

Volunteer Literacy Tutor Conference 2026 Workshop Schedule



Registration: 9:00-9:25 am – Building 9, conf room 221/222

Check-In, Refreshments, Announcements

Session 1: 9:30-10:45 am – Building 7

Workshop A, Room TBD

Foundational Literacy with Beginning ESL Learners

Presented by Amy Grant

In this workshop we'll explore ways to adapt research-based foundational literacy methods (such as the methods taught in the PLC Foundational Literacy workshops) when working with beginning-level ESL learners.

Most foundational literacy teaching practices focus on helping native English speakers learn to read efficiently. Most ESL teaching practices focus on helping learners who are already literate in an alphabet-based language. Having both limited familiarity with alphabetic literacy and limited English vocabulary adds an additional challenge for early-literacy + beginning-level ESL learners. The objective of this workshop is to identify ways to bridge these two practice domains.

Learner: ESOL

Level: Beginning

Workshop B, Room TBD

Tutoring at Local Organizations (panel)

Moderated by Heidi Dryden & Lisa Palm

Are you starting to be a volunteer tutor? Or are you looking for some new opportunities? Our Panel Discussion of real volunteers will share experiences from five ESOL programs— Clark College, Portland Community College, Beaverton Literacy Council, SOAR and Torus.

Learner: ESOL & ABS/GED

Level: Beginning or Intermediate

Workshop C, Room TBD

US Citizenship: How to Support Learners in 2026

Presented by Eric Dodson

In the last year, U.S. Citizenship education programs have been decimated and the civics test has been re-worked; however, many organizations and tutors are helping immigrants persevere. In this workshop, we will learn about the process of citizenship, parts of the citizenship interview, practice activities, resources to support learners with legal questions, and common issues. Tutors will actively engage in ways to provide encouragement, feedback, and structure for one-to-one study with citizenship applicants, and learn how to connect with volunteer organizations. No previous experience with citizenship tutoring is required, though experts are welcome to join, review, and share.

Learner: ESOL

Level: Beginning, Intermediate, or Advanced

Workshop D, Room TBD

Conquering The Dreaded GED Math Test: A Workshop by Expert GED Math Tutors

Moderated by Dr. Lauren Zavrel

According to The GED Testing Service, 81% of GED students who have one test left to pass are stuck on the math, which is only a quarter of the testing requirements. Math is feared, hated, and often taught and tutored in ways that don't make sense to students. Tutors fear it too; they often feel ill-equipped to tackle GED math with struggling students.

This workshop is led by expert GED math tutors:

Lauren Zevrel and GED Tutors from Rebel Academy

Adrienne Larsen – Rebel Academy tutor

Tim Tipton – Rebel Academy tutor

Christian Rodriguez – Rebel Academy graduate and translator

Tom Whiteford – Rebel Academy tutor

Shawn Nelson – Rebel Academy tutor

Learner: ABS/GED

Level: Intermediate or Advanced

BREAK: 10:45-11:00 am – Buildings 7 & 9

Session 2: 11:00 am -12:15 pm – Building 7

Workshop E, Room TBD

Where to Begin: Creating a Structured Literacy Lesson Plan

Presented by Julie Hiefield

What are best practices in writing and delivering a structured literacy lesson plan? How does one determine a student's strengths and areas that need to be supported? These questions will be discussed by members of the Language and Literacy Fund; an Oregon nonprofit whose mission is to provide literacy support for adults in the Portland metro area.

- Participants will learn about lesson planning and the activities to include for a successful structured literacy lesson for both ESOL and native English speakers.
- Participants will learn about several informal assessments that may be used to inform what areas their student may need more support.
- Participants will also have the opportunity to practice giving an assessment and developing an introductory lesson plan for a fictional student.

Learner: ESOL & ABS/GED

Level: Beginning or Intermediate

Workshop F, Room TBD

Empowering Adult Learners: Practical Tutoring Strategies & Better Materials Design

Presented by Jennifer Elise Baran

Adult learners bring rich knowledge, cultural backgrounds, and life experience to the classroom, yet foundational literacy is often taught with materials and methods designed for school-aged learners. This mismatch can unintentionally undermine learner confidence, be patronizing, and reduce motivation.

