

# Chapter 13 Outline

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# Foundation Phase

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## Objectives

**To recognize Foundation Phase learners and their skills and needs**

**To identify the outcomes and expectations for Foundation Phase**

**To share effective practices in the Foundation Phase classroom**

## Learner Profile: Foundation Phase

An at-a-glance profile of adult ESL literacy learners at Foundation Phase  
All skills are measured according to the Canadian Language Benchmarks and the Canadian Language Benchmark Literacy Phases

| Years of Formal Education   | Reading and Writing Skills  | Range of Listening and Speaking  | Range of Numeracy |
|---|---|--|-------------------|
| 0-2   | Foundation Phase  | CLB 1-3  | Phase I           |
| Typical Age Range   |   | Gender   |                   |
| adults of all ages, but predominantly either between 18-25 or over 55   |   | usually mostly women   |                   |
| Common Challenges in the Classroom  | Common Strengths in the Classroom   | Common Barriers to Learning  |                   |
| no classroom experience<br>frequent exhaustion<br>few formal learning strategies<br>low oral skills<br>building fine motor skills<br>realizing that print has meaning   | taking risks<br>collaborative learning<br>oral repetition<br>prior practical knowledge<br>survival skills | poverty<br>lack of adequate housing<br>lack of childcare<br>lack of transportation<br>lack of ability to access help<br>issues likely to be in crisis before learner receives help   |                   |
| Typical Social and Political Background   |   | Indicators a Learner is at Foundation Phase  |                   |
| learner can come from any country in the world<br>usually rural villages<br>usually highly oral societies<br>learner may have spent time in refugee camps or in additional countries before immigrating<br>learner may have experienced war, famine, displacement, poverty, or social or political unrest |   | learner has a lack of familiarity with classrooms<br>learner cannot identify his or her own nametag<br>learner has difficulty with left-right and top-down directionality<br>learner holds a book upside down or sideways<br>learner is unable to track (follow the text) with his or her eyes |                   |
| Typical Educational Background  |   | learner may talk when the instructor is talking, not recognizing that what the instructor is saying is relevant, or even that it is language at all  |                   |
| 0-2 years of formal education<br>formal education has been interrupted or cut short<br>previous formal education may have been in a second language<br>previous educational setting may have lacked resources, facilities, or educated teachers   |   |  |                   |

## The CLB Literacy Phases

The Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks (CCLB) has published two documents that provide a set of outcomes for ESL and ESL literacy learners in Canada. The first document, *Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000: English as a Second Language for Adults*, divides language learning into twelve different levels, called Benchmarks, in four different skill areas: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. This document is NOT intended for use with Learners with Interrupted Formal Education; it assumes a previous formal education, even at the lowest benchmarks. The second CCLB document, *Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000: ESL for Literacy Learners* (the CLB Literacy Document), focuses on ESL literacy and LIFE. It sets outcomes for four different levels, called Phases, in three different skill areas: reading, writing, and numeracy. ESL literacy programs who use this document measure their learners' levels by using the Phases for reading, writing, and literacy, and by using the Benchmarks for listening and speaking. Each Phase can further be broken down into Initial, Developing, and Adequate stages, and it is important to note that the difference among the stages is considerable.

At Bow Valley College, we use the CLB Literacy Document and the literacy Phases in our ESL literacy programs. There are two clear advantages to this document: there has been a considerable amount of material produced by the CCLB to support the Benchmarks and the Phases, and this is a national standard, so learners can more easily “transport” their education from one institution to another or from one province to another. We strongly recommend that any Canadian ESL literacy program look into using the CLB Literacy Document in their program. If you are not familiar with the CLB literacy Phases, Section Three of the handbook can still be useful to you; it provides a thorough introduction to ESL literacy at each of the four Phases, which are equally applicable to learners of different levels no matter what the levels are called (Foundation Phase, Phase I, Phase II, Phase III; Beginner, Intermediate, Upper Intermediate, Advanced; ESL literacy 1,2,3,4, etc.).

## Introduction: Foundation Phase

The Foundation Phase is the first stage on the road to becoming literate. It is also referred to as the foundational or pre-literate stage, as learners have no or almost no familiarity with printed materials. Very few adults are actually at the Foundation Phase. The ones who are at this level may be from oral cultures where the language has no written form, or may be from literate societies but have never needed to read or write before coming to a new country. Although learners from this group often have no spoken English, some may have quite developed speaking and listening skills – as high as CLB 3 in some cases.

Foundation Phase learners typically come from small rural communities and, coming from a strong oral culture, often have well-developed informal learning strategies. Depending on where they are from, they may already have two or more other languages, which makes it easier to acquire English.

When they arrive in their new countries, these non-literate adults are suddenly thrust into a completely foreign situation. They are in school for the first time, struggling to use a pencil while simultaneously learning to speak a new language. Meanwhile, learners often need to deal with everyday challenges of life with often limited ability to access support. Absences and withdrawal from class are frequent.

In the Foundation Phase, learners need to improve their oral English, gain foundational literacy skills in both reading and writing, and learn appropriate classroom behaviour. Attaining a rudimentary knowledge of oral English is essential because without it, learning to read and write is reduced to simply copying. Early reading materials often rely on learners reading their own words, so speaking is critical. Pre-reading skills involve visual discrimination, directionality, sequencing, and learning the names of the letters. Pre-

### **Collaborative Poster-Making**

In this activity, suitable for a Foundation Phase class, learners create a group poster. One easy theme is colour. After learning the different colours, each group picks one colour they want to represent on their poster. Learners flip through magazines to find anything in this colour and then cut it out. When enough pictures are found that are of the particular colour, the learners work together to glue them on the poster board. The result is a colour collage. When they are finished gluing, one student writes the name of the colour onto the poster. The learners copy their names onto the bottom of the poster. These posters can be hung on the walls and used for reference throughout the term. Even learners who have limited experience using scissors and glue sticks can successfully create beautiful collages in this fashion. Through poster making, the students get practice not only with the colour vocabulary but also with using scissors and writing their names. They also get the pride of displaying their work on the classroom walls.

writing skills involve the proper method of holding the pen and copying letters. For more information on foundational literacy, including pre-reading and pre-writing skills, please see Chapter Eight.

