

A Practical Guide for the Teaching of Literacy to Adults With Learning Difficulties

Part XI

MAY 2002

A Practical Guide for the Teaching of Literacy to Adults With Learning Difficulties

Diagnosis and Intervention Strategies

**XI — Cognitive Field
Module: Receptive Language**

MAY 2002

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English version

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XI—COGNITIVE FIELD

RECEPTIVE LANGUAGE

INTRODUCTION

“The cognitive field includes the cognitive skills that make learning possible. The existence of learning problems indicates a strong possibility of deficiencies at the cognitive level; if there is dysfunction at the level of cognitive skills, there is a strong likelihood of learning problems.”¹

As this passage makes clear, cognitive skills have a major impact on learning. Skills such as attention, language, perception, memory as well as planning and executing tasks are a part of daily, ongoing learning, and are all directly related to learning basic subjects. During workshops, it is important to encourage adult learners to speak, to think, to use their memory and attention span, and so on.

Although the development of cognitive skills is an ongoing process, specific activities and exercises can help foster these skills. It is important to present the adult learners with the objectives of each activity, to help them make the connection between cognitive skills and learning and to repeat these activities as often as possible.

Activities should be varied in order to stimulate different cognitive skills. Special attention should also be paid to the immediate environment (the organization of physical space), to the ground rules established within the group, to the kinds of work habits being fostered among the adult learners, and so on. Organize workshops in such a way as to encourage participation, responsibility, cooperation and mutual assistance—remember, interaction and the development of cognitive skills go hand in hand.

In short, the suggested intervention strategies for the various aspects of the cognitive field are designed to incite adult learners to interact, not only with the other members of the group, but also with the specific object of learning (a text to read, a problem to solve, etc.). This way, the adult learners’ efforts to grasp the object of learning—through mastery of the necessary cognitive skills—will enable them to gradually understand the purpose of the activity and to successfully complete it.

¹ Translated from J. Jasmin, *Guide d’utilisation de la grille de dépistage de problèmes d’apprentissage chez les adultes* (Montréal: Commission des écoles catholiques de Montréal, 1990).

COGNITIVE FIELD

<p>RECEPTIVE LANGUAGE</p>

1.	Does the adult learner have a good understanding of English?
YES:	The adult learner has a good understanding of English.
NO:	The adult learner has difficulty understanding all the words.

SUGGESTED INTERVENTIONS

- First make sure that the adult learner has a sufficient attention span to understand the verbal information conveyed during a conversation. See the interventions suggested in the “Attention” module.
- Verify the learners’ comprehension regularly by asking them to restate in their own words what has just been said.
- Take advantage of everyday opportunities to encourage learners to identify objects, to pinpoint similarities and differences and to name them. (Learners with limited vocabulary may be reluctant to speak and therefore should be encouraged gradually to express themselves within the group.)

SUGGESTED INTERVENTIONS (cont.)

- Expand the adults learners' passive and active vocabulary by means of various activities that require them to listen, understand what has been said and in some cases comment. For example:
 - ◇ Set aside a few minutes every day for a group discussion on a subject of interest to the group (current events or a topic proposed by the group).
 - ◇ Have the learners identify a mystery object or person on the basis of the verbal clues provided.
 - ◇ Have the learners identify and describe different elements in an illustration or photograph.
 - ◇ Conduct brief improvisation activities using everyday situations (learners must listen to and understand what is said and respond accordingly).
 - ◇ Use a brief recording that the learners can listen to while reading along with the accompanying text and illustrations.

- Encourage the learners to ask questions about words they do not understand.

- Act as a role model:
 - ◇ Use correct pronunciation.
 - ◇ Speak at a normal speed.
 - ◇ Use clear and simple language.
 - ◇ Find synonyms for unfamiliar words; use the unfamiliar words in a context that is relevant to learners in order to enable them to discover their meaning.

- Take advantage of reading activities to help learners enrich their vocabulary. (A rich and extensive vocabulary facilitates reading comprehension and vice versa.)

