# ADAPTING CLASSROOM ASSESSMENTS FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS

*A Collaborative Effort of*

## THE MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION'S REFUGEE AND NEWCOMER WORKING GROUPS

**MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

# INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this resource is to provide guidance on methods for appropriately adapting classroom assessments for English learners (ELs). Appropriate adaptations will provide support to various levels of English proficiency while enabling ELs to demonstrate what they have learned in the content areas. Appropriate assessments for English learner students are essential to determine how well students understand the concepts taught.

# COLLABORATION

A key component for effectively adapting assessments for English learners lies in the collaboration between EL teachers and content area teachers.

Multi-disciplinary teacher collaboration is essential when determining how to best provide assessments that allow ELs to truly demonstrate what they know. Areas to focus on for effective teacher collaboration that lead to trust and success include:

|  | Trusting Relationship | Goal Focus | Small Steps | Listening |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **What it is** | Create a safe working environment<br><br>Demonstrate mutual respect | Anchor collaboration time on student learning | Set small achievable steps that lead to long term progress | Listen to one another |
| **How to do it** | - Ask about one another's lives<br><br>- Learn about and accommodating for working styles<br><br>- Respecting each other's opinions | - Set specific meeting goals (time and activities)<br><br>- Pre-determine the weekly goal | - Creating assessment scaffolding methods<br><br>- Determine essential assessment questions | - Create opportunities for EL and content area teachers to discuss ideas and concerns and to plan accordingly<br><br>- Try to listen for deeper understanding |

# CLASSROOM ASSESSMENTS

The purpose of classroom assessments is to measure knowledge of students understanding of content standards on an ongoing basis. Typical classroom activities that measure progress toward understanding taught concepts include formative and summative assessments and are used to guide instruction.

Essential assessment questions to keep in mind:

1. What is the purpose of the assessment?

2. Do I have enough data collections from different sources to make final judgements on what my students can produce?

3. How can I have my students drive this assessment?

4. How can I create assessments/assessment items to enable students at different levels of English language acquisition demonstrate what they know about the concepts?

5. Have I identified ways to accommodate students based on their language service plans?

Asking these essential questions will enable educators to better develop and design assessments and individual assessment items that will support EL student's ability to demonstrate what they understand about content area concepts as well as provide support for ELs at varying levels of English language acquisition. For more information about the different levels of language acquisition see the Mississippi English Learner Guidelines: Regulations, Funding Guidance, and Instructional Supports available at https://tinyurl.com/2p9cjjs5.

## Performance- and Portfolio-Based Assessments

Traditional classroom assessments often fall short of providing varied opportunities for English learners to truly demonstrate what they know. Two types of classroom assessments that support learner variability are: performance-based assessments and portfolio-based assessments.

### Performance-Based Assessments

Performance-based assessments measure student's ability to apply skills and knowledge learned from a unit or units of study and challenge students to use higher-order thinking skills to create a product or complete a process (Chun, 2010). When using performance-based assessments, try to assess no more than two or three objectives at a time.

### Examples of performance-based assessment strategies that support ELs

- Make assessments multi-modal (music, art, visual presentations, student demonstrations –  group or individual)
- Couple multi-modal means with text (visuals, auditory – oral reports/presentations/explanations)
- Collect student understanding from as many different activities as possible (writing, oral explanations, diagrams, etc.). These can also include recorded presentations for later review from the teacher and as part of a student portfolio to show growth over time.
- Utilize exit slips where students respond to such prompts as "I think…", "I wonder…", "I still want to know…"
- Give students choices on ways to demonstrate what they know
- Ask questions, request clarification, and negotiate for understanding
- Conduct one-on-one conferences with ELs
  - Provides the opportunity to assess their thinking in the content area with language proficiency
  - Allows the teacher to interact with the four language domains (listening, speaking, reading, writing)
    - Did I provide sufficient and specific opportunities for listening and reading in class today?
    - What did my EL students say in class today?
    - What did my EL students write in class today?

