



LiteracyLinks

The Newsletter for Volunteer Tutors

[Peggy L. Murphy, Editor](#)

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March 15

**Annual Tutor Conference
Reed College**

Save the Date!

Awesome Tutor Techniques

(An activity formerly known as Tutor Discussion Group)

by Peggy L. Murphy, Editor

Does this spark your interest?

“You will walk out of this workshop with techniques you can use right away with your learner(s), no matter their background or literacy level. You’ll be energized, inspired, motivated, and more effective.”

That’s the workshop description for the first Awesome Tutor workshop, “How Do I Know They Are Really Learning?”

Portland Literacy Council is teaming up with People*Places*Things to provide quarterly training opportunities — Awesome Tutors — for volunteer literacy tutors. Patrik McDade, program director at P*P*T, will kick off the new quarterly activity. This change resulted from feedback at previous tutor discussion groups at which tutors expressed interest in more training opportunities. The workshop agenda includes exploring social dynamics and building skills, along with reflection and discussion among participants.

The anticipated date for the workshop is a Saturday at the end of January or the first part of February. The workshop will be 2 hours and light refreshments will be provided. Arrangements will be finalized winter term. We’ll keep you posted on the details.

Meanwhile, *LiteracyLinks* posed five questions for Patrik about being an Awesome Tutor.

Q: Is it hard to be an awesome tutor?

Patrik: It’s not hard to do — but it’s not always intuitive. The things we think we should do are not always as effective as we expect them to be. There are a few techniques that work really well in a variety of situations, and they do take a little practice. It can be hard when you connect personally with someone and you realize their situation is so challenging — such as not being able to talk to their kids. Imagine if your children or grandchildren only spoke Vietnamese!

See “Awesome Tutor,” page 2.

Awesome Tutor (from page 1)**Q: Do I need to spend money on materials?**

Patrik: No. Paper and writing utensils are a minimum for tutoring or small group work. You can be very effective without books or equipment — a magazine or a bunch of pictures can be very useful, but even that is not required.

Q: If I make a grammar mistake, will it scar my student for life?

Patrik: A common question! Just like with any skill, the mistakes guide you toward the learning! Many times, the mistakes tutors are concerned about are because they are explaining a grammar point. It's good to stick with modeling natural language and writing it down instead of explaining and you'll get it right every time!

Q: How do I teach pronunciation?

Patrik: A really good approach is to say something natural — "I ate a bowl of cereal this morning", and then have them write it down. Then have them repeat each word after you, then have them say the whole thing together. Focus in on the problem pronunciation areas, but stay calm and steady with your repetition for no more than 5 minutes. There is a point where too many repetitions make it even more difficult to pronounce — come back to it next session.

Q: How can I build self-confidence in my student(s)?

Patrik: Always have a notebook, and have them write down every single word you say.* Focus on tasks they can succeed at, such as pointing to objects, images, or words. Have them repeat what you say out loud. Avoid asking questions that require them to come up with original responses. Imagine If you were asked to talk about your family in Vietnamese!

Portland Literacy Council and People*Places*Things are enthused about the opportunity to bring more training opportunities to volunteer literacy tutors. We hope you'll consider joining us.

**Editor's Note: I questioned this technique and Patrik explained it in detail. Perhaps this question will be asked/answered in the training. See you there!*

Grammar Review with OWL

Do you ever feel like you need a grammar tune-up? You may want to turn to the [Online Writing Lab](#) (OWL) website from Purdue University.

OWL content discusses grammar and mechanics, plagiarism and academic integrity, practice and exercises, and workplace writing. The OWL uses plain language to explain grammatical concepts, and presents clear examples in context.

On first look, OWL may seem limited to the basics, but access to first-level content leads to second- and third-level content. Site layout includes a left-side column of links with arrows indicating additional content.

Some of the site offerings may be more directly useful to tutors and instructors than to lower-level ESL students. For example, the section on sentence punctuation patterns explains eight types of sentences. The explanation begins with simple sentences, followed by three types of compound sentences, two types of complex sentences, and two sentences with independent clauses and embedded clauses or phrases.

"Writing for a North American Business Audience" contains good general advice on writing: e.g., tight organization, simple wording, active/passive voice. This section includes a link to proofreading that discusses general strategies and how to personalize proofreading to help writers focus on their own common missteps.

Our reviewer relied quite a bit on the Internet browser history for navigation. On first-glance OWL seems to have a three-level organization; however, links embedded within the text often led to new threads that don't appear in the left-column links.

OWL has many printable resources. Please see their [Terms and Conditions of Fair Use](#) policy if you wish to use the materials.

Looking for free resources for tutors and students? Try the Portland Literacy Council website. Available 24/7.

What's in Your Tutor Toolbox?

The Language Diet

by [Patrik McDade](#), Program Director,
[People*Places*Things](#)

If you want to learn a language, you might as well drop 20 pounds at the same time.

Improving language skills is an arduous process, just like changing your body weight. To permanently improve one's language skills implies daily work. You have to create new habits and even change your social and physical surroundings. It requires consistent exercise.

Those of us who have learned another language know — if you don't permanently change your life to include using your new skills, you will find yourself rusty in a matter of months. Just like with dieting, you'll gain that weight right back.

As tutors and language trainers, keep in mind the four or so hours learners spend with you are sort of like intensive exercise sessions. They will get benefits — but if they are not “eating right” and “exercising regularly” outside of the classroom, their progress will be limited.

As language and cultural skills development specialists, if we truly care about people improving their communication skills, we must think of ourselves more as coaches than teachers.

Here are some things you can do to inspire more engagement and practice outside of your sessions:

- Accompany your learners to relevant real-world locations to help them build confidence.
- Become a part of your learners' lives — and maintain healthy boundaries.
- Brainstorm and arrange interesting “homework” tasks which are focused on their lives — e.g., watch a TV show in English with their daughter; go to the library and check out a book; order from a fast food restaurant in English; go to an English speaking church.
- Set achievable goals.
- Stay in touch by text or phone to follow up on real world practice activities.

Editor's Note: Patrik regularly presents at the Annual Tutor Conference. We thank him for sharing his expertise.

For Your Calendar Tutor Training

Saturday, January 18 & 25
PCC Southeast Center
2305 SE 82nd Ave, Portland

March 1 & 8
PCC Willow Creek
241 SW Edgeway Drive, Beaverton

- [Register online](#) at Portland Literacy Council website.
- Register by mail, print [tutor training brochure](#), complete registration form, and submit to Portland Community College
Attention: Kay Talbot, VLT
P.O. Box 19000, SY SS 3
Portland, OR 97280

Questions: Kris Magaurn, Portland Literacy Council, [Email](#) or phone, 971-722-3700

The next and last tutor training for the academic year 2013-2014 is in May.

Opportunities

Oregon & SW Washington Health Literacy Conference

Sponsored by Legacy Health and community partners

Friday, March 7, 2014

Governor Hotel, 614 SW 11th Avenue, Portland

Online [conference registration](#)

Editor's Note: We test all Internet links embedded within *LiteracyLinks*. Occasionally we find that a website has changed the location of a webpage after our newsletter is published. We apologize for any inconvenience to our readers.