

Suggestions for Literacy Instructors

Input, Intake, Output

When teaching a **beginning level language**, it is important to remember that all learners — children or adults — go through three basic steps:

- First is **input**. This is when we hear or see information, but we may not yet understand it. It is like tuning a radio: if we only hear static, that is like input.
- Second is **intake**. This is when we can hear and see information and we can begin to understand words. Remember tuning the radio? When we turn the dial and catch a word, that is intake.
- Last is **output**. This is when a person starts to speak or write the information she understands.

The teacher must help turn “input” into “intake.” It is the English teacher’s job to try to make new information understandable.

Silent Period

There is a time when students are first exposed to the language that they do not yet have confidence. They may not want to speak or to write the language. They simply want to listen and watch as they begin to understand more words. This is called the **Silent Period**.

The **Silent Period** is normal when learners are first learning a language. Students may be in the Silent Period for a few hours and even for a year or more; however, this does not mean that they sit and do nothing in your class! Teachers must respect a student’s silent period; however, you need to give them non-speaking activities. These non-speaking activities can show you their understanding and keep them involved in the class.

Classroom Routines for Beginners

Like all students, beginning level students need to have a positive, caring learning environment. When their emotional and physical needs are met, they are able to learn language more easily. They are more likely to take risks if they are in a comfortable, trusting environment. Classroom routines provide a safe, predictable environment for students. They know what to expect and this puts them at ease.

Examples of routines for beginning level teachers to use:

- arrive in class before your students every day
- greet students by name each day and ask how they are

- review previous lesson's work
- sing a song or do a chant every day—practice the same one over a few days
- check homework
- practice printing letters/ alphabet
- talk about the date and season
- read aloud to your students
- do similar activities every unit, but add some new things too

Classroom Language

Classroom language are words you use to organize activities in the class. Use the same words all the time and students will learn this language by following these instructions daily. At the beginning of a term, use gestures to accompany your words, and you may also write directions on the board. Slowly, use the gestures and writing less and just use the words.

Examples of classroom language:

sit down, stand up	watch
quiet please, listen	everyone repeat
open your books to page ____	in groups
colour	alone
write	look at the board

Teach around a Particular Topic

Organize your lessons around themes. Ask your students what theme they would be interested in. Spend several lessons on the same theme. We do this because it is easier for students to remember language that is connected to something. It also makes it more interesting and meaningful.

Practice words students already learned in earlier lessons and themes. The more words that are reviewed and used, the more confidence your students will have to remember the words and to use them properly.

Some themes for beginners are:

The calendar (days, months)	Seasons	Holidays
Personal Information	Colours	Weather
Community Buildings and Places	Time	Numbers
Family and relationship words	Jobs	Housing
Transportation	Food	Games
Hobbies	Sports	Clothes
Animals	Body parts	Money

Organizing your Lessons

The Presentation Phase

The presentation phase is when you first present the words or groups of words to the students.

- Vocabulary words should all relate to a theme and be presented through using pictures or real objects.
- Students should understand the basic meaning of the words and how they sound.
- Show them what the written word looks like by writing the word on the chalkboard.
- Repeat the words you are teaching many times. As you say the word, show a picture of the word (like a welding torch), or show the real object (like a mango) or show the word written on a flash card. (Keep all of the flashcards together to use later for reading drills.)
- Say the words slowly and clearly (but with a natural rhythm). Use the words in a simple sentence. Repeat this sentence various times.
- Do not ask students to repeat or say the words the first time. If students spontaneously speak, don't discourage this.

Practice Phase

The Practice Phase is when learners can practice the vocabulary without having to use it in “real” life. Students will still have to think about the words you are teaching and complete the activities.

Beginners need a lot of listening/watching activities at first. Then, they can move on to activities in which they have to speak or write.

The first time you ask students to speak new language, have them do it as a group. This feels safer than doing it on your own.

- As a teacher, tell your students how they are doing as they practice. This can be done either through words or gestures.

Some Speaking/writing activities

- Teacher asks students to do a listen and repeat drill
Teacher: I like mangoes.
Students: I like mangoes.
Teacher: I like oranges
Students: I like oranges etc.
- Teacher asks students to do a “chain drill” where students take turns asking and answering the question. For example:
Teacher: I like mangoes. What do you like?
Student 1: I like pawpaw. What do you like?
Student 2: I like fufu. What do you like? Etc.

- Teacher asks students to look at a picture and say the word
- Teacher asks students to read the word
- Teacher asks students to write the word
- Teacher asks students to think of other words that mean the same
- Teacher asks students to write words under pictures
- Teacher asks students to put pictures in order and tell the story
- Teacher asks students to fill the blanks of a sentence or paragraph
- Teacher asks students to write their own sentences for a story

These guidelines are drawn from *Teaching True Beginning Level English Language Students* adapted from a workshop presented at TESL SAG Conference 2005; original paper published December 2005. *TESL Manitoba Journal Vol 21, No. 12* by Rachael Fecyk-Lamb, instructor at the University of Manitoba's Certificate in TESL and Bachelor of Education programs.