



SHAPING SUCCESS ACTION RESEARCH PROJECTS

**FINAL REPORT ON THE SHAPING SUCCESS AR PROJECT –
USING AUDIO AND EMBEDDED PHONICS IN ONLINE
FUNCTIONAL SKILLS AND ESOL CLASSES**

Haringey ALS

Haringey ALS (2021) *Final Report on the Shaping Success AR Project – Using audio and embedded phonics in online Functional Skills and ESOL classes* . London: ETF.

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This resource was produced as part of the Education and Training Foundation's OTLA programme, which was funded by the Department for Education. To learn more about the OTLA programme please visit: <https://et-foundation.co.uk/supporting/professional-development/practitioner-led-development-and-research/otla/>.

For further information regarding the Shaping Success Action Research programme and this project go to <https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/otla-7/>.

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Final report - Using audio and embedded phonics in online Functional Skills and ESOL classes

Haringey ALS

This project aimed to extend the work of our OTLA 6 project (HALS, 2020), using phonics to support our English classes. All lessons were delivered online. We found that ESOL learners and Functional Skills English learners benefitted from the use of audio and embedded phonics in the classroom.

Summary

Haringey Adult Learning Service (HALS) is a Local Authority service for learners aged 19+. The service runs programmes in the areas of Functional Skills, ESOL, Well-Being, Career Development and Family Learning. Since March 2020 all learning has taken place online due to the COVID-19 pandemic. All learning offered is mapped to the priorities of the Local Authority.

HALS took part in an OTLA 6 Post-16 Phonics project. The intent of the OTLA 7 project was to use audio as a key tool to further embed phonics into our Functional Skills English lessons and our ESOL spelling and grammar workshops.

It was also hoped that good practice in this project would be shared with a partnership organisation, Islington Adult and Community Learning Service.

The project lead (who also teaches Functional Skills English) collaborated in this research with an ESOL tutor and a volunteer who assists with ESOL lessons.

Rationale

Our OTLA 6 project utilised phonics approaches to address under-performance in our Functional Skills English lessons, and spelling, punctuation and grammar were identified as particular barriers to success. Designed to build confidence, study skills and grit in learners with low literacy levels, the project secured improved achievement and engagement. However, as the project was relatively time-limited, there were limitations on the number of tutors involved and, therefore, there was room for further development in terms of the impact across the service. However, an unanticipated finding was the high level of engagement, interest and achievement from ESOL learners and, therefore, we wanted to build on this and continue the good practice identified in OTLA 6.

COVID-19 has entrenched existing inequalities and created additional barriers for learners with low level literacy skills. Many of our learners, across Functional Skills English classes and ESOL classes, struggle with reading and spelling and also have poor digital skills. These difficulties can negatively impact many areas of their lives and can often be a barrier to passing their courses and progressing. These are the issues that we wanted to address.

Approach

The majority of the lessons were delivered online. This brought many challenges such as access to devices, connectivity issues and poor digital skills for the majority of the cohort. However, HALS started teaching online in March 2020, prior to the project starting, so tutors and some learners already had some experience of learning online.

Early on in the project we identified *The Drop-in Series* by Frances Woodward (2021), a set of decodable readers for adults, that formed the basis for the majority of the teaching and learning in ESOL lessons and some Entry Level lessons. These readers are very simple stories for adults which are usually used in structured and sequential phonics lessons but we found them useful in our embedded phonics and mixed-methods approaches.

They were used:

- in class to read for meaning and decode unfamiliar words
- for independent study to listen and track text and to underpin pronunciation for learners with additional primary languages
- as homework to write sentences using words from texts which all contained the same sound such as /ae/ in 'say', 'cake', 'table', 'pain' etc
- in subsequent lesson spelling tests based on words and sounds from text
- in ESOL lessons for writing stories inspired by the audio.

The use of audio was central to this. The readers were made into audio using PowerPoint and learners were asked to listen and read along with the text in their own time. This approach proved so popular that learners asked for it to be applied to other resources. For instance, the Entry level 2 spelling list was broken down into sections and audio was added. (Appendix 2).

Teachers used phonics approaches as a springboard for improved reading, spelling, writing, language acquisition and to achieve accreditation in Functional Skills English. The different approaches included One-to-Many word sorting and word stretching from *Post-16 Phonics Approaches: A Toolkit* (ETF, 2021) and others that had been developed by HALS during OTLA 6.