In this practical, hands-on workshop, participants will develop tutoring strategies that honor adult identities and support equitable learning experiences. The session introduces simple ways tutors can use accessible digital tools, including AI, to create adult-centered worksheets, visuals, and literacy activities. Tutors will be able to replace outdated materials with tailor-made resources that reflect learners' real lives, goals, and identities. Tutors will leave with concrete techniques, examples, and custom created

materials ready for immediate use. **No technical experience is needed; however, participants are encouraged to bring laptops.**

Learner: ESOL & ABS/GED

Level: Beginning or Intermediate

Workshop G, Room TBD

An Open Education Resource (OER) for the GED

Presented by Julie Pursell

We are creating an OER textbook that integrates all four GED® subjects. This integrated textbook is centered on themes that are culturally relevant and inclusive of students' lived experiences. The thematic nature of this text, combined with the overarching subjects, encourages student and teacher collaboration. We will share the first three units of this project.

In this session, participants will interact and share ideas about teaching strategies and how they support learners.

Learner: ABS/GED

Level: Advanced

Workshop H, Room TBD

Welcome Neighbor! English Tutoring and Authentic Relationship

Presented by Patrik McDade

Language is not something disconnected from our lives. We live in and through language. For newcomers learning English, the simplest tasks that they could do in their own language can be inaccessible. For most new tutors, the first question is - where do we start? And we're usually thinking in terms of language structures.

In this discussion oriented workshop, we'll go through activities to explore who your learners are and how to discover their goals, even when their level is low. We'll explore your motivations and level of commitment. Participants will realize that 1-1 tutoring is fundamentally about relationships.

Learner: ESOL

Level: Beginning, Intermediate or Advanced

LUNCH: 12:15-1:45 pm – Building 9

Luncheon & Student Speakers

Session 3: 1:45-3:00 pm – Building 7

Workshop I, Room TBD

Cultural Awareness Panel

Moderated by Edit McDonald

Current and former ESOL students at PCC Rock Creek will share their experiences with American culture as compared to their home countries – good, bad and charming. Discussion will delve into the students' experiences both in the regular ESOL class and about their experiences in the volunteer tutoring program. There will be ample opportunity for interaction and insights on what is most helpful to ESOL learners.

Learner: ESOL

Level: Beginning, Intermediate or Advanced

Workshop J, Room TBD

So, how is that Foundational Literacy program working out? (panel)

Moderated by Peggy Murphy

Twenty percent of adults cannot read well enough to participate in parent/teacher conferences or help children with homework. They have trouble reading and understanding food labels, menus and prescription instructions. Low literacy skills affect employability and educational opportunities. In 2024, Portland Literacy launched its Foundational Literacy Program to help adults develop or improve literacy skills.

A panel of tutors and students/learners will share the difficulties, challenges, and rewards of Foundational Literacy tutoring. PLC program staff will provide updates on administering the program and future plans.

Learner: ESOL

Level: Beginning, Intermediate or Advanced

Workshop K, Room TBD

Intercultural Communication Activities for Beginners

Presented by Rachel Skinner

Beginning-level English learners struggle to develop cultural competency because teachers believe their language level is too low. My presentation challenges this belief and shows teachers and tutors how they can find and prepare materials for beginners that go beyond superficial culture and stereotypes. Participants will gain access to my materials and gain new perspectives on how culture is an integral part to language learning through discussion-based activities and reflection questions.

Learner: ESOL

Level: Beginning

Workshop L, Room TBD

We Belong: 1-1 Tutoring Program with Afghan Support Network

Presented by Patrik McDade with Grace Rubenstein

1-1 tutoring for immigrants and refugees is likely the most impactful way to support our newcomer friends. Not only is 1-1 tutoring impactful socially and linguistically, it's also not as difficult to train people to do well. Tutors need upfront guidance and support to stay engaged, feel confident, and motivate learner progress. Grace Rubenstein coordinates the English program at ASN, and has started a 1-1 program to complement the group classes she organizes. Patrik McDade is supporting this effort. Together, we'll share our learnings. Ideal for program coordinators, but tutors will learn from this too!