2. Does the adult learner have a good vocabulary?

YES: The adult learner has a sufficient vocabulary to function in society.

NO: The adult learner does not have a sufficient vocabulary.

SUGGESTED INTERVENTIONS

- Regularly verify the adult learners' comprehension by asking them to restate in their own words what was just said.
- Take advantage of everyday opportunities to encourage learners to express their needs, to identify objects, and to pinpoint and state the similarities and differences between different objects.
- Pay particular attention to vocabulary and language skills related to the themes selected for integrated learning:
 - ◊ Find out what the adult learner knows about the subject; use this knowledge and everyday language to promote the acquisition of key words.
 - ◊ Develop a reference tool consisting of vocabulary related to the themes covered.
 - ◊ Use scenarios and role-playing to develop language skills related to everyday situations: making an appointment, asking for information, etc.
- Help learners develop strategies that will enable them to understand what is being said. For example, encourage them to:
 - ◊ use the context (explanations given on a subject)
 - ◊ use knowledge they already have on a specific subject
 - ◊ observe and use nonverbal language (gestures, facial expressions, tone of voice, etc.)
 - ◊ ask questions whenever anything is unclear
 - ◊ reformulate in their own words what has just been said: "If I understood correctly,..."

SUGGESTED INTERVENTIONS (cont.)

- Expand the adults learners' vocabulary by means of various activities that require them to listen, understand what has been said and in some cases comment. For instance, ask them to:
 - ◇ match words with illustrations
 - ◇ identify as many elements as possible in an illustration or photograph
 - ◇ identify a person from the group or a famous person on the basis of the verbal clues provided
 - ◇ describe an object based on its characteristics. For example: The table is round, low, red, etc.
 - ◇ complete a series of words. For example: Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, etc.
 - ◇ identify as many elements as possible from a given category, beginning with a generic term such as "furniture"
 - ◇ use synonyms and antonyms
 - ◇ observe the many pictograms in our everyday environment and describe what they represent: road signs, instructions, etc.

- In a reading context, draw the learners' attention to certain key words essential to understanding: words that provide nuances, words that alter significantly the meaning of a sentence, etc.

A good English vocabulary will enable the adult learners not only to communicate with greater ease and effectiveness, but also to enhance their reading comprehension.

3.	Is the adult learner able to distinguish sounds and words:	
3.1.	in a quiet environment?	
YES:	The adult learner has no difficulty at this level.	NO: The adult learner has difficulty at this level, and seems unable to recognize or grasp all the sounds and words.

3.	Is the adult learner able to distinguish sounds and words:	
3.2.	in a noisy environment?	
YES:	The adult learner has no difficulty at this level.	NO: The adult learner has difficulty at this level, and seems unable to identify all the sounds and words above the noise.

SUGGESTED INTERVENTIONS

- First make sure that the adult learner does not have a hearing problem. When in doubt, suggest that the learner consult a specialist.
- Verify if the adult learner has the attention span and concentration required to distinguish sounds and words, especially when there is noise. See the interventions suggested in the “Attention” module.
- Expand the learners' active vocabulary required to perform everyday tasks, using the methods suggested in section 2.
- Identify the specific sounds or words that the adult learner has difficulty distinguishing and focus the interventions on these elements.

SUGGESTED INTERVENTIONS (cont.)

