

**Consumer.gov / Consumidor.gov Teacher Resources**  
**Teacher Resource Series #2**

**Using Consumer.gov and Consumidor.gov to Teach Basic  
Literacy and Internet Navigation to Adults with Limited  
Educational Backgrounds**

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The clean design, accessible language, transparent navigation, and topic relevance of Consumer.gov and Consumidor.gov make these websites useful tools for developing adults' basic literacy and internet navigation skills. By providing guided practice activities that connect with learners' existing knowledge and focus on one or two concepts at a time, teachers and tutors can use these websites to introduce adults with limited experience as readers and as Internet users to literacy in the digital context.

The activities listed here are written for use by a teacher with a class group, but can be modified for use by tutors working with pairs or individual learners if the tutor participates as a learner in each small group activity. The activities can be done on a smartphone, tablet, or laptop computer, as available resources and learner access / familiarity dictate. When possible, however, a desktop computer should be used because a larger screen can be more accessible to users with limited Internet experience and literacy skills.

In all these activities, start with the learners rather than the website, and with concrete, focused topics to ensure that material is connected to learners' lives and therefore meaningful and memorable. Adults with limited educational experience and those from oral cultures can begin to build literacy skills on the basis of their existing knowledge and oral skills; using language and content that are familiar and self-generated can facilitate this process.

Pace instruction carefully to ensure that learners are able to develop understanding over time and perceive themselves as successful. Activities can be repeated multiple times so that learners' comfort levels and sense of control increase. The web navigation and listening activities also lend themselves to individual practice outside of class if learners have online access at home or in a public space such as a library.

The activities below are based in research and practitioner experience in the language learning and literacy development of adults, and build on the evidence-based principles outlined in the Framework for the Consumer.gov/Consumidor.gov Lesson Plan Series. For more information on the evidence base on adult literacy acquisition, see the following resources:

Kruidenier, J. R. (2002). *Research-based principles for adult basic education reading instruction*. Portsmouth, NH: RMC Research Corporation. Available at <http://www.sabes.org/info-center/research-resources/>

Kruidenier, J. R., MacArthur, C. A., & Spruck Wrigley, H. (2010). *Adult education literacy instruction: A review of the research*. Washington, DC: National Institute for Literacy. Available at <http://www.sabes.org/info-center/research-resources/>

Vinogradov, P., & Bigelow, M. (2010). *Using oral language skills to build on the emerging literacy of adult English language learners*. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics. Available at <http://www.cal.org/caelanetwork/resources/using-oral-language-skills.html>

See also the resources listed in the References section of the Framework.

## Visual Activities and Webpage Basics

Adults with limited or no experience with the Internet need time to develop understanding of what they are seeing when they look at a website. They need to understand how websites use color, icons, highlighting, and other features to guide and direct attention. Learners from exclusively oral cultures also need time to understand and “see” two-dimensional representations, such as icons and symbols—that is, to make the transition to the visually based nature of literacy.

For these activities, you can use the website itself if online access is available or use a color printout of a screenshot. For many activities, you can also use the print versions of site pages available from [bulkorder.ftc.gov](http://bulkorder.ftc.gov). Note that these activities encourage ESL learners to use their first language(s), and encourage all learners to interpret the site using their own knowledge and experience.

### *Activity 1. Colors*

This activity helps learners see that the website uses colors intentionally as cues to different types of content.

1. Have learners work in pairs, threes, or individually, as they are comfortable. Have them look at the top portion (main navigation) on the home page of either Consumer.gov or Consumidor.gov. Orient them to the tabs for the three main sections of the website. Have learners discuss these questions:
  - How many colors do you see? What are their names? *For ESL learners using Consumer.gov: What are their names in your language?*  
[Be prepared to provide alternative English names for the colors, and for extended discussion around the colors, which can be “seen” in multiple ways. Allow time for discussion of the meaning of these colors in native cultures, as appropriate.]
  - Why do you think the site uses different colors?

Circulate to assist learners by providing the vocabulary and language they need to move discussion forward. Allow discussion to go on until learners come to a consensus and are ready to report out to the larger group.

