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# Teachers—Adult Literacy and Remedial Education

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## Significant Points

- Many adult literacy and remedial education teachers work part time and receive no benefits; unpaid volunteers also teach these subjects.
- Most programs require teachers to have at least a bachelor's degree; a public school teaching license is required for publicly run programs in some States.
- Job opportunities are expected to be favorable, particularly for teachers of English to speakers of other languages.

## Nature of the Work

*Adult literacy and remedial education teachers* instruct adults and out-of-school youths in reading, writing, speaking English, and performing elementary mathematical calculations—basic skills that equip them to solve problems well enough to become active participants in our society, to hold a job, and to further their education. The instruction provided by these teachers can be divided into three principle categories: *remedial* or *adult basic education (ABE)* is geared toward adults whose skills are either at or below an eighth-grade level; *adult secondary education (ASE)* is geared towards students who wish to obtain their General Educational Development (GED) certificate or other high school equivalency credential; and *English literacy* instruction for adults with limited proficiency in English. For the most part, students in these adult education classes traditionally have been those who did not graduate from high school or who passed through school without acquiring the knowledge needed to meet their education goals or to participate fully in today's high-skill society. Increasingly, however, students in these classes are immigrants or other people whose native language is not English. Educators who work with adult English-language learners are usually called *teachers of English as a second language (ESL)* or *teachers of English to speakers of other languages (ESOL)*.

Remedial education teachers, more commonly called adult basic education teachers, teach basic academic courses in mathematics, languages, history, reading, writing, science, and other areas, using instructional methods geared toward adult learning. They teach these subjects to students 16 years of age and older who demonstrate the need to increase their skills in one or more of the subject areas mentioned. Classes are taught to appeal to a variety of learning styles and usually include large-group, small-group, and one-on-one instruction. Because the students often are at different proficiency levels for different subjects, adult basic education teachers must make individual assessments of each student's abilities beforehand. In many programs, the assessment is used to develop an individualized education plan for each student. Teachers are required to evaluate students periodically to determine their progress and potential for advancement to the next level.

Teachers in remedial or adult basic education may have to assist students in acquiring effective study skills and the self-

confidence they need to reenter an academic environment. Teachers also may encounter students with learning or physical disabilities that require additional expertise. Teachers should possess an understanding of how to help these students achieve their goals, but they also may need to have the knowledge to detect challenges their students may have and provide them with access to a broader system of additional services that are required to address their challenges.

For students who wish to get a GED credential in order to get a job or qualify for postsecondary education, adult secondary education, or GED, teachers provide help in acquiring the necessary knowledge and skills to pass the test. Earning a GED requires passing a series of five tests in reading, writing, mathematics, science, and social studies; most teachers instruct students in all subject areas. To help students pass the tests and succeed later in life, teachers not only provide subject matter instruction but also focus on improving the communication, information-processing, problem-solving, and critical-thinking skills necessary for further education and successful careers.

ESOL teachers help adults to speak, listen, read, and write in English, often in the context of real-life situations to promote learning. More advanced students may concentrate on writing and conversational skills or focus on learning more academic or job-related communication skills. ESOL teachers work with adults from a wide range of backgrounds. They must be prepared to work with students of all ages and from many different language backgrounds. Some students may have extensive edu-



*Adult literacy teachers help students learn by using examples from everyday life.*

cational experiences in their native language, while others may have very little. As a result, some students may progress faster than others, so teachers must be able to tailor their instruction to the needs and abilities of their students. Because the teacher and students often do not share a common language, creativity is an important part of fostering communication in the classroom and achieving learning goals.

All adult literacy and remedial teachers must prepare lessons beforehand, do any related paperwork, and stay current in their fields. Attendance for students is mostly voluntary and course work is rarely graded. Because computers are increasingly being used to supplement instruction in basic skills and in teaching ESOL, many teachers also must learn the latest applications for computers in the classroom.

**Work environment.** Because many adult literacy and remedial education teachers work with adult students, they do not encounter some of the behavioral or social problems sometimes found with younger students. Adults attend by choice, are highly motivated, and bring years of experience to the classroom—attributes that can make teaching these students rewarding and satisfying. However, many adult education programs are located in cramped facilities that lack modern amenities, which can be frustrating for teachers.

A large number of these teachers work part time. Some have several part-time teaching assignments or work full time in addition to their part-time teaching job. Classes for adults are held on days and at times that best accommodate students who may have a job or family responsibilities, so evening and weekend work is common.

**Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement**

Nearly all programs require teachers to have at least a bachelor’s degree, but some require a master’s degree in adult education or ESOL instruction. Some States require teachers to have a public school teacher license or a license specifically for adult education teachers.

**Education and training.** Adult education teachers need at least a bachelor’s degree, although some programs prefer or require a master’s degree. Programs may also prefer to hire those with teaching experience, especially with adults. Many colleges and universities offer master’s degrees or graduate certificates in adult education, although some adult education programs offer classes or workshops themselves on topics relevant for their teachers. These include classes on teaching adults, using technology to teach, working with learners from a variety of cultures, and teaching adults with learning disabilities. ESOL teachers also should have courses or training in second-language acquisition theory and linguistics. In addition, knowledge of the citizenship and naturalization process may be useful. Knowledge of a second language is not necessary to teach ESOL students, but can be helpful in understanding

the students’ perspectives. GED teachers should know what is required to pass the GED and be able to instruct students in the subject matter.

