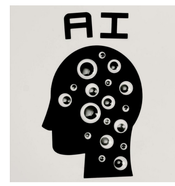
English Language Learning Program Newsletter

May/June 2024

AI in English Language Learning



Perhaps you've been wondering how you or your learner might benefit from new AI tools like ChatGPT. Maybe you've given ChatGPT a try and want to hear how other tutors have used it. Either way, you are welcome to attend the upcoming workshop for tutors on this topic! Here is the description:

You've probably heard about some of the amazing things that ChatGPT can do. It's one of several new artificial intelligence tools that have begun to transform business, healthcare, education, and many other fields in recent years. In this workshop we will explore how ChatGPT, Gemini, and other AI tools can be used by adult English learners and tutors.

I will be presenting this workshop twice: on Thursday, June 6, at 7:00 p.m. on Zoom and Friday, June 7, at 10:00 a.m. at the library. Space is limited. Click on one of the links to sign up. I hope to see you then!

Learn English with TV Series

As many of you know, I think that YouTube is a great resource for language learning. One YouTube channel that I often recommend is Learn English with TV Series. It features clips from popular TV shows, such as *The Simpsons* and *The Office*, as well as movies and music videos, to explain expressions, idioms, slang, and other aspects of English that learners may find challenging. Take a look at this example, which uses clips from *The Office* to help learners understand expressions like "no such thing" and the difference between phrasal verbs like "get up" and "get back." Another video explains idioms like "miss a beat" and slang like "player" in Taylor Swift's song "Shake It Off."

If you think your learner would enjoy this sort of resource, I recommend exploring some of the hundreds of videos that the channel has to offer. Happy viewing!

Learner Profile

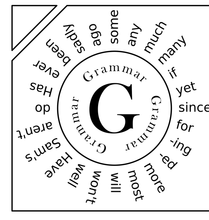
This is the sixth in a series of profiles of ELL tutors and learners.

Olha came to the United States from Ukraine two years ago due to the war, and she has been studying with her tutor, Inna, since September 2022. In Ukraine she was a doctor. Here she lives with her daughter's family, helping to take care of her two grandsons. (She says that being a doctor in Ukraine was easier than being a babysitter here!) She applied to the ELL Program because she didn't speak English when she arrived, and she wanted to communicate better with American people. "Every day I go to [my grandson's] school, and every day I go to store, and I have to speak with people, and I want to understand very well," she explains.

It was "comfortable" at first to study with Inna, who also speaks Russian. (Olha, left, is pictured above with Inna.) However, they try to speak only in English. She likes that Inna gives her interesting stories from the *True Stories* series, which they discuss together and which Olha can ask questions about. Inna also draws on her knowledge of Russian when explaining aspects of grammar and pronunciation that may be particularly challenging, which Olha finds very helpful. Olha thinks that other tutors should take advantage of books in the ELL collection and teach students grammar, starting with the basics.

Olha knows that she still has room to improve. "My English language isn't correct, and I can't speak quickly," she says. However, thanks to Inna, she has made significant progress. When she arrived, she relied on her daughter at medical appointments, but now she can go herself. "It is big deal for me because now I'm not afraid to speak with English people."

Grammar Corner



This is the second in a series of mini lessons about common grammar issues among English learners.

Have you ever heard an English learner say things like "I enjoy to dance" or "I like walk"? These are examples of common mistakes with an aspect of English grammar known as gerunds and infinitives. A gerund is a word ending in "ing" that functions as a noun, not a verb. We use gerunds at the beginning of sentences ("Swimming is fun"), after prepositions ("He is interested in learning Spanish"), or after certain verbs ("I enjoy dancing"). An infinitive is the word "to" followed by the simple (base) form of a verb. We typically use infinitives after adjectives ("It is important to speak English") or after certain verbs ("I like to walk").

Which verbs are followed by gerunds and which by infinitives? This is where it gets tricky! Some verbs, such as "want," "need," and "decide," are only followed by infinitives. Some verbs, such as "enjoy," "avoid," and "finish," are only followed by gerunds. And some verbs, such as "like," "love," and "hate," can be followed by either a gerund or an infinitive. A few verbs even change their meaning when followed by an infinitive or a gerund! (Consider the difference between "He stopped smoking" and "He stopped to smoke.")

Learners need to memorize which verbs are followed by gerunds and which by infinitives; there aren't easy rules to follow. You can find lists in grammar books and on various websites, such as this one. Here are a few ideas about ways to help learners with this topic:

- Find or create conversation questions that use gerunds and infinitives: "What do you enjoy doing?" "What do you avoid eating? "Where do you want to travel in the future?"
- Have your student write a paragraph (perhaps based on the questions above) using a certain number of verbs followed by gerunds, infinitives, etc.
- Do a dictation in which your student has to listen and write the correct gerund or infinitive after various verbs.
- Have your student create flash cards ("enjoy"/gerund, "want"/infinitive, and so on) using index cards or an online flash card site, such as Quizlet.

Program News

- There are now kits with mini whiteboards and markers available for tutors to borrow at the circulation desk. These are for in-library use only. Keep in mind that even if you don't have a whiteboard, it's a good idea to write down words and sentences with whatever you have at hand — a notebook, a laptop, etc.
- In the first four months of this year, 100 learners from 27 countries applied for a tutor! The most common countries of origin were China (29 learners), South Korea (15), Ukraine (6), Russia (5), and India (5).
- As a reminder, I maintain an extensive list of recommended resources for tutors. If you are looking for new books or websites to use with your learner, I would suggest taking a look at it! If you need the link, please contact me.

Until next time,
Andrew

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