

CREATING EFFECTIVE STUDENT GROUPS WITH ELS

01.

Homogeneous Grouping (Similar Ability Levels)

Students are grouped by similar academic ability or English proficiency levels.

- It allows the teacher to provide targeted intervention. The "Emerging" EL group might focus on basic sentence frames while the other groups work on complex sentences.
- For ELLs: This reduces "affective filter" (anxiety). Students often feel safer taking risks and practicing pronunciation with peers who are at a similar stage of language acquisition.
- Good for guided reading, phonics, and specific skill gaps



02.

Heterogeneous Grouping (Mixed Ability Levels)

Groups are intentionally diverse, mixing academic or language levels.

- It fosters peer modeling and social-emotional growth. Stronger students solidify their knowledge by leading and helping other students who may need additional support.
- For ELLs: This provides a rich "language bath." When an ELL is paired with a fluent peer, they hear authentic academic language modeled in real-time.
- Good for group projects, discussions, lab work



03.

Interest Based Grouping

Students choose their group based on their interest on a given task.

- Motivation is a massive lever and increases the level of engagement. When students care about the topic (e.g., "The History of Soccer" vs. "The History of Textiles"), they are more likely to persevere through difficult texts.
- For ELLs: Passion often overrides language barriers. An ELL who loves gaming will find the "language of Minecraft" much easier to navigate than a generic textbook passage, boosting their confidence and apply background knowledge.
- Good for research projects, creative writing, choice boards



04.

Primary Language (L1) Grouping

Grouping students with the same native language, regardless of their English level.

- This allows concept mastery without the "language tax." If the goal is to understand the Water Cycle, letting students discuss it in their L1 ensures they grasp the science first.
- For ELLs: This is a powerful tool for "translanguaging." It allows students to use their full brain to solve problems before translating their final thoughts into English.
- Good for brainstorming, complex thinking, social support



Tips

Tips for Implementation

- Keep it Fluid: Never let a group become a "permanent track." Students should move between different types of groups throughout the week.
- Assigned Roles: In mixed groups, give the ELL a specific role (like "Timekeeper" or "Illustrator") so they have a defined way to contribute while they process the language.
- Provide sentence stems to help keep the conversation on target.



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