The time spent acquiring these skills and concepts depends a great deal on how much English the individual has and on where this individual is starting from. For this reason, the Foundation Phase may vary in duration from one learner to the next. It is not unusual for learners to take more than one session before they are ready to move on to Phase I.

# Nyakat's Story

## **A Foundation Phase learner**

*Nyakat is 25 years old and is from Sudan. She is single, has three small children, and lives with her uncle. As a child in Sudan, she attended school for almost a year until her father died and she was forced to quit. She moved to Egypt as a teenager where she worked in a coffee shop before coming to Canada four months ago.*

*When she begins class, Nyakat has no English. She cannot answer questions about her name or where she is from. She has no reading or writing skills and is unable to pick out her own name card or copy her name onto paper. Initially, the only activity she is able to do with any level of success is using a magnetic board where, given a model, she can organize the first six letters of the alphabet. Much of her time is spent dozing, because being surrounded by a foreign language and sitting in a chair for extended periods of time tire her out.*

*After the first two weeks, Nyakat masters the mechanics of forming letters. It becomes apparent that she enjoys drawing and colouring. One day, during the daily picture bingo games, she and her partner get a bingo and the lights go on for her. She finally understands the meaning of the game and, from that point on, begs to play bingo all the time. She is a quick learner and rapidly catches on to the different activities. Board games, clapping games, and computer games suddenly intrigue her. She plays the same ones over and over, internalizing the patterns. She still sleeps in class occasionally, but more and more she is participating in classroom activities.*

*After a few weeks of silence, Nyakat begins to first understand and then to produce some spoken English. She readily follows along in TPR (Total Physical Response) and plays picture bingo on the computer. Her love of singing gently nudges her out of her silence. By the end of the session, she understands many personal information questions and happily attempts to communicate all sorts of ideas in one and two word sentences.*

*In numeracy, Nyakat is able to count single digit numbers and can use manipulatives to count to ten. However, she has little understanding of money and, on shopping field trips, tries to buy things she cannot afford.*

*Nyakat is doing extremely well in the Foundation Phase class. She is determined to learn, loves playing games, and is beginning to realize that the spoken word can be represented by print. However, she is best served by having one more session at the Foundation Phase level in order to cement both her oral skills and her pre-reading and writing skills, before moving on to a Phase I class.*

## When is a Learner Ready for Foundation Phase?

It is a little misleading to think of when a learner is ready for Foundation Phase because there are no pre-requisites for Foundation Phase. A more pertinent question is when a learner is ready for Phase I, Phase II, or Phase III, in order to distinguish the levels. Any learner who is not yet ready for Phase I belongs in the Foundation Phase.

Foundation Phase learners are small in number and come from a variety of backgrounds and countries. What they have in common is their lack of formal education. They have had no or almost no education and have at most attended school only sporadically for one or two years. They are unfamiliar with classroom learning and are often unaware of the importance placed on the written word in their new country. Although they may have well-developed informal learning strategies to help them acquire spoken English, they have few strategies for learning the written word. They are likely to have little comprehension that words represent real objects and speech.

At this level, some learners will know nothing about the alphabet or have any pre-reading or pre-writing skills; others will have some basic familiarity with the alphabet and may know how to spell their names without a model. At Foundation Phase, learners can read little other than their name or a few simple words by rote. None can write a dictation, except maybe their name; all of this is a puzzle for them to piece together. This level has no prerequisites, so the instructor begins where the learners are, starting with the assumption that the learners have no literacy knowledge whatsoever.

*Atem, a forty-eight year old Dinka speaker from a village, had never been to school before coming to Canada. He is not yet aware that writing is related to speaking, even when the instructor uses learner-produced stories. He remains silent while the other learners “read” the story chorally, for he does not realize that the story and the chanting are connected. He is afraid to speak, for he does not want to lose face by making a mistake, so he is silent.*

## Foundation Phase Outcomes

Outcomes describe what learners will be able to do when they complete a unit, level, or program. The CLB Literacy Document provides a list of outcomes for each Phase, as well as conditions for these outcomes. When working with these outcomes, or basing classroom outcomes on the CLB Literacy Document, it is essential to recognize the conditions as well. The conditions explain in what circumstances a learner will be able to complete an outcome and are just as critical as the outcomes themselves. Conditions may state, for example, how much support is allowed and required from the instructor, how long a reading text should be, or how relevant and

familiar a topic should be for writing. At all literacy Phases, conditions ask for considerable instructor support and familiar circumstances for all reading and writing tasks.

Foundation Phase learners are working on a number of skills as they begin to develop literacy and spoken English and as they get used to the expectations and conventions of the classroom. They are learning pre-reading, pre-writing; classroom behaviour, and life skills for studying and living in their new country; and they are continuing to develop their listening and speaking. Level outcomes should be based on these challenges and the needs of the learners in the class. The focus should be on what is immediately useful and practical to the learners, such as recognizing their names in print or copying their telephone numbers.

The learning requirements for Foundation Phase are a very heavy load, and learning may be a slow process. During the Foundation Phase learners acquire an enormous amount of skills and become a little less passive in their learning. They become adept at forming letters, copying words, and manipulating picture cards. In addition, they come to the realization that the printed word represents the spoken word. They are beginning to follow along in books using left-right, top-down directionality. They become familiar with classroom routines, looking at books, and going on field trips. They are able to find their ID cards, and they are beginning to learn where to copy their information on simple instructor-made forms. They start to be aware of the print around them and use the surrounding environment to help them with their learning by looking at posters and pictures around the room.

