



Tips for Selecting ESL Curricular Materials

Selecting appropriate materials for use in the ESL classroom is in many ways similar to choosing materials for a mainstream classroom. It is important to consider the objectives, the methods, the layout and the appropriateness of the content of any materials used in a classroom setting. However, some additional considerations should be made in finding the best materials to help the English Language Learners in your school work towards fluency and the ability to meet local and state academic requirements. The two most salient points to consider in your process of finding the right materials are:

- any materials you choose should reflect the general curriculum, standards, and learning objectives found in the mainstream classes in your school
- materials need to be appropriate for the age and language level of your students.

The following is a series of questions and descriptions that together, provide an overview of the vital points to consider when making decisions about materials to be used with ELLs.

What are the stated or implied objectives?

Begin by looking through the table of contents and/or the first and last pages of each unit and making brief notes about the overall objectives as well as those found in each unit or chapter. Objectives should be clearly stated; however some materials contain less transparent objectives and goals that you should be aware of before using them. Reading through the table of contents, the opening paragraph and the final paragraph of units or chapters will usually reveal the themes and types of materials used throughout the text, this will help you identify all of the objectives (learning, content, language, cultural etc.) presented in the materials you are considering.

What are the expected learning outcomes?

List the major things that students are expected to be able to do, that they couldn't do before, after each section, unit, or chapter. Learning outcomes should be specifically stated, observable, or measurable abilities that students will gain through instruction and practice; these are different from objectives which state more general ideas, concepts, or abilities that students are expected to learn.

For example: *Objective:* Students will know how to use past tense in English. *Learning Outcome:* Students, when given a sentence and a choice between the past and present tense of a verb, will be able to choose the correct form of the verb to complete the sentence.

Is the content meaningful, accessible, and presented in a logical sequence?

The content of many language acquisition books is forced and not applicable to students' lives, inside and outside of school. For example a chapter focused on the use of the future form of verbs, or on conditionals is more meaningful if students talk about their own future plans, wishes or dreams, rather than reading a story about extraterrestrial beings. Students will be more engaged and therefore more likely to learn and remember material

that is presented in a meaningful way: meaningful materials make use of students' schemata, and can be applied – or teach skills that are necessary for their personal and academic lives. The language used in texts, stories, directions etc. given to ELLs should reflect their level of English language proficiency. Resources for ELLs ought not be encumbered with unnecessary punctuation; difficult vocabulary; or complicated grammatical structures. Accessible materials use vocabulary, visuals, graphics and so on to present relevant content in a way that students with low levels of English proficiency are able to understand. It is also helpful to note the order in which information is presented and decide if it seems logical. Logically presented materials should correspond with the progression of students' academic and personal linguistic needs.

Are all five of the identified language domains addressed?

Is the material presented in such a way that students will have an opportunity to develop and demonstrate their abilities in *reading, writing, listening, speaking, and comprehension*?

What helpful features are included?

There are many "extras" and study friendly features that can aid ELLs in their learning process. Some such features include picture dictionaries, glossaries, **bold face key vocabulary**, vocabulary keys, graphics, pictures, CDs or tapes for listening activities, and so on. These should be in accordance with the students' language levels, the content, and the objectives of each lesson, chapter or unit.

Can this material easily be adapted for use in various settings and for different learning styles?

Some curricular materials include a wide range of learning activities and types of student output, others follow a more set pattern from one chapter to another. As in all classrooms, it is important to allow ELLs opportunities to engage in both active and passive learning, and to engage their whole brain in the learning process.


Form for evaluating possible ESL curricular materials

Questions	Notes
What are the stated and implied learning objectives?	
What are the expected learning outcomes?	
Is the content meaningful, accessible, and presented in a logical sequence?	
Are all five of the identified language domains addressed?	
What helpful features are included?	
Can this material be easily adapted for use in various settings and for different learning styles?	
Which of the above aspects of these materials correlate to the needs, objectives, learning outcomes, and standards of the school?	
Which of the above aspects of these materials do not correlate with the needs, objectives etc. of the school?	