Bridges ESL

FALL 2020 STUDENT ANTHOLOGY

FEATURING WORKS BY OUR STUDENTS

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Briefly about me: I am a journalist and media specialist from Moscow with extensive experience in international and government organizations in Kazakhstan and Russia. My attitude to Yale University is very special. Back in Moscow, I read a lot about this amazing, famous place where the smartest students are studying to very high standards. It was my dream to visit Yale.

It is surprising, but true: the first city where I settled in the United States was precisely New Haven. Yale attracted me after all! It allowed me to see its magnificent university buildings, museums, concerts, and imbued me with the spirit of the student fraternity that is in the air there. And I really wanted to become a part of it. But how?

To my great joy, in the city library I was told that the university has an excellent Bridges ESL program. This program, it was explained to me, would provide an opportunity to advance my level of English, help to make new friends, and give a new, rich experience. It was a great and joyful discovery for me.

I registered on the Bridges website and later on I received the letter I was waiting for. It said that I was now a member of the program! It was a beautiful day!

From the beginning, our tutor, Liubov Samborska, conducted our classes with so much tact and such a desire to give us as much knowledge as possible, that every time I regretted that the lesson ends so quickly. My vocabulary has expanded noticeably, and I also stopped feeling insecure in speaking and pronunciation. Liubov divided very effectively our activities into several parts: reading, listening, writing and speaking. This gave us the opportunity to improve all these very important skills.

Now, it's not a problem for me to have an active dialogue and even understand the speaker well on the phone, despite my pronunciation and limited vocabulary. I became more confident and eager to continue studying English as hard as I can. For this I am very grateful to Bridges ESL!
By Alice Braga  
Tutor: Flora Ranis

My name is Alice, and I am from the South of Brazil. I came to the USA almost eight months ago to be an au pair. I learned English by myself, and a few years ago I decided to do an exchange program. However, I felt that I needed to improve my vocabulary and grammar to be confident when speaking with a native speaker. So, I took English classes before I started the exchange process.

I can say that the experience is enriching in every way; every day I learn something new and improve my English. I am learning a lot about North American culture. I see that it was worth all my dedication before I came here.

Unfortunately this year, it was not possible to take classes in the classroom, but the experience was still incredible.

My tutor, Flora Ranis, was attentive and patient at all times, and I learned a lot from her. Our classes were dynamic, and we had very interesting conversations about different things. It was truly an exchange.

Thank you very much, Flora and Bridges ESL. I will remember this experience forever!

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“Don’t be Afraid to Learn, It’s Worth It”
By Jonh Rivera  
Tutor:

It’s already been two years since I started taking ESL classes at YALE and I couldn’t be more thankful for what I’ve learned.

I remember exactly the first day at the Asian cultural center, a bunch of people from all around the world waiting to check-in. China, Brazil, Mexico, Colombia, a melting pot of people from all around the world waiting to start their ESL classes with their respective tutors.

It was my first month here in the US and at the time I felt disoriented but, standing up in that little hallway, surrounded by a bunch of strangers made me realize I wasn't alone. We weren't sharing the same nationality but We had one thing in common, a big desire to learn and improve our English for different reasons.

Time passes and, those "strangers" Who were simple classmates you would share your experience with, have become your friends which have shaped your experience abroad in some sort of way.

ESL didn't justly help me improve my English but, listening to different stories of why people joined it, forged me to be a better human being.
The Compliment Culture in America
By Linyan Wei
Tutor: Tanzi Sakib

“I like your shoes,” “Your sweater is beautiful” -- When I first came to America, I always received these kinds of compliments, usually from strangers, as I walked on the street or sat in a cafeteria. Colleagues also used compliments to start conversations and to show friendship: “Your shirt looks good,” “Your speech at the meeting that day was wonderful”, and so on. That made me, someone who came to a new and strange environment all by herself, feel so welcomed and cheerful.

Then I gradually realized that, in American culture, anyone can praise or be praised. Personal clothing and hairstyle are always the principle focus of the praise. The subjects of praise are mostly women, which is closely related to the American society's trend of focusing on female attractiveness of appearances. And American women do not think these words are flirtatious or offensive. On the contrary, they think it is a kind of praise and honor to her. So, I started to try to pay attention to the fascinating aspects of others and give compliments accordingly. And indeed, a sweet compliment feels like a spring breeze during the otherwise awkward social interactions, so that people who have never known each other can eliminate the feeling of strangeness and can make friends feel warmer.

Meanwhile in China, we usually don't start a greeting in this way. The appearance of women is also a content of praise, but it is not that dominant. Chinese society always pays more attention to people's virtues and personal qualities. We believe that appearance is not as important as virtue. Moreover, there are also differences in the way one responds to praise. In American culture, compliments are accepted with "thank you" because they believe that all people are equal. While Chinese people express humility with self-deprecating words, such as: I'm not so good, when receiving compliments. Americans think that this is too modest. While Chinese think that Americans are too confident and don't know proper etiquette.

