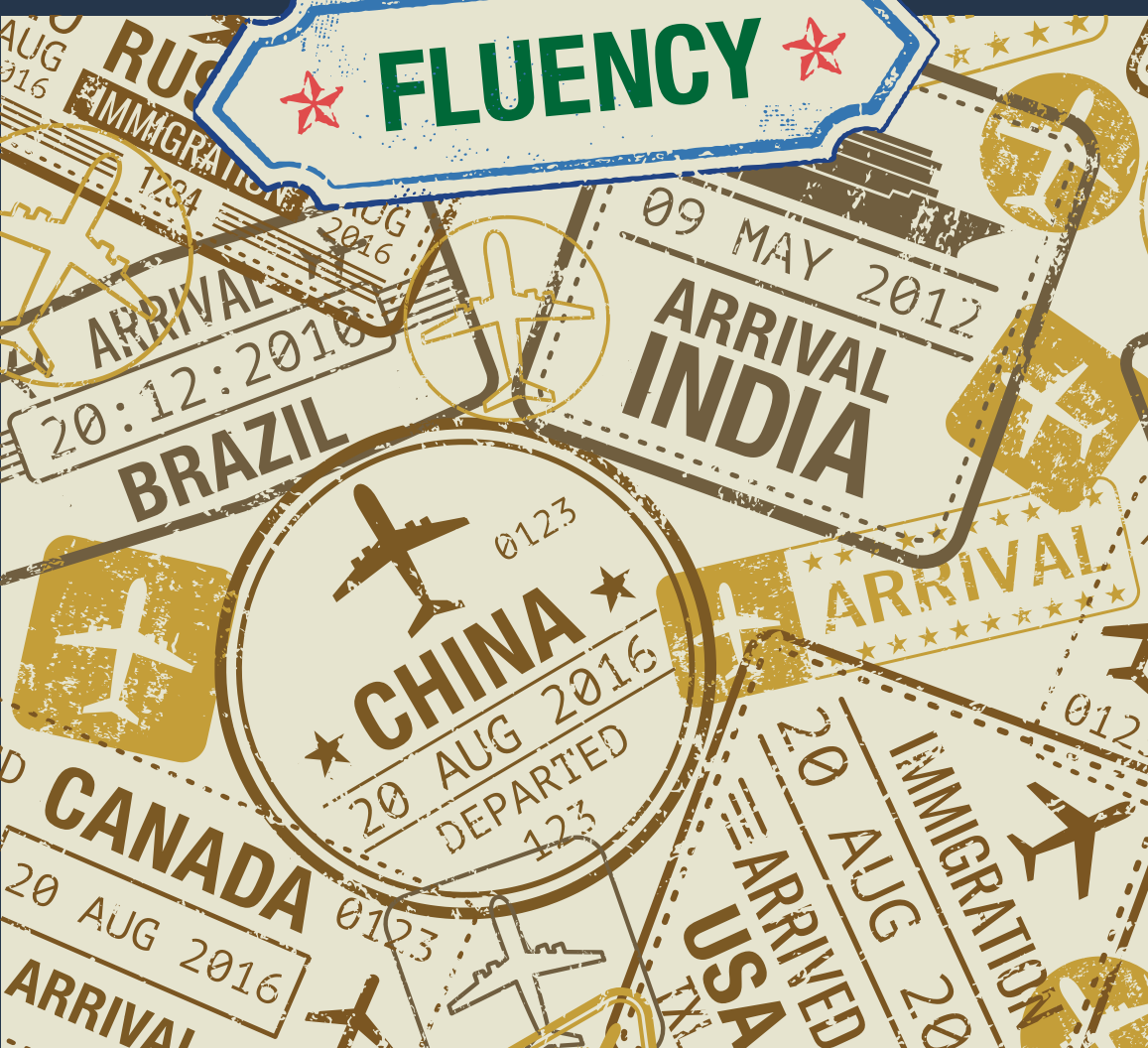


Backpacker's Guide to Teaching English



★ **FLUENCY** ★



JUDY THOMPSON



SEP 2010
DEPARTURE

RUSSIA
IMMIGRATION

1234

20
AUG
2016

15 DEC
2010

ARRIVAL

0:12:2010

09 MAY

ARRIVAL
INDIA

BRAZIL



0123

CHINA
20 AUG 2016
DEPARTED
123

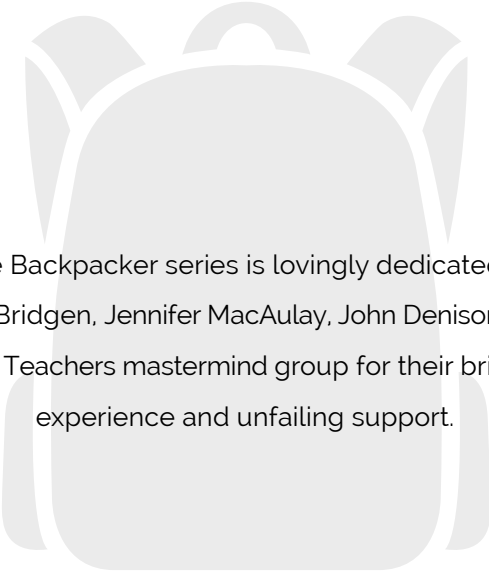
CANADA

AUG 2016

ARRIVAL
★ ABCD

USA ARRIVED





The Backpacker series is lovingly dedicated to
Noreen Bridgen, Jennifer MacAulay, John Denison and my
Radical Teachers mastermind group for their brilliance,
experience and unfailing support.



JUDY THOMPSON

Backpacker's Guide to Teaching English



All rights reserved. This work is the intellectual property of the author. This book contains material protected under International and Federal Copyright Laws and Treaties. Any unauthorized reprint or use of this material is prohibited. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the author, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other non-commercial uses permitted by copyright law.

For permission requests, write to the author at
judy@thompsonlanguagecenter.com

Thompson Language Center
Niagara Falls, Canada

Copyright © 2018 by Judy Thompson. Second Edition 2021.

Developed in Canada

ISBN: 978-0-9812058-6-1

CIP available upon request.

Every effort has been made to trace ownership of all copyrighted material and to secure permission from copyright holders. In the event of any question arising as to the use of any material, we would be pleased to make the necessary corrections in future printings.

Edited by: Noreen Brigden and Jennifer MacAulay

Cover design by: McCorkindale Advertising & Design

Layout and Production by: McCorkindale Advertising & Design

Printed in USA (subject to change)



Contents

Fluency	7
Introduction	8
The Purpose of this Book	9
1) Is the Learner Ready?	20
2) How to Teach Brain Leap	27
3) Non-Verbal Communication	42
My Story	11
Backstory on English	12
Chapter 1:	
How to Tell when a Learner is Ready for Fluency Skills	20
From the Bottom Up	22
Chapter 2:	
How to Teach Brain Leap	27
The Gateway — Humor	28
And then There's Innuendo	41
Chapter 3:	
Non-Verbal Communication	42
The Four New Elements of Fluency	50
Conclusion	55



SEP 2010
DEPARTURE

15 DEC
2010

RUSSIA
IMMIGRATION

1234

20
AUG
2016

09 MAY

ARRIVAL
0:12:2016



ARRIVAL
INDIA

BRAZIL



0123

CHINA
20 AUG 2016
DEPARTED
123



CANADA

AUG 2016

ARRIVAL

USA
ARRIVED

20



Backpacker's Guide to Teaching English



Book Three Fluency By Judy Thompson

Fluency is in expressions, humor, nuance and the freedom to learn from mistakes.

Circumstances create informal English instructors that the English as a Second Language (ESL) industry calls Backpackers. Although the term was originally coined for travelers, it can apply to volunteers, refugee hosts, any people with no special teacher training who find themselves in a position to assist non-native speakers improve their English but with no idea how to do it. While coaching with no formal training sounds like a brazen, formidable task, it isn't. It's a snap. And having no special education for it is a blessing in disguise. Judy Thompson



Introduction

English is abstract. English learners need to understand that there is *another level of meaning* operating most of the time. *Red chair*, *red sweater* and *red door* are things colored red; *red tape*, *red eye* and *red letter* are something else entirely (bureaucracy, overnight flight and good news). When a co-worker asks, *Are you going straight home?* — they want a ride. When a teenager asks, *What are you doing tonight?* — they want the car; And when a man asks a woman, *Would you like to go for coffee?* — he is hoping for a whole lot more. In this book, uncertified teachers learn how to train non-native English speakers in a high level of English fluency where meaning is most often a function of what **you don't say**.

The Backpacker's Edge

Traditional language education is driven by the false pretence that more information provides more value — more is better. In terms of English as a Second Language, particularly spoken English, nothing could be further from the truth. It turns out that preoccupation with details (grammar, for example) *prevents* students from using English. **Details impede, patterns facilitate.** Patterns are the way humans learn. Using the old car-analogy, students have been served up years of labelling engine parts (and Newton's Laws of Motion) when all they needed to know was **gas, brake, left** and **right**.

Herein lies the **Backpacker's Edge**. Backpackers are unencumbered by the ESL, ELL, EFL whatever waning *way we have always done it*. Their minds and attitudes are open and eager to learn about patterns and provide learners with the roadmap for practicing their way from tentative, mistake-filled utterances to competence and beyond. The Backpacker series is about the simple patterns learners need to know for **pronunciation, conversation** and ultimately, **fluency**. By attaching new information to

what students already know, the learning process is accelerated. It's not magic. In order to speak English, learners still have to crawl before they can walk. Crawling is in *Book One*, walking is in *Book Two*, and this volume is about running.

The Purposes of this Book

As the unspoken and unwritten rules of oral communication are neither spoken nor written, they are tricky to teach. In *You Don't Say*, Book Three, are the tools for identifying:

- 1** **When** a learner is ready for fluency training beyond the nuts and bolts of conversation
- 2** **How** to teach the *brain leap* required for expressions, humor and *the other level*
- 3** **What** messages are hidden in non-verbal cues, gestures, voice qualities and culture

You are about to learn more about your mother tongue than you could ever imagine. Awareness is the beginning of effective teaching. You can't teach well if you have no idea how you unconsciously manage English yourself. The moment you are clear about how English works is when you can show someone else how simple English really is.



My Story

I grew up on a farm, graduated from University with a B.A. in English, got married, raised my children on a farm, eventually went back to school for TESL (Teacher of English as a Second Language) certification, landed a plum job with a Board of Education outside of Toronto, blah, blah, blah. It was a pretty straight curve. My whole world turned upside down in a single moment when I ran into a former student. Manuel was a physician from South America. The political winds changed in his country, and he was forced to emigrate. It was his goal to be a doctor again in Canada. He enrolled in Adult ESL classes. Manuel was a model student: motivated, smart, popular, professional. He breezed through the intermediate curriculum in my class and rose quickly through the ranks, graduating in record time. One day, in front of the library on my way to work, I was delighted to run into Manuel.

