed those students who were asked comprehension questions on the same readings.) Choose a graphic organizer that represents the text genre (a linear string for a chronological text, a flow chart for a text describing a process, or a grid for a text that describes categorization). Parrish and Johnson (2010) provide [sample lessons](#) that illustrate the benefits of using graphic organizers while listening or reading.



Systematic integration of academic language, language skills, and critical thinking



Authentic materials and complex, nonfiction texts



Evidence-based instructional strategies

2 The video titled “Developing Listening Skills with High-intermediate Learners” may be accessed from the New American Horizons Foundation Web site: <http://www.newamericanhorizons.org/training-videos> or directly from <http://bcove.me/5p6grdyb>.

3 The video titled “Developing Reading Skills for Intermediate/Advanced Learners” may be accessed from the New American Horizons Foundation Web site: <http://www.newamericanhorizons.org/training-videos> or directly from <http://bcove.me/5p6grdyb>.

- *Use jigsaw reading and listening with informational texts.* Jigsaw reading or listening consists of assigning different texts, or parts of texts, to different students so that they can become experts for their sections, which they then present to their colleagues in class. This approach adds practice in communication strategies (seeking clarification), selective listening or reading strategies, and critical thinking (analyzing and synthesizing information). (View a [jigsaw reading lesson](#)⁴ and a [jigsaw listening lesson](#)⁵ to see how the approach promotes these skills).
 - *Use project-based learning.* Project-based learning consists of learners working collaboratively in teams to develop a product, such as a booklet on community health resources. It is an excellent way to make use of real-world data and authentic texts. While students focus on real-world issues or concerns, they use language in a variety of ways “to collaborate on a plan, negotiate tasks, contribute ideas and constructive criticism, assess progress, and achieve consensus on various issues that are important to the learners’ lives” (Finn Miller, 2010, p.4).
 - *Teach the language of critical thinking.* Zwiers (2011, 2014) provides [resources and activities](#) for developing academic language and the language of critical thinking. Teachers can provide sentence and paragraph frames to build learner confidence in engaging in critical conversations. Learners should engage in activities that require elaboration, synthesis of ideas, or support of an argument. (For practical suggestions on integrating practice with critical thinking skills, see Unit 4 of *Meeting the Language Needs of Today’s Adult English Language Learner: Professional Development Module*, available from the [ESL Pro landing page](#) of the LINCS Resource Collection.)
 - *Focus on evidence in a text.* Adult ELLs need to be able to use evidence to support their position when discussing a problem with a boss at work, during work or community meetings, or during class discussions. Students need to gather evidence from what they
- have listened to or read when completing academic writing tasks. Further, it is important that they learn that “evidence” does not refer to their personal opinion on the subject. Instruction in this area marks a shift from language practice focused on particular language functions (greetings, making complaints) or competencies (opening a bank account). Classes should be supplemented with practice in finding evidence to support claims to better prepare adult ELLs for the demands of speaking and writing tasks required in postsecondary and work contexts. This can be done in any type of curriculum.
- *Ask the right questions.* Asking the right questions can lead adult ELLs to deeper thinking and analysis, as well as to a better understanding of how to find evidence in a text. In a reading or listening lesson, effective questions help students collect the evidence they need to support their claims and make conclusions about what they are listening to or reading. Teachers should construct questions that depend on information that can be found in the text (*What tells you Ivan was disappointed in his son?* versus *Tell us a time you were disappointed in your son.*). To promote critical thinking in any lesson, avoid display questions with only one right answer. Ask *How do you know...*, *What tells you...* *Why...*. These questions allow ELLs to demonstrate their understanding, rather than simply supply a one-word answer that can be found in a dialogue or text. Asking such questions can promote the higher order thinking skills of analysis and interpretation as opposed to simple recall and reporting.

Considerations for Administrators

There are clear connections between rigorous instruction and heightened expectations in the Teaching of English to Speakers of Other Languages Standards for ESL/EFL Teachers of Adults (TESOL, 2008). These standards make specific reference to promoting problem-solving and critical thinking skills, learning that requires collaboration, and instruction that prepares learners for real-world tasks. Program administrators can do a number of things to support efforts to heighten expectations of teachers and increase the rigor of instruction in ELA programs.

When observing teachers, program supervisors can tie teacher observation and supervision to increasingly rigorous instruction. Observation rubrics can include categories on how well a teacher promotes critical thinking in lessons and

4 The video titled “Developing Reading Skills for Intermediate/Advanced Learners” may be accessed from the New American Horizons Foundation Web site: <http://www.newamericanhorizons.org/training-videos> or directly from <http://bcove.me/5p6grdyb>.

5 The video titled “Developing Listening Skills with High-intermediate Learners” may be accessed from the New American Horizons Foundation Web site: <http://www.newamericanhorizons.org/training-videos> or directly from <http://bcove.me/5p6grdyb>.

the extent to which the teacher uses authentic materials and real-world data in lessons. Program administrators should provide time and professional development (PD) for teachers to understand language demands, and then respond accordingly in their curricula/instruction. Administrators should also provide time for teachers to work across different standards and resources to see how and where practice with academic language, language strategies, and critical thinking can be embedded.

Programs can make use of existing models and frameworks for ideas and guidance for increasing the rigor of instruction. Minnesota's Academic, Career, and Employability Skills (ACES) project (Adult Basic Education Teaching and Learning Advancement System, 2013) has developed the [Transitions Integration Framework \(TIF\)](#) for adult education. Although intended for all adult education, a number of the TIF categories correspond directly to the three core areas outlined in this brief: *academic language and skills, learning strategies, and critical thinking*. The [Employability Skills Framework](#) can also guide development of more rigorous, work-focused instruction (Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education, 2014).

