



## Strategies to Support Newcomers at the High School Level

Document adapted from Gary Giblin, ESL Coordinator for Winton Woods City Schools, and from ESOL Strategies for Teaching Content by Jodi Reiss (Pearson Education, 2005)

### STRATEGIES TO MODIFY CONTENT

Adapt, adjust, and simplify the content in your curriculum.

Ask: What do I really want my ELLs to know? By definition, these students cannot learn all of the content or they would not be classified as LEP. If we try to teach them everything, they may well end up learning nothing.

**Focus on the principle of “learn more about less.”**

**Select Priority Topics**—one that recurs at various grade levels or is a concept upon which others are built, e.g., magnetism in science, freedom in social studies, and place value in math

**Select Topics of Interest**—topics that relate to students’ personal experiences or prior learning

**Select Practical Topics**—topics that are easiest to make comprehensible to ELLs, the ones that best lend themselves to the modifications described here

## STRATEGIES TO MODIFY ORAL INSTRUCTION

ELLs are constantly working to translate what they hear (English) into what they understand (their primary language). Complicating this “double duty” is the fact that while working on the meaning of one sentence, they then completely miss the next thing the teacher says. For ELLs, then, how the teacher speaks is as important as what the teacher says.

### Change the Pace of Your Speech

**Slow Down** - Speak at a slightly slower, but not unnatural pace; pause for an extra second or two to give students a chance to process the oral language and catch up.

**Enunciate** - Try to speak as clearly as possible, vary the pitch of your speech, and emphasize key words, as if underlining them in a text. Do not raise your voice.

### Simplify Your Speech

- Avoid contractions It's natural to say they're instead of they are, but try to use the latter to make the meaning clearer (vs. their or there). This will also help to slow down the rate of your speech.
- Use Fewer Pronouns Try repeating common and proper nouns more frequently than you normally would since trying to decode the pronouns (“What is they?”) can impede comprehension.
- Use Simple Words Use high frequency words often, repeat known vocabulary words instead of synonyms, e.g., the minus sign -, which can be verbally expressed in several ways (less, take away, minus).
- Teach the Meanings of Words that are Used in Different Ways ELLs may know the word strike in the baseball sense, but what about in bowling, industry, mining, weather, and the military? In math words like table and round and in science words like kingdom and matter may require clarification.
- Explain and Limit Idioms Don't put your foot in your mouth over this one. They may spice up your speech, but ELLs could have a cow! Become aware of idioms and figurative speech (“fighting under the Confederate flag”) and explain examples when you can.
- Simplify Your Sentence Structure Keep sentences short and simple, using the subject-verb-object structure, instead of long complex sentences with embedded clauses, e.g., “The Civil War, which took more American lives than any other war in our history, divided the people of the United States, so that in many families, brother

fought against brother.” This would be more comprehensible to ELLs as: “The Civil War divided the people of the United States. In many families, brother fought against brother. More Americans died in the Civil War than in any other war in American history.”

### **Enhance Your Words**

- Use Gestures Make oral language a visual experience by using hand gestures and

facial expressions, e.g., holding up three fingers as you say, “There are three rules.” But try to make it part of your usual style so that you do not appear to be singling out the ELLs for this “special” visual enhancement.

- Use Visuals and Graphics Whenever possible, write on the board, use pictures, real objects, maps, graphs or anything else that would visually enhance your words. This is what is meant by contextualizing speech.

- Use Repetition and Paraphrase Emphasize key points by summarizing or repeating them several times during class and not just at the end. Ask: “So, why was \_\_\_\_\_ important?” “Who can explain the process we just saw?”

- Check for Comprehension

Avoid asking, “Do you have any questions?” This can make those who do have questions avoid looking “stupid” by simply keeping their mouths shut. Instead, expect questions by saying, “OK, question time. What questions do you have for me?” Reinforce by answering, “Great question. Thanks for asking that!”

- Give Clear and Consistent Directions

- o State what you want students to do in a simple, step-by-step manner.

- o Support your words with written directions and keep these in view during the lesson.

- o Model the process and the product so they can see exactly what to do and what the result should look like.

- o Check for comprehension by asking students to repeat what they are expected to do.

- Develop and Maintain Routines

All of your students will benefit from knowing what happens each day, but especially the English Language Learners.

