

## Instructional Activities for Building Oral English Proficiency: Thematic Unit on Employment

*Level:* Low Beginning ESL; SPL 2

*Language Focus:* Oral Communication

*Curriculum Unit:* Employment

*Learning objectives:* Given visuals, identify job titles, tasks, tools, and location; describe present and past jobs, including job title, tasks, locations and length of employment; ask questions and report information about hours, duties, salary and benefits.

The following activities are designed for adult ESL students at a Student Performance Level (SPL) 2 who are learning English through a content-based unit on **employment**. An adult ESL student at a SPL 2: “Functions in a very limited way in situations related to immediate needs. Can handle only routine entry-level jobs that do not require oral communication, and in which all tasks can be easily demonstrated. A native English speaker used to dealing with limited English speakers will have great difficulty communicating with a person at this level. Understands a limited number of very simple learned phrases, spoken slowly with frequent repetitions. Expresses a limited number of immediate survival needs using very simple learned phrases.” (See [http://www.cal.org/caela/esl\\_resources/slspls.html](http://www.cal.org/caela/esl_resources/slspls.html) for a complete set of SPL descriptors.)

### Listening Comprehension Activities: *(How well do language learners understand conversational English?)*

- *Pictures and flashcards:* Students listen to vocabulary words about basic occupations, tools, and/or tasks and point to or choose the correct picture (*Oxford Picture Dictionary* is one good resource for learning job-related vocabulary).

- *Following directions:* A simple series of two- or three-step instructions are read and students put representative pictures in order (e.g., “Open the door, take the bowl, close the door”).

- *Answering simple questions:* Class brainstorms a list of yes/no and WH- present tense questions that they ask or have been asked at work (to/from boss, co-workers, customers, employees, outsiders, etc.). Possible responses are brainstormed. Students practice responding appropriately using the list of questions and answers the class has generated.

- *Discrete sounds:* Practice with numbers that sound similar (e.g., 13/30, 15/50). Give groups of students a calculator and read a list of commonly misunderstood numbers. Students add the numbers up on the calculator (or on paper) and see if the total is correct.

- *Language experience approach:* As a class or from one individual, write simple sentences on the board detailing a real workplace experience, routine, or anecdote. Orally ask comprehension questions about what the class has composed (for more information, see [http://www.cal.org/CAELA/esl\\_resources/digests/LEA.html](http://www.cal.org/CAELA/esl_resources/digests/LEA.html)).

- *Conversational information chart:* Create a basic chart for students to ask simple questions of each other:

Student Names	Where do you work?	What is your job?	Do you like your job?

- *Find someone who:* To reinforce vocabulary and simple questions, have students walk around and ask each other questions (e.g., “Find someone who works on Saturdays. Find someone who works in a hotel”).

- *Clarification and repetition checks:* Practice simple phrases to ask for clarification or repetition at work.

- *Spelling/dictation*: Students listen to and repeat job vocabulary, then practice writing the words down as they are individually spelled orally and then practice writing whole words as a part of sentence dictation.

- *Listening to others*: In a large group, students practice asking questions or identifying items in a picture, but they must not repeat a question or item that someone else has already said.

- *Follow-up questions*: Students ask a simple question and based on the answer, must give an appropriate follow-up question.

- *Cloze*: Sentences are written down with one word missing. Someone reads the complete sentence and students must fill in or orally identify the missing word.

**Language Complexity Activities:**      **(How do language learners organize and elaborate their ideas?)**

- *S-V-O word order*: a) Students practice putting words written on index cards in order (e.g., [go] [the] [I] [to] [in] [work] [morning] → I go to work in the morning). b) They then practice answering the simple/learned questions in complete sentences with all subjects (I, you, he/she, etc.: “When do you go to work? I go to work in the morning. When does she go to work? She goes to work in the morning.”). c) Practice word order in affirmative and negative sentences (e.g., “I talk to customers. I don’t talk to customers”).

- *Elaboration*: a) In groups, students try to come up with the greatest number of simple sentences describing a picture. b) A picture is shown to the whole class. Each person tries to say something different about the picture.

- *Timeline*: Given a simple timeline (e.g., “7:00 a.m.: drive to work; 11:00: take a break; 2:00 pm: meet with supervisor”), students give an oral description of the events (“He drives to work at 7:00 a.m. He takes a break at 11:00 a.m. He meets with his supervisor at 2:00 p.m.”).

- *Abilities*: Given pictures, props, or sentences, students practice saying what they can and can’t do (e.g., “I can use a computer. I can’t fix cars”).

- *WH- questions*: Match possible answers with related WH- question words (who = person, subject pronoun; where = location, city; when = day, time).

- *Verbs*: Students practice simple present tense and a limited number of past tense verbs (e.g., “Now I work at a supermarket. In my country, I worked on a farm.”).

**Communication Activities:**      **(How clearly do language learners communicate meaning?)**

- *Pronunciation of vocabulary*: Students practice the pronunciation and spelling of basic vocabulary words. Students also focus on intonation of questions vs. intonation of responses.

- *Model dialogues*: Students practice reading and performing simple model dialogues related to on-the-job interactions.

- *Pausing to respond*: Students learn and practice simple ways of pausing and asking for a moment to think before responding to a question (e.g., “One minute please. Let me think... OK...”).

- *Substitution sentences*: Students practice key learned sentences by substituting one word in each sentence (e.g., "Please help me with this customer [machine, task, bag]").

- *Personal referents*: Pronouns and possessive adjectives are learned and practiced to avoid confusion in relaying information (e.g., "I drive my car to work," "He uses his hammer").

- *Alternate forms*: Given a sentence or a picture, students practice saying similar information in different ways (e.g., "I don't have benefits = I don't get vacation time. I don't have health insurance").