

Developing Reading and Writing Skills

Part I ♦ Integrating Reading and Writing Skills Development

5

5.1.1 INTRODUCTION

Print is everywhere. Imagine how difficult it can be for learners new to English to access the abundance of printed material that comes their way: bills, junk mail, school materials, advertisements, work instructions, schedules. Being an independent writer is a necessity for anyone who wants to go to school or attain and hold onto employment. In this chapter, we turn to the issue of literacy: the skills of reading and writing. We look at the varying purposes for reading and writing, the challenges students with no literacy in their first language face, and the most common approaches to teaching reading and writing to adult ESL students. It needs to be stressed that no one approach is used in isolation; a whole-language teacher may conduct a language experience to generate stories. A teacher using the Language Experience Approach may use phonics techniques to help learners recognize sound/symbol correspondences in a class-generated text.

The chapter begins with an examination of approaches for developing reading and writing skills together (LEA, Whole Language/balanced literacy approach), particularly with emergent readers and writers. Next, we turn to techniques for teaching reading and writing for learners who already have stronger literacy skills. Let's start by thinking about what we read and what is involved in reading.

Getting Started

★ Task 5.1

Read the following real-world case and answer these questions with a partner, or write answers in your journal:

- 1 What are Choua's literacy needs? What kinds of texts does she need to read?
- 2 What unique challenges does she face?

Paseng goes to the university in Eau Claire, WI, about a five-hour drive from his mother's home in Milwaukee. He returns to his

CHECKLIST

After reading this chapter and completing the activities, you should be able to

- ★ describe various purposes for reading and writing.
- ★ describe the difference between top-down vs. bottom up approaches to literacy development.
- ★ describe processes used in the Language Experience Approach.
- ★ develop a reading lesson that includes prereading, reading, and follow-up activities.
- ★ explain the differences between product-oriented and process-oriented writing tasks.
- ★ create a writing activity that is form-focused; create a process-oriented writing lesson.
- ★ explain considerations for deciding when and how to correct learner errors in writing.

mother's home every weekend. Aside from his desire to see his mother, his primary reason for returning home each week is to help her go through all of the mail she received the previous week. Paseng's mother, Choua, is not literate in English or in her first language. She can't tell the difference between the Publisher's Clearinghouse ad and a request to visit the Social Security office to go over her benefits. When Paseng speaks to her on the phone before each week's visit, he can hear the panic in her voice.

This is a common scenario for many immigrant families. For now, Choua is not enrolled in an ESL class and the likelihood that she'll acquire the literacy needed to maneuver independently through the barrage of text in our culture is small. There are many students like Choua in your classes, who have had little or no experience with literacy, yet they are bombarded with written texts every day in our very print-dense culture. Just think about all the things you need to read each day.



Task 5.2

Working with a partner or on your own, think of *everything* you read in a given day. Write your answers in this box:

Daily Reading

Now look at your list of items and put them into one of these two categories: **Everyday** or **Intensive Reading**. I've included some examples to get you started.

Types of Reading Material

Everyday Reading	Intensive Reading
menus	novels
billboards	poetry
packaging	

- 1 What types of reading texts do you encounter most often?
- 2 *How* do you read the things in column 1 vs. those in column 2?
- 3 Which of the two do you think your learners encounter most often?

Follow-up As you read about reading principles and practices in the chapter, reflect on how the items you brainstormed above could best be integrated into ESL lessons. What reading skills does a reader employ when reading these different types of texts?

1.1.2 VIEWS OF LITERACY

A variety of terms describe the different types of texts we encounter and the ways we read them. Everyday reading includes **environmental print**: billboards, signs, packaging, menus, etc. It also includes **functional texts** (forms, applications, bills, etc.). All of these can be considered **instrumental**, that is, we read them for an immediate purpose (Harmer 2000). We look up a number in the phone book because we need to call someone; we read a menu in order to make a choice at a restaurant. On the job, we read a manual in order to operate a machine. Reading these types of texts often involves reading very selectively, for example, when you receive your phone bill, you look directly at the amount due, due date, and probably the long distance calls made to assure that no mistakes have been made to your bill. You **scan** the text, or read for specific information; you probably do not read all of the fine print.

In her work on competency-based literacy instruction, Lynn Savage (1993) describes four types of reading:

Survival Literacy Literacy which revolves around learners' immediate day-to-day needs, e.g., recognizing prices, forms of identification.