## **STRATEGIES TO MODIFY THE LANGUAGE OF WRITTEN INSTRUCTION:**

### **TEXTBOOKS**

Textbooks can be made more comprehensible to both ELLs and struggling native English speaking students through these modification strategies.

**Use Textbook Aids**

Give a short lesson/demonstration on the various textbook aids and how to use them, e.g., chapter titles, section headings, outlines, summaries, discussion questions, glossaries, text boxes, highlighted areas, bilingual dictionaries, etc.

**Pre-teach Select Vocabulary**

Preview chapters, select vocabulary that may be difficult or technical, as well as key concepts, and teach these to the whole group or, if appropriate, to the ELL group individually while other students write or work on another activity. You can also have students create their own personal dictionaries of new and important terms.

**Highlight Important Concepts**

Make an outline or T-notes of each chapter. Offer native English-speaking students extra credit if they will make these for the ELL students. Outlines and T-notes help to streamline the reading process and serve as good review tools later on.

**Group Students to Discuss the Text**

This is a whole-class strategy that can improve comprehension. Organize students in small groups to discuss the reading assignment of the day before. Many students learn more from small group discussions, where the language demands are less, than in a more formalized question-and-answer exchange with the teacher.

**Learning Logs**

Have students record their reactions to the text in a daily journal. Set up the log with columns for "Text Pages" "What I Understood" "New/Difficult Vocabulary" and "Questions I Want to Know." Students can meet in groups to discuss their entries with teacher support. The logs can also serve as notes for lesson review.

**Bilingual Peer Tutor**

On a limited basis, a bilingual peer may be asked to translate concepts and information from the text. This is recommended as a strategy to use with beginning level ELLs.

**Allow Extra Time**

Plan to give ELLs extra time to complete assignments, and to practice and apply new concepts. Remember that they are learning English at the same time they are learning in English.

**Modify Homework**

Give different assignments to different students depending on language ability. Use the techniques outlined above.

*STRATEGIES TO MODIFY THE LANGUAGE OF WRITTEN INSTRUCTION:  
ASSIGNMENTS*

Goal: Create challenging assignments that teach content but keep the language as simple as possible.

## Whole Class Assignments

- Provide a Word Bank For beginners provide only the words needed to complete the assignment; for more advanced ELLs you can add extra words that will not be used.
- Assign Fewer Questions Select the ones that seem most central to the topic and eliminate the rest
- Evaluate for Content Only Read for content, not for grammar—the message not the means.
- Provide Models and Outlines Create pre-formatted sheets so that ELLs can concentrate on the content and not on creating language to convey the content. In science, a pre-formatted form might include “We wanted to show that \_\_\_\_\_” and “The first thing we did was \_\_\_\_\_.”

## Developing Alternative Assignments

- Diagrams, Maps, and Charts In place of descriptive writing, ELLs can complete a map, chart or diagram; adding some words or short phrases may also be appropriate depending on the ELLs level of proficiency.
- Sequenced Pictures These work well in science classes, where, instead of writing up the results of an experiment, ELLs can draw sequenced pictures that illustrate several stages or steps. They can even be as simple as “before” and “after.”
- Graphic Organizers Word webs have the widest application, allowing students to depict complex relationships among elements with minimal language. In social studies they can be used to show the causes of a war or in science to classify, categorize and describe substances and structures. Venn diagrams and timelines are also effective for ELLs.
- Hands-on Assignments Have ELLs, especially beginning level learners, show mastery of content by creating dioramas or models. As they acquire more language, ELLs may present an experiment, exhibit, or demonstration.

## STRATEGIES TO MODIFY THE DELIVERY OF INSTRUCTION

Many of these strategies are techniques that facilitate learning for all students, not just ELLs.

### Activate Background Knowledge

This makes learning more meaningful by building upon a student’s own background

knowledge. Many ELLs, however, come from cultural and educational backgrounds quite different from those of “traditional” American students. The challenge for teachers is to not only activate background knowledge for ELLs, but to help build that knowledge when it does not exist.

Brainstorming

Introduce a new topic by asking an open-ended question such as, “What do you think of when I say \_\_\_\_\_?” Write the topic and student responses on the board as a graphic organizer. As the lesson proceeds, add new words, erase or correct previous words and phrases.

Think-Pair-Share Start with a topic and question as above, but give students a couple of minutes to jot down responses. Give them a couple of minutes to discuss and expand their notes with a partner. Then have the students share their ideas with the class. If the language learner feels comfortable, he or she may be the one to present to the class.

