

Adaptation of Content to All Levels of Student Proficiency

In many schools, teachers are required to teach from textbooks that are too difficult for English learners to read. We have previously mentioned the problem of “watering down” text to the point where all students can read it; content concepts are frequently lost when the text is adapted in this way. We also know ELs cannot be expected to learn all content information by listening to lectures.

Therefore, we must find ways to make the text and other resource materials accessible for all students, adapting them so that the content concepts are left intact (Short, 1991). Several ways of doing this have been recommended for students who have reading difficulties (Readance, Bean, & Baldwin, 2001; Ruddell, 2005; Vacca & Vacca, 2004; Vogt, 1992), and they work equally well for ELs. These approaches can be used throughout a lesson, as a prereading instructional strategy, as an aid during reading, and as a postreading method for organizing newly learned information.

- **Graphic organizers:** These are schematic diagrams that provide conceptual clarity for information that is difficult to grasp. They help students identify key content concepts and make relationships among them (McLaughlin & Allen, 2002). Graphic organizers also provide students with visual clues they can use to supplement written or spoken words that may be hard to understand. When they use them prior to reading, students can use the organizers as a guide and as a supplement to build background for difficult or dense text. When used concurrently with reading, they focus students’ attention and help them make connections (e.g., Venn diagram), take notes, and understand the text structure (e.g., a timeline informs students the text will be organized chronologically). When used after reading, graphic organizers can be used to record personal understandings and responses (Buehl, 2001). Graphic organizers include story or text structure charts, Venn diagrams, story or text maps, timelines, discussion webs, word webs, clusters, thinking maps, and so forth. Vogt & Echevarria (2008) include a number of templates for these graphic organizers.
- **Leveled study guides:** These are study guides designed specifically for diverse students’ needs. All students are expected to master the key concepts in the text; however, depending on students’ language and literacy development, the leveled study guides are written differently. For some students who can easily read the text material, the study guides extend and enrich the subject material and they include challenging questions or tasks. For other students, leveled study guides lead them through the material with definitions and “hints” for unlocking the meaning, and they include fewer challenging questions and tasks. For some ELs and struggling readers, the study guides may include brief summaries of the text along with more manageable questions and tasks. Questions, tasks, and statements on the leveled study guides can be marked with asterisks as follows (from most manageable to most challenging):

*All students are to respond to these questions/statements/tasks

**Group 1 students are required to complete these questions/statements/tasks

***Group 2 students are required to complete these questions/statements/tasks

Of course, the option to try the more challenging questions or statements should be open to all students.

- **Outlines:** Teacher-prepared outlines equip students with a form for note-taking while reading dense portions of text, thus providing scaffolded support. These are especially helpful if major concepts, such as the Roman numeral level of the outline, are already filled in. The students can then add other information to the outline as they read. For some students, an outline that is entirely completed may be helpful to use as a guide to reading and understanding the text. Figure 2.4 shows an example of a scaffolded outline for a reading on the circulatory system.

FIGURE 2.4 *Scaffolded Outline*

The Circulatory System

- I. Major Organs
 - A. Heart
 - 1. Pumps blood throughout the body
 - 2. _____
 - B. _____
 - 1. _____
 - 2. _____
- II. Major Vessels
 - A. Artery
 - 1. Takes blood away from heart
 - 2. _____
 - B. Vein
 - 1. _____
 - 2. _____
 - C. _____
 - 1. Connects arteries and veins
 - 2. _____

- **Highlighted text:** A few literature anthologies or content textbooks may be marked and reserved for students acquiring English and/or for those with delayed literacy development. Overriding ideas, key concepts, topic sentences, important vocabulary, and summary statements are highlighted (by the teacher or other knowledgeable person) prior to the students using the books. Students are encouraged to first read only the highlighted sections. As confidence and reading ability improve, more of the unmarked text is attempted. The purpose of highlighted text is to reduce the reading demands of the text while still maintaining key concepts and information.
- **Taped text:** Key portions (such as the highlighted text just mentioned) or the entire text is recorded, and students are encouraged to listen to the tape while they follow along in the book. For some students, multiple exposures to the taped text may result in a more thorough understanding. Ideally, tapes should be available for both home and school learning center use.
- **Adapted text:** As mentioned earlier in this chapter, text adaptation involves rewriting selected sections of text that contain key concepts and information. Although time consuming, rewriting text is an effective modification of curricular materials because information is organized in small sequential steps, avoiding long, dense passages. Short, simpler sentences are rewritten from long, complex ones. An example of a complex sentence from a science text follows: "Electrons have negative electric charges and orbit around the core, nucleus, of an atom." A simple adaptation of this sentence is, "Electrons have negative charges. They orbit around the core. The core of the atom is called the nucleus."

Ideally, rewritten paragraphs should include a topic sentence with several supporting details. Maintaining a consistent format promotes easier reading for information-seeking purposes. All sentences included in the rewritten text should be direct and relevant to the subject. In the following example, a paragraph of original text is taken from an anthology theme in a reading series (Cooper, et al., 2003). This passage was excerpted from a piece of nonfiction literature, *Into the Mummy's Tomb*, written by Nicholas Reeves.