

# Distance Learning

## **Introduction**

Welcome to the wonderful world of *Distance Learning*.

As we write this, we are entering our third year at Chula Vista Adult School (a unit of Sweetwater Adult School) with our *ESL Distance Learning* program. We achieve an average well over 100% required for ADA.

We began our program in the summer of 2000. We started that summer with an average of 10 student visits per week. As we open in the fall of 2002, 2½ instructors are seeing approximately 285 *Distance Learning* students per week and there is a waiting list.

Basic to any successful program are dedicated teachers, motivated students and a supportive administration. We have that. However, it is also evident that *In-English*, *On Your Own* and *In-English* are real keys to our success.

We know that in Adult Education, students are known to vote with their feet. Therefore, it is critical for the success of a Distance Learning program that the students see immediate success and understand that they are going to learn. With *In-English*, the students see immediate success and understand how they are going to learn.

Therefore, while we use other materials (see Appendix 1 for a chart of where we place different materials in our sequential program), almost all of our students begin with *In-English*. We are focusing on *In-English* and its use in this document.

Before we began our program, we visited other *Distance Learning* programs. Much of what we do is based on our learning at Downey Adult School, and we are taking this opportunity to thank them for their invaluable assistance.

### ***In-English, On Your Own and In-English***

The *In-English, On Your Own* and *In-English* programs are published by Video Language Products ([www.videolanguage.com](http://www.videolanguage.com)). *In-English* is a beginning through upper intermediate ESL program, which is video-based (*In-English* was recently published on CD-Rom and DVD) with workbook support. With *In-English*, the video is truly the textbook and the learning takes place with the video.

*In-English, On Your Own* and *In-English* are organized into five sequential volumes or levels and 12 units. The five volumes and 12 units are placed on 20 videocassettes, CDs and DVDs.

There is a workbook for each of the five volumes. Video Language Products sells an annual license for the workbooks. With the licensed workbooks, we produce our own covers with our program name on the cover. With the license, we never have to worry about book inventory. Plus, we sell the individual workbooks for \$4.50, which covers the cost of our duplication.

In addition, we color code our covers to the different volumes for ease of tracking inventory and distribution.

Each of the 12 *In-English* units are organized in the same manner. A scene introduces the structure and vocabulary the students will learn in each unit. The scene is followed by the vocabulary section, which is a multi-sensory presentation of each word and/or phrase in the scene. That is, the vocabulary item is displayed in visual context (which is sometimes the same context as in the scene and sometimes in a different context or contexts), and the item is spoken and captioned on the screen so that the learner is seeing, hearing and reading the vocabulary item in context. In my years in ESL, I've never seen students acquire vocabulary as rapidly as they do with *In-English*.

The vocabulary section is followed by questions on the scene, a structure exercise, a writing exercise, a dialog (a novella which runs throughout the program), an evaluation which is a modified Cloze exercise and beginning in unit 2, questions for conversation.

There are end of unit tests for each of the 12 units, which we use to check for grammar and comprehension. We score this test and record it. We expect a score of 80% before the student can move to the next unit.

In *In-English, On Your Own*, which is Volume 1 (first 4 units) of *In-English* (more on this below), all the answers to the test questions are on the video for Unit 1. Then fewer answers are provided on the video as the students progress through Units 2-4. The approach of *In-English* to their tests are ideal for teaching students to take the ubiquitous American multiple choice tests. Beginning with Volume 2, Unit 5, the students have no access to the answers to the end of unit tests.

The questions on the scene, the writing exercises, the modified Cloze, the questions for conversation, and the end of units tests are invaluable as reinforcement and for documenting student learning.

In addition to the exercises provided by Video Language Products, we have developed some additional exercises. Further, Video Language Products publishes additional exercises on their website, developed at Madera Adult, Downey Adult and by Richard Bourrell, the author of *In-English*. These are available for download at no charge.

Video Language Products also provides a pre-/post-test package consisting of a pre- and post-structure test, a listening/comprehension test, and a multiple choice listening test. The test questions are sequenced and grouped to correspond to the five volumes or levels of *In-English*.

(We will discuss our use of the VLP pre-/post-test package in the placement section.)

As stated above, *In-English, On Your Own* and *In-English* consist of five volumes or levels, which are divided into 12 units and are on 20 videotapes or CDs. Volume 1, which includes the first 4 units, makes up *In-English, On Your Own* and costs of 12 of the 20 videos or CDs, which make up the total program.

*In-English, On Your Own* has proven to be a remarkable tool for the beginning *Distance Learning* student. Each of the four units in *In-English, On Your Own* consists of 3 videos, CDs or DVDs. Repetitions are built in. In addition, everything in the workbooks is on the video, including the answers. Partly because the students have access to the answers to the exercises in a multi-sensory format, many of the frustrations normally encountered at the beginning level of language learning are eliminated. This, of course, increases our student retention.

The students have learned to use the process involved while working through *In-English, On Your Own*. Now, it is time to engage the students in less directed learning.

## Distance Learning

Beginning with Volume 2, Unit 5, *In-English, On Your Own* becomes *In-English*. Beginning with Volume 2, Unit 5, only the scene, the vocabulary, the dialog and the pronunciation sections are on the videos, CDs or DVDs. The students now complete the various exercises without the answers being modeled for them on the screen. This format remains the same through Volume 5, Unit 12, Tape 20 of *In-English*.

