



Integrate oral and written English language instruction into content-area teaching



This recommendation outlines ways that teachers effectively support English learners in various content-area classrooms by providing them with explicit instruction in reading, comprehension, and discussion of complex texts. English learners are uniquely challenged when accessing complex texts because they need to learn a second language as well as the content. Teachers must find efficient methods for helping students understand the content. Specifically, it is recommended that teachers use structured academic activities to develop a deep understanding of complex texts.



How to carry out the recommendation	Potential roadblocks
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Strategically use instructional tools—such as short videos, visuals, and graphic organizers—to anchor instruction and help students make sense of content.2. Explicitly teach the content-specific academic vocabulary, as well as the general academic vocabulary that supports it, during content-area instruction.3. Provide daily opportunities for students to talk about content in pairs or small groups.4. Provide writing opportunities to extend student learning and understanding of the content material.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Based on perceived time constraints, teachers from various content areas may oppose using instructional time for developing speech and writing skills.2. Teachers from specific content areas may lack the skills needed for integrating speech and written instruction.3. Teachers may believe that including explicit language instruction will not benefit native English speakers.

Reference: Baker, S., Lesaux, N., Jayanthi, M., Dimino, J., Proctor, C. P., Morris, J., . . . Newman-Gonchar, R. (2014). *Teaching academic content and literacy to English learners in elementary and middle school* (NCEE 2014-4012). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance (NCEE), Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/PracticeGuide/19>



How to carry out the recommendation

1. Strategically use instructional tools—such as short videos, visuals, and graphic organizers—to anchor instruction and help students make sense of content.

Use visual models such as photographs and videos to provide a common experience for students. Common learning experiences offer students the opportunity to participate in interesting conversations both as a class and in small groups. Be sure to use tools that interest students, and provide students with questions that they can think about while they engage with the chosen educational tool.

Graphic organizers can also be a helpful educational tool to support learning because it provides a visual map of the text content. Graphic organizers can help clarify the content focus and make connections across the text. Teachers should begin by showing students how graphic organizers can be used to increase understanding of texts and then gradually release students to complete organizers independently. Sample lessons and organizers can be found on pages 34–36 of the practice guide referenced on the first page of this document.

2. Explicitly teach the content-specific academic vocabulary, as well as the general academic vocabulary that supports it, during content-area instruction.

During various content-area classes, provide explicit instruction around content-specific and general academic vocabulary essential for understanding instruction. Content-area teachers need to collaborate to build a list of specific words that students need in order to develop an in-depth understanding. They should select words that are essential for comprehending the current text or future content. When words have multiple meanings based on the context, it is important to teach the general language meanings along with how those meanings differ in different contexts. After explicit instruction about word meaning, teachers should also provide students with practice activities through ongoing tasks. Additionally, students may come across other words that are unfamiliar but not identified as essential for in-depth understanding, so it is important to give them other places to look, such as dictionaries or functional websites. Both newly learned words and previously learned words should be reviewed regularly to retain the learning.

3. Provide daily opportunities for students to talk about content in pairs or small groups.

It is important to allow time for students to discuss new content and work in small groups to gain information from one another and practice the language they are studying. Additionally, small-group discussions provide teachers with opportunities to assess students' level of understanding of the content. Groups should be diverse so that students who are more proficient with English can serve as models for students who are less proficient. Groups should gather more than once a day for short durations.

Effective discussions are structured and actively monitored by the teacher; otherwise, academic discussions deteriorate into social discussions. For structure and lesson examples, see pages 40–41 of the practice guide. Allow students who are less proficient with English to

begin their discussion in their primary languages to allow for understanding in a language that they understand before communicating in English. It may be appropriate at times to provide students with less proficiency in English with questions that have simplified language but not simplified cognitive requirements.

4. Provide writing opportunities to extend student learning and understanding of the content material.

Provide opportunities for students to have time for writing as a way to develop an understanding of a new subject matter. These activities could include writing a summary, creating a visual map to cultivate ideas, or answering questions put together by the teacher.

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Potential roadblocks and how to address them

Roadblock	Suggested Approach
<i>Based on perceived time constraints, teachers from various content areas may oppose using instructional time for developing speech and writing skills.</i>	While it initially takes more time to teach language and content, it is beneficial to do so because it allows students to develop a deeper understanding of content and thus retain more content. Language development activities are not intended to replace content but are instead alternatives for activities such as seatwork and silent reading. Additionally, teachers should review and prioritize instruction because there is not time to cover all curriculum to the same depth of understanding.
<i>Teachers from specific content areas may lack the skills needed for integrating speech and written instruction.</i>	Some content-area teachers might need to learn new skills for integrating explicit literacy instruction into their content area. Professional development and cross-discipline collaboration teams can support teachers in gaining new knowledge, developing effective lessons, and applying new skills in the classroom. Common planning time for teachers is essential to supporting this effort.
<i>Teachers may believe that including explicit language instruction will not benefit native English speakers.</i>	It has been shown that these methods of instruction benefit all students. English learners and native English speakers who are struggling with literacy show similar patterns in their areas of weakness; therefore, this instruction would benefit them as well.



For more information on the research evidence and references to support this recommendation, or for more detailed explanation from the What Works Clearinghouse committee who developed this recommendation, please refer to the practice guide cited at the bottom of the first page of this document.