As Manuel shared with me what he was doing, I began to feel sick; the longer he talked, the sicker I felt. He was not working in the medical field. He was cleaning office buildings at night — a toilet cleaner. Worse still was that he spoke exactly the same way he did the first day he came to my class. I assumed he would be taught to speak English in some part of his formal ESL training. I was wrong. Although I had no functional training in it, teaching speaking was on me, and I had dropped the ball. **Manuel would never be a doctor in Canada because I hadn't taught him to speak English.** In that moment, I decided no student was ever going to leave my English class unable to speak English confidently with anyone, on any topic. It was a game changer.

I wasn't alone. That was 1997. Testament to my fellow teachers recognising that there were no materials or training to help ESL students was the small fortune in big-name, dust-covered grammar tomes that rested peacefully in the reference room at the Board of Ed. While focusing on grammar makes life easy for teachers and administration, it doesn't help students speak English. This wasn't fine with me, and when I shared my commitment to teaching speaking with my site supervisor, I was invited to leave my plum adult ESL job. Making a difference mattered more to me than that beautiful paycheck, job security, benefits and pension. Damn.











With the guidance of pioneers like Lydia Aiello and Kathryn Brillinger, I learned all I could about teaching pronunciation until I developed a first-rate speaking course of my own. Based on patterns, not details, my system is so simple and so inclusive that anyone who can read can learn or teach it. In 2006, a top-notch college hired me to teach my own program, *Speaking Canadian English*. It was a great success. (The Backpacker series is the Coles notes from that program.) In 2009, I published the course textbook, ***English is Crazy, Students are Not***, and joined LinkedIn. The rest, as they say, is Herstory.




Backstory on English

English is tricky. The mechanics of written English and spoken English are as different as night and day. I only teach speaking. When you look at the following **Roadmap to Fluency**, you'll eventually notice grammar isn't there. Think about it. Grammar study is not necessary when first language is acquired. What is on the map is the framework, the scaffolding, for all English oral interactions. There are six fundamentals for speaking English that are always true – with no exceptions. None of them is grammar.

♦ **The Roadmap to Fluency** ♦

Pronunciation	Conversation			Fluency	
1 Sounds	2 Words	3 Sentences	4 Linking	5 Expressions	6 Non-Verbal
<p>English Phonetic Alphabet</p> <p>24 CONSONANTS</p> <p>18 familiar bdfghj klmnp stvwyz</p> <p>6 new Sh, Ch, TH, Th, Ng, Zh</p> <p>16 VOWELS</p> 	<p>Syllables</p> <p>1 vowel sound per Syllable</p>  <p>Stress</p> <p>1 Syllable in a word is...</p> <p>longer louder higher ...than the rest</p> <p>baNAna</p> <p>Schwa</p> <p>Tiny 'uh' sound in unstressed syllables</p> <p>buhNAnuh</p>	<p>Important Words</p> <p>CONTENT nouns verbs adjectives adverbs negatives</p> <p>Unimportant Words</p> <p>FUNCTION all others – grammar words</p>  <p>uh CUP uh COffee</p> <p>Pausing</p> <p>Pause every few Content Words</p> <p>Content Words + Pausing = Intelligibility</p>	<p>A Listening Tool</p> <p>CC bus stop bu_stop</p>  <p>CV tur_n off tur_n off</p> <p>VV I am I_yam</p> <p>Start words with consonants</p>  <p>Can I have a bit of egg? Ca ni hava bi da vegg?</p>	<p>English is Idiomatic</p>  <p>blue moon (rarely)</p>  <p>red eye (night flight)</p> <p>Learners Need to Ask</p> <p>What is the expression for that?</p>  <p>When pigs fly... (no chance)</p>	<p>Tone of Voice</p> <p>High-positive Low-negative</p> <p>Notes</p>  <p>what TIME is it?</p> <p>Gestures</p> <p>Body Language is 80% of the Message</p> 

©Judy Thompson, 2009
♦ **Changing the way the world learns English** ♦
TLC THOMPSON LANGUAGE CENTER 

It's no accident that the progression from **sound** — what kind and how many, to **words** and the value of word stress, to **sentences** and important words, to **linking** and the flow of conversation — follows the same natural progression as first language acquisition. In fact, at every opportunity, the Backpacker's system harvests what is the same from a learner's first language to facilitate speaking English. Ultimately, any two languages are more the same than different, and there is plenty to salvage from every learner's first language.

As **sounds** in Column 1 are the foundation of any spoken language, so *Book One, Cracking the Code*, is for English **pronunciation** and using the English Phonetic Alphabet (EPA) to represent them. *Book Two, Need for Speed*, is about **conversation**, how words are pronounced, which ones are important, and how they run together in predictable places. Columns 2, 3 and 4 in the *Roadmap* are all about words and conversation. Understanding how words work in conversation facilitates **faster listening**. The practical and technical aspects of spoken English are complete. Columns 1 to 4 contain the patterns learners need for successful conversations.

This book covers the last two columns on expressions and non-verbal communication. *Book Three* is on *Fluency* and the abstract nature of English, or what my students call *the other level*.

What do you Need English for?

If you are jumping into this speaking system for the first time here in *Book Three*, you need to know a few basics. Fluency is not for everyone. The first critical question for your students is finding out why they need to speak English? For an entry-level job, talking to their child's teacher, explaining their symptoms to a doctor, they need conversation skills to be able to talk to strangers. For professional school, corporate meetings and public speaking, learners want to be fluent. The foundation material in **sounds, words** and **sentences** is the same for all learners. *Most learners are happy and complete with the ability to understand others and chit chat confidently in any situation. If they need more, you are in the right place.*

Before we **assume** or make an **ass** of **u** and **me**, determine the level and needs of the student. The abstract skills addressed in this book might be too advanced for their needs.

*Notice how you just processed that **ass u me** double meaning? Somehow you detected something was up, looked at it a different way, and made an intellectual leap to understanding. This is the exact process required for fluency. To learn how to teach brain leap, stay tuned.*

It's on Learners

Whatever your students' level and whatever they need English for, learners should know they have enough information to speak English now. Context and body language drive basic conversation, not grammar or vocabulary. Improvement comes from *exposing themselves* to hundreds of hours of English, followed by *mistake-filled practice*. **Listening** or **watching without understanding** is the portal to fluency. Insist your students listen to at least 300 hours of normal English conversation, podcasts, songs, videos... — **without understanding** what is being said. This foundation work is totally on the learner, not the teacher. It pays big dividends, I promise.

Education has misled students into believing they need more and more and more instruction before they can begin to converse. This simply isn't true. In good faith, learners work towards some magical day in the future when they'll know enough English to start having perfect conversations. That day never arrives. It's a lucrative business model for schools, but it's a bad burn for students.

The Backpacker's Edge is the edge for learners too. You aren't going to bore them senseless with onerous, inconsequential details because you don't know any. This approach is different. You are going to **coach experiential learning** with the least amount of information possible in order to support learners' speaking by actually speaking. Yes, the book offers fascinating, important insights that will make students' experiences more fruitful, but any polyglot will tell you that language learners don't need teachers at all. Learners need to speak, make mistakes and improve their way to the level they chose to achieve. The Backpacker's series provides a roadmap of six principles that are always true and the guidance to coach learners to speak their way to fluency. Speaking is a skill, like playing the cello or riding a bicycle, speaking comes from speaking, not reading.

Why Don't you Speak English Now?

The second critical question you must ask your students (after *What do you want English for?*) is *Why don't you speak English now?* Pay attention to their answers. This is their dragon, and you have to slay it. Their answers fall into a surprisingly narrow range, none of which are real. Some will say they haven't studied enough. Bollocks! If they understood the question and formed an answer, they know enough. It's the *Wizard of Oz* effect — they can but don't know it.

The vast majority of learners cite some version of fear of making mistakes and/or selfconsciousness about their accent, which are versions of **reluctance to look foolish**. It's a human-being thing. Don't underestimate this progress killer. Studies show native English speakers would rather die than speak in public. Magnify that by a thousand, and you can begin to imagine the dread learners have for hearing their own voices speak English. Empathize but be firm. Build their program around their strengths, interests and what they can do. More and more information is not going to rid their fear of looking stupid, but the right kind of information significantly mitigates it. Ultimately, learners have to jump in despite of their fears.

Embarrassed is a Choice, Choose Something Else






My grandfather died when I was in high school. I remember feeling sad and going to the funeral expecting everyone to be sad because it was a funeral. I was shocked to find the full spectrum of human emotion in the room. Sad, mad, glad (emotions are all some versions of these) were all there. Some people were sad like me, but some were angry about some of his treatments, and some were glad he was no longer suffering. The situation didn't dictate emotions, the individuals did.

Emotions are choices. We think they are real and imposed on us by the events around us, but that isn't so. It is within our power to choose emotional responses. Since I learned I have power over my own reactions, I have often avoided feeling sad or embarrassed — not in a psychopathic way, but in a healthy way — by choosing something else. Professional speaking can be scary; choosing to be *excited* before a presentation is so much more empowering.

Tell your students the funeral story and encourage them to consider that embarrassment exists in their heads. Outside of their heads, native speakers are impressed by those learning to speak a second or third language (because English speakers barely speak one). Native speakers' experience of learners is awe. And native speakers think accents are sexy, not exactly the big problem learners hold their accents to be.

Learning to speak a new language is a clumsy process. Encourage students to be kind to themselves. They will stumble. No one is judging them as harshly as they judge themselves.

Throughout the messy process of slogging about, making mistakes, surviving small inconvenient daily humiliations, a novice's listening and speaking skills improve, their vocabulary and confidence build from incremental successes until they are ready to choose fluency training. This book shows you how to help them soar.

