



The Insider, the monthly newsletter of LVA Essex & Passaic Counties, will keep you in the loop on all the organization's upcoming events.



Erik Jacobson, Professor in the Department of Teaching and Learning at Montclair State University, supported our tutors with a workshop on "Getting Started with Writing Prompts." The workshop provided sample prompts and a discussion on what makes good prompts for our tutors to bring back to their students. Thank you, Erik!

Literacy Volunteers of America, Essex & Passaic Counties

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The Insider

Greetings LVA family!

As we enter November, a month shaped by reflection and gratitude, we are reminded of the extraordinary community that makes Literacy Volunteers of America, Essex & Passaic Counties such a meaningful place to learn, teach, and grow.

This issue highlights that spirit through the stories of Ling and Pablo—two voices that capture both the courage of learning and the generosity of teaching. Ling's transition from a distinguished academic career abroad to her deeply compassionate work as an LVA tutor, and Pablo's determined path to strengthen his professional English to advance his career, remind us of what is possible when people invest in one another.

Our featured story this month explores new research showing how movement can reshape pronunciation and language learning.

In our "In the News" section, we share several pieces that speak directly to today's literacy landscape. Each article underscores a simple truth: the need for strong, community-based literacy programs has never been greater.

We also extend heartfelt congratulations to all the tutors and students recognized during LVAEP's Annual Awards Ceremony in October. Their achievements reflect the dedication and resilience that define this community. Please take a moment to enjoy the photos in the section below—they capture the energy and pride of a truly inspiring evening.

At this season of thanksgiving, we express our sincere appreciation to every tutor, student, partner, volunteer, board member, and supporter. Your commitment ensures that learning remains accessible, hopeful, and life-changing for so many.

From all of us at LVAEP, thank you—and warmest wishes for a meaningful month ahead.

In the News

Copy and paste the highlighted website into an internet search bar to view the following stories.

"Continued literacy growth requires an ongoing commitment to continuous improvement." EdNC. <https://bit.ly/48gKY2e>

"Bridging the Literacy Gap: How Mike Hirsch and Literacy Rescue Are Rewriting the Narrative for Dyslexic Learners." USA Today. <https://bit.ly/4phGApu>

"Schools Turn to AI Translation Tools to Support English Learners." Ed Surge. <https://bit.ly/481HT1o>



Originally from Ecuador, Pablo arrived in the U.S. with a degree in Industrial Mechanics, but soon realized English was going to be a new challenge to overcome. He now works diligently in his new language skills, and looks forward to studying to become a bookkeeper as his next step.

Tutor Training Workshops

Online Training, by Ally Schmidt

Platform: Zoom (*sponsored by LNJ*)

Wednesdays, 6 to 8 pm

Feb. 11, 18, 25, and Mar. 4 and 11, 2026

Online Training, by Marilyn Bellis/Laura Pistoia

Platform: Zoom (*sponsored by LNJ*)

Wednesdays and Mondays, 9:30 to 11:30 am

Jan. 21, 26, 28, and Feb. 2 and 4, 2026

Online Training, by Jo Krish

Platform: Zoom (*sponsored by LNJ*)

Thursdays, 6 to 8 pm

Jan. 15, 22, 29, and Feb. 5 and 12, 2026

Tutor Support Workshops

"Tips & Tricks: Reading Skills," with Barbara Trueger

Platform: Google Meet

Wednesday, January 14, 2026, 1:00 pm – 2:30 pm

Tutor Study Circle

Facilitator: Cheryl Locastro

Thursday, December 11, 2025, at 3pm

(Themed online meeting)

Getting to Know Us

Pablo, LVA student

When Pablo arrived in the United States from Ecuador in 2022, he carried with him a quiet determination and a deep desire to begin again. Back home, he earned a technological degree in Industrial Mechanics and worked with precision tools, machines, and systems. He was used to solving problems through logic and patience. But after moving to the U.S., he quickly realized that his greatest challenge would not be mechanical—it would be linguistic. To find new opportunities, he needed to master English.

“I went to the library to ask about English courses,” he recalls. “They sent me to Mr. Jorge.” That conversation opened a door that would change the course of his life. Through Literacy Volunteers of America, Pablo began taking English classes and, as he describes it, “started a process of personal development.”