Performance-based activities such as the following may be used for specifically assessing speaking and listening as well as assessing academic skills and understanding of concepts:

- Partner reads
- Orally retelling stories
- Role playing
- Use of visuals or written prompts to understand descriptions or instructions
- Use of fill in the blank responses to sentence frames or completion of targeted sentence starters
- Oral reports given by students
- Use of sequence cards to retell a story (main idea and details)
- Oral debates
- Utilize response journals prior to speaking to collect thoughts and vocabulary

## Portfolio-Based Assessments

Portfolio-based assessments are a way to document student growth over time. Portfolio-based assessments are a compilation of student work over time and are made up of collections or samples related to each child's developmental progress in an educational setting. (Huffman, P.). This allows educators to systematically and strategically collect multiple artifacts that reflect student growth and understanding of content area concepts. Portfolio-based assessments can be used in both data meetings as well as in parent teacher conferences.

### Examples of portfolio artifacts may include but are not limited to:

- Written work samples (including prewriting, drafts, final copies, etc.)

- Recorded oral work (such as student oral reading samples, student peer partner discussions on academic topics, oral recounting of steps in a process or literature summary, etc.)

- Teacher checklists of students meeting benchmark standards or goals (such as accuracy ratings/check offs for various academic skills such as phonics skills, math concepts, or other academic course requirements)

    o Enable teachers to collect the same information for all students and

    o Enable teachers to assess individual students as well as the class as a whole

### Student engagement in the portfolio process enables and encourages the student to take ownership of their work by allowing them to:

- self-select work samples for placement in the portfolio

- understand and work towards their individual academic and linguistic goals

- set achievable goals for improvement over time

# EQUITY IN ASSESSING ENGLISH LEARNERS

| Key Considerations for Equity in Assessments for ELs |
|---|
| 1. Instructional Practices |
| 2. Formatting Assessments for Accessibility |
| 3. Grading |

## Instructional Practices
1. Provide students with quality instruction and resources – this includes creating a classroom environment that supports student collaboration, dialogue, and group activities.

2. Utilize appropriate accommodations – these include things such as allowing the student to use a word-to-word glossary/dictionary, allowing for extra time to complete tasks, providing the information to students in multiple ways (such as auditory, written, visual supports, etc.), and allowing students to use translations from their first language into English.  Accommodations for students are listed on individual language service plans. Students should be provided with extensive opportunities to practice and utilize these accommodations on an ongoing basis.

3. For additional support with instructional practices for English learners see the Mississippi Department of Education's English Learner Guidelines: Regulations, Funding Guidance and Instructional Supports https://tinyurl.com/2p9cjjs5.

## Formatting
1. Ensure that assessments are fair – separate language skills from content skills.  Language skills include vocabulary, comprehension, phonology, syntax (grammar), and semantics (meaning).  Students should not be penalized for language errors outside of English Language Arts.

2. Utilize appropriate accommodations – these include things such as allowing the student to use a word-to-word glossary/dictionary, allowing for extra time to complete tasks, providing the information to students in multiple ways (such as auditory, written, visual supports, etc.), and allowing students to use translations from their first language into English.  Accommodations for students are listed on individual language service plans and should be used for formative and summative assessments based on individual student needs.

## Grading
- Grade content understanding, not the language proficiency of the student
- Grading should be a collection of different activities in all four domains of listening, speaking, reading, and writing.  This is an ideal area for content area and EL teachers to collaborate and collect documentation where students demonstrate what they know
- Make indicators transparent to students
- Allow choice in assessment activities so that students can exercise personal passions and interests
- Work in collaboration with EL teachers
- Provide support and check for growth – portfolio assessments
- Use rubrics that include the full scope of concepts that are being assessed

# SEVEN KEY STRATEGIES TO ADAPTING WRITTEN ASSESSMENTS FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS

When adapting assessments for ELs, it is important to maintain the rigor of the assessment. Collaboration with EL and content area teachers will ensure appropriate adaptations which will maintain the rigor of the standard. This collaboration is also highly effective when analyzing student work. This deepens the EL teacher's knowledge of the content area instructional goals and deepens the content area teacher's knowledge of second language acquisition.