Indeed, compliments make the environment more positive and affirming. Of course, who doesn't like being praised? Sometimes, however, it is inevitable to be a little overused. For example, the term “perfect” should only be used in special circumstances. These compliments create over the top self-confidence among Americans which makes them daring enough to ask anything and try anything, but they also lead some people to lack introspection. Just as inflation devalues a currency, too much praise reduces the value of praise. Then we don't know what the real compliment is. And it will reduce our ability to accept failure. Even worse, in some occasions, if the compliments were used improperly, the effect will be counterproductive, making the others feel hypocritical and insincere, thus hurting each other's feelings.

Praise is just a small part of language, and language is the carrier of culture. The language habits, social culture, and many other background factors of different nations are not exactly the same, which leads to differences in people's speaking methods and habits. Americans like to feel optimistic and confident all the time. They are also willing to work hard to make others feel good. While the traditional Chinese wisdom is that in order to have the motivation to make progress, there must be a sense of worry. Therefore, understanding the differences of compliments and their responses in various cultural contexts can help reduce misunderstandings and embarrassment in cross-cultural communication.
My Best ESL Learning Experience
By Emily Yang
Tutor: Andreea Ciobanu

My name is Emily and I have been in America for almost 10 years. I have enrolled in several ESL programs before. But this semester’s learning experience with Andreea is the best that I ever had. She is an exceptional teacher. First, Andreea is focused on each student’s needs. For example, all three of us need to improve our TOEFL score. She covers all four parts of the TOEFL test (Reading, Listening, Speaking and Writing) and provides a lot of practice questions during class and after. Second, Andreea is very dedicated to teaching. She usually sends an email right after class, which includes a summary of the class and homework for the week. Every Wednesday she will send another email with the materials attached for the upcoming class and remind us to submit our homework by Friday. In addition to plenty of TOEFL practice questions, she also covers a variety of current topics, such as politics, media, news, etc. According to the mistakes in our homework, she will include a short grammar lesson and practice questions in each class, which is extremely helpful. Lastly, Andreea spends a lot of time on our homework. She does not just point out the mistakes and correct them, but she also writes a lot of notes to analyze these errors and provides a few tips for further improving in the future. For grammar mistakes, she additionally includes a practice link to refresh our memory. One day, I did not submit my homework till Friday night. She sent me back the edited version at 2am! I was shocked to see it on Saturday morning before class.

I really treasure this wonderful learning experience with Andreea and give many thanks to the Bridges ESL program!

By Bianca Torres
Tutor: Stephanie Shao

Hi, my name is Bianca Torres. I’m from Mexico. I’ve been in Connecticut for 2 years and I’ve been learning English since I arrived here. I want to write about my experiences skydiving and skiing and why I decided to do it.

I’m scared of heights but I love to face my fears and try new things. I didn’t know when I was going to try skydiving, but when I finally did, I didn’t plan it myself. One day I was talking with my ex-boss (my host dad) and I told him about going skydiving. I always want to do it in an exotic place with a nice view. For my 26th birthday, he bought me a ticket to go skydiving. I was very excited and told my close friends about it, and they decided to do it with me, which made it more exciting. Six brave girls decided to do it together. I have to confess that I was very nervous when I was walking to the airplane. I was thinking, “What am I doing? Am I really going to do it? Can I give up now?” The adrenaline that I felt when I got up and stood in the doorway was
indescribable. After I jumped, everything became less scary and I started to enjoy the experience. When I finished and touched the ground; I just wanted to do it again. I felt grateful that I didn’t die trying this, but I felt alive with all the emotions going on. I can tell this is one of my best experiences, and if I have the opportunity to do it again I will do it. Even if you are scared, you should try it. It's a magnificent experience.

I had never skied until my first time in 2018, which was also my first year and winter in the USA. I hadn't even skated before, so I didn't have any idea how to stand up on the ice. I went to Vermont to ski for the first time, and I was not very scared until I had to stand up while wearing skis. I was scared about falling down and breaking my legs. I took classes and obviously they explain techniques, but it's still scary when you don't have an idea about what is going on. I was very tense and stressed. I was about to give up because I was getting tired. I couldn’t remember how many times I fell down, but the good thing is: the first thing I learned was how to get up. After one hour, I felt comfortable, and I got much better. I'm not a professional skier but I had a lot of fun. If you do it with friends, it is even better. Skiing is definitely a great fun activity to do in the winter.

My advice for trying new things is this: No matter how scared you are, if you have the opportunity, do it. Try your best even if it is hard. Don't give up on the first try. The reward is very gratifying.

Throwback Tuesday: Remembering Good and Old Times in USA

By Ma. Camila Peláez Arango
Tutor: Arianna Hairston

Writing about living in the USA, makes me feel so nostalgic and full of feelings. To start, I should confess it has been one of the most amazing experiences of my life. It was 18 months where I met incredible people, made new friends, tasted delicious food, like sweet potato and pumpkin pie (my favorite pie flavor), lived new experiences and above all, discovered myself.

I think living abroad, far away from your family, your country, your friends, your customs, totally changes the way you are— the way you look at the world and live the life. In that sense, you are a new version of yourself.

When I came to the USA in 2018, I arrived with 40 pounds of baggage, full of dreams, expectations and why not? Fearful and nervousness because I was alone, I needed to speak English, to get out of my comfort zone and face the fact that I was in a different country with a culture totally different from mine, even though we belong to the same continent. However, after 7 months, I came back to Colombia, my country of origin. But I miss my old life. I miss my friends. I miss my host family, who welcomed me into their home. I miss the seasons (and fall is my favorite because I love the pumpkin spice, the yellow of the leaves, the weather). And a fun fact about Colombia is there aren’t seasons here— we have the same weather all year long. So, you can’t imagine my happiness the first time I saw snow or all the yellow and orange leaves on the ground. It was beautiful— magical.

