

## **Instructional Strategies that Support Language Learning across the Curriculum**

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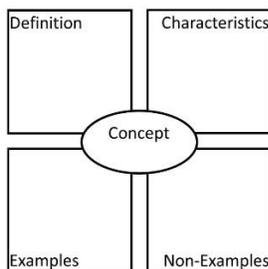
- 1. Warmers:** Warmers should take up no more than the first five minutes of class. Make the most of the first five minutes with a short activity to get students thinking about the day's topic and reminding them of what they already know connected to the day's topic. This will help students to activate their background knowledge, and prepare for the day's topic. Examples of warmers include having students share a personal anecdote in connection to the day's topic, write sentences including key concepts for the course, complete a graphic organizer such as a Venn Diagram with their ideas for how two concepts may be similar or different, or label a picture as best they can.
- 2. Avoiding Questions to the Whole Class:** Try not to ask questions to the entire class as a whole, such as "who is the head of state in Canada," without giving the class time to think with their peers. With questions given to the whole class, typically, the same people will answer these questions over and over again. Instead, ask students to work with a partner to answer the questions. Once you are satisfied that most students have an answer to the question, then you can ask the class for the answer. This will give students time to put together a thoughtful answer to a question as well as rehear their answers in a group before sharing them with the class.
- 3. Clear directions and rubrics:** Lower any ambiguity in assignments by providing clear directions so students know what is expected. Provide the directions both orally and in writing. Along with the directions, provide precise grading information so that students know how they will be evaluated before they begin the assignment. These rubrics will help students understand their grades. Model answers and assignments are also useful learning tools so that students may see what is expected of them. Ask students who have done particularly well on an assignment in past semesters or years if you may use their work as a model for other students to look at.
- 4. Cloze activities:** Use cloze activities to review key passages from the textbook or assigned readings. One way to create a cloze activity is to blank out key terms from the textbook, and have students work to fill in the blanks with information either from a word bank (less challenging) or from memory (more challenging). Cloze activities can also be used to check comprehension after a lecture, reading, or video. Cloze activities have the double benefit of getting students to think about language (how words fit into the blanks) as well as content (which words fit into the blanks).
- 5. Define idioms and cultural references mid-speech:** Be aware of any figurative language or cultural references you are using in class. Idiomatic language can be a real challenge for students from non-English speaking backgrounds. If you use an idiom, provide an explanation at the same time. For example, you might say to a student: "You are on the right track. You almost have the correct answer." or "I'm not sure when we are going on the field trip. Let's play it by ear, see what happens naturally, before we decide on a specific date." Cultural references to define as you go include ideas such as "big brother is watching," or "I feel like I am living in Blade Runner."
- 6. Dictogloss.** In a dictogloss, a key passage from a text or a key part of a lecture is delivered twice to the students. The first time, students listen and take notes of the main ideas. The second time, students listen and add in the key support details for each of the main ideas. Once they

have heard the passage two times, they work in groups to try and recreate the text excerpt or lecture as completely as possible. Dictogloss has the double benefit of getting students to think about content (what ideas they should include in their writing) and language (how they should put down those ideas).

**7. Embedded Definitions:** Define words as you speak by explaining academic vocabulary and key terms within the context of the sentence. This strategy is also known as impregnating sentences because the sentences are pregnant with definitions. Example #1: Before you begin an experiment, you should develop a *hypothesis*, which is an idea you have based on what you know so far, but it hasn't been proven yet. Example #2: They all lived in a *hut*, in other words a tiny house, beside the river.

**8. Essential Questions** (e.g. Wiggins & McTighe, 2005): Start each day's lesson with an essential question. These are questions that have no specific correct answer (elicit more than just yes or no). Rather, they encourage rich responses from students. An essential question focuses attention on the day's topic as students look for answers, and primes them to use their language skills to deeply engage with course content. Essential questions also encourage higher thinking skills and may lead to more questions, curiosity, and lively discussion.

**9. Frayer Model:** A Frayer Model is a diagram with four parts. It is used to help students uncover the core definition of a key term. The term is in the middle of the chart, with essential characteristics, examples, non-examples, and the definition in the corners. Students work together to complete the chart, and then develop a definition. They can be great warmers, reviews for a previous lesson, or closers that demonstrate learning.



