Ideas for Modifying Lessons for ESL Students

Each ESL student needs a different amount of support in the classroom. At the beginning of the school year, the ESL teacher will provide you with a list of specific modifications that are recommended for each ESL student. To help you develop a unit plan that modifies for your students, use the Modification Plan Form below. These materials are also available on EagleNet should you wish to download the template.

Essentially, there are three components to modify for an ESL student:

- **Content** (the curriculum, essential ideas, key understandings, vocabulary, terms, etc.)
- **Instruction** (the method of presentation, classwork expected of the student, and materials provided to the student)
- **Assessment** (the manner in which student knowledge is evaluated and graded)

Some ideas as to how to modify in each of these areas are provided below. There are also some forms and samples provided for you on EagleNet.

HOW TO MODIFY CONTENT FOR ESL STUDENTS

Depending upon the level of English proficiency, your ESL student will be able to manage a certain amount of material in your class. Remember...ESL students are intelligent and really want to learn what you are teaching! They want to learn some or all of the content of the class. The suggested guidelines might help:

**Early Beginner:** identify two or three essential ideas for students to learn and several background words that would be helpful for students. For example, if you are teaching a unit on the properties of fluids, these new students might be able to learn words such as: water, solid, fluids, liquid, soft, hard, wet, and so on.

**High Beginner / Intermediate:** Identify several essential ideas for students to learn and a concentrated list of core vocabulary. These ESL students would benefit from a shortened list of the vocabulary that you've identified as important for this unit.

**Advanced:** These ESL students should be expected to learn the majority or all of the content that you teach to regular education students. However, they may need more time to complete assignments, demonstrate their knowledge, and more support and structure during lessons and assignments.

HOW TO MODIFY INSTRUCTION AND MATERIALS FOR ESL STUDENTS

Many teachers feel overwhelmed at the prospect of modifying their classroom instruction for ESL students. They may assume they should prepare a completely alternate lessons, or find very different materials for these students. That simply is not true! A few simple strategies will help you
change the existing lesson so that the ESL student can make progress too. Remember: the definition of 'modify' is to change something that already exists, not to create something new.

The key to success in modifying instruction and materials is PRE-PLANNING!!! If you can modify your materials BEFORE the lesson, the ESL student will be able to make the most of the existing instructional time.

Early Beginner: these students can be the most challenging to reach, as their communication skills are not well developed. Try to write out as many simplified directions for them as you can. Provide graphic organizers to them. Pre-copy the class notes and give students the notes before the lesson. Use highlighters and sticky notes to identify the material you expect them to focus on.

High Beginner / Intermediate: Identify several essential ideas for students to learn and a concentrated list of core vocabulary. These ESL students would benefit from a shortened list of the vocabulary that you've identified as important for this unit. For simplified materials that would help these students make progress, we suggest browsing popular ESL sites and sharing materials with colleagues.

Advanced: These ESL students should be expected to learn the majority or all of the content that you teach to regular education students. However, they may need more time to complete assignments, demonstrate their knowledge, and need more support and structure during lessons and assignments. Check out our resources page of ESL sites for more ideas.

The trick to working with these students is to continually check in with them regarding how much they understand. Because these students have strong social language skills, it is easy to assume that they understand much more than they do and/or that they have the background knowledge needed to make good progress. Since these students have spent the past few years learning English, they may not have the same background knowledge as your other students.

HOW TO MODIFY ASSESSMENTS FOR ESL STUDENTS

We recommend identifying the way in which you will assess the ESL student at the outset of the unit. Depending upon the ESL student's level, you might choose one of the following levels of assessment:

Early Beginner / Beginner students: Alternate assessments

High Beginner / Intermediate students: Simplified and/or Modified assessments

Advanced Students: Modified and/or Accommodated assessments

Descriptions of each type of assessment are below. Please note that all ESL students may receive extended time to complete assessments and also use their bilingual translators. These accommodations are recommended by the NYS Department of Education.
Alternate: Allow the ESL student to demonstrate their knowledge in a completely different format. Generally, for beginning students with limited proficiency in English, pictures, drawing, and short verbal explanations work best. At this stage, the student is generally only graded on content, and not on spelling, grammar, or stylistics.

- Label a picture or diagram
- Draw a picture that demonstrates a key idea
- Explain an idea orally
- Answer a few questions orally
- Draw lines between vocabulary terms and pictures
- Allow students to submit a project in lieu of an in-class test. The project might take a week or more for the student to complete.

Simplified: Develop a short assessment that evaluates only the essential ideas and core vocabulary that the ESL student was required to learn.

- True/false
- Multiple choice with two answers
- Matching with a limited number of choices
- Word bands provided

Modified: Use the same test that you've prepared for regular education students, but shorten it and focus on essential ideas and core vocabulary.

- Cross out half the questions
- Require students to complete only certain portions of the test
- Provide a word bank (write it on the test)
- Allow students to choose to answer 5 of 10 questions
- Provide multiple choice answers for questions that would normally require students to create an answer
- Turn short answer into multiple choice or a math problem
- Shorten the length of the required answer
- For multiple choice, cross out one or two of the incorrect answers

Accommodated: Use the same test as used for regular education students, but also allow ESL accommodations such as extended time and the use of bilingual translators/dictionaries.