*Atem, who has been in a Foundation Phase class for about two weeks, has little previous experience with writing. In a short time, he learns his first sight word, his name, which he diligently writes on every handout. However, he still requires assistance in reciting his address and phone number even after several weeks of regular practice.*

*Atem's basic knowledge of numbers is exhibited through his love of playing dice and of counting markers on board games. When playing games, Atem comes alive in the classroom, interacting and even correcting other learners, and it is during these games that he speaks his first English words.*

In the CLB Literacy Document, there is no numeracy strand in the Foundation Phase; numeracy begins at Phase I, although instructors may choose to introduce some basic numeracy concepts into their Foundation Phase classes. In this case, instructors can focus on the names of numbers and counting up to twenty, providing both the concept of numbers and counting as well as the language to do this in English. Instructors may find that playing games taps into the numeracy skills of the learners.

The Foundation Phase for reading is divided into two distinct stages, Initial and Developing, each with their own set of outcomes. In the Initial stage, pre-reading skills work toward the development of the learner's visual discrimination and introduce the concepts that speech can be represented in words and pictures and that we use directionality when we read. In addition, the concepts of same and different are introduced to promote the visual discrimination necessary to form letters. Letters are introduced through personally relevant material such as the spelling of the learner's name. In the Foundation Developing Phase of reading, learners work on recognizing their own names and addresses in the written form.

Writing in the Foundation Phase is a single level; it is not subdivided into Initial and Developing stages. At this Phase, learners are not able to phonetically encode, but they are learning the mechanics of copying. Writing conventions such as where to write on the page, how to form letters, and the importance of using spaces are introduced. Learners may need to begin with air drawing of pseudo-letters, progress to tracing, and, finally, to copying actual letters. The further the model is from where they are to copy, the more difficult the task. As learners progress, the model is slowly moved further away so that eventually learners can copy from the whiteboard or a flipchart.

The CLB Literacy Document sets outcomes in three areas: reading, writing (including reading and writing strategies), and numeracy. Depending on the program, instructors may choose to set outcomes in other areas as well, including learning strategies, vocabulary, and life skills. In the following chart, there are examples of outcomes in each of these areas. There are hundreds of possible outcomes to set in a program; this chart provides samples to give an idea of what outcomes look like at this level. For more information on setting outcomes, please see Chapter Three.

*Not all learners in a Foundation Phase class are at Foundation Phase in numeracy. Harjot is another learner in Atem's Foundation Phase class. Harjot is from India and has lived in Canada for fifteen years; until recently, he worked in a factory, but a job site injury has landed him in the classroom. Harjot's numeracy skills are much higher than most of the other learners. He is fully familiar with Canadian money, knows how to use six digit numbers, and can even calculate what his wage would be if he were paid double time and a half for overtime.*

*Tiziana is a Farsi speaker with no English or education before arriving in the classroom. When she first arrives in her Foundation Phase class, she chooses the wrong name card, unable to recognize even her own name. She is not aware that print represents spoken words. She does not consistently hold handouts right side up. Within a few weeks, however, she becomes aware of the concept of directionality and takes great pride in organizing letters on a magnetic board, copying a model. Soon, Tiziana is able to copy letters and say their names. Through translation, the instructor learns that Tiziana has embroidered a great deal and the instructor believes the attention to detail necessary in embroidery has been transferred over into letter discrimination.*

## Sample Outcomes for Foundation Phase

| Reading   | Writing   | Vocabulary   | Numeracy  |
|---|---|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• point to pictures to match realia</li> <li>• match letters to identical letters (same font, same case)</li> <li>• point to items that are same/different</li> <li>• echo the names of letters and numbers</li> <li>• point to own name in a list of six other personal information words</li> <li>• match upper and lower case familiar words (NAME to name)</li> <li>• spell own name aloud</li> <li>• identify various real life signs such as EXIT or STOP</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• air draw lines, circles, and letters following instructor model</li> <li>• use finger to trace large letters</li> <li>• copy letters directly below/beside model on unlined paper</li> <li>• copy letters directly below/beside model on lined paper</li> <li>• copy name from a model</li> <li>• copy address and phone number from a model</li> <li>• fill in missing letters from their personal information using a model</li> <li>• print a letter dictation</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• echo new words</li> <li>• clap out syllables in new words</li> <li>• say word to self while copying it</li> <li>• point to a new word on a picture or poster</li> </ul>   | <p>According to the CLB Literacy Document, there is no numeracy component for the Foundation Phase; however, some instructors may find that an introduction to numbers is useful at this point.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• choral count to 20</li> <li>• show fingers for numbers 1-10</li> <li>• recognize numbers up to 20</li> <li>• fill in missing numbers 1-10 in a sequence</li> <li>• organize numbers 1-10 sequentially</li> </ul> |
| Reading Strategy  | Writing Strategy  | Learning Strategy  | Life Skills   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• memorize two or three sentences</li> <li>• use a strip of paper or their finger to help with eye tracking</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• copy from another classmate</li> <li>• copy from a model</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• indicate with body language or a single word when they need help</li> <li>• bring the necessary learning tools and supplies to every class</li> <li>• ask other learners to explain a task in their own language</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• carry a piece of paper with personal information on it</li> <li>• find identification when asked</li> <li>• give family a note from the instructor</li> </ul>  |

## Approaches and Activities for Foundation Phase

Foundation Phase learners come from a very different world where information is relayed orally and where learning is done through hands-on methods. With their often highly developed oral cultural background, they are typically good oral language learners, although they may arrive in the classroom speaking little to no English. No matter what level of English they have when they begin class, they desperately need to become more proficient in order to function in their new country. Yet they must learn this new language without the literacy skills needed to take notes, review their school work at home, or learn new vocabulary from reading. The instructor's challenge in this class is to keep things easy enough not to overwhelm the learners, varied enough to stimulate their brains, and, most importantly, relevant to their lives, all the while recycling everything so that the learners have many opportunities to learn. It is a challenge for the learners and the instructor alike.