**10. Graphic Organizers:** Use graphic organizers to support learning. Examples of graphic organizers include: Venn diagrams, fish bone diagrams, t-charts, time lines, ladder charts, concept maps, starburst diagrams, etc. Graphic organizers can be filled in during a lecture, while watching a video, reading a textbook excerpt, or working on a writing assignment. Graphic organizers can also make great brainstorming tools, warmers to activate students' background knowledge, and closers to solidify or demonstrate learning. A quick google search will reveal hundreds of types of graphic organizers that are suitable for a variety of disciplines.

**11. Repeat after me:** Have the class say the words out loud together. Don't be afraid to have the class repeat a key term aloud in unison after you've carefully pronounced it for the class. It will help to anchor the pronunciation for students from non-English speaking backgrounds and it will highlight a term's importance for other students in class. It only takes a couple of seconds to get everyone in class to repeat a term such as "thermodynamics". At the same time, write the words being practice on the board so that students can see how the spelling relates to the pronunciation. Even native English speaking students will enjoy this brief activity.

**12. Instill Confidence:** Having confidence that the materials are learnable is part of maintaining motivation. Remind students of when they are making progress. One way to instill confidence is to have students work in small groups to share with each other what they currently know that they did not know before, or what they can do that they could not do before. By keeping track of their learning success, they can help to increase their confidence.

**13. KWL Charts:** KWL stands for Know, Want to Know, and Learned. Activating students' background knowledge at the start of the lesson will prepare them for the material ahead and support active learning. Have students brainstorm with a partner everything they already know about the day's topic. Then have students brainstorm what they want to know about the day's topic. Having students brainstorm what they want to know about the day's topic will help to generate curiosity and promote motivation. In addition, the questions students write will prime their attention to look for answers in the day's lesson activities. After the lesson, have them brainstorm everything that they learned. This instructional strategy provides a nice frame for a lesson.

What do you know?	What do you want to know?	What have you learned?
Salmon return to where they were born to lay their eggs	Why are salmon populations decreasing?	Hydo-electric dams can negatively affect Salmon habitats.

**14. Lateral Questions:** Typically, questions and answers flow between the instructor and a student. Encourage students to listen to each other's answers by asking follow up questions such as "Do you agree with what Yuki just said? Why or why not?" "Stanley, can you add to Sarah's answer?" You may also have small groups discuss other people's comments/answers and then respond to them once they have formulated their ideas. During a discussion, you can have students write down questions to ask other students as they listen to their classmates' ideas.

**15. Learning Blogs:** Students can blog about the learning they have achieved in class and how it relates to them. Part of the blogging experience might also involve students being required to read their classmates blogs and comment on them. Instructors may decide to comment on student blogs, or just monitor them to ensure that everyone is blogging. This activity can reinforce learning, and inject a written component into a class that might not have a writing requirement. In addition, having students read one another's blogs and comment on some of them activates the zone of proximal development. Students begin to learn not just content, but also are exposed to each other grammar and vocabulary.

**16. Leave the lectern:** Teach from different areas in the classroom or lecture hall. When students have having discussion time, circulate around the class and interact one-on-one with students. Aim to speak to almost every student (or group of students in large classes) at least once (briefly) during the class period. This helps students to focus as they can anticipate that you may speak to you at least once during a class.

**17. Make connections:** During the lesson, take time to allow students to make connections with the day's topic and their own lived experiences. They can connect the day's topic with something personal, with something they have already read or seen, or with the wider world in general. Making connections helps to make learning more relevant. When learning is more

relevant, it is more motivating, and this supports language learning. If students are maintaining a blog or a journal, they can be encouraged to make these connections in there. These connections can also be made at the end of class as a closing activity, for example on an exit slip on which students write how the day's topic connected to them.

**18. Multi-modal input:** use a variety of traditional and non-traditional formats to convey content, such as print, audio, video, internet, music, etc. This helps to take into account different kinds of learners: kinaesthetic, aural, visual, musical, etc. For example, a short video clip can help to reinforce learning and engage students. Activities in which students get up and move around also promote active learning (for example, students who agree with one side of an issue can stand against one wall, while students who agree with another side of the issue can stand against another wall).

**19. Paraphrase and repeat language:** As you lecture, paraphrase key sentences so that the information is conveyed more than once in more than one way. For key ideas, you can aim to paraphrase yourself around three times for the information to be grasped by the students. It is also helpful to repeat yourself at key points (say things two or three times) so that students are aware of important information. During a class discussion, be sure to repeat and rephrase student contributions so that everyone in the class has a chance to hear and understand what is being said.