- One-to-Many word sorting activities were key. For example, after reading a text, learners would be tasked with finding all of the words containing the <ea> grapheme and sorting them into a table according to the sound they made in the word. This helped learners to notice the different sounds that are commonly spelled <ea> such as 'bread', 'great' and 'to read'. This process was used for many other graphemes, including <ough>. (Appendix 3)
- Word-stretching activities helped learners to build their vocabulary and notice patterns for spelling. For example, 'fun' became 'funny' and then 'funniest' and 'dirt' became 'dirty' and then 'dirtiest'.

The English and ESOL teams worked together from the onset of the project to provide a two-pronged approach to delivering phonics. In English classes, phonics was embedded from the initial assessment stage and continued throughout the teaching of courses. A spelling diagnostic was introduced in the first week of teaching. It was a test based on 'difficult' words such as homophones and those containing digraphs or silent letters. Results of tests identified which graphemes to concentrate on.

Phonics was applied based on need and not imposed on learners who did not have spelling issues. To this end, flipped learning was used partially in lessons for some learners, whilst others concentrated on phonics spelling and reading strategies.

In ESOL lessons, a greater emphasis was put on pronunciation and reading fluency and the audio resources helped to model good practice in this. This was used in conjunction with resources to support the learning of spelling through phonics activities like sorting the various spellings of a sound. See Appendix 4 for our lesson on ways of spelling the sound /oe/. Digital learning was embedded throughout, with learners expected to use links to websites, such as Edmodo, in their learning.

Learners enjoyed these activities and said they found them useful. The image below shows part of a lesson evaluation form.

<p style="text-align: center;">ESOL SKILLS FOR LIFE AND WORK - ENTRY 3</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Working with vocabulary lists - Learner Evaluation</p> <p>Name: H</p> <p>Date: 21/9/2020</p> <p>What did you like about the lesson?</p> <p>The lesson guided me to understand better the words syllables .</p> <p>Breaking down the words make it more easy to pronounce and spelling .</p>

A holistic approach was also taken in the English department where learners were encouraged to think not just of the sounds in a word, but also what the word meant, what its purpose was in the text, and also to think about how the spelling of a word impacts on its word class.

In class, phonics was delivered alongside grammar activities and other spelling strategies such as 'i before e' and 'silent letters'. Phonics was embedded into most lesson activities. For example, after reading through extracts or doing spelling tests, the teacher would always ask the learners what they noticed about the spelling patterns. In a lesson, where learners were practising writing out the numbers from one to ten, they said they found 'six' and 'ten' easy to spell (because they were phonetically predictable). They also noticed that 'five' and 'nine' both contained the

/ie/ sound spelled using the split digraph <i-e>. Making these links aided their spelling. All learners said that 'eight' was the hardest to spell, but they recognised that it was a homophone with 'ate'. These strategies also served as a springboard to other things such as:

- enhanced digital literacy as learners were regularly asked to use emailed hyperlinks (for example)
- better grammatical awareness
- improved knowledge of homophones

Professional learning: Evidence of changes in teaching, learning and assessment practices

The teachers involved in the project have a better understanding of strategies that help their learners, particularly:

- who benefits from phonics approaches
- how phonics can be embedded in lessons
- the benefits of audio for language acquisition and spelling

In the process of the research project we also discovered the benefits of writing activities which are inspired by stories or things that are meaningful to the learners. You can see acrostic poems based on learner names in Appendix 6.

The teachers also have a renewed understanding of the importance of adult learners having access to independent learning so they can learn at their own pace and access developmental resources. Digital resources (links to websites) and audio tools have been invaluable. These were discovered due to the sudden, necessary move to online learning but, nevertheless, they are learning points that we will carry forward even if we move back to face-to-face teaching.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

The anticipated collaboration with Islington ACL did not take place due to the constraints of the pandemic. However, within our own organisation cross-curricula working between the ESOL and English departments did take place as a result of working on the project. This is a significantly positive outcome of the project because of the diverse backgrounds of learners attending courses. In essence, English classes are made up mainly of previous ESOL learners. In a class of 14 learners, it is not unusual to have 10 learners with a different primary language. Therefore, when effective collaboration takes place between the two departments, learners benefit from two distinct skill sets.

The project lead held regular monthly meetings to discuss the progress of the project and also delivered joint training sessions. Initially the training sessions were open to all staff. However, later training sessions were targeted at ESOL tutors. The reason for this was twofold: interest in the project from ESOL tutors was greater and the size of ESOL provision at HALS far exceeds the English provision and therefore the need was greater.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

Learners were very enthusiastic about audio. They said:

"I can listen and practice when my children are in bed."

