

# Digital for Older People Who Speak Limited English

Supporting older learners with limited use of English to use digital

For many older people, digital already feels like a foreign language, so supporting people who are learning English as their second language brings additional challenges.

Yasmin Akhtar from Go-Woman Alliance (or GOAL) has been running the DOSTI group since 2013 for older, first generation women, mostly from South Asian countries. DOSTI (which means *friendship* in Hindi) aims to provide a safe space for women to meet, learn and share. Most members speak quite limited English, so the group facilitators are mindful of this.

Yasmin says that many of the older learners at GOAL had never imagined using digital in their lifetimes and didn't see the need for it.

Over the years, DOSTI started to bring in elements of digital into the sessions, using creative ways to get their group online and confident in the digital world. Covid really accelerated this and they worked really hard to get their group access to the internet, trying new things online, and connecting to one another through digital.

## What works

- **Embed digital into other activities**  
Talking about shared cultural foods? Why not look up recipes on YouTube (and critique the chefs...). If your group enjoys arts and crafts, use Google to search for new cross-stitch patterns. If they would like to work on their English, you could use a simple online word game to learn English and digital skills at the same time.
- **One step at a time**  
Digital can be overwhelming, especially if you're learning in your second language, so introduce one new skill or app at a time. Give lots of opportunities for learners to practice and keep coming back to what they have learned previously.
- **Keep it relevant**  
Older learners probably don't want to know how to look for jobs online or create Excel spreadsheets, but they do want to know how to access their pension credits and stay in touch with their loved ones abroad.
- **Make sure learning isn't lost between sessions**  
If possible, make sure your learners have devices they can use at home between sessions and give them simple tasks to practice what they've learned.

Go-Woman Alliance had access to devices and mobile data during the pandemic, and helped them to gain confidence in using their device over several weeks.

- **Use the tools you have to overcome language barriers**

Maybe one of your tutors or volunteers speaks a community language, or one of your learners speaks more English and can translate for the rest of the group. Images and visual instructions are always useful, and there are loads of digital translation tools that might help your learners. And don't forget that Learn My Way has a screen reader function which can help speakers of other languages to understand.

- **Patience and Time**

All of the above requires a lot of patience and time to make sure that your learners are really getting the most out of digital.

## Final thoughts

Language and literacy can be a big barrier to using digital because there is a lot of reading and jargon involved. Finding visual and natural ways to incorporate digital into other activities can make it less scary and more useful to older learners who are learning English.

Join us for our next [Digital Inclusion and ESOL meet-up or training session](#) for more recommendations.

## About Go-Woman Alliance

Go-Woman Alliance, or GOAL, work in Saltley, Birmingham. They provide a range of services for their community, including ESOL lessons, digital skills and social activities. Yasmin from GOAL has worked with Good Things for many years supporting other organisations in our network who work with ESOL learners.

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