

ESOL Teaching Strategies^{1, 2}

The taxonomy presented below offers teachers an organized set of ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) teaching strategies. The strategies are pedagogically and linguistically appropriate for English language learners (ELLs). Drawing from second language acquisition (SLA) theory and content adaptation teaching principles for linguistically diverse students, this taxonomy provides teachers with a systematic approach to scaffolding the integration of technology in multiple content areas as they address the needs of ELLs.

According to SLA research and theory, instruction should be designed so that instruction supports language development and curriculum content simultaneously. Sheltered Instruction or Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE) are recommended instructional approaches for content-based second language acquisition.³ These approaches combine high quality teaching with second language acquisition principles, producing grade-appropriate, curriculum-based learning that is comprehensible to ELLs. They promote learning of grade-appropriate content plus mastery of English language forms, conventions, and vocabulary that can lead to the acquisition of academic English while helping students to develop meta-cognitive strategies that facilitate language development.

Stages of Language Development

Given that language acquisition is a developmental process, planning for ELL-adapted instruction should be designed with students' developmental needs in mind. This ESOL taxonomy is organized around four widely accepted stages of language development as identified by Krashen & Terrell (1983). The four stages are listed in the table that appears below.

Stage 1	Preproduction
Stage 2	Early Production
Stage 3	Speech Emergence
Stage 4	Intermediate Fluency

Students functioning at the *preproduction stage* (or *silent period*) tend to be overwhelmed and anxious, particularly when required to produce speech in the target language. The intensity of focusing upon absorbing an unknown language makes students tire easily and

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³ For more information about SDAIE, see Echevarria & Graves (2007); Echevarria & Short (2009); and Echevarria, Short, & Vogt (2008).

shortens their attention spans. At this stage, students rely heavily upon nonverbal communication and whatever contextual clues they are able to perceive and understand.

During the *early production stage*, students feel more comfortable with the target language, and can respond to questions with single words (e.g., “yes,” “no,” “you,” “me”). They are also able to recite short and simple texts (e.g. poems, short phrases, sentences). It is important to note that a low-anxiety learning environment fosters higher risk-taking dispositions in ELLs. Therefore, it is critical that teachers create nurturing learning environments by employing strategies such as circumlocution (offering multiple ways to define a word or phrase), paraphrasing, and repetition.

As students continue to develop their target language skills, they enter into the *speech emergence* stage. At this point, they begin providing longer answers to questions and more complex utterances, and they use language more freely. With the use of longer and more complex utterances, however, more syntax errors are produced. During this stage, teachers should scaffold instruction by providing many opportunities for students to work in small groups and to use organizers (advance and graphical) to help to generate ELLs’ language. It is also helpful at this stage of development to permit students to use their primary language to support second language (L2) development (e.g., by member checking utterances with a bilingual peer or teacher).

Once students have reached the *intermediate fluency* stage, they are able to initiate and maintain conversations in the target language. Syntax errors continue to be evident, but at this stage, students are more aware of their language skills, and can often identify their own errors and correct themselves. It is important to note that although ELLs may seem to know a good deal of English and may appear to be near-native in their conversational English at this stage, they have *not* achieved the same near-native proficiency in academic English. To the less experienced educator, this can be a misleading stage, can generating unrealistic expectations for academic writing, advanced reading comprehension, and/or oral presentation skills.

Using the ESOL Strategies with Learning Activity Types

Content area teachers who are working with ELLs while seeking to incorporate curriculum-based use of educational technologies should begin instructional planning of each lesson, project, and unit by selecting content goals and objectives. The next step is to identify the learning activity types best suited to students’ learning needs and preferences with reference to those goals/objectives from appropriate content area learning activity types taxonomy/ies. (Links to the most recent versions of all of the activity types taxonomies are available at: <http://activitytypes.wmwikis.net/>.) Then, teachers need to identify their ELL students’ proficiency levels and choose the ESOL strategies that best complement students’ learning that will be structured using the selected activity types.

The taxonomy presented below provides specific ESOL instructional strategies for teachers to use. These strategies are organized into eight general recommendations that remind teachers to:

- a) Communicate clearly.
- b) Make content understandable.
- c) Check students' understanding.
- d) Elicit students' responses.
- e) Demonstrate and model.
- f) Encourage interpersonal communication.
- g) Group students to assist their learning.
- h) Promote cross-cultural awareness.

