

LEARNING SUPPORT ACTIVITIES

English Learners Teacher Guide

Purpose

Practical classroom strategies, accommodations, printable learning support ideas, and assessment options designed specifically for ASL teachers working with English Learners (students whose first language is not English).

Who are English Learners?

English Learners (ELs) are students who are developing English as an additional language while also learning ASL, meaning they are building multiple languages at once. These students are capable, often multilingual learners who thrive with strong visual supports, connections to their home language and culture, and instruction that doesn't assume prior English fluency.

Student Strengths

- Multilingual thinker
- Strong visual and contextual learner
- Culturally adaptable
- Motivated to communicate
- Brings rich home-language knowledge
- Resourceful problem solver

Teaching Strategies

- Pair new signs with pictures rather than English text alone
- Avoid relying on idioms or figurative English phrases
- Connect new vocabulary to students' home language/culture
- Use visuals, gestures, and demonstration over verbal explanation
- Preview key vocabulary before lessons
- Allow extra time for processing in a third or fourth language

Learning Support Activities

- Picture-based vocabulary cards (sign + image, minimal text)
- Cognate and comparison activities with home language
- Bilingual/multilingual word walls where possible
- Sign-matching games with visual rather than text cues
- Partner practice with a peer buddy

Assessment Ideas

- Video or sign-based responses instead of written English
- Visual/picture-supported assessment formats
- Extended time to process multilingual demands
- Focus assessment on ASL skill, not English proficiency

Things to Avoid

- Relying on written English instructions alone
- Using idioms, slang, or figurative language without context
- Assuming silence means lack of understanding or effort
- Testing English proficiency instead of ASL skill

Remember

Every student is unique. Use these strategies together with each student's IEP, Section 504 Plan, school policies, and professional judgment. The goal is not to lower expectations, but to provide meaningful access to learning.