Conclusion

ELA programs that embed systematic practice with academic language, learning strategies, and critical thinking at all levels of instruction are positioned to serve the increasingly complex language needs faced by today's adult ELLs. The instructional suggestions outlined in this brief represent several ways to increase the rigor of instruction and include: making use of rich, nonfiction content; creating tasks and asking questions that promote critical thinking; and promoting practice with listening and reading strategies that allow ELLs to access complex texts. This move to increased rigor does not mean a complete overhaul of ELA programming. Rather, it represents a shift in our thinking about what constitutes the essential skills and language that can be included in any English language program.

Preparing English Learners for Work and Career Pathways



Introduction: Responding to a Changing World

In the United States, as elsewhere, there is an increasing demand for a job-driven adult education system that teaches adults the skills needed for work in “good jobs.” As the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (2014) makes clear, adult education and training need to be more closely aligned to prepare students for employment in a reasonable time frame (Biden, 2014). In many cases, this calls for collaborative relationships between training providers, such as community

colleges that offer career pathways, and adult education programs focused on English language acquisition (ELA).

Research suggests that “good jobs”—that is, jobs that pay family-sustaining wages—require at least some postsecondary education. For many low-skilled adults, including English language learners (ELLs),¹ a good option appears to be focusing on education and training for middle-skill jobs that require some postsecondary education but not a 4-year degree.

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¹ An *English language learner* is defined as an adult or out-of-school youth “who has limited ability in speaking, reading, writing, or comprehending the English language—and whose native language is a language other than English; or who lives in a family or community environment where a language other than English is the dominant language” (Public Law 113–128, July 2014, Title II, Sec. 203[6]). This term replaces the phrase *individual of limited English proficiency*, which was used under the former law, the Workforce Investment Act.

This issue brief is a part of the LINCS ESL Pro suite of resources on *Preparing English Learners for Work and Career Pathways*. The purpose of this issue brief is to provide teachers and administrators with practical ideas and present a broad overview of considerations for connecting ELA to career pathways. It is intended to serve as an introduction to the topic of career-focused contextualized instruction that teachers and administrators can use as a springboard to additional in-depth resources on this topic. This brief describes program models designed to strengthen the alignment of adult education, employment, and skills training. The Instruction section outlines the skills that ELLs need to succeed at work and in postsecondary education and offers ideas for teaching practice.

Although this issue brief provides links to resources that help illustrate the current trend in career pathway services for ELLs, it is not intended to be used as an instructional guide. For more comprehensive, targeted information, refer to the two related resources below, available from the [ESL Pro landing page](#) of LINCS:

- *Preparing English Learners for Work and Career Pathways: Professional Development Module*
This online, self-access module includes an overview of contextualization concepts as well as units on program design, curriculum and instruction, and evaluation and learner assessment. The module provides in-depth information for teachers as well as administrators.
- *Preparing English Learners for Work and Career Pathways: Companion Learning Resource*
This practical, comprehensive instructional resource is written specifically for teachers.

Context: Adult English Learners, Work, and Careers

As the adult education field shifts to meet emerging needs, models that integrate basic skills with occupational skills are starting to emerge across the United States. Adult education programs are now working in collaboration with employers, members of workforce boards, and colleges to build services that allow for a seamless transition from training to career pathways. These pathways often start with industry-recognized certificates that can be obtained in less than a year—certificates that constitute the first rung in the career ladder in growth industries such as health care, information technology, construction, or transportation and logistics. Integrated instruction allows immigrants and refugees to participate in training for these job sectors while they are developing their English skills.

Efforts to transition ELLs to work and/or training are more likely to be successful if the knowledge and skills that students learn reflect the demands of employment in local industries. These efforts should reflect what students need to know and should be able to do in career pathway training designed to lead to family-sustaining employment. Because many immigrants face challenges in their lives related to work and family responsibilities and have limited resources of time and money, supportive services may be necessary. For example, several of the colleges that are part of Accelerate Texas employ a “student success advisor” or a case manager who helps vulnerable students persist and succeed in their transition

Career Pathway: A series of connected education and training strategies and support services that enable individuals to secure industry-relevant certification and obtain employment in an occupational area and to advance to higher levels of future education and employment in that area.

U.S. Departments of Education, Labor, and Health and Human Services, 2012

from ELA to postsecondary education and training.

Key Considerations

ELLs often have dual needs: the need for English instruction and the need for occupational skills training. Yet, traditionally, the training and education systems have worked in silos, making it difficult for providers to offer services that address the multiple skill demands of modern society (Parrish & Johnson, 2010). These include oral and written communication skills along with the occupational skills and credentials valued by employers. They may include marketable skills certificates as well as noncredit and credit certificates in areas related to health, information technologies, or manufacturing. ELLs also need the work-readiness skills necessary to obtain and retain employment and advance to jobs beyond the entry level. But basic skills and technical knowledge may not be enough for today's world: Employers have also consistently stressed the need for soft skills—skills often used in team participation, problem solving, and decision making (U.S. Department of Labor, n.d.). Several websites offer excellent suggestions on how to prepare students for work, including the U.S. Department of Education's site outlining an Employability Framework (<http://cte.ed.gov/employabilityskills>).

Programming efforts that connect adult education to employment in high-growth industries follow an approach that focuses on preparing adult learners for work and career pathways. These approaches are often jointly developed through community partnerships with workforce boards, employers, and colleges, and they focus on transition to jobs and training opportunities available locally. Instruction is contextualized to either specific jobs or career clusters, enabling students to develop the language and literacy skills necessary for the next step in their careers. (For a discussion of contextualization, see also Johnson, 2002; Mazzeo, Rab, & Alssid, 2003; Perin, 2011.)