- Have the adult learners do numerous exercises involving auditory discrimination:
 - ◇ Have the learners listen to recorded sounds and ask them to identify the sound that is different from the others (headphones can be used to help with concentration).
 - ◇ Dictate a series of words that are similar in pronunciation and ask the learners to identify the word that corresponds to a given illustration.
 - ◇ Ask the learners to associate words that contain the same sounds;
 - ◇ With the learners, prepare a list of words that contain the sound or sounds that pose difficulties.
 - ◇ Have the learners do exercises which involve repeating sounds and words that pose difficulties; suggest that they record themselves and correct their own work if necessary.
 - ◇ Occasionally speak to the learners in a low voice and ask them to repeat what you just said.
- Help the adult learners develop strategies to overcome their auditory discrimination problems, especially in noisy situations. For example, encourage them to:
 - ◇ use the context to identify confused words or sounds. For example: “One would be referring to a **teacher**, rather than a **preacher**, to designate someone who works in a school.”
 - ◇ observe nonverbal language (the speaker’s gestures, facial expressions, tone of voice) to better understand the content of the message heard
 - ◇ ask questions whenever anything is unclear
 - ◇ ask the speaker to repeat, if necessary
 - ◇ reformulate in their own words what has just been said: “If I understood correctly,…”
- Suggest to the learners that they choose a place to sit in class where they can easily see and hear the instructor.
- Encourage the learner to be attentive during group discussions and to participate in them.

SUGGESTED INTERVENTIONS (cont.)

- Adopt rules of conduct during group discussions or conversations. For example, insist that:
 - ◇ only one person speak at a time
 - ◇ each person be given an opportunity to speak
 - ◇ people speak in a low voice, when the situation calls for it

- Make use of written material, if possible, to help the learner distinguish confused sounds or words. (Seeing the written form of a word or sound that causes confusion may help the learner focus more attention on its voiced form.)

- In a noisy situation, suggest that the adult learner:
 - ◇ move closer to the speaker
 - ◇ watch the speaker's lips
 - ◇ derive information from other aspects of the situation:
 - ⇒ the context in which the conversation is taking place (casual conversation, discussion on a specific subject, an argument, a request for information, etc.)
 - ⇒ nonverbal language (gestures, facial expressions, etc.)
 - ◇ restate what has just been said
 - ◇ ask questions about anything that is unclear

3.	Is the adult learner able to distinguish sounds and words:	
3.3.	when facing the person speaking?	
YES:	The adult learner has no difficulty at this level.	NO: The adult learner has difficulty at this level, and seems unable to grasp all the sounds or words. Sometimes the learner appears to be reading the speaker's lips to decode, or frowns, indicating an effort to understand.

3.	Is the adult learner able to distinguish sounds and words:	
3.4.	when near but not facing the person speaking?	
YES:	The adult learner has no difficulty at this level.	NO: The adult learner has difficulty at this level. He or she seems unable to grasp background sounds and words, even when near the speaker. Sometimes the learner appears to be reading the speaker's lips to decode, or frowns, indicating an effort to understand.

SUGGESTED INTERVENTIONS

- First make sure that the adult learner does not have a hearing problem. When in doubt, suggest that the learner consult a specialist.
- Verify if the learner has the attention span and concentration required to distinguish sounds and words. See the interventions suggested in the "Attention" module.

SUGGESTED INTERVENTIONS (cont.)

- Help the learners develop certain habits during conversations. For example, have them:
 - ◇ focus on a point (the speaker's nose or preferably eyes) in order to follow what is being said without being distracted by any surrounding sounds or movements
 - ◇ observe nonverbal language (the speaker's gestures, facial expressions, tone of voice) to better understand the content of the message
 - ◇ use the context to distinguish words or sounds. For example: "One would be referring to a **teacher**, rather than a **preacher**, to designate someone who works in a school."
 - ◇ ask questions about anything that is unclear
 - ◇ ask the speaker to repeat, if necessary
 - ◇ reformulate in their own words what has just been said: "If I understood correctly,..."

- As a speaker, adopt habits that will help the learners distinguish sounds and words. For example:
 - ◇ Pronounce words clearly.
 - ◇ Speak at a normal speed and with a normal tone of voice.
 - ◇ Use clear and simple language.
 - ◇ Find synonyms for unfamiliar words; use the unfamiliar words in a context that is relevant to learners to enable them to discover their meaning.

- Identify the specific sounds or words that the learner has difficulty distinguishing and focus the interventions on these elements.

