

Sample focus group questions for a new family literacy program

For potential participants:

- ▶ Why do you want to study English?
- ▶ What do you need to read in English?
- ▶ Where do you need to speak English?
- ▶ Who do you need to speak English to?
- ▶ How often do you read with your child? (How often do you tell him/her a story; teach him/her letters, words, numbers; teach him/her songs or music; talk with him/her about family history, family culture, or ethnic heritage?)
- ▶ How often do you visit your child's school (to talk to your child's teacher or principal; to observe classroom activities; to attend a school event such as a play, art show, or party; to meet with a parent-teacher organization; to volunteer; for other reasons)?
- ▶ What are good times to offer English classes?

For school representatives:

- ▶ What languages do parents speak in your district?
- ▶ What challenges do you face communicating with the non-English-speaking parents in your district?
- ▶ What systems does the school/school district have in place to facilitate non-English-speaking parents' involvement in school activities?
- ▶ How might the school/school district be able to support a family literacy program (offer space, host events, involve the children's teachers, etc.)?

Types of Needs Assessment

Type 2: Questionnaires of Learners' Needs and Goals

Description

Questionnaires frequently consist of a list of topics, skills, or language and literacy uses. The learners indicate what they already know or what they want to know by checking the appropriate column or box, or they may use a scale to rank the importance of each item.

For beginning learners who do not read English, pictures depicting different literacy contexts can be shown, and learners can mark the contexts that apply to them. The list of questionnaire items may be prepared ahead of time by the teacher or generated by the students themselves through class discussion. Note: The sample questionnaires below are models; teachers need to adjust or develop forms for their own students. It is recommended that teachers create a folder of these forms to keep for future use.

Discussion Questions

1. How might this type of needs assessment be useful in your class?

2. When would you use this type of needs assessment?

3. What could you use as a guide in determining what questions to include in the questionnaire?

Sample Questionnaire 1

Figure 1. Questionnaire for Beginning-Level Learners

What do you want to study? Circle three topics.

<p style="text-align: center;">Community</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Health</p> <p style="text-align: right;">HEADACHES & STOMACH ACHES</p> <p>HELP! HELP!</p> <p style="text-align: center;">PRESCRIPTIONS</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Work</p> <p>COOK</p> <p>RECEPTIONIST</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Housing</p> <p style="text-align: center;">APARTMENT TOWNHOUSE HOUSE</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Money & Shopping</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Transportation</p> <p>BY BUS ...</p> <p>BY AIRPLANE ...</p> <p>BY CAR ...</p>

Note: Adapted from National Center for Family Literacy & Center for Applied Linguistics. (2004). *Practitioner toolkit: Working with adult English language learners*. Louisville, KY & Washington, DC: Author.

Sample Questionnaire 2

Table 1. Questionnaire for Beginning/Intermediate-Level Learners

Name _____ Date _____

What do you already know how to read in English?

What do you want to learn to read? (Check ✓)

	Already know how to read	Want to learn how to read
Newspapers/magazines		
GED textbooks		
Job ads		
Job applications		
Signs at work		
Checks from work		
Housing ads		
Notes from school		
Children's books		
Income tax forms		
Bank statements		
Bus and train schedules		
Dictionaries		
Labels on food		
Labels in clothes		
Medicine labels		
Telephone/utility bills		
Other		
Other		

Sample Questionnaire 3

Table 2. Questionnaire for Intermediate-Level Learners: Family Activities

Purpose: To identify literacy practices in the home, record parent-child interactions, and provide a baseline for documenting changes over time.

Process: As part of either a whole-group or a small-group discussion, have learners discuss activities they currently do with their children. Give the learners the following prompt: “Parents and children can do many things together. They go to the park on Sunday, go fishing, cook, clean the house, go hiking, watch TV, work in the garden, or look at magazines. In many families, parents help their children with homework or check their assignments. What do you do with members of your family?” Record their responses on the lines below.

Luisa and her husband go to church together on Sundays.

Then they watch their son Marcos play soccer.

Note: From Holt, D. D., & Van Duzer, C. H. (Eds.). (2000). *Assessing success in family literacy and adult ESL* (p. 83). Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics. Adapted with permission.