Responding to the Language and Literacy Needs of English Learners

The United States is home to more than 25.3 million individuals with limited English proficiency, including both foreign-born and U.S.-born individuals (Whatley & Batalova, 2013). The pressing need to move beyond life skills-oriented ESL instruction is felt quite keenly by ELA program² administrators and instructors, who are aware that the majority of ELLs are far from earning the middle-class wages envisioned in the Ready to Work report (Biden, 2014); instead, many are employed in entry-level, low-wage jobs. This is true not only of low-skilled immigrants with little education but also for immigrants and refugees with professional degrees, who tend to be underemployed as well (Spence, 2010; Wilson, 2014). Both groups are employed at a higher rate than U.S.-born adults but are overrepresented in the low-wage workforce (Capps, Fix, & Lin, 2010).

Given the pressures to find work and support a family, few learners new to English have the time or resources to persist through a sequential ELA program that moves them from the beginning to the advanced levels of English proficiency required for certificate training in high-demand jobs in fields (McHugh, 2014; Wrigley, 2009). Concerned about these realities, President Obama's administration (White House, 2015), working with key federal departments, has suggested alternative models to accelerate the transition to job skills training and to allow students with different experiences and backgrounds to participate effectively in a changing labor market.

A federal report jointly developed by the U.S. Departments of Labor, Commerce, Education, and Health and Human Services (2014) entitled *What Works in Job Training* also highlights models that build partnerships between education and workforce institutions. These models reflect a new skills paradigm designed to move youth and adults into good jobs that are ready to be filled.

2 An *English language acquisition program* is defined as "a program of instruction designed to help eligible individuals who are English language learners achieve competence in reading, writing, speaking, and comprehension of the English language; and that leads to attainment of the secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent; and transition to postsecondary education and training; or employment" (Public Law 113–128, July 2014, Title II, Sec. 203(6)). This term replaces the formerly used phrase *English as a second language*, or adult ESL.

Connecting Adult English Language Learners to Work and Training: Practical Strategies

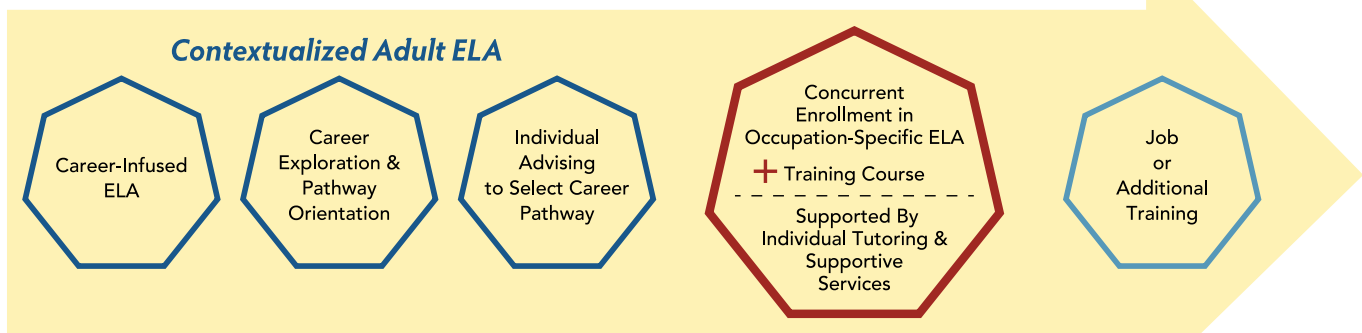
Adult ELA programs serving students who are looking for work or looking to advance in their current jobs might consider shifting from general ELA to one or more contextualized ELA classes focused on workforce preparation. These classes often integrate a career awareness component to help students identify both the skills they have and the skills they need to qualify for jobs that pay family-sustaining wages.

Particularly important for immigrants and refugees are components that increase awareness of career ladders and the hourly wages associated with each step on the ladder. Students from poorer families can often benefit from gaining a broader perspective that illustrates how investing in longer-term opportunities might benefit a family financially in the long run. Other options include: **bridge courses** that prepare students for the next step in their careers, whether employment or skills training; the **concurrent enrollment model** (see Exhibit 1), which allows students to co-enroll in a technical class and an English support class; and the **I-BEST (Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training) model**, an approach, supported by research evidence (Zeidenberg & Jenkins, 2010), which uses team teaching. In the latter model, a technical instructor and an adult basic education or ELA instructor work side by side in the same classroom, interweaving basic skills and occupational skills. Many of these programs also provide advising and other supportive services to make it possible for students to persist and succeed in the long term.

Blended learning models that combine online learning with face-to-face group instruction can help to accelerate learning at any level. However, while higher-skilled students may be able to learn independently using computer-mediated systems (with some guidance), lower-skilled students new to technology may need a great deal of support and assistance in using new media for learning. (For additional information, see the issue brief and in-depth, online training module on *Integrating Digital Literacy Into English Language Instruction*, available from the [LINCS ESL Pro landing page](#).)

Contextualization for English language acquisition: A process of providing language and literacy services contextualized to the skill demands of work or career and technical training. Instruction is offered in a supportive environment and uses authentic materials gathered from workplace and technical training.

Exhibit 1: ELA career pathway model that includes concurrent enrollment with supportive services



Example of a pathway model that moves students from contextualized ELA to career exploration and individual advising to concurrent enrollment in an ELA and a training course.