• The Roadmap to Fluency •			
Pronunciation	Conversation	Fluency	
		5 Expressions	6 Non-Verbal
		<p>English is Idiomatic</p>  <p>blue moon (rarely)</p>  <p>red eye (night flight)</p> <p>•</p> <p>Learners Need to Ask</p> <p>What is the expression for that?</p>  <p>When pigs fly... (no chance)</p>	<p>Tone of Voice</p> <p>High-positive Low-negative</p> <p>•</p> <p>Notes</p>  <p>what TIME is it?</p> <p>•</p> <p>Gestures</p> <p>Body Language is 80% of the Message</p> 

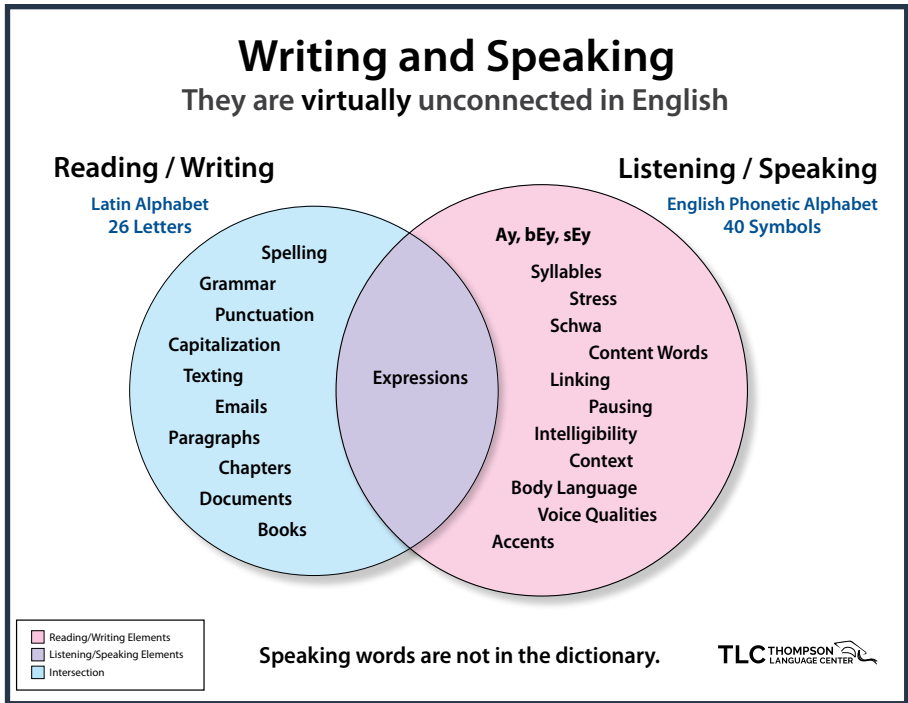
Judy Thompson

• The Backpacker's Guide to Teaching English •

TLC THOMPSON LANGUAGE CENTER

Before We Get Started, a Little Useful FYI

Besides being the number one earmark of fluency, here is something very cool about expressions. **Expressions** are the only place where writing and speaking intersect — not letters, not vocabulary, not sentences, not grammar. Writing and speaking have absolutely nothing in common in English except expressions. I'll show you what I mean. In the Venn diagram (page 18), the elements of reading and writing are contained in the blue circle on the left. The elements of listening and speaking are in the pink circle on the right. The only place where they intersect is **Expressions**. That's it.



Having a hard day

Once in a blue moon

Take the red eye

English is idiomatic, which means shortcut-rich. The secret to fluency in writing and speaking is the **accurate use of expressions**. Reading can contribute to oral fluency in that reading is passive with the luxury of time to review, ponder and accumulate new words and expressions.

Conversely, conversation is fleeting and instinctive. In an unhurried manner, reading exposes learners to **expressions** and the subtle indirect way native speakers express ideas. The other elements of reading and writing are of no consequence to listening or speaking whatsoever.

Are you still staring at that Venn diagram? Yup, we no longer have to wonder why teaching reading and writing (and calling it English) doesn't lead to speaking fluency, no matter how many years a learner spend\$ in the blue crescent. This is the crack that superstar Manuel and countless students like him fall through in endless English classes.

How conversation really works is virgin territory for the ESL industry. Backpackers, volunteers, laypeople, anyone who lacks confidence in their ability to make a difference for those struggling to speak English (and charge money for it) should be starting to feel rather good. You are holding the keys to fluency that millions of people want to know. Can the fundamental patterns of fluency help the acquaintances you meet while traveling or guests you host in your home regardless of your level of education? You bet.

Fluency is a Game

As an abstract language, **English exists in thought**. Fluency is mostly a guessing game; I like to call it *What do you Think they Said?*

To understand the game, listeners need simultaneously to assimilate a wide range of cues from context and multiple possible word meanings to voice qualities, culture and basic psychology. Listeners need to become experts at what I call *brain leap* and what others call *lateral thinking*.

***Lateral thinking** is solving problems through an indirect and creative approach, using reasoning that is not immediately obvious and involving ideas that may not be obtainable by using only traditional step-by-step logic.* Wikipedia

To play the game of Fluency, speakers must share their most complex ideas using the fewest words. Expressions, metaphors and proverbs are some of the vehicles for sharing ideas. These forms stretch what I have been calling *expressions* past its limits. Collocations might be a better umbrella. **Collocations are small, fixed groups of words used to convey images**. I'm taking liberties with the term, but I don't care. Collocations it is. While expressions comprise the lion's share of the collocation family, there are many other members from words-that-go-together-for-no-reason like *strong coffee*, *fall in love* and *what's up* to axioms, fables and phrasal verbs...

One way to introduce the concept of abstract English and word groups representing complex ideas is to talk to students about tales and expressions from their first language. Stories like *Stone Soup* and *Cry Wolf* are almost universal. While different language groups share some stories, many folktales and expressions will be different because of the historical and cultural nature of lore. Metaphors and stories depicting morals are

self-explanatory. What about fixed groups of words like *cold cuts*, *heavy traffic*; or doublets like *high and mighty*, *spic and span*; and sayings? How does one teach/learn how to flag and interpret *blue moon* and not *blue chair*?

There must be Rules Or No One could Play the Game

Let's concentrate on expressions as learners are most familiar with this concept. Expressions have to be rooted in patterns or they wouldn't be decodable. The patterns are so strong and so deep that jargon and expressions like *social media*, *CEO*, *24/7* and *edupreneur* are being created everyday, following the same flyway as expressions hundreds of years old (for example, *black sheep*, *too many irons in the fire* and *all hands on deck* from agricultural and nautical heritage). Before the patterns for interpreting expressions are revealed, determine if your students are ready.

1 How to Tell when a Learner is Ready for Fluency Skills

I might as well say it now and get it over with. At any time, learners may reach the level of success they are functional and comfortable with and *fossilize* at that stage, never to improve beyond it. That's okay, but these are probably not the people asking you for fluency help. For those who do want to excel, learning to identify and use abstract tools is a bumpy road. Crossover from first language, accidental encounters, flip flopping between literal and abstract all these contribute to the fluency progress in individuals. I've identified four phases to mastering expressions and abstract conversation skills. While most people have a sense there is more to meaning than what is said, abstract mastery starts as feelings and ripens into a skill.

Judy's Scale

Here is a very loose ascending scale to identify where pupils are with respect to fluency.



"How was your day dear?" "Fine"

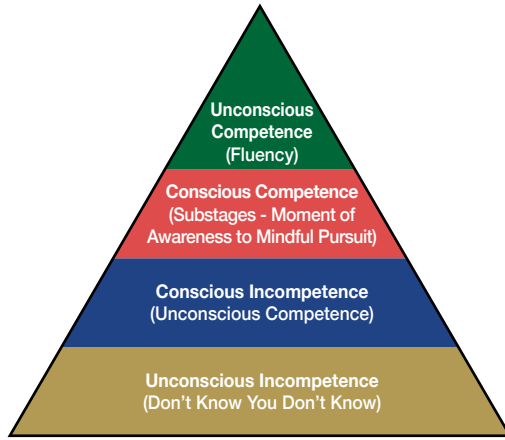
What kind of a day did this woman have?

Fine?

I don't think so.

Funny story. I thought I had invented this scale of four stages from total unawareness about the abstract level of English to mastery. It turns out, Martin M. Broadwell first articulated a similar model in his "four stages of teaching" in February 1969. I sure can verify most of his model because I noticed almost exactly the same stages.

Broadwell's *Hierarchy of Competence* (it goes by a few names) shown here has his labels for each stage printed on the top of each section. My take on each stage is in brackets beneath his.



Hierarchy of Competence

From the Bottom Up

Stage One: Unconscious Incompetence

In the context of abstract English, it's the lack of a general sense that words and meanings often don't mesh. Asperger's aside, most people regardless of their English ability *intuit* the woman in the cartoon on page 21 did not have a good day. If they can't, their skills are still too basic, literal, linear, whatever, to start talking about fluency.

Stage Two: Conscious Incompetence

In deference to Broadwell, I have included his label, but it doesn't make any sense to me. The first glimmerings of understanding that expressions exist and perform specific functions are almost accidental with ESL learners. Awakening might show up as laughing at a joke, either because they understood it or because they noticed other people laugh. Or a learner may latch onto an expression like *Whatsup?* or *as a matter of fact* or *in my opinion* and begin to use it in context. Beginners often overuse the first expression they feel confident about and slip it into almost everything they say. While it can be annoying, it's a clear indication that the learner has somehow ascertained that there are small fixed groups of words with specific purposes and how to use one. A better name for this shift is *Accidental* or *Incidental* or **Unconscious Competence**. But it's a start.

However humble the beginning, as a coach, you need to acknowledge the breakthrough and counsel your charge to listen for more of these word groups. Documenting expressions they encounter in their own Expressions Dictionary is a good practice. Only accountants, those with OCD, the academically inclined, and goodie-goodies are going to do it, which is fine. The artists, teachers, engineers, know-it-alls and too-busies will have to be transformed other ways.

Stage Three: Conscious Competence

In my experience, **Conscious Competence** develops in a series of stages — awareness, pursuit, and integration.

Progress often accompanies a sense that education dropped the ball. Too much of what learners experience can't be accounted for by the dogma they have studied in the past. For example, one is unlikely to ever hear, *Good morning. How are you?* Instead, English speakers greet each other with endless variations of *Hey?*, *What's up?*, *How's it hangin'?*, *Ya'll right then?*, *G'day*. The unfixable problem with grammar (and education) is that it is linear and concrete, while English is three-dimensional and abstract. Nothing we teach in school happens in real life.

The light bulb moment occurred for a Chinese client of mine who knew more about grammar and spelling than I did. His assignment was to watch *The Devil Wears Prada* three times and document the expressions he heard. At our next session, he declared, *Everything is expressions*. Bingo! He didn't need any more lessons after that. My guru, Kathryn Brillinger, used to say learners only need grammar because they don't know the expressions. Traditional English classes don't mention that. Score another point for the Backpacker.

Stage Three A: Awareness

It's alarming how often you meet advanced students who know more about English than native speakers, yet fluency eludes them. European English programs are fantastic. Everyone in Europe studies English in school, and most can speak English and a few other languages as well, but they still might not be fluent.

Ingrid was a young woman from Sweden who shared with me the moment she knew she wasn't fluent in English. Ingrid moved to the States with her American boyfriend a few years ago. Friends of his were moving *kit and caboodle*. For a case of beer and all the pizza he could eat, her boyfriend was asked to help. Ingrid went with him. After every box was packed, every piece of furniture was in the truck and they were ready to pull out of the driveway, they couldn't find Ingrid. She was in the house looking for the cat. She heard they were moving /kit'n caboodle/ and thought they owned a baby cat named Caboodle. Ingrid spoke English extremely well, but the moment she realized they didn't own a cat was the moment she realized she was not fluent. She started paying more attention to collocations.

Fluent non-native speakers can often recall a painful moment of clarity like Ingrid's when they were *left out in the cold* and the abstract nature of English came crashing into their lives. You are going to mitigate this for your students because your milieu is the real world with no artificial over-processed, indigestible content.

