



MEA

ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

As communities across the United States are becoming more diverse, many new teachers are finding that their responsibilities include teaching both academic content and language skills to English Language Learners (ELL). Regardless of the type of setting you're in, remember that it's your responsibility to deliver instruction to students in a way that is understandable. That means organizing your teaching practice to meet their needs, as well as navigating the system to ensure that students are getting the services, such as extra support for taking tests, that they need.

As a starting point, find out what kinds of services your school offers to support English Language Learners and you as their classroom teacher. Ask your administrators, colleagues or district bilingual/ELL office for resources and support. When possible, use translation software to communicate effectively with families and/or to support your students. Often schools will have a policy that allows you to adjust grades for ELL students. Do your own research about English Language Learners and how their needs can best be served. Some suggestions can be found below.

Strategies for Improving Instruction for English Language Learners

- Speak slowly, audibly, and clearly in whatever language you use in the classroom. Avoid asking students in front of the whole class if they understand. Instead, ask students to volunteer to repeat the instructions in their own words.
- Prepare English Language Learners for challenging whole-class lessons ahead of time. In a small group, teach the second-language vocabulary that students will need to know. In addition to vocabulary, introduce the concepts that the whole class will be learning. Use materials that are geared for the specific group of English Language Learners (i.e., materials in the students' home language and/or in English that are appropriate for the students' English reading level). When you teach the whole class lesson, English Language Learners have a head start because they've already been part of one comprehensible lesson on the topic.
- Use lecture and lengthy verbal instruction as little as possible. Use visual cues, such as posters, electronic presentations, videos, and illustrated books. Use active methods of learning, such as games, skits, songs, partner interviews, and structured conversation with classmates. Where support is available, translate text from worksheets and books when necessary. Finally, be prepared to spend additional time helping English Language Learners do the work. To keep things in perspective, try thinking about how your performance on the assignment would change if you were doing it in a language in which you were not yet fully proficient.
- Use whole class instruction as little as possible. English Language Learners sometimes get lost and/or tune out during this kind of lesson. Whenever possible, work with small groups of children, or get students working on an assignment and circulate among them as they work.
- In reading class, use literature—in English or the students' home language—that features the students' language/cultural groups. Give English Language Learners lots of attempts to be successful in a low-

stress environment. Choral reading, echo reading, and partner reading all allow students to work on fluency and pronunciation without putting them on the spot. Rehearsing a sentence, paragraph, or page before reading it aloud to a group can help students to improve fluency one chunk of text at a time. Plays and skits provide a wonderful opportunity to encourage students to practice the same lines over and over until they master them, and presenting a play or skit in their second language gives students a great sense of accomplishment.

- Encourage students to maintain and develop their first language at school, at home, and in the community. Research shows that students learn English more effectively and don't lag as far behind their English-speaking classmates in other subject areas when they do more academic work in their native language. And when students are pushed to learn English only, and aren't given the chance to continue learning their home language, they lose the opportunity to be bilingual—a skill that's increasingly valued in society.
- Don't assume a student has special education needs just because they're struggling academically. It could just be that they lack the academic vocabulary or language skills to successfully complete more academic work in English. At the same time, don't ignore potential special education needs either. Seek out resources in your school, district, and community to help you determine what is going on with a particular student who may be struggling to meet academic expectations.