In addition, I learned how to live by myself. To be honest, I am a terrible cook. I just don’t like it, but I learned how to do it due to need and after all, I enjoyed it. I managed money, my
expenses, I assumed a lot of duties and responsibilities, which I never did before because I used to live with my parents, and although I helped out at home, it wasn’t the same to do everything by myself.

Nevertheless, everything wasn’t perfect. English was a challenge for me. At the beginning, when I arrived, I used to say “I just want to make new friend who doesn’t speak Spanish, in order to have to speak in English and practice my language skills,” but after 3 months I felt homesick and I just wanted to speak with family, friends, people who speak the same language, visit Colombian restaurants and share the same customs. So, I didn’t practice English as much as I wanted even though my main reason to live in USA was to learn the language.

Fortunately, I took some courses at English as Second language at Yale Bridges. I felt so lucky to take classes in one of the most important universities in the United States with amazing students and tutors that made the process easier. I think living this process with other people from different countries who also have the same goal and interest (to learn and speak English) is really interesting and exciting because we have the opportunity to know more about other cultures, other opinions and learn together. I have no words to express how thankful I am to Bridges ESL for thinking about the community and all of us who want to improve our English skills.

To summarize, my time in America was an experience that I would choose again. I was fascinated and remember it. It makes me feel a lot of emotions: happiness because they were beautiful times, nostalgic due to it belonging to the past, and hopeful to return one day and visit these places and people that made my stay in the USA incredible.

By Diana Vidal
Tutor: Kristen Enriquez

I am so happy to be in this program and have an excellent tutor even though we do not meet in person because of the pandemic. Every Saturday I enjoy my class and I am always learning something new and interesting. My tutor, Kristen, makes the class so dynamic that I feel like time goes by so fast. We have good conversations and I feel comfortable speaking and expressing my ideas and opinions and I also like hearing different points of view of my tutor and my classmate, Sharon. On the other hand, I am learning more than English. With the fascinating articles that we read I learn about history, psychology, culture, etc. The videos we see are also interesting and I like to write my thoughts after watching them; it is so great that Kristen reads my writing and suggests some things or corrects it so I can see my mistakes.

I came from Mexico last year to improve my English and have the cultural experience of the United States. So far, even with the pandemic, I am enjoying my stay here and my experience with Bridges has been amazing.
Don't be Afraid to Learn
By Samuele Falletto
Tutor: Anthony Coelho

It's already been two years since I started taking ESL classes at Yale and I couldn't be more thankful for what I've learned.

I remember exactly the first day at the Asian cultural center, a bunch of people from all around the world waiting to check-in. China, Brazil, Mexico, Colombia. A melting pot of people from all around the world waiting to start their ESL classes with their respective tutors.

It was my first month here in the U.S. and at the time I felt disoriented but, standing up in that little hallway, surrounded by a bunch of strangers made me realize I wasn't alone. We weren't sharing the same nationality, but we had one thing in common, a strong desire to learn and improve our English.

Time passes and those "strangers" who were my classmates that I shared my experience with, have become my friends which have shaped my experience abroad in some sort of way.

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How “America Dream” Became a Dream
By Camila Rodrigues
Tutor: Andreea Ciobanu

My name is Camila and I am from Brazil. I had never wanted to live in the United States like everyone else that talked about the “America Dream.” I grew up in a small town called Lamim (Minas Gerais - Brazil). When I say small town, I mean really small, like tiny, with about 3 thousand people living there. I came from a simple family that lived in poor conditions.

When I was teenager, I started to dream about living in a big city, more specifically in Belo Horizonte (capital of Minas Gerais), where my grandparents live. My parents planned to send me to college there, because in Lamim there is no college. But I was so excited that I convinced my parents to go earlier, when I was in my last year of high school.

Moving to the capital was big shock for me: I had a lot to learn but also had really good times. I was very confused about what to do with my life after high school. I knew that I liked to draw and I loved fashion design, but my family convinced me to not go to fashion school because they worried about me not being able to get a job after.

I took a while to figure out what else I wanted to do and found out about architecture. So, I went to architecture school and loved it. I was an intern at a great architecture firm, but I got the bad news that I would not be hired after my contract expired. The country was in a bad economic situation, and I had to hear from many companies that they would not hire someone without experience.
2017 was difficult year for me. During college I had expected that I would get a great job after graduation, but my expectations were impossible at that time. I worked as an architect freelancer, but I could barely pay my bills and I was still living with my grandparents.

I was desperately looking for opportunities and that was when I was introduced to the Au Pair program in the United States through two friends that were au pairs. I did not speak English, and I had no experience with childcare, but I realized that I had to create my own opportunities. So, I created my plan and within 6 months I came to the United States. I struggled a lot with the language, and I am still learning it, but I love the American culture. I made so many friends and I also have an amazing host family.