Sample Questionnaire 4

Table 3. Questionnaire for Intermediate/Advanced-Level Learners

Name _____	Date _____
1. Why do you need to learn more English? Please be specific. Give examples of situations that are difficult for you in English.	
2. What specific areas of English would you like to improve before you leave this class?	
3. When people speak English to you, how much do you understand? Check the amount. ___ everything ___ most ___ some ___ a little ___ very little	
4. When you watch TV, how much do you understand? Check the amount. ___ everything ___ most ___ some ___ a little ___ very little	
5. When you speak English, how much do other people understand? ___ everything ___ most ___ some ___ a little ___ very little	
6. Order the skills that you need from 1 to 6. Number 1 is the most important and number 6 is the least important to you at this time. Please use each number only one time.	
___ Reading	___ Writing
___ Listening	___ Speaking
___ Vocabulary	___ Pronunciation

Note: From Moss, D. (1994). *Alternative assessment: A fork in the road*. Presented at TESOL. Adapted with permission.

Types of Needs Assessment

Type 3: Inventories of Language and Literacy Use

Description

Learners keep lists of the ways they use language and literacy and update them periodically. Inventories may consist of a checklist or open-ended questions. Teachers can use the information from the inventories to tailor their classes to the needs of their students.

Discussion Questions

1. How might this type of needs assessment be useful in your class?
2. When would you use this type of needs assessment?
3. Why is it helpful to know how students are using English outside the classroom?

Sample Inventory 1

Table 4. Language Log for Beginning-Level Learners

Name _____ Date _____
Where did you speak English this week? _____ _____ _____
Who did you speak English to? _____ _____ _____
What did you read in English this week? _____ _____ _____
What did you need to study this week? _____ _____ _____
This week, _____ was difficult in class.
This week, _____ was easy in class.

Note: From Moss, D. (1994). *Alternative assessment: A fork in the road*. Presented at TESOL. Adapted with permission.

Sample Inventory 2

Table 5. Family Events Log for Beginning-Level Learners

Sample 2: Beginning-Level Family Events Log

Process: Ask the learners to record the activities they do with their children each week. Then have them discuss this record with a partner. At key points in the class cycle, meet with learners to compare their list with their planned activities. Then discuss the plan again and renegotiate, if appropriate.

Name _____	Week of _____

This week I...	

<i>helped my son with his math.</i>	

Note: From Holt, D. D., & Van Duzer, C. H. (Eds.). (2000). *Assessing success in family literacy and adult ESL* (p. 87). Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics.

Sample Inventory 3

Table 6. Beginning-Level Language Use Inventory

Process: Give the forms on the next two pages to the students. Display this handout on an overhead transparency or PowerPoint slide. As a large group activity, go over the handout, offering suggestions and asking for examples from the students. Have students work on their handout individually, then have them form pairs and interview each other using the second form.

Write YOUR answers below.

	Who did you speak to?	What did you say?	Was it easy? Difficult?
At home?			
At work?			
At the store?			
Another place?			

Table 7. Beginning-Level Language Use Inventory (Part 2)

Now Write your PARTNER'S answers.

	Who did you speak to?	What did you say?	Was it easy? Difficult?
At home?			
At work?			
At the store?			
Another place?			

Note: From Moss, D. (1994). *Alternative assessment: A fork in the road*. Presented at TESOL. Adapted with permission.

Sample Inventory 4

Table 8. Can-Do List for Self-Assessment for Intermediate to Advanced Levels

Name _____ Date _____

Put a checkmark (✓) in the box that best describes you (one ✓ for each row).

Here's what I can do.	I can do this. No problem.	I do OK most of the time, except when things are complicated.	This is a little difficult for me, but I can do it with some help from others.	This is very difficult for me. I can only do it with a lot of help from others.	I can't do this. No way. It's much too difficult.
Talk about my country and my city with a friend or neighbor					
Ask for directions on the street or ask where something is in a store					
Ask someone to speak more slowly or to say things in a different way					
Fill out a form (name, birth date, address, phone)					
Explain about myself and my work in a job interview					
Understand the notes that my child's teacher sends from school					
Figure out my phone bill or electricity bill					
Explain to the doctor in detail what's wrong with me					
Pick a story in the newspaper and read it					
Understand the news on TV					

Note: Adapted from Holt, D. D., & Van Duzer, C. H. (Eds.). (2000). *Assessing Success in family literacy and adult ESL* (p. 95). McHenry, IL & Washington, DC: Delta Systems & Center for Applied Linguistics.

