



TIPS | for Educators of ELLs in Grades 4-6: Reading

The tips below offer some great ways to help your English language learners (ELLs) become confident and successful readers. Add a new language strategy each week, and watch your students' reading improve!

Note: These tips can be used with both newcomer and long-term ELLs. Newcomer ELLs are students who have just arrived in the United States. Long-term ELLs are students who have been in the United States for a longer period of time.

■ Increase exposure to language by reading to students every day.

Choose texts with lots of illustrations and frequently used words. To provide extra scaffolding, choose books with simple sentence structures, repetitive phrases and predictable plots.

■ Reread familiar texts.

Rereading familiar texts is one of the best ways to improve reading accuracy and fluency. Rereading also helps ELLs develop vocabulary by providing repeated exposure to the same words in context.

■ Provide explicit, systematic instruction in phonics.

To become successful readers in English, students need explicit instruction in sound-symbol correspondences. Make phonics instruction part of a balanced program that includes reading meaningful texts that are aligned to the content being taught in the classroom.

■ Help students recognize the structure of expository text.

Introduce the various parts of the text, such as the table of contents and the glossary. Show students how the text is organized by pointing out bold print, chapter headings and chapter summaries.

■ Build or access prior knowledge before reading.

Set the stage for reading by helping ELLs build background knowledge and make connections to their own experiences.

■ Ask open-ended questions.

Asking questions that require more than a "yes" or "no" answer helps students organize their thoughts in English and fosters English language proficiency. It's also a great way to check reading comprehension. Ask students for evidence of the answer, and ask other students if they agree or disagree.

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■ Provide opportunities for students to work in pairs and groups.

Working with peers during classroom activities supports language development and content learning. Like native English speakers, ELLs must continue to expand and extend their English vocabulary as they “read to learn” in the upper elementary grades.

■ Assign reading buddies to develop oral fluency.

Have student pairs practice choral reading or echo reading. This also will help students feel more comfortable with their classmates.

■ Practice makes perfect for fluency.

Activities such as readers’ theater and poetry or speech reading allow students to practice their parts before performing them with a partner or in a small group. This builds both reading and oral language fluency.

■ Provide models of fluent reading.

Listening to fluent reading by a teacher or another student helps ELLs improve their own fluency in reading and in speaking.

■ Use physical responses as one way of checking comprehension.

Techniques such as total physical response (TPR) give students an opportunity to show what they know by acting it out in skits and by playing games.

■ Make reading a hands-on activity.

Use manipulatives, props, puppets, games, drawing or skits to bring the text to life.

■ Consider books on tape and captioned movies.

Providing textbooks on audiotape and films with captions are effective alternatives for some English language learners who struggle with the increased language demands posed by content-area textbooks.

■ Make use of multicultural texts.

Including texts that feature multicultural themes and settings not only validates English language learners’ home cultures but also allows students to draw upon existing background knowledge to support comprehension.

