



## Chapter 7

### Adapting Materials for English Language Learners

*Please note: The term limited English proficient (LEP) and English language learner (ELL) are both used to describe students who are not native speakers of English. The term ELL is more frequently used in recent literature in the field and as such is used more frequently in this guide. However, the terms are interchangeable.*

The published materials available to a teacher are never wholly adequate. All groups of learners are unique, with different needs and interests that cannot be met by a single textbook written for a generalized audience. As such, teachers find that they must go searching for the materials that they need or create new ones. This is especially true of teachers in blended classrooms, where the texts used are often not entirely appropriate for ELLs. While creating new materials from time to time is probably unavoidable, it is not reasonable to expect a teacher to create all the class texts (that is, readings, handouts, worksheets, etc.) himself.

Previous chapters in this series have explored how CTE instructors can modify their teaching for a blended classroom. This chapter discusses how the instructor can modify course materials in order to make them more *accessible* - easier to read and understand - for English language learners (ELLs). A short reading passage and its adaptation for ELLs are included as an example of the application of some strategies and techniques introduced here.

#### Improve Readability

CTE teachers can make some texts more accessible for ELLs without changing the wording at all. The techniques outlined can draw attention to key parts of the text, allowing ELLs to grasp the most important information, even though they may not be able to read it in its entirety. The techniques, which involve changing the appearance of

the text or changing the instruction and activities built around the text, are useful for readings that are too long to re-write or adapt in other ways.

- **Highlight key information**

Call ELLs' attention to key words, concepts, and the main ideas of a text by highlighting them. Highlighting can be done with the use of different colored inks or by underlining, circling, italics, or bold type.

- **Preview vocabulary**

Identify the vocabulary in a passage that is the most important and/or the most difficult. Difficult words include those that are uncommon, particularly long, or very technical. In addition to highlighting these words, they can be glossed (defined) and discussed before students do the reading and reviewed afterwards.

- **Use pictures and props**

Find photos, illustrations, and items that can be used before and after a reading assignment to help clarify meaning for ELLs. Photos and illustrations can sometimes be found on the internet, in pamphlets, and in other textbooks. For example, for a reading on electrical safety, show pictures of the items and practices in the text or bring in the tools and safety items themselves to show and use in a demonstration.

- **Use graphic organizers and outlines**

Graphic organizers are visual devices that teachers use to make words and concepts more easily accessible for all learners, not just ELLs. These organizers can be used before a reading to help students brainstorm answers to a question related to the text and to access their background knowledge on a topic. They can be used during a reading to make concepts clearer or after a reading as well to review and expand upon the concepts in the text. Graphic organizers include timelines, flow charts, Venn diagrams, and word webs. Teachers can find free and customizable graphic organizers on Web sites for educators such as the following:

<http://www.teachervision.fen.com/graphic-organizers/printable/6293>

- **Increase “white space,” font size, and use of headings**

Even if you do not have the time to change the words in a text, you can make it more accessible by changing its formatting. If you have an electronic copy of the reading, chunk the parts of the reading into small sections with bolded headlines. Leave more empty space between each section and between the lines of the text. This is often referred to as “white space,” and it can help a text look less dense and more inviting for ELLs, as well as help them more quickly locate and take in main ideas. If the font used in the text is small, make it a little larger.

- **Tape the text**

ELLs learn best when the same information is presented in different ways. Consider asking a native English-speaking student to read a passage out loud into a recorder (or do it yourself) and provide tapes along with the text for ELLs to take home.

### **Adapt Texts**

Short texts can be adapted for the ELLs in a blended classroom. In this sense, to *adapt* means to change the wording of the text in order to make it easier to read. It is important to note that adaptation simplifies the *language* in a text, but *not the content*. ELLs need access to grade-level content. Adaptation increases this access without simplifying the concepts contained in the text. Instructors are encouraged to adapt only those texts that are relatively short (between 1-5 paragraphs) and central to the themes of the lesson.

The following strategies can guide the CTE instructor in modifying important class texts for ELLs.

- **Identify main ideas and key words**

In preparation for adapting a text, read it a few times. Identify its main ideas and the vocabulary that is key to those main ideas. Underline these or list them separately as points of reference – these items must be clear and salient in the adapted version of the text. It is also recommended that you write an outline of your adaptation before

you begin to write to ensure that ideas flow logically and that all important points are covered.

- **Be consistent**

The structure of the adapted passage should be clear and consistent. It is recommended that you begin each paragraph or segment with a clear topic sentence and follow that with a few supporting sentences that provide more detail. This practice can provide important predictability and clarity for the ELL.

