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Manual for Distance Learning

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(Edited from the original)

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the wonderful world of distance learning. This user's manual has been written to make the implementation of your own distance learning program as seamless and hassle free as possible. The information in this manual is based on my experience and my discussions with those who conduct other programs. To help you avoid some of the pitfalls that some programs have encountered, I am writing a practical, hands-on manual for launching and sustaining a quality distant learning program.

The *In English* and *In English On Your Own* video series and workbooks have been used with strong outcomes in ESL and CBET classes, but even greater success has been achieved in the distance learning format. The series takes the learner sequentially through increasingly complex language structures and vocabulary. The key point that differentiates traditional classroom instruction from distance learning can be best summed as follows: "you cannot rewind the teacher, but you can always rewind the tape." This ability to focus on specific areas of need in individual chapters is an important element in the success for students. Additionally, this helps to more effectively utilize the weekly face to face meeting between the pupil and the teacher.

This manual is based on my experiences at Chula Vista Adult School where, for several years, we have operated a very successful distance learning program. Our program has grown substantially each year and I hope that this manual will allow your program to find the same success.

THE BIG PICTURE

The most common element in successful distance learning programs is an environment where students feel welcome at any time, not only when they have an appointment. Many students come into our classroom to watch their videos or to ask for a short clarification of something. The actual weekly meeting lasts between 20 and 30 minutes. The basic goal is to build an individual connection with a student; the stronger the connection, the stronger the chance of good attendance and good progress. A simple example: whenever I work with a student I always sit next to them at a table rather than across from them with a desk in between. This is a small thing, but these small things will make a big difference.

There is a saying in adult education that students vote with their feet; if they don't get what they need, they will not attend. I have found that being available to my students,

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being flexible in rescheduling appointments, and being genuinely interested in them as individuals are critical to maintaining consistently strong attendance and positive results.

Along with the *In English* videos and workbooks, the teacher will need supplemental materials, student folders, tests, etc. The better the organization of these materials the easier it will be to serve students. Good organization will also mean better records on student progress and appropriate program funding. Examples of student assessment sheets and video check out forms are available at no cost from Video Language Products. In my program the videos are organized in a large standing cabinet or on bookshelves for easy accessibility with all forms and student files in file cabinets immediately behind the desk.

The information in this user's manual is quite detailed. I recognize that many of the readers will have long experience in education and possibly with teaching adults as well. For those of you who do not, I have included information on learning styles and the difference between teaching children and adults toward the end of the manual.

PLACEMENT AND ORIENTATION

Although each situation will be different, there are some tried and true procedures that have allowed distance learning to be successfully implemented in a variety of settings. This information is presented chronologically the same way the students will receive it. The instructor is encouraged to watch the videotapes and follow the related workbook exercises to better understand and answer students' inquiries. If time does not allow for the viewing of all tapes then at least several chapters perhaps units one or two, five or six, and eleven or twelve could be seen to provide a general understanding of the program and its scope.

The initial encounter with the student will set the tone for later instruction. Due to the program design which focuses on one-on-one meetings, it is important that the student feels welcome and in good hands. At the first meeting with the student, introduce the general outline of the program, i.e. a video based program with companion workbooks that provide listening comprehension, vocabulary development, writing exercises and pronunciation practice. After registering the student, (or if the learner must go to another location then before they leave), administer the pre-test to determine placement in the workbooks, (see the program manual for specific directions on test administration). To reduce test anxiety, remind the student that the assessment is **only** for placement and that it cannot be failed.

PLACEMENT

A **very important** cautionary note: some students will score very high – volumes 4 or 5 or even above placement level on the test, (76 or higher of 84 questions). However, the student may need to be given an oral assessment as well either with the listening pre-test or by the instructor directly to assure proper placement in the program. Experience has shown me that many students, especially if well educated, have strong grammar skills but

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lack a corresponding ability to comprehend spoken English or the ability to effectively communicate ideas in speaking or writing. Indeed, one of the greatest strengths of the *In English* video program is the opportunity for students to receive as much practice as they wish in listening to English spoken at a natural pace by a variety of native speakers. Pronunciation practice and writing exercises in the workbooks, coupled with the weekly meeting with the teacher, provide a comprehensive program for English language development.