Learner: ESOL

Level: Beginning, Intermediate or Advanced

2026 Presenter Biographies

Eric Dodson has taught Citizenship and English classes with SOAR Legal Services for 10 years (i.e., four presidential administrations and hundreds of successful students). In addition, he teaches English to Speakers of Other Languages at Portland Community College in Southeast Portland where he lives with his family.

Heidi Dryden is an Adjunct teacher at Clark College, is on the PLC board as Tutor Education Co-Chair and runs the Portland ESL Network. She loves culture and languages. She has lived in Mexico, Honduras and studied a semester in China. Heidi works hard to make her ESOL classes active and fun, to equip English Language Learners to use their whole brain to learn.

Amy Grant is a teacher, mentor, and instructional designer at Beaverton Literacy Council. Since 2020 she has focused solely on working with pre-beginning (Level 0) and early literacy ESOL students, primarily in online classes. She has a masters degree in Learning Design & Technology and a CELTA (TESOL) certificate.

Julie Hiefield is a Literacy Specialist with the nonprofits Language and Literacy Fund and Language Skills Therapy and at Edison High School in Portland. Edison supports students with learning differences such as dyslexia, ADHD and other complex learning challenges. Since 2012, the Language and Literacy Fund has supported post-secondary students through classes offered at Portland Community College. The classes "Foundational Literacy Skills" are open to all students who struggle with reading, spelling and writing.

Patrik McDade is the founder and program director for People-Places-Things, building language and culture bridges in our communities. He received a Teaching English as a Second Language certificate from PSU and has taught in many countries. He has facilitated language skills development in immigrant and refugee communities since 1996. Through his work with People-Places-Things, he is shifting the dialogue about the role of language teaching and culture learning for building a more inclusive America. He is currently focusing on building language internships online, in person, in the US, and abroad.

Edit McDonald Hi there! I've been teaching ESOL for more than 20 years. I've taught in-person, remote, and web classes. Coordinating volunteer tutors is my other job at PCC. Both wonderful jobs have given me a strong foundation in the community and have deepened my cultural awareness. I enjoy baking, doing yoga, going to the Oregon Coast, gardening, and watching K-dramas.

Peggy L. Murphy is a retired technical writer and an active adult literacy advocate. She has served on the Board of Directors of Portland Literacy Council since 2010 and is a Past President of the Council. She is the Program Director of PLC's new foundational literacy skills program that serves native-English speakers and manages PLC's GED scholarship program. A graduate of Portland State University, she holds an Oxford Certification in TESOL/TESL/TEFL Teacher Training.

Lisa Palm is the Volunteer Tutor Coordinator at PCC Cascade Campus and has her own business teaching beginning level ESOL to adults. She volunteers with Portland Literacy Council and Portland ESL Network. Lisa received her TESOL certification from University of San Diego. Having served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in The Gambia, West Africa, she continues to love studying languages and empowering adult language learners.

Juliet Pursell teaches Adult Education at Portland Community College, where she has worked for 23 years. She teaches reading and writing and social studies.

Rachel Skinner teaches ESOL at Portland Community College and holds an MA in TESOL from Portland State University. Her bilingual journey in Brazil deeply shaped her understanding of language, culture, and identity. She is passionate about supporting adult learners as they navigate new languages, communities, and ways of seeing the world. With experience teaching beginning-level and literacy learners in a community college setting, Rachel specializes in

creating and adapting student-centered, task-based materials that support meaningful communication and real-life language use.

Dr. Laura Zavrel, the **Rebel Academy** is a local nonprofit that employs formerly incarcerated GED tutors to work with adult GED and diploma students and naturally, focuses mostly on math instruction. The Founder and Director, Dr. Lauren Zavrel, has been training GED tutors and teaching GED as faculty, mostly in prisons, since 2010. Her dissertation research through Arizona State University was focused on the national training deficit for prison GED faculty, particularly when it comes to teaching GED math.