There is some preparation needed and adaptation to the change in format. However, the students adjust and move forward.

### ***Recruitment***

In the early summer of 2000, we posted flyers on the campus and in the community. That got us our first few students. Those first few produced more by word of mouth. When husbands, wives, neighbors, uncles, aunts, etc. see the vocabulary section in particular of *In-English*, we sometimes get them enrolled. However, we know that our students have family members and neighbors working with them at home that we are not getting enrolled. We estimate that 30-35% of our students have come to us through word of mouth.

The *Distance Learning* announcement appeared in the class schedule that August which is mailed to every household in the community. This produced some students. It is useful if there are translations in the target languages in the class schedule.

In September of 2000, with the support of the administration and the ESL teachers, we went to the ESL classes on campus and advertised the opportunity to the classes for their own participation and so that class members could tell their family and friends about it.

The class visits increased our *Distance Learning* attendance and had little, if any, impact on regular ESL classes.

Now that the program is in place, the keys to our continuing success are:

1. The teachers' approach to the 20-Minute Meetings. They are empathetic and insistent on learning.
2. We make it clear we are concerned with our students and their success.
3. Program management including phone calls and postcards if students miss a meeting.

There are many other recruiting possibilities. However, we have grown to approximately 285 contacts a week in ESL and we have a waiting list doing the outreach described and we are continuing to grow in a controlled manner.

### ***Intake***

The student has found his way to the *Distance Learning* classroom. About 99% of the students who come through our door to sign up are now “pre-sold”. However, this initial encounter is critical. This meeting sets the tone for all that follows. Due to the design of *Distance Learning* programs and their focus on one-on-one meetings, it is critical that the student feels welcome and in good hands.

Students want to know if there is a cost. There is. We ask for a \$20.00 deposit on the videos and we charge \$4.50 for the *In-English* workbooks, which is very close to our reproduction costs. The students want to know the time they need to invest. There is the 20-minute weekly appointment and they are expected to work with the videocassettes and workbook exercises.

In almost all cases, the student wants to start that day. In our situation, we register the student for *Distance Learning* in the *Distance Learning* classroom for different purposes. Even before we do a placement, we are able to determine if the student is at too low a level to participate, and we ensure the availability of a slot for the tutorial.

When our program began, we would show video clips (especially of the vocabulary and the questions on the score) at this juncture. This is rarely the case now since most all of the students are ready to sign up when they come through the door.

After the student registers, we give them the tops form and advise them of their appointment. We then conduct an assessment and place them.

### **Assessment / Placement**

Intake, assessment, placement and orientation takes approximately 1½ hours.

After the student is registered, we give the student the *In-English* structure test. (The students are tested separately for CASAS and we do not use CASAS for placement in *Distance Learning*.)

There are 84 questions in the *In-English* structure pre-test and the questions are sequenced to correlate with the five *In-English* levels. We give the students the first 18 questions which correlate to Volume 1 of *In-English*. We correct that. If the student misses 3 or more, we are going to start them with the first unit. If the student gets 100%, or misses only 1 or 2, we then have them complete the remainder of the test. (If the student cannot answer the test questions, they are not ready for Distance Learning and we ask them to take a literacy class.)

We correct the remainder of the test and we are able to determine where the student fits regarding the structural level of *In-English*. We get a number of students who do very well on the structure test, but we already know from observation that they cannot understand if we speak too rapidly or with complex structures and they cannot respond orally with any fluency. *In-English* makes a listening/comprehension assessment available as a part of their assessment package. We don't use it. Each of our instructors is comfortable asking questions consistent with the *In-English* summary of structures using do/does, past, past irregulars, etc. in order to check for aural understanding and the ability to make an oral response.

We offer the student the opportunity to review the workbooks at their level as well as workbooks at lower levels. From time to time, we will also view sections of the tape and ask questions. We point out that they will be asked to respond to the questions based on listening only and not reading and developing a written response (although they will do that too).

We try to give the student "ownership" in the level at which they start. We prefer they start at the lowest level at which we find gaps in knowledge and skills whether those be reading, writing, listening, speaking or structure.

We find that students will usually want to start if not at the beginning, at least at the level that they can handle with relative ease.

***Orientation***

In most situations, the students start with the first tape and the first workbook. Before we send the student off for their first week of study, we walk them through the workbook and we show them segments from the first three videotapes so the student gets an understanding of the program.

Video Language Products has provided detailed self-study instruction in English, in Spanish and in Chinese. These step-by-step instructions are invaluable for the beginning *Distance Learning* instructor as well as for the student. The English and Spanish versions are on the [videolanguage.com](http://videolanguage.com) website.

For the few students who will begin at Unit 5 or higher (remember the format change), we explain what is expected of them.

In the Appendix, we have included a section which will give model assignments for *In-English* in a *Distance Learning* program.

Before the student leaves this meeting, we have:

1. Scheduled their first appointment;
2. Collected a \$20.00 deposit (explaining that it is refundable until the last video is returned. We have had students want to pay \$20.00 for each video and keep them) and \$4.50 for the workbook.
3. Made them comfortable in their assignment.