There are a number of approaches and activities that are effective in the Foundation Phase classroom:

**Review:** The instructor must provide many opportunities for classroom review in the form of repetition and recycling of material into new activities.

**Oral Practice:** Because the learners are oral learners, it is most effective if the vocabulary is well-established orally before it is taught in reading and writing; otherwise, the activity becomes an exercise in copying alone. Build in plenty of repetition and recycling of oral vocabulary.

**Chanting:** To build on the learners' strengths, it is important to use teaching methods that, instead of relying on the written word, rely on oral methods like repeating and chanting.

**Clapping and Singing Games:** Simple songs such as "Are you sleeping, Brother John?" and "Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes" teach vocabulary and provide an opportunity to improve fluency. Clapping is a good way to teach multi-syllable words, with each syllable getting a clap. Also, clapping games can reinforce the new vocabulary. A game can be played where everyone stands in a circle, everyone claps three times, and then one person says a word from the theme. Everyone claps three more times, and the next person says a different word, and on it continues until either the theme vocabulary is exhausted or everyone has had a chance to say a word.

**Whiteboard Work:** A whiteboard can be used for many different things and has the advantage of being erasable so mistakes are readily corrected, leaving no trace. The instructor can write words or sentences on the board, the class can read them chorally, and then individual learners can be asked to circle or underline particular words. Another way to do this is for the instructor to write sentences and read them aloud with the learners a number of times. The instructor then erases a word or two and has the learners chorally read the sentences and supply the missing words. Even simpler is for the instructor to write a few sentences, and then pass out flashcards

with some of the words from the sentences on them. Learners are then able to match the words on the board with their flashcard using magnets or sticky tack.

### **Looking for Signs**

One of the outcomes for learners in Foundation Phase and Phase I Initial is to recognize print and signs in their lives. A walk around the neighbourhood or even the school itself is a great way to look at signs. After reviewing some of the signs in class using either photographs or pictures, the class can go for a walk to find signs. As they are walking around, the instructor helps them notice some of the recurring signs such as *push*, *pull*, *exit*, and so on. After the instructor has pointed out the signs a few times, the teacher can ask the learners to guess what the next one says. There are also often recurring signs around that say the name of the school or the city. The instructor can point to these signs and ask the learners what they think they say. Often, learners are not even aware that the print is there and that it has meaning. This is a great way to get out of the classroom, connect learning with the community, and help learners become aware of the print around them.

### **Walks to Nearby Places:**

Walking around the school or nearby streets is a good way to create an awareness of print. The instructor and learners can point to various signs around them.

**Categorizing:** Beginning with picture flashcards, learners can be taught to divide pictures into categories such as food, transportation, and animals. After the vocabulary for these words has been learned, the instructor can make columns on the board, hand out picture flashcards, and have the learners use magnets or sticky tack to put the flashcards in the correct column. This allows

learners to help each other and also allows for repetition, as the instructor can reshuffle the cards and do it again and again. Once it has been mastered with pictures, word flashcards may be introduced.

**LEA:** Language Experience Stories are useful ways to teach. There are various theories on using them, with the purists advocating using only the learners' language while the non-purists lean more toward the instructor introducing some structure to the sentences. Either way, a story is created by the class with the instructor as the scribe. It is read chorally several times and then used as a source for further activities and worksheets. For more information on LEA (Language Experience Approach), please see Chapter Seven.

**Listen and Point:** This is a simple exercise which does not involve a pencil, so any mistake is easily corrected, and the learner meets success. Learners point to the picture that the instructor says. This is quick exercise to do between other activities.

**Personal Information Practice:** Learners need to be able to locate and state their personal information, so regular practice is necessary. Initially, this should be done orally and, later, written practice can be introduced. Simple drills can be done where the instructor asks the learners their phone number or the spelling of their name. An instructor-made reference card with their personal information can be taped to the inside of their binders. Initially, learners may echo the instructor or simply point to their personal information. Later, as they become more skilled, they will need less help from the instructor. They can have envelopes containing cut up cardstock of their own personal information to be used as a matching exercise on simple instructor-created forms, and, when they are ready, they can copy their personal information onto the forms.

*Although he does not read, somewhere along his life's journey Atem has learned letter formation and directionality. He readily copies – from books, from the board, from posters, and everything around him. Once Atem learns his first sight word, his name, he copies it onto every handout. Soon he can write his name without assistance, and he is very proud of this. With the instructor's guidance, he copies his address and phone number onto simple instructor-made forms.*

**TPR (Total Physical Response):** This technique allows the learners to demonstrate their understanding without risking speaking. The instructor says a word or command; the learners act it out chorally at first, and then, as it is fully understood, individually. For instance the instructor says, "Point to the clock" and all the learners point to it. This is a good exercise to do at the beginning of the day or after a weekend when they have not heard any English for a while. It also gets learners moving, which is very important at this level. It can only be done for a few minutes at a time but is very effective in teaching basic directions, classroom objects, and commands. For more information on TPR, please see Chapter Seven.

**Sitting Game:** Another listening game similar to TPR begins with all the learners standing. Then the instructor tells them to sit if they fit into certain categories. For instance, the instructor may tell them to sit if they speak Farsi or to sit if they have seven children. It continues until all learners are sitting. It is a good way to check for understanding and also to get learners moving.

*Tiziana has learned a few food words. Within a few weeks, with the help of a volunteer, Tiziana can now match half a dozen familiar food picture cards to their corresponding words. Working with the same set repeatedly, she is able to do this on her own over time. This makes her extremely happy.*

**Copying Exercises:** Using instructor-made worksheets, learners can copy the word below the picture. The same set of a dozen or so vocabulary items can be made into several variations of the same exercise to be done over the course of a week or two. If the learners are higher-level, the same set of pictures in a different order and without words can be made into a worksheet,

where the learners use the first worksheet as the model for the second worksheet. This gives additional practice and teaches the strategy of looking back to past work for help with current work.