2. Have the individuals/groups report out. Facilitate discussion until the class reaches consensus on the number of colors and their names (in English for Consumer.gov; in Spanish for Consumidor.gov), and has put forward ideas on what the colors signify.
3. Help learners read the text labels on each of the three tabs. Lead a discussion on what those words mean and what kinds of information might be included under each one. What do learners think is the relationship between the name for each tab and its color?

### ***Activity 2. Symbols and Icons***

This activity helps learners see that the website uses colors intentionally as cues to different types of content. This activity can be combined with Activity 1 if your learners have sufficient skills and if class time permits.

1. Bring in three physical objects: a dollar bill, a hand-held calculator, and a warning sign (or photo of one that has the triangle with exclamation point; this should be a photograph, not a drawing). Show them to learners in the whole group and discuss what they are and what they are used for.
2. Have learners work in pairs, threes, or individually, as they are comfortable. Have them look at the top portion (main navigation) on the home page of either Consumer.gov or Consumidor.gov. Orient them to the tabs for the three main sections of the website. Have learners discuss these questions:
  - What symbols do you see? What would you call them? *For ESL learners using Consumer.gov: What would you call them in your language?*  
[Be prepared to provide alternative English names for the icons, and for extended discussion around them as learners develop understanding of two-dimensional (that is, abstract) representation of concrete concepts. Allow time for discussion of the meaning of the icons (and alternatives) in native cultures, as appropriate. Support use of paper and/or whiteboard for drawing of alternative representations.]
  - Why do you think the site uses these icons/symbols?Circulate to assist learners by providing the vocabulary and language they need to move discussion forward. Allow discussion to go on until learners come to a consensus and are ready to report out to the larger group.
3. Have the individuals/groups report out. Facilitate discussion until the class reaches consensus on the names for the icons (in English for Consumer.gov; in Spanish for Consumidor.gov), and has put forward ideas on what they signify.
4. Help learners read the text labels on each of the three tabs. Lead a discussion on what those words mean and what kinds of information might be included under each one. What do learners think is the relationship between the name for each tab and its icon?

### ***Activity 3. Folders***

This activity helps learners understand categorization of individual items into larger groups.

1. Have learners work in pairs. Distribute three folders to each pair: one blue, one green, and one orange. Distribute nine or ten photos of different items (cut from magazines or printed from the internet) to each group. If possible, items should be related to the content of the website; for example, photos of credit/debit cards, banks and credit unions, money, coupons, advertisements. Have pairs work together to decide how to divide the items among the folders. Ask them to be prepared to say why they assigned the items as they did.
2. Have learners rotate so that each works with a member of a different pair. Have them compare what they did with the folders and the photos. Do they agree? Would they change what they did?
3. Discuss the results in the whole group. Reinforce that there can be many ways to categorize things, and all are useful or meaningful in their own contexts.

#### ***Activity 4. Website Versus Print***

This activity helps learners recognize the difference between site content, which is also contained in the printout, and site functions and navigation, which appear only online. This activity aligns with the “preview webpage” activities provided in the lesson plans, which can be used as follow-on exercises.

1. Have learners work individually, or in pairs if they prefer. Distribute the printout of a specific page from Consumer.gov or Consumidor.gov (for example, the What To Do page from Opening a Bank Account; use the “print” button to generate these, or order them from [bulkorder.ftc.gov](http://bulkorder.ftc.gov)). Direct learners to the same page on the website, or distribute a screenshot if online access is not available.
2. Have learners compare the printout with the actual webpage or the screenshot. How many things can they find on the webpage that are not on the printout? If learners are using a printed screenshot, have them circle or mark those things.
3. In the whole group, have learners report on the things they found. Help them read the label for each, and interpret the symbol or icon for those that have them. Demonstrate (if online access is available) or explain what each one does. If individual workstations or devices are available, allow time for learners to experiment with the different functions and navigation themselves.

#### **Basic Literacy Activities**

Adults with limited educational backgrounds may not have had opportunities to master the basic concepts about print that underlie development of reading skills. You can use the computer screen in the same way you would use a printed page to introduce and reinforce these concepts.