## Appropriate Assessment Adaptations for English Learners

### FORMATTING ASSESSMENTS FOR ACCESSIBILITY

1. Provide clear and easy to understand directions.

2. Provide clear places for students to mark responses.

3. Add images and icons to the assessment to make text more comprehensible.

4. Add synonyms behind academic vocabulary (not the targeted content vocabulary).

5. Label diagrams for clarity.

6. Provide sentence frames or sentence starters to help students communicate their ideas without giving away the answer.

7. Simplify multi-part questions by separating them into separate questions or question parts.

## Example Questions and Adaptations

**The sample assessment items on the following pages provide examples of what these adaptations may look like when assessing ELs in content areas.**

Example 1 Not Adapted for ELs in Science:

| A =_____ | B= _____ | C = _____ | D = _____ | E= _____ | F = _____ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|

| TERM | DEFINITION |
|---|---|
| A. Metamorphic | The preserved remains or traces of a living organism from the distant past |
| B. Sedimentary | A rock formed through the cooling of magma or lava |
| C. Igneous | A rock formed from great heat and pressure inside the Earth's crust |
| D. Fossils | A solid substance that occurs naturally, and is consistent throughout |
| E. Minerals | Rocks formed from years of sediment compacting together and becoming hard |

## Example *Adapted for ELs in Science*:

# Directions: Match each vocabulary word with its definition. Write your answer in the box.

| Types of Rocks | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Word** | **Answer** | **Definition** |
| **Example:** Rock | **W** | **W. The solid mineral material forming part of the surface of the earth** |
| Metamorphic | | **A.** The preserved remains or traces of a living organism **(living thing)** from the distant past |
| Sedimentary | | **B.** A rock formed through the cooling of magma or lava |
| Igneous | | **C.** A rock formed from great heat and pressure **(force)** inside the Earth's crust |
| Fossils | | **D.** A solid substance **(particular kind of matter)** that occurs naturally, and are consistent (the same) throughout |
| Minerals | | **E.** Rocks formed from years of sediment compacting together **(pressed together)** and becoming hard |

Adding **directions** and **examples** clarifies the task for those not familiar with the assessment format.

Adding a **column** for students to write the answers clarifies what to do if they do not know what "match" means.

Adding **synonyms** behind academic vocabulary (not the targeted/tested content vocabulary) clarifies statements.

# Example 2 Not Adapted for ELs in Science:

**Use the following food chain to answer questions a) and b).**

sunflowers ⟶ aphids ⟶ ladybugs ⟶ sparrows ⟶ hawks

a) Which organism is a secondary consumer?
_____

b) If the hawks were removed from the food chain, what is most likely to happen to the number of other organisms in the food chain?
Circle the best answer (a, b, or c)

| Food Chain | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | **Aphids** | **Ladybugs** | **Sparrows** |
| **a.** | Decrease | Decrease | Decrease |
| **b.** | Increase | Increase | Increase |
| **c.** | No change | No change | No change |

# Example 2 *Adapted for ELs in Science*:

**Use the following food chain to answer questions a) and b).**

sunflowers ⟶ aphids ⟶ ladybugs ⟶ sparrows ⟶ hawks



a. Which organism is a secondary consumer? _____

**Insert icons or pictures to make text more comprehensible.**

**Add synonyms to make text more comprehensible.**

b. If the hawks were removed **(taken away)** from the food chain, what is most likely to happen to the number of other organisms in the food chain? *Circle the best answer (a, b, or c)*

**Add icons and images to make text more comprehensible.**

| Food Chain | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | **Aphids**  | **Ladybugs**  | **Sparrows**  |
| **a.** | Decrease ⬇ | Decrease ⬇ | Decrease ⬇ |
| **b.** | Increase ⬆ | Increase ⬆ | Increase ⬆ |
| **c.** | No change ＝ | No change ＝ | No change ＝ |

