English Language Learning Program Newsletter

September/October 2023

Upcoming Tutor Workshop

Some of you probably remember attending a workshop with Marnie Reed, a professor in the TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) program at Boston University, several years ago. She is an expert in the teaching of pronunciation and listening skills to English learners. Given that pronunciation is an area of focus for many of our tutors and learners, I thought she would be a great presenter to bring back for a workshop, "Pronunciation for Intelligibility: Insights and Strategies for Student Success." Here is part of the description:

Learners' pronunciation goals are often either vague – such as "I want to improve" – or unrealistic, such as wanting to get rid of their accents. Learners also experience listening challenges on two levels: successfully identifying words in continuous speech and understanding a speaker's intended meaning.

This workshop offers insights into the listening and speaking connection as well as evidence-based strategies and practical tips to address the interconnected pronunciation and perception skills. The workshop will address the scope of the task, with tips for teaching the four components of pronunciation: segmentals (consonants and vowels), suprasegmentals (stress and intonation), grammar sounds (contractions and noun and verb endings), and connected speech processes (the "Izzybizy" [Is he busy] phenomenon).

This event will take place on Tuesday, October 3, at 10:00 AM at the library. Space is limited. You can read more and sign up here.

Conversation Pairs

Some tutors have expressed an interest in having their learner practice speaking English with another tutor/learner pair. I think this would be a great way for learners to meet new people and hear new voices, engaging in conversation in a relaxed, unintimidating setting. The two pairs could chat in the library or take a fun field trip to another location.

If you and your learner are interested in this idea, please fill out this form. I will then work on connecting you with another tutor, with whom you can arrange the details. Please note that this activity is different from the larger conversation groups that we offer (both in person and online), which you could also encourage your learner to try. Some students may not be as comfortable speaking in a larger group; for them, participating in a conversation pair might be the perfect thing!

Google Arts and Culture

One of my favorite online resources is Google Arts and Culture. It's a free collection of paintings, photographs, and other works of art from thousands of museums, galleries, and cultural institutions around the world. I think it's a great source of conversation and an excellent vocabulary development tool for English learners. You could use it during lessons online (while sharing your screen) or in person (with a laptop, tablet, or smartphone).

You might have a beginner student name the objects in Van Gogh's "The Bedroom," or ask a Japanese learner to discuss the cultural significance of "The Great Wave off Kanagawa," or explore Rio de Janeiro with a student from Brazil. You could also play around with some of the site's games and experimental activities, such as Geo Artwork, in which you have to guess where in the world a work of art originated. The possibilities are endless!

Of course, being close to Boston, you and your learner could also pay a visit to the Museum of Fine Arts, the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, or another nearby institution. Happy viewing!

Zoom Changes

There have been some reports of a change in Zoom's policy with regard to free accounts. Until recently, meetings set up with free accounts would end after 40 minutes, after which the host could restart the meeting and continue for another 40 minutes. However, some Zoom users have received a message saying that they need to wait about 10 minutes before restarting their meeting. As far as I can tell, there has been no official announcement about this, but you can read a response from a Zoom rep on the company's community forum here.

If you haven't run into this issue yet, that's great, and if you are okay with waiting 10 minutes, feel free to do so. However, I would suggest considering an alternative like Google Meet, Microsoft Teams, or Skype. With a free Google account, you can meet for up to 60 minutes (then restart the meeting if necessary) using Google Meet. (Stay tuned for some videos explaining how to use Google Meet in a future newsletter.) Please don't stop your lesson completely after 40 minutes!

Program News

- In addition to the pronunciation workshop mentioned above, I am planning a workshop on useful practice activities for ELL lessons. It will be led by Eric Shuel, a popular presenter at adult education programs around Massachusetts. Mark your calendars for Saturday, November 18, in the afternoon at the library. More details to come!
- I will be contacting active tutors soon about filling out a report form, which is important in helping me maintain accurate program records. If you would like to get a head start on it, here is the link.
- The ELL website now has a list of other free English programs near Newton. I hope that it is helpful for students who are looking for additional practice or who can't come to Newton easily. The list is here. Please note that some of these programs have a waiting list.
- Over the summer we had our first in-person tutor training workshops since before the pandemic. Training sessions will take place online this fall. If you know someone who would be interested, please contact me!

Until next time,
Andrew

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