







Unit 1: Increasing the Rigor of Instruction

Sample Lesson Enhancement

Imagine that you are doing a unit on Language Learning Practices in a low-intermediate adult English language acquisition class. It is part of an integrated-skills curriculum that includes practice with competencies (e.g., reading a paycheck), language functions (e.g., making complaints and apologies), reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills, as well as grammar. Within that unit, there is a short reading that serves to present and practice simple present tense to talk about routines, along with adverbs and adverbial phrases of frequency. The reading is about Alina's reading and writing habits and the purpose for this topic is to show English language learners different ways they may use reading and writing in their own lives.

As you look through the lesson, think about how you might challenge learners more. What enhancements might you make so that learners get more practice with academic language, reading strategies, or critical thinking?

Pre-reading: Talk to a partner. Match the picture to the words for each reading or writing activity.

1.			a. Read to a child
2.			b. Help a child with homework
3.			c. Read the mail
4.			d. Write a grocery list
5.			e. Read email from friends or family
6.			f. Write a letter to friends or family

Read the following story about Alina's reading and writing activities:

Alina reads and writes many things every week. She opens and reads the mail each day after work. On weekdays, she reads her daughter's homework assignments. Sometimes Alina reads email from her family on the computer, but she doesn't write to them by email. She usually writes letters to her family and friends once a month. When she goes shopping on Saturdays, Alina likes to write a grocery list. She likes to read to her daughter every night before bed. Sometimes her daughter reads to her!

Find and circle the words in the story that tell you how often Alina does each activity.

Answer these questions:

What does Alina read every day? _____

What does Alina read every weekday? _____


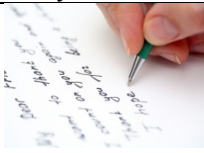

What does she read on the computer? _____




How often does she read to her daughter? _____

When does she go grocery shopping? _____

What does she write on Saturdays? _____

Follow-up: Talk to at least three classmates about their reading and writing habits.

	Ask: How often do you....			
	Reading or writing activities	Partner 1	Partner 2	Partner 3
1.	 Read email from friends or family?			
2.	 Write a letter to friends or family?			
3.	 Write a grocery list?			

	Write a grocery list?			
4.	 Read to your child?			
5.	 Help your child with homework?			
6.	 Read the mail?			

How to Provide Rigorous Instruction

Now we will look at enhancements to this lesson to provide learners practice with *academic language*, *reading strategies*, and *critical thinking*.

Enhancement 1: Pre-reading

Pre-teaching vocabulary for pre-reading is widely used and is appropriate in this lesson. However, it does not go far enough in activating learners' prior knowledge about the topic. In addition to pre-teaching the vocabulary words, add a reflection task. For example, read a statement and have students stand next to one of these signs around the room:

I can do this in English.

I need to do this English.

I want to do this in English.

or

I do this in English.

I do this in my own language.

I don't do this.

This allows students to think critically about the topic. There are some literacy practices they will do in their first language (which you can discuss with them). What are benefits of speaking your home language with your kids? When do you need to use English? How comfortable are you doing these activities in English? What else do you read or write each week?

Skills added through this enhancement:

Reading strategies:

- Anticipation of content; predictions about the reading

Critical thinking skills:

- Exploration of prior experience with a topic
- Analysis of situations when we might choose our first language or English
- Challenging of assumptions about when to use home language or English
- Comparison and contrast: Discussion of benefits of using one's home language or English in different situations

Enhancement 2: The reading activities

Find and circle the words in the story that tell you how often Alina does each activity and Answer these questions are quite typical ELA activities. However, there are some missed opportunities again. The questions are largely based on recall and are what we call “display questions.”

What does Alina read every day? _____

What does Alina read every weekday? _____

What does she read on the computer? _____

How often does she read to her daughter? _____

When does she go grocery shopping? _____

What does she write on Saturdays? _____

There is one correct answer, which students could answer correctly without necessarily understanding the actual meaning of phrases such as “every day” or “every weekday.”

Alternative Approach:

Distribute pictures of Alina's reading and writing activities. Ask the students to group the activities under these headings (or in a small class, have students walk around and physically create groups).

What does Alina often do?

What does Alina sometimes do?

What does Alina never do?

