

Intervention: Graphic Organizers

Graphic Organizers for ELLs (All Grade Levels) by: Terri Siqueza in *Colorin Colorado* (2005)

Graphic organizers are a great tool to use when teaching English language learners (ELLs). Visual illustrations allow ELLs to better understand the material while learning important vocabulary.

Graphic organizers are most useful to ELLs when presented in small group activities. During the activities ELLs benefit from opportunities to work cooperatively – students are able to discuss and share their thoughts as they begin to contribute to the group effort. When ELLs use graphic organizers, they show achievement benefits across a variety of content areas, in all grade levels.



What I Know	What I Want to Know	What I Learned

Graph 1

When teachers begin to use graphic organizers they need to follow some simple steps to make sure ELLs gain knowledge from such a simple yet reliable tool (Merkley & Jefferies, 2001). For example as a teacher begins to present a new topic, such as the [solar system](#), an organizer can assist introducing the new idea (*see graph 1*).

Teachers should also begin to verbalize the relationship between the ideas, and the information that will be taught. Students or adults can write/draw the information provided by other students using a [KWL chart](#) (click for a blank one). Graphic organizers should be tailored to reinforce the relationships between concepts, reminding students that this is just a quick preview of the material that will be taught next.



Concept Definition Map	
Concept Definition	
Example	Definition
Example	Definition
Example	Definition
Example	Definition
Example	Definition
Example	Definition
Example	Definition

Graph 2

Secondly, teachers need to provide the opportunity for students to participate in discussions. ELLs need to have numerous pauses to process language in order to participate. For instance, classroom activities can be tailored to let students create graphs such as a [concept definition map](#) (see graph 2). Students can create a list of familiar terms to these maps.

Once students had the opportunity to share their thoughts and understand the topic that it is to follow, teachers can start to connect new material to their prior knowledge. Lessons need to guide ELLs to activate prior knowledge as they recollect earlier taught content to be able to retain new material (Merkley & Jefferies, 2001). In other words, graphic organizers provide a visual summary as they describe information – introducing ELLs to new technical vocabulary as they reinforce decoding skills of key words for an upcoming lesson.

Graphic organizers facilitate ELLs' comprehension through visual illustrations of key terms, vocabulary, ideas, and the relationship among them. Improving student's reading comprehension can be challenging, but such progress is necessary when focusing on students who are learning English (Kim, Vaughn, Wanzek, & Wei, 2004).

References

Kim, A., Vaughn, S., Wanzek, J., & Wei, S. (2004). Graphic organizers and their reading comprehension of students with LD: A synthesis of research. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 37*(2), 105-118.

Merkley, D. M., Jefferies, D. (2001). Guidelines for implementing a graphic organizer. *The Reading Teacher, 54* (4), 350-357.

Endnotes

Terri Siqueza expressed that ELLs are not necessarily struggling learners; they are learning a new language, and this is an enormous job on its own. As an advocate for ELL students her primary goal is to assure they are taught at their grade level using graphic organizers to meet their second language needs. Terri believes that graphic organizers hold they key to providing an opportunity for students to have access to content material with visual supports to fully reach their learning potential. Graphic organizers are easily accessible and adequate for all grade levels as they make learning meaningful, to all students.

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