After a while of living in the United States, I started to miss working with architecture. Since I still want to be living here, I decided to apply to an Architecture Master’s program. I started to study for the TOEFL exam and found out about Bridges ESL. The English classes have helped a lot, and I am so thankful for everything that I have been able to experience and learn until now.

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**A Brief (or not) History About my Exchange Year**

*By Isabella Marafon*  
*Tutor: Thomas Postiglione*

My name is Isabella. I’m 22 years old and I’m from Brazil, although I am currently living in New York.

Everything started back in 2018 when I was studying to get into medical school for the third consecutive year. “Exhausted” and “stressed” are probably the words that best describe how I was feeling at that time. I could not fail the tests again, but I did. Then, I realized maybe it was time to do something different with my life. Maybe I should stop pursuing medical school, or at least take a break, and go explore, see what is out there, spend some time traveling. After all, when would I have the chance to do that once I got into college? "After all, when would I have the chance to do that once college started? I would be constantly studying and once I received my medical degree, I would be working long hours in the hospital."

My parents fully supported me. I guess deep inside they were also tired of that stressed person I became. They just wanted to see me happy again even if that meant I were to move to a different country.

I went to a travel agency to see my options, and the Au Pair Program caught my attention. My parents also thought it was a safe choice, since I would have the support of the agency and a host family to take care of me while I was abroad. I’m not going to lie, I wasn’t always a fan of kids, but I was definitely willing to try to love them if that’s what I needed to do in order to come to the US and start my new adventure.

The first step was to get some experience with children, of course. I didn’t think it would be easy, but it was easier than I expected! I was so lucky to find a neighbor that had two kids and was opening a daycare - a perfect opportunity! I volunteered for a couple of months, getting all my hours with kids in. Not only that, but I created a bond with those kids that I will
never forget. From that moment, I realized I might actually enjoy children and that they liked me too.

I also had to get my driver’s license! That was exciting. And during that process, I started to work at a store as a receptionist to earn and save some money. It was a crazy year. I wasn’t where I always dreamed to be and I had doubts that I was doing the right thing, but I didn’t give up.

When I had all I needed to be an Au Pair, I started to interview with host families, until I finally found THE one. They lived in St Louis, Missouri, and had two children that I immediately fell in love with. Samuel and Aliyah. I got my visa and came to the US in February, 2019.

2019 was quite a year (the “best year of my life” maybe). I found myself in so many ways. I became more mature, independent, and creative. I made so many friends in St Louis - connections I never had with anyone in Brazil. I traveled a lot and made so many of my dreams come true. I went to Disney, New York, The Bahamas, Paris, London, Amsterdam, Chicago, Nashville, Colorado and so many other places that were not even on the list.

In 2020 I had the option to continue with that host family for another year or to go somewhere else, and since I thought I got everything I could out of St Louis, I decided to go to try a new adventure! I moved to Boston, Massachusetts.

Boston was intense. I liked my new host family and made new friends quickly. I was so in love with the city. It was very different from St Louis. I also did a lot of travelling in less than 2 months. I went to San Francisco, Vermont, Pennsylvania, Washington DC and New Orleans, but then Covid knocked on our doors, and my host family decided we should completely lockdown. Those next 4 months would be hard.

In July, I decided I didn’t want to spend the rest of my year like this. I moved to a suburb in New York, to a different host family’s house.

Here I can say I’m having an interesting experience. We live a bit far away from civilization. There aren’t many restaurants, or places to visit, but I take care of the sweetest 2,5 year old boys who give me joy every day. My host parents are not depriving me from seeing my friends, and that already makes all the difference. I’m enjoying the quiet and peace of this area. It might even be the best place where I could be during these times.

I believe everything happens for a reason. Life’s a journey and it’s meant to be enjoyed. I don’t regret (even a little bit) leaving everything behind and coming here. I don’t know what my future is going to be like, but I know I am strong enough to face it.
I am in New Haven, which is quieter than any other time. It is somewhat alien for me to see the empty backyard of the social science building (CSSSI), the old campus and colleges during lunch time still and calm like an old temple in Korea where I am from. I met Emiliano as a Bridge tutor who would probably be at few blocks away from me and Selim who is in Turkey as a fellow student, far, far away from here through Bridges this semester (Fall 2020). I got to know about them and had a chance to talk with them every Saturday. For the period of time where we are hardly able to differentiate/discriminate? the difference of relationships online from in person, they have been wonderful mates who filled my daily life of autumn in New Haven although we have not met offline even once.

Our conversations sometimes went way farther than our physical distance. While practicing English language, we talked about one’s soul-touching music or aesthetics, histories of each country, favorite questions we have these days, beautiful or spiritual moments we had experienced, the dimension or the plane we think where human beings belong and underlying philosophies related to our topics. Emiliano, who’s majoring in philosophy, always brought up the questions we all enjoy and supportively led our conversations to a more meaningful degree in which abundant ideas from individuals with different backgrounds and the commonality as the same human being have been beautifully intersected. While we all are bearing some awkward moments texting “how are you doing?” and “I am doing pretty well” in the middle of pandemic of being not ‘pretty well’, these variety of topics we talked over during Bridges sessions were truly something I enjoyed a lot and through which I not only had a chance to practice English but also relieved my stress of being in sort of quarantine.

