

50 Simple Things You Can Do to Teach English Language Learners

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1. Get to know your students. Pronounce their name correctly, know where they are from & learn how to say "Good morning" or "hello!" in their first language.
2. Learn how to interpret ACCESS reports.
3. Make rebus charts with pictures and words for your Top 10 classroom procedures.
4. Label everything in your classroom (or better, yet, have students do it!) This is an easy, effective way to do a first-day proficiency assessment of new students.
5. Pull classroom labels off & have ELs replace them correctly.
6. Play "scavenger hunt." Describe classroom objects orally or in writing. They bring you the card.
7. Eliminate or explain cultural bias in lessons and assignments, i.e., references to sports, songs, movies, TV shows, stories, or basic cultural habits like how we get to school or go shopping.
8. Simplify your linguistic complexity: syntax, nominalization, and polysemy.
9. Use lower-grade-level materials with more graphics, less text
10. Give written AND spoken directions, with expressive gestures.
11. Show as you tell. Gather real-world objects to have on hand for demonstrating as you teach.
12. Walk around the room to monitor for understanding.
13. Use pictures! Copy from curricular materials; "steal" from the internet; have students draw them.
14. Buddy ELs up with non-ELs for assignments and projects.
15. Provide complete exemplars, especially for projects.
16. Preview reading: Why are they reading this? What will they be asked to do afterwards?
17. Write daily vocabulary on the board. Use these terms on ELs' summative assessments.
18. Distribute highlighted/annotated copies of materials at the beginning of the lesson OR do a notes swap afterwards: give them a copy of the notes that they SHOULD have taken.
19. For guided reading, make photocopies of materials with the key bits blanked out. You can also use these for dictation.
20. Teach how to use graphic elements (e.g. titles, headings, highlighted vocabulary, captions) in the text.
21. Highlight and annotate as you go and as others speak. Use the interactive white board, an overhead projector, a document camera, or write on the white board with markers.
22. Print out the warm-up; don't make them copy it themselves.
23. Save class notes. Electronically: TAKE PICTURES! Print them, post them online, or make copies and keep them in a class binder. OR Use chart paper for class notes. Keep these posted around your room so ELs can refer to them frequently.
24. Student-created Bulletin Boards: Keep a word wall of idioms and phrases. Keep a "Today I Learned" board.

25. Keep blank graphic organizers at the ready. Your basics should include a summary chart (5 Ws, Beginning/Middle/End), Cause/Effect, Sequence, Timeline, Frayer, and Main Idea/Supporting Details concept map
26. Learn to create tables on the fly in MS Word. This skill will save you TONS of time!
27. Write in printing, not cursive.
28. Create clear, legible notes and photocopies. NO cut-off words or hole-puncher mysteries!
29. Use word searches and crossword puzzles for vocabulary development.
30. Communicate using Google Translate/iTranslate. Use calendars, clocks, gestures, intonation, & drawings.
31. Make read-along audio available.
32. Use multimedia resources. Turn on the subtitles!
33. Have ELs use their technology to take pictures of class materials.
34. Use a variety of language domains to assess. You may need to do a one-on-one interview to assess what they've learned.
35. Allow ELs to write responses in L1 and then translate using technology or with peer support.
36. Word banks: Low-tech version: Write in the margins before you make the EL versions of tests. Tech version: Make a table with word bank terms/symbol keys. Print several copies on a page. Cut into strips and hand them out as appropriate. Math: Keep laminated copies of word-symbol keys.
37. Give open book/open note assessments.
38. Keep assessments concise: Eliminate questions that assess duplicate information.
39. Assess with pictures - have ELs draw, label, sequence, match, or categorize.
40. Keep matching sections to no more than 5 terms per section.
41. No True/False questions. Instead, ask either/or questions. (*Does the nucleus make proteins or control the cell?*)
42. Use open-ended patterned sentences with a word bank. ("*Mammals have _____.*" five times)
43. Change multiple choice questions into statements to form cloze sentences.
44. To adapt word problems: Set up the equation for student or draw the picture indicated OR Let ELs use notes from previous classes where similarly worded questions were presented and solved.
45. For brand-new ELs: Provide list of key terms in a 4-column table. EL copies definition from textbook glossary (column 2). Translates definition (column 3). Creates graphic/symbol to represent concept (column 4). Easiest. Assessment. EVER.
46. Write key definitions on sentence strips. Cut into individual words. Have students arrange them into sentences. Easier/super-fast version: Do this using a table in MS Word. Print them & cut.
47. Use adaptive online resources like Study Island or Moby Max.
48. Give a 2nd chance on test items. Check through answers once. Circle wrong answers. Have ELs try again.
49. Evaluate answers for content & meaning. Overlook errors in conventions.
50. For higher-proficiency ELs, select one objective to focus on when grading writing, such as periods, capitalization, or subject/verb agreement.