Document Literacy Literacy needed to decipher charts and tables, labels, bills, advertisements.

Quantitative Literacy Literacy needed to use and understand texts with numeric information, e.g., pay slips, schedules.

Prose Literacy Literacy that requires an ability to understand more extensive texts, e.g., manuals, rental agreements, etc.

These descriptions illustrate the enormous range of text types learners need to access. In the process of conducting a needs assessment at a company concerned about cross-cultural issues, I noticed that many of the problems supervisors cited were related to issues of literacy. The examples below illustrate the different types of literacy identified by Savage:

- 1 *Some of our workers don't punch out on the new computer system we use for that, even though we've shown it to them again and again.* (Document and Quantitative)
- 2 *We have workers who are highly skilled and have been employed here for several years. We're a medical device manufacturer and can be audited by the FDA. This means that our line operators can be asked at any time to show exactly where in the production process they are on a manufacturing instruction. While the workers have fairly strong oral skills, it has become apparent that their literacy skills are lacking and they can't always respond accurately to the auditors.* (Document and Prose)
- 3 *I requested a schedule (verbal request), and the schedule was provided, but not in the format I expected.* (Document and Quantitative)

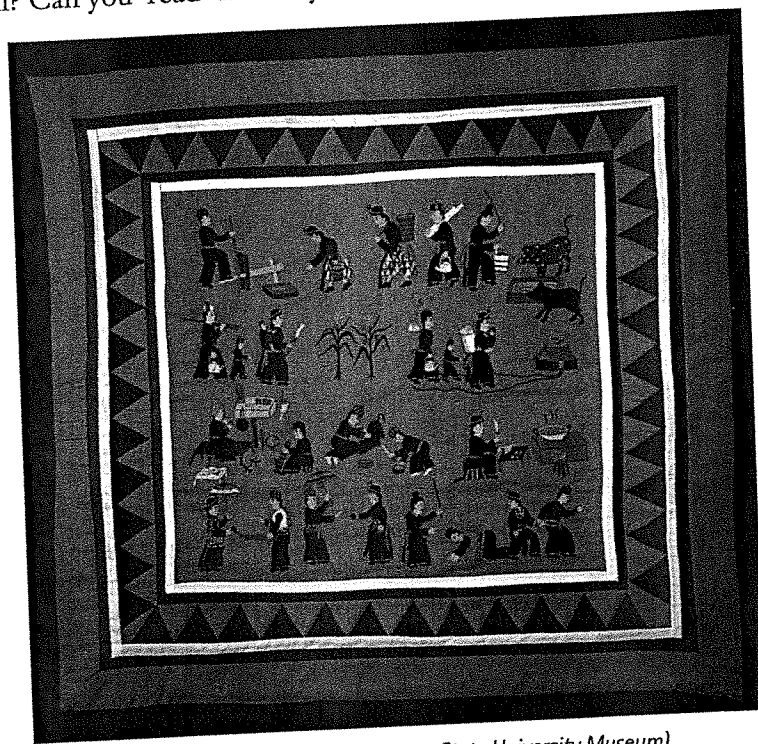
- 4 *Sometimes a worker won't mark down that a defective part was thrown out. We have a form to use, but sometimes they won't even know where to mark it down. They don't seem to understand why this is a problem. (Document)*

In these workplace examples, literacy involved reading and writing schedules, knowing the conventions of a particular workplace, reading manuals, reading and using online time cards, and reading and completing forms. Literacy involved the ability to perform these tasks as well the ability to use new technology to complete the tasks, what we could call 'technological' literacy. Added to this list is 'graphic' literacy, or the ability to understand symbols. How do you organize information on your computer screen? How do you know what restroom to go into, even if you are in a different country where you do not know the language? You use **graphic literacy** to read symbols like these:



Task 5.3

Think back to Choua and her lack of experience with text-based literacy. Can she read or write a story? Yes, she can, but the symbols she uses for conveying meaning are not with written words. What story does this *pa ndau* (Hmong quilt) tell? Can you 'read' the story? Share your interpretations with a partner.



(Photo by Mark Eifert, reproduction courtesy of Michigan State University Museum)

Follow-up Read the story on page 161 and compare it to your own interpretations.