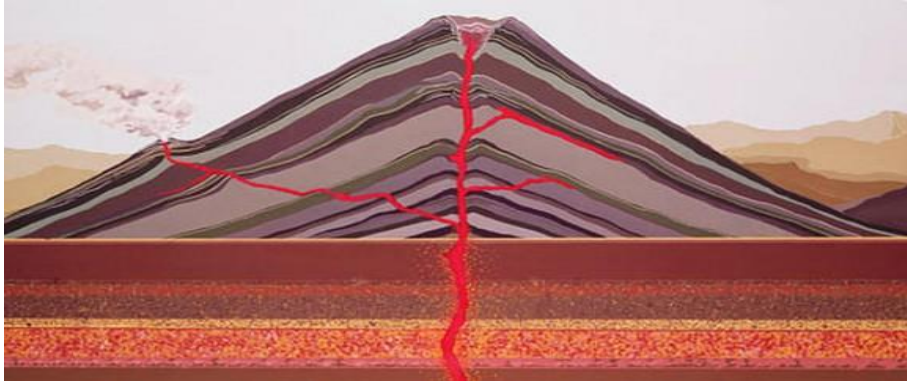# Example 3 Not Adapted for ELs in Social Studies

Use the diagram below to answer questions 1 and 2.

1. What causes volcanoes to erupt?
   _____.

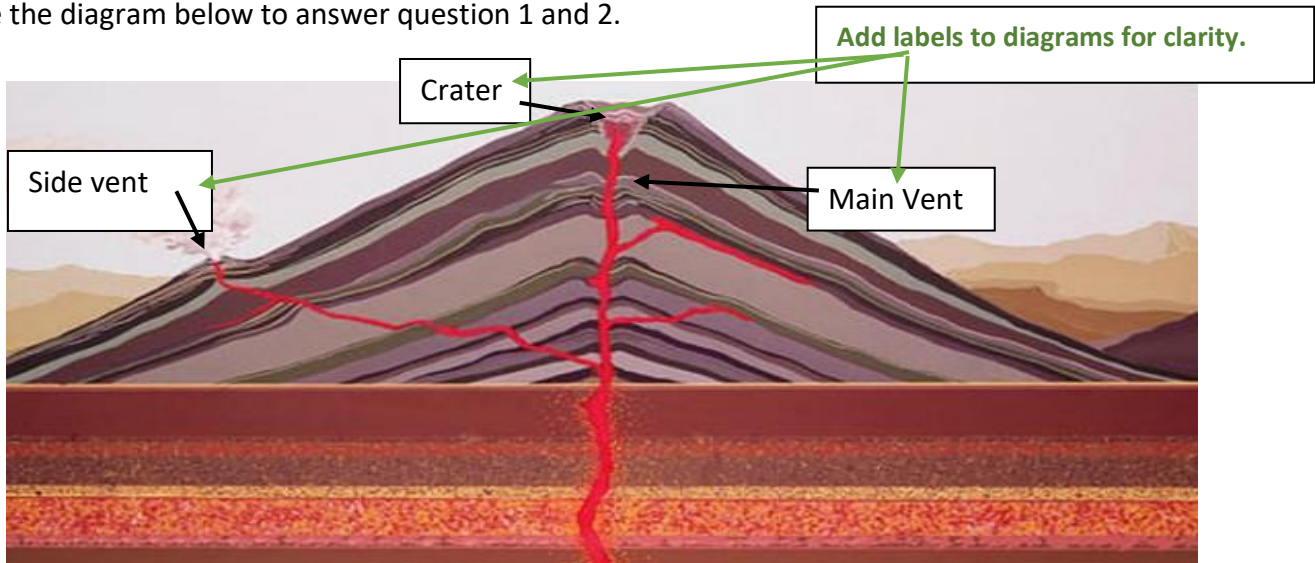2. What are some of the effects of volcanic eruptions?
   _____.