Specific instructional strategies that can be used to operationalize each of these recommendations appear in the sections and tables below.

Once teachers select and sequence the learning activity types, then choose the ESOL strategies to use within a specific lesson, project, or unit that they are planning, they can consider the suggested technologies associated with each, selecting ones to use based upon appropriateness, availability, and students' and teachers' prior experience. In the charts of ESOL recommendations and strategies that appear below, the columns that read "Stage 1," "Stage 2," "Stage 3," and "Stage 4" correspond to the four stages of ELL students' language development explained earlier: preproduction, early production, speech emergence, and intermediate fluency, respectively.

Communicate Clearly

Communicating clearly when working with language learners is very important. It is common for native speakers to think that they must speak slowly to be understood, and that everyone understands idioms and other colloquial expressions given their wide usage. As native speakers, we are not fully aware of the wealth of linguistic knowledge and resources we possess; we take this for granted. It is not until we are confronted with learning another language that we become more conscious of how challenging it can be to do so. Communicating clearly requires using concrete language that is content-related and not idiomatic or colloquial. This section provides eight strategies for teachers to use that will help them to communicate clearly when teaching language learners.

Table 1
Strategies for Communicating Clearly

Strategy	Possible Technologies	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4
Position ELLs in close proximity to the teacher.	Clip-on microphone (for teacher)	X	X		
Use concrete language/avoid colloquialisms.	Audio recorder to analyze your own speech patterns	X	X		
Draw parallels between English and native language words and word parts (cognates).	Document camera, interactive whiteboard, presentation software	X	X	X	
Repeat and/or paraphrase with sufficient wait time.	Audio recording software, audio discussion tools (e.g. <i>VoiceThread</i>)	X	X	X	
Recap and clarify primary points.	Document camera, interactive whiteboard, presentation software	X	X	X	X
Speak more slowly (not more loudly) with clear enunciation and expression.	Audio recorder (to analyze your own speech patterns)	X	X		
Use body language to assist comprehension.	Video recorder (to analyze your use of body language)	X	X		
Use simple rather than complex sentence structures.	Bulleted lists in presentations and notes	X	X	X	
Avoid including extraneous information when speaking.	Audio recorder (to analyze your own speech patterns)	X	X		
Explain instructions step-by-step.	Presentation software, document camera, interactive whiteboard, word processor to create handouts	X	X	X	X

Make Content Understandable

Making content understandable or providing *comprehensible input* (Krashen, 1981) helps teachers to communicate in an ESOL-friendly format that fosters students' understanding

of the content being learned. While presenting information, teachers must make some adaptations that help students to understand key concepts. The table below shares 15 strategies that teachers can use to improve ELLs' comprehension of curriculum-based content.

Table 2
Strategies for Making Content Understandable

Strategy	Possible Technologies	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4
Analyze curriculum goals and instructional materials before using them to identify potential comprehension difficulties.	Word processor for annotations, scanner to annotate printed documents	X	X	X	X
Provide a synopsis/outline of the content to be explored.	Presentation software, document camera, interactive whiteboard	X	X	X	X
Activate students' background knowledge, experiences, perceptions, and interests.	Presentation software, video clips, digital images	X	X	X	X
Display visuals (e.g., images, diagrams, pictograms) that illustrate content presented.	Presentation software, document camera, word processor to create printed images to reference/display in class	X	X	X	X
Provide/construct graphic organizers with words and/or pictures	Concept mapping software, word processor	X	X	X	X
Visually emphasize (e.g., circle, highlight, display, label, animate) English words that represent key concepts.	Presentation software, document camera, interactive whiteboard	X	X	X	X
List, define, and repeat new terms and concepts.	Presentation software, document camera, interactive whiteboard	X	X	X	X
Dramatize/mime/role play.	Video recorder to capture dramatization for future reference	X	X	X	
Use real objects/manipulatives that illustrate content presented.	Virtual manipulatives, physical manipulatives	X	X	X	

Use native language, if possible, to explain confusing content.	Language learning software or podcasts to develop your own vocabulary in students' native language, translation software on a mobile device as a reference	X	X		
Provide alternative forms of materials (e.g., text, video, audio, screen reader)	Presentation software, video clips, audio files, podcasts	X	X	X	X
Break complex ideas/texts into their component parts.	Concept mapping software, document camera	X	X	X	X
Simplify and shorten longer texts (e.g., with bulleted lists).	Use of bulleted lists in presentation software, word processed handouts and notes	X	X		
Provide tools and resources (e.g., dictionary, thesaurus, etc.)	Online dictionary/thesaurus, scanning pens, translators	X	X	X	X
Challenge students slightly beyond their current comprehension levels.	Web sites, web-based interactive tools, mobile device apps	X	X	X	X

Check Students' Understanding

Checking for students' understanding is part of most teaching procedures. With ELLs, frequent comprehension checks are key to both ongoing assessment and maintaining students' engagement in the learning process. The table below suggests seven strategies that can be used to check students' understanding.

Table 3
Strategies for Checking Students' Understanding

Strategy	Possible Technologies	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4
Ask a question that the students answer.	Presentation software, document camera, interactive whiteboard to display questions	X	X	X	X
Students think aloud.		X	X	X	X
Students complete sentences, charts, tables, etc.	Word processor, Web-based interactive tools, interactive whiteboard, concept mapping software	X	X	X	X

Students restate an idea in their own words.	Word processor, audio recorder	X	X	X	X
Students indicate a response nonverbally (e.g., pointing, acting out, clicking)	Student response system, printed student response cards	X	X		
Focus on the meanings of students' statements more than their forms.		X	X		
Provide supportive feedback.	Word processor, email, document camera	X	X	X	X

Elicit Students' Responses

Eliciting students' responses helps teachers to perform periodic informal language assessments. In response to teachers' spoken and written prompts, ELLs produce language (output) that will vary in complexity, especially over time. Teachers can use [the Student Oral Language Observation \(SOLOM\) Matrix](#) to estimate students' spoken language development and progress toward facility with academic English. The table below offers eight strategies that help to elicit students' responses.

Table 4
Strategies for Eliciting Students' Responses

Strategy	Possible Technologies	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4
Ask questions that evoke simple responses (e.g., words or phrases).	Presentation software, document camera, interactive whiteboard to display questions	X	X		
Ask students what would be helpful to their learning.	Web-based survey, email, student response system	X	X	X	X
Prompt student responses of increased complexity over time.		X	X	X	X
Solicit students' perspectives, experiences, etc.	Web-based survey, email, blogs, discussion forum, student response system	X	X	X	X
Request written responses in different formats (e.g, answers to questions, poetry, news stories, picturebooks, letters, skits)	Word processor, drawing software, animation software, video/audio creation software	X	X	X	X

Provide structures for written responses (e.g., templates, questions)	Word processor, concept mapping software	X	X	X	
Ask students to identify/summarize key concepts/main ideas	Word processor, concept mapping software	X	X	X	X
Ask students to do oral presentations, reports, skits, etc.	Presentation software, audio/video creation software, audio/video recorder	X	X	X	X

Demonstrate/Model

Modeling and demonstration are generally effective instructional approaches. When teaching ESOL students, it is helpful for teachers to demonstrate—in advance and step-by-step—what is expected from students, and to model ways of thinking, behaving and communicating that will help students to reach curriculum-based learning goals. The strategies presented below can assist all learners—monolinguals and ELLs. The chart offers seven strategies that can support teachers’ modeling and demonstrations.

Table 5
Strategies for Demonstrating/Modeling

Strategy	Possible Technologies	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4
Use mnemonics to build memory of content.	Audio recorder	X	X	X	
Use read-alouds and/or read-alongs.	Books, Web-based readings	X	X	X	X
Model decoding skills and word analysis.	Presentation software, document camera, interactive whiteboard	X	X	X	X
Model comprehension strategies.	Presentation software, document camera, interactive whiteboard	X	X	X	X
Model language learning strategies.	Presentation software, document camera, interactive whiteboard	X	X	X	X
Model study skills.	Presentation software, document camera, interactive whiteboard	X	X	X	X
Model presentation skills.	Presentation software, video recorder	X	X	X	X

Encourage Interpersonal Communication

All learners need to interact with peers, teachers, and others involved in the learning process, regardless of their language backgrounds. For ELLs, it is even more important to have extensive opportunities to practice oral and written communicative language. By interacting with peers, teachers, and others, ELLs can expand their content knowledge as well as strengthen their second-language reading and writing skills. The chart below suggests eight strategies that encourage interpersonal communication within and beyond the classroom.

Table 6
Strategies to Encourage Interpersonal Communication

Strategy	Possible Technologies	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4
Provide tutoring/mentoring (peers, teachers, community members)	Web-based discussion, email, chat, videoconferencing	X	X	X	X
Set up conversation partners	Web-based discussion, email, chat, videoconferencing	X	X	X	X
Students summarize each other's points in a conversation.	Audio recorder to review later			X	X
Exchange opinions, emotions, and/or perspectives.	Web-based discussion, email, chat, videoconferencing			X	X
Share information.	Presentation software, concept mapping software, Web-based discussion, email, chat	X	X	X	X
Ask and answer questions.	Chat, Web-based discussion	X	X	X	X
Exchange written documents (e.g., letters, stories, dialogue journals, peer feedback, etc.).	Word processor, wiki, email, blog	X	X	X	X
Extend opportunities for interpersonal communication beyond the classroom.	Web-based discussion, email, chat, blog, videoconferencing	X	X	X	X

Group Students to Assist Their Learning

Grouping students strategically can assist their learning in multiple ways. Teachers often try to keep ELLs away from other students with similar linguistic backgrounds to prevent them from talking with each other in their native language. At times, it can be helpful for students to work with a group member who speaks their native language to prevent the ELL from getting lost. However, it is not a good idea to segregate ELLs by native language. Groupings—in same-language or different-language clusters—should be determined by considering the nature of the learning task at hand and the language facility of the students participating. The following table offers five strategies that teachers can use when grouping their ELL students.

Table 7
Strategies for Grouping Students to Assist Their Learning

Strategy	Possible Technologies	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4
Work with a partner who can speak in the student's native language.	Videoconferencing, wiki, blogs	X	X	X	
Work with partners at similar English language proficiency levels initially.				X	X
Keep group sizes small and increase numbers gradually.		X	X	X	X
Work collaboratively to create a product.	Wiki, collaborative word processor	X	X	X	X
Work cooperatively to accomplish a task.	Wiki, collaborative word processor	X	X	X	X

Promote Cross-Cultural Awareness

ELLs arrive with diverse cultural backgrounds. Helping ELLs to develop an understanding and appreciation of their adopted country's culture should not be pursued at the expense of fostering respect for and maintenance of students' cultural identities. The table below provides seven strategies that can support such intercultural endeavors with ELLs.

Table 8
Strategies for Promoting Cross-Cultural Awareness

Strategy	Possible Technologies	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4
Show respect and appreciation for ELL's native language by learning (and teaching to the class) basic greetings or key words in the target language.	Translators, Web-based dictionaries	X	X	X	X
Present to the class different holidays from ELLs' home countries and from the U.S.	Video streaming sites, DVDs	X	X	X	X
Invite guest speakers (face-to-face or virtual visits).	Audio/ Videoconferencing	X	X	X	X
Take classroom virtual tours to ELL's home country's iconic places and compare those of similar meaning for U.S. people.	Web-based virtual tours, DVDs, video streaming sites, videoconferencing	X	X	X	X
Extend opportunities to conduct ethnographic interviews among students from different backgrounds.	Audio/Video recorders, word processor, presentation software, videoconferencing	X	X	X	X
Pair ELLs with American students to compare and contrast everyday patterns of life as pertains to students' age.	Concept mapping software	X	X	X	X
Activate students' previous experiences from home countries and have them write reflective journals	Word processor, blog		X	X	X

Conclusion

Many of the strategies shared here will be familiar to experienced teachers, but their helpfulness to ELLs is not often considered. When second language acquisition principles are used for curriculum-based teaching, they can contribute to better learning for both ELL and non-ELL students. We hope that the taxonomy of ESOL teaching strategies presented here, used in conjunction with taxonomies of curriculum-based learning activity types, will assist teachers with planning, organizing, and offering instruction that is appropriately supported with digital and non-digital tools and resources.

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