"It helps me pronounce the words and then I can spell them."

Three of the four learners in the Entry Level class had English as an additional language, so words had to be decoded. For example, in a lesson where we were looking at split digraphs, a learner questioning the meaning of the word 'fake' led to a discussion on 'fake news' see Appendix 5. This showed how using a phonics approach to decode words can be empowering. The learner chose to use this word in a sentence and, although the spelling and word order is unclear, she felt confident enough to tackle the complex concept of 'fake news'. This is also a good example of how phonics works with an understanding of 'adult literacy as social practice' (Papen, 2005). The phonics activities led to real-world discussions, rather than just being spelling drill activities that learners may have found boring.

The audio Entry Level 2 spelling lists were divided into sections and turned into audio PowerPoints. The learners not only found the words easier to spell but, as context was added in the case of homophones, they also gained greater understanding of the meaning of words (Appendix 2). The audio decodable readers were also used as writing prompts. The Entry Level 2 Functional Skills writing paper contains lots of instructions which learners felt overwhelmed by. They found it easier to write after using the decodable readers as a prompt. All learners achieved their Entry level 2 writing exam on their first attempt. Writing took place in every session using decodable readers with the result that learners were less intimidated by the writing exam. See Appendix 9, where the learner's fantastic progress over time is evident.

In English lessons, the use of phonics strategies was taught alongside word classes and learners were encouraged to think about a word's 'function' in a sentence. For instance, the words 'bought' and 'brought' both contain the same phoneme and grapheme <ough> but they are also both irregular verbs which added greater depth to the lesson.

ESOL learners found rhyme quite liberating because they were able to discover a wealth of new words which have the same sound at the end. Language acquisition was a key outcome from the project and increased confidence in learners' spoken as well as written abilities. An example of one learner's poem can be seen below and further examples can be seen in Appendix 6.

My poem,
The Trip by HAD

Travelling to different place, ^{its's} its very hard during this case
Quarantine and several tests
Waiting for the results
^{it's} its the most difficult ^{quest} quiz
Your heart jumps from your chest
Waiting for the negative test
These days will pass in the end
So just relax and try to mend.

Learning from this project

A key finding of the project is that phonics approaches, when delivered strategically, can have a very positive impact on learners' spelling, reading fluency and language acquisition.

Learners benefit greatly when phonics is embedded into their regular curriculum. Phonics delivery does more than just help learners spell words. This is crucial otherwise phonics can be imposed on learners that do not need it. This is also emphasised in the Post-16 Phonics Toolkit, (ETF 2019, p.15). Tutors need to see phonics as a valuable tool that can be used, as opposed to yet another subject to teach, (ETF 2019, p.13).

The sharing of phonics resources that work is important, as tutors may not have the time or the confidence to make their own. However, the biggest challenge is to find websites that refer to graphemes rather than letter names. Two excellent resources for this are <https://www.clarospeakweb.com/phoneme/> and <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english> which includes both audio and video pronunciation from British English speakers.

Using audio as a teaching tool gives learners agency over their learning. It was initially thought that audio would be a good tool to use online as it provided repetition of sounds. However, it emerged that learners liked audio because it gave them greater access to learning.

Audio also helped learners with concept checking. Retention can be an issue with learners with low levels of literacy and they found audio PowerPoints could be listened to again to consolidate their learning.

Going forward, we will be consistently using audio and embedding phonics into our practice and we now have a bank of phonics resources and approaches that we can use. This will also be useful for personalising learning. For example, in the future we would feel comfortable knowing when certain resources and approaches may help address the challenges a particular learner has, even if they are studying Functional Skills Level 2, for example, rather than an Entry Level qualification. As a result of the successful outcomes of the project, HALS have also now created a new course. It is

a non-accredited course for people who have significant challenges with reading or spelling but have a good level of spoken English. The number of learners on the course doubled in the first six weeks and quickly reached capacity so we are hoping to be able to extend the provision to support even more learners in the future.