**Flashcards:** Flashcards can be used to match two identical pictures or to match a picture and a word. They can also be used for playing concentration or simply for oral practice.

**Bingo Games:** Instructor-made bingos of pictures or the alphabet are very useful for vocabulary development. Learners get a chance to hear the vocabulary again and again. Some very simple commercial bingos can be used as well.

**Learner Photo Stories:** The instructor can make booklets using a photograph of each learner individually. Below the photo can be a simple repetitive story stating some basic information about the learner such as his or her name, country of origin, number of children, or favourite food. This story can then be used as text for the next several lessons. Since the story is formulaic, the learners get the opportunity to hear the language repeated many times. Cloze exercises can be made from these stories. Repetitive words can be found and highlighted or circled by the learner. The instructor can do oral yes/no or wh- questions about each learner. In addition, this booklet can be taken home so that the learner's family can see who else is in the class. Learner photo stories are particularly effective because they are about real people familiar to the learners. Foundation Phase learners have difficulty with the abstract and little concept of fictional characters.



Doo is a man.  
He is from Burma.  
He has 8 children.  
He likes bananas.

## Materials for Foundation Phase

Instructors in this level will need to unleash their creativity in order to make materials which are personally relevant to the learners. They will need to create new materials, reusing the same vocabulary and the same activity in new ways so that the learners have many opportunities to see that particular material again. There is a dearth of appropriate commercially-produced materials for Foundation Phase, and what little there is often needs to be reworked with the correct font and limited vocabulary for these particular learners. Finding material that suits adults with very small vocabularies can be challenging, and a great deal of the instructor's time is spent making or modifying materials. Certain commercially-produced computer programs make this easier; there are ones for making word searches, word shape worksheets, and bingos. LIFE are often kinesthetic learners and need to work with manipulatives such as picture and alphabet cards. They need to roll dice and move markers on board games. Keep in mind that the use and organization of these materials will also require time. The instructor needs to spend time putting the sets back in order to be used the next time as learners are often unable to do this. Zip lock baggies and elastic bands work well for keeping small bits of paper in sets.



Appropriate Fonts for  
Foundation Phase:  
Century Gothic 20 pt.  
Comic Sans 20 pt.

Materials at this level must be easy for learners to use; when creating materials, instructors should pay attention to font, font size, and the amount of white space or clutter on a page. At the Foundation Phase, font size should be very large. The CLB Literacy Document recommends as large as 20-point. For more information on adapting and creating materials for the ESL literacy classroom, please see Chapter Nine.

Suggested materials:

- ABC flashcards for teaching letter recognition and directionality
- instructor-made simple forms with first name, last name, telephone number, and address (several different versions with varying order of information)
- picture flashcards and picture/word cards, in varying numbers of pairs
- worksheets to copy words where there are clipart pictures above and vocabulary to copy below
- worksheets for matching capital and small letters, word searches, and cloze exercises
- magnetic ABC boards
- bingo games, either instructor-made or commercially-produced (food, ABC, numbers, animals, etc.)
- picture stories such as *Very Easy True Stories* (Longman)
- realia such as flyers, food containers, etc.
- dice, board games (with ABCs or simple pictures)
- 4 to 9 piece jigsaw puzzles
- picture dictionaries (with few words and lots of clear pictures)
- commercial board games with letters such as *Junior Scrabble* or *Boggle*
- magazines and poster board to make posters and collages
- map of the world; map of Canada; map of the city/neighbourhood

See the following pages for examples of materials suitable for Foundation Phase. These materials are available in “clean” copies for photocopying in the back of the handbook. Please feel free to adapt these materials to suit the needs of a particular group of learners. They are examples only and can be changed depending on level, theme, or program outcome.

Personal Information

Write 

Tips for Use 

Filling out forms and applications is a relevant task

Practices basic information and allows space for writing and large fonts for easy reading

FIRST NAME \_\_\_\_\_

LAST NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CALGARY AB

POSTAL CODE \_\_\_\_\_

TELEPHONE \_\_\_\_\_

Tips for Use

Repeated picture and word recognition builds sight words

Vocabulary specific to theme



giraffe

tiger

zebra

elephant

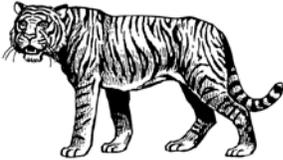
Copy

Tips for Use

Connected to previous template

Complexity level increases slightly to reinforce vocabulary recognition and practice independent writing skills

Widely transferable



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giraffe

elephant

zebra

lion

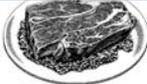
tiger

## Tips for Use

Practices sorting skills

Uses familiar vocabulary

## Categories

|   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
|  PEN   |  PENCIL |  MEAT |
|  APPLE | SUNDAY   |  EGG  |
| FRIDAY  | MONDAY   |  BOOK |

| FOOD | CLASSROOM | DAYS |
|------|-----------|------|
|      |           |      |

# Transportation



|            |          |         |      |
|------------|----------|---------|------|
| motorcycle | bus      | C train | boat |
| car        | airplane | bicycle | walk |

# Days of the Week

Put the days of the week in order:

### Tips for Use

Learners practice sequencing and copying

Reinforces vocabulary

|           |          |
|-----------|----------|
| Wednesday | Saturday |
| Tuesday   | Friday   |
| Thursday  | Monday   |
| Sunday✓   |          |

1. Sunday
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_

## Classroom Routines for Foundation Phase

It is important to remember that Foundation Phase learners do not have much experience with sitting in a classroom, and reading and writing exercises are likely to be exhausting for them. Change activities at least every 20 minutes and intersperse intense written work with activities where they can speak and move around.