- **Shorten sentences**

Whenever possible, break long, complex sentences into two or more sentences. Make sentences short and straightforward and eliminate unnecessary words or clauses. For example, consider the following sentence about first aid for burns:

*After the burn becomes cooler, apply a moisturizer or aloe vera gel to the burn to reduce scratching and itching and to keep the skin moist.*

This sentence could be broken up into three shorter sentences without any loss of meaning:

*Let the burn cool. Then, put on a moisturizer or aloe vera gel. Moisturizer or gel will keep the skin moist (a little wet) and reduce scratching and itching.*

- **Simplify grammar**

Grammar can also be simplified. To some extent, this may happen naturally when you shorten sentences. In addition, use simple tenses (e.g., *I ate* vs. *I have eaten*), difficult-to-define words like *nevertheless* and *insomuch*, and the active voice (e.g., *Tom ate the apple.*) instead of the passive voice (e.g., *The apple was eaten by Tom.*).

- **Simplify vocabulary**

Replace long, uncommon, or otherwise difficult words with shorter, simpler words when possible. For example, *ascertain* could be replaced with *find out*; *obstruct* could be replaced with *stop*. Other words that are not central to the meaning of the passage can be omitted altogether.

- **Rephrase complex ideas**

If a sentence or passage is too difficult to superficially modify, you may need to completely rewrite it. If that's necessary, don't lose the main idea of the original text.

- **Clarify**

In addition to simplifying and eliminating words and sentences, you may also have to add some clarifying language as well. Where necessary, add examples to illustrate a point or give the meaning of a word in parentheses.

- **Consider text appearance**

When adapting a text, do not forget to utilize the previously mentioned techniques for improving the appearance and accessibility of a text. Incorporate plenty of "white space," create bolded headings for different sections of the text, and increase the font size slightly for better readability.

### **Example of Text Adaptation**

The following is a brief passage on first aid that might appear in a book or article used in class. After that, an adaptation of this passage is presented. As you read both texts, try to identify the strategies that were used in the adaptation process.

#### Original Text:

A bystander is often the first to encounter an emergency situation. If you are the first to reach an ill or injured individual, immediately apply the basics of first aid. First, if another person is present, ask him to call or locate help. If you are not trained in first aid and another person is not present, you may decide that you need to leave the injured party and seek help. If you stay, ascertain that the victim is out of danger without putting yourself in harm's way. If the victim must be moved, do so with extreme care. Otherwise, refrain from moving him, due to the possibility of spinal injury. Next, if you are trained to do so, apply basic first aid: clear the victim's airway, check for respiration, and perform rescue breathing. Then, check for circulation and, if necessary, perform CPR. If the victim is bleeding profusely, apply pressure to control it as much as possible.

Adapted Text:

## First Aid



**Part A. Instructions:** Discuss the meanings of the following key words with your teacher:

*injured*

*first aid*

*hazards*

*to clear*

*pressure*

**Part B. Instructions:** If you see a person who is injured (hurt) or sick, apply first aid:

- **Get help first**

Call 911 or send another person for help. If you are alone, decide if you should leave to get help.

- **Look around for hazards**

Make sure the victim (the hurt person) is out of danger. Make sure you are safe, too.

- **Do not move the victim.**

Do not move the victim. He may have injuries to his neck or spine. If you need to move the victim out of danger, move him very carefully.



= spine

- **Apply first aid**



If you are trained, apply first aid:

- CLEAR the airways (the nose, mouth, and throat). Make sure nothing is blocking the victim's breathing.
- CHECK for breathing.
- DO rescue breathing.
- CHECK for circulation.
- DO CPR, if necessary.

- **Apply pressure**

If the victim is bleeding a lot, apply pressure (press down) to control it.

### **Other Strategies**

In addition to the changing the appearance or the wording of difficult texts, instructors can employ other strategies to increase ELLs' access to course content.

- **Decrease the amount of work**

Once you have identified the main ideas of a lesson, consider lessening the work load on ELLs. For example, ask them to read a little less than their native speaking classmates or do a little less homework, while making sure that the reading and homework they are required to do contain the main ideas and key information from the lesson.

- **Increase opportunities for practice, discussion, and review**

While you may decrease the amount of input for ELLs, you can increase the ELLs' opportunities to interact with the text and the new ideas and information it contains. Create more opportunities to practice the new information learned in the text, through

class or small group discussions, review exercises, debates, role plays, demonstrations, and other activity types.

- **Work with an ESL teacher**

ESL teachers and other school staff trained to work with ELLs can be excellent resources to the CTE instructor. Take advantage of opportunities to work with these professionals. They can provide assistance and guidance in the adaptation of materials, suggest or even help design activities to help ELLs practice and review the content of texts, and may even have materials to share.

### **Conclusion**

ELLs need access to the same content as their English-speaking peers in a blended classroom. However, the complex or technical language in which classroom texts are written can be a barrier to that access. Through adaptations that change the appearance and/or wording of a text, as well as through the instruction and appropriate activities, the CTE instructor can help ELLs understand and learn important course content.



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