**20. Pay attention to class geography:** Divide the classroom up into zones, and ensure that someone from each zone has contributed to class discussions over the course of a lesson. In particular, be sure to call on students from the back or sides of the class. Vary which part of the class you are eliciting answers from. Pay attention to those quiet corners and encourage them to participate. Before eliciting answers or opinions from the class, give them rehearsal time to think about the questions before you call on members of the class to answer as a whole. When asking students questions, give them time to respond. Students from non-English speaking backgrounds might need a few seconds of silence (wait time = 5 to 10 seconds) to put together an answer. Avoid the tendency to interrupt or move onto another student. What might feel awkward to the instructor is helpful to the student.

**21. Preview Important Vocabulary:** Extract what you think are the important vocabulary terms from the upcoming lesson and introduce them at the start of the class. These can be general academic words that cross disciplines (such as words from the Academic Word List), or they can be discipline specific words that are key for content understanding (such as technical terminology). Tools such as the Classic Web VP Profiler at [www.lex tutor.ca](http://www.lex tutor.ca) can help you determine which words to focus on. You may just show students important vocabulary for the day (on the board, PowerPoint, etc). You may do a short activity such as putting up a PowerPoint slide with 12 to 20 words, and ask students to look at the words on the screen and work in pairs to make a list of five words they are unfamiliar with in connection to the lesson topic. Once students have their lists, elicit about five vocabulary terms from the class and explain them briefly before beginning the lesson.

**22. Preview readings in class:** Have students open their textbooks and look at the assigned reading. Direct them to look at the illustrations and graphics as well as the titles and subtitles. Have them determine what the chapter will likely be about before they read it. Another strategy is to have students write out a question that they think will be answered by the upcoming reading. They can then look for the answer in the text while they are reading. Direct students to

the glossary (if available) to show them where to find definitions of key terms. These pre-reading tasks will help to activate students' background knowledge and enable them to better engage with the reading content.

**23. Process Approach to Assignments:** Rather than one large assignment, chunk assignments into smaller pieces. For example, feedback could be provided on student outlines, introductions, first drafts, peer evaluations, etc. At each point, students can make revisions to their work so that the final draft represents their best efforts. In the early drafts, focus on content and organization rather than look at grammatical issues (unless the issues interfere with conveying meaning). Once students have the appropriate content and organization for their assignments, then they can expend the effort to work on editing their grammar and vocabulary in later drafts.

**24. Promote learning strategies:** Have a learning strategy goal along with content and language goals for each lesson. A wide variety of learning strategies are needed by students to help them learn language. They help students link new information, organize knowledge, aid evaluation of learning, and uncover emotional and collaborative supports while speeding up language learning. Examples of learning strategies include trying to guess the meaning of new vocabulary terms from context, summarizing information, effective note taking skills, and self-evaluation.

**25. Reading Scaffolds:** For challenging texts, provide an outline for the assigned reading. As students read, they can fill in the outline with the main ideas and key supporting details. Give students time to compare their completed outlines with one another to make sure they have not missed any important information. In addition to outlines, students may also be given graphic organizers, such as a concept map, to complete while they are reading.

**26. Recycle and Spiral:** Intentionally repeat language, concepts, and strategies at certain points during a course. This naturally reintroduces grammar, concepts, strategies, functions, and vocabulary during a series of lessons and it gives students the many times they need to hear something in order to learn it: e.g. 8 – 10 times for a word (passive knowledge). Recycling also helps students make connections between previous lessons and current lessons. Spiralling increases cognitive challenge while revisiting and reinforcing previously taught language, strategies, and concepts from different perspectives.

**27. Review the previous lesson:** Take a minute or two to have an activity to review the previous lesson. This will help to link the topics for the students. Activities can be as simple as having students work in pairs for a couple of minutes to remind each other of the previous lesson's topic. Another idea might be to have a graphic organizer (such as a t-chart outlining the two sides of an issue discussed in a previous class) that students complete with a partner based on the content of the previous lesson. If you have an essential question that guided a previous lesson topic, students can discuss answers to that question.

**28. Shared Lesson Plans:** Put a skeleton of the day's lesson up on the board, or in a conspicuous place. This will be a roadmap to have students understand where they are in the lesson and where they are going. Students who become lost can look at the lesson plan to see where they are. It will also reinforce how the parts of the lesson fit together for the day's learning objectives. Go over the agenda for the day with the students before the start of the class.

