



ESP:

English for Scouting Purposes

by Lauren Kennedy

In Canada we are blessed to be part of a multicultural society, and Scouts Canada is a great place for youth from different ethnic and linguist backgrounds. Not only do the youth benefit from the program, but they also have the opportunity to learn about different customs and practices. But what do you do when you have a youth in your group who

doesn't speak English as their first language, or parents whose English abilities makes communication difficult? As an ESL (English as a second language) teacher, Scout Leader, and a Rover, I want to share some of my tips with you on how to ensure every member of your group has a great time in Scouting.

1. RELAX! Youth who don't speak English fluently have the same interests as youth who do. They will become just as engaged in a hike, game or craft as the other members of your group. Tag is universal.
2. You are probably more concerned about the youth's ability to understand instructions than the other youth in your group. Friendships between youth (especially at the younger age levels) are based more on doing things together than long conversations. You will be amazed at how people in your group will help others to participate and have a great time doing it. This will also help to develop patience and tolerance for differences among people.
3. People who don't speak English fluently, generally have great observation skills. Demonstrate what you want done, make sure the youth can see you, and provide simple clear instructions while you are demonstrating a craft, camping technique, or game. Use gestures and eye contact.
4. Don't yell. Volume does not improve comprehension.
5. If the youth doesn't understand something that you said, pause, and then say the same thing again, **using the same words**. What is happening is that the youth is trying to translate in their head what you just said and may need a little bit more time to do that. If you immediately try to say the same thing another way, they get confused. Because then not only are they trying to translate your first sentence, they are now trying to
- translate your second sentence as well. So be patient and repeat what you said in the same way at least twice. If this doesn't work then you can try to say the sentence another way, but do tell the youth that is what you are doing by saying something like "I'm going to say this a different way".
6. "Get" is one of the hardest words to use in the English language. Look it up in the dictionary, and you will be amazed at the variety of ways we use this word. For example, I'm going to get my hair cut, get me some firewood, we have to get there by dark, etc. Avoid this word.
7. People's comprehension skills are generally more advanced than their production skills. This means that your youth (or parents) can listen or read better than they can speak or write. Don't assume that because the youth isn't talking, they don't understand. They probably know a lot more about what is going on then you think. In ESL research, there is what we call a "silent phase" which is generally followed by huge jumps in language production. During the silent phase, the youth is taking in a lot of the language around them and adding it to their mental dictionary. Even if they aren't talking, they are learning.
8. When giving complex directions or instructions, such as details about an outing, write them down. This way the youth (or parent) can take the time to understand fully what is happening and what is required of them.
9. Talking on the telephone in your second language is very difficult. Whenever possible try to talk to the youth or parent in person. If you do need to use the telephone, speak very slowly, and be very clear on what it is you want to say. Try to use face-to-face, e-mail, and newsletters as much as possible.
10. Avoid acronyms. In Scouting we use a lot of acronyms on a regular basis, such as PL/APL, KY-BO, GORP, BP etc. A very fluent German leader I met last year, when confronted with a kit list that asked her to bring a PFD didn't know what that was. Dictionaries don't normally list acronyms and they can cause problems if they aren't explicitly explained.
11. Resist the temptation to continually use the youth as a representative of their culture, language, religion, etc. Although one or two meetings can be devoted to exploring this youth's background, they probably don't want their differences to be the focus of every meeting or outing. The parents and youth can be a great resource for your program but don't forget that they want to be considered the same as everyone else too.
12. Acknowledge the youth's ability to speak more than one language by presenting a language strip (worn over the front pocket). These are available at the Scout Shop in a variety of languages. If your local Scout Shop doesn't have the language required, you can always order one from the catalogue.

Everyone Loves Games

Here are a few games that are appropriate for ESL Scouts.

BE PREPARED

(Beavers to Scouts)

Preparation:

1. On separate cards, draw items you should take on a hike/camping trip (or you could cut out magazine pictures).
2. Write the words for each item on separate pieces of construction paper.
3. Draw a large outline of a Scout to which the items can be attached. On a separate piece of paper, create the heading "Kit List".

At the meeting:

1. Hand each youth a card – everyone gets either a word or a picture.
2. Once all the cards are handed out, everyone stands up and looks for their partner.
3. A leader will then call out the items, and the two youth holding the corresponding name and picture will bring them to the front, attaching the picture to the Scout outline, and the word under "Kit List".
4. Then the leader (or the youth) can explain why the item is important to bring on a hike/camping trip to the rest of the group. Try to get both youth to speak.



Games are a universal language.

Why it's good for ESL Scouts:

- They work with the other youth in the group and if necessary can be helped by another youth.
- It's easy to explain/demonstrate
- Teaches and practices camping vocabulary
- Teaches and practices camping skills
- You can give the ESL youth "easier" objects.

ACTION RACE (Beavers and Cubs)

Divide the group into teams. Each team sits in a line beside a chair. One youth from each team stands next to the chair and the leader calls out an action, such as "jump". The youth must

jump to the other side of the room and back, and then sitting down in the chair must yell, "Beavers (Cubs) can jump!" before the next person can stand up for their action.

VARIATION: call out camp tasks. For example, the action could be "reef knot", "unroll sleeping bags", "set up tents", etc. Depending on the action, you may want to partner everyone.

Why it's good for ESL Scouts:

- It's easy to explain/demonstrate
- Teaches and practices camping vocabulary
- Teaches and practices camping skills
- Allows "quiet" youth a chance to speak in the group and demonstrate skills.

Having a youth in your group who doesn't speak English as their first language, can be a challenge but it can also be a rewarding experience for everyone in the group. Additional resources can be found through your local Scout office, community centres, library, and on the Internet. Happy Scouting! X

– Lauren Kennedy is a troop leader with 69th Ottawa Scouts and also a Nepean Rover Crew member. Her background as an ESL teacher at Carleton University helps her in her volunteer role.

Linking to Strategic Direction #6.

Photographer: Peter Ng



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