



# Show-Me

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Literacy...

## Cross-Cultural Issues in Adult ESL Classrooms

*Written by Mary McGroarty; Northern Arizona University; July 1993 and reprinted from the Center for Adult English Language Acquisition (CAELA) website.*

Instructors in adult ESL classes in the United States need no reminder that their classrooms serve as a meeting place for learners of many and often disparate cultural backgrounds. They recognize, further, that for many learners, the ESL class serves the crucial function of cultural as well as linguistic orientation. Yet intellectual recognition of these issues does not always provide specific pedagogical direction; that demands not only the sound judgment born of training and experience, but also an understanding of the cultural factors that shape the actual processes of classroom instruction. This digest identifies some of the cultural factors that can influence learner and teacher behavior during classroom ESL literacy instruction.

### **Roles of Learners and Teachers**

Expectations about educational roles that participants bring to the classroom influence not only their views of the class, but also their willingness to participate in different kinds of learning activities. In adult ESL classes, learners and teachers alike bring years of life experience and cultural knowledge to the instructional setting. Learners may bring to class the expectations regarding teacher relationships and behavior that prevailed in their home countries, especially if they had extensive schooling there (McCargar, 1993). Thus, learners from more traditional educational systems may expect teachers to behave in a more formal and authoritarian fashion during classes and may be displeased, puzzled, or offended if a teacher uses an informal instructional style, such as using first names in class or allowing learners to move freely around the room.

Learners may also want teachers to maintain a clearly ordered pattern of classroom activity and, perhaps, engage in extensive correction of grammatical form or pronunciation during all activities rather than at specified points in a lesson or not at all. Failure to conform to these ideals may give learners the impression of lazy or inadequate class preparation on the part of the teacher.

Teachers, similarly, bring to the classroom their own expectations regarding teacher behavior. This includes their views on appropriate adult behavior within American culture in general, as well as in the classroom (McGroarty & Galván, 1985). If the American adult ideal is to be self-reliant, at ease in expressing and defending personal opinions, and interested in personal advancement, teachers will expect to provide instruction addressed to these goals and may unconsciously attribute these same goals to their students. The potential for conflicting expectations and evaluations of behavior between teachers and learners is evident.

### **Gender-Related Issues**

Related to the issue of expectations regarding appropriate adult behavior is that of appropriate gender-related behavior, which can produce tensions during instruction. Teachers need to find out whether learners have ever

experienced mixed educational groupings; whether they expect male and female teachers to behave differently; and how different classroom activities, including various group configurations (pairs or small groups) or activity types (e.g., role plays or dialogue practice), might affect learners differently because of their native cultural constraints. For example, in an adult ESL class some years ago, eager to put the desks in a circle to promote interaction and communication, I was concerned to see that, after a few minutes, one of the men in the class turned nearly rigid and stared straight ahead. When I asked after class what was wrong, he told me that with the class sitting in a circle, and thus moving their heads to look at me and each other when conversing, he was sure the other men were looking at his wife, a behavior he considered inappropriate. Had I explained clearly why a different arrangement of desks might be useful for classroom activities and been willing to alter the classroom configuration to accommodate specific needs, I might have prevented such unnecessary distress.

Additionally, ESL teachers need to be aware that shifts in status and economic and family responsibilities that often accompany immigration are likely to affect learners'--especially women's--very presence in class, as well as their attitudes and behaviors. Prospective female learners are often prevented from attending ESL classes by lack of childcare (Hayes, 1989), a factor that does not affect men as profoundly. In many Western immigrant-receiving countries, such as the United States, women may be encouraged to pursue educational goals that run counter to traditional expectations within their native countries (Paige, 1990). The need to seek employment outside the home may put pressure on women to learn English quickly, even as they recognize that this challenges traditional family structures. Moreover, men from more traditional cultural backgrounds may discourage or resist the efforts of wives or daughters to pursue literacy skills (Gillespie, in press).

In encouraging women students to speak up and take an active role in class, ESL instructors may encounter reluctance from both men and women from cultures in which women have historically been constrained by social roles that do not promote active participation in mixed-sex settings (Massin, 1992). One solution proposed in Australia has been literacy classes for women only (Rado & Foster, 1991). Teachers can also make special efforts to structure activities so that all learners, not just those who volunteer, have equal opportunities for practice and discussion.

