

Q1: What are some techniques used with “true” beginners (also called “newcomers” or “preliterate” students), who have little or no knowledge of the English language?

This is a challenging and important question. First, it’s important to put yourself in the place of the student: What would you be expecting? What would help you? Most people would say VISUALS—gestures, pictures, graphs, etc. Also, seeing something written—even if you don’t know the entire alphabet—can help. The other thing to remember is that students expect certain things from a classroom experience: They expect the teacher to present something and to ask questions to the class. They also expect to learn “basic” English functions first—introducing yourself, getting to know people, learning the most important words and phrases for “getting by.” They also expect to be repeating words and phrases. To this end, here are some of the most frequent suggestions offered by experts...

1. Speak at a rate about HALF the speed of your normal conversational speech.
2. Use a TON of visuals—both drawings/cartoons and real-life photographs.
3. Use nonverbal communication—head nods, hand movements, charades, and even sound effects etc. Smile and laugh A LOT—particularly when people seem tense. If you allow yourself to loosen up, they will too.
4. Consider asking for a non-verbal demonstration of understanding. For example, after teaching a few verbs to students (e.g. sit, stand up, go, turn, say your name, repeat, etc.) quiz them by asking for a bodily response (or use hands to indicate correct/incorrect). There is an entire methodology called Total Physical Response (TPR) based on this approach. You can find a number of videos of teachers using TPR on Youtube.
5. Also use choral response (entire class at once) to help build confidence.
6. Combine useful phrases (i.e. “chunks”) with individual vocabulary words. For example, you might teach: I like to play soccer. And then substitute other verbs for play and/or other nouns for soccer.
7. Give students plenty of opportunities for practice and feedback. THEY should be doing more work than YOU in the class.
8. If you know students’ first language (L1), use it sparingly—particularly if students seem confused or frustrated. But try to challenge yourself and them by staying in English (L2) as much as possible. You might want to ask if there’s a more advanced student who could be available for *selective* interpretation—only for particularly challenging tasks.
9. As soon as possible, begin to do some needs analysis, to learn what the students’ goals are. It’s particularly important to know how important reading/writing is for them, as that’s something you’ll want to begin to integrate along the way, using materials for ESL “literacy” and “preliteracy” (if applicable) e.g. <http://home.earthlink.net/~brekkmil/id24.html>

These and other tips found at links for “true beginners,” “newcomers,” and “preliterate” such as:

<http://iteslj.org/Techniques/Andrews-Beginners.html>

http://www.cal.org/caela/esl_resources/digests/HOLT.html

(as well as most of the CAELA resources- http://www.cal.org/caela/esl_resources/)

<http://everythingesl.net/in-services/september.php?ty=print>

<http://www.springinstitute.org/Files/springinstituteprel7663bf.pdf>

Q2: How can teachers address issues of motivation and confidence, particularly for teens and adults?

First, good teaching is the best motivator. As we discussed in the workshop, this involves things like...

- Getting to know your students and their needs and goals
- Teaching what's most relevant to students
- Building on students' prior knowledge and experiences
- Incorporating a variety of intelligences in your lessons
- Including multiple opportunities for practice and feedback
- Focusing on clarity over correctness

In many cases, motivation and/or confidence begins to lag when students feel that they're not making progress toward their goals. One of the best motivators, then, is to have students **reflect** on what their goals are and what progress they've made. This can happen in a number of ways—through reflective writing, portfolios of “best work,” personal dictionaries and/or error logs, etc.

Another key aspect of confidence is **feedback**. Students need to receive specific praise (e.g. “Your ___ was particularly strong this time.” vs. “Good job!”) as well as constructive feedback that includes specific suggestions for improvement. I'm a big fan of giving some sort of grade (even if it's a \checkmark -, \checkmark , \checkmark + system), because they become tangible markers of achievement. I also use **rewards** such as stickers, raffle tickets, etc.

Finally, I'd emphasize getting students **engaged** in the class as much as possible, by incorporating multiple intelligences, interactive activities, games, songs, etc. Don't forget about the handouts at <http://shawnashapiro.com/> with favorite games and engaging textbook activities. Also don't forget that PASSION and ENERGY are often contagious. Model the excitement you'd like to see from your students!

More on motivation and confidence-building can be found at:

<http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/blogs/alexenoamen/ways-motivating-efl-esl-students-classroom>