Foundation Phase learners are unfamiliar with the classroom and therefore need to be taught specifically what is expected of them. On the one hand, they are collaborative learners and help each other; on the other hand, because they are completely out of their element, they are passive learners who sit patiently doing nothing until the instructor can individually help them. Pen and paper work is exhausting for them, yet they are frustrated if they cannot finish a worksheet. Listening to a foreign language tires them, and, unable to understand it, they may tune out and look disinterested; this is especially true of the learners who start with

neither oral nor writing skills. The following are ideas for classroom routines that work well with this level:

**Create a Routine:** A predictable routine helps the learners know what to expect each day. Since learning in a school environment is new for them, having a routine facilitates learning. Starting each day with a warm-up of predictable oral practice makes it easier for the learners to transition from speaking their own languages to speaking English. Ending the day with a fun wind-down activity gives the learners something to look forward to. This also signals to them that it is nearly time to go home.

**Change Activities Often:** Because of their unfamiliarity with a classroom setting and the concentration required to attain literacy skills, learners need to have a change of activity three or four times an hour. Literacy work is mentally challenging and this type of work must be interspersed with other less demanding activities that allow learners to move around. At this level, activities are best if they don't last too long. For instance, sandwich the difficult task of filling out a personal information form between oral personal information questions and a song or TPR.

*Since Harjot has lived in Canada for fifteen years, he has a more fully developed oral vocabulary than many of the other learners in his class. With access to a relatively rich vocabulary, he is able to grasp sound/letter correspondence for initial sounds and has more than a dozen sight words by the end of the session. He processes strategies such as looking at the model and checking for accuracy, and he patiently assists fellow learners. Perhaps because he has children in the Canadian school system, he knows how a book works. He can find particular pages, hold the book right side up, and open it from front to back.*

**Be Learner-Centred:** The secret to a good class at this level is to make it learner-centred; break tasks into very small steps, and make it short.

**Maintain a Consistent Format:** Using the same format on worksheets helps the learners know what is expected of them. If the worksheets always have a line below the picture to copy, then don't change them by making the line beside the picture.



**Oral Before Written Tasks:** The learners should always know the oral vocabulary before it is introduced in writing. Thus, a great deal of time each class will be spent on practicing oral language. Once the learners have the oral vocabulary, writing can be introduced in a very predictable context. Learners are only beginning to grasp the concept that the written word represents the spoken word and cannot effectively learn new vocabulary through writing.

**Pre-Reading and Pre-Writing Skills:** There are many activities that can be introduced to promote reading readiness. Following a story with one's finger is a listening activity that also teaches eye-tracking. Looking at picture books just to see how they work is another pre-reading skill. Cutting and pasting pictures teach the learner not only fine motor skills, but also sequencing. Board games teach learners some literacy skills while at the same time providing an opportunity for collaboration and fun. Writing the alphabet across the board can provide endless activities that promote phonemic awareness. For instance, learners can each copy their own name below the letter it starts with, or the instructor can act as the scribe with the learners calling out a different word for each letter of the alphabet. Learners can each be given a different word on a flashcard and put it under the letter on the board (*ball* goes under *B*). For further information on pre-reading and pre-writing skills, please see Chapter Eight.

**Recycle Vocabulary and Skills:** The instructor needs to build in countless opportunities for the learner to use these newly honed skills again and again in very similar situations. Learners need to be given many opportunities to recycle the skills and vocabulary they have recently learned.

## Sample Theme Unit for Foundation Phase

A theme unit is a series of connected lessons, taught over a longer period of time, from a week to several weeks. There are many advantages to teaching in theme units; it is an excellent way to introduce vocabulary and concepts, and it means that the instructor can recycle outcomes without the lessons feeling repetitive to the learners. For more information on theme units, see Chapter Ten.

In this sample Foundation Phase theme unit, learners will learn vocabulary about family and continue to work on pre-reading and pre-writing skills. They will be better able to fill out forms and better able to participate in social situations where Canadians ask them about their family. This unit gives learners an opportunity to recycle several reading, writing, speaking, and listening outcomes for the level. There is a high level of instructor support at each stage, and the same vocabulary is repeated throughout the unit.

LIFE are highly self-referenced and family is very important. Learning the words for different family relationships enables them to participate in social situations and aids them in government forms which often ask about family members. Everyone has a family, and this is often a way to connect with the learner who has limited English. A word of caution is needed in dealing with learners who have lost some or all of their family; the instructor must be sensitive to this situation, perhaps talking privately to see how the individual wishes to participate.

This sample theme unit is appropriate for learners in the Foundation Phase. It should take about two weeks of full-time classes to complete and is here as a model to demonstrate what theme units look like at this Phase. Note the level of recycling and repetition between lessons.

## Sample Theme Unit for Foundation Phase: Family

### Introducing the Theme: Family Members

#### Speaking & Listening Outcomes

- respond nonverbally to questions about family

#### Strategic/Life Skills Outcomes

- repeat family words
- identify pictures that correspond to spoken word

#### Numeracy Outcomes

- show fingers for “how many”

#### Brief Lesson Descriptions

1. Introduce family relationship vocabulary with photos of instructor’s family.
2. Solicit learners to bring photos of their families to talk about. Learn and practice oral vocabulary around family. Introduce numbers for counting family members.
3. Look at learners’ family pictures. Playing the sit down game, have learners sit down if they have \_\_\_ number of sisters. Play again with brothers, daughters, and sons. Ask each learner how many brothers he or she has.
4. Listen to and follow along with a listening exercise with pictures of family members. Learners point and repeat.