Hamilton (1999), and Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) suggest that we differentiate uses for literacy in different cultural contexts, including not just print literacy, but mass media and electronic literacy. Literacy is **situated** in different contexts, or domains, in our lives, for example home, work, or school (Barton and Hamilton 2000), and the skills we use to access print in these different contexts vary. Also, activities that involve literacy do not happen in isolation. Look at the following daily tasks learners may encounter along with the literacy skills that may be used for each one:

Daily Tasks	Literacy Activities
Preparing meals	Reading packaging; measurement/numeracy
Food shopping	Making lists; reading labels and pricing; reading signs in the store
Getting to work	Reading bus schedules, street signs

(Dyck, S., Battell, E., Isserlis, J., and Nonesuch, K. 1996:192)

In reviewing this task analysis, we can see the ways in which literacy is situated in everyday tasks, and how its uses combine with other language and life skills. It becomes evident that literacy activities occur as part of other daily tasks; therefore, educators need to look beyond reading and writing as a skill set taught in a classroom, to the actual uses for these various forms of literacy used in learners' lives.

Defining literacy more broadly acknowledges the strengths a learner brings to the task (a strength-based vs. deficit-based view is discussed in 2.2.6). Given her experiences with literacy, Choua may have an easier time reading icons that convey manufacturing instructions on a computer screen than a learner who is dependent on text-based literacy. Likewise, teachers need to have a view of literacy that encompasses multiple purposes for reading and writing; there are reasons other than survival and work that motivate adult ESL learners to attain literacy in English. Parents want to understand and help their children with homework, and correspond with school administrators and teachers. Literacy is also a vehicle for recording and passing on culture and traditions from one generation to the next (Crandall and Peyton 1993).

5.1.3 **HOW DO WE READ?**

Reading and listening have many parallels and are referred to as the **receptive skills** (writing and speaking, the productive skills). There are, of course, many differences as well, one being the permanence of written text, allowing the reader time to go back to reread as needed. In real-world listening situations (i.e., the teacher is not replaying a tape), the listener has one opportunity to access the information or seek clarification. One of the key similarities between reading and listening is the important role **prior knowledge** plays in order to understand and use written or oral texts, or what is called **schema**

theory (for a complete discussion, see 4.1.3). As with listening, an efficient reader is one who can draw the information they need from the whole text, using top-down processing. Task 5.4 illustrates the powerful role prior knowledge plays in helping us access the meaning of written texts.



Task 5.4

Look at the following text and answer the questions that follow:

怀恩通讯

我们有大量免费电话，任君选择
持再送：收讯加强器，免持耳机，皮套，车上充电器

<p style="text-align: center;">\$19.99</p> <p style="text-align: center;">白天 600 分钟晚上 100 分钟 全美漫游</p>	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; padding: 5px;"> <p style="font-size: small;">内置相机 彩色显示屏 世界通</p> </td> <td style="width: 50%; padding: 5px;"> <p style="font-size: small;">三频彩色世界通 内置数码相机 可拍照或录影 内置中文显示屏</p> </td> </tr> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; padding: 5px;"> <p style="font-size: small;">全世界最小 三频彩色 世界通 中文</p> </td> <td style="width: 50%; padding: 5px;"> <p style="font-size: small;">三频彩色世界通 内置数码相机 内置中文显示屏</p> </td> </tr> </table>	<p style="font-size: small;">内置相机 彩色显示屏 世界通</p>	<p style="font-size: small;">三频彩色世界通 内置数码相机 可拍照或录影 内置中文显示屏</p>	<p style="font-size: small;">全世界最小 三频彩色 世界通 中文</p>	<p style="font-size: small;">三频彩色世界通 内置数码相机 内置中文显示屏</p>
<p style="font-size: small;">内置相机 彩色显示屏 世界通</p>	<p style="font-size: small;">三频彩色世界通 内置数码相机 可拍照或录影 内置中文显示屏</p>				
<p style="font-size: small;">全世界最小 三频彩色 世界通 中文</p>	<p style="font-size: small;">三频彩色世界通 内置数码相机 内置中文显示屏</p>				
<p style="text-align: center;">\$29.99</p> <p style="text-align: center;">白天 600 分钟晚上全免 全美漫游</p>					

(Courtesy of Grace Su)

- What is the purpose of this text?
- Where might you find this text?
- What information is given in this text?
- Who is the audience for this text?