SUGGESTED INTERVENTIONS (cont.)

- Have the learners do numerous exercises involving auditory discrimination:
 - ◇ Have the learners listen to a series of sounds (live or recorded) and ask them to identify the sound that is different from the others.
 - ◇ Dictate a series of words that are similar in pronunciation and ask the learners to identify the word that corresponds to a given illustration.
 - ◇ Ask the learners to associate words that contain the same sound.
 - ◇ With the learners, prepare a list of words that contain the sound or sounds that pose difficulties.
 - ◇ Have the learners do exercises which involve repeating sounds and words that pose difficulties; suggest that they record themselves and correct their own work if necessary.
 - ◇ Occasionally speak to the learners in a low voice and ask them to repeat what you just said.

3.	Is the adult learner able to distinguish sounds and words:	
3.5.	when his or her back is to the person speaking?	
YES:	The adult learner has no difficulty at this level.	NO: The adult learner has difficulty at this level, and seems unable to grasp all the sounds and words when his or her back is to the person speaking. Sometimes it appears that the learner has not heard anything or has only heard a few words.

3.	Is the adult learner able to distinguish sounds and words:	
3.6.	when far away from the person speaking?	
YES:	The adult learner has no difficulty at this level.	NO: The adult learner has difficulty at this level, and seems unable to grasp all the sounds and words when far away from the speaker. Sometimes it appears that the learner has not heard anything or has only heard a few words.

SUGGESTED INTERVENTIONS

- First make sure that the adult learner does not have a hearing problem. When in doubt, suggest that the learner consult a specialist.
- Verify if the adult learner has the attention span and concentration required to distinguish sounds and words. See the interventions suggested in the “Attention” module.

SUGGESTED INTERVENTIONS (cont.)

- Expand the active vocabulary that the learners require to perform everyday tasks, using the methods suggested in section 2.
- Suggest to the learners that they change places in the classroom in order to compare their ability to distinguish sounds and words depending on whether the instructor is near or far.
- Help the learners to become aware of the importance of paying close attention to what is being said when the speaker is far away or out of their field of vision; in such a case, the auditory stimulation is weaker and the elements of nonverbal language are outside of their field of vision.
- Make use of the radio (the news, a current affairs program, etc.), various recordings (songs, dialogues, stories, etc.), or any other audio material, without visual support, to help the learner to concentrate on what is being said without being distracted by other sounds or movements.
- As a speaker, adopt habits that will help the learners distinguish sounds and words from a distance. For example:
 - ◇ Address the learners by name to get their attention.
 - ◇ Pronounce words clearly.
 - ◇ Speak at a normal speed.
 - ◇ Speak loudly enough (without exaggerating) that learners who are at the back of the class can hear without difficulty.
- Help the learners develop the habit of regularly checking their understanding of something that has been said by:
 - ◇ asking questions about anything that is unclear
 - ◇ asking the speaker to repeat a word or a part of what has been said, if necessary
 - ◇ reformulating in their own words what has just been said: “If I understood correctly,…”

SUGGESTED INTERVENTIONS (cont.)

- Have the learners do numerous exercises involving auditory discrimination:
 - ◇ Have the learners listen to a series of recorded sounds and ask them to identify the sound that is different from the others (headphones can be used to help with concentration).
 - ◇ Dictate a series of words that are similar in pronunciation and ask the learners to identify the word that corresponds to a given illustration.
 - ◇ Ask the learners to associate words that contain the same sound.
 - ◇ Have the learners do exercises which involve repeating sounds and words that pose difficulties; suggest that they record themselves and correct their own work if necessary.
 - ◇ Occasionally speak to the learners in a low voice and ask them to repeat what you just said.

4.	Is the adult learner able to follow simple instructions:	
4.1.	without them having to be repeated?	
YES:	The adult learner understands the first time and is able to follow simple instructions, that is, a message or directions made up of one sentence.	NO: The adult learner does not understand simple instructions the first time and keeps asking that they be repeated. If required, the teacher should repeat the instructions several times.