### Developing the Theme: Reading about Learners’ Families

#### Reading & Writing Outcomes

- echo a two-sentence story written on the whiteboard
- find and read own name
- match upper and lower case words
- find, circle, and copy target family words
- track a two-sentence text using finger

#### Speaking & Listening Outcomes

- answer five family questions verbally or nonverbally

#### Strategic/Life Skills Outcomes

- recognize own written name embedded in text

#### Numeracy Outcomes

- count using fingers

#### Brief Lesson Descriptions

1. Write a formulaic story on the board about each learner and how many siblings or children he or she has. Practice choral reading. Point to the family words. Solicit learners to guess what the word is. Have learners circle target family words on board.
2. Using a handout of the above story, read chorally and have learners circle own name and target family words on handout.
3. Several repetitions of listening to and following along with a listening exercise with pictures of family members as in 4 above. Ask, “How do you spell ‘sister?’”
4. Use a worksheet of a photocopied photograph of each learner’s family. Beside each person, write the family word, leaving space for learner to copy. Each learner then has their own family worksheet to copy family words onto.
5. Worksheets: word searches of family words; matching upper case and lower case family words.

## Final Product: Reading about a Fictional Family

### Reading & Writing Outcomes

- track story with finger
- find and circle target family words
- categorize into two groups with instructor support

### Speaking & Listening Outcomes

- respond to “Who is...” family relationship questions
- use male/female family vocabulary
- respond to vocabulary: circle, point, listen, and repeat

### Numeracy Outcomes

- count with fingers and echo numbers

### Brief Lesson Descriptions

1. Worksheets: sorting family words into male/female categories.
2. Play the family game. To play this game, one learner must choose a spouse. The spouse must choose a daughter. The daughter chooses a brother. Continue building the family with learners. Each time a family member is picked, the instructor asks about the various relationships. For example “Who is Nyadak’s grandmother?” or “Who is Abdul’s sister-in-law?”
3. Using a picture story such as “A Son for Mr. and Mrs. Aversa” in *Very Easy True Stories*, the instructor reads the story and learners follow along with pictures. After several readings, learners find and circle target family words.

## Tools

### New Vocabulary & Concepts

- vocabulary for family members
- vocabulary for female/male
- reinforcement of previously introduced vocabulary: circle, point to, listen, copy
- introduction of concept of categorization (male/female)
- use of numbers or show of fingers to demonstrate understanding of “how many?”
- understanding of “who” questions

### Language Structures

Learners can answer the following:

- Do you have a \_\_\_\_\_?
- How many \_\_\_\_ do you have? (How many sisters?)
- Who is \_\_\_\_\_ sister?
- Circle \_\_\_\_\_.

### Resources and Materials

- a picture story, such as *Very Easy True Stories* (Longman)
- instructor-created worksheets including photocopied photos of learners’ families, word searches, matching upper and lower case family words
- listening exercise of family words, such as Minnesota Links [http://www.mnlincs.org/online\\_audio](http://www.mnlincs.org/online_audio)

**Assessment**

The learners are assessed throughout the unit in their abilities to meet the outcomes. Where suitable, they can choose one or two tasks to be included in their portfolio. For further information on portfolios, please see Chapter Eleven.

## Lesson Planning for Foundation Phase

Lesson planning for Foundation Phase means creating meaningful, effective lessons that help learners meet the outcomes of the class. Lessons are often connected to a wider theme. The first of our sample lesson plans is connected to the sample theme unit; the second is another example of a possible lesson.

In any lesson plan at Foundation Phase, it is important to recycle vocabulary several times and in several different ways, giving learners an opportunity to absorb the new words. Remember that Foundation Phase learners cannot go home and “study” vocabulary; all learning is done in class. The instructor also uses the theme to work towards some of the reading and writing outcomes of the class: increasing sight word vocabulary, strengthening the connection that objects and ideas can be represented by words and symbols, and copying from a model.

There are several key features to an effective Foundation Phase lesson plan:

- No activity takes longer than 20 minutes.
- More intense activities, such as copying, are interspersed with activities that involve talking and movement.
- The lesson begins with oral vocabulary before moving to reading and writing.
- There are directions in the lesson plan for modifying activities for lower- or higher- level learners in the class; not every learner needs to do exactly the same worksheet or answer exactly the same questions.

## Sample Lesson Plan for Foundation Phase: Family

Part of Theme: Introducing the Theme

Level: Foundation Phase

Lesson Objectives:

- introduce family vocabulary
- recognize sight words for personal information
- copy words from a model
- reinforce sequential order of ABCs
- practice understanding yes and no questions

| Timing     | Activity Description  |
|------------|---|
| 15 minutes | <b>Warm up:</b> Greetings. Hold up name cards and have class identify whose card it is. Next, ask learners personal information questions such as phone number or language spoken.  |
| 10 minutes | <b>ABC Practice:</b> Everyone says, then sings, ABCs. Point to random letters and elicit the letter names. Give each learner a set of ABC flashcards to put in order. Higher-level learners can match capital and lower case letters. Lower-level learners can work from a model, using a magnetic board with only the first third of the alphabet.                             |
| 20 minutes | <b>Family Vocabulary:</b> Introduce <i>mother, father, sister, brother, husband, wife, son, children, and daughter</i> using overheads of photographs. Show class a photograph of your own family and say, “This is my sister. This is my daughter.” Ask each learner if he or she has a sister or daughter, etc. Ask learners to bring in photos of their family the next day. |
| 15 minutes | <b>Listening:</b> Pass out listening handout from Minnesota Links: Online Audio ( <a href="http://www.mnlincs.org">http://www.mnlincs.org</a> ); have learners point to and repeat each family members as they listen. Do this two or three times.  |
| 10 minutes | <b>Listening and Speaking:</b> Ask learners how many children they have. Allow learners to translate if necessary. Tell each learner how many children he/she has: “You have two children.”   |