I wonder how long and to how much extent we have to or we are able to substitute our physical, tangible daily lives to something called untact or new normal. However, until the time we all expect comes, these small but industrious, regular engagements in activities where we can know of each other and share thoughts should not stop, and I really appreciate Bridges for giving me this opportunity to be connected to wonderful individuals with their own realities. Just like the infinite depth of an individual, the potential of these intersections was, is and will be beyond ones’ and my expectations.

Plus, Just as many fellow Bridges members do, I wish I could wait for my Bridges tutor at the couch of the center on Crown street in the near future.
American family and take care of kids, like a babysitter. I'll be writing about my experience while I am improving my English.

Taking courses was awesome and helped me a lot, especially with grammar, because you think your English is good until you come here and listen to American people talking. During my first month I was not able to understand what the kids were saying... One funny story I had was when I was asking for a straw at a restaurant and I didn't know the word for “straw”: I started making some funny gestures for the guy to be able to understand what I was saying, and he laughed.

That's when I started watching movies and reading books in English to try to improve my speech. Before coronavirus, I went to the cinema every week because there, you do not have a chance to put subtitles.

After a few weeks I started to feel comfortable with my English. I was very happy because day by day I came to understand my family. I've been so grateful for everything that this country provides me with. As a result of these new experiences and my new friends, I continue to learn about this culture. This culture keeps surprising me every day.

By Jia’an Yin
Tutor: Jenna Kauffman

I can still clearly remember the scene when I first arrived to the US. It was at the airport, and I saw people in the same flight stand on a line to scan their visas on the machine. I didn’t know why they were doing this, but I followed them. When it was my turn, I scanned my visa, but it failed, and I didn’t get the ticket like other people. Then I asked a staff member for help. I asked, ‘Excuse me, why I can’t… Uh…. the visa?’ I didn’t know which verb to use, and when one of the customs workers asked me, ‘Do you like the United States?’, I didn’t understand the meaning at first, but after I passed the customs, I realized how foolish I was; we usually call the United States ‘America’ or ‘USA.’ Even worse, I didn’t have any money or Internet at that time.

To be honest, I didn’t like living here in the first few months because of the cold weather, the unfamiliar place, the inconvenient transportation, the boring life and my bad oral language. However, the ESL courses helped me assimilate into the community. I met a lot of people from different backgrounds, I heard a lot of interesting stories, and my speaking English improved a lot. The life started to become attractive. When the spring comes, flowers blossom everywhere, and the city is really fantastic. I am also completely defeated by the greenish summer and the colorful foliage in autumn. We have visited most of the beaches and state parks near New Haven, and the nature sceneries have impressed us deeply.

Having been living here nearly two years, I am already used to the lifestyle and love it sincerely. I wish the beauties of this city could last forever.
“My Bridges Class”
By Kazuaki Amikura
Tutor: Elena Castro

I’m a Japanese post-doc in the department of Molecular Biophysics and Biochemistry at Yale. The Bridges program made excellent connections between tutors and students possible, even during COVID-19. I appreciate all of their efforts.

My tutor, Elena, gave us a well-managed class and prepared an interesting topic for us each time. The topics she presented were mainly focused on poetry and science. “The effect on human brains by making poetry”, “Plant music with science” and “World champion slam poet who studied anthropology and molecular biology”—each topic was overlapping in many ways. In each class, I clearly saw the growth of my English vocabulary, my ability to use idioms, my understanding of different cultural backgrounds, etc. It was a really nice way to learn.

I didn’t know a single word to explain poetry before her class. So, I didn't have any interest in English poetry. In other words, it was impossible to see/read/hear this kind of poetry, but now I have many words to explain poetry. Stanzas, rhyme scheme, simile, hyperbole, assonance, etc... It paved my mind for an interest in the cultural aspects of English, not only for vocabulary related to Science. I am certain that this will enrich my life in the United States. If I didn’t join her class, I would have never noticed it. Thank you to my tutor Elena and Tatsuno my classmate!

Living Abroad in America
By Klaudia Williams
Tutor: Andreea Ciobanu

Have you ever wondered how it is to live in America, to communicate in English every single day, and experience the unknown and unfamiliar? Have you dreamed about moving abroad but are too conscious of the language barrier? Have you pictured yourself walking down the streets of New York City? I have always had a feeling about changing something in my life, but it’s always easier said than done. Fear of failure, curiosity about the world, in my mind all the time. If I had a chance to live in the United States, I would move there at the drop of a hat, I thought. So I did and here is my experience.

The truth is that many people are not aware of the advantages that come from living abroad. First, speaking perfect English in everyday life is something you can learn only by living in English-speaking countries, like the United States. This was the main reason I decided to give it a chance. Although I am still working on advancing my language skills, my improvement happened in the blink of an eye. I leave no stone unturned when it comes to my language education. As a result, I never cut corners while studying and moreover, I always go the extra mile when learning English.

Second, the linguistic and cultural diversity in the United States blew me away. Here, there are people from all around the world. Furthermore, in big cities, New York City for instance, you can hear about 800 different languages. Isn’t it amazing? To put it differently, lots
of Americans are around foreign people every day and are open to hearing about the world you come from as well. With this in mind, you won’t struggle to make friends.

