

## THE ENGLISH IMPATIENT

### IMMIGRANTS WANT TO LEARN THE LANGUAGE, PRONTO

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## **Body**

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Yuan Di Qia is in a big rush to learn English.

"If people talk so fast, I can't understand them," explains Qia, 53, who arrived from China just three months ago.

Since then, he has been taking classes at the Flushing YWCA, trying to catch up with and on to what people around him are saying. "I hope my listening and speaking have good progress for living in America," says the aspiring Chinese businessman, who wants to start his own import-export company.

New York is now absorbing the largest influx of immigrants since the 1920s. According to a recent City Planning Commission report, 563,000 legal immigrants came to New York between 1990 and 1994.

There are scores of places where recent arrivals can go to learn English, but demand for English as a Second Language (ESL) programs easily outpaces supply these days.

"There is not a program that needs to do any advertising," says Richard Fish of the Mayor's Office of Adult Literacy, which oversees ESL programs throughout the city. "They all literally have waiting lists."

According to the Literacy Assistance Center, about 35,000 New Yorkers are enrolled in state and city-funded ESL programs throughout the city. But, Fish adds, there are another 30,000 names on waiting lists to get into ESL classes.

In fact, many of the free, government-funded programs now accept students through an admissions lottery. For example, the New York Public Library, which runs programs at branches in the Bronx, Manhattan and Staten Island, requires prospective ESL students to apply in person. Applications are then picked randomly to fill the available seats. Last year, there were 2,000 students.

Spanish is No. 1

Among the newest New Yorkers, Spanish is by far the most common native tongue it being the primary language spoken in five of the top 20 countries of immigrant origin, according to the City Planning Commission.

Speakers of Russian and Chinese made up the second and third-largest immigrant groups.

To meet these diverse needs, there are as many different kinds of programs as there are reasons to learn English.

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For foreign-born professionals and graduate students, a number of private colleges and language schools run specialized courses in business and academic English, for which tuition which can range from a few hundred to a few thousand dollars is required.

Meanwhile, the city's public schools, colleges and libraries sponsor English classes, most of them free, to provide basic language skills, especially for speaking and listening.

In addition, according to Dr. William Askins of the Literacy Assistance Center, countless numbers of informal conversation practice and tutoring groups have sprouted up at churches and temples across the five boroughs.

Neighborhood groups, partially funded by the government, also boast a range of services. For example, the Flushing Jewish Community Council, which serves a largely Russian population, and Sunset Park's Brooklyn Chinese-American Association, which has a mostly Asian constituency, teach free English classes to help prepare immigrants taking their citizenship exams.

Manhattan's Riverside Language Program offers free intensive English classes to a linguistically mixed group of refugees and newcomers and even assists students with applications for political asylum or permanent residency.

"There's a range of people who come for ESL services: from people who are physicists and doctors to people who come from agrarian communities who literally have never had formal education and are therefore illiterate in their native languages," Fish says. "Obviously, their needs are not all the same."

At the Flushing YWCA, which offers free English classes to its members (mostly Asian, but with a growing Russian population), Assistant Executive Director Roeme Kim notes: "The majority of our seniors here, for example, want to speak English and assimilate to the culture. If they can take their grandchildren to McDonald's and order lunch for them, they are happy."

### Sidebar list: SPEAKING OF CLASSES

So you want to talk like an American. Below are listings of some places where you can go to take English classes or call for more information.

#### Where to start:

Literacy Assistance Center, (212) 803-3333. Here you can get referrals to free English classes in all five boroughs, including programs run by the Board of Education, City University of New York, public library systems and other community-based organizations associated with the New York City Adult Literacy Initiative. Operators at the center's hotline can answer your questions in Spanish, Haitian Creole and Russian, as well as in English. New York State Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (NYSTESOL), (212) 678-3074, another resource for ESL information. Ask for a list of English programs in your borough.

Free (public) ESL programs Board of Education Office of Adult and Continuing Education. The public schools offer free day, evening and Saturday classes to adults at 120 sites throughout the city. Call the Board of Education office closest to you. In the Bronx: central, (718) 716-2904; south and east, (718) 292-4104. In Brooklyn: north and west, (718) 797-2434; Bedford-Stuyvesant, (718) 638-2635; east and south, (718) 622-3000. In Manhattan: north, (212) 740-3706; south, (212) 868-1168; central Harlem, (212) 666-1920. In Queens: north, (718) 361-9480; South Jamaica, (718) 658-2626.

City U. Located throughout the city, the colleges of the City University offer a range of free and low-cost as well as tuition programs, usually through the college's continuing education program. Check with the City U college in your community for more information.

For example, City College has a free intensive ESL program especially targeting the Spanish-speaking population of Harlem. Classes meet six hours a week from September to June. For more information, call the Community Education Center at (212) 650-7597.

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Also, Hunter College offers two ESL programs: Community Outreach Program in English (COPE) and Saturday Program in English Language Literacy (SPELL). COPE targets adults who are recent immigrants. Classes meet every Saturday for 12 weeks. There is a \$ 30 fee for this course. SPELL is a free Saturday language program specifically for working heads of household and single parents who have limited English skills. For information about either COPE or SPELL, call (212) 772-4666.

Brooklyn Public Library. Although this library offers no ESL classes at this time, the Education & Job Computer Center has resources on English programs in Brooklyn. However, no referrals are given over the telephone. For more information, call (718) 780-7777.

New York Public Library. Free English classes meet two weekday evenings or one Saturday morning a week at five public library branches in the Bronx, four branches in Manhattan and three branches on Staten Island. Admission is by lottery and you must register in person. Registration for spring classes is next week. For places, dates and times, and more information, call the Office of Special Services at (212) 340-0918.

Queens Borough Public Library. The library has free English classes for recent immigrants. Admission is by lottery. Spring classes are already full. Registration for fall classes begins in August. For more information, call the New Americans Program at (718) 990-0891.

Also, the library sponsors free conversation groups for more advanced ESL speakers. For more information, call the Adult Learning Center at (718) 657-2779.

### Private ESL programs

American Language Communication Center, 1-800-364-5474. Located across the street from Penn Station. Day, evening and Saturday classes. Tuition ranges from \$ 120 (four hours a week for 10 weeks) to \$ 300 (10 hours a week for 10 weeks).

Berlitz Language Centers, 1-800-457-7958. Especially geared toward foreign-born professionals and graduate students. Locations in Manhattan near Wall St. and Rockefeller Center. Intensive program taught in group, semi-private and individual classes. Tuition ranges from \$ 399 to \$ 849.

Columbia University - The American Language Program, (212) 854-3584. Especially for foreign-born professionals and graduate students. Intensive summer (four, eight or 12-week) and spring/fall (three-month) programs. Tuition ranges from \$ 1,392 to \$ 4,176.

The New School, (212) 229-5372. Best suited to foreign-born professionals and graduate students. Intensive 12-week courses. Tuition ranges from \$ 610 to \$ 1,500.

New York University - The American Language Institute, (212) 998-7040. Especially geared toward foreign-born professionals and graduate students. Day and evening (part-time), intensive summer (eight-week) and spring/fall (three-month) programs. Tuition ranges from \$ 600 to \$ 4,000.

92nd St. Y, (212) 996-1100. Day and evening classes. Tuition ranges from \$ 235 (two days a week for 14 weeks) to \$ 465 (three days a week for 14 weeks).

## Graphic

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Caption not available electronically

## Classification

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