Stage Three B: Pursuit

Context and body language are the strongest indicators of meaning, especially context. **Vladimir** was a wonderful Russian engineer in my speaking class for foreign-trained professionals. After class one day, he approached my desk and asked, *What does /way/ mean?* His English was excellent, so I suspected he probably wasn't confused about 'way' as in direction or even 'weigh' as in heaviness, so I asked him where he'd heard it? *At work*, he replied. His co-worker often said things were *way cool*. Oh! In that context, way means *very*.

Without the context, I couldn't have guessed in a million years that way meant *very*, but *very* was expressed in this way regularly a few years ago. Pursuit of fluency is covert. It often follows a light bulb moment like Ingrid's and involves research and quietly asking questions about familiar words that don't make sense. *What does this mean? How do you say...?* Native speakers will invariably ask, *What was the sentence?* The answer is in the context.

Stage Three C: Integration

Learners have arrived when they know there is an expression for exactly what they want to say and aren't shy about asking about it. Integration is overt and unabashed. **Minakshi**, from my *Speaking Canadian English* night school class, was a young woman of East Indian descent employed as an office worker by day. She shared a story about something she said that hadn't landed well at work. Her co-worker announced she had won \$1,000 in a lottery. My student said, *You have to buy us dinner*. Her remark fell flat, and everyone just let it go. She asked me to help her find the right expression.

First, I asked her about the atmosphere at her work. *Was everyone friendly? Before I weighed in, I wanted to get a feel for the group. Were they hostile, convivial, prejudiced, insular...? Basically, was her workplace a safe space? Everyone is great*, she assured me. Good. I couldn't think of the expression she was looking for off the top of my head, so we continued with class. About twenty minutes later, I stopped the class and called to her. *Dinner's on you*. She said, *That's it!*

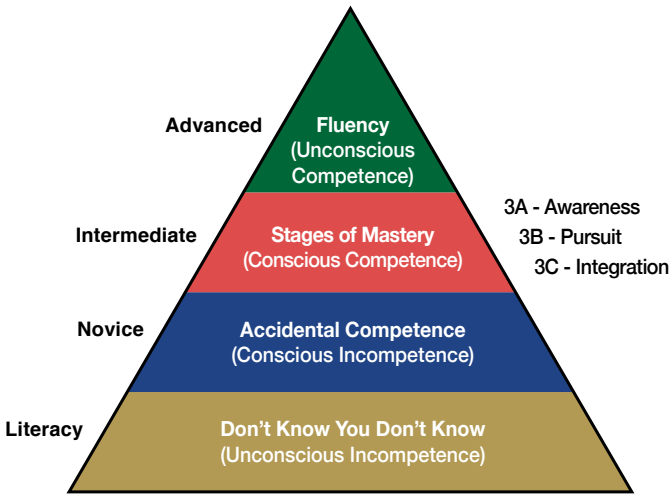
She was as close to absolute fluency as she could possibly be. She was mindful of the role expressions play, that there was one that expressed exactly what she wanted to say, and she knew the essential vocabulary for it. Her context and timing were perfect. In her supportive workplace incubator, this baby chick was hatching in front of our eyes.

She had already learned to ask, *What's the expression for...?* There wasn't anything else I could teach her, but I could direct her to a great resource: *How Do You Say? Dictionary for Expressions, Pronunciation and Spelling*.

Stage Four: Unconscious Competence

In plain English, **Unconscious Competence** is when a skill has become second nature. One doesn't have to think about an activity to perform it successfully. Driving a car is a good example. English fluency is another. When a learner seamlessly incorporates expressions, makes jokes, appreciates humor and unselfconsciously asks for clarification when they are confounded by some aspect of English, they are fluent.

Judy's Scale of Fluency



While not exactly the same as Broadwell's *Hierarchy of Competence*, it's remarkably similar and shows the gradual steps to fluency.

2 How to Teach Brain Leap

Be mindful of where on *Judy's Scale* learners are and acknowledge their success.

Starting From Scratch

Once you identify that your students have picked up at least one saying or expression, the games have begun. Start with the *Cry Wolf* or *Stone Soup* story. Talk about how the expression *cry wolf* has come to represent the entire fable and is used in any situation where someone has asked for help they didn't need, then can't get help when they do need it. Do they have an expression for this in their language? Tune up their awareness. What other expressions are in their first language? What other expressions might they have heard?

My heartbreaker student Manuel's English was flat. He explained his life in straightforward, simple, perfectly correct sentences with perfectly correct words that no English speaker would actually use. His speaking was unnatural and wooden. He spoke like he wrote, which didn't accurately reflect his intelligence, experience or character. It demonstrated his limitations.

Teachable Moments

I was teaching graduate students in Korea when a student said "*snakes gave him chicken skin*". *Chicken skin*? Ah, a North American would say *goose bumps*, but it was a perfect segue to a conversation about expressions, fables, lore and abstract language skills.

Michael Lewis

I don't teach writing at all, but in his book, ***Teaching Collocations***, Michael Lewis has some fabulous ideas for supporting students' writing excellence. One of his ideas is to give the learners a suggested list of collocations with their writing assignment. It is easy to imagine that the quality of a love story is infinitely enriched when expressions like *once upon a time*, *love at first sight*, *hold hands*, *gaze into each other's eyes*, *knight in shining armor*, *fall in love*, *live happily ever after*, are supplied before the learner begins. Teaching collocations/expressions is a shortcut to more native-like writing and speaking.

The Gateway — Humor

Short of providing a list of thousands of expressions, how do you teach learners to glean expressions and interpret abstract cues on their own? How did you learn to *read between the lines*?

At five years of age, children are still very literal. A first-grade teacher in Virginia presented her students with the first half of common expressions and instructed her students to complete them. The results were hysterical. Here are a few examples:

You can't teach an old dog.....	<i>math.</i>	(new tricks)
Where there's smoke there's	<i>pollution.</i>	(fire)
Two's company, three's....	<i>the muskateers.</i>	(a crowd)
If at first you don't succeed....	<i>get new batteries.</i>	(try and try again)
Better late than...	<i>pregnant.</i>	(never)

All great, concrete, culturally astute answers, but there's no sign of abstract connection yet. Something happens with language around first grade — *Knock, Knock* jokes. When was the last time you heard a *Knock, Knock* joke? That's right. *Knock, Knock* jokes are too silly for adults. They performed a specific language function for fairly young children, and then it isn't appropriate for native speakers to use them after the age of six or seven. *Knock, Knock* jokes are the gateway to the abstract realm and a critical stepping stone to the other level in English. *Knock, Knock. Who's There?* is perfectly appropriate — even necessary — for adult English learners.

Knock Knock
Who's there?
Harry
Harry Who?
Harry up and answer the door

There is a lot going on in this structure. That's right structure. There is a distinct pattern that is so simple a child can identify it and play along. When I toss out *Knock, Knock* as a professional speaker, every single member of the audience responds, *Who's there? Knock, Knock* is a pattern, it's a convention, and it's part of North American culture. The format tells the participants to expect something funny, probably a twist-of-word meaning or pronunciation. *Knock, Knock* jokes begin to stretch a child or learner's thinking in different directions and in different ways.

Other patterns tell us a joke is coming. The absurd, for example, *What did one wall say to the other wall?* It has to be a joke because walls don't talk. *Meet you at the corner.*

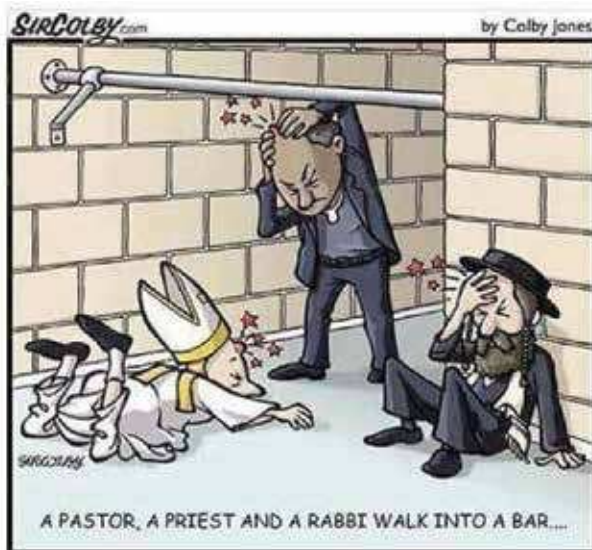
Anything *walks into a bar* (drinking establishment) is going to be a joke. *A three-legged dog walks into a bar and says, "I'm looking for the man who shot my paw."* (as in Pa — old West term for father. Ha ha!)

PAST PRESENT
AND FUTURE
WALKED INTO
A BAR
IT WAS TENSE

Did you hear about the guy...

What do you call a...

Any variation of *a minister, a priest and a rabbi* is going to be a joke. Here's a combination of two classics, *a pastor, priest and a rabbi walk into a bar...*



Teach humor to your students beginning with *Knock, Knock* jokes and silly riddles.

What's Black and White and Red all Over?

Blatant formulas aside, how do you know someone is telling a joke? When I was in Grade One, Michael McMillan told a joke. His body language gave him away. He could hardly contain his laughter while he asked a group of us six-year-olds, *What's black and white and red all over?* I had no idea. He was bursting to tell us, *The newspaper!* Everyone laughed, and I knew enough to laugh along although I had no idea why it was funny.

Three years later, my little sister came home from Grade One and told the exact same joke. I knew the answer was *the newspaper*, but this time I knew *why* it was funny. *Read all over.* Ha ha ha! It took me three years to *get* that joke. A woman in the front row at a conference burst out laughing at my confession; she just got the joke. She explained her brother is ten years older than her, and when she was six, he had circled job ads in their paper with red ink. Her newspaper was black and white and red all over. It took her thirty years to get the joke! Three years or thirty years, three seconds or thirty seconds, there is a gap — a *brain leap* — as humans learn to process abstract messages. Silly jokes are the best way to exercise this muscle. With mastery, the gap gets smaller and smaller. When students *make jokes*, it's a significant fluency marker.

The Money Shot — Teaching Expressions

The easiest most effective way to teach anybody anything is to attach new information to information the learner already knows. This was never more true than in decoding expressions. By way of reference, *Book One* of the Backpacker series teaches how to use the **letters** from ABC (the first thing beginners learn in English class) and sounds from first language to pronounce English. *Book Two* teaches how to use **colors** (the second thing beginners learn in English class) to facilitate **conversation**. After the concept of abstract language has been introduced with *Knock, Knock* jokes and silly riddles, what's the pattern for accessing expressions and their meanings? **There is always a pattern, and it can always be attached to information learners already know.**

To Make a Long Story Long

The story of figuring out the pattern behind expressions is a long one but a good one, hang in there. My exposure to Rita Baker solidified my understanding of patterns and their importance in learning. She wrote an eBook a few years ago called *Brain Power* that is well worth the \$8 (<http://brain-power.co.uk>). She put words to my thoughts. We are going to hear more from Rita in a few minutes when she explains the pattern to phrasal verbs, but I'm getting ahead of myself. Right now, I'm leading up to (and providing context for) the *aha!* moment I had about the origin of expressions that struck me while editing *How Do You Say?*

I used to think *English is Crazy, Students are Not* was the greatest ESL book ever written, but now I realize it is only a fantastic book. The greatest book ever written is *How Do You Say?*, the first dictionary organized by vowel sounds. Are you getting the tongue in cheek? It's a very subtle form of humor. That said, it is also the truth in it that makes something funny!

