

"The ELL Top 10"

Strategies for Working with English Language Learners in Mainstream Classes (for Academic and Vocational Instructors)

1. Use **short phrases** and sentences; include "**audible punctuation**" at the end of each thought. Try not to "ramble" or "think aloud;" choose your words carefully and be **concise**.
2. **Demonstrate/model** steps of a task when possible; do not simply explain verbally.
3. **Break down a task** into steps, but do not list them all at once. Try to follow the cycle of (a) **explain** a step, (b) **demonstrate** the step, (c) **students execute** the step, (d) **evaluate** and **move on** to the next step. If necessary to give multiple steps together, give **no more than three** steps at a time.
4. Speak more **slowly** than you normally would, and **pause** frequently at natural points to allow listeners to process a phrase, concept or point before moving on. Try not to have them "just listen" for more than a few minutes at a time.
5. Speak **audibly and enunciate clearly** (no mumbling) and try to **face the students** when speaking to them, allowing them to read your facial expressions and – to some extent – your lips to help them catch the words and tone of what you are saying.
6. Use frequent **comprehension checks*** to see if students understand instructions, explanations, etc.
 - a. Have them individually or collectively repeat back to you what they remember
 - b. ask basic questions to individuals/groups soon after giving instructions e.g. "how many examples will you write in each box?" or "What do you need to do after checking the area for debris?"
7. Use **visual aids** and **graphic organizers** to represent information in a variety of ways. **Structured worksheets** (e.g. a blank flow-chart, time-line with empty points or outline with basic prompts and empty space) are helpful for students to anticipate information and take notes more successfully.
8. **Grouping options** – allow students to work in pairs or small groups
 - a. **homogeneous** (similarly-proficient students working together) to allow pairs to work at own comfort level without pressure, or
 - b. **heterogeneous** (students of different proficiency/skill levels working together) to allow stronger/more linguistically proficient students to help weaker ones
9. **Encourage ELLs to use academic/industry phrasings in their speech.** Hold ELLs to a higher academic/professional communication standard by helping them use clearer, more accurate language. Briefly rephrase their statements back to them, to model what it *should* sound like, then have them repeat it back to you once to help them internalize the pattern. It will also help them recognize those patterns when heard on the work site or seen on tests. (See "**corrective feedback**"** strategies on the next page.)
10. Try to find **alternative means** for students to demonstrate their knowledge or skill **for evaluation**. E.g. If the test requires writing a paragraph to explain a procedure, but paragraph writing is beyond their ability, let them make an ordered outline of keywords and phrases, draw a diagram, explain orally or demonstrate physically. If the test is specifically to test their paragraph writing skills, try using a simpler topic or prompt. (Be aware of the point at which a skill/content test inadvertently becomes a language test, preventing students from demonstrating their skills or knowledge!)

Additional Notes on Working with ELLs

* **Comprehension checks** – It should be noted that asking yes-or-no questions such as “Do you understand” or “Are there any questions” as comprehension checks is **not** typically a useful strategy. English Language Learners are often hesitant to admit non-comprehension, and thus will simply claim that they understand everything. Alternatively, they may *think* they understand everything, but you will soon realize where there has been a misunderstanding. As a result, **open-ended questions** that simply assume someone *does* have a question, such as “What questions do you have?” “Which part is most confusing?” or, “Who can tell me what you’re going to do first?” tend to be more successful.

****Strategies for providing “Corrective Feedback” when students speak**

When students say something with incorrect/non-targetlike grammar or a wrong vocabulary word, etc., you can take various steps to help them speak more accurately and clearly.

First, acknowledge the value of the content, but make a quick, simple comment to draw their attention to the error, and try to get them to repeat the phrase but using a correct form. There are several general strategies you can use, both providing the correct form for them, and prompting them to correct it for themselves. e.g.:

Form provided:

“Not ‘yesterday I go,’ but ‘I went’. Say it again please.”

“Try again – ‘He *doesn’t* like broccoli’.” (If the student said “He don’t...”)

Form not provided:

“Yesterday I go?” (Emphasizing error with questioning tone)

“Yesterday I...?” (Voice trails off, indicating student should complete the phrase him/herself.)

“Remember to use the past tense.” (Just reminding them of rule; let them find the error and fix it for themselves.)

The **key** is to **keep your feedback short and simple**. The more you say, the more they have to filter through and process. You are not scolding them, just casually being helpful. Try NOT to launch into grammatical (or other) lecture. Just address the issue and then move on, so as not to detour the conversation/lesson too far. **Goal: make correction a natural part of learning**, not shame, etc. It offers a good opportunity for everyone to learn, since they will all make some very common mistakes.