

Testing: What Can I do for my English Learners?

Tip: Assess ESL students according to what they can do rather than what they cannot do.

Standardized tests or even teacher-created tests can't always measure ESL students' progress accurately or authentically. Instead, measure ESL students by what they can do at any point in time, keeping in mind what they could not do earlier. Have they shown progress? Have they sincerely made an effort to learn? Have they demonstrated their learning?

Technique: Modify the tests you give.

- Test key concepts or main ideas
- Avoid test questions asking for discrete information
- Make a simplified language version of the test
- Simplify instructions
- Provide illustrated or non-illustrated word banks
- Give students extra time to complete test
- Give students objective tests: matching, multiple choice, etc.
- Make all or part of the exam oral.

Technique: Use alternate assessment strategies for ESL students.

1. Non-Verbal

- physical demonstration (point, gesture, act out, thumbs up/down, nod yes/no)
- pictorial products (manipulate or create drawings, diagrams, dioramas, models, graphs, charts; label pictures; keep a picture journal)
- KWL Charts using pictures or native language

2. Oral and Written Strategies

- Interviews, oral reports, role plays using visuals cues, gestures or physical activity
- describing, explaining, summarizing, retelling, paraphrasing
- thinking and learning logs
- reading response logs
- writing assignments
- dialogue journals
- audio or video recordings of students
- portfolios

