

ESOL Screening Tool for Speaking and Listening





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Information and guidance

What is ESOL?

ESOL stands for English for Speakers of Other Languages. It applies to adults living and/or working in the UK, whose first language is not English.

What is the ESOL Screening Tool?

The ESOL Screening Tool for Speaking and Listening is a short questionnaire that can be used to identify whether a person in prison – who speaks English as a second or additional language – should be referred for further ESOL assessment. It is the first stage in assessing the prisoner’s English language skills.

Who can use the ESOL Screening Tool?

The ESOL Screening Tool can be used by any staff member working in prisons. Staff do not have to be language specialists to use the tool.

When should you use the ESOL Screening Tool?

The ESOL Screening Tool should be used as part of the prisoner induction process.

What happens next?

Using the ESOL Screening Tool will determine whether or not a prisoner needs to be referred for further ESOL assessment. This further assessment should be carried out by an ESOL specialist, who will be able to refer the prisoner to the most appropriate learning programme.



How to use the ESOL Screening Tool

Follow the steps below and read the Important information for staff using the tool on the next page.

Step 1: Preparing to use the tool

- a. Find a quiet room to carry out the screening interview.
Make sure you have:
 - A copy of the [ESOL Screening Tool](#).
 - A copy of the [ESOL Screening Tool record form](#).



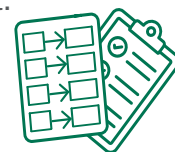
Step 2: Getting started

- a. Introduce yourself, e.g. *My name is . . .*
- b. Tell the individual that you are going to ask them some questions to find out whether they need help with their English, e.g. *I need to ask you some questions, so I can help you with your English language.*



Step 3: Using the tool

- a. Start by asking question 1 from the screening tool.
- b. Compare the answer given with the four “possible responses” in the next column and decide which of the options (a, b, c, or d) is the closest fit.
- c. Document the best-fit response (a, b, c, or d) on the ESOL Screening Tool record form.
- d. Repeat with questions 2–5.



Step 4: Making an assessment

- a. Review the answers on the ESOL Screening Tool record form.
If the individual gave two or more answers at levels a, b, or c, you should refer them to an ESOL specialist for further assessment.



Remember, the individual may be nervous, tired, etc., which could impact on their answers. This is why it is important to see whether they answer at level a, b, or c on at least **two separate questions** before deciding to make a referral. **If in doubt, check with an ESOL specialist or refer the prisoner for an initial assessment.**



Important information for staff using the tool

During the screening interview it is important to:

- ✓ **Speak clearly.** Use the ESOL Screening Tool as a script. If you have to ask questions that are not on the tool, use short, simple sentences and avoid very informal language or slang, e.g. “mate” or “loo”.
- ✓ **Listen carefully.** The individual may be saying the right word but pronouncing it wrongly. If you do not understand, ask them to repeat the word or write it down.
- ✓ **Wait for the individual to reply.** It is important to give them time to think when asked a question. As English is not their first language, they will need longer to process what they hear. If an individual does not understand a question straight away and/or does not reply, or replies with a wrong answer, repeat the question more slowly and **wait** for them to answer. If you have repeated the question and they still do not understand, try **re-phrasing** the question and ask it in a different way. For example, “What job did you do in your country?” could be re-phrased as: “Did you work in your country?” If they answer “Yes”, then ask: “What work did you do?” or, “What was your job?”
- ✓ **Be aware of cultural differences.** For example, in some cultures, nodding is used to indicate “No”. Also, an individual’s previous experience of authority figures may make them suspicious, scared, and/or uncooperative.
- ✓ **Put the individual at ease** and create a non-threatening atmosphere. Shyness, anxiety, and worry may all limit how much someone is prepared to say in a new situation.
- ✓ **Use mime, pictures** (if available), or **actual objects** to assist communication where possible. For example, when asking a question about clothes, point to the relevant item.



ESOL Screening Tool for Speaking and Listening

Questions

Possible responses

1

**What is your name?
Can you spell it?**

- a. Does not understand question/does not reply/cannot spell their name
- b. Can say name clearly but has difficulty spelling it
- c. Can say name clearly and spell it without much difficulty
- d. Can say name clearly and spell it without difficulty

[Click here to record answer](#)

2

How well do you speak English?