How Do You Say? organizes the 2,000 most common words in English by main vowel sound/color. If you know anything about the English Phonetic Alphabet (EPA) pronunciation system, you know that main vowel sounds are inextricably linked to the 16 colors that feature those sounds in their names. *Long a* is in **Gray**, *Short a* is in **Black**, *Long e* is in **Green**, *Short e* is in **Red**, *Long i* is in **White**, *Short i* is in **Pink**, and so on for the 16 vowel sounds in General American (GA) English.

Because of the nature of English as a stress-based language, one and only one syllable is the most important in any word. **The most important syllable dictates the pronunciation and color** of the word; conversely, **the color of the word dictates the pronunciation and the stressed syllable.**

Judy is **Blue**, so are **juice, news, school, review, uncouth, Tuesday, beautiful, rejuvenate**... Spelling doesn't tell us pronunciation, but the vowel sound in the main syllable/color does. Every word in English is one of the colors on the following Thompson Vowel Chart — **no exceptions**. This book is on something else, but you need the background for the flash of insight that identified the hidden patterns in expressions. Be patient. We are getting there.

THOMPSON VOWEL CHART			
color word	color	EPA	double example
gray		/Ay/	rainy day
black		/a/	black cat
green		/Ey/	green tree
red		/e/	red head
white		/ly/	white knight
pink		/I/	pink ring
gold		/Ow/	old goat
olive		/o/	hot coffee
blue		/Uw/	blue shoe
mustard		/u/	honey mustard
wood		/^/	good wood
turquoise		/Oy/	noisy toy
brown		/Aw/	brown cow
purple		/Et/	purple girl
charcoal		/At/	dark charcoal
orange		/Or/	orange door

How Do You Say? works like this: Anyone can hear the same main vowel sound in words like *friend*, *guess*, *head* and *said*. If they are familiar with the Thompson Vowel Chart, they recognize these as **Red** words. To find the spelling of a **Red** word, look it up in the **Red** chapter in *How Do You Say?* where you'll find it listed alphabetically with the other most common English **Red** words. This makes *How Do You Say?* merely awesome. We'll get to greatest-in-the-world part presently.

I had a Dream

I had a burning desire to create a sound dictionary from the moment the Thompson Vowel Chart was created. To that end, in 2012, I downloaded the 2,000 most common words in English, color-coded them, grouped them into chapters according to pronunciation, and started writing a dictionary. I wrote one page. It was really hard. I quickly realized I couldn't write a dictionary all by myself! I was working in Brazil for a few months at the time and took the opportunity presented by the nine-hour flight to Sao Paulo to create just a few pages of one chapter of the dictionary — the **Gold** Chapter. Then I sent a request to some of the hundreds of teachers who were using *English is Crazy*, *Students are Not* and loved EPA; I asked them for help. I was totally moved when dozens of teacher/believers volunteered their time to help me write the world's first dictionary by sound that categorises words by main vowel sound, not spelling.

Rooms at the beautiful Ben Miller Inn in Goderich, Ontario, were booked and extraordinary women from London, Stratford, Toronto, Mississauga, Oakville, Brampton and as far away as Ottawa (a seven-hour drive) showed up to change the way the world learns English. I put the women in pairs and gave each pair the word list for one color chapter and a template for how the final product would look. And they changed history.

What makes *How Do You Say?* the greatest ESL book ever written is the focus. The format is very light on definitions (if you didn't already know what a word meant, you wouldn't be using it).

How Do You Say? is for pronunciation, spelling and **how words are used**. In other words — **expressions!** Learners know what **blue** means, and they know what **moon** means, but they don't know what a **blue moon** is, and they can't guess. They also won't find *blue moon* in a standard dictionary.

I hope you are getting the uselessness of a standard dictionary for students. If you ever say "Loo ki du pin the dikshunery" again, I'll hunt you down and slap you. Spoken English isn't in the dictionary. Standard dictionaries are only for written English.

I digress.

The task for the volunteer teachers was to find and include the **expressions** for each word entry. *How Do You Say?* is a **book of expressions** with the words organized by sound so learners can find the darn things. It's chock full of expressions so students can look up the language exactly as they

encounter it. For round two in creating the dictionary, more volunteers (including some men) edited chapters, and three of us did a final edit from cover to cover.

Steeped as I was in teaching ESL and the editing of the world's first Sound Dictionary, I began to notice patterns (you can't actually stop the human brain from doing that):

- There are more ways to spell long vowel sounds than short ones.
- Long vowel sounds are in most languages, and short vowel sounds are not.
- Short **o**, **u**, **i** and **Er** (Olive, Mustard, Pink and Purple) are by far the most challenging vowel sounds for learners, followed by **a** and **e** (Black and Red). The rest are easy.
- I could anticipate which words would have many expressions and which wouldn't.

Stop right there. On some unconscious level, with no implicit instructions from me, my wonderful human brain found patterns. I became aware I was accurately predicting which words were going to have huge entries with loads of expressions and which were not. The exact word that tipped me off was *insect*. It was a light-bulb moment. There was a growing awareness that some words (for example, **colors** and **body parts**) were going to be rife with expressions. But as soon as I read the word *insect*, I instinctively knew there weren't going to be expressions with it. How could I know that unless there was a pattern? **What was the pattern** that had me accurately predicting which words were going to take forever to edit because their expression-packed entries would be so long?

Let's look. **Colors** for sure had myriad expressions. When I came across color words like black, red, green and blue, they included many expressions. **Col:** short for collocations is the marker where definitions and what-not end and expressions begin.

black /blak/ [blacks, blacker, blackest] *adj* the darkest color *Most of my students have black hair.* • *noun* the color *Black is flattering on almost everyone.* **Col:** black and blue – badly bruised black and white – very clear having only one meaning black eye – purple around the eye from bruising black hearted – evil black out – lose electricity or go unconscious black sheep – the one person who is different or strange black tie – very formal event pitch black – no light at all

green /grEyn/ [greens, greener, greenest] *adj* 1 the color of grass *The grass was a deep green.* 2 not yet ripe *The apples were too green to eat.* 3 not experienced *He bought a green horse and trained it himself.* *noun*, 1 vegetables *Greens are super-foods that should be eaten every day.* 2 the color *Green has been adopted to represent the environmental movement.* **Col:** get the green light – permission go green – change habits to protect the environment green around the gills – nauseous green as grass – inexperienced green backs – money green belt – large protected land around cities and urban areas green-eyed monster – jealousy Greenpeace – global protection activist organization green thumb – good gardener green with envy – jealous

red (read) /red/ [reds, redder, reddest] *adj* the color of blood *Primary colors are yellow, blue and red.* *noun* the color. *Red and green are Christmas colors.* **Col:** catch red-handed – catch in the act of breaking the law don't have a red cent – no money at all in the red – debt, owe more than one makes like a red flag to a bull – provoke rage out of the red – out of debt paint the town red – celebrate red eye – all-night flight red head – person with red hair red herring – takes attention away from the main topic red ink – corrections Red sky at night, sailors delight, red sky in the morning sailors take warning – rule of thumb weather indicator red tape – official or bureaucratic paperwork red-blooded – patriotic red-carpet treatment – special treatment red-hot – desirable red-letter day – fantastic news roll out the red carpet – treat someone like royalty run a red light – traffic violation, not stopping at a red signal see red – become very angry the red-light district – prostitutes the red, white and blue – American flag turn beet red – flushed with embarrassment

blue /blu/ [blues, bluer, bluest] *adj* 1 the colour of a clear sky *Blond haired people often have blue eyes.* 2 feeling sad *After losing her dog, the little girl felt blue.* *noun* the color *Blue is an eye color.* **Col:** be blue – sad blue blood – noble family blue cheese – string cheese with pieces of mold blue plate special – low price dinner special blue light special – featured sale item in a department store blue movie – an indecent, pornographic film blue ribbon – a prize for excellence blue-collar – factory workers Blue-nose II – a famous sailboat from Nova Scotia pictured on the Canadian dime into the wild blue yonder – far away once in a blue moon – rarely, from the frequency of two full moons in one month out of the blue – unexpected room was blue – the room was full of smoke or frequent bad language scream blue murder – complain or shout loudly swear a blue streak – a great deal of swearing the blues – a style of jazz music true blue – loyal

(Did you spot blue moon in the blue entry?)

Was that it — color words? Was that the pattern? No, but close.

When I started mindfully looking for the pattern, I noticed there were many expressions for:

Colors: *green thumb, black and blue, red-carpet, white collar, yellow journalism...*

Body Parts: *pain in the neck, cost an arm and a leg, head in the clouds, shake a leg...*

Food: *easy as pie, a piece of cake, plum job, when life hands you lemons...*

Animals: *dog tired, sly as a fox, a memory like an elephant, horse sense...*

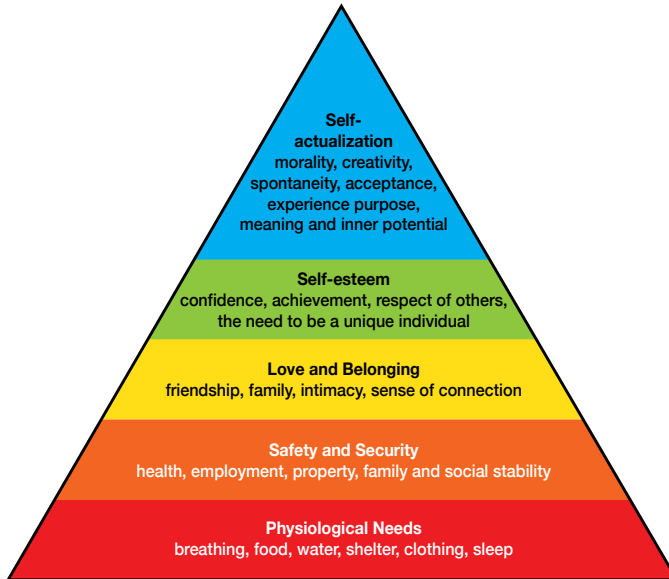
Numbers: *it takes two to tango, three's a crowd, five-finger discount, a baker's dozen...*

Clothing: *give the shirt off his back, put their pants on one leg at a time, coat of paint...*

Wait a minute. These categories were very familiar. I taught Literacy for long enough to recognize these as survival topics. There's the pattern! Colors, numbers, food, clothes, body parts, shapes, animals... these are first level vocabulary for survival English. In fluent English, ideas are conveyed using images suggested by basic survival words.