Even if you don't know any Chinese, what could you decipher from this text? Were you able to identify the purpose for the text? Could you guess the kind of store that placed this ad? Could you "read" the words? No, but you could gain a preliminary understanding of what the text was about, what it would be used for, and the places where you'd find certain types of information. Top-down approaches to teaching literacy are based on the premise that any reader brings knowledge and experiences from the world and their life experiences, and that is where literacy development needs to begin. Had I asked you to decipher individual characters in the text, you would have gotten nowhere in your understanding. Starting with a bottom-up approach to reading with your ESL students will have the same effect. That's not to say that working on letter/sounds, word and sentence level decoding is not part of what we do; it is just *one* part of the picture.

Reading, like listening and speaking, is interactive in nature and open to various interpretations. A text does not just transmit information, as shown in Figure A. It involves information going from the text to the reader and back. A text means something different to each of us because of what we bring to it. The ways we read a text depend on prior knowledge, our needs, expectations,

the context in which we are reading, as well as our own interpretations, experiences, and culture. This interaction is depicted in Figure B.

FIGURE A A one-way view of reading

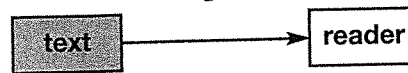
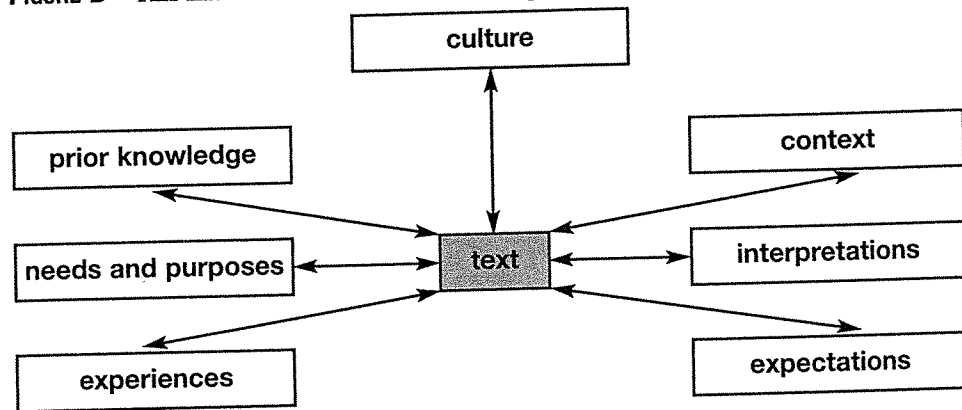


FIGURE B An interactive view of reading



Bottom-up approaches that rely heavily on decoding letters, words, and sentences are one-way approaches to reading. Holistic, top-down approaches allow for these multiple interpretations and experiences that a reader brings to a reading text.

5.1.4 TEACHING LITERACY SKILLS: WORKING WITH LEARNERS WITH LIMITED LITERACY

ESL teachers help learners develop literacy skills in just about any type of ESL program. What differs is the themes or content of instruction. For example, a family literacy class might focus on parenting and school systems, while a vocational English class would use work-specific manuals and documents. Another key difference is the approach to literacy development a teacher chooses, and this depends largely on the learners' level of proficiency and experience with reading and writing. Throughout this book, I have made reference to students with "few literacy skills" or "limited literacy." These emerging readers may fall into one of the categories seen in Table 5.1 (Haverson and Haynes 1982).

TABLE 5.1 Types of Emergent Readers

1 Preliterate	Students speak a language that does not have a written form, or has a form that is rare or has developed very recently (e.g., Hmong).
2 Nonliterate	Students speak a language which has a written form, but the students don't read or write that language themselves. This is often the case of refugees whose education was interrupted due to war (e.g., Somali, Sudanese).

TABLE 5.1 Types of Emergent Readers continued

3 Semiliterate	Students have some formal education or are able to read and write but only at an elementary level.
4 Literate in a non-Roman alphabet	Students are literate in their first language, but need to learn the sound/symbol correspondences of English. Because these students are already literate, their acquisition of literacy skills in English will generally come much more easily than for the three other groups described above.

The approaches we use with preliterate, nonliterate, and semiliterate learners differ from those used with more proficient readers, even those literate in a non-Roman alphabet. You learn to read once, and reading skills and strategies learned in the first language transfer to reading in a second language (see Chapter 1 (1.2.8) for the discussion of Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency). An approach that has been successful with preliterate, nonliterate, and semiliterate learners is the Language Experience Approach (LEA) because it begins with what language learners are able to produce orally and uses that language as the basis for creating written texts.