### **Appropriate Topics for Instruction**

Cultural expectations regarding the nature of education and what is appropriate to talk about may also affect the kinds of topics students are willing to pursue in class. Cultural as well as personal sensitivity is vital in knowing if, when, and how to introduce topics or lessons that may be distasteful or difficult. For example, lessons on fast food might need to incorporate information on how to determine presence or absence of pork if learners' cultural affiliation includes religious prohibitions against eating it. Even apparently innocuous topics can be sources of difficulty, depending on the experience, sophistication level, and particular social situation of learners. Learners who are recent refugees from civil strife, for example, may find it hard to produce descriptions of the homes they had to flee in fear, particularly during their initial period of adjustment. If learners are still in the process of resolving their immigration status, they may feel threatened by question-answer sessions based on individual information such as "Where were you born?"; "How long did you live in X?"; and "Do you have a job?".

Clearly, instructor discretion is essential in these areas. Sensitive topics can be raised--indeed, some newer adult literacy materials make a point of acknowledging personally difficult situations of loneliness, isolation, or job loss that affect adult ESL learners (see Long & Spiegel-Podnecky, 1988, and Weinstein-Shr, 1992, for two texts that deal tactfully with potentially sensitive issues)--but the way they are treated and the extent of student participation expected should allow a range of alternatives, including the option to simply observe activities or, where possible, respond in writing rather than speaking up.

### **Behavior at the Site of Instruction**

Culturally specific expectations regarding appropriate behavior in public places such as schools affect the entire instructional environment, including classrooms, hallways, cafeterias, and restrooms. Hence, rules regarding appropriate ways to maintain order; move or not move furniture such as desks and tables; discard litter; and regulate eating, drinking, and smoking can affect the comfort level of learners, teachers, and others associated with adult ESL instruction.

Like many areas of cultural customs, these areas can seem trivial until behavior that is different from the expected occurs; a breach of the cultural compact related to school site behavior then has a negative impact on instruction. Teachers, custodians, administrators, and perhaps other students may become annoyed if some adult learners engage in behavior that is permitted in their own countries but frowned upon in the United States, whether this involves smoking at the instructional site or appropriate ways to arrange classroom furniture or use a Western-style toilet. In one large Los Angeles adult school, some of these issues were deemed so crucial to a good instructional atmosphere that a committee of teachers developed special materials to orient learners to American cultural expectations and provide all participants--learners, teachers, and other staff members--with guidelines (Ryan, 1989).

### **Developing Literacy Instructors' Cross-Cultural Expertise**

Tremendous student diversity, coupled with the part-time and temporary nature of ESL instruction and the varied backgrounds of literacy instructors, makes it both impossible and inadvisable to offer a universal template for cross-cultural training that fits all adult ESL classrooms equally well. Several staff development formats are available for instructor training, ranging from in-service workshops, to conferences, to action research and self-directed learning (Kutner, 1992); cross-cultural topics can be incorporated into any of them. Models and materials for generic cross-cultural training are also widely available (for example, Bhawuk, 1990; Damen, 1987).

However, published sources may not be current or particular enough to provide instructors with the site-specific information and techniques they need (McGroarty, 1993). Following the growing trend toward participatory instruction, cross-cultural training for instructors needs to become participatory in a dual sense: Instructors need to participate in designing their own training opportunities in local instructional programs, and they need to learn how to participate with learners in identifying culturally appropriate instructional processes, topics, and materials that promote language progress (see Auerbach, 1992, for discussion and strategies). Only cross-cultural efforts that require ongoing mutual discovery and adaptation by both learners and teachers can provide the concrete guidance needed to insure that literacy instruction is culturally as well as linguistically compatible for all those involved.

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The following free worksheets were reprinted from <http://elcivics.com/worksheets/esl-worksheets.html>.

## Jerry Smith

Jerry Smith is 28 years old, and he is single. He lives in Cerritos, California. He teaches ESL at an adult education center. He works Monday to Friday from 8:00 to 3:00. On the weekend, he visits his girlfriend. Her name is Susan, and she is 27 years old. Jerry and Susan like to watch movies and walk along the beach. They also like to jog and ride bicycles.



### A. Questions

1. What is Jerry's last name? \_\_\_\_\_
2. How old is Jerry? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Does he work on Mondays? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Does he work on Wednesdays? \_\_\_\_\_
5. What is Jerry's girlfriend's name? \_\_\_\_\_
6. How old is she? \_\_\_\_\_
7. What do Jerry and Susan like to do? \_\_\_\_\_

### B. True or False

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Jerry is a teacher.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Susan likes to watch movies.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Jerry and Susan are married.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Susan is older than Jerry.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Jerry's last name is Reyes.

