

Tips for Supporting English Learners (ELs) in CTE

Use visuals in CTE classrooms.

English Learners have a harder time processing spoken language. So, when it comes to instruction, even basic directions for classroom procedures, it should be written on the board whenever possible.

Learn about the cultural background of your students.

Avoid forcing a student speak about his/her entire culture. Learn basics of where students come from. Not taking the time to correctly identify a student's country of origin is like not bothering to pronounce their name correctly, is a kind of a small, subtle insult. Make a commitment to be someone who bothers to get it right. Students learn better when they first access what they already know, and this plays a huge role in improving English Learners' literacy skill.

Build in more group work in CTE classrooms.

If you really want the students to learn, they must be engaged. That means less lecturing, teacher-led, whole-class instruction, and more small groups and hands-on activities, where students can practice with their peers in a more personal, lower-risk setting. Provide small-group interventions for students struggling with specific problems in language development.

Allow some scaffolding with the native language when needed.

When a student is still very new to a language, it is okay to pair the English Learner with other students who speak his/her native language. If you give students questions to answer, but the EL does not yet have the proficiency to handle writing his or her response in English, avoid making them just sit there. Allow them to answer questions in their first language if they are able.

Use sentence stems in CTE when needed to give students practice.

All students, not just English language learners, need practice with academic conversations. *Sentence frames – partially completed sentences like “ I am calculating an object's _____ in terms of position, _____, and acceleration.*

Pre-teach whenever possible.

If you are going to be covering a particular CTE concept English Learners must know or career material in weeks to come, give them a copy of it beforehand.

Be on the lookout for unique CTE vocabulary.

For most of these students, their background knowledge may be lacking, so it is important to directly teach certain vocabulary words. Use pictures because some things are not common in their first language. *Examples for Automotive: brakes, coolant, hoses, battery, air filter, etc.*

One way to differentiate for English Learners is to consider the whole list of terms you're going to possibly teach for a unit, and if you think an English Learner may be overwhelmed by such a long list, omit those that are not essential to understanding the larger topic at hand. If they are advanced level in English, yes. If they are beginning level in English, no.

Use graphic organizers in CTE when needed.

Graphic organizers are a great tool to use when teaching English Learners (ELs). Visual illustrations allow ELs to better understand the material while learning important vocabulary. Graphic organizers are most useful to ELs when presented in small group activities. During the activities ELs benefit from opportunities to work cooperatively. This helps discover new learning and ideas.

Students are able to discuss and share their thoughts as they begin to contribute to the group effort. When English Learners use graphic organizers, they show achievement benefits across a variety of content areas, in all grade levels.

Meet students where their reading levels are, even in high school.

Do not expect beginning/intermediate English Learners to be at the same levels as advanced English Learners. You must meet them where they are. It is not about having them at mastery, it is about helping them get better in English. We cannot afford to simply wait for students to "catch on"; we must focus on helping students become proficient with their language usage, well beyond social language skills. How? motivate all students regardless of their English proficiency and academic level.

MOST IMPORTANT! English Learners (ELs) will not learn or be engaged when we have failed to offer support and tools. Tools are not a magical quick "fix," but finding the right tool or resource for a specific student's needs can make a huge difference.