Engaging Employers to Support Adult Career Pathways Programs

Employer engagement can significantly contribute to the success of a program's career pathway efforts. For example, employers working in collaboration with ELA and training providers can be asked to identify the language and literacy demands of specific jobs, provide input on curriculum, and describe current and future work opportunities in their sectors. They may also help determine which industry-recognized certificates should be created for specific pathways. Some companies, including hotels, restaurants, and custodial staff in school districts, are collaborating with ELA programs to help design customized training programs with an eye toward employee advancement.

Employers can also be asked to coordinate their on-site training with opportunities afforded by local providers, and they can offer internships or other work-based learning opportunities. Many employers are willing to participate in career days and conduct mock interviews with students. Fully engaged employers may offer release time for classes or provide other incentives and supports to help workers persist and complete a course.

Employer Engagement With Adult ELA: Case in Point:

One such initiative, built in collaboration with ELA experts and delivered by ELA instructors, is McDonald's *English Under the Arches*,³ a language program operating in 41 sites across the United States. Since 2008, the program has served more than 2,500 ELLs (all management trainees and assistant managers) through a blended learning model that includes virtual classes taught by an adult ELA instructor from a local community college. Students also meet regionally face to face to get to know each other and learn the technology they will use. Instruction is contextualized to the technical training the company provides. Program components include face-to-face classes at a local site, independent e-learning, and on-the-job practice with coworkers and customers based on structured assignments (Aspen Institute, 2014). Other companies, such as Marriott and Walmart, offer their employees opportunities to improve their English by participating in an online course. (The companies buy licenses and access is free to employees.) Additional ideas on building partnerships with employers can be found at <http://lincs.ed.gov/employers> and <http://UpskillAmerica.org>.

Instruction: Addressing Learner Needs

Although general program models may look similar for all adult basic education students, the instructional opportunities offered to ELLs preparing for work and training must be quite different both in design and execution. New immigrants and refugees may be unfamiliar with the culture of the U.S. workplace or the culture of training. They may have little experience in learning technical skills in a classroom setting and might need information, support, and guidance in making career choices and selecting appropriate training opportunities. The following list outlines some of the key skills that a contextualized ELA program might address, along with strategies for strengthening these skills.

- **Speaking and Listening Skills:** Unlike native speakers, ELLs may not be familiar with the social and technical language used in modern workplaces and training. There is a great need for functional language associated with asking for information, making requests, providing explanations, discussing problems, or making amends when things go wrong.
 - » **Bright Ideas:** A needs assessment to identify the language demands of certain job sectors can serve as a framework for instruction. Role plays and simulations (e.g., turning the class into a make-believe computer repair shop for a day) offer opportunities for practice. Asking students to pay attention to the language they hear around them at work, in stores, or at social service agencies builds language curiosity and language awareness, both of which are important for ongoing learning beyond the classroom.
- **Academic Listening Comprehension Skills:** The skills needed to understand and respond to lectures are particularly important in training, whether they are part of workplace training or part of an occupational skills course offered in a career and technical program. ELLs at all levels need experience listening to academic presentations. They must gain proficiency in both global listening—to get the main point of an explanation—and listening for important details that need to be remembered. Because the technology used in both work and training is rapidly evolving, the skills necessary for each increasingly include the use of software-based training modules that require “problem solving in technology-rich environments” (see also Survey of Adult Skills, Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and

³ The U.S. Department of Education does not endorse any particular model.

Development, 2013). This can be a challenge for many ELLs who have not participated in distance learning.

- » **Bright Ideas:** Hearing a mini-lecture on a topic related to careers (e.g., The 10 Skills Employers Want) gives students practice in listening for a main idea and identifying examples. It also supports note-taking skills. (For more information on teaching academic skills, see the online training module *Meeting the Language Needs of Today's Adult English Language Learner*, available from the [LINCS ESL Pro landing page](#).) This module includes examples of online how-to videos that give students a chance to practice both note-taking and listening skills.)
- **Written Communication:** The writing that ELLs must do at work and in training courses is quite different from the personal narratives that are common in many ESL programs, particularly at the beginning levels. ELLs preparing for careers are expected to become proficient in document and informational literacy (Parrish & Johnson, 2010). Expectations for work-related written communication now go far beyond simply filling out print forms or jotting down information in a note. Workers and trainees increasingly need to access information contained in company and training websites and are expected to use e-mail on a regular basis. Increasingly, they must request time off, check schedules, clock in and out, and report problems online. Communication regularly flows via e-mail, and in most training courses, students are expected to download readings and upload completed assignments.
 - » **Bright Ideas:** Integrating a computer literacy component into ELA classes and offering hands-on practice in electronic communication will help students be competent and confident in using new tools. Learning about social media and the etiquette that governs its use can forestall potential problems as students transition to college. Students can also be asked to generate and answer questions via e-mail, use Twitter to give their opinions on an issue, create a LinkedIn page that highlights their job experience and skills, or use a spreadsheet to analyze answers to an interview they conduct as a class.
- **Technical Language and Vocabulary.** The language used in job skills training tends to be quite different from the everyday language that ELLs hear and read in conventional ELA classes. Vocabulary may be a challenge as well. ELLs who want to succeed in training will need to acquire thousands of new words to understand lectures and textbooks, participate in discussions, and pass exams. The terminology used in technical classes may represent the academic language of a profession or industry, but it often includes *subtechnical vocabulary*, terminology that native speakers tend to know but that may be unfamiliar to ELLs (e.g., *cardiac arrest*, *blueprint*, *reboot*, or *spreadsheet*).
 - » **Bright Ideas:** Using image-rich materials written for both lay people and specialists can afford exposure to new forms of discourse. Selecting a few sentences of dense, jargon-free text and deconstructing them with a class can offer experience in finding the meaning behind the words (e.g., in tightening a Phillips head screw, care must be taken not to strip it). Magazines on health, popular mechanics, and automobiles can help make learning relevant to students' interests while introducing new vocabulary to be studied. Asking students to bring their favorite tools to class, discuss their use (and misuse), and research their history engages students while building background knowledge as well as new vocabulary. Building on what students know and what they are interested in takes advantage of the background knowledge that ELLs possess and is likely to deepen learning.
- **The Culture of Work and Training:** Immigrants and refugees who are still learning English and have been in the United States for only a relatively short time may need a great deal of guidance on how to navigate the U.S. workplace or how to succeed in a training course at an academic institution (Wrigley, Richter, Martinson, Kubo, & Strawn, 2003). Cultural knowledge may include the skills associated with high-performance workplaces and career and technical training, such as problem solving, decision making, and working in teams. ELLs may likewise be unfamiliar with the language used in social interactions, such as communicating with supervisors or instructors and collaborating with fellow workers and students. ELLs may also need to know about workers' rights and learn more about social and legal issues related to sexual harassment and discrimination.

