

Resource Review

abc English

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■ <https://www.abceng.org/>

During my time in adult education classrooms working with adult English language learners (ELL), many of whom were attending school for the first time in their lives while also learning to speak in a brand-new language, I spent countless hours searching online for worksheets and handouts that were not covered with teddy bears and dinosaurs. Eventually, like so many adult English teachers, I gave up and spent even more of my limited prep time creating original resources from scratch. While working as a teacher trainer, the online resource abc English was recommended to me by teaching colleagues; however, I did not dig deeply into the site until I returned to the classroom in 2021. I greatly appreciate the abc English resources because they take the guesswork out of teaching systematic phonics and provide level- and topic-appropriate texts for adult learners. Moreover, the materials are well-designed and easy to use. Jennifer Christenson, the site's creator and author, has drawn upon her long-time classroom and training experience to develop effective, clear, and well-researched materials that can be easily incorporated into online, in-person, or hybrid instruction.

The abc English resource library contains a wide array of tools for teachers and tutors that include:

- teacher training resources that demonstrate how to use the materials
- assessment tools for beginning ELL literacy learners
- slideshows on systematic phonics, vocabulary, and easy English grammar
- home language resources (Spanish, Swahili, Kinyarwanda, and Somali)
- citizenship materials
- decodable texts, easy readers, and reading skills stories
- phonics-based flashcards, handouts, and classroom posters

All of the online library content is available to paid subscribers as Google slides through the site or as PDFs that can be downloaded and printed. An individual license costs \$25 for three months, or \$90 per year, and group licenses for 5 or more teachers are available for \$6 a month per teacher. Potential subscribers can sign up for

a free 30-day trial to explore whether the materials are the right fit for learners. Print copies of the abc English phonics books Levels 1-4, the reading skills stories, and decodable readers are available to order. The teacher training resources, home language materials, assessment tools, and full online previews of the print books are always available for free.

Assessment

abc English is the most comprehensive classroom resource that I have encountered for teaching reading to learners who have had no or limited print literacy in any language. This website offers an extensive collection of materials specifically designed for educators who work with adult and adolescent emergent readers who are also developing English. The site provides valuable tools and, importantly, also outlines the methodology I was looking for to incorporate systematic and explicit phonics instruction into reading instruction. It breaks down the components of reading into manageable pieces for beginning readers and offers resources for building fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension, not phonics alone. Critically, the topics on abc English are of high value to English learners with immigrant and refugee backgrounds through building vocabulary and phrases as well as integrating common sight words. Among the topics in the reading skills stories are family life, paying bills, taking the bus, and working. The easy English readers feature discrete components of phonics and vocabulary, as well as listening tasks to build up verbal and print familiarity with core language learning topics such as shopping, food, and emotions.

In my multilevel literacy class, learners of all levels benefit from the focused practice on phonics rules and patterns. The more advanced learners appreciate the explanations of the “why” behind the spelling rules, and the beginning literacy learners thrive on the explicit and methodical phonics instruction. Once a week, an in-person volunteer works with a group of beginning literacy students using one of the Level 1 phonics lessons. Together, the group reviews vowel sounds, sounds out words with the target sounds, practices cumulative blending, and writes as the tutor dictates sentences and short words. I use these same materials when I am teaching without a volunteer, expanding the phonics activities with Tier 2 academic

words that use the targeted sound patterns to challenge and engage the more advanced learners as we move through the lesson.

In my English Level 1-2 class, an online volunteer leads a reading group in a breakout room with several online learners, working with them on a reading skill story from the abc English resource library. The learners have a print copy of the reading packet in front of them, and the volunteer takes them through the accompanying slide show, providing each learner in the small group multiple opportunities to sound out words, identify word patterns, and read out loud. In addition, one of the learners who is preparing for the citizenship test gets pulled out twice a week by a volunteer to work on the 100 civics questions and the reading and writing portions of the test with the abc English citizenship resources, which are appropriately leveled for a beginner including with clear visuals, simple language, and several ways to review.

What’s the best thing about abc English? For me, it is the thoroughness and predictability of the resources which enable my volunteers to walk in the door and jump into teaching. I do not need to spend 15 minutes meeting with them before they begin to explain the materials and activities. Everything the volunteers need is ready and waiting for them, and they are able to maximize their time working with learners. This means that I do not spend hours preparing and adapting materials, which frees up my limited prep time.

Of course, adult learners have unique needs and experiences; no single curriculum or resource is able to provide all of the information that immigrants and refugees need to navigate a new culture and language successfully. Verbal skills and oral vocabulary provide the foundation that literacy skills are built upon, so it is essential that teachers bring in multiple opportunities to practice developing speaking and listening skills to supplement any phonics and reading resource. Learners also need the opportunity to apply the decoding skills they are learning to authentic texts that they encounter outside of the classroom (e.g., receipts, signs, notes from their child’s school). They also need opportunities to produce original writing. While the abc English phonics materials are beautifully scaffolded and systematic, the open enrollment nature of many adult education programs means that teachers have to decide how to

regularly revisit previously introduced material so that learners who are new to the class are not lost. Fortunately, the materials are easy to retrieve and review, and even experienced readers benefit from the repetition of basic phonics concepts.

Recommendations

The resources on abc English can function as stand-alone lessons and as a supplement to existing curriculum. They can also provide opportunities for extensive reading. The materials on this site are valuable for novice and experienced teachers alike. In particular,

programs that use volunteer tutors to deliver instruction will find the ready-to-use slideshows with their step-by-step teacher instructions a welcome addition to their curriculum, especially since proven literacy and language teaching practices such as scaffolding, repetition, practicing skills in a variety of ways, and using high-quality visuals are expertly woven into the materials and activities. While abc English requires a paid yearly subscription, the fact that its resources are constantly being updated and added to means that they remain relevant and fresh. abc English is definitely worth a closer look for any teacher who is teaching reading and English to adults who are new to both.