Read the mail

Read homework assignments

Read email from her family

Write letters to her family

Write a grocery list

Read to her daughter

Listen to her daughter read

You are probably asking: *But how will they decide what constitutes “often” vs. “sometimes”?* Is “once a week” “sometimes” or “often”? If we look at all of Alina’s activities, the learners can have a debate about what they think each means. Maybe for some of them, “once a month” is often. So, while somewhat relative depending on one’s circumstances, by sorting the activities by frequency (grouping according to “often,” “sometimes,” and “never”), learners demonstrate their understanding of how the phrases differ; that comparatively speaking, “once a month” would be “sometimes” and “once a day” would be “often.” This task will check understanding of the words in the text for which the frequency is less obvious:

Weekdays = 5/7 days of the week, therefore Alina reads her daughter’s homework assignments often

On Saturdays = Once a week, so they can decide if in their opinion that is “often” or not. How does that compare to their own shopping habits?

Skills added through this enhancement:

Academic language:

- Interpretation of words used to show frequency
- Use of simple present to show routines
- Language to express opinions, agreeing and disagreeing: “*In my opinion,*” “*I think that...*”

Critical thinking:

- Debate/analysis of what constitutes levels of frequency
- Categorization of information

Enhancement 3: The questions we ask

As mentioned above, the comprehension questions with the reader fail to promote anything more than simple recall. Here are questions to promote more analysis and critical thinking:

Which activities does she do the most often?

How does she feel when her daughter reads to her?

What do you think she likes more? Writing letters or writing emails?

Skills added through this enhancement:

Reading strategies:

- Interpretation of meaning from context - the text does not explicitly state that she doesn't like writing on the computer, but we might infer that she does not because of the conjunction "but" followed by "she usually writes letters."

Academic language:

- Conjunction to show contrast
- Language to express opinions, agreeing and disagreeing: *"In my opinion," "I think that..."*

Critical thinking:







- Comparison and contrast
- Analysis of the situation ("how does she feel when...")


Enhancement 4: Follow-up

Data Collection

Reading and Writing Practices: One-question interview (Each student is given only one strip.)

Interview everyone in class about their reading and writing practices. *Tally* your answers:

	How often do you use a computer?
Every day III	Every week II
Every month	Never III
	How often do you read a newspaper?
Every day	Every week
Every month	Never
	How often do you read books?
Every day	Every week
Every month	Never
	How often do you write letters to friends or family?
Every day	Every week
Every month	Never
	How often do you read to your child?
Every day	Every week
Every month	Never
	How often do you help your children with homework?
Every day	Every week
Every month	Never

	<p>How often do you open and read mail?</p> <p>Every day Every week Every month Never</p>
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Have students who had the same question come together to discuss their results. Prepare a bar graph to present to others.

As students begin sharing and discussing their results, they will need phrases (we call these “language frames”) like these:

Useful language frames to talk about the data...

Most people...

Some people...

Two-thirds of the class...

Half the class...

More people _____ than _____.

Practice with academic language: Using the data collected about the class, students write a paragraph about the group using this paragraph frame:

Our Group’s Reading Habits

Our class reads and writes _____. _____ use a _____ every day. Many people _____ every week. Most of the class doesn’t _____ every day. More people _____ than _____ every week. Some people never _____.

Skills added through this enhancement:

Academic language:

- Language to talk about data and quantity (“most people,” “two-thirds”)
- Paragraph structure for synthesizing information

Critical thinking skills:

- Analysis of data (not to mention all the great practice with numeracy skills)

- Comparison and contrast of practices with others in class
- Synthesis of information from the whole class

BONUS ENHANCEMENT: Working with real-world data replicates what students may encounter in academic or work settings. Treating literacy as a critical issue (first and second language practices) speaks to learners' intellect and challenges them to think critically.

So, with the enhancements in this otherwise fairly basic lesson, we have added practice in:

Academic Language	Reading Strategies	Critical Thinking
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interpretation of words used to show frequency • Use of simple present to show routines • Language to express opinions, agreeing and disagreeing: <i>"In my opinion," "I think that..."</i> • Conjunction to show contrast ("but") • Language to talk about data and quantity (e.g., "most people," "two-thirds") • Paragraph structure for synthesizing information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anticipation of content; predictions about the reading • Interpretation of meaning from context (e.g., the text does not explicitly state that she doesn't like writing on the computer, but we might infer that she does not because of the conjunction "but," followed by "she prefers to write letters") 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploration of prior experience with a topic • Analysis of situations when we might choose our first language or English • Challenging of assumptions about when to use home language or English • Comparison and contrast: Discussion of benefits of using one's home language or English in different situations • Debate/analysis of what constitutes levels of frequency • Categorization of information • Data analysis (not to mention all the great practice with numeracy skills) • Synthesis of information from the whole class