4.	Is the adult learner able to follow simple instructions:	
4.2.	without visual support?	
YES:	The adult learner understands and is able to follow simple instructions without visual support.	NO: The adult learner does not understand simple instructions without visual support. Writing down the instruction or reproducing it graphically is often required.

SUGGESTED INTERVENTIONS

- First make sure you have the adult learner's attention before giving the instruction.
- Have the learner restate the instruction before carrying it out.
- Verify if the learner fully understands the meaning of all the words in the instruction.
- Ask the learner to carry out an instruction that requires a simple, concrete gesture. For example: "Could you please give this book to Jason?"

SUGGESTED INTERVENTIONS (cont.)

- Take advantage of everyday opportunities to give instructions to the learners in the group.
- Have the adult learner begin by pinpointing all the key words in the instruction. Example: “Could you **take this book** to the **instructor** in the **next classroom**?”
- Develop the habit of giving very clear instructions once only, while making sure that the adult learner is paying attention. This may help discourage learners who have a tendency to ask for the instruction to be repeated, not due to lack of comprehension but rather out of habit.
- Regularly assess the adult learners’ comprehension by checking that they have completed the assigned task. Also, give them feedback. For example:
 - ◇ Use positive reinforcement if the instruction was carried out correctly (encouragement, appreciation, etc.).
 - ◇ Ask the adult learner to do what was not done or to redo what was done poorly.
 - ◇ Repeat the instruction, if necessary.
- Occasionally give the learner a responsibility which is within his or her ability, which requires that he or she be attentive and which calls on him or her to put into practice understanding of an instruction. For example, have the learner bring someone a message and bring back the verbal response.
- Clearly and slowly state a series of simple instructions to be carried out consecutively. Do not repeat the instructions. Examples:
 - ◇ “Take out a blue pen.”
 - ◇ “Write your name at the top of the paper.”
 - ◇ “Write the date below your name.”

SUGGESTED INTERVENTIONS (cont.)

- In the early stages of teaching the learners how to follow simple instructions, allow them to write down the instructions or key words. Gradually encourage them to eliminate this visual support.
- Help the learners acquire habits that will enable them to understand an instruction the first time. For example, encourage them to:
 - ◇ observe the nonverbal language that accompanies the verbal delivery of the instruction, such as gestures or facial expressions
 - ◇ make a mental representation for themselves of the task to be carried out, such as visualizing the place where an object has to be put
 - ◇ pinpoint the key words in the instruction
 - ◇ when necessary, restate in their own words, either out loud or mentally, the instruction to be carried out

5.	Is the adult learner capable of following several instructions at a time:	
5.1.	without having them repeated?	
YES:	The adult learner can follow several instructions at a time, without repetition, that is, a message or information involving at least two tasks to be completed or two elements to be retained.	NO: The adult learner cannot follow several instructions at a time on the first try, and keeps asking that they be repeated. If required, the teacher should repeat the instructions several times.

5.	Is the adult learner capable of following several instructions at a time:	
5.2.	without visual support?	
YES:	The adult learner understands and is able to follow several instructions at a time without repetition or visual support.	NO: The adult learner does not understand and is unable to follow several instructions at a time unless visual support is provided.

SUGGESTED INTERVENTIONS

- First make sure you have the adult learners' attention before giving them the instructions.
- Start by giving the adult learners one instruction at a time while checking their comprehension. Gradually guide the learners to handle two instructions at a time.
- Ask the learners to carry out instructions that require simple, concrete gestures, for example: mailing something to someone and bringing back something else.
- Take advantage of everyday opportunities to give instructions to the learners in the group.

SUGGESTED INTERVENTIONS (cont.)

