



# LITERACY MATTERS

MARCH 2016

Literacy Matters is a recurring publication of Literacy Nassau, Inc.



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## CENTER FOR APPLIED LINGUISTICS ROLLS OUT BEST PLUS 2.0

*(submitted by Karen Micciche)*

We recently learned that the Center for Applied Linguistics will be releasing a new version of our most commonly used standardized test, the BEST Plus. The BEST Plus test assesses speaking and listening ability in our lower level English Language Learners. The test is administered by our team of Literacy Specialists and takes about 20 minutes to complete. It is designed to feel like a typical conversation, a give and take of thoughts and ideas pertaining to basic subjects, including the weather, hobbies, traffic, and more. Examinees are scored on three criteria: listening capacity, language complexity, and communication.

The BEST Plus 2.0 is different in two key ways. The questions have been modified, and the accompanying picture prompts have been updated to correspond with the new questions. This will not change the nature of the test for the user at all. (It will, however, be a welcome break for our staff from the same sets of questions we have been asking repeatedly for the past five years!)

The second major change to the test is the scoring rubric. Currently, the rubric gives a student a score of up to 541 before he/she "scores out" of the test and has to move on to the next test in the series, the BEST Literacy.

In the 2.0 version, the rubric will allow an English Language Learner to stay with the BEST Plus until he/she reaches a score of 565. It may seem minor, but this is an important distinction, because often times we have found that non-native English speakers who are testing at or above 541 are really not ready for the next test, so this modification enables them to stay on the BEST Plus for long enough to acquire the skills to be truly ready for the next level.

I'm sure you're wondering how this will affect you as a tutor. As you know, in the spring, our Literacy Specialists administer their post-tests during one of your tutoring sessions. If you work with an English Language Learner, and your post-test appointment is made for May 1st or later, your student will very likely have to take two tests: a post-test in the BEST Plus (current version), followed by a new pre-test for the next program year in the BEST Plus 2.0. If you are an SGI or SGIB tutor, there is a very strong likelihood that instead of meeting with just one Literacy Specialist, you will find pairs of Specialists coming to deliver the tests in tandem in an effort to save time.

The roll-out of this new test is very exciting for our program and we appreciate your support as we work to transition all English Language Learners to the new test. For more information, please contact your Literacy Specialist.

## THOUGHTS FROM THE CORNER OFFICE

Hi Everyone,

Rhythm is one of the most important elements of comfort. People feel most at ease when they have a sense of what to expect, or what's next. In our house, for example, dinner for my kids is on the table at 5:15, and is followed by bathtime, and finally bedtime. I don't have to fight with my girls to get them to take a bath or to fall asleep because they know that is the next step in the day, so they expect it. I find I only have trouble putting them to bed or getting through a meal when I've broken the rhythm, like if we eat dinner at a friend's house instead of eating at our kitchen table. It upsets their equilibrium, and they act out.

Another major upside to developing rhythm is that it creates boundaries without having to overtly spell out what those boundaries are. I don't have to worry about Haley trying to eat her dinner on the floor because she knows we eat at the table. That's just the way we do things.

I think it's a great universal lesson that can also work with students in our program. If you maintain a rhythm (meeting at the same time and place, reviewing homework first, etc.) you may find that your student does what is expected of him/her more readily. You will also have less instances of miscommunication - I guarantee it!

*Karen*



Creating a daily rhythm offers my children not only a sense of security, but also provides them with a healthy sense of boundaries.



## ANNUAL ASSESSMENTS AND NEXT STEPS FOR BEGINNERS

(submitted by Barbara Fody)

There is no doubt that we live in a data driven world, with data that can drive us crazy. As you may know, Literacy Nassau is required to meet data driven benchmarks every fiscal year. One of those benchmarks is achieving a specific percentage of students who have made gain on the annual assessments administered every spring.

In keeping with our philosophy that test scores are not the only measure of progress, we will consider multiple factors when recommending the next step in the pathway to English language self-sufficiency. As you may know, this past fall Literacy Nassau introduced an instructional pathway for English language learners, which is represented by the graphic below.



Starting in spring 2016, but concentrated in May and June, every student in our program will be tested. Many volunteers are working with beginners since individual tutors are now reserved only for the beginning English language population. How and when we determine the next step on the pathway for the beginner is the focus of this article.

After the student is assessed with BEST Plus, a listening and speaking test exclusively, the test is scored online. If the score indicates that the student has moved into the intermediate level, your Literacy Specialist will consult with you to determine if moving into small group instruction (SGI) is in the best interest of the student. In other words, our students are not merely test scores, but rather individual adults with many components driving their personal need to learn the English language.

