English Language Learning Program Newsletter

Fall 2025

New AI Tools

The use of AI in education has been expanding significantly, and AI-powered apps and websites for teaching and learning English have proliferated in recent years. If you are new to AI, I would suggest starting with ChatGPT, which more and more tutors have been using with success. Try asking it to help you plan a lesson, create a role-play script, explain a grammatical concept, or write a text to use with your learner. (Keep in mind that there is no obligation to use AI; some tutors may not see a need for it or may be disinclined to use it for a variety of reasons. Also, AI can make mistakes, so you should always double-check what it produces to make sure it is appropriate for your learner.) If you are a little more experienced and interested in exploring some other AI tools, here are a few ideas:

- Little Language Lessons — This is an AI "experiment" based on Google's Gemini (similar to ChatGPT), so it requires a free Google/Gmail account. It has three components. In the first, called "Tiny Lesson," you enter a topic, and it generates related vocabulary and sentences (each explained using different words and with audio for learners to listen to), as well as grammar tips. For example, when I entered "going to the doctor," it explained how we use modal verbs like "should" for advice ("You should take this medication twice a day") and how we use the present continuous tense to talk about the future ("I am seeing the doctor at 10:00 a.m. tomorrow"). The second component, "Slang Hang," creates a conversation with a variety of expressions, idioms, and slang. The third is "Word Cam". When you take a picture, it identifies objects in the image and generates a variety of related sentences.

- DeepL Write is a tool from the makers of DeepL Translator, an online translation tool similar to Google Translate. When you enter text, it provides corrections of grammatical errors and offers a variety of alternative phrasings based on different styles and tones. For example, when I wrote the sentence "Our program supports adult English learners in the community" and selected an academic style, it produced: "The objective of the program is to provide support to English learners within the community." When I selected an enthusiastic tone, it produced: "Our program is dedicated to supporting English learners in the community, and we're thrilled to see the positive impact we're making."

- Padlet TA is an outgrowth of Padlet, a popular website for creating interactive bulletin boards on which teachers and students can post text, images, videos, audio recordings, and more. With Padlet TA, you enter a topic and other relevant details, and it can create interactive activities including flash cards (here is an example of a flash card activity about fruits and vegetables), matching, and fill-in-the-blank sentences; printable activities, such as worksheets and multiple-choice quizzes; and aids for teachers, such as lesson plans and multimedia slideshows.

- Gliglish is one of many AI conversation tools that have been developed in recent years; you may have come across others. (Learners can also practice speaking with ChatGPT, Gemini, or other well-known AI chatbots.) The free version gives you 10 minutes per day of conversation. You can converse about whatever is on your mind or choose from a number of suggested scenarios, such as ordering at a fast-food restaurant or checking in at a hotel. You can use the website or download the Gliglish app.

If you try one of these, or if you have tried other AI tools and would recommend them to others, please let me know!

Tutor Profile

Anndy has been an ELL tutor for about three and a half years. She decided to volunteer with the program after retiring from her career as a molecular biologist, a science educator at museums, and a science teacher at Newton North. She wanted to meet new people and help others, and she liked the fact that the schedule was flexible and she could volunteer close to her home.

She has tutored three learners, all women from Korea, but with varied backgrounds and circumstances. Their lessons tend to focus on conversation, with some grammar and reading practice. She tries to be responsive to her students' questions and the things that are on their mind; for example, when one student wanted to feel more comfortable with parent-teacher conferences, Anndy was able to draw on her teaching experience to do some role-plays. "I think she liked having another parent to bounce things off of, especially a teacher, because I've seen such a range of kids," she says. She has enjoyed the opportunity to make new friends and to learn about a different culture. "K-pop isn't the whole story," she adds.

Anndy has also made use of her background to teach two science-focused group classes, in which she has covered topics like how ears work and why leaves change color in the fall. "I try to pick things where people may actually have all the information already, and we're just doing it in English, or they don't really have the information, so they'll pick up a little science." While science topics are in her wheelhouse, she doesn't always know how to answer students' questions about English, such as why the words "meadow," "bear," and "tear" (as in crying) have different vowel sounds but are all spelled with "ea." "Stuff like that – that's baffling and challenging and I don't have an answer for it. I think it bothers me more than it bothers them. I feel like, 'Why is our language so complicated?'"

Anndy's advice to new tutors is to remember the challenge that students face in learning English in a new country and to provide positive affirmation. "I think the most important thing to remember is the person on the other side of the table, or whatever the setup is, is a human being who's trying to learn something that's incredibly difficult...I say to my students all the time, 'I'm just so impressed with you.'"