- Help the adult learners:
 - ◇ begin the process by pinpointing all the key words in the instruction. For example: “Would you **take** this **paper** to the **secretary** and **bring back** a pair of **scissors**?”
 - ◇ become aware of the chronological order in which some instructions must be carried out, by using vocabulary that will allow them to fully understand what needs to be done and in what order. For example: firstly, first of all, first, to start, then, secondly, after, etc.
- Make sure the learners fully understand the meaning of all the words in the instructions.
- Develop the habit of giving very clear instructions once only, while making sure the adult learner is paying attention.
- Regularly assess the adult learners’ comprehension by checking that they have completed the assigned task. Also, give them feedback. For example:
 - ◇ Use positive reinforcement if the instruction was carried out correctly (encouragement, appreciation, etc.).
 - ◇ Ask them to do what was not done or to redo what was done poorly.
 - ◇ Repeat the instructions, if necessary.
- Occasionally give the learner a responsibility which is within his or her ability, which requires that he or she be attentive and which calls on him or her to demonstrate an understanding of an instruction. For example, have the learner bring someone a message and bring back the verbal response.

SUGGESTED INTERVENTIONS (cont.)

- Clearly and slowly state a series of instructions to be carried out consecutively (instructions involving the organization of time and space or other skills). Do not repeat the instructions. For example:
 - ◇ “Take out a blue pen.”
 - ◇ “Write your name at the top, left-hand side of the paper.”
 - ◇ “Write today’s date below your name.”
- In the early stages of teaching the learners how to follow simple instructions, allow them to write down the instructions or key words. Gradually encourage the learners to eliminate this visual support.
- Help the learners acquire habits that will enable them to understand an instruction the first time. For example, encourage them to:
 - ◇ observe the nonverbal language that accompanies the verbal delivery of the instruction, such as gestures or facial expressions
 - ◇ make a mental representation for themselves of the task to be carried out, such as visualizing the place where an object has to be put
 - ◇ pinpoint the key words of the instruction
 - ◇ when necessary, restate in their own words, out loud or mentally, the instruction to be carried out

6.	Is the adult learner capable of:	
6.1.	following a conversation?	
YES:	The adult learner is capable of following and participating in a conversation.	NO: The adult learner has difficulty following and participating in a conversation.

6.	Is the adult learner capable of:	
6.2.	understanding the meaning of a conversation?	
YES:	The adult learner is capable of following, understanding and participating in a conversation.	NO: The adult learner has difficulty following and participating in a conversation and does not understand its meaning.

SUGGESTED INTERVENTIONS

- First make sure that the learner is able to focus on the speaker and on the content of the verbal exchange. As the speaker, use various means to help the learner focus, such as:
 - ◇ using the learner's name and making sure he or she is "mentally prepared" to participate in a conversation
 - ◇ positioning yourself within the learner's field of vision
 - ◇ as much as possible, eliminating background noise and visual elements that could be distracting (for instance, find a quiet setting if there is too much noise)
 - ◇ using vocabulary that the learner can easily understand
 - ◇ referring to concrete situations that the learner is familiar with and about which the learner has something to say
 - ◇ refocusing the learner's attention if it begins to stray during the conversation

SUGGESTED INTERVENTIONS (cont.)

- Expand the adult learners' active vocabulary through various activities that require them to listen to information, process it to understand what has been said, and comment. For example:
 - ◇ Set aside a few minutes every day for a group discussion on a subject of interest to the group, such as current events or a topic suggested by the group.
 - ◇ Conduct short improvisation activities using everyday situations during which the learner must listen to, understand and respond to what has been said.
 - ◇ Have the learners identify an object or person on the basis of the verbal clues provided.
- Stimulate listening skills during group discussions by occasionally suggesting the following exercise: ask each person before they speak to repeat what was said by the preceding person.
- Regularly hold effective listening activities (activities during which the learner has to pay attention to a message or text read out loud and retain the main themes).
- Make the learners aware of the various aspects of a verbal exchange (other than words):
 - ◇ nonverbal communication: gestures, facial expressions, etc.
 - ◇ tone of voice (varies depending on the speaker's feelings)
 - ◇ intonation, depending on whether the speaker is asking a question, making an assertion, trying to convince, etc.