After the pre-test has been administered, correct it using the pre/post assessment manual which accompanies the video tapes and determine proper placement for the student. It is not unusual for a student to request a lower level than achieved on the test to allow for review of grammar and listening practice. This is a situation that each site must determine how to handle. My experience is that by allowing students ownership at this point, success will often foster success. One way to help the student to decide is to offer the student a chance to look over the book at the level of placement as well as workbooks one and two levels lower. Ask the student to review the grammar structures presented and also to listen to the scene on the tape while following the questions that are presented in the book. Remind the student that they will be expected to follow the tape and to transcribe the answers based on listening only.

As a rule of thumb, it is better to start the student at a lower level to establish a solid foundation of confidence and understanding, as each unit will build on the next.

The logistics of keeping track of student progress, appointments, and videos can be daunting at first, but don't despair! Sample scheduling, video checkout, appointment, and missed meeting forms and cards that have been developed and effectively utilized in several distance learning programs are available from Video Language Products.

ORIENTATION

After the student has been assessed and appropriately placed, a more detailed explanation of the program is in order. Take a few moments to walk through each section of the book with the student explaining the way it will be presented on the video. Begin with the student starting on the first video: Volume 1, Unit 1, Lessons 1 & 2. (The workbook sections are the same throughout the program, with one exception. All units, except unit 1, have an additional section called conversation that requires responses to questions based on personal information that along with other sections can be practiced with friends, family, or classmates.

In the first four units there are three videos for each unit. After unit four, each unit will have only one video. The three videos present a great deal of repetition and practice. Encourage the student to watch the video several times to ensure their understanding of the material. The first thing the student will see on the tape is the "scene". The first video takes place at the Los Angeles International Airport (LAX). As a camera pans across different areas of the airport the words of the scene are heard but no spoken interaction occurs between the characters. A helpful suggestion for students, even this early in the series, is to read the scene first without the video playing, then read the scene with the video playing, then rewind the video and once again watch the scene with the book closed

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for comprehension. Show the student the vocabulary/pronunciation pages and tell him/her that each word will be shown separately with the word written on the screen and the word pronounced out loud. The words on this list as well as the expressions will all be presented in this way. The same words will also be shown in video 2 focusing on pronunciation. The camera will focus on the mouth of the teacher speaking the words and time will be allowed after each word for the student to repeat it.

Following the vocabulary/pronunciation pages, show the student the questions on the scene in the workbook and point out the triangle on the page at the top. Explain to the learner that the triangles will also appear in the video with a number corresponding to each question and are there to help in answering the questions. It may be worth showing a student a segment of the scene on the video pointing the triangles as they appear and their connection to the questions.

The next section of the workbook will be structure, which presents the grammar concepts being presented in the unit. The structure will be studied by the student in the workbook and will also be explained in the 3rd video. Following each structure section there are related writing exercises giving the student the chance to practice the concepts r learned in the grammar section.

After writing comes the dialogue section, which serves several functions. First the dialogue provides additional listening practice and an opportunity for comprehension development. Second, it provides an opportunity for the student to hear different voices, both male and female, engaged in conversation in a natural manner. Third, it provides a framework for the development of the characters, their relationship to one another, and the unfolding of the story line. It is worth noting that in general the scene and the dialogue are connected. As an example, the scene in unit 1 is at LAX and the dialogue introduces us to Susan who lives in Los Angeles and is at the airport to pick up Richard who is arriving from Chicago.

The vocabulary, expressions, and grammar structure of the unit are embedded in the scene and the dialogue. The end of the dialog will often lead to the beginning of the next scene and also provides a thread that runs through the twelve units. The last part of the unit to show the new student is the evaluation, which is a cloze exercise using the text of the scene. As with any cloze exercise the material presented has words missing and by listening and stopping the tape as needed the student will fill in the missing word to complete the exercise. Show the students the test located at the back of the book and ask them to complete it after the evaluation. Be sure to remind the student that there are three tapes all relating to the unit and that within those three tapes all workbook exercises will be shown and completed on the screen including the unit test. Because there are three tapes involved and to keep the student from keeping the tape too long I suggest that the student exchange tapes at least once during the week. After unit 4, when there will be only one tape and no answers provided on the screen, students often require more time to complete a unit. In the first 4 units, however, with all answers provided, it is indeed possible for the student to make extraordinary progress in units 1 through 4.