The Fifth Principle of Spoken English: *English is abstract.*

Before Broadwell made a triangle graph with colored horizontal sections, Abraham Maslow did. Here is *Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs* from 1943. Check out the bottom tiers. More than 80% of common expressions are rooted in the vocabulary of most basic human needs. It's our old friend, *humans learn by attaching new information to old information.*



When humans create something new; a concept, even technology, they attach the image back to basic vocabulary for connection, explanation and marketing purposes — Apple, mouse, web, worm, moon, eye...

Teaching Expressions

It shouldn't be too hard now that you know what they are, where they come from, and why. It is silly to teach individual expressions without the pattern; it is impossible to teach all of them as there are a great many and even more are being created every day.

Expressions — Multiple Choice Exercise

Read the expression and choose the answer that means the same thing:

1. the red eye a) eye infection, b) too much crying, c) overnight flight
2. shake a leg a) please pass the chicken, b) hurry up, c) iron your pants
3. black tie a) formal event, b) goes with any outfit, c) undoable knot
4. easy as pie a) loves to bake, b) eat dessert first, c) simple to do
5. keep your shirt on a) be patient, b) its cool in here, c) let's go out for dinner

A: 1c, 2b, 3a, 4c, 5a

Independence for Learners

It's about **lateral thinking**. When one **recognises the individual words but they don't make sense**, the speaker probably isn't an idiot (that's too easy), it's a tip-off for an expression. Native speakers take note of the context, consider the **qualities embodied** by the words, and look for other possible meanings. Teach that.

As a coach, do some informal assessment of where the learner is developmentally. Tell some jokes and have them tell jokes from their first language (they won't be funny — at all; humor is cultural). Explore expressions. Find some common ground. Pull up whatever authentic piece of literature you can get your hands on, not useless ESL textbooks — real English. Start where you started. Berenstain Bears are full of authentic speaking, like *Gimme a break*. Collocations are in bold print in Archie comics. I'm not kidding. Newspapers are great. They have so much information to convey in a limited space that they are thick with collocations. **Reward students for finding new expressions** and showing them to you. This might get our artists, teachers, engineers, know-it-alls and too-busy friends enrolled in **collocation awareness** — a prize.

Collocation Hunt Exercise

Here's a passage from **My Story** near the beginning of this book. Count the number of collocations (words that go together for no reason to create an image) you can see.

I grew up on a farm, went to university (B.A. English), got married, raised my children on a farm, eventually went back to school for TESL (Teacher of English as a Second Language) certification, landed a plum job with a Board of Education outside of Toronto, blah, blah, blah. It was a pretty straight curve. My whole world turned upside down in a single moment when I ran into a former student. Manuel was a physician from South America. The political winds in his country changed, and he was forced to emigrate. It was his goal to be a doctor again in Canada. He enrolled in adult ESL classes where I taught. Manuel was a model student: motivated, smart, popular, professional. He breezed through the Intermediate curriculum in my class and rose quickly through the ranks, graduating in record time.

A: 13-15 Excellent, 10-12 Very Good, 6-9 Good, 5 or less getting the idea, look again. The complete answer is at the end of this section.

Google *Collocation Exercises* and include them in the word or words you want to feature in the search. There are tons of ready-made activities there.

Phrasal Verbs

As small fixed groups of words that go together for no reason to convey images, phrasal verbs fall into the category of collocations and are a critical part of fluency. Phrasal verbs like *put up* and *put up with* have vastly different meanings. While we *smell* the roses and *taste* champagne, we *listen to* music and *look at* books. Phrasal verbs pose significant challenges for non-native speakers. Is it possible there is a pattern to make phrasal verbs easier to learn? There is.

I invited **Rita Baker**, the world's foremost expert in English from the Lydbury English Centre in beautiful Shropshire, England, to give you the skinny on phrasal verbs.

*Phrasal verbs are embedded metaphors. They are taught by translation — which is crazy as **there are thousands and thousands of them.***

However, there are only thirteen principles (patterns); then you understand every phrasal verb.

You have to think about a group of uneducated, illiterate people, namely Anglo Saxons. They had a very physical concrete language, and they had to battle with abstract concepts using only physical vocabulary. They lived in a physical world of survival, and they had to use physical words to explain abstract concepts.

For instance, here is an example of one particle — over.



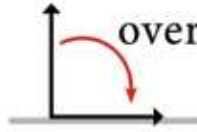
If it's a fence or a wall, it is easy to visualize over.

What about a meeting?

*If this is a meeting, the meeting is **over.***



If something falls from vertical, it falls **over**.



Something that repeats happens **over** and **over** again.



If you recover from an upset, you are **over** it.



Hand it **over**. When you see it visually, the arc is there.
You can't translate that.



Phrasal verbs – you take a preposition or an adverb and abstract it.
Phrasal verbs start off as visuals like over.

Germanic languages (English) keep on using the physical manifestations.
For phrasal verbs, there are only thirteen families, principles – patterns.

Abstract it – I love that, using *abstract* as a verb. Abstract ideas – convey them with concrete vocabulary. Sound familiar? That's exactly what happens with expressions. Concrete nouns are **abstracted** into expressions.

Patterns make learning the impossible simple. Find and teach patterns, not details. You are probably waiting for me to share Rita's thirteen principles. I'm not going to. That is her Intellectual Property (IP), and you'll have to check out the Global Approach for them and more unbelievably easy solutions to everything English.

Answer in Detail to the Collocation Exercise

I **grew up** on a farm, went to university (B.A. English), **got married**, **raised** my **children** on a farm, eventually **went back to school** for TESL (Teacher of English as a Second Language) certification, landed a **plum job** with a Board of Education outside of Toronto, **blah, blah, blah**. It was a fairly **straight curve**. My whole world **turned upside down** in a single moment when I **ran into** a former student. Manuel was a physician from South America. The **political winds in his country** **changed**, and he was forced to emigrate. It was his goal to be a doctor again in Canada. He enrolled in adult ESL classes where I taught. Manuel was a **model student**: motivated, smart, popular, professional. He **breezed through** the Intermediate curriculum in my class and **rose quickly through the ranks**, graduating in **record time**.

And then There's Innuendo

Innuendo or **hinting** uses body language, context and words but not necessarily **using any of the words** you'd use to ask directly.

Are you finished with that?

While glancing at an unfinished portion of delicious food, *Are you finished with that?* means:

Can I eat your food?

Where there is only one computer, or pencil sharpener, or hole punch... spoken in a soft voice, *Are you finished with that?* means:

May I use that when you are done?

Spoken in a loud voice, *Are you finished with that?* means:

Hurry up! I am waiting to use that.

Innuendo is heavily supported by context and body language (gestures and voice qualities). Find out what role hinting plays in your student's culture. It's really fun but not critical to structure some hinting games. You probably don't have to teach innuendo/hinting so much as mention it when it comes up. Watching the same movie or show over and over is a good technique for appreciating all sorts of the subtle intricacies of fluency.

3 Non-Verbal Communication

Body language is the familiar label I have been using, but it too is an oversimplification referring to any communication clues that aren't words. Gestures and voice qualities are included in nonverbal communication.

Voice Qualities

There are basically two things native speakers do with their voices to convey information independently of the word content in a message:

1) **tones** and 2) **notes**.

Tones indicate **emotion**, and **notes** indicate **importance**.

1) Tone of Voice

Tone of Voice conveys emotion or how the speaker feels about what he is saying. Some words are naturally loaded as either good, bad or neutral.

- **High range = good** – *Party, fun, concert, win, holiday* are naturally high-loaded words indicating positive, happy, exciting, fun...

Go ahead, say them out loud.

- **Low range = bad** – Listen to the low somber tone in words like *funeral, sick, accident, cancer* when naturally uttered. The lower the range, the worse the experience is.
- **Neutral** has no innate emotional charge: *table, spoon, car, brick*.

How does this language feature compare with a learner's first language? Many speakers (Eastern Europeans, for example) have a narrow tone range. They don't provide enough clues with their voice to let Westerners know how they feel about things. While Russians and other Eastern Europeans are perfectly intelligible, they sound hostile to native speakers because there isn't enough range in their tone of voice. If Eastern Europeans were to use more high notes in their speaking range, people would be nicer to them.

Mother-in-Law Exercise

A very simple awareness and practice activity for tone of voice is to have your student say, mother-in-law. You and other listeners, if they are present, determine if the speaker likes their mother-in-law or not, depending on how they say it. If you don't guess correctly, how they feel isn't being conveyed by their tone. They need to keep working on it until it does or change their experience of their spouse's mom. Good luck with option two.



Sarcasm

Don't teach this. As demonstrated perfectly in this *How was your day, Dear* cartoon and the recent *good luck with option two*, the innate tone of the words doesn't match the tone in which the speaker delivers them. *Sarcasm* is the result. The natural tone of the word **fine** is above neutral, so is **good luck**. You can imagine *Dear's* voice is low given her body language in the cartoon, and my voice in your head is low — because I'm a sarcastic person. Be careful. It is easy to fall into the trap of teaching too much information. You don't have to share hair-splitting details about voice qualities like this, but they are good for you to know in case someone asks — since you are the expert.

2) Notes

Normally there are three main notes in English. Here they are:

- **High – important** If you are familiar with the term, stressed.
- **Middle – unimportant** Case-in-point, grammar
- **Low – finished** The speaking equivalent of a period in print.

time

What is
 it?

This book is not about word stress (*Book Two* is), but it suffices to know one syllable in every word is **higher, longer** and **louder** than the others. Important words (nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs and negatives) are so important that if only important words are uttered with no grammar at all, no meaning is lost.

Time?

Middle notes indicate unimportant syllables, and native speakers selectively ignore information expressed in the middle range as it is unimportant. Native speakers focus only on high (important) and low (finished) notes. The low note performs the same function as a period in punctuation. Full stop. Like periods, low notes never occur in the middle of sentences.

In a left-handed way, you know this already, and so do learners. In conversation, questions utilize notes extensively. Yes/No questions finish on high notes. Statements and *Wh* questions finish low.

Yes/No Questions

Q: Is it rain^{ing}?

A: **Yes**, it is or **no** it isn't.

Statements and *Wh* questions finish down.

Ju	na	time
I'm	I'm Ca	What
dy.	di	is
	an.	it?

How is this System Different for your Students?

Spanish mainly uses two main notes. When this transfers to English, and Spanish speakers finish statements on high notes, they sound unsure.

have	go	store.
I	to	to the

Middle Eastern and Asian languages don't use notes in the same way. In these languages, every sound, syllable and word have equal weight.

I have to go to the store, without much break between words
lhavetogotothestore is how aspects of these languages transfer to English.

Play with it. Listen to your students with voice qualities in mind and see how their first language may be different from English in this area. Native speakers look for a certain range, and miscommunication can result if this element is weak or missing.

Too much information? It doesn't matter really. All you need to know is in the *Yes, Dear* cartoon. Tone of voice trumps (poor word choice) vocabulary and grammar every time.

Your mother was right. It isn't what you say, it's how you say it.

Is There a Doctor in the House?

