

FINDING A BALANCED BLEND: DESIGNING AND SUPPORTING ENGAGING
AND EFFECTIVE INTEGRATED SKILLS MATERIALS FOR ADULT ESL
BLENDED LEARNING CLASSROOMS

by

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master
of Arts in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages.

Hamline University

St. Paul, Minnesota

August 2021

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SUMMARY

Multimodality has been increasingly prevalent in our daily lives and schools, but the COVID-19 pandemic made digital communication truly essential. With the almost overnight shift to online schooling, many people had to adapt to a new way of teaching and learning (Novak & Tucker, 2021). Even as vaccines allow for much of society to begin to reopen, it's clear that the educational landscape has shifted, and schools will need to continue to be prepared for future disruptions (Sung 2020). Adult learners are now likely to encounter multimodality in and out of school settings. The current need for multimodality in adult education and flexible blended learning environments led me to my research question: *What are the necessary components of a blended learning environment to foster increased language fluency and accuracy across all language domains for intermediate Adult Basic Education (ABE) English as a Second Language (ESL) learners?* My aim in exploring this question was to highlight guiding principles and practices that can be applied in ABE ESL classrooms.

The investigation of this research question yielded the creation of a toolkit that teachers can use to develop blended learning classes. This toolkit includes planning checklists, guiding questions, student support considerations, sample student facing materials, and more. The aim of this toolkit is to assist teachers in the development of multimodal ESL curriculum for blended learning classrooms in order to ensure effective teaching practices that lead to increased language fluency and accuracy across all four language domains for intermediate ABE ESL learners. I hope this toolkit will help more ABE ESL classes thrive in a blended learning model. As our world accelerates in a multimodal technology integrated direction, I want to see ABE ESL classes equipping

learners with the skills they need; in order to do this educators need to be prepared with the knowledge and tools to support their students.

A primary audience for this project will be other ABE ESL instructors who will hopefully be able to use the guide from the toolkit to inform their instruction as they develop blended learning classes, and may be able to use the student-facing resources in their classrooms. I hope that this project will provide key principles and practices that can be applied by other instructors in their classrooms.



An ABE Teacher's Toolkit for Blended Learning in ESL classes

Image Source: <https://thenounproject.com/term/toolkit/154266/>

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How to use this toolkit

This toolkit is intended to serve as a quick reference resource for educators that are teaching blended learning classes. The context you are teaching in will inform your teaching decisions, and will shape how you use these materials. Please use the table of contents for a quick reference. Resources do not need to be reviewed sequentially, but rather each piece in this toolkit can be pulled out for use on it's own, or can be used in combination with the other resources provided here.

Blended learning is an exciting but challenging pursuit! It is my hope that this toolkit can support the development of blended learning classes in many different settings, and can be adapted and modified to serve the needs of different teachers and learners.

Why Blended Learning?

Blended learning offers several benefits:

- Hybrid learning creates opportunities for students to be more **actively involved** in their learning, **increasing learner autonomy** ([Bender 2003](#))
- Hybrid learning can **extend opportunities** for learning outside of class time, as well as offer **greater opportunities for differentiation** ([Rosen & Vanek 2020](#)).
- Hybrid learning can **increase the amount of language input** students receive and offers a variety of **options for output** ([Ferreira, Salinas, & Morales, 2014](#))
- Interacting online with peers and teachers can **increase learning outcomes** ([Ravenna, Foster, & Bishop 2012](#))
- Hybrid class models have proven to be **more effective for ABE learners** than either face-to-face or online instruction alone ([Rosen & Vanek 2020](#)).
- The flexibility of a hybrid learning model can free up the teacher to have **more time for individual and small group learner support** ([Pinto-Llorente, Sánchez-Gómez, García-Peñalvo, & Casillas-Martín, 2017](#))
- The flexibility of a hybrid learning model can increase the opportunities to **make learning accessible** to all student ([Novak & Tucker 2021](#))

