

Accommodations for ESOL Students In Regular Education Classrooms

This information is to guide instruction of ESOL students in mainstream classrooms. In actuality most classroom teachers are already familiar with these suggestions but perhaps unaware that good teaching practices work equally well with all students. In some ways it is a matter of focus rather than new information. All of us are lifelong language learners. No one can claim to understand every word or nuance present in his/her native language. Therefore, all teachers are language instructors. We have all seen this highlighted by the overt inclusion of the four language skills, listening, speaking, reading and writing in all the content areas.

You might also note the term "accommodations" rather than "modifications". Modifications tend to be permanent changes to assist a permanent impairment in the learning strategies of some pupils. ESOL is a temporary program of which all students will be exited once they reach a level of English-language proficiency necessary to function at their grade level in an English-speaking instructional setting. Most teachers probably will discover that these activities work so well with all their students that they will permanently incorporate them in their lessons.

One must also note a concurrent theme amongst these recommendations; the key is to go directly from object or concept to English (Immediate Meaning Identification). This approach compels the students to "think" in English. The alternative, object or concept to first language to English (Mediated Meaning Identification) will waste valuable learning/listening time in translating.

Specific recommendations:

Remember the 5 R's:

REPEAT, REPHRASE, REITERATE, RESTATE, REWORD!!!!!!!

Choose a proficient American student (of the same gender) to serve as the ESOL student's partner. First, this will be a wonderful learning experience for the American to "teach" the ESOL student. Second, the ESOL student will have an excellent role model in English and one who is familiar with the content of the class.

Label items in the classroom **in English only**. The students already know their own language and would ignore the English if you displayed their first language in addition to English.

Provide cloze technique (some words missing) passages for the Limited-English-Proficient (LEP) student to complete from the regular text or lecture notes.

Find lower grade level or alternative materials that cover similar content but with more illustrations and less language.

Have the ESOL student view videos or filmstrips or listen to cassettes of the content.

Have the ESOL student take a test or quiz "open book" or offer the examination orally.

Provide a "Geo-Safari" workstation (or equivalent) with appropriate content area vocabulary.

Use graphic organizers. These are essential for the visual learner and assist the language learner in seeing the relationships between concepts and their vocabulary labels.

Use a "Language Master" or equivalent machine for new vocabulary.

Use read-along cassettes and books, either purchased or teacher created.

Set up a listening station where the student can read aloud and record himself/herself.

Investigate educational software for your content area for computer use.

Utilize the guidance of brain-based learning or also referred to as multiple intelligences. Hands on activities, jazz chants, choral reading, nursery rhymes, drawing, these are all staples of a rich language learning environment.

Use hand signals to accompany verbal instructions and augment any materials with pantomime and gestures.

Establish a learning contract between the student, his/her parents, the ESOL teacher and all classroom teachers. This could include a checklist of skills or specific content area items. Teachers would meet and create this document that would include objectives, strategies and evaluation. By comparing the student's progress, all parties involved would be appraised in the net gains and expectations of achievement.

Remember schematic sets for acquisition of new vocabulary. Avoid introducing new words out of context.

Use power writing.

Use fewer pronouns. Repetition of key concepts is essential. With low-level learners the use of imperative or command form of verbs is easier to understand. Avoid use of conditionals, these may cause confusion.

Keep strong communication ties with the parents or guardians. Use translators if necessary. By federal law, a parent is entitled to have access to the education system of their child and it is the school's responsibility to find a way to help parents have access. Seek the child's parents at any parental involvement activity. This will also alert school staff to any younger siblings that may arrive in your school in the future. Try to combine parental activities such as PTA and the Migrant Education Program's Parent Advisory Councils.

Avoid any assumptions about routine American "common" knowledge. For example, these children may not have experienced Mother Goose or the Beatles' music.

Avoid filler phrases that confuse an ESOL student. Make words count and clarify meaning.

Do use students' knowledge about their homeland in classes such as Social Studies, but be cautious. School is a stage of life where the key is to "fit in". Consistent reference to a child's first language or their culture can cause the student to feel different, isolated and no longer "part of the crowd".

Have ESOL students create their own picture dictionaries utilizing photos from magazines, catalogs or teacher created materials.

Make directions comprehensible. Determine your top ten directions and illustrate or demonstrate them.

Model rather than overtly correct a student's errors. Address only those pronunciation errors that can affect communication.

With limited-English-proficient students who are just beginning to learn English, do not confuse the normal "silent period" of language acquisition with a lack of absorption. Actually, this crucial period is experienced by all second language learners.

Be aware of the state's requirements and your school's procedures to determine eligibility for ESOL services. Avoid the assumption about a student's academic language proficiency because you see evidence of social language adeptness.

Strongly and consistently utilize **pre-reading strategies**; i.e., intent of the reading selection, activating background knowledge, looking at the title, picture or charts to predict meaning and reviewing the main rhetorical styles of English (comparison/contrast, descriptive, etc.) and review key vocabulary.

The following are excerpted from the *Colorado Department of Education Handbook on Planning for LEP Student Success*:

Make a point of correctly learning and pronouncing the student's name. Practice students' first and last names until you master them. Remember that you only have a couple of new words to learn while LEP students have thousands. Ask students the names that they prefer. A person's name has great personal and emotional impact, so don't shorten or change names just to make it easier to pronounce.

Invite a LEP student to be Class Messenger. This position of importance will give the student confidence, a sense of belonging and an identity with your class.

Announce the objectives and activities for each lesson. This gives students a context for their work.

Develop and maintain routines to help LEP students anticipate what will happen without relying solely on language clues.

List and review instructions step by step.

Speak more slowly.

Provide frequent summaries of the salient points of the lesson.

Write legibly as some students have low literacy levels or are unaccustomed to the Roman alphabet. Remember cursive is difficult for LEP students to read.

Use Process Writing - A writing approach that emphasizes content over mechanics. It encourages students to begin with pre-writing activities that include the review of key concepts in group activities; thus, language is learned in a safe environment.

Have students keep journals in English explaining what they've learned and what questions they have (peer tutors can help).

Give story summaries.

Use a Language Experience Approach - after a common experience such as a field trip or lab experiment, students dictate to the teacher what happened, work together to organize the written ideas and make corrections as necessary.

Plan for group work (cooperative learning) - Group LEP students with native English speakers to accomplish a group goal.

Have a time for Show and Tell - students are motivated to describe objects or events of interest.

Using dictated or other stories of interest, have students create gestures to represent characters and actions to provide their peers with nonverbal cues for understanding.

Adapted from *ESOL Resource Guide*, Department of Education, 2002.