

Unit 5 Content
Input: Contextualization for Comprehension

What to consider during the Input Phase

The most essential element of this stage for ELLs is for the input information to be comprehensible, clear, and relevant. If new content is clearly presented in this stage, the foundation is laid for deep understanding and learning that is meaningful and long-term. If, however, information is presented in a way that ELLs have difficulty comprehending, the result will be an increased possibility of failure during the processing and output phases. In fact, the core of most ELL student failure is trouble during this initial stage.

Staying focused on the objectives that we have set in unit three will remind you of where to concentrate your time and energy and helps to weed out extraneous information and activities that do not help you to achieve your goals. “Will this help you reach your objectives?” is a question you should constantly ask yourself. Your class time is precious. There is not a minute to lose. And for your ELLs who have the additional pressure of having to navigate through the language in order to get to your content, you want to make sure you do not exhaust their energy unnecessarily. In fact, the attention span of most students is much shorter than you think. Some educators argue that you have approximately eight minutes of their attention before their thoughts start drifting elsewhere (Conyers, 2005, p. 21). This has huge implications on your lesson delivery. The amount of time that we have to make an impact during the input phase is extremely limited. You have to be efficient.

Content Readiness

ELLs typically bring a great breadth of prior knowledge and academic experiences to the classroom and teachers can increase student engagement and motivation by tapping in to what they already know and building upon it. In order to decide what activities you will use to help students meet your learning objectives, you must first ascertain what level of exposure they have had to the actual content. Think again about that student that grew up in Florida and spent time discussing and/or exploring its native wildlife. He is going to have much more exposure to, and therefore, readiness for, delving into a unit on Florida Wildlife than a student who just moved to

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Florida from a large urban area with little exposure to nature. These two students are at different content readiness levels when it comes to this topic. If you spend a day introducing basic information about different animals that live in the Everglades, the student from Florida will likely grow bored quickly since he already knows this basic level of information. Just as you wouldn't want your own children wasting valuable school time on information he already knew; you want to make sure the same does not happen to your students. One relatively simple way to find out the level of exposure that students have had to a specific topic or skill is to administer a diagnostic assessment before you begin. Now, this does not have to be a long test. No. This can be a simple pretest, survey, questionnaire, or anticipation guide.

Once you have a clearer idea of how much each of your students already knows (prior knowledge) about your topic, you can make informed decisions about how to proceed with each. The information gathered might also be helpful for you for designing your grouping configurations. Group configurations can include: heterogeneous groups or pairs (based on content readiness and/or language readiness) and homogeneous groups or pairs (based on content readiness and/or language readiness). These are a couple of examples of ways you can group students. You will see more considerations for grouping in later units. However, it's important to remember that grouping configurations should be flexible, in that you are able to make adjustments as the need presents.

Language Readiness

Do They Understand Me?

One of the major components of the META Consent Decree is the agreement that all ELL students have the right to *comprehensible input*. In other words, you have to make sure that you are making your content understandable for all of your students. How can you possibly do this for a newcomer ELL that understands very little English? Well, believe it or not, there are some simple, yet powerful things that you can do that will make a big difference in how much your ELLs understand.

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First, think about languaging, which is basically your word choice and how you speak. Below is a list of seven things to be aware of when you are sharing information verbally. Take a moment to think about your own speech patterns in class. Do you often feel rushed to move quickly through information? Do you speak quickly? How well do you think you enunciate? The honest responses to these questions will give you an idea about how comprehensible your speech patterns are for your ELLs in regards to sharing information verbally.

- Enunciate
- Aware of rate of speech
- Paraphrase
- Repeat
- Use gestures
- Point
- Use concise language (decrease figurative language)

Attached is a **five-minute** for your self-reflection. You can choose to have students complete the survey about your speech patterns or you can ask a colleague to observe you for five minutes and give you feedback. Or, if you rather do it on your own, you can conduct the survey about yourself. The idea is to get true reflective feedback for your professional growth. The results will not affect your performance or your grade in this course. In fact, you will not even be asked to share the actual data. It is designed strictly for your professional reflection and growth. So have fun, but do consider the following questions as you reflect:

- What did you learn about the way provide comprehensible input to English learners?
- Are your speech patterns and expressions comprehensible for students that are new to the English language?
- In what ways could you make the way you speak more comprehensible?

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L1 Support: Heritage Language Dictionaries & Online Translators

Heritage Language Dictionaries

Another important way to ensure that your ELLs comprehend the content is to provide L1, or first language, support. As a mandated accommodation, you must make sure that ELLs have access to translation dictionaries for assessments. These are not definition dictionaries. These are special English-to-heritage language translation dictionaries that allow students to access the equivalent of each word in their home language. Look for the attachment if you would like to read more about State and District guidelines for using heritage language dictionaries. It is important to note that this testing accommodation must take place throughout the school year – not just for standardized assessments.

Online Translators

There are many online resources available that provide first language support for ELLs. One user-friendly website is **Google Translate**

<http://translate.google.com/#auto|htl>



This site allows you to type, or copy and paste, any text and translate it into just about any other language with just the click of your mouse! Give it a shot. Type in any text and select the language of one of your ELLs for translation. Voila! It's that simple. Now, by no means do you assert that any online translator will provide perfect translation all of the time. Nor is it suggested that this be overused as an accommodation. Nothing can replace authentic and meaningful teaching with ESOL strategies. Additionally, linguistic features such as semantics and syntax must be taken into consideration. However, in a pinch, it's better than nothing 😊