



# Evidence-Based Instructional Strategies for Elementary English Learner Students



Research provides insight into specific instructional strategies that should be used in every classroom to support elementary English learner students in developing both English language skills and academic content. This infographic is a quick reference to these evidence-based practices that can be used daily by elementary classroom teachers to support effective instruction for their English learner students.

## Teaching academic vocabulary

1. Begin teaching academic vocabulary in the primary grades.<sup>1</sup>
2. Teach content-specific academic vocabulary daily during content-area classes.<sup>2,3</sup>
3. Select target words critical for understanding the text for intensive vocabulary instruction.<sup>2</sup>
4. Use a variety of instructional activities such as providing student-friendly definitions; applying definitions in context; providing examples, non-examples, and concrete representations; having students respond to questions to show their understanding of the selected words; and providing structured opportunities for students to talk about academic words.<sup>2</sup>
5. Teach students to use context clues, word parts, cognates, and dictionaries to determine the meanings of unfamiliar words.<sup>2,3,5,6</sup>



## Supporting content-area learning

1. Scaffold content-area learning by using videos, visuals, and graphic organizers to help students understand content.<sup>2,3,4,5,6,7</sup>
2. Plan pair and small group learning opportunities for students to talk about content with peers.<sup>2,3</sup>
3. Have students engage in content-focused writing activities to develop academic language and writing skills.<sup>2</sup>
4. Provide opportunities for students to talk and work together on writing assignments.<sup>2</sup>



## Using home language

1. Preview and review content material in the home language.<sup>3</sup>
2. Read storybooks in the home language.<sup>3</sup>
3. Have students use their home language in conversation to interpret new content or vocabulary.<sup>3</sup>
4. Provide students with definitions of target vocabulary words in their home language.<sup>3</sup>
5. Teach students to use cognates to determine the meanings of unfamiliar English words.<sup>2,3,6</sup>
6. Connect new concepts and content to students' background knowledge or prior experiences.<sup>3,4,6,7</sup>
7. Support English learner students in developing literacy in their home language.<sup>6</sup>



## Assessing linguistic and academic progress

1. Screen for literacy challenges and reading problems.<sup>1,3</sup>
2. Progress monitor English learner students at risk for reading problems more than three times per year.<sup>1,3</sup>
3. Use available assessment information to identify English learner students who persistently struggle with specific aspects of language and literacy development.<sup>2,3</sup>
4. Use performance benchmarks to adjust instruction when progress is not sufficient.<sup>1</sup>
5. Guide instruction using formative assessment data.<sup>1</sup>



## Providing or intervention to struggling English learner students

1. Provide intervention for at least 30 minutes per day in groups of no more than five or six students.<sup>1,2,3</sup>
2. Configure homogeneous groups based on student English language proficiency level or target skill for intervention.<sup>2,8</sup>
3. Provide teacher-led, small group, explicit instruction on the target skill.<sup>2,8</sup>
4. Focus intervention on vocabulary development, listening and reading comprehension strategies, and foundational reading skills for English learner students struggling with foundational reading skills.<sup>2</sup>



- 1 Gersten, R., Baker, S.K., Shanahan, T., Linan-Thompson, S., Collins, P., & Scarcella, R. (2007). *Effective literacy and English language instruction for English learners in the elementary grades: A practice guide* (NCEE 2007-4011). National Center for Education and Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences. U.S. Department of Education. <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/PracticeGuide/6>.
- 2 Baker, S., Lesaux, N., Jayanthi, M., Dimino, J., Proctor, C.P., Morris, J., Gersten, R., Haymond, K., Kieffer, M.J., Linan-Thompson, S., & Newman-Gonchar, R. (2014). *Teaching academic content and literacy to English learners in elementary and middle school* (NCEE 2014-4012). National Center for Education and Evaluation and Regional Assistance (NCEE), Institute of Education Sciences. U.S. Department of Education. <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/PracticeGuide/19>.
- 3 National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2017). *Promising and effective practices for English learners in grades Pre-K to 12*. In R. Takanichi & S. Le Menestrel (Eds.) *Promoting the educational success of children and youth learning English: Promising futures*. (pp. 291-335). The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/24677>.
- 4 U.S. Department of Education, Office of English Language Acquisition. (2017). *English Learner Tool Kit* (2nd Rev. ed.). Office of English Language Acquisition. <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oela/english-learner-toolkit/index.html>.
- 5 Gibson, C. (2016). Bridging English language learner achievement gaps through effective vocabulary development strategies. *English Language Teaching*, 9(9), 134-138. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/elt.v9n9p134>.
- 6 Turkan, S., Bicknell, J., & Croft, A. (2012). *Effective practices for developing literacy skills of English language learners in the English language arts classroom*. Educational Testing Service. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2333-8504.2012.tb02285.x>.
- 7 Neri, R., Lozano, M., Chang, S., & Herman, J. (2016). *High-Leverage Principles of Effective Instruction for English Learners. From College and Career Ready Standards to Teaching and Learning in the Classroom: A Series of Resources for Teachers*. The Center on Standards & Assessment Implementation. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED570911.pdf>.
- 8 Richards-Tutor, C., Aceves, T., & Reese, L. (2016). *Evidence-Based Practices for English Learners* (Document No. IC-18). University of Florida. Collaboration for Effective Educator, Development, Accountability, and Reform Center. <https://cedar.education.ufl.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/EBP-for-english-learners.pdf>.