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# Example 3 *Adapted for ELs in Social Studies*:

Use the diagram below to answer question 1 and 2.

Add labels to diagrams for clarity.

Crater

Side vent

Main Vent



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Provide sentence starters or sentence frames to help students communicate their ideas.

1. **What causes volcanoes to erupt?**
   **Volcanoes erupt when** _____.

2. **What are some of the effects of volcanic eruptions?**
   **Volcanic eruptions can cause** _____, _____, and
   _____.

## Example 4 Not Adapted for ELs in English Language Arts:

In the book <u>Little Women</u>, identify one main character other than Jo and explain how he/she influenced Jo's choices in the book.
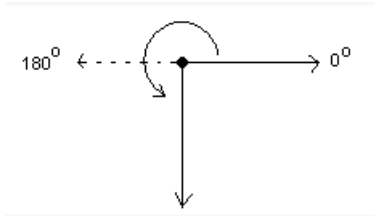
## Example 4 *Adapted for ELs in English Language Arts*:
**(Break two-part questions into two more concise questions.  Use sentence frames if needed.)**

1. In the book <u>Little Women</u>, identify one other character that influenced Jo.
   A character who influenced Jo was _____.

2. Write a sentence to explain how your selected character influenced Jo's life choices.
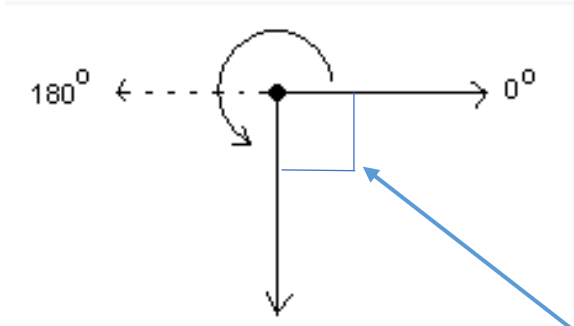   _____ influenced Jo because _____.

## Example 5 Not Adapted for ELs in Math:
What is the measure of the solid line angle depicted by the following figure?



## Example 5 *Adapted for ELs in Math*:
What is the measure of the solid line angle depicted **(shown)** by the following figure **(picture)**?



**Add clarifying language to the question.**

**Add visuals to support understanding of required tasks.**

# TWO STEP SCAFFOLDING TECHNIQUE TO SUPPORT ESSENTIAL QUESTION UNDERSTANDING

Classroom teachers often strive to create assessments that mirror benchmark and state assessments in order to better prepare their students for these assessments. One technique for leveling the playing field for ELs is to provide scaffolds which enable them to better decipher the questions on these types of assignments. Below is a simple and effective technique for providing support:

1. Provide beginning level ELs with versions that highlight important words in the question so that students will understand the essential question

2. Allow intermediate ELs to highlight important words in the question with teacher checking to verify that all essential components are included

This technique may vary for ELs' varying levels of English proficiency and may change over the course of the year as students progress in both academic concepts and academic vocabulary. Students at English proficiency levels 1 or 2 may need the teacher to highlight the important words. Students at English proficiency levels may be able to highlight the important words themselves with the teacher checking to verify appropriate highlights. More advanced students may or may not need to highlight important words or may not need the teacher to check highlighting.

**Examples:**

For an EL student who is at a level 2, teachers may need to highlight the important words in questions to support student understanding.

**Math example:**

Colin loves to eat tuna salad for lunch. His mom is always looking for a bargain on 12-ounce cans of tuna. Today, his local grocery store is offering 4 cans of Sea Star tuna for $3.28 and 2 cans of Ocean's Best tuna for $1.88. Which brand is the better deal?

**History example:**

When it was completed in 1787, the new Constitution of the United States had to go through a process called ratification to become legal. Which state became the first to ratify the Constitution?

Washington            c. Delaware
New York              d. Pennsylvania

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