**29. Speak naturally and enunciate intonation with animation:** You may be tempted to artificially slow down and simplify your speech. Avoid bullet speech or “dumbing down” your lectures. Instead, speak naturally, but at a slower pace with normal phrasing. Rather than pausing between each word, pause in the spots you would normally pause, but add a couple of seconds to the pause to help students from non-English speaking backgrounds process the information. In addition, enunciate important terms and vocabulary clearly, with the emphasis on the stressed syllables. While you are doing this, you can animate your delivery with appropriate body language and hand gestures.

**30. Student Glossaries:** Have students keep their own personal glossaries of key terms and vocabulary during the course. Students can add terms to their glossaries during class or while they are studying. Students become lexicographers, creating their own personal dictionaries for later reference.

**31. Question Preparation Time:** Asking the class if there are any questions typically results in no questions being asked, or the same few students asking the questions (usually the ones who least need help). Have students first think about what questions they might have. They have students work in small groups to make a list of questions they have about the topic. Finally have a spokesperson from each group ask their question.

**32. Use the board:** In addition to using a PowerPoint or other kind of presentation, use the board as you lecture. Using the board will naturally slow down the speed of your delivery, to facilitate note taking. You can also write down key terms to emphasize importance. Good board work can help students to follow along in a lecture and associate spelling and pronunciation.

**33. Record lectures:** Video record your lectures and put key parts of the lectures up on your institution’s learning management system, such as Blackboard, Moodle, or D2L. Try to limit your video clips to a maximum of 20 minutes. Students who need to can then review key parts of previous lectures. As an alternative to video recording, you can record a podcast or add audio to a set of PowerPoint slides.

**34. Take advantage of a Learning Management System:** Take advantage of a learning management system to run parallel support to your course. Key vocabulary, PowerPoint slides, graphic organizers, outlines, supplementary or alternative readings, can all be posted to provide support to learners. The LMS can also be used to maintain discussion boards and blogs to promote interaction between students.

**35. Have a routine:** Try to follow the same routine for each of your classes. Begin with sharing an outline of the day’s lesson along with the learning objectives followed by a short warm-up activity. Lectures can be delivered in 15 to 20 minute chunks. Between lecture chunks, the class can engage in small interactive activities. Aim to consistently end with a concluding activity, such as having the students write out a 1 minute essay in which they record the key point(s) they learned that class (Shapiro, Farrelly, & Tomas, 2014).

**36. Comprehension checks:** Rather than asking students if they understand, you can check learning by having students work in groups to summarize a short section of the class and then share what they have learned so far. You might also have mini-quizzes interspersed throughout the class to check comprehension. If your institution uses clickers, you can take advantage of those to get a quick pulse on student understanding.

**37. Think-Pair-Share:** Rather than asking questions to the entire class, you can provide time for students to formulate their answers for a minute or two. They can then share their answers with a partner. After students have rehearsed or adjusted their answers with a partner, they can then be called on to share their answers with the whole class. In this kind of activity, the instructor can be confident that if he or she calls on a student, they will have an answer to share with the class. It helps instructors to avoid putting students on the spot.

**38. Activities while students listen, reading, and watch:** Give students an activity to complete during a class lecture, discussion, reading activity, presentations, etc. For example, students who are giving a presentation to the class can be asked to prepare a graphic organizer or an outline for the classmates to complete while they are presenting. The instructor can collect these after the presentation. This will focus the attention of the class while they are watching a presentation. For a reading assignment, students might have a graphic organizer to complete while they read.

**39. Small group discussions:** When using small group discussions in class, be aware of the group dynamics. Visit the groups to interact with the students. Also, have the group members assign themselves specific roles during the discussion such as note taker, timer, task manager, researcher, reporter, etc.

**40. Intentional Readings:** Be aware of the reading load assigned to the students. Calculate the number of pages you are assigning, and be aware of the time it might take students to complete the readings. Taking their other classes into consideration, ask whether the reading load is reasonable. Also, make your expectations for the readings explicit. Indicate why you have chosen a reading, how it contributes to students' learning, and what they should focus on. Finally, indicate if students should read an assignment in-depth and take notes/make annotations, or whether they should simply skim and scan a reading to get the gist (Shapiro, Farrelly, & Tomas, 2014).

**41. Jig-Saw Activity:** Jig-saw activities take a reading and break it down into parts. For example, if there are four parts to a text, groups of four students will each read one section of a text. They will then work together to solidify their knowledge of their part of the text. The groups are then broken up and reformed so that each group contains a student who has read a different part of the text. Students will then teach their part of the text to their new group members. Once students have a solid understanding of all four parts of the text, they can go back to their original groups to compare what they have learned.

## **References and Further Reading**

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