A. Language Experience Approach

The Language Experience Approach has been used for decades in elementary schools for first-language literacy development. Because the texts used in this approach are student-generated, it is ideal for any age learner and has found great success as an approach for emergent adult ESL readers and writers. LEA is based on the assumption that if the words we read describe our experiences, we are far more likely to understand them. Far too often the reading texts found in even beginning-level ESL materials are beyond the level of the learner audience and the content is disconnected from their life experiences, being outside their frame of reference.

So how does LEA work? A teacher who uses LEA begins by having the class take part in a group experience; this may be a field trip or a hands-on activity such as cooking, planting, etc. (for examples of activities students can take part in, see Taylor 1993). In cases where this is impractical, a set of pictures for describing a sequence of events or learners retelling an event from their lives can be used as the starting point. After taking part in the activity, the teacher elicits orally from the class what happened during the experience, which she or he then transcribes on the board. There are divergent views on what the teacher transcribes. Many educators transcribe the text verbatim, with all of the learners' errors. This is based on the idea that in order for learners to make meaning of the written word, it needs to be connected to what we know they can already say and understand orally. The teacher will make corrections offered by other classmates as she or he is recording the story on the board, but other corrections to the text become part of an extension activity in a later lesson. The other approach is to make corrections to the text as it is being written, but those corrections need to be accessible to the students in class, i.e., no changes in vocab-

ulary or additions of complex grammar forms. The teacher taking this approach would add a plural *-s*, perhaps, or *-ed* verb endings, for example.



In Laura Lenz's family literacy class, some students are reordering the LEA story generated the day before, while others copy the story.

Once the class has created the text, the students can take part in any number of activities, many of which are used in any reading lesson (see Table 5.2).

TABLE 5.2 Language Experience Activities

- Give the story a title.
- Illustrate the story.
- Match lines from the story with a visual representation.
- Copy the story.
- Cut words in sentences up and have student reorder them.
- Cut the sentences up and have student reorder them.
- Have students create comprehension questions to ask a partner.
- Make a cloze text (leave out all the verbs, or every fifth word, for example, which learners fill in).
- Collect stories and create a class text for other groups at school to use as their reading text.
- Do phonics work: find all of the words that start with the letter ____.
- Practice with sight-word recognition: How many times can you find the word *there*?

The Language Experience Approach by no means needs to be used as a stand-alone approach to teaching ESL literacy. The principles of LEA have become standard practice as part of many ESL classrooms. This may take the form of learners with limited literacy reporting to a fellow student what they did over the weekend, and having the more capable writer transcribe the story. In project-based learning, a language experience may be part of a project, for example a book of folktales told by students in class and transcribed by the teacher, students with more literacy skills, or volunteers.

B. Whole Language/Balanced Literacy Approach

In Chapter 2, we looked at the core principles of the **Whole Language approach**. It is often thought of as an approach to literacy development, particularly because it replaced phonics-based, bottom-up approaches in many school systems. Whole Language principles related to literacy development are the following:

- ★ It is a top-down approach.
- ★ It works with whole, authentic texts (not adapted, simplified books).
- ★ It encourages the use of inventive spelling so that learners can begin to write without first worrying about mechanics.
- ★ It is process oriented; learners create texts in steps including prewriting and multiple drafts.

While Whole Language has its critics, it represents much of what we know to be best practice with adult learners, namely, a focus on meaningful and relevant material, a valuing of prior knowledge and experience, and an emphasis on using reading and writing skills and strategies to understand texts (predicting, using contextual clues, etc.).

More recently, ESL and mainstream educators have used what is called a balanced literacy approach. This approach encompasses Whole Language principles while acknowledging the need for developing phonemic awareness or, with some adult learners, the ability to hold a pencil or write the alphabet. This leads us to phonics, a bottom-up approach to literacy development that is used for first and second language learners.

C. The Place of Phonics

Phonics views literacy development as a linear process whereby learners first acquire **sound/letter** (or sound/symbol) **correspondences**, with which they create words and then sentences. It is based on the assumption that the learner has acquired oral language, which is the case for children learning to read in their first language. This is not necessarily the case for adult ESL learners, however. In cases where adults have minimal or no oral skills in English, this bottom-up approach is problematic for ESL literacy development. Phonics does not encourage readers to make meaning of what they are reading, or to use contextual clues, predicting, or other top-down, holistic processes that are all used by efficient readers. There is no question that we use both top-down and bottom-up processing as we read, but the two are best used in combination, and always with the goal of creating meaning out of what we read.

