

Classroom Tips for Content Area Teachers of Newcomers

1. Provide both oral and written directions.

Newcomers will need to translate directions in order to understand what the classroom teacher is asking him/her to do. If the teacher only provides oral directions, the newcomers may not be able to translate the directions fast enough in their heads.

2. Provide summaries of chapters or texts and/or reduce the length of reading assignments.

Newcomers will have to translate almost everything they read in class. This requires much more work than their native-speaking peers. It is not feasible to expect that a student with very limited English proficiency is able to read the same amount of text as other students.

3. Provide copies of teacher notes.

If teachers provide newcomers a copy of their completed notes, the students will be able to concentrate on taking in and understanding the new information while it is being presented in class instead of copying notes. . It will also allow students additional time to translate the new material during instruction.

4. Indicate the page number and/or heading where answers can be found in the text.

Since reading in English will be a much slower and more difficult process for newcomers, page numbers and heading references will allow students to focus in on a specific section of a text and support the students in locating information so that they can successfully respond to questions.

5. Reduce the number of problems and/or questions on homework.

It will take newcomers much longer to complete homework assignments than their native-speaking peers. With this in mind, consider eliminating questions and/or problems that are assessing the same skill AND or questions and/or problems that are not absolutely essential to the student meeting the standard you are teaching.

6. Reduce the number of answer choices on assessments.

Since reading will also be a struggle for newcomers on assessments, consider reducing the amount the newcomer needs to read by eliminating answer choices for multiple choice and matching questions on tests and quizzes.

7. Provide a word bank.

Productive language (writing & speaking) develops much later when learning a new language than receptive language (reading & listening). Newcomers often struggle to recall new vocabulary words offhand but are able to use them correctly when provided a list of vocabulary words to refer to. With this in mind, consider providing students a list of key vocabulary words to use for short answer and fill-in-the-blank questions.

8. Provide extended time for assignments.

Both reading and writing take longer for students who are learning a new language. In order to reduce anxiety and allow students to put forth their best effort, more time will be needed for lengthier assignments that require students to seek the support of an EL teacher to complete them.

9. Use visuals.

Visuals help newcomers comprehend new information even if they are not able to understand every word their classroom teachers are saying. Whenever possible regularly incorporate visuals into classroom instruction, handouts, and assignments.

10. Provide written examples of classroom assignments.

Written examples that newcomers can go back and review after class has ended will support them in both understanding the directions of the assignment and understanding the quality of work their teachers are requiring. They are also helpful to the EL teachers who are not able to be in class with the students but are often helping them complete the assignments after class has ended.

11. Provide sentence starters.

Beginning a sentence or structuring their thoughts in sentence format can be very difficult for language learners. Providing the first couple of words of a sentence can be a very useful support for students.

12. Slow your speech, increase pauses, and speak in phrases.

Students who are new to learning a language will need more time to process oral information. Make sure to use the least amount of words possible to communicate ideas and pause between thoughts to allow students time to translate and digest what you have said before continuing.

13. Rephrase questions, directions, and explanations in a simpler form with more general vocabulary.

Pay attention to the vocabulary and the grammatical complexity you are using to communicate with students. With the exception of key vocabulary that the students need to master to meet the content standards, make sure to use more general vocabulary to replace less familiar words. Don't forget that idiomatic or slang expressions can be especially confusing to language learners because they are not easily translated.

14. Allow students to demonstrate their comprehension in nonverbal ways (i.e. thumbs up/thumbs down, fist-to-five, ABCD response cards, drawings)

Be creative about allowing newcomers to express their comprehension of a topic without having to speak or write a sentence. Students who are new to learning a language will often go through a silent period where they aren't speaking yet but are still able to comprehend the classroom instruction. By allowing students to respond to questions in a nonverbal way, they too are able to demonstrate their knowledge of a topic.

15. Present assessments in the same phrasing as used in learning and reviews.

A newcomer will have a very limited English vocabulary and may not be familiar with synonyms of words not explicitly taught or discussed in the classroom. Remember to be consistent in the wording and phrasing you are using and make sure that you are writing questions and answer choices in the same way you have presented the material in class.

16. Adapt assignments to reflect the student's language proficiency.

Language learning is a continuum and develops over time. Assignments that are appropriate for native speakers may not be appropriate for newcomers who are just beginning to acquire English. Be especially mindful of the reading and writing tasks you are assigning to students who are just learning to read and write in English. You may need to come up with alternative assignments when you are assigning the other students in your class a long reading passage or multi-paragraph writing assignment.

