

# Learning English Efficiently

## What to expect?

Our Director, Dr. Suzanne Panferov, compares learning a language to training for the marathon. To run the marathon successfully, you must train in different ways for a long period of time. To reach academic proficiency in English, you must study different skills in different ways and practice using the language for a long period of time. That is why CESL has at least 7 levels and students progress through the levels, recycling their knowledge and practicing skills in different ways at each level.

Most students reach “survival” English in our **beginning levels**. They can live in Tucson, do the grocery shopping, eat dinner in a restaurant, go to movies, and talk to friends.

In our **intermediate levels** students begin to reach “conversational fluency”. They can understand most native English speakers and make themselves understood to most people in most situations. They can understand movies, read newspapers and understand jokes. They feel really good about their English progress and think they speak and understand English very well. They do, but now they have to get ready for the university.

At the **advanced levels**, it is difficult for students to see their progress. It is here that they must take the last and longest step to “academic proficiency”. To succeed in the academic language at the university, students must be able to not only understand different accents in large auditoriums, but must be able to read and analyze vast amounts of academic texts and then respond in writing in short periods of time.

Our intermediate and advanced levels concentrate on what Jim Cummins calls “Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency” (CALP) – that is, the curriculum concentrates on academic skills, such as comparing, classifying, synthesizing, evaluating and inferring, that are necessary for university study. Students will acquire and master

these skills at different rates and it is often difficult to feel progress. Academic language acquisition is not just the understanding of the content area vocabulary, but learners must be able to manipulate that information and present it to others both orally and in writing. That is why it is possible to continue studying language at our advanced level more than once. Students recycle their knowledge, refine their abilities and practice skills in different ways and at their own changing level of increasing competence.

## How long will it take?

There is great variability in how quickly students will learn English and in the type of proficiency they reach in conversational and literacy situations. However, research shows that most students need more than 7 years to acquire academic English on a level comparable to their native-speaking peers. At CESL we speed this process with intensive, effective instruction.

There are many factors that can affect the time necessary to reach academic proficiency.

1. At what level did the student begin CESL?
2. Is his/her native language related to English?
3. Is the native language written with the western alphabet?
4. Does the student read extensively in his/her native language?
5. Does the student use English 12-15 hours a day at CESL and at home?
6. How well does the student use academic skills in his/her native language?



Our CESL curriculum is designed to accelerate your progress as much as possible. How can you speed your own learning?

1. Take your language lessons very seriously from the first day. Talk to former CESL students about their experiences during their first semester in the university; **keep a vision** of yourself sitting in a university auditorium taking a 20 minute essay test.
2. Try to spend **8-10 hours a day using English**: in class, with your classmates outside of class, participating in CESL activities, and doing homework.
3. Plan on at least **3-4 hours of homework** and language study outside of your CESL classes daily.
4. **Read extensively at least 1 hour every day** at your current level.
5. **Write at least one-page** in a journal every day. Go back every once in awhile to see how your entries have changed and improved.
6. Recognize that if you begin in our lowest levels 10/20 or 30, it will take from 1 ½ to 2 ½ years to reach academic fluency!
7. Realize too that you may repeat or continue in a level at some time. Many students need more time at some level. For Example: 10-20-20-30-40-40-50-60-70-70

## Some Common Myths about Language Learning

Below are some common myths about language learning. For a full discussion and scenarios of each please see the book **Myths and Realities**, Second Edition, Samway & McKeon, 2007.

**PLACEMENT MYTH** ELL students need only about one year in which to learn enough English to be able to succeed academically. Therefore, the emphasis should be on transitioning students out of special programs as quickly as possible.

**REALITY:** There is great variability in how quickly ELL students learn English and in the type of proficiency they reach in conversational and literacy situations. However, most ELL students need from seven to ten years in order to acquire academic English on a level comparable to their native-speaking peers.

**STAFFING/STAFF DEVELOPMENT MYTH** English language learners learn more quickly when they are placed exclusively with teachers who are native speakers of English.

**REALITY** Just being a native speaker of English isn't enough to ensure that students will learn English – what's really important is that a teacher is well-qualified to teach. Nonnative speakers of English can be excellent ESOL teachers.

**SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION MYTH** Once second language learners are able to speak with reasonable fluency, their problems are likely to be over in school.

**REALITY:** The ability to speak a second language (especially in conversational settings) does not guarantee that a student will be able to use the language effectively in academic settings.

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**SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION MYTH** Learning academic English is equally challenging for all second language learners.

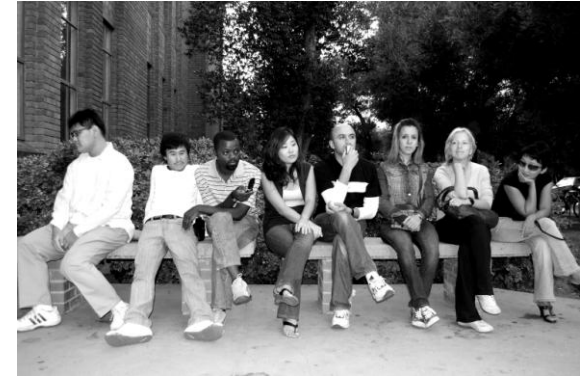
**REALITY:** The challenge of learning English for school varies tremendously from learner to learner and depends on many factors.

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**SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION MYTH** If we focus on teaching the English language, learning in all areas will occur faster.

**REALITY:** Language learning is a developmental process; while learning a language will not occur in the absence of exposure to the language, increased exposure to the language (particularly in academic settings) does not guarantee quicker learning.

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*How long will it take?*

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