» **Bright Ideas:** Scenarios depicting “sticky situations” at work or in training can offer a jumping-off point for discussion on “how things work” in the United States. Asking students how they might respond to a critical incident and discussing options and consequences as a group provides language practice and offers opportunities for cross-cultural comparisons. (Scenario example: One of the expensive tools you had to buy for the class is missing. You think one of your co-workers/fellow students took it, but you are not sure. What do you do? What do you say?) Employers and training instructors often have many examples that they can share.

Considerations for Administrators

As the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education report *Making Skills Everyone's Business* (U.S. Department of Education, 2015) makes clear, the trend toward implementing career pathways offers program managers in adult education unprecedented opportunities for collaboration at the local level. Working with community colleges and community-based service providers allows administrators to build a continuum of services that includes the support that ELLs might need not only to access programs but also to persist and succeed. Through partnerships with workforce boards and by engaging employers, program administrators get a chance to highlight the diversity of ELLs who reside in their communities and to emphasize their strengths. These partners can also identify growing occupational areas that offer expanding opportunities for work in the local area. In discussions with those outside the ELA field, ELA administrators can explain how the approaches that support less educated learners may need to be adjusted for higher-skilled, foreign-educated students who can benefit from accelerated learning. Finally, advocating for and implementing high-quality professional development specifically focused on this new trend offers administrators a chance to become leaders in the area of connecting adult ELLs to career pathways through contextualization.

Conclusion

ELA programs that actively prepare students to access the employment and training services related to career pathways contribute to immigrant integration (see also the Networks for Integrating New Americans (NINA), Kallenbach et al. 2013). Contextualized programs fill an important gap in the field. They allow ELLs time to build their language and literacy skills while increasing their knowledge of concepts and terms used in an occupational area, at work or in training. Building programs that offer instruction contextualized to work and careers helps create pathways to self-sufficiency and offers access to quality jobs for immigrants and refugees who may be underemployed or educationally underprepared and whose English is still a work in progress. It also creates opportunities for economic integration (Kallenbach et al., 2013) and helps ELLs see that “getting good jobs with good wages” is an attainable goal.

Contextualization models and instructional approaches designed to meet the needs of ELLs are addressed in more detail in resources available from the [LINCS ESL Pro landing page](#), including a companion learning resource that illustrates best practices in action and an in-depth, online training module.

Integrating Digital Literacy Into English Language Instruction: Issue Brief



Introduction: Literacy in the Modern World

In our contemporary society and global economy, what it means to be literate is constantly changing. Literate adults still need to know how to use printed and written information to perform tasks in their daily lives, such as read notes that come home from a child's school, use written communication at work, synthesize and summarize information for an educational assignment, read instructions on how to put together a toy, or write a letter to an editor to express an opinion. However, the way literate adults complete these tasks has changed dramatically, as most of these tasks are now done using technology.

For example, a child's teacher may send information by e-mail or as a text message, or post it to the class web page; written communication in work settings is usually done through e-mail; completing educational assignments involves accessing information online, evaluating and synthesizing the information, and then submitting the written summary through an online course management system; instructions for toy assembly can be found online in written or video format; letters to the editor are submitted online, and opinions are often expressed online via social media and blogs. For these and other purposes, what it means to be literate has expanded to include the ability

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to use digital technology for literacy tasks. In the future, as technology, learning environments, and expectations for students continue to change, what it means to be literate will also evolve.

This issue brief is a part of the LINCS ESL Pro suite of resources on Integrating Digital Literacy into English Language Instruction. The purpose of this Issue Brief is to provide teachers and administrators with a broad overview of digital literacy as it relates to adult English language learners (ELLs) in English language acquisition programs. It is intended to serve as an introduction to the topic of digital literacy that teachers and administrators can use as a springboard to additional in-depth resources on this topic. Although this Issue Brief provides links to resources that help illustrate the current issues in developing digital literacy, it is not intended to be used as an instructional guide. For more comprehensive, targeted information about incorporating digital literacy into adult ELL programs, refer to the two related resources below, available from the [ESL Pro landing page](#) of LINCS:

- *Integrating Digital Literacy Into English Language Instruction: Professional Development Module*

This online, self-access module on digital literacy includes four units on integrating digital literacy into adult English language instruction. The module provides in-depth information for teachers as well as administrators.

- *Integrating Digital Literacy Into English Language Instruction: Companion Learning Resource*

This is a practical, comprehensive instructional resource written specifically for teachers.

