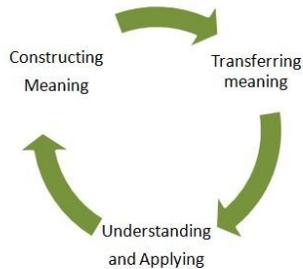


# Stages of ELL Development

## How Students Learn Language



Regardless of whether a student has learned how to read in their first language or not, they are still processing a second language when they are learning how to read in English. Therefore, they learn HOW to read and speak in English differently than when they learned how to speak in their first language. (Think about this if you took a foreign language in school, did you learn how to read in that language the same way you learned how to read in English?)

Many teachers are under the misconception that just because they never learned how to read in their first language, they will learn how to read the same way as their American peers. This is simply not true. English is the FIRST language of American students.

## STAGE 1 The *Silent Period* (*Pre-Production*)

Some second language learners (L2) stay silent for several weeks, or even months when learning their new language. The function of silent period may serve as an active period of listening, a period of reflection, or simply a period of incomprehension that finally gets sorted out. Silent learners may in fact speak to themselves. Some students have been recorded rehearsing: repeating, practicing, substituting, and expanding words and sentences.

## STAGE 2 (*Early Production*) *Formulas*

Learners will often use memorized chunks of learning to communicate basic needs or get feedback. These chunks are well formed, often in contrast to other utterances. Chunks may not always be used correctly and may perform more than one discourse function. Some suggestions for working with students in this stage are:

- asking yes/no questions
- accept one or two word responses
- use pictures to support questions
- modify the content of what they are learning to the level of the student
- build vocabulary using pictures



- focus on key concepts and vocabulary, simplify the content to be learned but do not water it down
- for very young English language learners, use simple books with predictable text

### STAGE 3 *Speech Emergence (unpacking)*

Most students by this stage have acquired a vocabulary of 3000 words and are able to communicate with simple words, chunks and phrases that may or may not be grammatically correct. One can speak the chunk while thinking of the words for the next sentence. This is an important stage because students at this point gain greater comprehension, and begin reading and writing in English. They are able to initiate short conversations with their classmates, and understand easy stories read in class with the support of pictures. They will also be able to do some content work with teacher support. Some simple tasks that they should be able to complete are:

- Sound out stories phonetically.
- Read short, modified texts in content area subjects.
- Complete graphic organizers and word banks.
- Understand and answer questions about charts and graphs.
- Match vocabulary words to definitions.
- Study flashcards with content area vocabulary.
  - Participate in group reading activities.
- Understand two-step directions and teacher explanations.
- Compose brief stories based on personal experience.
- Write in journals.



Journals are important because students can write about topics that interest them, and can so at their own level and pace. They have a place to express their thoughts and ideas.

Examples: “May I go to bathroom?”

“Whaduyu...” as an all-purpose question word.

### STAGE 4 *Intermediate Fluency*

Vocabulary at this stage is about 6000 words. English language learners are beginning to use more complex sentences when speaking and writing, and are also beginning to share thoughts and express opinions. They are not as apprehensive and will begin to ask questions to clarify what they are learning in class.



English language learners at this stage will be able to work in grade level math and science classes with some teacher support. Comprehension of English literature and social studies is increasing. Many will use strategies from their native language to learn content in English.

Student writing at this stage will have many errors as ELLs try to master the complexity of English grammar and sentence structure. Students at this stage should be expected to synthesize what they have learned and to make inferences from that learning.

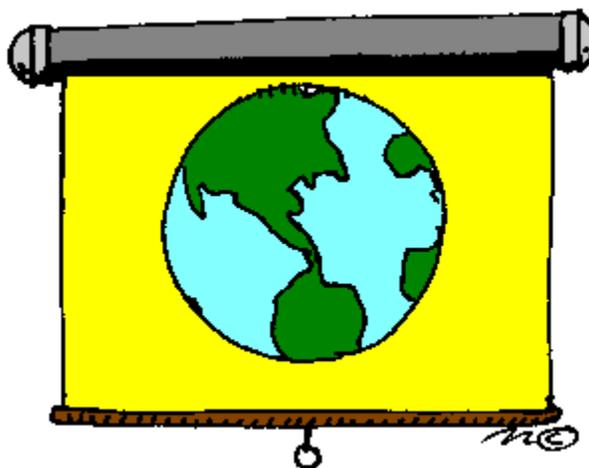
This is the time for teachers to focus on learning strategies. Students at this stage will be able to understand more complex concepts.

Stage 4 is a **crucial stage** because English language learners are beginning to think in their second language, which helps them gain more proficiency in speaking it.

## STAGE 5 *Advanced Fluency*



It can take up to **two** years to reach the point of advanced fluency in a social language proficiency, and from **five to eight** years to achieve academic content proficiency in a second language; some students may take up to **ten** years. Most English language learners at this stage have been exited from ESL and other support programs; however they will need continued support from classroom teachers, especially in history and social studies, and in writing.



## References

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