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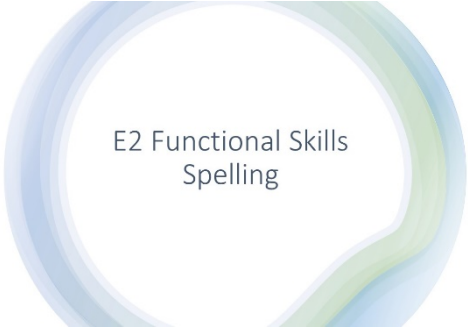
Appendix 1 – The project team

Project Role	Name	Job Role
Project Lead	Samantha Hobbs	Tutor
Deputy Lead	Melanie Johnson	Tutor
Project team	Jane Waghorn	Volunteer
Project Mentor	Kirsty Powell (ccConsultancy)	
Research Group Lead	Tricia Millar (That Reading Thing)	

Appendix 2 – The Entry Level 2 spelling list

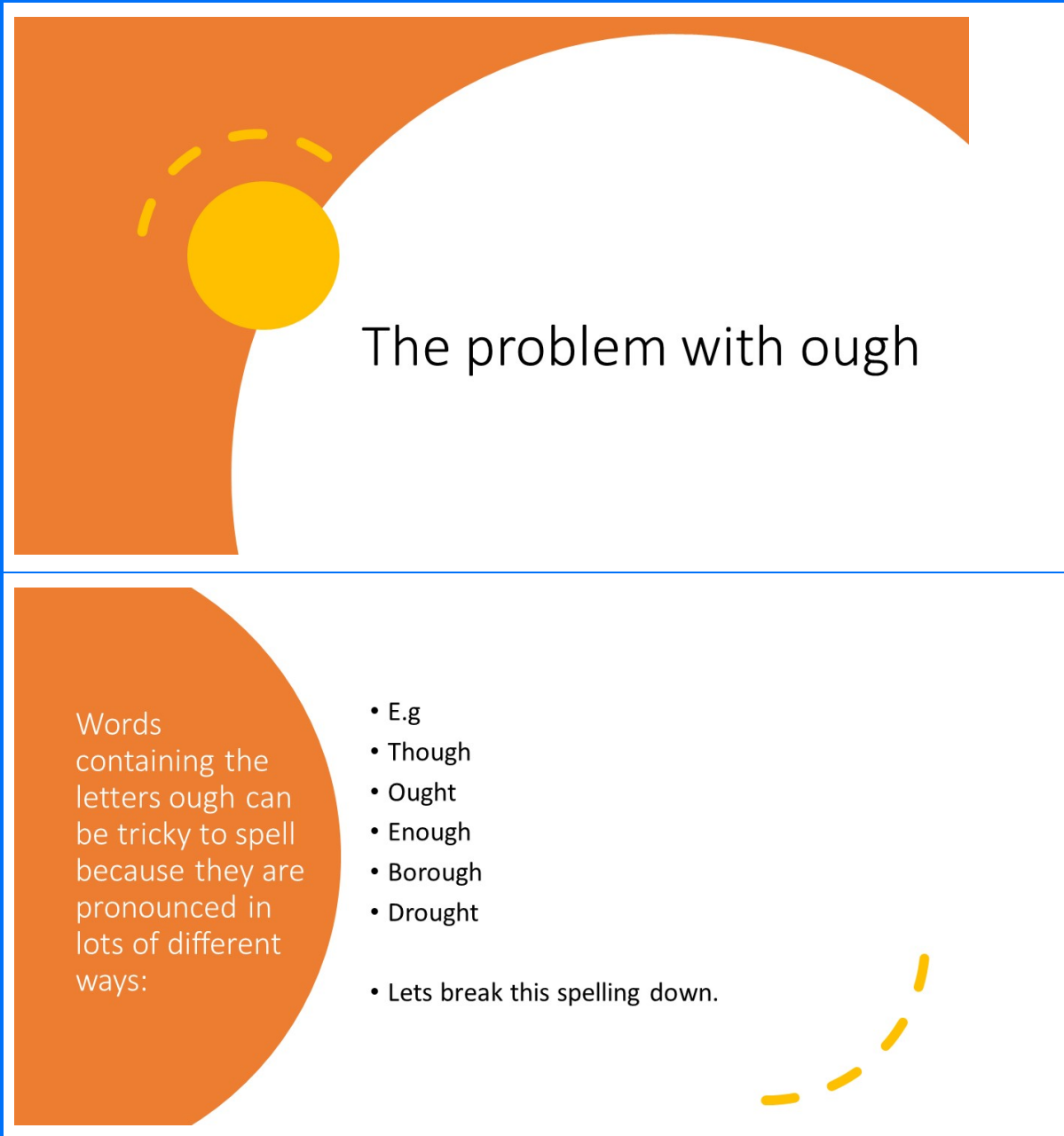
PowerPoint presentation with audio:

<https://youtu.be/7rxoCBnVcQg>

 <p>E2 Functional Skills Spelling</p>	<p>Practice these words:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Listen to the sounds• Read the words aloud• Practice writing the words.
<p>add _____ address _____ age _____ always _____ among _____ animal _____ answer _____ anything _____ arrive _____</p>	<p>bare _____ bear _____ beautiful _____ behind _____ believe _____ better _____ blew _____ blue _____ break _____</p>
<p>breathe _____ build _____ business _____ busy _____</p>	<p>Double letters</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• There are five words in the list that have double letters. Can you find them?