|            |   |
|------------|---|
| 5 minutes  | <b>Listening Exercise:</b> Everyone stands up and instructor calls out, “Sit down if you have ___ children.” Do two or three times. On the final round, add some other familiar questions such as “Sit down if you are married” or “Sit down if you are from Pakistan.”   |
| 15 minutes | <b>Personal Information:</b> Pass out flashcards with <i>name, address</i> , etc. Have learners “read” the cards several times. Place cards on whiteboard in same order as on an instructor-made form and have learners read them again. Ask learners their name, address, etc. and act as scribe. Hand out instructor-made forms and read together again. Each learner fills in form using a model. Lower-level learners use an envelope of cut-outs of their personal information and match it to form. |
| 10 minutes | <b>Yes/No Game:</b> Hand a <i>yes</i> and a <i>no</i> flashcard to each learner. Explain which is which. Ask questions and learners hold up right answer. Examples: <i>Do you live in Calgary? Do you speak Dinka? Do you like school? Do you have six children?</i>  |
| 15 minutes | <b>Bingo:</b> In pairs or individually, play ABC bingo.   |
| 5 minutes  | <b>Wrap Up:</b> Learners line up at the door. Ask each learner how many children he or she has. They answer with a show of fingers. If wrong, they go to the back of the line and try again.  |

## Sample Lesson Plan for Foundation Phase: Food

Part of Theme: Developing the Theme

Level: Foundation Phase

Lesson Objectives:

- review food vocabulary
- recognize sight words for personal information
- copy words from a model
- reinforce sequential order of ABCs
- practice understanding yes and no questions

| Timing     | Activity Description   |
|------------|--|
| 15 minutes | <b>Warm Up:</b> Greetings. Hold up name cards and have class identify whose card it is. Next, ask learners personal information questions such as spelling of their last name or address. For higher oral learners, ask harder questions about their birth date or the spelling of Calgary.  |
| 5 minutes  | <b>Listening Exercise:</b> Everyone stands up and instructor calls out, “Sit down if...” questions. Do two or three times.   |
| 20 minutes | <b>Personal Information:</b> Pass out flashcards with <i>name</i> , <i>address</i> , etc. Have learners “read” the cards several times. Place cards on whiteboard in same order as on an instructor-made form and have learners read again. Ask learners their name, address, etc. and act as scribe. Hand out instructor-made forms and read together again. Each learner fills in the form using a model. Lower-level learners use an envelope of cut-outs of their personal information and match it to the form. |
| 15 minutes | <b>Food Vocabulary:</b> Using realia (pieces of fruit, bag of rice, cans of food, etc.), elicit food vocabulary from learners. Ask each learner to name one food they ate yesterday. In pairs, use picture dictionary to name food items.  |
| 15 minutes | <b>Clapping Game:</b> Stand in a circle. Everyone claps three times. One person names a food item. Everyone claps again, and the next person names a food item. Continue until each learner has had two chances to say a food word or until food vocabulary is exhausted.  |

|            |   |
|------------|---|
| 15 minutes | <b>Copying:</b> On an overhead, go over a worksheet of food vocabulary (sheet has clip art food with a word below and space to copy). Go over it two or three times, first getting learners to say the name of the food and then asking higher learners, “How do you spell ____.” Hand out sheets for learners to copy. Sheet can be modified for lower learners. Have each learner read the sheet to instructor when done. |
| 15 minutes | <b>Reinforce Vocabulary:</b> Ask learners yes/no questions about food they like. “Do you like pizza?” Learners hold up <i>yes</i> or <i>no</i> flashcard. After playing, practice saying, “Do you like ____?” Play “hot seat” where a learner sits at the front of the room and other learners each ask the one at the front, “Do you like ____?”   |
| 15 minutes | <b>Bingo:</b> In pairs or individually, play food (picture) bingo.  |
| 5 minutes  | <b>Wrap Up:</b> Learners line up at the door. The instructor asks each one a food question which he or she must answer correctly before going home. If wrong, he or she goes to the back of the line and tries again.   |

## Conclusions

Foundation Phase learners are almost always attending school for their very first time. They are entering this Phase without former contact with written language. In order to succeed in this Phase, there are many skills and behaviours they need to develop. First and foremost, they need to develop their oral skills. Learning to speak English is one of the first steps they need to becoming literate, for without at least the rudiments of the oral language, they cannot begin to make the connections between the spoken and written word.

The Foundation Phase is a time for learners to develop and foster the behavioural practices of literate people. It is a time for them to become aware of print, sequencing, and directionality in print. They need to be cognizant of patterns and of the relationship between symbols and the spoken word. This is the pre-reading stage. They also need to become proficient at the basic mechanics of letter formation and the conventions of where to write on a page. This is the pre-writing stage. As well as these skills, the learner acquires the socially-expected behaviours of the classroom, such as the importance of regular attendance and participating in activities. They will be learning different strategies for future learning, such as asking for help and checking for accuracy.

Becoming literate for the first time is indeed hard work, and the acquisition of these skills, concepts, and behaviours may take more than one session. Since the duration of time needed to become literate can vary from person to person, it is not unusual for Foundation Phase learners to repeat this level; the need for more exposure should not be viewed by the funding source, the program, or the learner as a failure, but instead seen as a legitimate opportunity for the learner to become proficient in these pre-reading and -writing skills and concepts. Only when learners have developed and internalized these beginning skills and concepts and have a beginner's knowledge of the English language are they ready to move into the next step of their literacy journey, Phase I.

*Nyakat, Atem, Harjot, and Tiziana each bring their own strengths and struggles to their Foundation Phase class. Many of these challenges are related to reading, writing, and numeracy, such as Atem's difficulty with understanding that text has meaning, while other challenges are in their lives outside of the classroom: Nyakat's struggle to feed, clothe, and house her children; and Harjot's chronic back pain. Some of these learners spend one semester in Foundation Phase and some spend two; however, all of them learn and develop. This growth is the first step on a road to increased literacy, but it also has an immediate impact on their lives: they all have better speaking and listening skills, they all have better understanding of life in Canada, they all begin to realize the importance of reading and writing in Canadian society, and they can recognize now-familiar words in the world around them, including name, address, STOP, and the names of their children or family members.*