As mentioned earlier, the conversation section focusing on personal information will begin in unit 2. This section will appear between the dialog and the evaluation. The

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conversation section provides extra practice for writing and another chance to learn about your students and their ideas.

Because unit 5 will move from three videos with all answers to a single video with no written assistance, I suggest that the student be slowly “weaned” from the answers starting with unit 3. The most effective method I have found so far is having students watch lessons 1 and 2 and 3 and 4 only, and not providing lessons 5 and 6. The advantage of this is clear; the student will be provided with approximately half the answers in the workbook, but not all and not the test responses either. By maintaining this two-tape pattern for unit 4 the student will be better prepared to adapt to the new format in unit 5. Once the student is on unit 5 or above it is probable he will need more time, perhaps two to three weeks, to complete each unit. Nevertheless all students must be strongly encouraged to maintain weekly appointments to allow for review of the work completed and to sustain teacher/student contact.

Before the student leaves the initial meeting, it is customary to collect a refundable cash deposit for the video with \$20.00 being the norm as of the 2002-2003 school year. Be sure to explain to this student that this is only a deposit to be held until the last video checked out is returned to the program.

Once the teacher is comfortable that the student understands what is expected, has been issued a video and has purchased a workbook, the last step is to set the weekly appointment. (Sample calendars and appointment cards are available from Video Language Products.) Sometimes students will not be able to arrange a set time weekly due to shifting work schedules. These students can be served by allowing them to be “floaters”, students who call once a week when their schedule is known to set an appointment. As there will almost always be some openings and changes in the weekly schedule, appointments can be arranged with flexibility.

The entire intake process including assessment, registration, program explanation, etc. will take between 50 and 90 minutes depending on the student and demands on the teacher’s time at the time of intake. In the beginning in the term, if there are many new students to enroll at once it is well worth setting a block of time aside to take a group through the orientation process rather than individually. The initial encounter will be the longest meeting between the student and the teacher. Weekly meetings with the instructor should be set at 20 to 30 minute intervals. Students who come in simply to exchange a video may be assisted by an aide to allow the teacher to focus on appointments.

The weekly meeting is where the real connection between the student and the teacher flourishes and provides the opportunity to enhance learning. The real beauty of the *In English* program when used in a distance learning format is to focus on specific points of need for the individual learner. For those 20 or 30 minutes the teacher functions as a tutor, a cheerleader and a resource for that student. When adult students understand the nature of these weekly meetings, they will come prepared with questions and requests for help with particularly difficult parts of grammar, specific vocabulary or abstract ideas.

If a student is to be placed above unit 4, remember that there will be nothing written on the screen for the student to follow. Not only will the student be doing all the workbook exercises without assistance there will not be any thing for the student to

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observe as a model for completion as is demonstrated in the first four units. While this is little cause for concern it is important to remember and this may require a slightly more comprehensive explanation from the teacher at the initial meeting. If the student is being placed in unit five or above the level of comprehension should be strong. I have found as with students placed in volume 1, the use of the video and the workbook along with words helps the students' comprehension. One tool that has proven useful is to complete one of the workbook units, say number 5, and then show the higher level student the completed unit during the orientation to provide an visual example along with the explanation.

ATTENDANCE

Regardless of the level of initial placement, the student must view the weekly meeting as an important appointment that must be kept or rescheduled. There are several reasons for this: respect for the teacher and the program, the development of a responsible attitude, and respect for other students whether floaters or another program participant who may be able to utilize the appointment slot. Remind the student that on-time attendance is considered very important in America, especially in the workplace and in the same way it is important here. On a more practical note for the school every lost appointment is a lost chance to collect ADA hours. The hard reality is that distance learning is driven and maintained by the hours that are generated; therefore, the higher your rate of attendance the higher the ADA collected and the happier everyone involved will be. In the program at Chula Vista Adult School we have 4 distance learning instructors each earning a **minimum 150% ADA** on a weekly basis.

One of the best ways to help your program achieve strong ADA is to assure that the student feels welcome at all times in the classroom or the lab. This cannot be emphasized enough. Invite the student to come in anytime they have a question or need for clarification. Although the videos and workbooks are quite clear in their explanations, some concepts may be new or create some uncertainty. By inviting the student to “drop in” as needed, you will not only help establish an excellent learning environment; you will also increase the chance that the students will be ready when they arrive for the weekly appointment.