This brief defines digital literacy and describes the ways in which digital literacy activities can be embedded in adult English language instruction to foster language learning and digital literacy acquisition. Specifically, this brief addresses four aspects of digital literacy: (1) using basic digital skills, (2) creating and communicating information, (3) finding and evaluating information, and (4) solving problems in technology-rich environments.

Context: Adult English Language Learners and Digital Literacy

Adult English language learners (ELLs) come from a variety of backgrounds and have different learning experiences and English language skills, as well as different levels of experience with print literacy and technology. Limited English language and literacy skills make it especially challenging for ELLs to acquire digital literacy skills. However, English language skills and digital literacy are essential for obtaining and keeping a family-sustaining job, supporting children in school, participating in community life, obtaining community services, and accessing further education and training.

ELLs and their teachers are part of a continuum of digital literacy experience and skills. Education, age, income, access to technology, social networks, and family members' use of digital technologies are some of the many factors that influence the digital literacy of ELLs. Some ELLs have digital literacy skills in another language

Digital literacy is defined as the skills associated with using technology to enable users to find, evaluate, organize, create, and communicate information (U.S. Department of Education, 2015), and the ability to use those skills to solve problems in technology-rich environments (Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, Castek, & Henry, 2013).

and need to develop their English language skills to be able to use those digital literacy skills in English. Other ELLs have print literacy skills in another language and need to develop both their English language and digital literacy skills. Still other ELLs are developing skills in all three areas: print literacy, English language, and digital literacy. Different supports are required for these various types of ELLs as they develop digital literacy skills, including face-to-face support by teachers, tutors, or peers; online support, such as images or translations that pop up when mousing over words; and appropriate content support (National Institute for Literacy, 2008; Reder, Vanek, & Wrigley, 2012).

Key Consideration: With Digital Literacy, Everyone Is a Learner

There was a time when getting important information from a government office meant going to that office to pick up a packet of papers, calling to arrange a meeting with someone at that office, or submitting a written request to the office. Today, however, getting information frequently involves accessing a complex website, downloading a PDF, or completing an online form. In the future, as technologies evolve, getting information will require still different digital literacy skills. Thus, what is meant by digital literacy today will continue to change over time (Lotherington & Jenson, 2011). Further, in these rapidly changing digital environments, with new and updated devices coming out all the time, everyone is a learner. That is an important consideration when designing instruction and supports for learners and teachers.

No teacher can be expected to know everything about the constantly changing nature of technology and the related digital skills required for digital literacy. In adult ELL classrooms, some students may have expertise in different technologies or applications that they can share with other students in the classroom. In this situation, the role of the teacher shifts: They become orchestrators of learning rather than dispensers of skills, serving to facilitate learning and often learning alongside their students (Leu et al., 2013; Vanek, 2014).

Using Basic Digital Literacy Skills: Integrating Basic Digital Skills Into Instruction

Basic digital skills are those needed to operate digital devices, including turning them on and off; keyboarding; using a mouse; using a touchpad; right- and left-clicking; double-clicking; and long-pressing. These skills also include knowing how to create, save, locate, and edit computer files as well as how to open, use, and close a variety of computer applications. These applications may include browsers for searching the Internet, mapping applications that provide driving directions, and applications for finding information. Basic digital skills also include having the necessary language and literacy skills to do things in a digital environment, such as sending an e-mail to a child's teacher or filling out a job application online.

For adult ELLs, effective activities are ones that teach basic computer skills alongside language instruction and integrate basic digital skills into the overall topic or theme of an adult ELL course (Littlejohn, Beetham, & McGill, 2012). As research with gaming has demonstrated, digital skills can be learned through

What has become perhaps most important about being digitally literate is having the mindset to expect change, to be open to learning new ways of knowing and doing, to be willing to try and see, and to expect to make mistakes and to learn from them.

hands-on discovery processes while in pursuit of a meaningful goal instead of in isolation (Gee, 2003). Student-centered instructional approaches seek to engage students actively in their learning in ways that are meaningful to their lives and their goals (Peyton, Moore, & Young, 2010). Thematic units, problem-based learning, project-based learning, and other student-centered approaches to adult English language acquisition provide content into which authentic digital tasks can be integrated. For example, a problem-based unit on issues with a landlord can include obtaining and reading important information about tenants' rights. The unit would include the vocabulary, grammar, and reading strategies needed for all of the activities, including digital ones. Supporting information may be available in a variety of languages for ELLs. For example, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development resource [Filing Your Housing Discrimination Complaint Online](#) offers guidance on filing a housing discrimination complaint online in seven languages. In completing this task, ELLs can complete learning activities that are specific to their needs, as determined by assessments like the [Northstar Digital Literacy Assessment](#). Appropriate activities such as those in the [Saint Paul Public Library Northstar Learning Guide](#) can be assigned to individual students to build the skills needed for the unit (Vanek, 2014). In the example of filing a housing discrimination complaint, the digital literacy skills involved might include basic word processing, creating and retrieving a word-processed document, copying text from the document into an online form, including one's e-mail address with other contact information, and submitting the online form.

Creating and Communicating Information—Using Technology to Extend Learning

As ELLs develop basic digital literacy skills, many opportunities will arise to extend English language acquisition beyond the walls of the classroom. A second aspect of digital literacy is the ability to create and communicate information online, which offers nearly unlimited English language acquisition activities. Any project, topic, theme, or problem-based approach can be extended on the Internet to (1) include speaking, listening, reading, and writing opportunities for additional English learning and (2) continue to develop digital literacy skills further along the digital literacy continuum.

