



Why ESL?

Students who are learning English must be able to do more than just talk to friends, buy things at a store, or find their way around the city. Students must understand different ideas and be able to **read, write, and talk** about the ideas. This is called **Academic English**.

Students need academic English to finish senior high school. It is also important for college, university, or future employment.

ESL classes help students develop academic vocabulary and subject-specific skills that they may not have developed in their own country.



Research tells us:

1. Students between 8-11 years old with 2-3 years of native language education take 5-7 years to reach grade level in English.
2. Students with little or no formal schooling who arrive before the age of eight take 7-10 years to reach grade level in English language literacy.
3. Students who were below grade level in native language literacy also took 7-10 years to reach the 50th percentile. Many of these students never reached grade level norms.

This data holds true regardless of the home language, country of origin, and socioeconomic status.

Adapted from: Collier, V., & Thomas, W. (1999) Making U.S. schools effective for English language learners, Part 1. TESOL Matters, 9(4): 1-6.

Most core subject teachers do not have ESL training. Quality content instruction alone is not sufficient to ensure that English Language Learners gain academic proficiency. Source: Susan Dutro & Carrol Moran, 2003



Vocabulary Trajectories

Age	Native Speaker	Elementary With Help	Elementary Without Help	Junior High School With Help	Senior High School With Help
1	0				
2	400				
3	1000				
7	8000				
10		0	0		
12		5000	5000		
13				2500	
15	40000	15,000	15,000	10,000	8000
16		20,000		18,000	16,000
17		25,000			
18	100000	30,000	18,000	26,000	24,000

Dr. Hetty Roessingh & Carla Johnson
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English has different ways to **write** information. Different subjects = different kinds of writing:

- Essays
- Reports
- Science labs
- Position papers
- Formal/business letters



Students need to learn the correct form for each kind of writing.

As students move up in grade levels, writing becomes more important and more difficult.



ESL classes teach students how to **read** for the different ways information is given.

Teachers help English Language Learners build background knowledge of topics so that they understand what they are reading in English. To do this, ESL teachers use:

- visual aids
- real objects
- discussion
- key vocabulary
- demonstrations
- role play
- text previewing
- many other strategies



In Canada, students and employees must often work in teams or groups. ESL teachers teach students how Canadians talk and work in teams and groups by developing 'soft skills' such as:

- respect,
- responsibility
- discussion skills
- the ability to work cooperatively with peers



ESL teachers encourage participation and help students to develop peer-groups and social networks.



ESL teachers have special training that may include:

- cultural awareness and understanding
- how to teach older students to read
- how to work with traumatized youth
- how to help students and families to access special supports and services
- how to access interpreters and diversity support workers
- understanding unique needs of complex, at risk ELLs

The experience of ESL students is different from that of English-speaking students who are learning another language. ESL students are learning English because they must **communicate, learn and participate** in a society that is new to them. This is difficult because:

- Fewer concessions are made to second language learners in the school and community and to young children learning their first language.
- Students may struggle to find ways to express their knowledge in a new language.
- Students may struggle to gather information and new concepts in an unfamiliar language.
- Students are exposed to informal English (e.g. slang) that makes understanding difficult.
- Students are in an environment where they are expected to acquire more sophisticated and complex knowledge and understanding of the world around them.
- Students are expected to express that knowledge and understanding with the level of English language that is similar to that of their native English – speaking classmates.
- Students must often learn the full Alberta curriculum while they are learning English.
- Many students will experience value and cultural conflicts between their home language and culture and the English language and culture in which they are immersed.

Adapted from: Alberta. Alberta Education. Learning and Teaching Resources Branch. English as a second language (ESL): guide to implementation

Students who are placed into content classes too soon often find it difficult to participate with other students. Class discussions contain:

- subject specific language
- idioms
- pop-culture references
- slang
- unfamiliar, western-based ideas

ESL students often feel 'invisible' because they cannot participate. Some worry or become sad if they feel that they are no longer 'top of the class'.



Non-academic aspects of school life, such as sports, celebrations, clubs, volunteering and social functions, are very important in Canada. Many newcomers do not participate much in these activities because they do not speak enough English, or because their parents do not feel that these activities are important. This can result in isolation and anxiety. ESL classes offer students a place to feel confident, experience success, make friends, and learn about the importance of becoming involved in school life.