



Transcript of Video: Best Practices in ESOL Instruction, Standard 6: Instructional Delivery

Welcome to *Best Practices in ESOL Instruction*, based on the Massachusetts Professional Standards for Adult ESOL—specifically, Standard 6: Instructional Delivery.

The Massachusetts ESOL Professional Standards outline what adult ESOL teachers should know and be able to do to deliver effective instruction. These standards include understanding how second languages are learned, knowing the components of English—grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and more—and, importantly, knowing how to teach them effectively. They also emphasize culturally responsive teaching, thoughtful and standards-based curriculum design, effective assessment practices, and a commitment to ongoing professional growth.

All of these expectations come together in Standard 6, which focuses on instructional delivery. This is where everything happens—whether the class is remote, in person, or hybrid. Classroom instruction is where teachers put theory into practice.

Before diving into best practices, consider your own experiences. As a teacher or a student, what has worked well in adult ESOL classes? What do you think about when planning lessons? Which practices help your students learn consistently? Your thoughts might include making lessons interactive and relevant, balancing instruction with practice, keeping activities appropriately challenging, fostering visible progress, and ensuring lessons remain student-centered, encouraging, and respectful.

Standard 6 captures all of these ideas. Research shows that adult second-language acquisition improves when teachers use a variety of rigorous instructional methods and relevant materials that engage learners, encourage productive struggle, foster critical thinking, and respond to diverse needs, interests, and readiness levels.

These best practices can be viewed through three core principles: making instruction **relevant and inclusive, engaging and interactive**, and **rigorous**. This involves culturally responsive, meaningful content; opportunities for learners to communicate and collaborate; teacher restraint so students do most of the talking; and feedback that encourages learning without discouraging effort. Rigorous instruction includes critical thinking, accessibility for all learners, gradual release of responsibility, and regular assessment communicated clearly to students.

Creating a Relevant and Inclusive Environment

Effective ESOL teachers begin by getting to know their students as individuals—and helping students get to know one another. This can happen during intake, through informal conversation, interviews, or writing activities. Teachers learn about students' backgrounds, cultures, work and family situations, communities, interests, and goals.

Teachers then use this information to shape instruction. Understanding students' goals and interests helps teachers select meaningful topics and materials that reflect the diversity of the class, such as texts and resources by authors representing learners' cultures. Instruction becomes contextualized and authentic. For example, if a student's goal is career advancement, a teacher might create lessons on job exploration, problem-solving in the community, or current events in students' home countries.

Effective teachers also give students choice and voice: allowing them to select research topics, contribute materials to the class, help establish routines, or provide feedback about pacing, homework, and class activities. Adult learning theory shows that adults learn best when instruction is purposeful, relevant, applicable to their lives, and respectful of them as adults. A supportive environment is also essential for successful language acquisition.

Ensuring Engaging and Interactive Learning

Another key principle of second-language acquisition is that learners progress more quickly when they actively interact with others. Effective teachers create communicative, collaborative learning opportunities and are intentional about planning these interactions. They identify the language learners will need, design paired or group activities, integrate multiple language skills, and guide students to stay on task.

Teachers are transparent about the purpose of interactive activities, helping students understand that regular use of the language accelerates learning. They also monitor their own talk time—aiming for roughly 20% teacher talk and 80% student talk—and practice “wait time,” allowing students to think before responding. Teachers ask open-ended questions, prompt elaboration, encourage peer explanations, and structure activities so students lead the interaction.

Comprehensible input is another essential principle. Teachers adjust their language to match learners' proficiency, avoiding unnecessary idioms, speaking clearly and naturally, and using gestures, facial expressions, and supportive visuals.

Error correction is handled thoughtfully. Effective teachers understand that mistakes are necessary for language development. When accuracy is not the goal, teachers may avoid interrupting fluency and instead note recurring errors to address later. When errors interfere with communication or when accuracy is the focus, teachers provide corrective feedback—sometimes directly, sometimes by prompting self-correction, restating a student's phrase more accurately, or offering metalinguistic cues. They aim to foster learner independence and self-monitoring.

Providing Rigorous Instruction

Adult learners need English not only to get by, but to thrive in work, education, and civic life. Rigorous instruction supports this by promoting critical thinking, ensuring accessibility, increasing learner autonomy, and assessing progress regularly.

Teachers contextualize language learning in tasks that require complex thinking—analyzing data, evaluating arguments, comparing information, solving problems, and engaging with rich

informational texts. Instead of surface-level topics like “shopping” or “health care,” teachers might design tasks such as comparing nutritional value across foods, researching food deserts, evaluating insurance plans, or presenting evidence-based viewpoints on social issues.

To ensure all learners can access rigorous tasks, teachers provide scaffolds such as reading guides, sentence frames, closed captioning, simplified texts, or audio supports. They differentiate instruction, teach academic vocabulary explicitly, offer background knowledge when needed, and sometimes allow first-language use for clarity or complex instructions.

Effective teachers gradually release responsibility for learning. They activate prior knowledge, introduce new content, model and guide practice, and eventually transition students toward independent, real-world application. Teachers check understanding frequently through informal observation, quick assessments, or learner reflections.

At the end of a unit, teachers ensure students can demonstrate mastery and transfer their skills to new contexts outside the classroom.

Bringing It All Together

Effective ESOL instruction is:

Relevant and inclusive—culturally responsive, meaningful, authentic.

Engaging and interactive—rich with opportunities for students to communicate, collaborate, and take risks in a supportive environment.

Rigorous—promoting critical thinking, offering accessible learning pathways, encouraging learner independence, and providing consistent assessment.

By applying these practices, ESOL teachers accelerate students’ language development, helping them gain the confidence and skills needed to communicate in English and navigate work, education, and community life.

For more information about effective ESOL instruction, the SABES website offers resources, research, and events on topics such as the gradual release of responsibility, scaffolding, differentiation, project-based learning, and more.