

Teaching Academic Content and Literacy to English Learners in Elementary and Middle School



1

Teach a set of academic vocabulary words intensively across several days using a variety of instructional activities.

1. Choose a brief, engaging piece of informational text that includes academic vocabulary as a platform for intensive academic vocabulary instruction.
2. Choose a small set of academic vocabulary for in-depth instruction.
3. Teach academic vocabulary in depth using multiple modalities (writing, speaking, listening).
4. Teach word-learning strategies to help students independently figure out the meaning of words.



2

Integrate oral and written English language instruction into content-area teaching.

1. Strategically use instructional tools—such as short videos, visuals, and graphic organizers—to anchor instruction and help students make sense of content.
2. Explicitly teach the content-specific academic vocabulary, as well as the general academic vocabulary that supports it, during content-area instruction.
3. Provide daily opportunities for students to talk about content in pairs or small groups.
4. Provide writing opportunities to extend student learning and understanding of the content material.



3

Provide regular, structured opportunities to develop written language skills.

1. Provide writing assignments that are anchored in content and focused on developing academic language as well as writing skills.
2. For all writing assignments, provide language-based supports to facilitate students' entry into, and continued development of, writing.
3. Use small groups or pairs to provide opportunities for students to work and talk together on varied aspects of writing.
4. Assess students' writing periodically to identify instructional needs and provide positive, constructive feedback in response.



4

Provide small-group instructional intervention to students struggling in areas of literacy and English language development.

1. Use available assessment information to identify students who demonstrate persistent struggles with aspects of language and literacy development.
2. Design the content of small-group instruction to target students' identified needs.
3. Provide additional instruction in small groups consisting of 3 to 5 students to students struggling with language and literacy.
4. For students who struggle with basic foundational reading skills, spend time not only on these skills but also on vocabulary development and listening and reading comprehension strategies.



This is an abbreviated digest of the Practice Guide cited below. It was created for instructional leaders and supervisors who are responsible for ensuring quality literacy programming but not responsible for implementing the evidence-based practices (EBP). The infographic is designed for awareness only. Access the Practice Guide for full understanding and implementation of the EBP.

Adapted from: Baker, S., Lesaux, N., Jayanthi, M., Dimino, J., Proctor, C. P., Morris, J., Gersten, R., Haymond, K., Kieffer, M. J., Linan-Thompson, S., & Newman-Gonchar, R. (2014). Teaching academic content and literacy to English learners in elementary and middle school (NCEE 2014-4012). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance (NCEE), Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from the NCEE website: http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/publications_reviews.aspx.