A more promising place for phonics within adult ESL literacy development may well be as one of many tools a teacher employs with her students as part of a balanced literacy approach. Let's look at a text created through a language experience, along with examples of phonics-based activities that help emergent readers recognize sound-spelling correspondences and sight words.

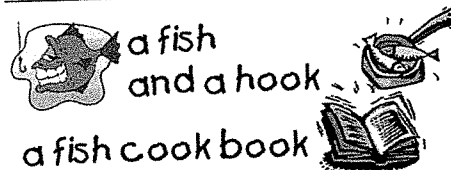
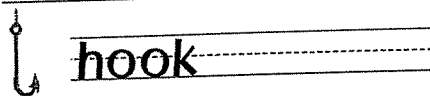
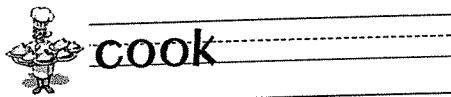
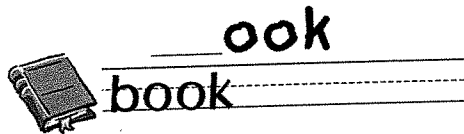
Planting a Seed

Put dirt in a pot. Make a small hole in the dirt with your finger. Put one seed in the hole. Cover the hole with more dirt. Pour some water in the pot. Be careful—don't pour too much water. Wait for one week. You will see a small green plant.

- Circle all the words that start with 'p'.
- Now point to other things in class that start with this sound.
- Find all the words with silent 'e' at the end of the word.
- Can you find words around the classroom that end in silent 'e'?
- Underline all the words that end in 't'; practice saying those words out loud.
- How many times can you find 'the' in the story?

(Thanks to Julia Reimer for sharing this LEA story from her class.)

By starting with a class-generated text to work on phonemic awareness, you can be assured that the learners understand the meaning of the words they are working with in a text. Contrast this with the following example from a phonics-based program. As you look at this example, ask yourself these questions: What is helpful about this activity? What is not as helpful? Why?



From Boggle's World (<http://bogglesworld.com/phonics.htm>)

Fluent readers can decode words quickly (Van Duzer 1999), so there are benefits to learning to recognize patterns like the one practiced above. The question is: How meaningful is the language commonly found in phonics

activities? These activities are best used in conjunction with holistic approaches, using words that are familiar to learners. Sentences generated from a language experience like the *Planting a Seed* story are more meaningful to adult learners than sentences that can be generated from a set of decontextualized rhyming words such as *book, hook, and cook*.

5.1.5 OTHER STRATEGIES AND TECHNIQUES FOR EMERGENT READERS AND WRITERS

The approaches outlined in this chapter so far can be used with learners who have limited literacy skills. In using these approaches, teachers need to draw on an array of techniques to help learners develop the most basic skills, some of which are purely mechanical. Imagine the learner who has never held a pencil, or who has never flipped through the pages of a book. There is much work to be done before such a learner is comfortable with reading and writing. Table 5.3 outlines some of the basic literacy skills emergent readers and writers may need to work on, along with sample activities.

TABLE 5.3 Literacy tasks for emergent readers and writers

Basic Literacy Skills	Sample Activity
1 Hold a pencil	Practice tracing shapes and letters.
2 Write from left to right	Copy class-generated stories.
3 Write the letters of the alphabet	Display alphabet in room; practice copying alphabet; play concentration with letter flash cards.
4 Alphabetize letters and words	Learners stand in alphabetical order by first letter of name, and gradually go to second and third letters of names.
5 Recognize upper and lower case	Circle all the upper case letters in a text. Sort nouns (proper and common) into two sets. Elicit what learners see in each set.
6 Recognize sound-spelling correspondences	Match sounds to pictures; bingo; find all the words with a particular sound in a text; find all the ways to write a particular sound; same/different activities (do these words start with the same sound or different sound?).
7 Recognize sight words	Label everything in the classroom; match pictures to words.
8 Develop numerical literacy	Practice with phone numbers, addresses. Put numbers in increasing order; listen and respond to simple addition facts, e.g., How many children do you have? How many does Elena have? How many do you have all together?

(Basic Literacy Skills adapted from Vinogradov 2000)

CONCLUSION This section has focused on approaches that integrate reading and writing instruction, particularly those used with students who have limited literacy. Next we turn to activities and lessons that help learners access the print that they encounter on a daily basis, for example, environmental print, work documents, or newspaper articles.