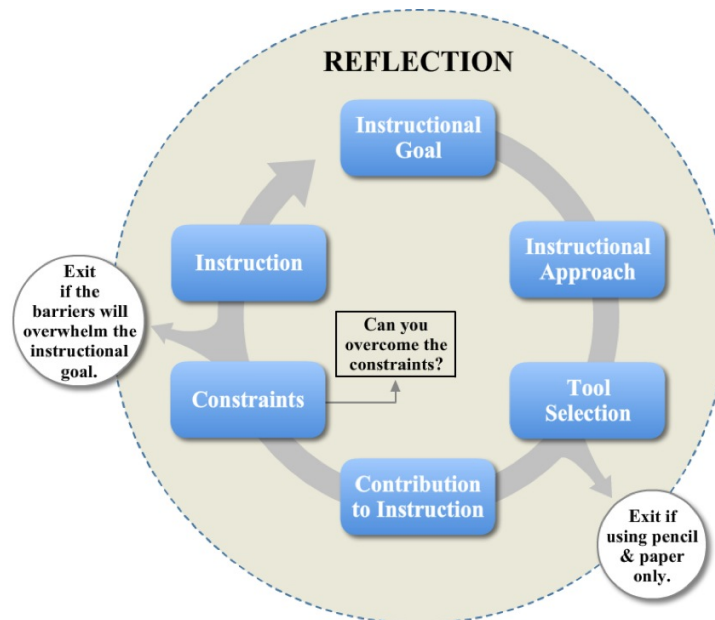
Technology Considerations: Making a Blend

When should we use technology in class? Consider the TIP Cycle

We want to use technology to better reach our instructional goals and increase student learning. When classes are occurring in-person high quality instruction will sometimes involve technology, and sometimes it will not. You may want to use the following questions from the Technology Integration Planning Cycle to help consider when and how to integrate technology in your in-person classes.

1. What is my instructional goal?
2. What instructional approach will I use to reach this goal?
3. What digital or non-digital tools will best support my instruction? (If a non-digital tool is selected you can stop here.)
4. How will the tool I selected contribute to the instructional goal?
5. What are the potential constraints of using this tool? Do the constraints of using the digital tool overwhelm the instruction? Can these constraints be overcome? (If the barriers will overwhelm the instructional goal you can stop here.)
6. How will instruction be delivered? (Consider: time, scaffolding, procedure, assessment, etc.)
7. After the activity: reflect on the instruction. What went well? What could be improved? Consider your technological knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and content knowledge. What area do I need to further develop?

Adapted from [Iowa Reading Research Center](#)



Source: [Hutchison & Woodward 2014](#)

TIP Cycle for the online classroom

Technology for online learning: Note that while the cycle gives the option to “Exit if using pencil and paper only” this will not necessarily be an option when you are planning for virtual days. You can still use this cycle for online planning, but overcoming constraints will become critical rather than an optional exit point in the planning cycle.

Instructional goals: The TIP cycle assumes that instructional goals will be focused on class content. However, we know that in a hybrid learning model **there are times when an instructional goal may focus on navigating a tech tool in and of itself** in order to prepare students for future learning opportunities. When planning for tech instruction you may still want to use some of the reflection and planning steps modeled in the TIP cycle.

Tool selection: In face to face classes and online it’s important to plan your instructional approach before selecting a tech tool so that you can consider not just what tool to use, but how to use it. On the next page the [triple E framework](#) will help you consider how tech tools are helping students meet learning goals. You can also refer to the [tech tool inventory](#) in this guide for support in selecting the appropriate tool for your objectives.

How should we use technology in the class? Consider the Triple E Framework

We want our technology integration to help students meet our learning goals. As you use technology in your class, consider the following three components and the questions to measure each.

Extend Learning	<p>Does the technology create opportunities for students to learn outside of their typical school day?</p> <p>Does the technology create a bridge between school learning and everyday life experiences?</p> <p>Does the technology allow students to build skills, that they can use in their everyday lives?</p>
Enhance Learning	<p>Does the technology tool aid students in developing or demonstrating a more sophisticated understanding of the content?</p> <p>Does the technology create scaffolds to make it easier to understand concepts or ideas?</p> <p>Does the technology create paths for students to demonstrate their understanding of the learning goals in a way that they could not do with traditional tools?</p>
Engage Learning	<p>Does the technology allow students to focus on the task of the assignment or activity with less distraction?</p> <p>Does the technology motivate students to start the learning process?</p> <p>Does the technology cause a shift in the behavior of the students, where they move from passive to active social learners (co-use or co-engagement)?</p>

Source: [Triple E Framework](#)

When working through the Triple E Framework, always consider the [instructional strategies](#) you want to use, remembering that even the best tech tools are not a magic bullet for learning. You can also use [this site](#) to select strategies based on factors you select that are critical to learner success.

Source: [Digital Promise](#)

How can I evaluate my less tech-integrated lessons? Consider the UDL Flowchart

In-person learning days may not always be heavily tech integrated. The UDL Flowchart can help you determine if you have created a lesson that aligns with UDL principles. This can be helpful to consider regardless of the specific tech integration on any given day.