Appendix 3 – The problem with <ough>

PowerPoint presentation.



The problem with ough

Words containing the letters ough can be tricky to spell because they are pronounced in lots of different ways:

- E.g
- Though
- Ought
- Enough
- Borough
- Drought
- Lets break this spelling down.

Ough –
sounds like
so

- Though
- Although
- Dough
- furlough



Ough sounds
like stuff

- Tough
- Rough
- enough



Sounds like
caught

- Bought
- Brought
- Ought
- Fought
- Sought
- thought



More ough words:

- Thorough
- borough
- Ough sounds like out:
- Drought.
- Ough sounds like off
- cough



If you want to find more ough words click on the link below:

- <https://www.morewords.com/contains/ough>



Appendix 4 – Phonics activity – sort by grapheme

Sorting task

Look at the words in the box below (taken from the story). They all contain the long 'O' sound. Sort these words according to the spelling (for example- just o, o-e. ow and oa). The examples **in blue** have been done for you.

+

1) home	2) road	3) knows	4) groans	5) so	6) Oh
7) alone	8) no	8) COVID -19	9) whole	10) boat	11) grows

□

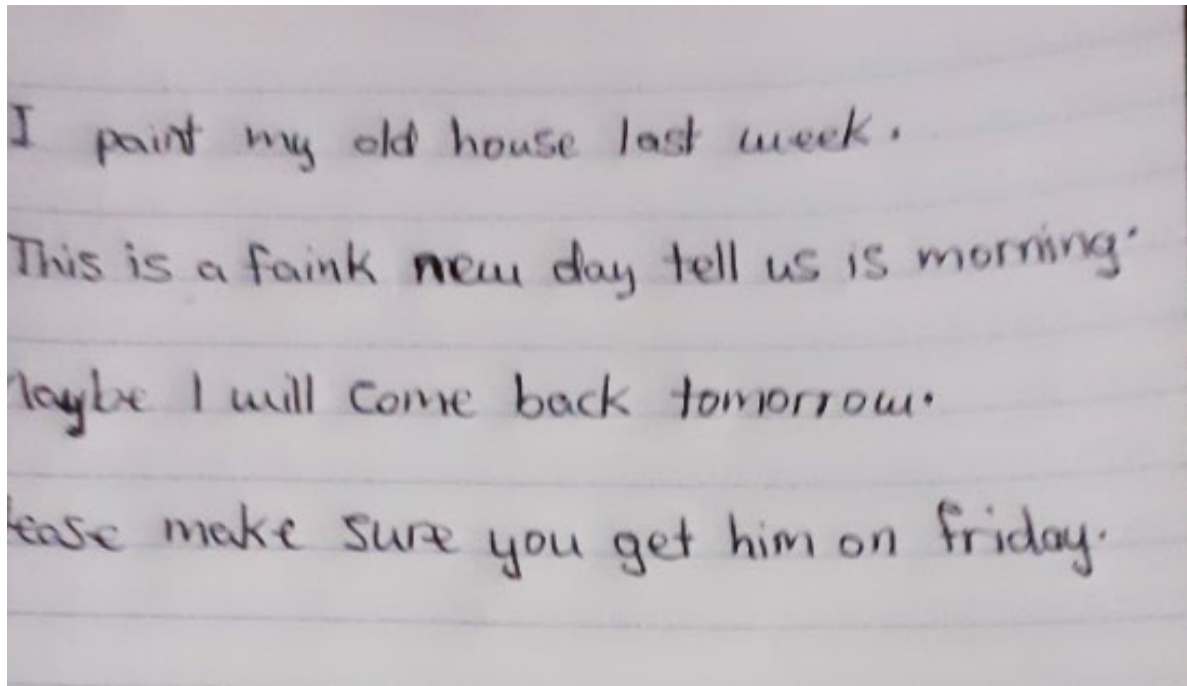
-o-	o-e	-ow-	-oa-
so	home	knows	groans

Now write 3 sentences using some of the words from the box. Post your answers on **Edmodo**.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Appendix 5 – Literacy as social practice from a lesson on split digraphs

On line 2, the learner can be seen writing 'this is fake news because they are telling us it is the morning.'