Third, the possibilities of traveling are enormous here. I have already been to so many beautiful places, and I get butterflies in my stomach from only thinking about the experiences I have already had. Beautiful cities, wonders of nature, climate diversity, a variety of food, and the kindness of local people are the reasons I love traveling within this country. And best of all is that every state is different, but you won’t know that unless you go and visit.

Although living abroad has many advantages, in my opinion, there are disadvantages as well. I am sure many people will agree with me that homesickness is the worst. I remember the feeling of spending my first holidays far away from home. Longing for a taste of my mother’s kitchen added insult to injury. Even though I had a stressful time, I kept my chin up. It was a chance to experience the American traditions and culture I had known only from movies. Thanks to technology I can keep in touch with my family anytime I want. It is very difficult, but I hang in there.

Never in my wildest dreams did I actually think about how much I would enjoy living in the United States. I have a gut feeling that many of my dreams will come true here. I definitely think that going abroad makes you look at the world differently. If you don’t act today, you’re going to miss the boat on a life-changing experience. It takes time to get used to the new environment, but you will find your way sooner or later.

My Mount Greylock Adventure
By Mariely Carvalho
Tutor: Thomas Postiglione

So COVID hit, and during this time, people could not leave their homes unless they were doing things outside. Isn’t that crazy? So we (my host family and I) thought we should do the same and get some fresh air ... seems like it is more important than ever right now. So, for a day we decided to be hikers.

I mean, what's the difference between walking around your neighborhood or going to Sleeping Giant (the local nature path) – aren't we all hikers? Well, it doesn't really matter because we decided we were hikers and we were going to climb the highest mountain in Massachusetts (mostly because that's the closest place we could go for a weekend, but that's not how we tell the story...). Mount Greylock has one of the nicest views in Massachusetts, so we made it a big deal! We stayed in a hotel in Adams, MA. The town looked like a ghost town... but it was very cute. On the hike, we visited some beautiful waterfalls! My friend did most of the research because I'm a can be very busy (at some point in the middle of the trip my friend get annoyed because he had to deal with everything).

On the second day, we chose to do the hardest trail which took us all the way to the top. It was named Thunderbolt. It was supposed to be a 5 mile loop but it was rated as difficult... and strenuous, but we didn't really care about the latter (I mean ... after all we are hikers). Nobody ever knows what they are doing until they get to the place and realize that they are lost. This describes our experience well. As a result, we left home later than expected, so we had to make
sure to finish the trail before it got dark. When we started it was fine. We walked a little and 
and my friend were so relaxed and excited to get to the top where you have the nicest view and 
there is also a big tower. However, as we walked, it started to get more difficult, and I was out of 
breath after 30 minutes. But, we kept going and I realized how poorly marked the trail was. I 
also have to mention we met only one other hiker the whole time we were on the path.

After almost 3 hours of walking, or should I say climbing my friend would have to wait for 
me to rest before we were to make it up the mountain. I was so tired, sweaty and hungry, but it 
felt right because my friend knew where we were going. However, we soon realized we actually 
didn’t know where we were going. We knew we were close, because we were very high at this 
point (we could see a few overlooks). So, we walked down to one of the overlooks and we were 
sure we made it to the top. We got so happy and excited, phew. Sadly, though, as soon as we 
looked up, the tower was far away, and I must say, much higher than the place we were. I felt 
sad, but my friend's face was the best part of all of it, he pointed to it and he was like: "I think 
that's actually the overlook we are looking for... that's the tower up there."
To which I replied, are you kidding me? I could see the tower and the way he reacted ... it was 
very funny. I think he didn’t actually want to keep going, because he asked if I wanted to turn 
around and go back? I said "hell no, we are here we are going make it." Then I asked him why 
we didn’t drive all the way up. That’s what smart people do”

Instead of driving, we decided to embark on our journey to the tower even though we 
initially went to the wrong overlook. After many more hours, we made it to the top (of the right 
overlook) and I couldn’t walk anymore. We still had to go up a few stairs, and my friend 
encouraged me to do it even though, I felt extremely tired. I’m glad I did because the view was 
worth it, it is breathtaking... literally. On our way down, we made the smart decision and went 
down the Bellows Pipe Trail, which was not so challenging. However, the story wouldn’t be 
complete if I did not mention that I didn't have ny hiking shoes, so I ended up falling when 
walking down. We were so desperate to be done and afraid to get dark, that we were willing to 
do anything to finish (by we I mean, he). So we actually finished going down way before the 
sunset and we hung out on a lake for a little before heading "home." I looked at my friend and 
asked him what was his favorite part and he said “absolutely when we finished it!” I couldn't 
agree more.

By Marina Laura Xavier
Tutor: Evan Roberts

Hi Everyone,

My name is Marina. I am from Brazil. I would like to share a bit about my experience with 
Bridges ESL. I am an au pair in Carlisle, a very small town in the state of Massachusetts and I 
wasn’t expecting to take an English class from Yale University. Through the online class I had 
the great opportunity to learn from Evan, my tutor and my classmates. Evan showed us a variety 
of themes like climate change, politics, vocabulary, interesting quizzes and hilarious videos. 
During the classes she was always very patient and every single thing was very helpful. The
process of learning a different language may be tricky sometimes and doing it through zoom meetings is even more challenging. But I believe that we did well, we were able to discuss and learn from each other. So I just want to thank you for this opportunity and it is very nice for the Yale Institution to provide these classes to foreign students.

