

Twenty Tips for Teachers of Language Minority Students

1. ***Increase your own knowledge:*** Learn as much as you can about the language and culture of your students. Go to movies, read books. Keep the similarities and differences in mind and then check your knowledge by asking students whether they agree with your impressions. Learn as much of the student's language as you can; even a few words help. Widen your own worldview; think of alternative ways to reach the goals you have for your class.
2. ***Simplify your language:*** Speak directly to the student, emphasizing important nouns and verbs. Use as few extra words as possible. Repetition and speaking louder doesn't help; rephrasing, accompanied by body language, does. Avoid slang and idiomatic expressions.
3. ***Announce the lesson's objective and activities:*** Write the objectives on the board and review them orally before class begins. It is also helpful to place the lessons in the context of its broader theme and preview upcoming lessons.
4. ***Write legibly:*** Remember that some students have low levels of literacy or are unaccustomed to the Roman alphabet. Use the chalkboard or overhead projector to write important words.
5. ***Demonstrate; use manipulatives:*** Whenever possible, communicate with gestures, pictures and objects that help get the meaning across. Use a variety of different pictures or objects for the same idea. Give an immediate context for new words.
6. ***Make use of all senses:*** Give students a chance to touch things, to listen to sounds, even to smell and taste when possible. Talk about the words that describe these senses as the student physically experiences something. Write new words as well as say them.
7. ***Use filmstrips, films, videotapes, and audiocassettes with books:*** Obtain audio-visual materials from the school or district media center to improve a content lesson. It is helpful to preview the audio-visual materials before showing them to the class, both for possible language difficulties and misleading cultural information.
8. ***Bring realia into lessons:*** Use visual displays (graphs, charts, photos), objects, and authentic materials, like newspaper and magazine clippings, in the lessons and assignments. These help provide non-verbal information and also help match various learning styles.
9. ***Adapt materials:*** Don't "water down" the content. Rather, make the concepts more accessible and comprehensible by adding pictures, charts, maps, time-lines, and diagrams, in addition to simplifying the language.
10. ***Pair or group language minority students with native speakers:*** Much of a student's language learning comes from interacting with his/her peers. Give students tasks to complete that require interaction of each member of the group while ensuring that the language minority student has linguistically easier tasks. Utilize cooperative learning techniques in a student-center classroom.
11. ***Develop a student-centered approach to teaching and learning:*** Instructional facilitators let students assume more responsibility for their learning. When activities are planned that actively involve students in each lesson, students can better process the material presented and acquire the language as well.

12. ***Have students do hand-on activities:*** Plan for students to manipulate new materials through hands-on activities, such as role-play and simulations. This includes TPR (total physical response), laboratory experiments, drawing pictures and story sequence, and writing their own math word problems.
13. ***List and Review instructions step-by-step:*** Before students begin an activity, familiarize them with the entire list of instructions. Then, have students work on each step individually before moving on to the next step. This process is ideal for teaching students to solve math and science word problems.
14. ***Ask inferential and higher-order thinking questions:*** Encourage students' reasoning ability and higher order thinking skills such as hypothesizing, inferencing, analyzing, justifying, and predicting.
15. ***Build on the student's prior knowledge:*** Find out as much as you can about how and what students learned in their own country. Then try to make a connection between the ideas and concepts you are teaching and students' previous knowledge or previous way of being taught. Encourage students to point out differences and connect similarities.
16. ***Recognize that students will make language mistakes:*** During the second language acquisition process, students make mistakes; this is natural in the process of learning a language. Make sure that students have understood the information, but do not emphasize the grammatical aspect of their responses. When possible, model the correct grammatical form.
17. ***Increase wait time:*** Give student's time to think and process the information before rushing in with answers. A student may know the answer, but may need a little more processing time in order to say it in English.
18. ***Don't force recent students to speak:*** Give students an opportunity to demonstrate comprehension and knowledge through body actions, drawing pictures, manipulating objects, or pointing.
19. ***Respond to the message:*** If students have the correct answer and it's understandable, don't correct their grammar. The exact word and correct grammatical response will develop with time, especially with young children. Instead, repeat their answer, putting it into standard English, and let students know that you are pleased with their response.
20. ***Support the student's home language and culture; bring it into the classroom:*** Your goal should be to encourage students to keep their home language as they acquire English. Many children in this world grow up speaking more than one language; it's an advantage. Let students help bring about a multicultural perspective to the subject you are teaching. Students might be able to bring in pictures, poems, dances, proverbs, or games. Do what ever you can to help your fluent English-speaking students see the language-minority student as a knowledgeable person from a respected culture.

Adapted from:

Short, D.J. (1991). *Integrating language and content instruction: Strategies and techniques.*

Washington, D.C. National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education

Sullivan, T. (1993). *Sheltered English techniques in the mainstream class: Guidelines and Techniques for Teaching.*

Washington, D.C. Center for Applied Linguistics.