

## Tips for Modifying Lessons for English Learners

1. English learners (ELs) must do two things in content classes: **learn content** and **develop language**. During each part of the lesson, for each modification, be sure you know which of these goals you are trying to meet.
2. See what *overall* changes you can make. These are changes that can help ELs but that at the same time are not detrimental in any way for any student. For example, you can list steps and write them on the board instead of extemporaneously describing to students what you want them to do. Or, you might change the order of activities, requiring a visual response before an oral one, which works well for ELs. In other words, **plan your lesson from the very beginning with ELs in mind**.
3. Differentiate for different language levels. Keep these broad realities in mind:
  - a. *Beginner learners*
    - Cannot produce explanations, definitions, or other complex language. However, they may be able to *demonstrate* what they know.
    - Will be acquiring *receptive* language, through listening and reading.
    - Can handle speaking tasks best if geared to their level, with a single empathetic partner as a listener.
    - Will need to learn most content through visuals and demonstrations.
    - Can benefit from content in their home language.
  - b. *Intermediate learners*
    - Can benefit from text and speech with highlighted words and phrases to bring out key concepts.
    - Should be using speech to solidify and demonstrate learning. Explanations and definitions should be produced, but with the assistance of sentence frames or starters, or the availability of models.
    - Can benefit from partners at the same level, for practice, and at higher levels, to hear more complex speech.
    - Can learn content through purposeful, visual-assisted talk and text.
    - Can still benefit from some content in their home language.
  - c. *Advanced learners*
    - Can generally do the tasks required of all students, with help, guidance, and feedback.
    - Need opportunities to use complex sentences orally and in writing.
    - Need continued feedback so that errors do not become fossilized.
    - May need conscious focus on motivation; motivation to continue to develop language may lag. Use pairings, texts, and tasks designed to motivate, as well as to develop language and content.

4. Let language objectives emerge from the lesson, informed by your knowledge of your ELs, their levels, and their language use. Some possible types of language objectives include the following:
  - a. *Words and phrases.* For example, if the word *yard* is used in a math word problem, along with a visual, a beginning EL may learn that word. For more advanced ELs, words and phrases typically used in academic settings (e.g., *actually*, *nevertheless*, *it goes without saying*, *erroneously*) are generally learned in the classroom. These words may be pulled out and given extra attention for ELs.
  - b. *Structures.* Is a history lesson telling what “had happened” before what “happened”? This is a prime place to give advanced students practice in contrasting past perfect (“had happened”) and past (“happened”). Or is a science lesson talking about what happens under various conditions? ELs can practice conditional statements (“If the plant doesn’t get sun, it dies.”)
  - c. *Skill areas.* The four major skill areas of language are reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Any one of these can be targeted for specific development for an EL in your class. Make sure that the language skill being developed is at the right level for the student. For example, a beginning EL should not be practicing retelling a battle using correct past tense forms. However, this goal would be a good one for intermediate or advanced ELs.