



Ten Strategies for Success

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Effective ESOL Instructors incorporate the following ten strategies to help adults learn, practice and use the English language:

1. **Get to know your students and their needs.** English language learners' abilities, experiences, and expectations can affect learning. Get to know their backgrounds and goals as well as proficiency levels and skill needs.
2. **Use visuals to support your instruction.** English language learners need context in their learning process. Using gestures, expressions, pictures, and realia makes words and concepts concrete and connections more obvious and memorable. Encourage learners to do the same as they try to communicate meaning.
3. **Model tasks before asking your learners to do them.** Learners need to become familiar with vocabulary, conversational patterns, grammar structures, and even activity formats before producing them. Demonstrate a task before asking learners to respond.
4. **Foster a safe classroom environment.** Like many adult learners, some English language learners have had negative educational experiences. Many will be unfamiliar with classroom activities and with expectations common in the United States. Include time for activities that allow learners to get to know one another.
5. **Watch both your teacher talk and your writing.** Teacher talk refers to the directions, explanations, and general comments and conversations that a teacher may engage in within the classroom. Keep teacher talk simple and clear; use pictures, gestures, demonstrations, and facial expressions to reinforce messages whenever possible. Use print letters, with space between letters and words, and do not overload the chalkboard with too much or disorganized text.

Although it is important for the teacher to understand the structure of the English language, it may not always be appropriate to provide complex explanations of vocabulary and grammar rules, especially to beginning-level learners. In other words, don't feel you have to explain everything at all times. At times it is enough for learners to know the response needed.

6. **Use scaffolding techniques to support tasks.** Build sequence, structure, and support in learning activities. Ask learners to fill in words in a skeletal dialogue and then create a dialogue of a similar situation, or supply key vocabulary before asking learners to complete a form. Recycle vocabulary, structures, and concepts in the course of instruction. Build redundancy into the curriculum to help learners practice using learned vocabulary or skills in new situations or for different purposes.
7. **Bring authentic materials to the classroom.** Use materials like newspapers, signs, sale flyers, telephone books, and brochures in the classroom. These materials help learners connect what they are learning to the real world and familiarize them with the formats and information in such publications. However, do prepare learners beforehand (e.g., pre-teach vocabulary) and carefully structure lessons (e.g., select relevant, manageable chunks of the authentic material) to make this work.
8. **Don't overload learners.** Strike a balance in each activity between elements that are familiar and mastered and those that are new. Asking learners to use both new vocabulary and a new grammatical structure in a role-playing activity where they have to develop original dialogue may be too much for them to do successfully.

9. ***Balance variety and routine in your activities.*** Patterns and routines provide familiarity and security and support learners as they tackle new items. But English language learners, like all learners, have a variety of preferences for processing and learning information. They also can get bored. Give learners opportunities to experience and demonstrate their mastery of language in different ways. Challenge them with activities that speak to their lives, concerns, and goals as adults.
10. ***Celebrate success.*** Progress for language learners can be slow and incremental. Learners need to know that they are moving forward. Make sure expectations are realistic; create opportunities for success; set short-term as well as long-term goals; and help learners recognize and acknowledge their own progress.

* Florez, M.C. & Burt, M. (2002) *Beginning to work with adult ESL learners: Some considerations* ERIC Q & A. Washington, DC: National Center for ESL Literacy Education.