Follow-up questions:

- How did you learn English?
- Where did you learn English?
- Did you go to English classes?
- How long did you go to English classes for?
- Do you have any English qualifications/certificates? Which ones?

- a. Gives a one-word answer, e.g. "OK", "School"/does not understand question/does not answer
- b. Gives a short answer (with inaccuracies that may prevent understanding), e.g. "I learn English in school my country." "I go ESOL class last year." "I make ESOL exam."
- c. Gives a more accurate and detailed answer (though there are likely to be some inaccuracies), e.g. "I studied English my country 5 years." "I went to English class when I came this country and I pass exam."
- d. Gives a fairly accurate and detailed answer, e.g. "went to college for three years in my country and I passed exams in English, I think it was higher certificate level." "Before I came to UK, I worked in office for 2 years."

[Click here to record answer](#)

Continues on next page...



Questions

3

Where did you live before prison? What town or city?

Follow-up questions:

- Is it a big town/city?
- Tell me about your town/city.
- Who did you live with?
- Did you live in a flat or a house?
- What was in your house/flat?
- Did you have any pets?

Possible responses

- a. Cannot say town or city clearly, or it is difficult to understand. Answers questions with one-word responses, e.g. "Yes", "Big", "Parents"/does not understand question/does not answer
- b. Gives a short answer (with inaccuracies that may prevent understanding), e.g. "I live Somalia, Adado city." "I live in house." "My house has kitchen, bed."
- c. Gives a more accurate and detailed answer (though there are likely to be some inaccuracies), e.g. "I come from Lagos, in Nigeria. I lived with my family there. In my house is 2 rooms for sleep. We have a dog. His name is Tito."
- d. Gives a fairly accurate and detailed answer, e.g. "I'm from a Berat city in Albania. It's a big city, and it's the capital Berat county. I lived there until I was 20 and then I moved to London with my wife and children."

[Click here to record answer](#)

4

Can you describe this room?

Follow-up questions:

- How big is this room?
- What can you see?
- What is on the table?
- What is on the wall?

- a. Gives a one-word answer, e.g. "Big"/does not understand question/does not answer
- b. Gives a short answer (with inaccuracies that may prevent understanding), e.g. "It small, ... have table, chairs."
- c. Gives a more accurate and detailed answer (though there are likely to be some inaccuracies), e.g. "It's small room, one table and two chairs. There's window and clock."
- d. Gives a fairly accurate and detailed answer, e.g. "It's small room and there's only one table. There are three chairs next to the table and there's a big window in the corner."

[Click here to record answer](#)

Continues on next page...



Questions

5

What is your favourite food?

Follow-up questions:

- Why do you like it?
- How do you make it?
- How often do you eat it?
- What do you eat with it?

Possible responses

- a. Gives a one-word answer, e.g. "Curry", "Pizza"/ does not understand question/ does not answer
- b. Gives a short answer (with inaccuracies that may prevent understanding), e.g. "I like pizza, it good food."
- c. Gives a more accurate and detailed answer (though there are likely to be some inaccuracies), e.g. "I like pizza, I don't make it, I buy in Tesco. I eat pizza two, three times every week."
- d. Gives a fairly accurate and detailed answer, e.g. "I really like pizza, in fact I love it. I eat it all the time. I buy it from Tesco usually and have with it salad or chips."

[Click here to record answer](#)



Record form

Name (and number) of prisoner:

Name (and number) of staff member:

Date completed:

1

Ask the prisoner to answer questions 1–5 from the ESOL Screening Tool.

Record answers (as either a, b, c, or d) in the table below.

Question	Answer level (a, b, c, or d)
1.	<input type="text"/>
2.	<input type="text"/>
3.	<input type="text"/>
4.	<input type="text"/>
5.	<input type="text"/>

2

If the prisoner gives two or more answers at level a, b, or c they should be referred for ESOL assessment.

Should the prisoner be referred for ESOL assessment? (please tick) yes no

Additional comments:

About The Bell Foundation

The Bell Foundation is a charity which aims to overcome disadvantage through language education by working with partners on innovation, research, training, and practical interventions. Through generating and applying evidence, the Foundation aims to improve practice, policy and systems for children, young people, adults, and communities who use English as an Additional Language in the UK.

Contributors

The ESOL Screening Tool for Speaking and Listening was developed in collaboration with the Learning and Work Institute and De Montfort University.



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