Planning Checklists

Unit Planning Checklist

In my unit plan I include:

- Standards ([CASAS Competencies](#)/[CASAS Content Standards](#)/[CCRS](#)/[ELP](#))
- [Social Justice Standards](#)
- Level objectives based on the Advancing a Level Chart
- Calendar considerations
- Essential questions I want my students to explore
- Objectives addressing what my students will understand, know, and be able to do by the end of the unit
- Objectives for all language domains (R/W/L/S), grammar, and life skills
- A plan for assessment that includes authentic performance tasks, evidence of learning
- Opportunities for student self-assessment and reflection

Is this unit:

- Relevant to student's lives?
- Appropriately rigorous for the level?

Unit Planning Template

The unit planning template [linked here](#) can be used for higher level planning. Use the categories in the table to organize the objectives, essential questions, and key tasks and assessments for the unit. Creating an outline of the unit using these key elements from your table can help transition this content to weekly plans following a backwards design process.

Weekly Planning Checklist

In my weekly plan I include the following both online and in-person:

A specific grammar point

Online

In-person

Activities that build community

Online

In-person

Activities that build agency

Online

In-person

Opportunities for choice with input and output

Online

In-person

Assessment opportunities (formative and summative)

Online

In-person

Reflection and self-assessment opportunities

Online

In-person

Ways for students to see progress

Online

In-person

Ways for students to receive feedback

Online

In-person

Technology integration to extend, enhance, and engage learning goals

Online

In-person

Activities that promote all language domains (reading, writing, listening speaking)

Online (use discretion for which domains work best online)

In-person (use discretion for which domains work best in-person)

Weekly Planning Template

The weekly planning template [linked here](#) can be used for outlining the activities for one week of class content. Objectives can be coded at the top with the days that they will be taught on. Technology integration can be planned and scaffolded using the tech tool table. Daily lessons can then be outlined. The table for weekly lessons assumes four days a week of classes with two days in-person and two days of virtual instruction. This can be modified to reflect the learning context.

Daily Planning Checklists

In my **in-person** plans I include:

- A warm up activity that creates flexibility at the start of class
- Independent or small group activities
- At least 3 to 5 communicative activities that encourage interaction
- No longer than 10 minutes at a time spent on a teacher led activity without **all** students meaningfully interacting
- Technology where appropriate for [engaging students in learning, enhancing learning, or extending learning](#) and supporting the skills needed for virtual days
- Opportunities for students to pre-plan their language use (wait time, I do-we do-you do, prepared role play, etc.)
- Opportunities for unscripted language use (Ex: conversation line, mingle, etc.)
- At least one opportunity for a physical exercise, stretch, or mindfulness activity in every 2.5 hour class
- One 10 minute break in every 2.5 hour class
- Announcements about school wide events and calendar considerations
- Time for students to reflect on objectives and learning
- Time after class for teacher reflection on the lesson

In my **online** plans I include:

- A warm-up activity that creates flexibility at the start of class
- Synchronous activity at the beginning and end of class
- Independent self-paced activity
- Opportunities for peer-to-peer interaction without a teacher present (ex: breakout rooms, discussion board, etc.)
- At least 3 to 5 communicative activities that encourage interaction
- [No longer than 10 minutes at a time spent on a teacher led activity without **all** students meaningfully interacting](#)
- Technology where appropriate for [engaging students in learning, enhancing learning, or extending learning](#)
- Opportunities for students to pre-plan their language use (writing a post for an online discussion, writing a script for a video, etc.)
- Opportunities for unscripted language use (Ex: breakout room conversation)
- At least one opportunity for a physical exercise, stretch, or mindfulness activity in every 2.5 hour class with permission to have video off
- One 10 minute break in every 2.5 hour class
- Announcements about school wide events and calendar considerations
- Time for students to reflect on objectives and learning
- Time after class for teacher reflection on the lesson

Recommendations and Guidance

Teaching a blended learning class can open the door to many new and exciting opportunities for students and teachers. Yet these opportunities come with challenges. It's important to consider your approach to blended learning to ensure that you are supporting learner outcomes, while also conducting your work in a time efficient manner.