Appendix 6 – Evidence of progress in ESOL lessons

A poem

By NL

No matter what happens

I will never complain

No matter who stands on my way

A day always start again

The image shows a page of handwritten notes on lined paper. At the top, there is a mind map with a central node '2 - Subject: Florenta' and three branches: '1 - Family - time - love', '3 - Life - children', and '3 - Elegant - wealth - flower'. Below the mind map, the text 'Good plan!' is written. At the bottom, there is a poem written in red and blue ink. The poem consists of seven lines: 'Full of love', 'Love family. favourite', 'Orchids my favorite flower.', 'Games with my kids.', 'Elegant', 'Remember the positive things.', 'Time is wealth.', and 'And live a life filled with love!'. To the right of the third line of the poem, the text 'UK spelling - favourite' is written.

1 - Family - time
- love.

2 - Subject:
Florenta.

3 - Life - children

3 - Elegant - wealth -
- flower.

Good plan!

Full of love.
Love family. favourite
Orchids my favorite flower. UK spelling - favourite
Games with my kids.
Elegant
Remember the positive things.
Time is wealth.
And live a life filled with love!

Blessed and lucky

Enthusiastick to learn new things

Never stop is my motto

Easy-going and kind in my way

Do better is my creed

Energy and positive attitude

To think before to judge

Touchy and

Absent mind somethimes|

Just a simple man.
One ^{who} it is ^{loves} love life.
Stronger than a tree
Ethics and generous.

My poem,
The Trip by HAD

Travelling to different place, ^{its's} very hard during this case
Quarantine and several tests
Waiting for the results
^{It's} the most difficult ^{quest} quiz
Your heart jumps from your chest
Waiting for the negative test
These days will pass in the end
So just relax and try to mend.

A Mystery in the Airport

She was looking around in the airport ^{at} to all those scary eyes during this pandemic, everyone is moving fast trying not to contact any one. And there a huge queue waiting for COVID 19 vaccine, people pushing others everyone trying to take the chance and have the vaccine. And I'm here standing alone looking everywhere ^{scary} scary, suddenly a strange man appears in front of me, he give me a flower with a ^{notebook} note book ^{Not} knowing who ^{was} is he ^{as his face was covered?} with the ^{cover} cover in his face. I tried to follow him, but I couldn't he just disappear. ^{ed} Then I looked at th^e ^{notebook} notebook, I open it and I saw the strangest words ever written to me.

Hopless: Short story summary

A woman in life thinks she has lost everything herself her child and her money. Everything in this life seems hopeless ~~to find herself~~ but at the end of the tunnel, she ^{at a} looks ~~a~~ white ^{back} black ground, which gives her ~~hope~~ ^{hope} for life so she manages to find the strength within herself to continue living.

hopeless

Short story summary:

Behind her beauty

Eva is the most beautiful woman ^a ⁱⁿ of the company.

An elegant woman with gold hair and delicate white skin.

Her innocence won the appreciation of the boss from the ^{very} first days.

No one thinks it hides a horrible past. ^{she?}

She continues to display her feminine courage and ^{strength} every day, but an anonymous letter completely destroys her life.

Wanstead flat

Yesterday I looked out of my large sash window that overlooks Wanstead flat. It was around dusk and I could see the outline of a man writing furiously in a notepad. He kept looking up at my flat. Oddly he was wearing sunglasses even though the sun was setting. With my curiosity aroused I decided to grab my keys and mobile and leave through the side exit. That way I could creep around and observe the man and see what he intended to do next.

neighbour = UK spelling
paralysed

I hide in one of the building corners and watched him. I noticed that he wasn't looking at my apartment, he was staring at my neighbour's flat. After a while, I heard their laughs, and they appeared in front of the main gate of the building heading to their car.

When they left, he immediately jumped through the stairs and headed toward my neighbour's flat. The fear inside me paralysed my body that I couldn't move a muscle. After a couple of seconds, I gathered my strength and followed him carefully. He opened the door using his tools and went carefully inside, then immediately dialled the emergency number.

They ordered me to leave the place, that they will be here very soon. Of course one day my curiosity will lead me to the grave, so I stayed. Suddenly I heard his steps, I jumped to escape and hide behind one of the trees near the building. I saw him running holding a huge bag, but he suddenly stopped when he saw himself surrounded by police cars.