In the beginning, speaking felt like an obstacle course. “Before I started the program, I didn’t have confidence in myself,” he says. “But step by step, I went through the process, and now I feel confident to speak up.” His tutors, he emphasizes, made all the difference. “In my opinion, my tutors are the best. They have a lot of experience and patience to help us through the process. Each class gives me motivation to keep improving.”

Little by little, Pablo noticed changes in himself. “The first time someone spoke to me in English, and I could understand them, I’ll never forget that moment,” he says, smiling. “It made me realize I was really learning.” Now he practices every day—watching movies, listening to music, and even talking to himself in English to build fluency. “Each class is an opportunity to get better,” he says.

He finds daily inspiration in *Unstoppable* by Tony Robbins. “Because we put our own limits,” Pablo explains. “If we believe in ourselves and keep working, we can go further than we think.” That mindset has shaped not only how he studies but also how he approaches his new life in America.

Today, Pablo feels proud of his progress and is preparing for his next goal—to continue studying and become a bookkeeper. It’s a new chapter, one that combines his precision, discipline, and growing confidence in communication.

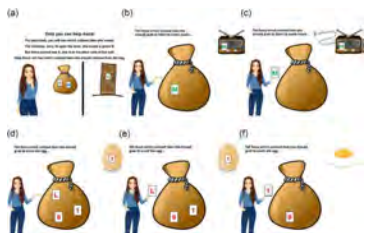
When asked what advice he’d give to other learners, his words are simple but powerful: “We need to face the fear of making mistakes and just do it. Keep going and never give up.”

From a single question at a library desk to finding his own confident voice, Pablo’s journey shows how courage, persistence, and gratitude can turn learning into transformation—one word, one conversation, one goal at a time.

Literacy opens a wide door to life. Help us keep that door open with your donation!

Thanks in large part to you, we are able to aid hundreds of students each year. Please continue your efforts to improve the lives of others by giving the gift of literacy.

<http://www.lvaep.org/donate.html>



Learning a new language often goes wrong with pronunciation and head movements

WJLA News, October 9, 2025

Written by: Jade Lawson

Adults learning another language often tend to continue using the intonation of their native language. This causes them to make mistakes in the new language: incorrect intonation can change the meaning of a word or sentence.

"When learning a new language, you also need to study intonation," says linguist Lieke van Maastricht of Radboud University. She investigated whether head movements can help with this.

Van Maastricht interviewed Catalan people who were learning English, together with her Spanish colleague Núria Esteve-Gibert. In previous research, Esteve-Gibert discovered that young children who are not yet able to use intonation to indicate where important or new information is in a sentence can already do so nonverbally, through head movements and facial expressions. Van Maastricht was curious to find out whether adults might also be able to compensate for their incorrect intonation with nonverbal information.

The work is published in the journal *Language Learning*.

Wrong emphasis

The linguists let Spanish students learning English via an online connection watch a game in which the fictional character Anna takes items out of a bag. The participants were allowed to say what Anna should take. For example: grab the yellow sock. Sometimes there is both a red and a yellow sock.

In that case, participants must say grab the YELLOW sock, while if there is a yellow sock and a yellow T-shirt in the bag, they should say grab the yellow SOCK, to indicate that it is the sock and not the shirt. From video recordings, the researchers were able to determine where participants placed the emphasis in the sentence and how they moved their faces while speaking. [...]

Can the correct intonation be trained? "That varies from person to person. [...]"

For the full study please copy and paste this link on your browser: <https://bit.ly/4i0EIEp>

Learning a new culture is more than studying a language. Tutoring is more than learning techniques. Our "Resources" webpage covers everything from legal matters, health care, & scholarships for immigrants, to professional development for tutors. Give us a look: <http://www.lvaep.org/students.html>

Tutor Spotlight Ling Fang, Tutor

When Ling Fan arrived in New Jersey in August 2023, she brought with her more than three decades of teaching experience—and an undiminished curiosity for learning. Before joining Literacy Volunteers of America, she was a professor at Beijing University of Chemical Technology, where she taught English to Ph.D. and postgraduate students for 32 years and authored multiple textbooks and research papers on linguistics and intercultural studies.