Speaking. To extend opportunities for speaking English to people outside the classroom, students can create

podcasts¹ or screencasts² as part of a class project or other instructional approach. Creating original multimedia products can be highly motivating to students as they learn the vocabulary and grammar needed to communicate their messages to an audience outside of their classroom, ideally to a real audience and for a real purpose. Students might make a mini-documentary about a visit to an art museum to show to students in another class; create a PowerPoint presentation about diabetes for members of the community (Wrigley, 2004); or develop a presentation about the culture, food, language, or educational system of their country of origin for a local elementary school.

Listening. Many different podcasts are available to add listening opportunities to almost any topic or theme³ of study in the adult English language acquisition classroom. Not only can podcasts provide listening practice, they can also be used to teach a variety of specific listening or note-taking strategies to increase the rigor of instruction at nearly any level (e.g., listening for specific information, listening for the main idea, making inferences). (For more information about increasing rigor in adult English language acquisition instruction, see the related issue brief and in-depth online module, available from the [LINCS ESL Pro](#) home page of the LINCS Resource Collection) Assigning individual students to listen to podcasts, YouTube videos, and other Internet-based media allows educators to differentiate instruction and better meet the diverse needs, interests, and abilities of students.

Reading. When reading comprehension is the instructional goal, online texts can be helpful. Images, hyperlinks to word meanings (in English or the students' first language), illustrative videos, and recordings of word pronunciations all provide support as ELLs match written form to meaning. ELLs learn vocabulary as they interact with

1 A podcast is a recorded audio file that is put online for others to listen to or download. Audacity (<http://audacity.sourceforge.net>) is an example of free podcasting software that students and teachers will find easy to learn and use.

2 A screencast is a video that records what is on a computer screen; it can also be narrated by a person on the computer. On the Free Tech 4 Teachers website, Richard Byrne reviews three web-based screencasting sites: <http://www.freetech4teachers.com/2010/07/3-web-based-tools-for-creating.html>.

3 For example, ello (<http://www.ello.org>) offers more than 1,300 podcasts for ELLs on a variety of topics, with various levels of difficulty, utilizing different voices. Each short podcast has associated comprehension and vocabulary activities.

these various aspects of word meaning.⁴ Digital formats can be especially useful for learners who are acquiring a combination of print, English language, and digital literacy. Multimedia formats with clear images and sound can help to make reading accessible.⁵ After learning a story, ELLs can access the digital story on their own, and practice reading, listening, and digital skills outside the classroom.

Writing. An important part of learning to write in a new language is writing purposefully or for specific audiences, not just for the instructor. The Internet offers ELLs access to a broad spectrum of potential readers. For example, students might create a class newsletter for incoming students, create a PDF that explains how to use the local banking system for a lower-level class, or make a video demonstrating how to cook a special dish for a class web page. What is important about these examples is that students are using their emerging English skills by writing for authentic readers. Focusing writing on specific readers helps ELLs select the language, most appropriate format, and degree of accuracy needed for the intended audience. Such writing projects are typically collaborative in nature, and they also allow students to learn relevant vocabulary, grammar, and digital skills at the same time.

Writing-based technologies, especially those involving the Internet, provide many opportunities for ELLs to be authors and knowledge makers. Multimodal formats such as blogs, digital stories, and wikis are some of the many digital tools that ELLs can use to communicate in and outside of the classroom. Writing for audiences outside the classroom can help to reduce the social isolation that can characterize linguistic minority group members (Webb, 2006) and create ways in which adult ELLs can construct and maintain identities as well as build community (Thorne, 2009).

Finding and Evaluating Information Online: Teaching Information and Media Literacy

The volume of information available online is almost unfathomable. Information on the Internet may be posted by people intending to inform, persuade, sell, and demonstrate, as well as mislead. Information and media literacy⁶ involves several sets of skills, including the ability to (1) locate and interpret online information and (2) evaluate the accuracy, reliability, and point of view of information on the Internet (Coiro, 2014).

Locating and interpreting online information involves creating effective search terms, scanning text and images for specifics, selecting relevant hyperlinks, picking out information sources, and interpreting perspective. These skills are often required for work and training. (For more information on connecting adult ELLs to career pathways through contextualization, see the related issue brief and in-depth module available from the [LINCS ESL Pro](#) home page on the LINCS Resource Collection.) Because ELLs are still mastering English language skills, the

Another way in which technology can extend the walls of the classroom is to provide independent online learning opportunities (for review, see Moore, 2009) that can be coordinated with what is happening face-to-face in the classroom.¹

1 One example is USA Learns (<http://www.usalearns.org>), which includes a variety of activities to accompany a video-based storyline.

4 GCF Learn Free (<http://www.gcflearnfree.org/reading/learnenglish>) is an example of an online interactive vocabulary learning activity.

5 The ESL literacy readers (<https://esl-literacy.com/readers>), produced by the Canadian ESL Literacy Network, are examples of online readers.

6 Can also be called information literacy, web literacy, or Internet literacy.

ability to find and evaluate information online can be difficult. It requires scanning to pick out what is important as well as a close reading of some elements while disregarding others. The typical busy web page is difficult for ELLs to read and interpret.⁷

In addition, the skills required for close online reading are not the same as the skills required for print reading (Wyatt-Smith & Elkins, 2009). Reading online is interactive and nonsequential in the sense that readers need skills to select the hyperlinks they want to follow and the embedded videos they want to watch. Online readers then need to determine whether or not to go back and continue reading from the original linked location. Because readers on the Internet select their own content, searching for information and reading on the Internet is a lot like authoring, as each online reader's experience is unique. This language-intensive activity is especially challenging for ELLs who need to read all of the information on a page to be able to identify the information that they are looking for or to select an appropriate link to follow.

