

Some basic principles and practices for teaching EAL (English as an Additional Language) students

Here are some good ideas and advice for Mentors helping supporting students who have English as a second language.

Idioms and slang

Avoid using idioms and slang. Everyday expressions which don't have a literal meaning can be very difficult to understand. Some examples are in the table below.

Idiom	Literal expression
You'll have to start from scratch.	You'll have to start again.
You've hit the nail on the head.	You're exactly right
You'll need to hit the books when you get home.	You'll need to do a lot of study when you get home.
Hold your horses.	Wait a minute; don't go yet.
At this rate, we'll be here till the cows come home.	If we go this slowly, we won't finish before the end of the lesson
The bottom line is...	The most essential point is...

Wait Time

After asking students a question, wait longer than usual to allow time for an EAL student to respond. The student may need more time to process or even translate your question in order to understand it. They will also need more time to formulate a response. You may need to re-phrase your question so that it is easier for an EAL student to understand.

Speaking speed

Do not speak too quickly. Try grouping your words and pausing between each group. For example:

"Now...what I want you to do...is to add the liquid...from the beaker...to the test tube."

Leaving an even gap between each word is **not advisable** as it can sound very condescending. For example:

"Now...what...I...want...you...to...do...is...to...add...the...liquid...from...the...beaker...to...the...test... tube."

Hand gestures can also help to make meaning clearer (but don't overdo it!)

Concept checking questions

Many students are not confident to say that they don't understand and may just nod when you ask them. It is much better to ask a **concept checking question**. A concept checking question makes sure that they understand the idea of what you are talking about, without you saying 'Do you understand?'. For example, "So, do you add the liquid from the beaker to the test tube or from the test tube to the beaker? How much liquid do you add?"

Remember that 'Does that make sense?', 'Is that ok' and 'Any questions?' often are met with the same response as 'Do you understand?'

Pronunciation

It is not always necessary to correct EAL students' pronunciation. Unless a mispronunciation causes a misunderstanding, it is probably not necessary to correct them.

If you are correcting pronunciation, be sensitive. Don't mimic what they say incorrectly (e.g. "No! Not *claw*, it's *claw*"); just tell them the correct version clearly and you can ask them to repeat if it feels comfortable (e.g. "we say 'claw' with an 'l' sound"). Focus on showing them the right way to do it, rather than reasons why they can't say it. Remember some students think that their spoken English is terrible, so they need some confidence building (which in turn will help them improve).

Try writing key terms on the board or on a piece of paper and use stress boxes to show where the emphasis is. For example:

□ □ □
Apparatus thermomometer incubator

Look these up first in a dictionary to check that you are right.

Vocabulary

Encourage EAL students (and all students ideally) to keep a vocabulary note-book to record new terms and definitions

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