The man was arrested and the police car left. This put a smile on my face. Maybe I was in denial or disbelief about what had happened. I thought that curiosity sometimes is a good thing because, without it, my neighbours would have been robbed.

Excellent story!

Please review your errors



Comments
More work needed with:
- spelling difference British vs American

Appendix 7 – Teacher evaluation of ESOL writing lessons

A teacher's evaluation of the ESOL lesson about writing acrostic poems

1. How did learners respond? What difference did I see in them when working in this way?

I have introduced the idea of using poetry to improve spelling and writing for my E1-E3 learners. Learners were fascinated with the elements of a poem notably rhyme and were quite enthusiastic about trying to write a poem.

2. Did I see any specific improvements in terms of what learners could do when working in this way?

Some learners who find spelling and writing quite difficult, were very motivated to undertake the task. The activity was mainly done in class and I found the learners were able to work diligently to complete the task. As a result, some of the reluctant writers mentioned that they now don't mind being asked to write in class.

In addition, some learners were able to overcome their fears and start to develop ideas for their writing. It was amazing to see that how using a spider gram to organise their ideas gave their work meaning and structure around a specific theme. Moreover, learners found rhyme quite liberating because they were able to discover a wealth of new words which have the same sound at the end.

3. What new opportunities for learning did it present?

Using acrostic poetry writing presented opportunities for learning new spellings and is a creative fun way to improve writing. A similar activity can be used with non-fiction topics such as Tolerance, Diversity, Easter, Eid, Interviews and so forth.

4. What are the learners saying about it?

The learners loved the task! It was a great way to embed current learning like personality adjectives, grammar and phonics. This is the first writing task that I have ever given which was completed quite quickly with passion and creativity- they clearly felt more confident.

Appendix 8 – ESOL learner end of year feedback

End of year feedback from ESOL learners

Name: HAD

Date: June 2021

Case study: Learner Journey 2020-2021

Learner background information: (introduce yourself- in terms of country of origin, language, previous/current education)

My name is Hind and I'm from Iraq. My mother language is Arabic. I graduated as a Pharmacist with Bachelor's Degree. Although I have studied and had worked experience in the English language, I wasn't that fluent.

How has your writing, speaking, pronunciation and/or spelling improved over the academic year 2020-2021?

Joining ESOL courses and the Phonic Project has improved all my English skills, and I feel now I'm more confident with the English language.

What impact has your learning with HALS had on your studies, well-being, and educational prospects or opportunities? What are you doing now?

Being at HALS opened a lot of doors. Firstly, they broke the wall of fear and shyness and made me more confident to engage with the community. Secondly, They gave us a lot of volunteering and courses which made our skills and quality be at higher levels. Lastly, they made me realize that I got new skills I never discovered before which will make me think about different opportunities other than my field.

What are your future plans? What would you like to do or study in September 2021?

My plan for the future is to continue to the advanced level and try to write more and more, and maybe in the future, I could release a book under my name.

Name: IT

Date: June 2021

Case study: Learner Journey 2020-2021

Learner background information: (introduce yourself- in terms of country of origin, language, previous/current education)

I'm from Romania and my first language is Romanian language. I finished high school there and then I came to England in 2015. Here I started an Esol course.

How has your writing, speaking, pronunciation and/or spelling improved over the academic year 2020-2021?

In this year I learned a lot of things. My writing, speaking, pronunciation and spelling have improved in all this time. It is now very easy for me to make a conversation or respond to emails /letters.

What impact has your learning with HALS had on your studies, well-being, and educational prospects or opportunities? What are you doing now?

For me this course had a huge impact because I felt I can continue my education, which I stopped a long time ago.

What are your future plans? What would you like to do or study in September 2021?

I have started a course at the University of West London.
My course is Business and Entrepreneurship.
In September I will continue my education.

Name: MDeA

Date: June 2021

Case study: Learner Journey 2020-2021

Learner background information: (introduce yourself- in terms of country of origin, language, previous/current education)

Hi, My name is Maria EDeA. I come from Venezuela but I am Portuguese too. I speak Spanish and Portuguese and at the moment I´m learning English with HALS.

In my country I did study some English in high school but American English and I hardly ever practiced listening or pronunciation. It is a bit complicated for me now but it is a big opportunity to learn.

How has your writing, speaking, pronunciation and/or spelling improved over the academic year 2020-2021?