Note: This worksheet may be reproduced for non-commercial use. Visit <http://www.elcivics.com> for more free ESL worksheets, crossword puzzles, games, videos, and ppts.

## Medical Appointment

### A. Reading

It is Monday morning, and Carlos is sick. He has a sore throat, a fever, and his body aches. He doesn't have health insurance, so he is calling the Maywood Health Clinic to make an appointment.



The receptionist at the clinic wants to know what time he can come in and if he has health insurance. She also wants to know if he has been to the clinic before.

After Carlos answers all the questions, the receptionist makes an appointment for him at 10:30 a.m. today. By the end of their conversation, Carlos is nauseated. He wants to vomit, but he can't. Now, Carlos needs to get dressed and drive to the clinic. He is worried that he might vomit while driving to the clinic. He doesn't want to vomit in his car. What can Carlos do? How can he solve his problem?

### B. True or False

1. \_\_\_\_\_ Carlos has health insurance.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ *Nauseated* means a person feels like vomiting.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ Carlos calls the Maywood Clinic at 9:00 Monday morning.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ Medical receptionists ask questions when patients make appointments.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ Carlos is worried he might have a car accident.

### C. Yes or No – What about you?

1. \_\_\_\_\_ I have health insurance.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ I seldom catch a cold.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ I take medicine when I feel nauseated.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ My family doctor works in a clinic.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ I take medicine every day.

### D. Writing – What should Carlos do? How can he solve his problem?

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*Teachers: This free lifeskills worksheet may be copied for classroom use. Visit us on the web at [www.elcivics.com](http://www.elcivics.com) for more downloadable ESL and EL Civics lesson material.*

## Going to the Dentist

### A. Reading

James is at the dentist's office today because he has a toothache on the right side of his mouth. He bought some medicine at the drug store, but the pain didn't stop. His last dental check-up was six years ago. James is afraid of dentists.

An x-ray technician took x-rays of his teeth. He has three cavities. The dentist is drilling two of the cavities, but he will have to pull out the tooth that has the third cavity. That cavity is so large that it can't be filled. That is also the tooth that is causing the pain.

Every time the dentist starts the drill, James clinches with fear. The dentist told him to relax, but he can't. What can he do? How can he relax?



### B. True or False

1. \_\_\_\_\_ James is afraid of dentists.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ A large cavity on the right side of his mouth is causing a toothache.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ The x-ray shows that James has three cavities.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ The medicine James bought at the drug store stopped the pain.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ James feels stress when he hears the sound of the drill.

### C. Yes or No – What about you?

1. \_\_\_\_\_ I am afraid of dentists.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ I brush and floss my teeth every day.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ I eat a lot of candy.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ I have a toothache.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ I have dental insurance.

### D. Writing – How can James relax while the dentist fixes his teeth?

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## Checking Account

### A. Reading

Rosa is engaged to her boyfriend Kyle. They plan to get married in May, and they are each saving \$350 a month for the wedding and the honeymoon.

Kyle wants to open a joint checking account in both of their names, but Rosa said no. She likes having her own bank accounts. She has a savings account and a checking account, and she doesn't want another account. Kyle is frugal with his money, and if she opens a bank account with him, he might ask her to explain why she withdrew money from the account. He might even ask her why she didn't deposit enough money into their account. Kyle thinks that Rosa doesn't trust him. He said they can't get married if she doesn't trust him.



### B. True or False

1. \_\_\_\_\_ Kyle is Rosa's fiancé.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ Rosa has a checking account and a savings account.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ Rosa has an ATM card.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ *Frugal* means thrifty.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ When you withdraw money from a bank account the balance goes up.

### C. Yes or No – What about you?

1. \_\_\_\_\_ I am single.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ I have a savings account.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ I am frugal with money.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ There is a bank near my house.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ I don't like to lend people money.

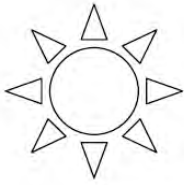
### D. Writing – Should Rosa open a joint account with Kyle? Why or why not?

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# Capital Letters

**Lesson One:** There are 26 letters in the English alphabet. There are capital letters and lower case letters. A is a capital letter and a is a lower case letter.