Best Regard,
Marina

By Mei Kamematsu
Tutor: Jenna Kauffman

I learned about Bridges ESL when my friend recommended it to me. I tried to take classes last winter, but it was full at that time. Fortunately, I had the chance to participate in them this fall, and now I am convinced that my friend is totally correct!

Bridges ESL is a precious group for me as it is held a session for three students for two hours for free. It is hard to enjoy our usual lives this year because of COVID-19, but thankfully they are offering us classes by Zoom. During the first class, we shared our own purposes and goals to learn English at Bridges ESL, and the tutor, Jenna, has planned what we do in classes based on the consensus. Classes are great help for me to improve speaking skills, such as daily conversation and debates, writing skills, and my ability to learn new words and phrases. We are required to participate in classes aggressively because it is a small group. When I came to the US, I was not so confident about English, so it was difficult for me to speak up in a large group. In Bridges ESL, I have a lot of chances to do that.

I am very satisfied with Bridges ESL, and I deeply appreciate Jenna, the classmates, the staff of Bridges and Yale to offer us such a valuable opportunity.

By Nicole Gutiérrez
Tutor: Maya Khurana

First of all, I am so grateful for the opportunity to access the English classes and to my tutor for her dedication in each class to teach me in the best possible way despite the distance. I came to New Haven and Yale looking for new opportunities and knowledge in relation to my acting studies and also to continue learning and practicing English. After a few days of arriving in NH I met people who told me about some workshops, talks and programs where Yale University invited the community to take part and I began to participate in some activities and meeting more people and one day a girl told me about these classes and decided to take them.

Each class was a contribution to continue learning English. My tutor, Maya used different tools to develop listening, speaking, writing and reading skills. She always had a good disposition, enthusiasm and flexibility in the classes. At the beginning of classes she explained
to me what we were going to do and every time she taught me a topic she asked me if I understood or if I had questions and when I had doubts she explained very well and we continued with the exercises.

Thanks for the opportunity and thanks to Maya for being a great tutor.

Nicole Gutiérrez

The Impact of Culture During the Language Learning Process
By Pamela Avila
Tutor: Arianna Hairston

Mastering English or any other language is a process in which you can experience all kinds of feelings, such as frustration, comfort, fear, and security among others. Now let me tell you what has been my biggest challenge during this learning process.

When I came to the States, I felt that my English skills were good enough in all aspects. However, the first time that I wanted to share a story, I realized that I struggled to express my ideas, thoughts, and needs. It happened to me because I was trying to do it in the same way that I expressed myself in my native language. That was the moment when I started understanding that a language goes further than just the way one speaks, talks, or writes.

A language involves everything: culture, history, socioeconomic status, and more. Then I started learning expressions, sayings, slang, and reading about politics, local news, and famous people. That was how I could communicate with more security and fluency.

I reckon that there are thousands of ways that you can improve in a specific field. You just have to look for the ones that work best for you. This is a process without an end. I deem we can continually get better, and there is always something new to learn every day. So, you should take confidence in your skills and knowledge. The ball is in your court!
By Priscilla Kim (Bo Wun)
Tutor: Allison Cho

My name is Bo Wun Kim. I’m South Korean. I’m studying English with the Bridges ESL program at Yale University. Even though my English was not very good in the beginning I started to gain confidence through the Saturday classes. My first tutor was David who encouraged me through conversation in the class. Every class, he listened to my life experience with a lot of patience. Naturally I overcame my shyness and fear of talking in English. I was encouraged and now with enthusiasm, began to study not only English but American culture. I read books about pioneer life. This semester my new English teacher is Allison Cho who is Korean. She taught me to speak quickly and helped my pronunciation skills. She sends me videos about grammar, helpful websites about learning grammar that have expanded my English knowledge. She has challenged me through various methods. I enjoy studying English. When I started to understand movies, the conversations and dialogue in English books, I felt so happy. Now I can read many books. Through these books I learned profound information and knowledge. I would like to read and understand more accurately in the future. I now have confidence. Thank you for giving me this great opportunity to learn English with an excellent English teacher.

By Quan Jiang
Tutor: Nicole Li

I felt that everything was fresh and was fascinated by novelty when I first came to America. However, I realized my language is a problem two weeks later because I found that I can’t have a good conversation with others, although I can express what I think and there is no problem in my daily life. The laboratory life is interesting and comfortable, but it is also intense. I don’t have many chances to speak English with other people and improve it. I heard about Bridge ESL from my friend, who recommended that I join this course which provides a platform to learn English, including listening, speaking, reading, grammar and so on. Unfortunately, the course had already started at that time, so I had to wait for the next registration.

I’m very glad to meet my tutor Nicole and my partners this semester. Nicole is responsible for our courses, and I feel she spends her spare time collecting learning resources which fit for us. She is also a kind teacher, and she explains the meaning of new words in detail from the articles or videos. It’s a pity that we can’t have classes face to face during the pandemic, but I hope we can have a hotpot party in the next year.
“Rose, Bud and Thorn”
By Ning-Hsien Liu
Tutor: Julia Arancio

This is my second semester in Bridges ESL. Spring 2020, I got a lot of help from my previous tutor and luckily I landed a job—which means a lot of changes and challenges for me and my family. While I was trying so hard to survive in my own situation, the world we live in was also changing unexpectedly and dramatically. Everything seems out of control.