In most cases, the student will be ready to move into SGI starting in summer or fall of 2016, where the critical opportunities to interact with multiple individuals cannot be duplicated in the one-on-one setting. In less frequent cases, the student will continue with the tutor, and may possibly be assessed before the next mandatory testing phase in spring 2017. Your Literacy Specialist will reach out to you during May, June, or July to discuss the optimal route for your student to continue successful engagement with the English language. Productive conversations will require time and focus, and with each Literacy Specialist's case load in excess of 150 students, scheduling conversations will have its challenging moments.

A note for tutors who started working with individual students who are not beginners: Your Literacy Specialist will contact you over the summer to discuss the best option for your student to continue the study of English. In many cases, the student who is intermediate or advanced could greatly benefit from small classes.

Albert Einstein wrote (I believe specifically for our program!): "Not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything that can be counted counts." We echo Einstein's words. Data scores are not always meaningful measures, and are certainly not the only measure especially when human components are part of the equation.

The Literacy Specialists look forward to collaboratively working out an optimal solution for your student.

### HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

Happy birthday to all of our tutors born in March! They are:

Frank Annese  
Marilyn Benson  
Susan Bernstein  
Joan Borruso  
Lyn Burros  
Carol Castle  
Claire Deroche  
Nancy Doyle  
Jeanne Dyche  
Inga Fassler  
Janet Fingeret  
Alan Freeman  
Charlotte Gabriele  
Deborah Honen  
Dilia Kamensky  
Margaret Kemp  
Robert Lanzisera  
Charles Liebov



Dena Lempert  
Mindy Mangot  
Harri Meyers  
Joyce Mongitore  
Deborah Monteko  
Ronnie Packer  
Aruna Paingankar  
Ammu Paulose  
Louis Pulido  
Lauren Quinn  
Janice Raven  
Charlene Serenita  
Sophia Shapiro  
Mary Smith  
Gladys Stuart  
Esther Thomas  
Peter Walsh  
Kathy Zuar

mixed messages

One cent exchanged for your opinions —  
A penny for your thoughts.

If you think your English word skills are the *bee's knees*, see if you can decipher the idioms below:

1. Quite a variation 24 hours creates
2. Get higher and glimmer
3. Lack of knowledge equals ecstasy
4. Ponder your thoughts prior to uttering them
5. Refrain from creating a downpour on my procession

*These examples were taken from a game called Idiomaddict sold at marbles the brain store.*

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ANSWERS: 1. What a difference a day makes. 2. Rise and shine. 3. Ignorance is bliss. 4. Think before you speak. 5. Don't rain on my parade.

## VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT: SUSAN FITZGERALD

*(submitted by Susan Fitzgerald)*

Susan Fitzgerald is a tutor with our Next Chapter Book Club in Bellmore. Her early career was as a flight attendant for a major airline. She then went back to college and obtained her master's degree to start a second career as a public librarian. She is married with two adult children and has been volunteering for different causes since the 1990s.

In Susan's words:

The Next Chapter Book Club has been a great experience. Our introductory meeting was to become acquainted with the members and discuss the goals and expectations of the club and to listen to what the participants' expectations were. Their goals were to become better readers and to increase their comprehension.

Our group consists of four women and our only male, co-facilitator Johnny Gilchrist. They have similar abilities but different levels of reading; they all bring

something special to the club. It's been very rewarding to see their progress and friendships grow. They enjoy the books, talk quite a bit and laugh frequently. One individual never liked to read aloud, and now she is the first one to read. Our group helps one another with word pronunciation and at times gently corrects each other when struggling with a word while reading. They are proud of one another when they are successful in sounding out a word. They enjoy hearing from Johnny and I that they are doing a good job and are getting better every week. They have not only grown in confidence but have really become proficient, fluid readers. They



Susan practices echo reading with one of her Club members.

like the activities we do to help with vocabulary and comprehension. They are enthusiastic and will try the new words in conversation.

Our club is filled with laughter and sharing stories of the impact the book has made on them in a personal way. They choose their next book thoughtfully after listening to a brief synopsis and are all eager to attend our meetings. They have become good friends. It fills me with a feeling of optimism for the future for those with developmental challenges. The Next Chapter Book Club is an important part of their life; it expands their knowledge and confidence, and gives them the opportunity to socialize publically and to proudly show their uniqueness and abilities.

I have a special place in my heart for developmentally challenged people. I originally heard about this program through another agency and was interested in becoming a volunteer. I'm so very happy I did. I love working with my Next Chapter Book Club.