Professional development among adult education and literacy teachers varies widely. Both part-time and full-time teachers are expected to participate in ongoing professional development activities in order to keep current on new developments in the field and to enhance skills already acquired. Each State’s professional development system reflects the unique needs and organizational structure of that State. Attendance by teachers at professional development workshops and other activities is often outlined in State or local policy. Some teachers are able to access professional development activities through alternative delivery systems such as the Internet or distance learning.

**Licensure.** Most States require teachers in these programs to have some form of license if they are employed in a State or local government-run program. Some States have specific licenses for adult education teachers, while others require a public school teacher license. Requirements for a license typically consist of a bachelor’s degree and completion of an approved teacher training program.

**Other qualifications.** Adult education and literacy teachers must have the ability to work with students who come from a variety of cultural, educational, and economic backgrounds. They must be understanding and respectful of their students’ circumstances and be familiar with their concerns. All teachers, both paid and volunteer, should be able to communicate well and motivate their students.

**Advancement.** Opportunities for advancement for adult education and literacy teachers again vary from State to State and program to program. Some part-time teachers are able to move into full-time teaching positions or program administrator positions, such as coordinator or director, when such vacancies occur. Others may decide to use their classroom experience to move into policy work at a nonprofit organization or with the local, State, or Federal Government or to perform research.

**Employment**

Teachers of adult literacy and remedial education held about 76,000 jobs in 2006. Many additional teachers worked as unpaid volunteers. Many of the jobs are federally funded, with additional funds coming from State and local governments. The overwhelming majority of these teachers are employed by the educational services industry, primarily in local school districts, adult learning centers, and community colleges.

**Job Outlook**

Employment is expected to grow faster than the average for all occupations, and a large number of job openings is expected due to the need to replace people who leave the occupation or

**Projections data from the National Employment Matrix**

Occupational Title	SOC Code	Employment, 2006	Projected employment, 2016	Change, 2006-2016 Number	Percent
Adult literacy, remedial education, and GED teachers and instructors.....	25-3011	76,000	87,000	11,000	14

NOTE: Data in this table are rounded. See the discussion of the employment projections table in the *Handbook* introductory chapter on *Occupational Information Included in the Handbook*.

retire. Job opportunities are expected to be favorable, particularly for teachers of English to speakers of other languages.

**Employment change.** Employment of adult literacy and remedial education teachers is expected to grow by 14 percent through 2016, faster than the average for all occupations. As employers increasingly require a more literate workforce, workers' demand for adult literacy, basic education, and secondary education classes is expected to grow. Significant employment growth is anticipated especially for ESOL teachers, who will be needed by the increasing number of immigrants and other residents living in this country who need to learn or improve their English skills. In addition, greater proportions of these groups are expected to take ESOL classes.

The demand for adult literacy and basic and secondary education often fluctuates with the economy. When the economy is good and workers are hard to find, employers may relax their standards and hire workers without a degree or GED or good proficiency in English. As the economy softens, employers can be more selective, and more students may find that they need additional education to get a job. In addition, adult education classes often are subject to changes in funding levels, which can cause the number of teaching jobs to fluctuate from year to year. In particular, budget pressures may limit Federal funding of adult education, which may cause programs to rely more on volunteers if other organizations and governments do not make up the difference. Other factors such as immigration policies and the relative prosperity of the United States compared with other countries also may have an impact on the number of immigrants entering this country and, consequently, on the demand for ESOL teachers.

**Job prospects.** Job prospects should be favorable as high turnover of part time jobs in this occupation creates many openings. Opportunities will be best for ESOL teachers, particularly in States that have large populations of residents who have limited English skills—such as California, Florida, Texas, and New York. However, many other parts of the Nation have begun to attract large numbers of immigrants, making good opportunities in this field widely available.

### Earnings

Median hourly earnings of adult literacy and remedial education teachers were \$43,910 in May 2006. The middle 50

percent earned between \$32,660 and \$57,310. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$24,610, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$75,680. Part-time adult literacy and remedial education instructors are usually paid by the hour or for each class that they teach, and receive few or no benefits. Full-time teachers are generally paid a salary and receive health insurance and other benefits if they work for a school system or government.

### Related Occupations

The work of adult literacy and remedial education teachers is closely related to that of other types of teachers, especially preschool, kindergarten, elementary school, middle school, and secondary school teachers. In addition, adult literacy and basic and secondary education teachers require a wide variety of skills and aptitudes. Not only must they be able to teach and motivate students (including, at times, those with learning disabilities), but they also must often take on roles as advisers and mentors. Workers in other occupations that require these aptitudes include special-education teachers, counselors, and social workers. Other occupations that involve working with speakers of languages other than English include interpreters and translators.

### Sources of Additional Information

Information on adult literacy, basic and secondary education programs, and teacher certification requirements is available from State departments of education, local school districts, and literacy resource centers. Information also may be obtained through local religious and charitable organizations.

For information on adult education and family literacy programs, contact:

► The U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education, Potomac Center Plaza, 400 Maryland Ave. SW., Washington, DC 20202.

Internet:

<http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/index.html>

For information on teaching English as a second language, contact:

► The Center for Adult English Language Acquisition, 4646 40th St.NW., Washington, DC 20016.

Internet: <http://www.cal.org/caela>