That morning, I got a zoom invitation from Julia, my tutor for the semester. I logged on, started the meeting, and well, my screen was frozen and my voice was breaking up. This was just another normal day.

“Sorry, the connection is bad,” I apologized.

“No worries, let’s try another time,” Julia waved to me from the screen. It was the first time I “saw” her, she had a very warm smile.

I found it was kind of funny in the moment when I replied “Ok, can you hear me now?” I murmured to myself in my heart: “This is actually a great opening for an English Class—exactly hits the point—I want to be heard.”

Julia started our first class by showing me a game “Rose, Bud and Thorn.” Which I found very poetic to describe not only the brightness and darkness in our daily lives, but also the mixed feelings of this year.

Since I moved to the United States, I have spent a lot of time alone. I am not sure if this is a blessing or a curse. Although I think it is always good having conversations with myself, having limited opportunities to talk to others sometimes makes me feel insecure. This year is even more special, everything has become even harder. Joining the Bridges ESL family is definitely a highlight of my 2020. I feel extremely blessed that I was brave enough to register and I really cherish the moments my tutors and I have spent together. For me, these Saturday meetings are beyond language courses but beautiful friendships – they make me feel like I am not left behind at this uncertain time.

*Special thanks to both of my tutors: Danny Li and Julia Arancio
*We read the famous column “Modern Love” from New York Times throughout these semesters and those stories really warmed my heart. Thank you Julia for your great pick! I would recommend this to anyone who still believes in love.

Amazing Life Experiences at Yale
Tutee: Runxia Gu
Tutor: Nicole Li

My name is Runxia Gu, and I’m a Post Doc in the department of immunobiology. I have studied at Yale for almost one and a half years. I really enjoy my life here. First, Yale is the third-oldest higher education institution in the US; there are excellent teachers who always try to inspire their students and are willing to offer help at any time. There are lots of fascinating lectures,
such as Globe Immunotalks, from the best professors and researchers. The most exciting thing is that I can conveniently communicate and discuss with these professors about their exhilarating experiences. In addition, Yale provides lots of opportunity for us to share our interests, talents and diverse cultures. Last year, I spent an amazing time with Professor Heath’s family on Thanksgiving Day. We shared the cuisines of our respective countries and interesting stories about our families. The kindness and humility of Professor Heath really impressed me. What’s more, at Yale, everyone is very nice to me. It made me feel like I was on top of the world. In conclusion, I fell in love with Yale University and am glad to study here.

By Xue Dong  
Tutor: Jenna Kauffman

My name is Xue Dong. This is my first time being in America with my family, so the year 2020 must be the greatest period in my life. I learn English from some tutors here. They are so nice and friendly, especially in Bridges. They arranged three students with one tutor and had English lessons every Saturday from 10:00-12:00 am. We had great fun in the remote class via Zoom, and it was a pity we couldn’t be in person due to COVID-19. We had a great tutor; her name is Jenna Kauffman. She is cute, beautiful, responsible, and dedicated. She is a Yale student. She has a lot of homework and assignments from Yale, so I believe it is hard to get a degree at Yale. Anyway, she did a great job being our English tutor.

We made many useful lessons and objectives for the process of English learning:

- “Read news articles for comprehension.” I read about some interesting topics such as the homeless in America, the privacy of IT, and the presidential debates.
- “Write grammatically correct pieces including e-mails, personal essays, and responses to news articles.” I wrote some essays on the articles. My tutor edited them for me and helped me to improve my writing.
- “Understand why specific grammar choices are correct.”
- “Engage in informal and formal conversations with ease.” We were divided into two groups to speak English and shared the experiences we had during the week.
- “Grasp the humor, idioms, cultural references, and slang used in different types of media such as newscasts, songs, and television shows.” We watched videos together and learned new songs.
- “Acquire and utilize new vocabulary with proper pronunciation.” Every week, I learned some new words from my tutor.

I believe my English will be improved with the help of my tutors. I wish all of us a merry life and a happy New Year!
By Shengming Yang
Tutor: Nakeshia Diop

My name is Shengming Yang. I come from Shanxi, China. I live in Tower lane, New Haven. My daughter lives in New Haven. I take care of her daughter, her name is Yuexi Yang (杨樾析). She is four years old. I live with my wife. She was born in 1944. Her health is not good. She likes planting vegetables with me and listening to music. I like to go hiking and biking. I am very happy living here. Here, there is a beautiful environment and fresh air. People are friendly with me.

But regrettably I don’t understand English, and don’t interchange with them. Surprisingly, we found Bridges ESL of Yale university. I took part in and started to learn English. Every teacher very earnestly teaches. My teacher Nakeshia Diop is willing to continuously teach me. Every class is adequately prepared, carefully explained, and all errors are thoughtfully corrected. Under all my teachers, my English level has improved. I am thankful for every teacher and Yale university’s Bridges ESL’s leaders. Because I do not work hard at English, so my English is not good. I will study hard, I hope to converse in English soon.