Dr Seuss is the best resource I know for installing the highs, lows, pauses, emotion and full stops in the natural rhythm of spoken English. **Hop on Pop** for individual sounds, **One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish** for word stress and rhythm, **The Cat in the Hat** for the full monty. If possible, record yourself reading sections of the books (on your phone); send the file to your students and have them mimic your pronunciation. They love it. Keep the *Thompson Vowel Chart*, a pack of rubber bands (*Book Two*) and these three Dr. Seuss books in your backpack and you are ready to rock.

The Final Frontier — No Words

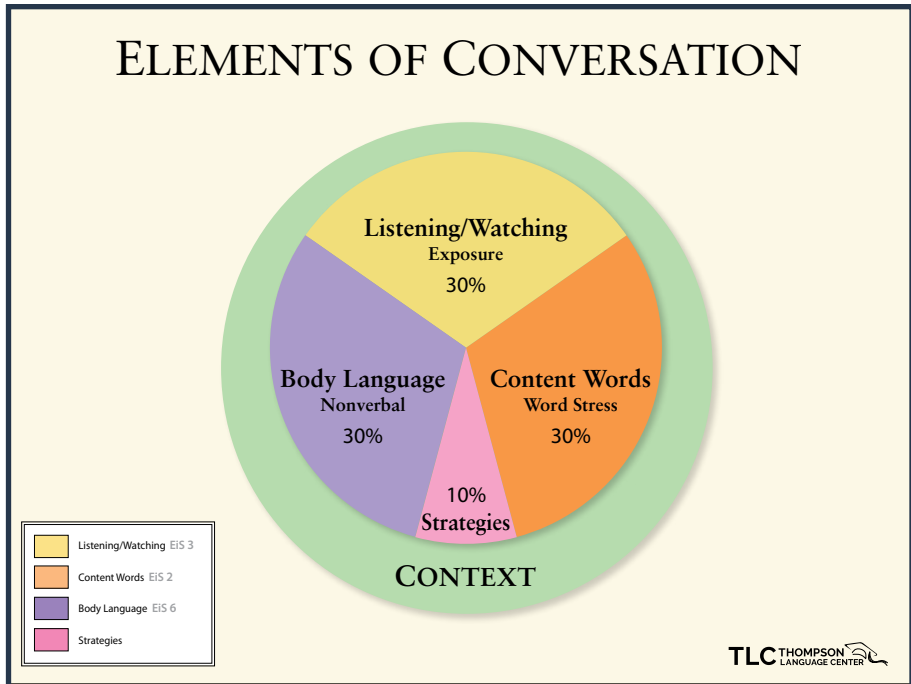
Body Language

No matter how perfectly a thought is uttered, the meaning can be totally hijacked by a roll of the eyes, shake of the head, a drop in the pitch of the voice... Ideally, these elements work together and support each other, but when they don't, **non-verbal communication is much more powerful than verbal.**

The Sixth Principle of Spoken English: *80% of the message is non-verbal.*

It is not unusual for non-verbal cues to provide 90-100% of a message. Context, voice qualities and gestures powerfully contribute to conversation.

The final frontier is a bit of a misnomer because body language has come full circle. Body language is also a founding pillar. Here's a concept pie graph to show the element required for basic communication and their relative weights.



It's a circle within a circle, and the outside circle is **context**. All communication happens inside of specific context that fully and constantly supports the meaning. **Context** and **gestures** alone are sufficient for successful, rudimentary conversation. That's something trained English teachers will never share with students, and they should.

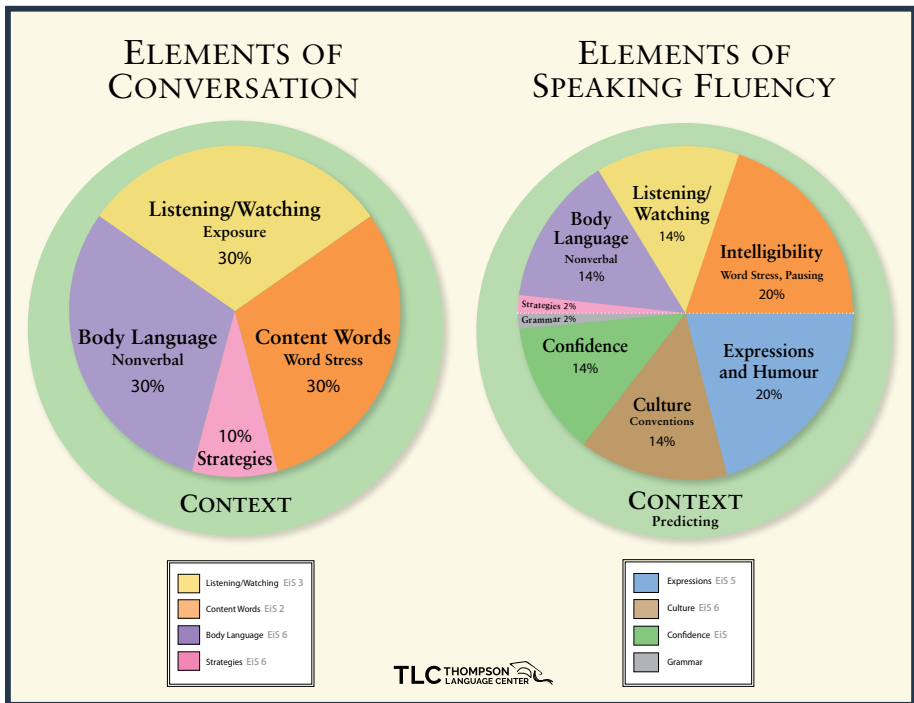
Continuing around the Circle

Listening/Watching weighs in as extremely significant for basic conversation. This section is the responsibility of the learner, not the teacher. Learning to speak English comes from exposure and participation, not study *per se*. As learners become more fluent, the **speed** and **accuracy** of their listening naturally improves.

Content Words properly stressed are the single most critical feature of **intelligibility**, but that was covered in *Book Two*. Students studying at the fluency level should have this down pat.

Strategies are always in the background of confident communication, also known as Plan B or *what to do if all else fails*. Writing messages down, drawing pictures, enrolling translators... are basic-level strategies. In the following *Elements of Fluency* chart, strategies are still part of the scene but in a much smaller, much more sophisticated way — *I beg your pardon?*, *Could you repeat that?* *Did you just say...?*

There are a few more aspects to **fluency**. Not only are the existing categories enhanced, there are four new categories.



All four *Elements of Conversation* (above the horizon) are also part of fluency, but there are four more parts to fluency, and the original sections are also ramped up a degree.

Body Language and Fluency

Before man stood erect, he successfully conveyed messages with gestures. We still do. Body language provides functional, practical, even universal support for communication. As conversation skills improve, so does non-verbal fluency. Learners develop more awareness and control over how they move their bodies and **use their voices** to express themselves and understand others.

Listening/Watching Fluency

Fluent speakers are fluent listeners. I trust that on Day One you insisted your students listen to hundreds of hours of English, didn't you? If they listen to the same show, podcast, dialogue... over and over, their overall listening speed and accuracy will improve. Their 'ear' for collocations will improve, and expressions will be stored automatically and be more quickly and confidently accessed.

Word Stress and Pausing in Fluency

Pausing has been added to the word stress sector in the *Elements of Fluency*. While word stress is the single most critical aspect of intelligibility, it's inconsequential without its sidekick, **pausing**. Pausing is not an issue with novice speakers. They pause all too frequently, searching for words and working out what they want to say. Pausing is an issue for advanced speakers. Actually, lack of pausing is the problem.

It seems like such a little thing, like the metal tongue in your belt buckle that catches the holes in your belt. If it isn't there, your pants fall down. Sometimes, tiny little things wield a lot of power. Pausing is one of these.

Rate of Words/Minute

Write	13 – 20
Type	50 – 60
Speak	125 – 250
Listen	400 – 500
Think	1,000 – 2,000

Humans think so quickly, all we need is a fraction-of-a-second break in speaking every three or four words in order to process what is being said. You know how people respond to what is being said before the speaker has finished saying it? It's in the context and the tiny critical pauses that the listener has processed or guessed what is being said, formulated their response and are so eager to share that they don't wait for the speaker to finish — which is a tiny bit rude.

In the case of *to pause or not to pause*, the effect is dire. There is no pausing in the Middle East or India. If these speakers' sounds and grammar were perfect, native speakers still wouldn't understand a word they say.

No word stress + No pausing = No intelligibility

Too often, learners equate speed with fluency. It's a big mistake. Unless word stress and pausing are evident, speed impedes intelligibility. Speed \neq fluency. You don't notice how important pausing is until it isn't there.

Strategies

At this level, strategies are fairly automatic. When talking to your boss and there is a miscommunication, you apologize — even if it is their fault (especially when it is their fault) and ask for clarification, *I beg your pardon? I'm sorry, could you repeat that?* When it isn't your boss and communication breaks down, students can use the word that native speakers use extensively — *What?*

The Four New Elements of Fluency

Expressions and Humor

While reading is a great way for learners to build their storehouse of vocabulary and expressions, it's useful for learners to know reading vocabulary is much, much, much more extensive than speaking vocabulary. Depending on their education level, native speakers can have reading vocabularies upwards of 50,000 words and access to more than a million, but most native speakers use between 1,000 and 2,000 for speaking. The issue with spoken words is not the number of words but the myriad way to use them (see, myriad — that is not a word I have ever said, but I read and write it). **More and more words aren't as important as using a few hundred words many different ways.**

Match is a noun if you *strike a match* to light a fire or organize a soccer competition.

Match is a verb if you are pairing similar things — *match wits, match up*

Match is an adjective if it is describing — *match point or match race, matchmaker*

Match collocates with *box, color, cricket, even, exact, excellent, football, girl, good, great, head, important, light, long, love, maker, perfect, soccer, tennis, wrestling...*

Brains like to store these natural word groups and cough them up when expressing themselves.

Make Do, Have, Get Collocation Exercise

Put a check mark ✓ under each verb that collocates with the noun in the first column.

Go ahead — say them out loud: *make married, do married, have married* and *get married*. Which one is right?

	Make	Do	Have	Get
married				✓
<i>Make married? What? That doesn't sound right.</i>				
lunch				
love				
homework				
dishes				
a mistake				
money				
laundry				
a haircut				
friends				
dinner				
a headache				
a job				
jokes				

If students did the listening as requested, they'll be surprised at how well they do in the *Make, Do, Have, Get* exercise. Unbeknownst (another word I have never uttered in conversation) to them, their marvelous brains began to perceive and store collocations long ago. Have your learners pay attention to words in groups from the outset.

