Ideas & Resources from June Tutor Roundtable

What techniques or resources do you use with absolute beginners?

Most people said that they haven't worked with absolute beginners (which is typical of Literacy Volunteers), but here are their tips for working with beginners:

- Gestures and facial expressions go a long way
- Focus on high familiar/relatable everyday topics OR goals
  - Try Jean's Subject Mapping list
  - Use the *Oxford Picture Dictionary* and its accompanying workbooks (there are multilevel options)
  - Talk about pictures on student's cell phone so they can describe their family, friends, travel, etc.
  - *Ventures* textbook
  - Flashcards for vocab/sight words
  - ESL newspapers
  - YouTube videos
  - Passing Citizenship or driver's license test
- If the language is difficult, make the tasks simple
  - Matching
  - Pointing to correct words
  - Multiple choice (over open-ended questions)
- Use visuals/write out new words for reinforcement
- Be mindful of quirks of English language and talk about them. **Don't** slow down too much or oversimplify your speech - your word choice can become a teachable moment.
  - Contractions and how they change the flow of a sentence (We say "Imma teacher" not "I am a teacher")
  - Slang or idioms - explicitly teach them
  - Spelling patterns or phonics/pronunciation patterns
- Try to plan activities that recycle/reinforce concepts (for example - a lesson on weather can bring in numbers (temperatures), clothing, days of the week, and weather words).
- When meeting with students in a library: allow them some time to take out a book
  - Can become homework or basis for discussion at next lesson
- Create puzzles (word searches and acrostics) based on student's interests
- Give homework, but don't pressure students

- ○ e.g., for lower-level students, give them a word list and ask them to use each word in a sentence
- ○ Assign writing, like a diary

What do you do when life gets in the way/sessions get interrupted?
- Be flexible/understanding & know your student
- Send text reminders the day before/morning of sessions (If you're uncomfortable sharing phone numbers, try the Remind app. It's a way to instant message without sharing numbers).
- Discuss expectations and protocols
    - ○ This is when/where/how long we meet
    - ○ This is what to do if you can't make it
- Work with multiple students so if one can't make it, you can still meet with someone
- Consider virtual tutoring tools (Zoom, phone, video chats) if student is having difficult getting to in-person sessions
- Know that it's okay to move on - our lives change and it's okay to let go or to stop working with one student so that you can work with someone on the waitlist.

What worked recently? Activities/resources/breakthroughs

- Using simple reading passages to reinforce vocabulary
- Tutor thought that her reading comprehension story and grammar book (That's Life) was too easy and was reluctant to use for lessons with her beginning student. When she introduced it to her student, the student very much enjoyed the level of the book. The breakthrough is to not assume a student needs to be challenged to learn.
- Integrated skills activity: Students answer a speaking prompt (e.g. "Tell me 3 things about one of your friends." Tutor takes notes in chat/on board and the student reads their ideas out loud to the group. The group asks follow up questions.
- Writing prompts for homework: Student does a writing activity and brings it to class. Read, discuss, and make corrections together as a weekly warmup.
- Resources that a tutor has found useful for more advanced students include: 1) New York Times articles, particularly the Science section and Metropolitan Diaries (short stories), 2) the U.S. Census site and articles, 3) News for You – ProLiteracy.   Student also enjoys learning about idioms are
- For online use, Burlington English is considered helpful.

- With beginner students, the green Phonics workbook is helpful to learn the sounds of English. The tutor not only uses the words in the book, but has fun with the student coming up with other words and phrases that can be used.
- Using translation tools like [Reverso](#) or [Google translate](#)

Some tips for virtual tutoring
- Prep a Word doc or PowerPoint to share on screen
- Screen share the Burlington English program
- Use videos to explain concepts (these can also be homework)
- When switching between documents while screen sharing gets disorienting, just choose the option to share the whole screen instead of sharing 1 document at a time (make sure anything you **don't** want the student to see is closed).