Reading strategies that are important for print reading are also important in digital environments, and include previewing, predicting, asking questions, monitoring comprehension, and making connections. For ELLs, reading a web page requires the ability to distinguish navigation features, advertisements, and sponsored content from the information on the page. In addition, in digital environments it is particularly important to be aware of one's own thinking in using reading strategies to locate, critically evaluate, and synthesize information (Coiro, 2011).

In addition to finding and interpreting online information, ELLs need to develop the skills to evaluate information on the Internet. One approach is to ask a series of critical questions about the author's purposes and goals in creating the message. Questions that critically examine online information can address topics such as relevance, accuracy, bias/perspective, and reliability (Coiro, 2014).

A stepping stone to developing English skills to evaluate information on the Internet is to develop those skills in a language in which adult ELLs are already proficient. Asking important critical questions does not depend on the language in which it is written; this can be done in any language. Adult ELLs with literacy skills in a non-English language can learn how to use critical questions to ask about online information and apply those questions to online information in any language. For example, an assignment can ask students to answer a set of critical questions about several websites on a current topic, and then students can be given the choice to use websites in English or in a language in which they are already proficient.

According to the Center for Media Literacy (2005), answers to five key questions help to critically evaluate information online:

1. Who created this message?
2. What creative techniques are used to attract my attention?
3. How might different people understand this message differently?
4. What lifestyles, values, and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, this message?
5. Why is this message being sent?

PDF available—http://www.medialit.org/sites/default/files/mlk/01_MLKorientation.pdf. Used with permission.

⁷ Several sites provide information that is appropriate for English language learners and teachers about effective Internet searching. [Digitallearn.org](http://digitallearn.org) (<http://digitallearn.org/learn/basic-search>) and GCF Learn Free (<http://www.gcflearnfree.org/internet101/5>) are two examples.

Solving Problems in Technology-Rich Environments: Teaching Advanced Digital Literacy Skills

To fully benefit from the opportunities offered by technology, adult ELLs need to be able to solve problems in digital environments. Developing this skill is important in a wide variety of contexts, including education and training, career, family, and community. An example of such a context is when an English language learner realizes that he or she is expected to go to a parent-teacher conference but does not know when or where to go. Communications between schools and parents have moved to primarily online and mobile phone text messaging formats, making this a technology-rich environment. Schools use their websites, blogs, social media, and other technologies to post school information and communicate with parents. Parents who are ELLs may have difficulty because of their English language and digital literacy skills. ELLs need to learn problem-solving skills to deal with such scenarios in technology-rich environments.

Solving problems in technology-rich environments involves analyzing various requirements to find a solution, setting up appropriate goals and plans, monitoring one's progress, adapting to barriers, and persisting until the purposes are achieved or until a resolution fails to be reached (Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies Expert Group in Problem Solving in Technology-Rich Environments, 2009). This is closely related to developing information and media literacy skills.

Collaborative problem solving in technology-rich environments is part of the next generation of skills required to be a digitally literate adult. Increasingly, collaboration for purposes of work, education, and community is being done in digital environments. This collaboration requires a new set of language and digital skills, such as conventions for getting the attention of participants, cues to confirm that one is listening, indications of agreement or disagreement, knowing how to initiate and terminate the software application used to communicate, and conventions for collaborative writing. There are a variety of ways to integrate these skills into English language instruction. For instance, in a unit on workplace communication, students can participate in a cross-class audio or video conference to collaborate on a project or problem-solving activity.

The interactive skills used in such an activity—such as taking turns, giving opinions, expressing agreement or disagreement, and active listening—provide opportunities for English language acquisition that mirrors real-world work situations.

Considerations for Administrators

As the role of the teacher shifts, so do the supports required (Means, 2010). Teachers need time to work together to define new ways of orchestrating learning, time for professional development relating to integrating technology into instruction, and support for policies that allow portable devices to be used effectively in the classroom. Instructors also need encouragement to continuously try new approaches with evolving technologies and the associated literacies. Administrative support is also needed so that teachers can plan and implement activities such as cross-class exchanges and expanding digital and face-to-face connections within the local community. Robust infrastructure and reliable, easily accessible technical support for students and teachers continue to be vitally important.

For more information about administrative supports for developing digital literacy in adult ELL instructional programs, see the in-depth module available from the [ESL Pro landing page](#) of the LINCS Resource Collection.

Conclusion

To benefit from the opportunities that technology presents for participating in modern life and for English language acquisition, adult ELLs need to develop digital literacy skills. This includes the use of basic digital skills, the ability to create and communicate digital information, the ability to find and evaluate information online, and the ability to solve problems in technology-rich environments. Ensuring that adult ELLs receive and are engaged in meaningful and relevant digital literacy instruction requires comprehensive thinking at the national, state, local, and classroom levels. Teachers and program directors need to integrate opportunities to develop digital literacies into lessons, curricula, and programs. State directors and professional leaders need to more deeply integrate digital literacy into national- and state-level thinking to expand concepts

of teaching and learning digital literacy skills. They need to provide supports at every level, so that ELLs develop digital literacies along with English language and other skills required for the workforce⁸, education, their communities, and family life. Knowledge of and beliefs about digital literacies must continue to evolve as digital literacies evolve. In the world of digital literacies, everyone is a learner.





“This document was developed from the public domain documents: Meeting the Language Needs of Today’s Adult English Language Learner: Issue Brief, Preparing English Learners for Work and Career Pathways, Integrating Digital Literacy Into English Language Instruction: Issue Brief – Literacy Information and Communication System (LINCS).”