## LITERACY SPECIALISTS' RESOURCE CORNER

*(submitted by Umama Pasha)*

Voice of America, also known as VOA, provides programming that broadcasts on radio, TV and the internet outside of the U.S. in English and other foreign languages. What makes the VOA such a valuable resource for you is that it has a "Learning English" section. The Learning English section includes up to date headlines about international and domestic issues as well as valuable information on health, history, education, and entertainment for beginners to advanced level learners. Articles are categorized by different levels (levels 1-3). Each article includes a listening section, a written component, and sometimes an audiovisual component. Each article also has a section called "Words in the Story", a list of vocabulary words used in the article with easy to understand definitions.

If you are looking for other opportunities to help your learner practice their English, especially if they need to focus on their listening comprehension, the VOA Learning English section has English podcasts like "Everyday Grammar" that discuss conditionals, verb tenses and dreaded prepositions! Or you can also try the "Learning English" podcast, which uses limited vocabulary and is spoken at a slower pace than other VOA podcasts. If you are looking for other topics, check out



"Words and their Stories," "This is America," or "Science in the News." Find VOA on the web at: [learningenglish.voanews.com](http://learningenglish.voanews.com)

## CONGRATULATIONS NEW TUTORS!

Congratulations - and welcome - to all our new volunteer tutors! Names noted with an (\*) are current tutors who either took a refresher or a different track.

Susan Anton	Susan Goldstein	Juan Manzano
Linda Argenziano	LaToyra Graves	Evelyn Monaco
Miguel Arias	Coleen Graziose	Ginny O'Sullivan
Dee Berger	Michele Haber *	Sandy Palmer
Ruth Bigman	Robert Hackett	Linda Podhurst
Bryna Bloom	Donald Hayde	Janice Raven
Maureen Comerford	Bryan David Huie	Lila Redlich
Carol Cook	Jan Kerr	Chris Rochford
Andrew Corsi	Alison Kohler	Claudia Silbert
Roberta Dixon	Marilyn Lamstein	Adarsh Singla
Peggy Dublin	Susan Laufer	Mary Smith
Rhea Epstein	Lynda Lax	Karla Solomon
Rebecca Figueras *	Kathy Leibowitz	Dara Sullivan
Janet Fingeret	Richard Levin	Mary Thrall
Lori Freeman	Debbie Levine	Joyce Tobkes
Rosemary Fuchs	Charles Liebov	Thomas Williams
Laura Garcia	Laura Longo	Gina Wood Hart *



## SPONSOR SPOTLIGHT: YELP!

Literacy Nassau received \$5,000 from the Yelp Foundation, after earning the most votes in the Yelp Foundation Gives Local grant contest. We're so honored by the outpouring of support from our community! Learn more about the great work of the Yelp Foundation at [yelpfoundation.org](http://yelpfoundation.org).



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## LITERACY NASSAU'S PARTNERSHIP WITH THE INN

*(submitted by Kim Nau)*

Since 1983, The Mary Brennan Interfaith Nutritional Network (INN) has been helping people all over Long Island who are plagued by hunger and homelessness. The INN recently launched a brand new Center for Transformative Change (CTC). This is a unique facility located adjacent to the Mary Brennan INN soup kitchen in Hempstead. The CTC serves as a resource center to assist guests of the soup kitchen in improving their quality of life by becoming self-sufficient. At the CTC, which opened in January 2016, volunteers will offer assistance with employment, housing, education, computer skills, and much more.

Literacy Nassau always strives to provide services to Long Island's under-served - those who are hardest to reach and teach. Since literacy is the key to unlocking the cycle of poverty, our visions will merge as we partner with The INN to offer our educational programs at their new CTC. We will hold new student registrations, Tutor Training Workshops, and instruction on their premises, allowing their guests easy access to the educational instruction that will help them grow and thrive. This is a new partnership and we are eager to mobilize tutors to assist with this extremely worthy project. Please contact Literacy Specialists Ocaria DiMango or Barbara Fody (extensions 12 and 17, respectively) if you are interested in making a meaningful difference with us at the Center for Transformative Change.



### **It's Finally Here: Our Annual (un)SCRABBLE Challenge!!**

Join us at Chateau Briand for an amazing event. An (un)SCRABBLE event, in a nutshell, is when teams compete in short, timed rounds. The team that forms the highest-scoring words from their Scrabble tiles in each round is the winner. It is called (un)SCRABBLE because the format is slightly different from the regular game - all of the tiles are exposed and the teams scramble to fill their boards.

**Date: March 31, 2016, 6:00-10:00 pm**

**Advance ticket purchase is required.**

Tickets can be purchased online at [www.LiteracyNassau.org](http://www.LiteracyNassau.org). All proceeds to benefit Literacy Nassau.