

## 10 Strategies for Teaching Adult English Language Learners

1. *Get to know your students and their needs.* English language learners' abilities, experiences, and expectations can affect their learning. Get to know your students' backgrounds and goals as well as their 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 regalia makes words and concepts concrete and connections more obvious and memorable.
3. *Bring authentic materials to the classroom.* Use materials like newspapers, signs, sale flyers, telephone books, and brochures. These 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 authentic material) to make this work.
4. *Model tasks before asking learners to do them.* Learners need to become familiar with vocabulary, conversational patterns, grammatical structures, and even activity formats before producing them. Demonstrate a task before asking learners to do it.
5. *Foster a safe classroom environment.* Like many adult learners, some English language learners have had negative educational experiences. Many are 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.
6. *Watch 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 letter with space between letters and words, and do not overload the chalkboard with too much or disorganized text.

It is certainly important for the teacher to understand the structure of the English language. However, it is not always appropriate to give learners explanations of each discrete grammar and vocabulary point. At times it is enough for learners to know the correct response.

7. *Use scaffolding techniques to support tasks.* Build sequencing, 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. Building redundancy into the curriculum to help learners practice using learned vocabulary or skills in new situations or for different purposes.
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.* Although patterns and routines provide familiarity and support as learners tackle new tasks, learners can become bored. Give learners opportunities to experience and demonstrate their mastery of language in different ways. Challenge them with a variety of activities that speak to their lives, concerns, and goals as adults.
10. *Celebrate success.* Progress for language learners is incremental and can move slowly. 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.

*This article is an excerpt from "Beginning to Work with Adult English Language Learners: Some Considerations" written by MaryAnn Cunningham Florez and Miriam Burt, published in National Center for ESL Literacy Education newsletter dated October 2001.*