

A Compilation of Strategies for Supporting English Learner (EL) Students During Distance Learning

Strategy #1: Maintain Frequent Contact with your EL Students

Lack of personal interaction negatively impacts EL students' performance. Maintaining frequent contact is key for EL students.

- Establish regular virtual meetings
- Reach out to the students at home
- Focus on the whole child (academic, emotional, and physical health)

Strategy #2: Create A Welcoming Online Learning Environment

Help ELs feel comfortable asking for assistance and provide opportunities for them to monitor their own progress

- Establish opportunities to meet face-to-face such in a virtual classroom platform
- Allow students to submit their assignments in stages
- When scoring assignments, provide purposeful feedback beyond “correct” and “incorrect.”
- Provide an optional peer-review forum for students to collaborate with each other.

Strategy #3: Provide Written Rubrics

ELs may be unaccustomed to American schools or have no experience writing academic papers. Provide written rubrics for Assignments. Be sure to review the written Rubric – a short video may be a useful tool as it provides EL students multiple opportunities to (later) review the content.

Rubrics:

- Specifically state the instructors' expectations
- Break down each part of the assignment on which the instructor will assess the English learner students
- Provide ELs with purposeful feedback to promote a deeper understanding of lessons
- Allow EL to adjust their approach on future assignments to earn higher grades
- Allow EL students to master learning objectives



Strategy #4: Scaffold to Fill-in Prior Learning Gaps.

Many EL students have not had much (if any) exposure to U.S. K-12 school content such as U.S. history, English, and literature courses. When an assignment requires EL students to connect new learning objectives to previous knowledge, instructors cannot assume EL students have mastered prior foundational content.

- Provide background information that is necessary for understanding the new material.
- Provide information from resources that imparts information in an accessible way.
- Provide opportunities for ELs to explore topics as needed which helps to ensure they will succeed.

Strategy #5: Use Multiple Forms of Assessment

Use multiple forms of assessment and provide flexibility for EL students to demonstrate content mastery. Remember assessing language skills is different than assessing content skills.

- Provide multiple options for assessments to take the burden off demonstrating language skills and instead emphasize demonstrating content mastery
- Focus attention on learning to reduce some of the stress of the assessment itself.
- Provide options that allow EL students to engage in the learning style and domain in which they excel.
 - PowerPoint presentations with voiceovers
 - Screencast of themselves reviewing different online resources
 - Draw a mind map or other artistic expression to demonstrate their understanding of the material.

Strategy #6: Provide Opportunities for English Learner Student to Amplify Their Voices.

ELs come to school needing more opportunities to practice English in a variety of settings. The more teachers can get ELs speaking, writing, and communicating, the better.

- Set-up times to talk your ELs on the phone.
- Utilize digital creation and storytelling activities.
- Jeff Knutson (2018) made some recommendations to amplify ELs' voices.
 - Focus on what ELs have, not what they lack. Look for multimedia-rich digital tools that help students create their own content to communicate and think beyond translations.
 - Use technology as a scaffold toward more person-to-person communication by giving ELs space to record themselves, listen back, and re-record before

- sharing with others then provide them opportunities to work with partners or in small groups.¹
- Give ELs an authentic audience for their work by having an audience of classmates, peers, friends, or family to provide ELs experience with authentic, meaningful communication in the world.

Other ways for ELs to connect online, both in real-time and in electronic forums, could include:

- Setting up groups and group folders shared virtually for student collaboration within your classes for peer feedback, calls, or written support.
- Using features of electronic videoconferencing platforms for whole group and small group discussion or feedback.
- Record questions and learning needs from ELs by video and provide support back to students based on their input. Create ranges of time for doing this and recording responses. Reach out to ELs needing more support, as needed.

Strategy #7: Remain Flexible with Pacing.

Individual learning styles, particularly when it comes to pace and particularly for ELs, will be evident in remote learning. Consider these strategies for English learner students:

- Have all the work for the week posted by the start of the week and due at the end of the week (or even over the weekend). Be consistent in the schedule, expectations, and communication with ELs to support families.
- Try working with “windows of time” instead of specific due dates for some assignments.
- Be prepared to differentiate due dates for students who struggle with the rigor or style of remote learning or just need more time due to their English language needs.

Strategy #8: Chunk Content Instruction into Smaller Pieces for English Learner Students.

Learning online is different from learning in a face-to-face environment for EL students.

- Limit the frequency of assigning long text passages or even long videos to EL students.
- Chunk or intentionally pacing instruction to deliver one idea at a time or one step at a time.
- Add visuals to represent ideas.
- Provide online interactions to allow EL students to discuss ideas to process the information learned.

¹ Pairing students or breaking them into small groups could be done through various technologies. See below for more information.

Strategy 9: Collaborate with the other Core Content Teachers

- Use online tools and applications to link to the main lessons of the content classroom teachers.
- ESOL teachers can focus on linking vocabulary support and comprehension skills necessary for content classes.

Strategy #10: Use EL-friendly online supports you might have already used or are familiar with that have variable language functions first.

- Many online tools have built-in features to support differentiated instruction for ELs.
- From basic translation to drawing tools, there are many technologies that can support EL-centered learning activities.
- A curated list is provided on the ESOL Language Program website:
 - [Online Resources for ESOL Teachers](#)
 - [Suggestions for Online ESOL Classes & Activities](#)

SOURCES:

Guidance on Remote Learning for English Learners. Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. (n.d.). Educational Resources for Students and Families. Retrieved April 21, 2020, from <http://www.doe.mass.edu/covid19/ed-resources.html>

Strategies for Teaching English Language Learners in the Online Classroom - Center for Teaching and Learning: Wiley Education Services. (2020, January 31). Retrieved April 21, 2020, from <https://ctl.wiley.com/strategies-teaching-english-language-learners-online-classroom/>