

# **Suggestions for Modifying Content For Beginning and Intermediate Level ESL Students**

by

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## **How do content modifications affect the academic success of the ESL (English as a Second Language) student?**

Students learning a new language face difficulties that are compounded when they are simultaneously presented with the challenge of learning new content. In the areas of Math, Science, Social Studies, and Language Arts, modifications can help the ESL students understand course content more quickly and more fully.

We are all partners in our students' education. Mainstream teachers have the content knowledge and ESL teachers have language acquisition knowledge. By working together and implementing recommended modifications, all teachers can provide grade-appropriate content instruction in a more simplified form that ESL students need.

The usual pattern of language acquisition is: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The most difficult skills are those involving reading and writing. Therefore, adapting verbal and written instructions, and providing information in visual and auditory forms can help ESL students understand information more quickly and completely. The following includes specific suggestions for modification of material and modified samples of tests and homework.

## General Modification Strategies

- Teach the **new concepts and vocabulary** before beginning the unit.

This will help the student make the connection between their prior knowledge and new information.

Example: Students can make **flash cards** with the word on one side and the definition and/or a picture on the other. Writing a sentence that includes the word with appropriate meaning and writing the word in their native language are also helpful.

- Show the student a **video, movie, or DVD** of the new topic before teaching it.

The images will support the new information and make it easier for the students to understand. They will be able to connect with their prior knowledge of the topic, giving them useful background information.

- Provide a **modified study guide** to the student before starting the unit.

This will help the student know what is important so that he/she will not be so overwhelmed by less important details when reading the text and studying class notes.

- Provide the student with **copies of the teacher's class notes** or legible notes from another student.

Taking notes is a very difficult skill for ELLs. With oral lectures, students have difficulty transcribing sounds, especially if terms/concepts are unfamiliar, and often miss the gist of notes. They tend to write down unimportant details that are usually more aurally familiar.

- On the board, write the **topic, page, and chapter** of the material being covered for that lesson.

Visual support for any lesson is helpful and serves as a reference.

- Provide student with **lower level books** (elementary grades 3-5) and materials on the same topic.

Books with more pictures and fewer, simplified vocabulary words are easier to comprehend and enable students to understand vocabulary and concepts more readily.

- Use **drills** without language or with simple language to reinforce concepts. Always include an **example**.

Drills set a pattern that is easier for the student to follow.

- Ask student to **highlight unfamiliar words** in directions and in questions.

This will help you, the teacher, to see whether his/her comprehension difficulty is with language, sentence structure, or content.

- Use **graphic organizers** so that student can “see” information more clearly and be able to “see” and identify important information.
- Explore the **web** for downloadable worksheets, graphic organizers, and lower level materials.

There are also interactive web sites that students can use individually. Supplemental materials can be helpful when planning modifications.

- Use the **Special Needs Workbook** that is available with many curricula.

Grade-level content is presented in a simplified and more streamlined way that is easier for the student to comprehend.

### **Modifying Tests and Quizzes**

- Use more **white space** on the page so the text is not so overwhelming.
- Use a **larger font** size.
- Ask **fewer questions**, but include the same content information.
- **Group** the questions into smaller groups, perhaps by topic or concept.
- Provide a **word bank**.
- Use simple **vocabulary** in test instructions.
- Provide a **sample answer** for each group of questions.

### **Alternatives to traditional tests that normally require written, open-ended responses**

- Use **cloze activities** (fill in the blank).  
Note: For more modification, limit the word choices to fewer possibilities.
- Use **multiple choice and matching** exercises.

- Use **visuals** like graphic organizers, charts, or pictures.
- Allow student to take an **oral** test in place of a written essay or open-ended question.
- Note: Try to modify existing tests, before giving alternative tests.

Intermediate level students would benefit from modified tests, while beginning students may more likely require alternative tests.

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