Vocabulary Resources

As tutors know, the ELL collection at the library is quite extensive, and there is a seemingly endless array of online resources, so I think it's helpful to highlight a few that I consider worthwhile – in this case, resources related to vocabulary. These are not new, but they may be new to you!

- *4000 Essential English Words* is a series by linguist Paul Nation. There are six levels of difficulty. Each unit within a level contains 20 words, which are based on lists of the most frequent words in English. (If you are interested in learning more about these lists, known as the BNC/COCA word family lists, you can read more here.) Learners practice the vocabulary with exercises and reading passages. QR codes enable them to hear the words spoken aloud, both individually and in sentences.

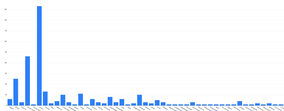
- *Building a Strong Vocabulary*, a series by Ellen Northcutt and Christine Griffith Wagner, consists of three books, covering life skills, work readiness, and academic preparation. Each chapter focuses on a topic in one of these areas, such as banking or preparing for an interview, and contains several useful exercises. Additional practice activities are available with a free smartphone app. You can find sample chapters on the publisher's website.

- *English for Everyone: English Vocabulary Builder*, by Thomas Booth, is part of the popular *English for Everyone* series, which features numerous illustrations that make the books fun and accessible. This book is similar to a picture dictionary, but with practice exercises for each section. Audio is available on the publisher's website or by downloading an app.

- ESL Crosswords — This is a fun way to practice vocabulary in a variety of categories, such as animals, body parts, weather, and food & drink. There are three levels of difficulty. Each crossword can be completed online or printed as a PDF, with or without a word list to make it easier for learners.

- Games to Learn English — This site has many interactive games to practice vocabulary, as well as some aspects of grammar. Some of the topics, such as days of the week and telling time, are appropriate for beginners, while other games cover vocabulary that might be new for intermediate learners, including idioms like "a fish out of water" and "cost an arm and a leg."

Some Numbers



From time to time I like to share some data about the ELL Program. So far in 2025, 303 learners have applied for a tutor. They come from 47 countries; the biggest groups are from China (93 learners), South Korea (46), Brazil (25), Turkey (13), and Israel (11). Among the less common countries of origin are Suriname, Mauritania, Uzbekistan, Cameroon, and the Netherlands (1 learner each). The pace of applications has generally been slower than in the previous two years, which I think is likely due to changes in federal immigration policies and uncertainty among potential learners about coming to or staying in the United States.

188 learners have been matched with a tutor this year, and there are currently 134 people on the waiting list. 360 learners have attended at least one of the 66 group classes we have had this year.

Finally, 94 new tutors attended the training this year, and there are 253 active tutors. Thank you to all the volunteers who have tutored, taught a group class, or contributed in some other way! This program would not have the impact that it does without you.

Program News

- I sent an email to volunteers in October about the new citizenship test. Green card holders who apply for citizenship on October 20 or thereafter will have to take the new 2025 civics test; it has 128 possible questions, which are generally more difficult than those on the previous test. (You can test yourself using this interactive quiz. Keep in mind that the actual test is oral and not multiple-choice.) Individuals who applied before October 20 will take the 2008 test, which has 100 possible questions. A helpful comparison of the two tests is here. More information and many resources for applicants are available on the library website. Books reflecting the updated test are in the works.

- As you may have noticed, this newsletter is labeled "Fall 2025" instead of "November/December 2025." I have decided that, going forward, I will send out ELL newsletters on a quarterly basis, which is a little more manageable than every other month.

- I also plan to schedule our "Tutor Talk Time" events on a quarterly basis rather than every one to two months. I will announce January's event in a few weeks.

- The next information session for prospective tutors will be on Saturday, January 10, at 10:00 a.m. on Zoom. It will be followed by training sessions on Saturday mornings in January and February, also on Zoom. If you know someone who would be interested, please tell them to contact me or have them fill out the tutor application on our website!

- As you may have seen in the library's monthly newsletter, we have an expanded collection of children's books in Korean, in addition to books (for both adults and children) in many other languages. Also, there will be a Japanese bilingual storytime event on Saturday, December 20; see here for details. Stay tuned for more information about children's collections and events in a future newsletter!

- Today is Giving Tuesday! Remember that you can support the ELL Program by donating to the library. If donating online, feel free to select "ELL Program" next to "I came to this donation page due to..." and write something in the comments box. More information is here.

Until next time,
Andrew

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