SUGGESTED INTERVENTIONS (cont.)

- Help learners develop strategies that will enable them to understand a conversation. For example, encourage them to:
 - ◇ use the context and their personal experience to determine the meaning of unknown words. Example: “My son has a bad flu; the doctor gave him antibiotics.” The learners who do not know the meaning of the word “antibiotic” can assume that it refers to medicine by using the context or their personal experience
 - ◇ observe and use nonverbal language
 - ◇ ask questions when something is unclear
 - ◇ ask the speaker to repeat, if necessary
 - ◇ reformulate in their own words what has just been said: “If I understood correctly,…”

7.	Does the adult learner ask the person who just spoke to repeat himself or herself:	
7.1.	within the context of a conversation?	
YES:	The adult learner asks the person to repeat himself or herself and seems to lose parts of the conversation.	NO: The adult learner does not ask the person to repeat himself or herself.

SUGGESTED INTERVENTIONS

- Help the adult learners to become more involved during a conversation with one other person or during a group discussion. To do so, guide them in their acquisition of specific listening habits, such as:
 - ◇ looking at the speaker
 - ◇ eliminating, when possible, any surrounding distractions
 - ◇ only focusing on the conversation taking place (it is rarely possible to do two things effectively at the same time)
 - ◇ observing what is being expressed through the speaker's nonverbal language
- Stimulate listening skills during group discussions by occasionally suggesting the following exercise: ask each person before they speak to repeat what was said by the preceding person.
- Regularly conduct effective listening activities (activities during which the learner has to pay attention to a message or text read out loud and retain the main points).

SUGGESTED INTERVENTIONS (cont.)

- Help learners develop strategies that will enable them to understand a conversation. For example, encourage them to:
 - ◇ use the context and their personal experience to uncover the meaning of unknown words
 - ◇ ask questions when something is unclear
 - ◇ reformulate in their own words what has just been said: “If I understood correctly,…”
- Help the adult learners acquire effective listening skills through various activities that require them to listen to information, process it to understand what has been said, and comment. For example:
 - ◇ Set aside a few minutes every day for a group discussion on a subject of interest to the group, such as current events or a topic suggested by the group.
 - ◇ Conduct short improvisation activities using everyday situations during which the learner must listen to, understand and respond to what has been said.
 - ◇ Have the learners identify an object or person on the basis of the verbal clues provided.
- Help the adult learners improve their ability to concentrate. See the interventions suggested in the “Attention” module.

7.	Does the adult learner ask the person who just spoke to repeat himself or herself:	
7.2.	within the context of an explanation of a lesson?	
YES:	The adult learner seems to lose parts of the explanation and never seems to understand the first time.	NO: The adult learner does not ask the person to repeat himself or herself.

SUGGESTED INTERVENTIONS

- Help the adult learners to be more involved and to maintain the attention necessary to understand a verbal explanation. To achieve this:
 - ◇ ensure you have their attention before starting the explanation
 - ◇ encourage them to take the necessary steps to eliminate as many distractions as possible in their immediate classroom environment (place their desks so they can easily see and hear the instructor, move away from participants who tend to chat, keep only the material necessary for the present exercise on their desks, etc.)
 - ◇ redirect the learners' attention if it wanders during the exercise
 - ◇ ask the learners questions about the explanation that was just given
 - ◇ ask the learners to restate in their own words the explanation that was just given
- Gradually introduce the objectives to be achieved, ensuring that the activities only require the learner's attention for brief periods of time.
- State the desired objective before beginning the explanation. The learners' attention may be more focused if they understand why it is necessary for them to listen to an explanation.
- Make sure the learners have the background knowledge and skills necessary to learn new material (concepts, vocabulary) and that the objective to be achieved is an appropriate challenge.

SUGGESTED INTERVENTIONS (cont.)