Have learners use their fingers to point, or have them use the cursor; the latter approach has the advantage of giving them practice with mouse skills.

### ***Activity 5. Left to Right and Top to Bottom***

This activity helps learners develop the concept that printed text is linear and sequential: it goes from left to right and from top to bottom on the page.

1. Select one of the main section pages, such as the landing page for Managing Your Money (<http://www.consumer.gov/section/managing-your-money>).
2. Explain, by pointing with your finger or the cursor, that reading starts on the left side of the line and goes to the right (for example, from the M in Making to the t in Budget in the line Making A Budget).
3. Have learners show you where they would start for each of the following lines, and which way they would go. Take only one line at a time until you are sure that learners have understood this concept.
4. When learners are ready for the next step, select a specific topic page, such as the What It Is page of Making a Budget (<http://www.consumer.gov/articles/1002-making-budget>). Have learners show you where they would start and which way they would go on the first line. Then demonstrate what happens when you get to the end of the line: you go back to the left side of the next line down. Have learners practice doing this on that page until they are comfortable with it.

You can extend this activity by having learners practice on other pages of the website and on various types of print materials. Use materials with relatively large print and a limited amount of text to make the task feel manageable. Be aware that, if you use books or magazines, you may need to introduce two additional basic print concepts: front and back and right side up / upside down.

### ***Activity 6. Words and Spaces***

This activity helps learners recognize that print consists of individual words separated by spaces. This can be challenging for some learners; research shows that adults from oral cultures have difficulty distinguishing words in oral speech, but can distinguish syllables, particularly stressed and unstressed ones (oral speech is usually continuous, without separation between words).

1. Select one of the main section pages, such as the landing page for Credit, Loans and Debt (<http://www.consumer.gov/section/credit-loans-and-debt>).
2. Show learners that there are four words in the heading (credit, loans, and, debt) with spaces between them.
3. Have learners take turns saying how many words are in each of the lines below the heading. Do not ask them to say what the words are, just to count them. As they show you how they count, reinforce the left-to-right principle.
4. If learners have been practicing the names of the letters of the alphabet, have them tell you the first and last letter in each word. The purpose this is to reinforce where words begin and end.

5. Ask learners to point to designated first and last words (for example, “Show me the first word in line 2”). The purpose of this is to reinforce the left-to-right principle and the idea of individual words.
6. If learners are able, show them the word Credit in the heading and ask them where else on the page they see that word. Do the same with Loans, and then with Debt.
7. Have learners continue to practice counting the words on different pages of the site. Encourage them to work in pairs and to challenge one another.

### ***Activity 7. Phonemic Awareness***

Development of phonemic awareness – recognition that letters are associated with specific sounds – is an essential part of learning to read. However, for many adult emergent readers, the difference between letter names and letter sounds can be difficult to grasp. A learner who has acquired the name of the letter D (as “dee”) may become stuck on that name as the letter’s sound, and so, when reading aloud a word such as “dog,” may say, “Dee – oh ...” rather than “daw...”

To help learners move past this sticking point, select a set of words with a shared phoneme from the website. Use words that learners know or that you are planning to use for vocabulary development, and start with words that have a common initial consonant (for example, “do,” “decide,” “down,” and “debt”). Do a call-and-respond in which you say, “What’s the sound of the d in decide?” and learner respond “duh” (and so on with the other words). As learners get the idea, have them ask one another, using other words that they can think of.

From consonants in initial position, move to consonants in final position, and then to consonants in word-medial position (the hardest to hear).

When learners have mastered this highly controlled exercise, give them clickers or some other type of noise maker. Then read parts of the web text to them, having them make noise when they hear a designated sound. As you do this, be careful of tricky letters such as “c,” which can sound like “s” or like “k.”

Development of phonemic awareness is particularly challenging in English because the English writing system does not have a one-to-one letter-sound correspondence. In Spanish, by contrast, the relationship between letters and sounds is much more straightforward. For more information on developing phonemic awareness in emergent readers of English, see *Why Reading Is Hard* by Carolyn Temple Adger, Catherine E. Snow, and Lily Wong Fillmore (Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics, 2001).