

Grading English Language Learners



Classroom teachers often have the following concerns when grading ELL students:

- The ELL student's limited English affects the student's ability to communicate his or her content knowledge.
- The ELL student works hard, but the student's achievement falls short in comparison to others in the class because of the ELL student's limited proficiency in English.
- The teacher worries that recognizing the ELL student's effort and progress will be setting two standards of achievement: ELL and non-ELL students.
- The teacher and the ELL student have different expectations and interpretations of the grade.

There are no easy answers to these issues. However, the following suggestions are offered to help teachers develop a grading and assessment plan. Teachers need to enable ELL students to attain their maximum levels of success. ELL students need to be held accountable for the learning of which they are capable of, but not penalized for their limited language proficiency.

1. Have grades reflect a variety of performance (some less dependent on fluent language skills) such as participation, projects, portfolios, and oral explanations.
2. Focus on the ELL student's *meaning* and *content knowledge*, not language errors such as grammar mistakes or awkward phrasing. Ask yourself: Did the student understand the question? Did he/she answer the question? And, if appropriate. How well did the student develop his thought?
3. Adapt test and test administration. For example, allow more time for ELL students, or read the test to them. Teach test-taking skills and strategies. Since grading on a curve is often unfair to beginning ELL students, use criterion-reference tests.
4. Recognize effort and improvement in ways other than grades. *Judy Jameson, Center of Applied Linguistic*
5. Students who are functioning in a particular subject or subjects at, close to, or above grade level should be graded as any English speaking student.

Remember: All ELL students in your classroom should receive a grade for every class in which they participate or are present.

Testing English Language Learners

Standardized and Classroom Tests:

- Read the instructions out loud. Explain in the native language if feasible.
- Check students after a few minutes of test-taking to make sure they understood the instruction and are on track.
- Allow bilingual dictionaries which give direct translations (word-to-word).
- Teach test-taking skills and practice on sample items throughout instruction.

Classroom Assessments:

- **Teach to the assessment; let students know in advance how achievement will be measured.**
- **Align instructional methods and assessment methods.**
- Check comprehension frequently throughout instruction.
- Supplement tests with other measures of content understanding such as observation, participation, talking to students, alternative assignments like projects.
- Review test "through the eyes of an ELL": look for difficult language and cultural bias; provide support such as word banks.
- Read tests to beginning ELLs.
- Allow more time for ELLs or give the test in sections.

Taken from: Enhancing English Language Learning in Elementary Classrooms

Test Accommodations:

- Test key concepts or main ideas.
- Provide basic vocabulary ahead of time so it can be studied
- Make a simplified language version of the test
- Simplify instruction
- Reduce number of test items
- Provide word banks or use of bilingual dictionary
- Add visual support
- Give students extra time to complete tasks
- Give students objective tests: matching, multiple choice, etc.
- Avoid negatives “all of the above” and “none of the above”
- Make all or part of the exam oral
- Use open book test when appropriate

Informal Assessment Techniques for Young Students or Beginning English Language Learners

- Use pictures to assess vocabulary
- Have students draw the concept
- Ask students to point to the correct answer
- Ask the student to paraphrase concepts
- Allow students to explain orally
- Allow oral reports instead of written ones
- Have students develop a drama or role play
- Allow students to record concepts on a graphic organizer or in a list instead of in an essay
- Provide a word bank for beginning ELLs
- Have students create a poster or display to demonstrate their understanding
- Use a project for assessment
- Use a pair and group reports
- Maintain Reading Journals or Logs. At intervals, record three books at the student’s reading level and attach a photocopy of a page from each book.
- Allow the use of a bilingual or picture dictionary

Taken from: Enhancing English Language Learning in Elementary Classrooms