

Strategies for Teaching English as an Additional Language (EAL) Students

Overview

- 4 key measurable skills, each at varying levels of ability:
Reading Writing Listening Speaking
- An EAL student will often have differing strengths across the 4 skills. Reading and writing can be worked on independently, but listening and speaking skill will often provide a barrier to learning.
- Non-native English speakers often need more time to process language and new concepts. This can be done using the Pre-teach, Teach, Post-teach strategy.

Pre-teach, Teach, Post-teach Strategy

1. Pre-teach

- Students should prepare before all lectures and tutorials. They need to be guided how to do this.
- Ask students to read the set readings before the lecture. Ask them to note any new words in their Vocabulary Diary and look up the meaning. Ask them to answer the concept checking end of chapter questions as they read (Reading the questions first will help guide them to the key points in the text.).
- Ask students to rewrite the key terminology in their own words before the lecture in their Key Terms Logbook.
- Ask them to check their understanding with a bilingual dictionary where necessary.
- Ensure you put up lecture notes and key readings on learnJCU one week in advance so EAL students have a chance to pre-read. Ask them to prep for each lecture the weekend before. For EAL students 1-2 hours preparation is not unreasonable.
- Asking students to writing a very short summary of a key reading will ensure students engage with a text.

2. Teach – In lectures

- The most important element is to signpost content to the EAL student, and then clearly and logical define and review it. Do not assume understanding.
- Set and follow a clear pattern to your lectures and do not deviate. Use a clear, numbered content page. This is important *to guide their listening*.
 - Tell them what you will do – “Today we will discuss four key areas, these are 1, 2, 3...”
 - Tell them – “Let’s define adaptation”
 - Tell them what you’ve done – “Today we have discussed the four points, 1, 2, 3...”
- Leave time for questions at the end where possible.
- Modulate your speech – slow and steady.
- Highlight/bold key words in your slides for easy identification. Ask EAL student to pre-study these terms before the lecture. This will help them with the terminology, but more

importantly acts as audible cues which help them to decode the spoken language during the lecture.

- Use short, declarative sentences in slides: “A **Keystone Species** is the dominant species which has the strongest impact on a habitat”; Avoid overly long sentences: “A **Keystone Species** is one that has the most significant impact on an ecosystem, it is particularly noticeable that this is not always related to abundance but rather predation or ability to significantly affect organisms in the surrounding habitat.”
- Use dot points where possible. The lecture slide should be *a guide* of the content, not the content itself. It should act as signposts to listening.
- Include a list of key terminology on the last slide of each slide set. This will act as an in lecture revision tool ‘Does anyone have a question about any of these terms we’ve covered today?’, but also as a pre and post study guide.

2. Teach – In tutorials

- Avoid closed questions (Yes/No) . Do not ask ‘Do you understand?’, ‘Is that clear?’, or ‘Have you got that?’. Students will avoid looking foolish by saying ‘Yes’ even if they are having difficulty.
- Use open questions to check comprehension. “Tran, can you tell me what ‘standard deviation’ means?”. This serves two functions, firstly it checks that students truly understand a concept, but it also allows other students to learn by listening to their peers (in a way that might be more effective for them). You may wish to ask more than one student to answer each key point to get a variety of responses, but also to allow EAL students the opportunity to listen more than once.
- Use the Test-Teach-Test method. Don’t assume an EAL student has the ‘basics’.
Test - by asking a comprehension question “Tracey, what is adaptation?”. If it is known, don’t spend time rehashing this knowledge, move on. When you ask a question that draws a blank move to the second section Teach.
Teach – Teach to the weakness, not the strength. Ask a stronger student to explain the concept, or reiterate yourself in simple language: “Adaptation is changing to suit an environment”.
Test – Ask a weaker student to explain the concept *in their own words*. Repetition of the ‘official’ line *does not indicate internalization or understanding*.
This method is based on the principle that acquisition of language (or content) must follow the rule *input-processing-output* (repetitively). It also assumes that a tutor must teach to the weaknesses and not the strengths. It is easier to teach to strengths as it allows the tutor to feel ‘successful’ and is not as intimidating as facing deficiencies.

3. Post-teach

- Post-teach allows students to review and solidify new learning. Ideally this should occur a minimum of 1 day after the first encounter with new material. It is also advisable to follow the revision strategy of 1 day - 1 week - 1 month review.

- Many students do not understand how to most effectively plan their study time and can fall into the trap of rote memorization without understanding. This may also be a feature of their previous educational experience, which may be more exam based rather than problem based. An educator ideally should provide students with the process to effectively study. Some suggestions are listed below.
- Release a list of 10 key questions for each week as an optional study practice (after the lecture, say on Friday of each week – easily set up in learnJCU as an auto feature which requires no work after the initial setup). This should not be marked, but act as a guide to EAL students on what is important to review. Sometimes international students may have some difficulty identifying a focus and can spend significant periods of time overanalyzing one small concept. Providing them a guide on what to review, and in what time frame, can help them to understand expectations.
- Ask students to write a summary of last week’s material as revision practice. Can be reviewed by a ‘study buddy’. Lecturers should not mark this, rather it is a guide for revision/study.
- Release a ‘Cheat Sheet’ which lists the key terms in a glossary format *one week after* the lecture for students to review (again, this can be set up for auto release through learnJCU).
- Ensure audio recordings are available *immediately* after lectures for EAL students to review. Don’t miss this step!
- Pair each EAL student with a local ‘Study Buddy’ on a 1-1 or 1-2 basis (no larger). This should be a high achieving student, or someone who is comfortable with the material. Encourage them to meet weekly. Do not underestimate the power of collaborative learning, this is a highly effective tool. Often EAL students will be too embarrassed to ask for help from a lecturer or tutor but will ask another student. Facilitating this connection is one of the most effective things you can do as an educator. Do not ignore the importance of having this set up *from the first week*. You can provide the study buddy with an initial question set to facilitate discussion. (If you feel that there are not enough high achieving students to facilitate this set up, combine a number of EAL students into a group of varying ability levels and ask them to review as a group after each lecture using the guided question set.).

Study Buddy Guided Question Set

Use these questions to facilitate a discussion of the material covered in the most recent lecture.

1. What was the topic of this week’s lecture?
2. What do you think were the main points from the lecture?
3. Can you explain the key terms in your own words?
4. What areas did you struggle to understand?
5. In your own words can you explain what is meant by the key term
_____ ?