Types of Needs Assessment

Type 4: Timelines

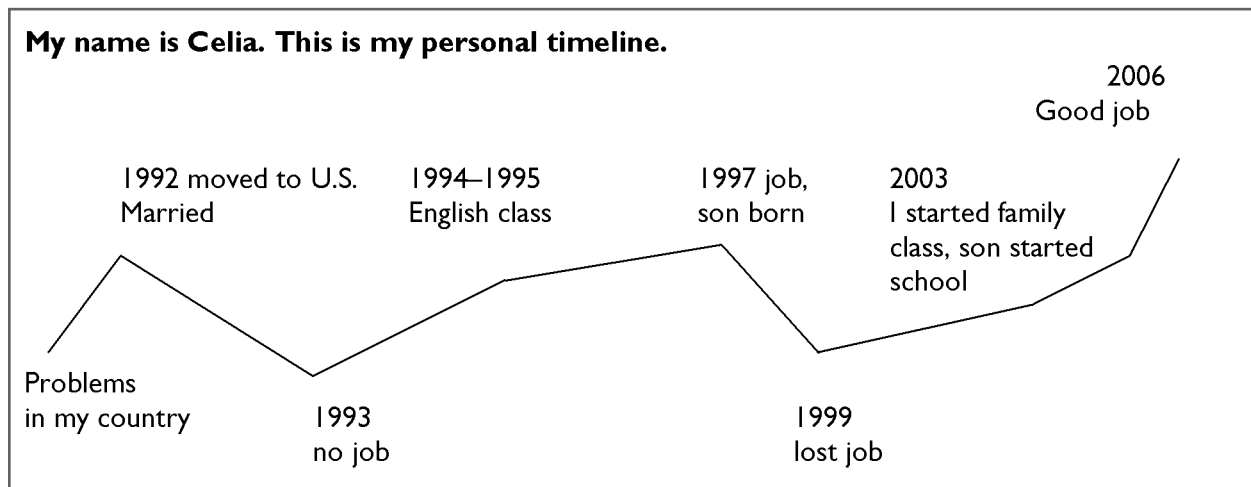
Description

With this kind of assessment, learners make written or pictorial timelines indicating major events in their lives (past and present). They also indicate future goals. Timelines help the teacher become more aware of learners' backgrounds. Class discussion should focus on the learners' goals and how the class can help them attain their goals.

Discussion Questions

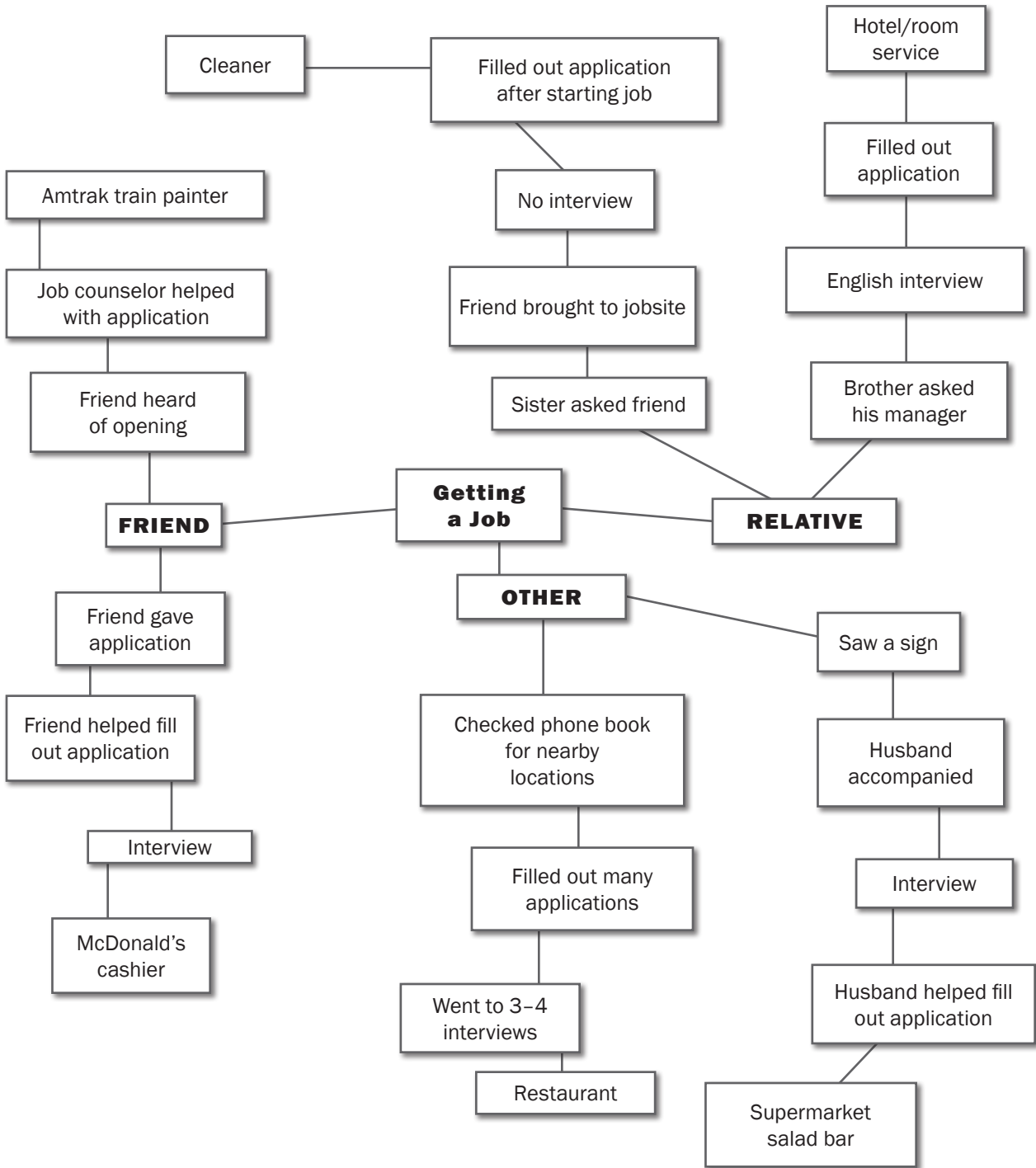
1. How might this type of needs assessment be useful in your class?
2. When would you use this type of needs assessment?
3. Why is it important to know about students' past experiences?