- Help the learners make connections between their knowledge and skills and the content of the current lesson.
- Regularly conduct effective listening activities (activities during which the learner has to pay attention to a message or text read out loud and retain the main points).
- Help adult learners develop strategies that will enable them to understand verbal explanations, without repetition. For example, encourage the learners to:
 - ◇ use the context and their knowledge on the topic to acquire new concepts or enhance other skills
 - ◇ ask questions when something is unclear
 - ◇ reformulate what has just been said: “If I understood correctly,…”
- Help the adult learners acquire effective listening skills through various activities that require them to listen to information, process it to understand what has been said, and comment. For example: group discussions, improvisation activities, exercises involving the identification of an object or person based on a verbal description.

8.	Does the adult learner easily grasp jokes?	
YES:	The adult learner easily grasps jokes.	NO: The adult learner has difficulty grasping jokes.

SUGGESTED INTERVENTIONS

- Use short comic strips, with or without text, such as those in daily newspapers, and:
 - ◇ ask the adult learner to describe each part of the comic strip: the characters, what they are doing, what they are saying, the outcome, etc.
 - ◇ show the adult learner the beginning of a comic strip, preferably without text, and ask him or her to imagine the ending; then compare the ending to the comic strip's actual outcome
 - ◇ ask the learner to explain what is funny about a comic strip that he or she understands well (word play, an unexpected ending, characters who are funny because of their physical appearance or their manner, etc.)
- Help stimulate the learners' imaginations and encourage the learners to make connections between different aspects of a situation by using various short activities. For example, have them:
 - ◇ identify things that are improbable (like "Spot the Mistake") in the classroom or in a picture, such as a poster hanging upside down or a person wearing two different coloured shoes
 - ◇ as a group, play word association games: each participant states a word that is associated with the previous person's word (e.g. read-glasses-glass-water-drink-eat, etc.)
 - ◇ make up the dialogue of people featured in pictures or photos
 - ◇ write collective sentences. Each participant must add an element to a sentence, without knowledge of the other elements (e.g. the first person writes a name, the second a qualifying adjective, the third a verb, the fourth a name, etc.). The sentences are then read out loud
 - ◇ find answers to riddles, rebuses, charades and invented games
- Draw the learners' attention to elements which cause laughter in class, such as gestures, words, unexpected situations and surprises.

9.	Does the adult learner understand nonverbal language such as gestures or facial expressions?	
YES:	The adult learner understands nonverbal language.	NO: The adult learner has difficulty understanding nonverbal language.

SUGGESTED INTERVENTIONS

- With the adult learners, draw up a list of everyday gestures which convey messages. For example: waving a hand to say “hello” or “goodbye,” nodding one's head to say “yes” or “no,” pointing a finger at an object or person to draw attention to that object or person, pointing an index finger upward to indicate “wait a minute” or “come here,” etc.
- Conduct various activities that will enable the adult learners to become aware of the importance of nonverbal language and how to use it effectively. For example:
 - ◇ Show the learners photographs of people's faces expressing a variety of emotions and ask the learners to describe these emotions.
 - ◇ Using comic strips without text, ask the learners to create a dialogue by observing the context, that is, the characters' gestures and facial expressions, the setting, etc.
 - ◇ Using mime (acted out by the instructor or the group), encourage the learners to name and mime actions such as running, dancing or sewing using the whole body, and then to mime feelings such as joy, pain or impatience using mostly the face, hands and feet.
 - ◇ If possible, show a short silent film or a film excerpt without sound, and ask the adults to reconstruct the story by describing the characters' feelings and actions and by inventing a dialogue.
 - ◇ Ask the learners to read short dialogues aloud or to recite them using nonverbal language that is generally used in this context; then repeat the exercise using nonverbal language that contradicts the message (for example, saying “I feel fine” while wincing in pain). This type of exercise underlines the importance of nonverbal language in relation to words.

XI—COGNITIVE FIELD

MODULE: RECEPTIVE LANGUAGE

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