Answer Key Make Do Have Get Exercise: make lunch (prepare), do lunch (meet for), have lunch (eat), get lunch (buy), make love (sex), do homework (work on school assignments), have homework (work to be done before next class), get homework (receive assignments), make dishes (special cooking), do dishes (wash), have dishes (own), get dishes (procure from a cupboard or store), make a mistake (err), have a mistake (unwanted pregnancy), make money (earn), have money (wealthy), get money (procure from a place), do laundry (wash), have laundry (to wash in the near future), get a haircut (go to the barber), make friends (find someone you like), have friends (a collection of people you know and like), make dinner (cook it), have dinner (eat it), get dinner (buy it), have a headache (current head pain), get a headache (head pain imminent), do a job (working at something), have a job (employed), get a job (look for employment), make jokes (creating funny), get a joke (understand the humor in it)

It does Not Compute

Computers can't translate English because computers (much like novice students) are literal and English isn't. An ordinary expression, for example, *out of sight*, *out of mind* (you soon forget people and events that aren't right in front of you) gets translated by a computer as *blind* and *crazy* — not the same at all. Collocations are one of the things I didn't teach Manuel. Consequently, he passed his ESL school speaking tests but couldn't speak English fluently.

More Lessons from Students

Before class in the morning, after break, after lunch... any time I entered my classroom, I'd hear noise, chatting in the room as I approached the door. The second I stepped into the classroom, the talking would stop. It didn't matter if I had a Literacy class, Intermediate or Advanced students, and it didn't matter how many different countries they were from (sometimes as many as 15 countries in one class), the students always talked successfully amongst themselves when I wasn't there!

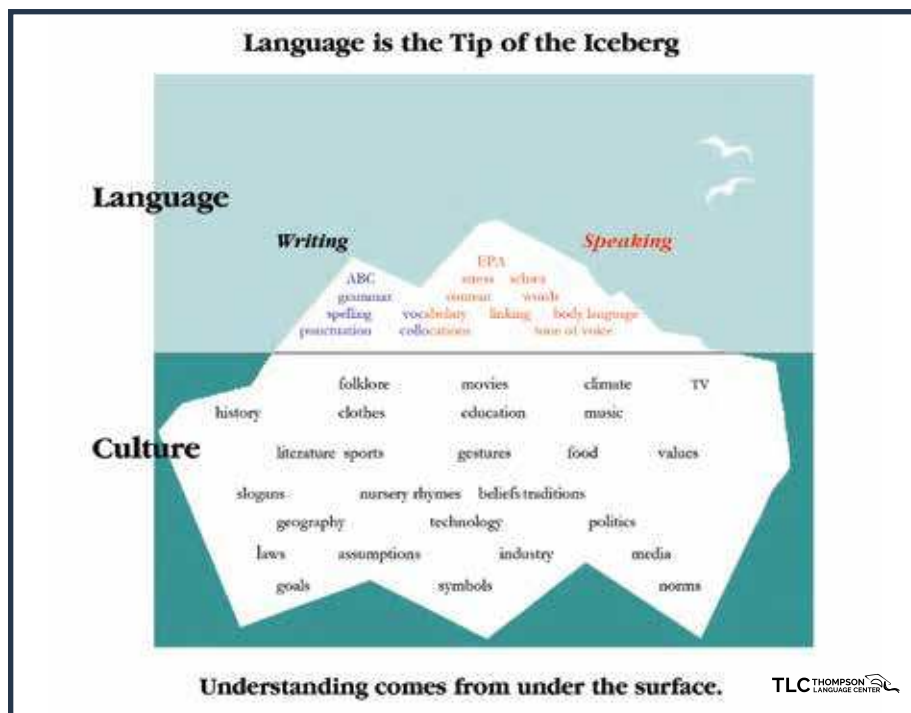
It turns out that the phenomenon of non-native speakers successfully conversing with each other in English is no problem and universal. **The native speaker in the mix is the problem everywhere.** Learners are intimidated by native English speakers, partly because they are self-conscious about making mistakes in front of them. This is not a concern with other imperfect speakers and drum roll please – mostly because native speakers use so much **jargon** and **expressions**, we are impossible to understand in a multicultural setting. Ouch.

English Changed without our Permission

Native speakers are being excluded from international meetings because the meetings are more productive and relaxed without them. Native English speakers are almost unable to process that we are the problem. It's a topic for another book. Meanwhile, your students should know the simple, often imperfect English that used to be called *broken English* is now known as *International English*. **International English** is perfectly acceptable, more generous and universal than its waning old cousin *Modern English* (Shakespearian) that is most often taught in school.

Culture

Language is not the access to culture, it's the other way around – culture is the access to language. *Matchmaker, football match, little match girl, strike a match, they are a good match, match point...* collocations (and dictionaries) reflect culture they don't define it. In order to become fluent in English, learners have to engage in the culture. Insist your students go to the movies, join a soccer team, volunteer their accounting skills at a local theatre group...



When I went to teach English in Korea, I appreciated a crash course on some dos and don'ts in the Far East — things I never would have guessed or noticed. It's hard to notice what people don't do — for example, sit on my desk (or even lean my butt on it), serve myself food or drink, show the soles of my feet. Travelers who consider teaching in foreign countries need to investigate appropriate behavior. Wherever you are, you are the trusted Western culture source for your students. Teach them the look-'em-in-the-eye, firm-grip handshake before they get passed over for a job and don't know why.

Confidence

Confidence can be cultural, situational, individual or a combination of them all. In very broad terms, young Latin males are comparatively comfortable with their imperfections and liberal with their willingness to try again. On the other end of the spectrum, older Asian females can be quite quiet, reserved and have extremely high standards for themselves. There is probably no politically correct way to say this, but there it is. (*Politically correct* has swung too far, in my opinion). The great news about confidence is that it's like a muscle — it gets stronger and stronger with tiny successes.

It is tricky to begin learning a new skill with any confidence. With the insights in this book and your compassionate coaching (no laughing at any mistakes — be a safe place), your student's confidence will grow with every imperfect encounter.

Oops

Students must accept that they will make mistakes. No one is going to die. Awkward silences often greet mistakes with open arms. There's your sign. Learners need to pay attention to their fails and learn from them. There is a lesson in every stumble. Shine a light on blunders, chew on them, embrace them, try again and enjoy success. Eventually, students won't have to think about every little aspect of communication. Their skills will seamlessly improve until speaking English is effortless and gently slips below their level of awareness.

Grammar

There is one more section in the Elements of Fluency. It's that little gray sliver due west. See it? Yes, that is the relative weight of learning grammar and why millions of students graduate from English classes with low (let's just say it — zero) functionality in English. The question of the day is, *Why is 90% of English class dedicated to teaching grammar?* It's old thinking in a dysfunctional system, and it brings us nicely back to the credibility of the Backpacker's Edge. Backpackers have no idea how to teach what doesn't matter! You should be charging a lot more for your coaching. Give yourself a raise.

Conclusion

Anyone who speaks English is considered a potential tutor in the eyes of a non-native English speaker. By avoiding jargon and details and focusing on the patterns of conversation, the Backpacker Series gives the broad strokes of how English works and a place for untrained speaking coaches to stand. **You Don't Say** teaches access to the other level, which describes the parallel universe where context, body language, and tone of voice are much more powerful conveyors of meaning than words. The goal is to give learners the least amount of information that makes the most amount of difference for them to get out in the real world and be successful in English on their own. You don't need an English degree to do that. All the tools you need are in the *Backpacker's Guide to Teaching English* series.

Six Rules of Spoken English

- 1) Every word in English is a color
- 2) English is a stress-based language
- 3) Important words carry the day
- 4) All interior words begin with consonant sounds
- 5) English is abstract
- 6) 80% of the message is non-verbal

Thompson Language Centre

Product List

ENGLISH IS CRAZY – User-friendly guide for English **conversation** skills. If you are an instructor who has avoided teaching **pronunciation**, this book is for you. Its pattern-based approach is simple and effective. Start teaching **Speaking** today. **ESL** (Amazon)

ENGLISH PHONETIC ALPHABET WORKBOOK – Companion to Chapter One of *English is Crazy* contains over 200 photocopiable, **individual sound exercises** to instill the 40 sounds of English learners' most preferred accent. Basic to Advanced levels inclusive. **ESL** (Amazon)

BACKPACKER'S GUIDE TO TEACHING ENGLISH – The Backpacker booklets on **pronunciation, conversation** and **fluency** concentrate the speaking program featured in *English is Crazy* with added tools to empower casual instructors making a difference for English learners. **ESL** (Amazon)

SPEAKING MADE SIMPLE – **ESL** Course curriculum. Tried and tested this step by step, 360-page, **speaking course** based on the patterns of spoken English introduced in *English is Crazy* is treasured by a wide range of English teaching facilities around the world since 2011. Available only as a printable, photocopiable pdf from www.ThompsonLanguageCenter.com

HOW DO YOU SAY? – Dictionary of **expressions!** A fabulous resource for authentic English rooted in the 2,000 most common English words. Learners LOVE it! Ordered by **sound** it provides easy access to spelling, meaning, pronunciation and expressions. **WARNING:** Contains adult language. (Amazon)

ABC FACILITATED READING — Teach reading at home. This interactive manual addresses English spelling and reading comprehension in a simple engaging process that parents and learners both enjoy. Facilitated learning evokes confidence, creativity, connection, life-skills, and fun. **Literacy** (Amazon)

Posters, Flashcard pdfs and Free Handouts are available from
www.thompsonlanguagecenter.com

For Tips on Teaching ESL explore the
Thompson Language Center YouTube channel
Playlist: Tips on Teaching ESL

FOR PEOPLE WITH NO TRAINING WHO NEED TO TEACH ENGLISH

"I revamped my entire teaching program to use the materials from the Backpacker books. I am a better teacher for it, and my students benefit tremendously!"

JOAN WEBER – ENGLISH IN THE WORKPLACE

"I wish I had this book when I was learning English."

DR. SHIJING XU, PH.D. – FACULTY OF EDUCATION

"By illustrating the patterns of the English language, Judy Thompson is startlingly successful at teaching foreign-trained professionals to speak American English."

SANDY LEPPAN – EXECUTIVE LIAISON

"The principles in the Backpacker series gave me the confidence to speak on CBC radio. I don't worry so much about grammar or my accent."

YURIY MITYURYAYEV – ENGINEER/PROJECT MANAGER

"Judy is one of the most professional and generous people I have met in the world of English Language Teaching. I admire her gutsy determination to speak out and challenge where there is need to challenge, but she doesn't stop there. Through research, trial and error, reflection and creative insight she offers solutions!"

RITA BAKER – WORLD'S FOREMOST EXPERT IN
TEACHING ENGLISH AS A LEARNED LANGUAGE

**The secret to great language coaching
is not in sharing everything you know about English
but in finding out exactly what your students
need to know and teaching that.**

–JUDY THOMPSON



JUDY THOMPSON, BA, TESL certification, pronunciation expert, author and TEDx speaker doesn't want you to know how long she's been teaching but decades ago she realized traditional methods for teaching English were missing the mark. She took away the jargon,

grammar and silliness, pared the language down to its bare essentials and teaches the simple patterns that are always true. Judy designed a system basic enough for laymen to teach that makes pronunciation, conversation and fluency accessible to every learner.

www.backpackersenglish.com

**YOU DON'T
SAY**

Book Three of Three

ISBN 978-0-9812058-6-1



9 780981 205861