Figure 2. Sample Timeline



From Lynda Terrill, adult ESL teacher (Arlington Education Employment Program, Arlington, VA), 2004. Used with permission.

Figure 3. Sample Mind Mapping 1: Getting a Job



Note: From Grant, S., & Shank, C. (1992). *Discovering and responding to learner needs: Module for ESL teacher training*. Arlington, VA: Arlington Education Employment Program. Adapted with permission.

Figure 4. Sample Mind Mapping 2: Writing

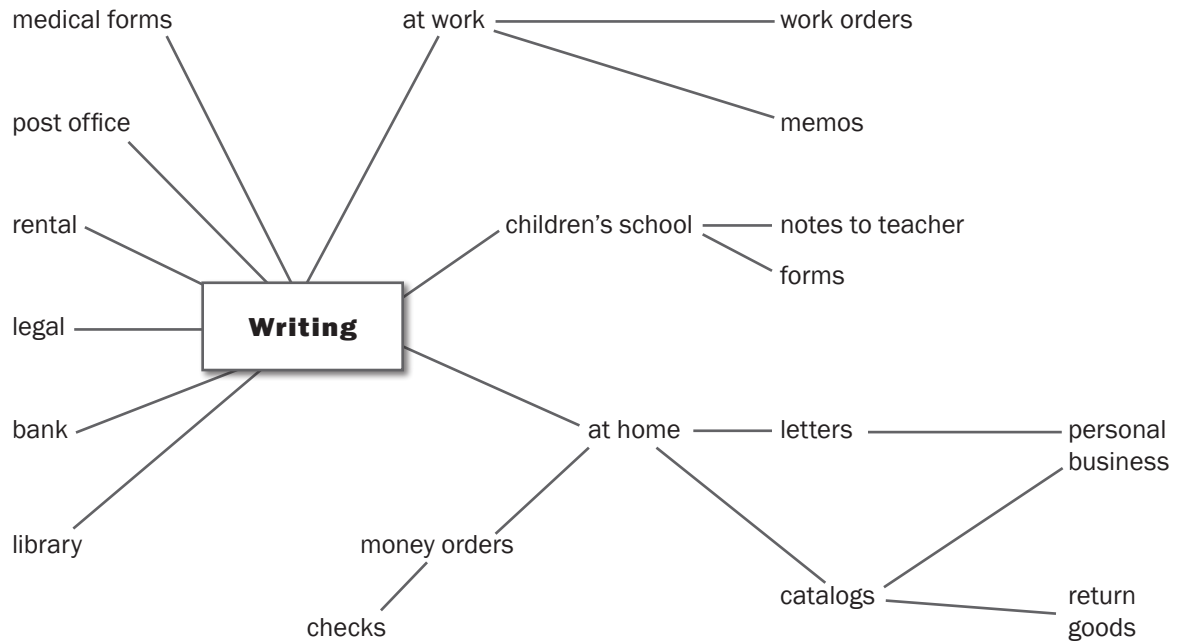
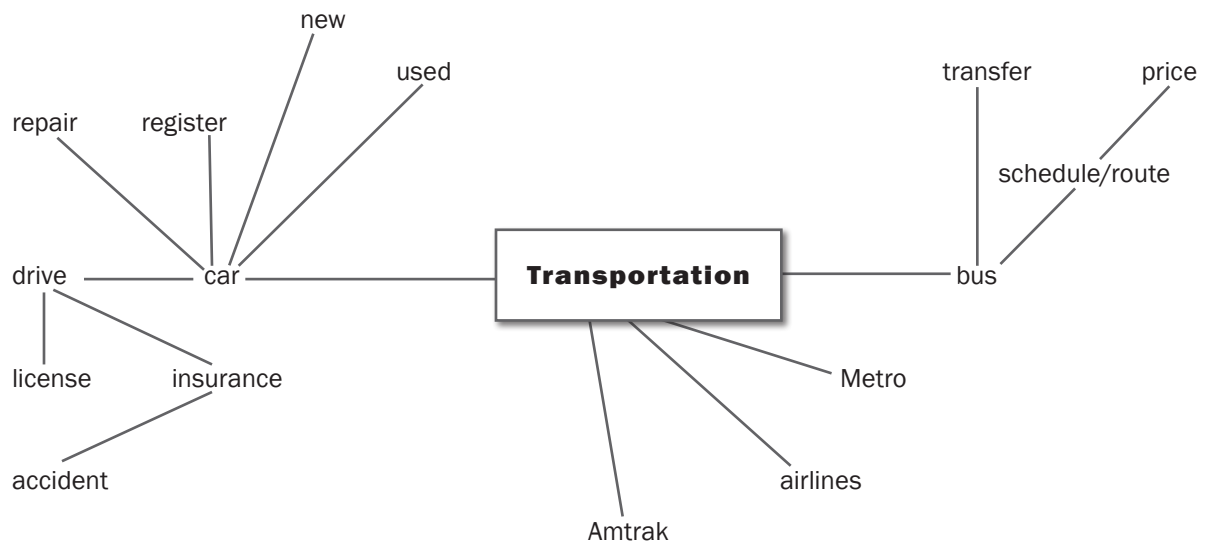


Figure 5. Sample Mind Mapping 3: Transportation



Note: From Grant S., & Shank, C. (1992). *Discovering and responding to learner needs: Module for ESL teacher training*. Arlington, VA: Arlington Education Employment Program. Adapted with permission.

Table 9. Needs Assessment Tools Chart

Tool	Description	Purpose	Analysis
Initial Assessment: Planning a Program or Curriculum			
Surveys	Surveys may consist of a written questionnaire or checklist that is completed by prospective program participants or administered orally by bilingual staff members in English or prospective participants' native language.	Survey results help create a general picture of the needs of adults who may be interested in the program.	Program planners can systematically examine respondents' answers to identify needs that should be targeted.
Focus groups	A focus group discussion is conducted with small groups according to a protocol that focuses on specific topics, procedures, and questions.	Focus group discussions help staff members gather information from a large number of people in a short time. Focus groups can help program planners understand the needs of potential program participants.	Program planners can systematically examine the participants' comments to identify trends or patterns that recur among different individuals or groups.
Interviews	Program staff can conduct individual interviews of existing service providers to obtain detailed information about setting up a program.	Interviews help determine what services already exist for learners and the relative effectiveness of those services.	Program planners can use interviews as an additional source of information about learners' needs and to understand the level of assistance available to meet those needs.
Document and literature reviews	Data can be gathered from school district records, including test scores, grades, and attendance records of participants' children; welfare department statistics on the socioeconomic status of participants; and journals, newsletters, books, and state and national reports that include information about the literacy-related needs of participants.	Document and literature reviews can provide useful information about the specific needs of targeted participants.	Program planners can examine the data to identify trends or patterns that recur among different individuals or groups.