Class Recommendations

- Create opportunities for **frequent peer to peer interaction in-person and online** to foster both language development and a sense of community.
- Ensure that students can sense your **social presence** in classes in-person and online by engaging students in conversation, [commenting strategically](#) on [online discussions](#), modeling in whatever virtual spaces you ask students to use, and providing strategic feedback. Social presence will increase student satisfaction, which leads to greater student engagement.
- Offer opportunities for both **synchronous and asynchronous peer to peer interaction** throughout the week. Synchronous interaction allows students to practice real time language usage in authentic ways. Asynchronous interaction allows students to think critically about their language usage and plan their words carefully. Both opportunities are advantageous to learning, and different students will benefit from each method.
- Asynchronous learning can **create opportunities for students to extend their learning outside of class**. Giving students tools they can use independently can allow students with the time and interest to continue learning on their own time. (Ex: [My English Lab](#), [Quizlets](#))
- **Consider using videos to create asynchronous instruction** in situations where you would explain something the same way for all students. This creates more up front work, but can free you up during class to provide more individualized support. Videos should not exceed 9 minutes. You should consider your learner's level of English and plan for an appropriate length to meet the learning objectives. Videos should be paired with pre- and post-activities.
- Ensure students receive **timely and specific feedback** when submitting asynchronous work. See [feedback recommendations on the next page](#).

Communication Recommendations

- Try to **respond to messages from students within 24 hours, or less**. When students aren't seeing their teacher face to face it becomes even more important for them to know that their teacher is available to help them. Communicate to your students early and often when you will make yourself available to them and how they can reach you. **Keep one consistent platform for communication**. (Ex: Whatsapp, Email, Google Voice, etc.)

Feedback Recommendations

How often should I give feedback?

You should provide your students with feedback as often as you feel necessary in order to achieve the following outcomes:

- Create a sense among learners that their teacher sees their work and is present with the class
- Monitor student progress and help students see their own progress
- Increase awareness of mistakes with target language usage so that corrections can be made

You will want to ensure students receive some type of feedback when students do the following types of activities.

- When students submit independent or group work completed online
- When students participate in an online discussion
 - (Note: a detailed response to every discussion post is not always necessary or helpful)
- When students complete a major project, assignment, or assessment

Feedback should be provided to students within 48 hours of the deadline. At a minimum you should confirm receipt of the assignment and tell the student when to expect feedback. Feedback should make clear how the student did or did not meet the objective of the assignment.

How should I give feedback online?

When students have less face to face contact with their teacher it's all the more important that they receive specific feedback. **Oral feedback** has been found to be particularly impactful for students. Students tend to perceive audio or video feedback as being more thorough and personal than written feedback (Noavk and Tucker 2021). Consider providing individual oral feedback on a regular basis in one of the following ways:

- Provide feedback **asynchronously** using video or audio recordings.
 - [Use Mote to share audio recordings with students](#) in Google docs, slides, classroom, or Gmail
 - Use Whatsapp audio messages
 - Use [Screencast-O-Matic](#) for a more detailed feedback video on a project or major assignment
- Provide feedback **synchronously** by preparing independent work times in class, during which time students can rotate to meet with you individually and receive feedback on one specific item or learning objective.
 - Create stations so that students can take turns meeting with the teacher during class while classmates work on other activities

Written feedback may also be helpful for some assignments. the following options for written feedback:

- [Comments on a Google Classroom assignment](#) in private comments to an individual or group
- Comments in a Google Doc assignment, [which may also be done using mote](#) and can be [streamlined with a comment bank](#)
- Comments in a dialogue journal or shared document for student/teacher communication

Tech Tool Inventory

As you plan your hybrid learning class you will want to be sure to integrate all language domains. Use the following list of current tech tools as a starting point to consider ways that you can introduce multimodality into your classroom. Tools marked with an asterisk can work particularly well in student led activities.

* = this tool can work particularly well for independent practice

** = this tool can facilitate practice across several language domains

Listening

[EdPuzzle](#)

[EdPuzzle](#) *

[VoiceThread](#) **

[Nearpod](#) **

[Wizer](#) **

Reading

[Achieve 3000](#) *

[Newsela](#) *

[Nearpod](#) **

[Wizer](#) **

[Immersive Reader](#) *

[BookWidgets](#) *

[Padlet](#) *

[Kahoot](#)

[Factile](#)

[Quizlet](#)

[Quizizz](#)

Speaking

[Flipgrid](#) *

[Mote](#) *

[VoiceThread](#) **

[Screencastify Submit](#) *

[Nearpod](#) **

[Wizer](#) **

Writing

[Nearpod](#) **

[Wizer](#) **

[BookWidgets](#) *

[Padlet](#) **

[Mentimeter](#)

Student Resources

Background

The following resources are intended to be used as student facing materials to support learners in your class. Please modify and adapt materials as you see fit to best serve your learners.

- The learning survey is intended to be used with students as they enter your program or class. You may want to use the survey to determine if the blended learning model is a good fit for the student, and to identify supports that may be needed in order to help the student achieve success.
- The “Skills for Learning” list is intended to be an activity to start a conversation with students about some of the soft skills and metacognitive skills that they will need to use in their blended learning class.
- The weekly schedule can be modified to match your class schedule. The intention is to help students make a plan for participating in class, and to communicate about what steps the student will need to take in order to do so.

Learning Survey

1. At home I have a quiet place where I can study for this course:
 - a. No, a quiet place is not often available.
 - b. Sometimes a quiet place is available.
 - c. Yes, a quiet place is always available.
2. The wifi I will use on my virtual days is:
 - a. Very strong. I do not have any wifi problems.
 - b. Ok. Sometimes I have wifi problems.
 - c. Weak. I have many wifi problems.
3. When I am using a computer I think...
 - a. I can't do this.
 - b. I need a lot of support to do this.
 - c. I need a little support.
 - d. I can try to do this on my own before I ask for support.
 - e. I know I can do this on my own.
4. When my teacher gives me written directions to follow on my own I think...
 - a. I can't do this.
 - b. I need a lot of support to do this.
 - c. I need a little support.
 - d. I can try to do this on my own before I ask for support.
 - e. I know I can do this on my own.
5. When my teacher gives me practice to do on my own:
 - a. I feel very comfortable working independently
 - b. I feel ok working independently
 - c. I feel a little uncomfortable working independently
 - d. I feel very uncomfortable working independently
6. I like talking on Zoom with my teacher and classmates
 - a. I like this a lot!
 - b. I like this a little.
 - c. I don't like this.
 - d. I really don't like this.
7. When I have a reading assignment for class or for work, I think of my reading skills as:
 - a. Lower than average. I usually need help to understand the text.
 - b. Average. I sometimes need help to understand the text.
 - c. Good. I usually understand the text without help.
8. When I have a writing assignment for class or work, I think of my writing skills as:
 - a. Weak. I find it hard to express myself in writing.
 - b. Average. I can express myself fairly well in writing, but sometimes have difficulty.
 - c. Good. I am comfortable expressing myself in writing.
9. Discussions in a class are:
 - a. Very useful to me. I almost always participate in class discussions.
 - b. Somewhat useful to me. I sometimes participate in class discussions.
 - c. Not very useful to me. I don't usually participate in class discussions
10. Knowing my classmates is:
 - a. Very important to me
 - b. Somewhat important to me
 - c. Not particularly important to me

Skills for learning

Read about five skills that will help you in class:

1. Time management



Time management means using your time in a good way to do the things you need to do. It is important to be on time for class at school and on Zoom.

2. Asking for help



Asking questions will help you learn. Your teacher wants to help you.

3. Preparation



Preparation means getting ready. You can be prepared for class if you bring the materials you need. Bring your computer, book, paper, and pencil for class every day. You can also be prepared by telling your teacher if you cannot come to class, or telling your teacher if you have a problem on Zoom.

4. Collaboration



Collaboration means working with your classmates. When you work together you all can learn more.

5. Reflection



Reflection means thinking about what you did and what you learned. Reflection can help you remember information and learn more.

Which skill is easiest for you?

Which skill do you need to practice?

Weekly schedule

My Weekly Schedule

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Before class I will:	Before class I will:	Before class I will:	Before class I will:	Before class I will:
X:00 - X:00 English Class In-Person	X:00 - X:00 English Class In-Person	X:00 - X:00 English Class Online	X:00 - X:00 English Class Online	X:00 - X:00 English Class Online
After class I will:	After class I will:	After class I will:	After class I will:	After class I will:

Recommended Reading

For further exploration on the topic of blended learning consider the following sources:

- [IDEAL Distance Education and Blended Learning Handbook, 7th Edition](#) - A guide to getting started with distance and blended learning. This guide was updated in 2020 with some new information in light of COVID-19. Information covers the whole range of programmatic and class considerations, including recruitment, orientation, administrative issues, and assessment.
- [The What, Why, Who, and How of Blended Learning for Adult Basic Skills Learners](#) - This guide unpacks the benefits of blended learning and offers guidance and tools for programs that are just getting started with blended learning.
- [UDL and Blended Learning](#) - This book helps educators discover how to apply UDL principles in a blended learning class, and addresses the current educational landscape in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- [Triple E Framework](#) - This website has several resources to explain the framework for measuring technology integration, and offers several tools for planning lessons and measuring effective technology integration.

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How to Use the Comment Bank in Google Classroom + Fancy Feedback Tips & Tricks

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