I feel I have improved in about 50% and my vocabulary has increased too. Of course I need more practice and to study a lot.

What impact has your learning with HALS had on your studies, well-being, and educational prospects or opportunities? What are you doing now?

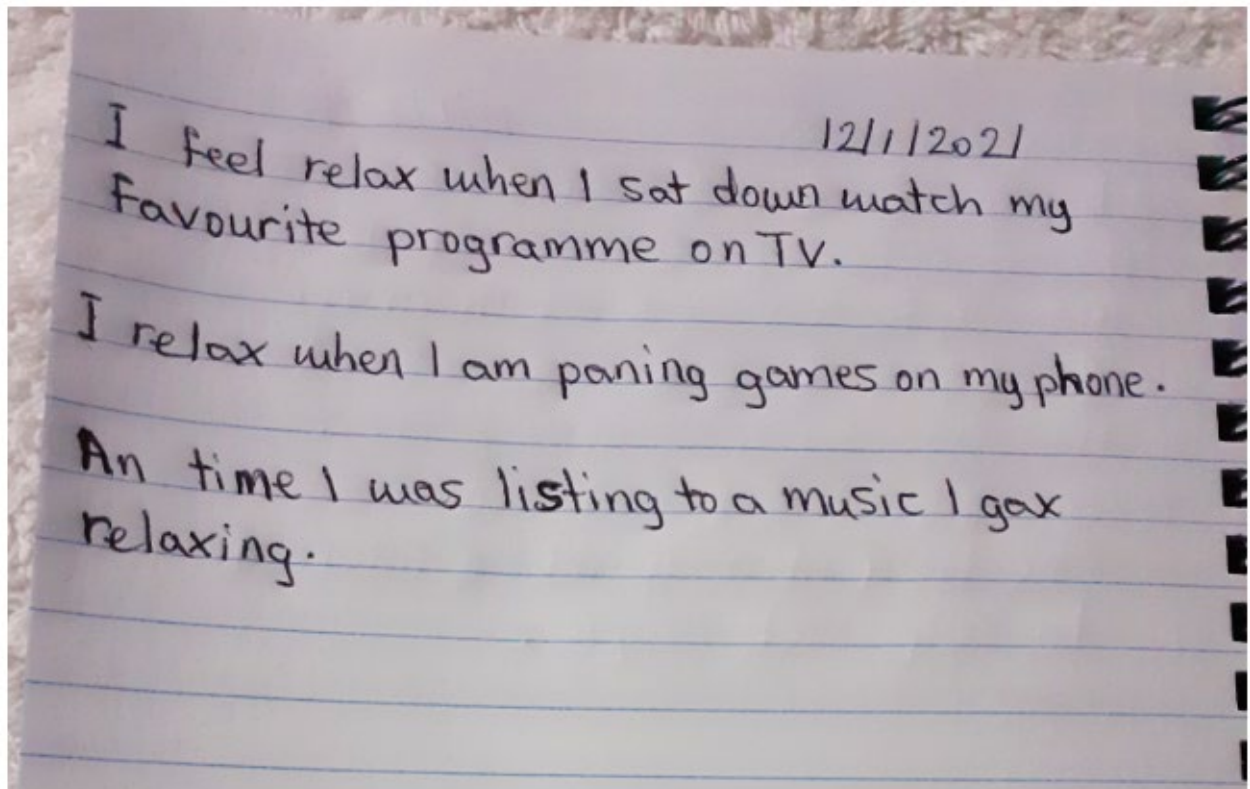
I feel that HALS has helped me a lot. I'm more confident to speak with other people. Now I can go at the hospital, pharmacy or supermarket and I am more confident to talk. It is very important for me.

What are your future plans? What would you like to do or study in September 2021?

I would like continue study to improve more my listening and pronunciation. I need to have better communication skills so I can get a good job.

Appendix 9 – A learner's work - beginning and end of year - Entry Level 2

The learner passed their exam on the first sitting.



to join a cooking club.

Fill in the form.

Cooking club	
Full name	S. [redacted]
House/flat number	[redacted]
Street	[redacted] Road
Town	London
Postcode	[redacted] RP
Email	[redacted] Com

Please write **four** sentences to tell us:

- what you like to eat
- what you want to learn to cook
- who you want to cook for
- what day you can come.

I like to eat rice and chicken.

I want to learn how to bake a cake.

I want to cook for my friend.

I want you to come on Monday.

OUR PARTNERS



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