English Language Learning Program Newsletter

January/February 2023

Follow-Up Grammar Workshop

The grammar workshop by Keith Folse in November was very well-received. (Please contact me if you'd like to watch the recording.) I am hoping that Keith will be able to offer another session in the first half of the year; in the meantime, I am planning to host my own follow-up session on common grammar mistakes by English learners, different from the ones that Keith discussed. Here is the description:

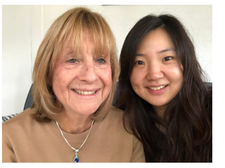
In this follow-up to the November workshop on common ELL grammar issues, we will explore more aspects of 'ELL grammar,' which native English speakers usually don't think about and don't study in school. For example:

- **The distinction between adjectives ending in -ED and adjectives ending in -ING. Learners sometimes say 'I feel frustrating' or "I was exciting" when they mean 'I feel frustrated' or "I was excited." How can we explain the difference?**
- **The present perfect and related verb tenses. An example of the present perfect is: 'I have done my homework.' Is this the same as 'I did my homework'? What kind of word is "done"?**
- **Gerunds and infinitives. We can say 'I like to dance,' 'I like dancing,' and 'I enjoy dancing,' but not 'I enjoy to dance.' Why? Are there are any rules about this?**

We will also discuss some strategies for teaching grammar to English learners and recommended practice activities.

This event will take place on Wednesday, February 1, at 7:00 PM on Zoom. You can sign up here. I hope to see you then!

Tutor Profile



This is the first in a series of profiles of ELL tutors and learners.

Janet has been an ELL tutor for six years and has had four learners during that time: three from South Korea and one from Russia. (She is pictured above with one of her Korean students, Sanghee.) She decided to get involved because she herself is from another country, England, though she has lived in Boston for almost 40 years. "Being a newcomer to Boston, I know what it's like to move to a new country," she says.

At first she was "quite nervous" about the fact that she had no teaching experience. However, she soon realized that she loves learning about students' cultures (after learning about Korea from her Korean students, she decided to travel there) and the gratifying nature of this kind of work. "I think it's immensely rewarding...It adds to your life, to be honest," she says.

Janet often does role-plays with learners based on situations that they are likely to encounter. For example, she and her current learner have set a goal of being able to participate in a parent-teacher conference without an interpreter. Her lessons also include reading together, practicing new vocabulary, and plenty of conversation, which she thinks is especially valuable when the tutor and student can share some laughs.

Janet's advice to new tutors? "Don't be afraid to try new things," such as reading books together with students. She recommends taking advantage of the ELL collection at the library. She also emphasizes the importance of being attentive to learners' interests. "It's important that I ask them what they want. This is their lesson. It has to be what they want."

The New York Times Learning Network

Many tutors like to read and discuss news articles with their learners. Popular websites with articles for English learners include VOA Learning English and Newsela (the latter requires free registration), while advanced learners may be able to read articles from newspapers intended for native speakers, such as *The Boston Globe* and *The New York Times*.

The *Times* has a great online resource called The Learning Network, which is intended for educators and students and doesn't require a *Times* subscription. Some tutors have been using the weekly feature called "What's Going On In This Picture?," in which students are asked to analyze and interpret a compelling photograph. After a few days, the story behind the photo is revealed to those who are curious. The photos could serve as interesting discussion or writing prompts for English learners. Here is a recent example.

There is also a Word of the Day feature (see this example about the word "discontent"); if I were using this as a tutor, I would ask my learner to use the word in one or more original sentences, both orally and in writing. In addition, The Learning Network has writing prompts, picture prompts, short documentary films, lesson plans (not intended for adult English learners, though they could be adapted), and more. Enjoy exploring!

Tech Tips

Those of you who have attended my tutor training workshops may have watched some of the short videos that I recorded for the benefit of tutors meeting with learners on Zoom. Topics include creating a Zoom account, scheduling a Zoom meeting, sharing your screen, using a virtual whiteboard, and showing YouTube videos. If you're uncertain about any of these topics or just need a refresher, I would suggest taking a look at the videos. (Even if you usually meet with your learner in person, you may decide to meet online when someone is traveling, during bad weather, etc.) You can find the videos here.

Regardless of whether you're meeting with your learner online or in person, consider using a messaging app, such as WhatsApp or Telegram, to communicate between lessons. (Your learner may already use a similar app, such as WeChat, which is popular in China, or KakaoTalk, which is popular in South Korea.) A key feature of these apps is the ability to send audio messages in addition to text messages, photos, links, and so on. This would enable your learner to practice speaking and pronunciation, which you could then provide feedback on. You could also send audio messages for your learner to practice listening. One idea for homework is to dictate some sentences that your learner would have to listen to and transcribe. For more possibilities, see this blog post from Oxford University Press. Not all the ideas will be relevant to you, but there's a lot of food for thought!

Program News

- There are now two ELL study rooms available on the third floor of the library. These are intended for tutors planning to meet with learners at the same time every week, and they can be reserved through me. However, some tutors prefer to meet in study rooms on the second floor, which allow for more flexibility in scheduling; these can be reserved on the library website or by calling the library. Tutors also meet at tables in the library, outdoors (weather permitting), or at other locations.
- The next information session for prospective tutors will take place on Wednesday, January 18, at 10:00 AM on Zoom. Training workshops will take place on Monday and Wednesday mornings in January and February.
- As you may recall, we put a pause on student applications at the end of September in order to reduce the size of the waiting list; it is now down to about 115 students. Since then, over 150 students have filled out the form to be contacted when we are accepting applications again. The demand for tutoring continues to be very high!

Until next time,
Andrew

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