Table 9. Needs Assessment Tools Chart (continued)

Tool	Description	Purpose	Analysis
Classroom Needs Assessment			
Information grid	<p>Learners interview each other to complete the grid.</p> <p>Topics and headings for grids are generated by the teacher and/or the learners.</p>	<p>Grids provide initial, pretopic, midcourse, and final information about the learners and their experiences, needs, and preferences.</p> <p>Grids can be adapted for various levels by controlling language or using pictures for literacy-level learners.</p>	<p>Results can be tabulated orally or on a master grid on an overhead or blackboard.</p> <p>If appropriate to the grid, the group prioritizes skills and topics to be covered.</p>
Topic selection	<p>Learners are given a list or a collection of visuals indicating skills, topics, or subtopics, either specified by a curriculum or developed by brainstorming.</p>	<p>Topic selection provides initial, midcourse, or pretopic information about learners' highest priority needs with regard to competencies, skills, and topics.</p>	<p>Teacher and class become aware of high-priority needs. Together they negotiate the selection and ordering of the course content.</p>
1. Priority cards	<p>1. Individuals or small groups create cards, each containing one skill or topic. The cards are placed in order of importance.</p>		<p>1. Individuals or small groups report their top priorities and the class reaches a consensus.</p>
2. Vote with your feet	<p>2. Names or pictures of skills or topics are posted around the classroom, and individuals move to stand near the most important choice. Several rounds of voting may occur.</p>		<p>2. At each round of voting, teacher counts learners who chose a particular skill or topic. A class consensus is reached.</p>

Table 9. Needs Assessment Tools Chart (Continued)

Tool	Description	Purpose	Analysis
<p>Brainstorming</p> <p>1. Learner-generated list</p> <p>2. Mind mapping</p>	<p>1. Small or whole groups generate lists of how they use skills (e.g., Where do you speak/write English?).</p> <p>2. Beginning with a topical question at the center of a diagram, class brainstorm answers. Responses and more-detailed examples are added to the diagram and drawn as branches from the center.</p>	<p>1. Learner lists provide initial and ongoing information about how learners use basic skills.</p> <p>2. Mind mapping provides initial and pretopic information about how learners use basic skills and life skills in a variety of settings and how they would like to be able to use skills.</p>	<p>1. The list may be used to create a questionnaire that individuals complete. The questionnaires can be tallied orally as a group. Identified needs can be prioritized.</p> <p>2. A count is taken of how many learners agree with each identified need. Identified needs can be prioritized as a group.</p>
<p>Questionnaires of learners' needs and goals</p>	<p>Questionnaires frequently consist of a list of topics, skills, or language and literacy uses. The learners indicate what they already know or what they want to know by checking the appropriate column or box, or they may be asked to use a scale to rank the importance of each item.</p> <p>For beginning learners who do not read English, pictures depicting different literacy contexts can be shown, and learners can mark the contexts that apply to them.</p> <p>The list of questionnaire items may be prepared ahead of time by the teacher or generated by the students themselves through class discussion.</p>	<p>Questionnaires provide initial, pretopic information about how learners use language and would like to be able to use language.</p>	<p>Results can be tabulated orally or by small groups.</p> <p>Based on results, the group prioritizes skills and topics to be covered.</p>

Table 9. Needs Assessment Tools Chart (Continued)

Tool	Description	Purpose	Analysis
Timelines	Learners make written or pictorial timelines that indicate major events in their lives (past and present). They also indicate future goals.	Timelines provide initial information about learners' lives and their goals for the future. As a final evaluation, learners indicate progress toward their goals.	Information can be used to tailor the class toward helping learners achieve their goals. Teacher becomes more aware of learners' backgrounds. Class discussion should focus on the learners' goals and how the class can help them attain their goals.
Dialogue journals	Teachers and learners correspond on a regular basis via a written journal. Teacher can ask learners to respond to specific questions in their journals (e.g., What would you like to learn in this class? What did you like best about class this week? What do you still need to learn?). The activity can be adapted to varying levels by controlling the language of the questions and of the responses expected.	Dialogue journals provide initial, ongoing, and final information about learners' learning needs and preferences.	Teachers can respond to individual learners about their needs, goals, and preferences and adapt the course as appropriate.
Inventories of language and literacy use	Checklists may be used, as well as open-ended questions requiring learners to keep lists of ways they use language and literacy and update them periodically.	Inventories provide initial, ongoing, and final information about learners' needs and progress.	Teachers can use the information from the inventories to tailor their classes to the needs of their students.

Note: From Grant, S., & Shank, C. (1992). *Discovering and responding to learner needs. Module for ESL teacher training.* Arlington, VA: Arlington Education Employment Program. Adapted with permission.
Also from Holt, D. D., & Van Duzer, C. H. (Eds.). (2000). *Assessing success in family literacy and adult ESL.* Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics.