

# Differentiating Instruction for English Language Learners

*Below are three principles to practice when teaching English Language Learners. The strategies listed will help your ELLs better comprehend what they are learning, develop the language they need to interact with others, and develop the language and skills they need for academic achievement.*

## ① Make language comprehensible and concrete

- Use visuals--pictures, actions, and objects—to support meaning.
- Include multi-sensory activities, especially visual and kinesthetic.
- Use picture walks and other pre-reading strategies to develop language students will need to understand the text.
- Set a purpose for reading or listening to help focus attention. Signal students when you want them to focus their attention.
- Check often for comprehension. Use a variety of question types.
- Keep instructions, explanations, and other “teacher talk” as brief as possible. Show as you tell; refer to picture or word cues.
- Use controlled language: simple sentence structures, simple verb tenses, and active voice.
- Repeat, rephrase, review, reread.
- Avoid idiomatic speech.
- Use words consistently (use either “kinds of” or “types of”).
- Build on language that students already have.



## ② Make learning interactive

- Structure mixed-level teams for completing group tasks and in which every student plays a role.
- Before reading, engage students in an experiential and interactive activity to build related background knowledge and vocabulary.
- Allow students to respond, chant, and sing together.
- Provide opportunities for students to MOVE together---through role-play, games, active singing, etc.
- Have students read and write in pairs or teams: assign reading buddies and student-student dialogue journals.
- Capitalize on every opportunity to allow students to help one another.
- Help students develop language for interacting with their peers, such as for making requests or offering help.
- Teach students how to ask questions and give feedback to one another.
- Provide opportunities for students to talk to each other about what they are going to do, what they are doing, what they did, etc.
- Incorporate technology, video, and other multimedia.

## ③ Develop academic language and critical thinking

- Introduce new knowledge and skills by connecting them to prior experience familiar contexts and familiar themes. Use vocabulary that students already know.
- Provide clear, step-by-step modeling of processes and strategies—such as how to give an oral presentation or use a picture dictionary--students can use and apply again in different contexts.
- “Boil down” concepts and salient points into a few key words or phrases.
- Highlight key concept words for students; emphasize key words repetitively and assist students with strategies for learning, recording, and recalling vocabulary.
- Allow students to express concepts visually or in other non-verbal modalities.
- Use graphic organizers to organize speaking as well as thinking and writing. Give students the opportunity to talk about the information presented, modeling and eliciting patterned language that reflects the structure of the graphic.
- Use think alouds, but structure speech so it is comprehensible.
- Provide opportunities for students to talk about what they are learning, how it relates to their own lives, and how they can apply the concepts.
- Teach language and literacy across the curriculum.
- Identify a language acquisition goal for content-based lessons.

## Differentiating Instruction for English Language Learners

Below are the three principles to practice when teaching English Language Learners. When watching the classroom video, reference the list of strategies provided. Take note of which strategies you see being implemented.

