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# Best Practices for English Learners

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Best practices for English learners also benefit other students. Giving instruction in a clear manner, providing examples of good work, showing concrete visual aids, and allowing “wait time” for students to consider ideas are some techniques that help *all* students process the content.

## The Student’s Role

“Language is the means of getting an idea from my brain into yours without surgery.”

### Preview and take notes

- Write down the main points, definitions, and examples. Don’t write down everything you hear.
- Preview material before class. Become familiar with the topic and new vocabulary.
- Review notes the same day as the lecture. Go over notes with the instructor, another student, or a tutor on a weekly basis.
- Keep a vocabulary notebook and review new words on a daily basis. A new word needs to be used many times before it is ingrained.

### Practice listening and speaking

- Listening and speaking are closely related. If you improve one, you’ll improve the other.
- Sit in the front of the classroom if possible. Watch your instructor pronounce the words.
- Listen to as much English as possible. Watch the news on a daily basis (formal language). Watch sitcoms regularly (informal language).
- Improve your pronunciation with a regular conversation partner (another student, a friend, a neighbor or roommate, a tutor).

### Be a conscientious writer

- Talk out your ideas before writing, in order to clarify thoughts.
- Correct grammar after writing a first draft. Read it out loud to hear how it sounds. Fix errors you identify.
- Use the tutoring resources in the Peer Tutor Center or at Smarthinking.com.

## The Teacher’s Role

“RELAX and delight in what each international student can add to the content of the course.” --Sue Fahlsing, WWCC ESL instructor

### Communication Strategies

- Speak clearly and in standard English. Use body language and gestures when possible. Rephrase important instructions or concepts.
- Use concrete objects or other visual aids to develop background knowledge and establish a frame of reference for new concepts. Provide “hands on” active learning opportunities.

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- Don't "talk down"; English learners are just as intelligent as other students. Speaking louder does not aid in comprehension; speaking more slowly does not help build essential listening skills.
- Check for understanding. Don't assume they understand because of nodding. Ask specific questions that gauge comprehension.
- Allow "wait time" for students to respond verbally to questions (3-5 seconds for native speakers; longer for English Learners).
- Provide opportunities for students to respond to one another regarding the academic content. Cooperative learning fosters positive social interaction.

#### Study Strategies

- Create a predictable routine in your class so students can focus on the content.
- Provide notes of class lessons. Emphasize key words students need for content comprehension.
- Provide examples of effective language in particular assignments.
- Form groups with a mix of international and native students.
- Pair up students to form "study buddies," with a "native" English speaker for each ESL student.
- Be sure students know about the Peer Tutor Center and Learning Center on campus.
- Good reading strategies are universal. Encourage "Active Reading Techniques" for all students.

#### The ESL Writer

- Evaluate content of the writing before addressing grammar. Focus on problems that prevent understanding of meaning; ignore minor problems that don't cloud understanding.

### Additional Considerations

"There are hundreds of languages in the world, but a smile speaks them all."

#### Understand the process of language acquisition

- BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills) may take up to 2 years to develop.
  - Learning language for a friendly visit to another country is relatively easy.
- CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency) may take 5-10 years to develop.
  - Gaining the language skills necessary for *academic success* in another culture is quite challenging.
- Respect the "silent period." Learning a new language means starting with a "silent period" in which listening, observing, and understanding the language must take place for some time before the individual can produce ideas in the new language.

#### Be aware of culture shock

- Learn and use the student's name. Foreign names can be hard to pronounce. Ask the student to repeat it slowly and give your best attempt. If you wish, ask the student if you can use a nickname. Decide on one together.
- The transition to a new culture, with new language and social expectations, can be challenging. Visiting with a counselor in the Student Development Center may be helpful.
- Anxiety impedes learning. A good relationship with teacher and classmates can help English learners with the challenges they face. Encourage a learning environment where students feel safe and secure in taking the risk of academic interaction.