K-W-L Chart On the board or as a hand-out, use the traditional K-W-L chart to find out what students already know (K), what they want to learn (W), and, after the lesson, what they have learned (L).

Personalize Lessons After ELL students have developed some proficiency in English, you may invite them to share first-hand knowledge or experiences related to the lesson. To introduce the Civil War (or any war, for that matter), you might talk about the concept that differences among people can lead to conflict. ELL students may be able to share first-hand knowledge of conflicts from their own countries.

### **Increasing Teacher-Student Interaction**

Monitor Your Interaction Patterns Teachers are sometimes surprised to discover that they do not interact with all the students in a class. Use a checklist if necessary to make sure you call on every student.

Encourage Participation The challenge with ELLs is to avoid putting them “on the spot” before they are comfortable communicating in English, while at the same time making sure that they do not feel left out. Try basic recall questions that can be answered with yes/no or a single word, e.g., “So, the South won the Civil War, right?” Encourage them to support their words by pointing to pictures, maps, or words on the board. As their proficiency in English increases, move them up to higher order questions like, “Why do you agree?” etc.

Reduce their anxiety by giving them extra wait-time to think and respond after you ask questions. Remember that English learners must not only think of the answer to the question, but also must process the language of the question itself and their answer.

Be sure to acknowledge incorrect answers with “Good try,” or “Almost,” so as to encourage them to try again.

### **Enhancing Teaching Techniques**

- o Write Your Words (on the board or overhead)
- o Illustrate Your Words (pictures, maps, charts, realia)
- o Demonstrate Your Words (model step-by-step how to solve a problem)
- o Dramatize Your Words (ham it up, emote, pantomime)

### *STRATEGIES TO MODIFY ASSESSMENTS*

Short answer and extended response questions can be extremely difficult for English Language Learners. Even “simple” multiple-choice questions can be hard for them (because of the high reading skill required). Grading these tests raises a fairness issue. Compared to native English speakers, ELLs often “earn” a failing grade on standardized tests. If you give the grade they earned, that can seem unfair, given the student’s lack of English. However, to give a higher grade can seem arbitrary or unfair to those who actually earned those grades. The answer is to use alternative or modified tests for ELLs.

### **Modifying Test Techniques**

- Replace multiple-choice questions (or even short answer and essay questions) with completion questions, which require a much lower reading demand, e.g., “The Battle of Antietam was important because \_\_\_\_\_.”
- For essay questions, allow students to use visuals and graphics, e.g., sequenced pictures, T-lists, labeled diagrams, or maps, as outlined above.
- For essay questions, use the cloze technique, omitting key words from a paragraph that students then have to replace.
- Allow the use of a bilingual dictionary.
- Answer questions that don’t give away the answer, e.g., to clarify or simplify the language of the question itself or multiple-choice answers.
- Allow extended time for completion or divide the test into several sections and give each one separately.
- Shorten the test (by selecting only the concepts of primary importance).
- Limit choices on multiple-choice tests (e.g., from four to two).
- Divide word banks into smaller groups, e.g., one word bank for every 4-5 questions.
- Change all or part of the test to an oral exam since oral language will likely be

easier for them to use.

- Allow students to use their notes or the textbook.

### **Alternative Assessments**

- Portfolios

Students and teachers together choose items for evaluation, documenting growth in language and content knowledge over a period of time.

Note: while you may not be a Language Arts teacher, it is nevertheless important to monitor the student's language growth. Without this, she will not be able to learn content or convey that learning to you.

- Learning Logs

Learning logs and content journals may be used for students who keep these on a regular basis to assess progress over time. If they know that these will be used as an assessment tool, students may be more strongly motivated to work on them.

- Self-Assessment/Peer Assessment

Using checklists, students can record their own feelings about comprehension, contributions or areas of improvement. These can be used not only in place of tests but as a means of establishing a dialogue between student and teacher, allowing both to agree upon what is working and what needs to be improved.

Sources:

<https://resources.finalseite.net/images/v1654208920/troyk12ohus/vrghpkibxqacb4pfsrtk/SrategiesforTeachingContenttoELLs.pdf>

12 Ways to Support English Learners in the Mainstream Classroom

<https://www.cultofpedagogy.com/supporting-esl-students-mainstream-classroom/>

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