Aa	Bb	Cc	Dd	Ee	Ff	Gg	Hh	Ii	Jj	Kk	Ll	Mm
Nn	Oo	Pp	Qq	Rr	Ss	Tt	Uu	Vv	Ww	Xx	Yy	Zz

A. Write the capital letters in the boxes below.

A												

B. Write the lower case letters in boxes below.

a												

C. Sentences start with a capital letter. Correct the sentences. Make the first letter of each sentence a capital. Examples: My name is John. I am twenty-two years old.

- hello. my name is Sue.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- it is nice to meet you.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- where are you from?  
\_\_\_\_\_

**D.** Use capital letters for the names of countries, states, counties, and cities. Correct the sentences. Examples: *Garden Grove is in California. I live in the United States.* \*Note: Do not capitalize 'the' in the United States.

1. More than 35 million people live in california.

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2. texas is the second largest state in the united states.

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3. washington, d.c. is the capital of the united states.

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4. atlanta is the capital of georgia.

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5. It takes four hours to drive from orange county to las vegas.

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**E.** Use capital letters for days of the week and months of the year. Rewrite the sentences. Examples: *Sunday is the first day of the week. Today is June 26, 2005.*

1. Today is november 15, 2005.

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2. The first day of the year is january 1.

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3. The last day of the year is december 31.

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4. Summer starts june 21.

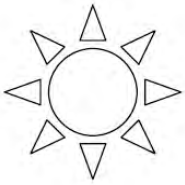
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5. I was born on february 14, 1923.

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 When were you born? \_\_\_\_\_





# Days

**Lesson Three:** There are seven days in a week. Sunday is the first day of the week, and Saturday is the last day. Capitalize the first letter of the days.  
Example: Monday

Aa	Bb	Cc	Dd	Ee	Ff	Gg	Hh	Ii	Jj	Kk	Ll	Mm
Nn	Oo	Pp	Qq	Rr	Ss	Tt	Uu	Vv	Ww	Xx	Yy	Zz

**A.** Write the days two times each. Capitalize the first letter of each day.

sunday \_\_\_\_\_

monday \_\_\_\_\_

tuesday \_\_\_\_\_

wednesday \_\_\_\_\_

thursday \_\_\_\_\_

friday \_\_\_\_\_

saturday \_\_\_\_\_

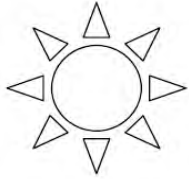
**B.** Answer the questions. Write complete sentences.

1. What is the first day of the week?

\_\_\_\_\_

2. What is the last day of the week?

\_\_\_\_\_



# Calendars

**Lesson Four:** Calendars help us organize our time. It is a good idea to write appointments on a calendar. \*Note: Holidays are in italics.

January 2006						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1 <i>New Year's</i>	2	3 school starts 8:00	4	5	6	7 dinner at mom's
8	9	10	11 movies 7:00 pm	12	13	14
15	16 <i>Martin Luther King Day</i>	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25 dentist 1:30 / (714) 555-9900	26	27 pay phone bill	28
29 <i>Chinese New Year</i>	30	31				

A. Answer the questions about the calendar.

1. When is the phone bill due?

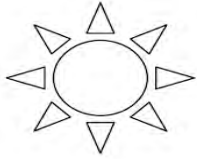
\_\_\_\_\_

2. When is the dentist appointment?

\_\_\_\_\_

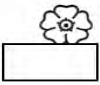

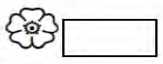



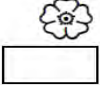
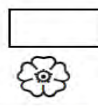
3. What is the first holiday in January?

\_\_\_\_\_



# Prepositions

**Lesson Eleven:** Prepositions of location tell you where things are located.  
 For example: The book is on the table.

	
The flower is <b>on</b> the box.	The flower is <b>in</b> the box.
	
The flower is <b>next to</b> the box.	The flower is <b>between</b> the boxes.
	
The flower is <b>behind</b> the box.	The flower is <b>in front of</b> the box.
	
The flower is <b>above</b> the box.	The flower is <b>below</b> the box.

**A. Write the correct preposition on the line.**

1. The flower is \_\_\_\_\_ the flower pot.
2. The books are \_\_\_\_\_ the shelf in the cabinet.
3. The salt shaker is \_\_\_\_\_ the pepper shaker.
4. My doormat is \_\_\_\_\_ the door.

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