Today, she applies that lifetime of knowledge in a very different classroom. As a volunteer tutor with Literacy Volunteers of America Essex & Passaic Counties, Ling teaches beginning English learners from Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Her students include restaurant workers, preschool aides, and warehouse employees, all bringing strong motivation to learn. "Sometimes they struggle to understand, so I have to change my way of teaching," she says. "It's a big challenge—but also how I grow."

That adaptability has shaped Ling's entire career. She holds a Ph.D. in English Linguistics from Beijing Normal University and master's and bachelor's degrees in English from Northeast Normal and Jilin Normal Universities. Since arriving in the U.S., she has continued studying, earning a certificate in Teaching Chinese to Speakers of Other Languages at Columbia University and completing graduate coursework in Adult ESL and Literacy at Rutgers University. She credits LVA's tutor training and Rutgers partnership with helping her "see adult learning in a new way."

Ling's classroom is lively and multicultural. In one recent lesson, she taught words related to volunteering and donating, sparking a conversation about cultural differences. In their home countries, some students said it's common to donate medicine—something not allowed in the U.S. The discussion helped them not only practice English but understand community life in their new home.

One student, Rosmary, a recent immigrant from the Dominican Republic, stands out for her enthusiasm and determination to belong. Ling often shares her own experiences of adapting to American life to encourage her and other students to stay curious and confident.

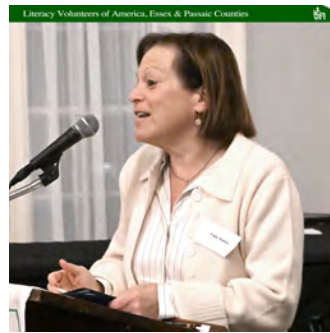
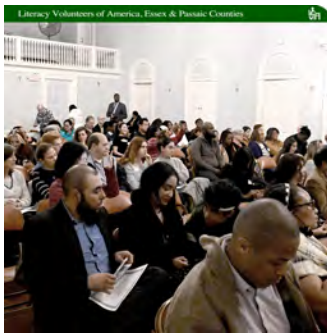
Moments like these make tutoring deeply rewarding. Ling recalls teaching directions and asking students to draw maps based on her instructions. When one student exclaimed, "I made it!" she felt his joy as her own. That sense of progress, she says, "is what makes all the effort worthwhile."

2025 Annual Awards Ceremony Literacy Volunteers of America, Essex & Passaic Counties

At last month's Annual Awards Ceremony at Bloomfield High School, we celebrated the dedication and progress of students, tutors, instructors, and teachers who have invested countless hours in their learning and teaching journeys. Honorees represented programs across both counties, including our valued partners at Maplewood Public Library and the NCC Adult Learning Center.



This year's recognitions highlighted both commitment and personal achievement. Students and tutors were honored for their hours of study and service, as well as for standout accomplishments. Our Students of the Year were Peterson for Essex County and Teresita for Passaic County. In addition, the Essex County Tutor of the Year and President's Award recipient was Hannah Beykirch, and the Passaic County Tutor of the Year was Melissa Primiceri.



For many newcomers, building a sense of belonging can be difficult—even after years in the United States. One of the most meaningful aspects of LVAEP is the way students forge friendships with one another as they learn English, explore new cultural experiences, and navigate work, family life, and personal growth.



2025 Annual Awards Ceremony Literacy Volunteers of America, Essex & Passaic Counties

Our tutors represent a wide range of backgrounds, yet share a common purpose: supporting students in their literacy goals. Some draw inspiration from their own family's immigrant history, others from their personal journey as immigrants, and all are united by a desire to give back and uplift their communities.



"I am often amazed at our students' commitment to learning English while juggling work and family responsibilities. They know new opportunities open as their English improves, but it takes determination and perseverance—and I admire each and every one of them," one tutor shared. This spirit is reflected in our Students of the Year: Miriam Ruminez in Essex County and Claudio Amaral in Passaic County.



Congratulations to all our students, tutors, instructors, teachers, and affiliate organizations!