RECRUITMENT

Be sure to use your students as recruiters for the program. Encourage the student to share their successes and enthusiasm and to invite friends, classmates, and family to join as well. The more connections that are established to the program, the better the odds are of maintaining student attendance. In my program we have siblings, parents, children, and couples enrolled and in almost every case a student in the program brought in another family member. If family members cannot attend, encourage them to watch the videos together at home. Encourage the learner to allow their school age children to help them. This is a wonderful chance to bring the family together in learning and may also do wonders for the children's self esteem and their own English development. Watching the videos together and having the children and parents assist each other are especially important if the program is being used as part of a Community Based English Tutoring (CBET) or Even Start program.

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INVOLVING OTHER ESL TEACHERS

One of the first tasks is to enlist the support and enthusiasm of the traditional ESL teachers on the staff. As everyone is justifiably concerned with keeping their own numbers up and may, at least initially, be concerned that distance learning is going to “steal their students.” This is an issue that must be addressed with kindness and sensitivity, but also with assertiveness.

It is very important that the distance learning teacher meet with the other ESL instructors to elicit their support, explain the program clearly, and to make clear that it is the intention of the program to impact their classroom enrollment and success only in a positive way. The distance learning instructor is encouraged to share the success of other schools using this program, especially the increase in student interest when they are enrolled in the distance learning program as well as in traditional classes. The general idea is as follows: When a student takes distance learning they have an opportunity to increase their own skills outside the classroom which will lead to more comfort and success in the classroom due to additional exposure to English that the non DL student does not have.

Ask the teacher’s permission to visit their classroom to give a short presentation to the students regarding this new and exciting program being offered at the school. During the presentation, as you explain the outline of the program, reinforce to the students that the classroom they are in is the best place to be for learning English. Address the concerns of the classroom teacher by emphasizing that the distance learning program is designed as an opportunity to supplement not replace the classroom experience.

There will be three distinct groups of students in the DL program: Students just described, i.e. traditional classroom students, students who come only to distance learning without classroom support, and students who either join or leave a regular class during the semester, but remain connected to distance learning. Let the classroom teacher know that often students will join traditional classes when they are in the program and for those who leave the class yet remain in distance learning the chance of their returning later to a traditional are greater than if they sever all ties to the school. One of my students, “Juan”, had a job change last year and was unable to continue in his traditional ESL class. “Juan” was able to continue with distance learning and now, due to seniority, he has arranged his schedule to return to the classroom for the next semester. Again, the focus is to gain support for the program and to encourage the teacher, to encourage the students, to participate in the distance-learning program.

THE 20 MINUTE MEETING

Now that the program is up and running, other ESL teachers are on board, and the students are enrolled, what actually occurs in those weekly meetings? Let me outline a typical session. After greeting the student and acknowledging them for being on time, invite the student to sit down and begin the session.

From Video Language Products, you can get two additional forms relevant to the weekly meeting: a form for video check out which also includes spaces for hours earned

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and handouts distributed along with other information; and a second form for documenting for your own use as well as possible auditing purposes what transpired during the meeting. If the student has returned a video and /or is checking out a video note that on the first form. All other information regarding the content of the meeting should be noted on the on the second form including what was reviewed, any areas of difficulty, what if any supplemental material was provided, as well as the outcome of the unit test if taken. It is worthwhile to take a quick look at the previous meeting's notes to see if there were any unusual difficulties that may need to be revisited or if a meeting was missed if the reason is noted.

It is probable that there will be particular areas that many learners will encounter difficulty with. The use of do and does in questions and the use of possessive pronouns are often a struggle. As these particular areas become clear it will be very helpful to the student and the teacher if there are additional worksheets available for supplemental assistance.

If the student was absent the previous meeting it is an opportunity to remind them of the importance of attendance. If the reason for the absence is known by the teacher and is something to do with family health, immigration school meeting, etc. it is a chance to ask about the situation, another way to show interest and concern that will strengthen the teacher/student connection. When "Rudy" missed a session due to a meeting at his son's school, my notes allowed me to ask about the next week and to tie the experience to the lesson. During the meeting it is helpful to start out by asking the student if there are any particular questions on any of the areas in the workbook or the video. If the student does have particular areas of concern be sure to address them first, but also remember that many students are shy or from cultures in which it is not considered acceptable to admit a lack of understanding. While being sensitive to these issues, it is nevertheless incumbent upon the teacher to draw the student out and to assure that the student does indeed understand all areas of the unit before attempting the test in the book.

During the meeting I have found it useful to quickly review each area of the workbook to give the student an additional opportunity to ask questions and of course to check the work for accuracy. It is always worthwhile to carefully review the structure and writing sections to allow clarification of important grammatical concepts. If students are waiting while you are busy with another appointment, it may be a good idea to provide the student with the answer sheet for the unit, which is included in the program manual. The answer sheets provide suggested responses to the questions on the scene as well as the answers to the writing exercises that follow the structure.

It is a good idea to invest in 3 or 4 small video/TV combo sets for use in the classroom as students will often want to come in to review the tapes while they are at school or before or after an appointment. This is just one more way to make the student feel welcome in the class.

After the material in the unit has been reviewed, all questions answered, and the teacher and student feel comfortable that the material is understood the pretest in the back of the book should be taken if it has not already been completed. Remember that not all students will be able to complete a unit each week; however, they must make their appointment to allow for student/teacher contact and to be sure that progress is being

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made. After the in book test is reviewed and the errors explained the student could take the same test on separate paper to be kept in the file for auditing purposes.

After the test for each unit is completed, the exam is scored and recorded on the checkout sheet and the information sheet. The student is now ready to go on to the next unit. Before the student leaves, issue the next cassette. If appropriate, give the student a the next workbook or pages from your workbook license.

After the student has completed unit 12, be sure that the student is administered the full post-test to measure gains between the original pretest and the post-test. The strong growth usually shown is a great boost to the student and will end the series and the student's involvement with it on a positive note. The best result I have ever had was when "Sala" who had 13 correct on the pre-assessment scored a perfect 80 on the post-assessment 9 months later. Some students, due to their very high initial score will have little room for growth.

There are many forms that will be used in a distance learning program utilizing the *In English On Your Own* and the *In English* series. Forms and other documents developed by our program are available from Video Language Products.

PEDAGOGY VS ANDRAGOGY

When we address ESL students who are adults, we encounter many who have already demonstrated success in their homelands. Many have also completed university and/or professional schools. As we instruct these students it is critical that we remain aware that a weakness in the English language **does not** reflect a general lack of ability or intelligence.

It is important for the teacher to help these students to find a way to connect and integrate previous experience with the newly presented material. By building on past successes we can support the students desire to progress by establishing a foundation of confidence and mutual trust. One of the best things about teaching adults is the freedom to create stronger bonds with your students, based on respect for their individual accomplishments and their goals. Knowing the students allows the teacher to tailor weekly instruction more specifically to the needs of the individual learner, which is the hallmark of distance learning setting. As with any teaching situation, it is incumbent upon the teacher to avoid a "cookie cutter" approach to the material or the student. Each learner will have particular areas of interest and/or areas of difficulty, so each session may be slightly different even with the same student on different chapters.

LEARNING STYLES AND MODALITIES

Students learn differently, and consequently the material must be presented differently depending on whether the learner is visual, auditory, or tactile/kinesthetic. Helping the student know their own learning style will allow the teacher and the student to interact effectively.

In brief, a visual learner will understand best by reading and seeing the material, an auditory learner is best served by hearing and repeating the material out loud, (think of the

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student who always appears to be mumbling when he is reading), and finally the tactile or kinesthetic learner who learns by touch and who needs either to manipulate objects or write to complete the loop of comprehension. (A quick note: For kinesthetic learners, suggest that they read with their fingers under the line being read. This will literally and figuratively put them in touch with the content of the material and will also improve comprehension and retention.) Every one of us uses all three of these styles, but each of us also has a primary one. By knowing and focusing on your students' strongest style the teacher can greatly improve the quality and effectiveness of instruction. There are several learning style inventories and I encourage you to utilize them.

CONCLUSION

This manual will provide the reader with all the “nuts and bolts” required to launch and sustain a quality distance learning program using the *In English* series of video tapes and accompanying workbooks. What this manual **cannot** provide is the enthusiasm of the teacher and the genuine interest in the student and the material that will make a decent program that plugs along into a truly excellent one. Good luck as you set off on this endeavor. This is a program that can really help the students who participate to improve their comfort level in English, obtain a broad vocabulary, and to develop a better understanding of the United States and their place in it.