STAGES OF SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION: For Classroom Teachers with ELL Students

This developmental language continuum is used to describe a student's current level of English proficiency.
The scale may be applied to describe oral language (speaking and listening), reading and writing proficiency.
For example, a student may have a language profile that looks like this: Oral language: 5, Reading: 2, Writing: 1

1 Beginning → **2 Developing** → **3 Expanding** → **4 Consolidating** → **5 Bridging**

Fluency occurs after stage 5.

CHARACTERISTICS OF STUDENT'S CURRENT STAGE OF SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

1 Beginning

Minimal comprehension

Student is at the start of their English learning journey. They may be in the silent stage.

- Listens and may repeat what you say
- Nods "Yes" and "No"
- Copies, draws and points
- Begins to recognize symbol/sound relationships

2 Developing

Limited comprehension

Student knows some common words, phrases, and sentences.

- Responds with 1-2 words
- Uses key words and familiar phrases
- Memorizes language chunks
- Understands the main idea of short simple text with support of visuals and background knowledge

3 Expanding

Good comprehension

Student can communicate in English but needs support with academic vocabulary

- Produces simple sentences and questions
- Makes errors and may misunderstand
- Understands easy stories with picture cues
- Does content work with support
- Makes logical connections

4 Consolidating

Excellent comprehension

Student can understand and communicate many ideas but needs support with figurative language and abstract academic content.

- Uses more complex sentences
- Expresses opinions and shares thoughts
- Asks questions for clarification and self corrects
- Understands more challenging texts and begins to make predictions and inferences

5 Bridging

Nearing fluency

Student can communicate and understand almost fluently but may need support with nuances in language.

- Fine-tunes English pronunciation and articulation
- Reads smoothly with expression
- Understands and uses a wider range of academic language and increasingly complex vocabulary

TEACHER PROMPTS

1 Beginning
- Point to / Show me...
- Circle the...
- Where is...?
- Who has...?

2 Developing
- Yes/no questions (Is this the...?)
- Either/or questions
- Lists
- Labels

3 Expanding
- Why...?
- How...?
- Explain...

4 Consolidating
- What would happen if...?
- Why do you think...?
- Have you ever...?
- Did she...

5 Bridging
- Decide if...
- Retell...
- How long have you...?
- In your opinion...

BEST PRACTICE

1 Beginning

Listening and Speaking:
- Model instructions and new vocabulary and paraphrase using gramatically correct structure.
- Teach new basic/functional classroom vocabulary
- Practice greetings and short phrases
- Teach the Roman Alphabet
- Games and activities that elicit language
- Choral work, chants, and repetition
- Honor and use home language as a learning tool

Reading
- Early literacy skills
- Teach phonemic and phonological awareness
- Use images to convey information and stories
- Use dual language resources
- Display and review vocabulary
- Allow for the use of assistive tech and software

Writing
- Teach early writing skills and short sentences using simple present tense
- Avoid excessive error correction
- Use images to elicit responses

2 Developing

Listening and Speaking:
- Teach familiar topics, new words and concepts through the use of visuals and scaffolding.
- Focus on every day social language and reinforce functional phrases
- Begin to introduce content specific academic language and key vocabulary with the use of translation tools

Reading
- Explicit vocabulary instruction
  - Expand literacy instruction and work on building comprehension
  - Use high interest/low vocabulary resources

Writing
- Provide sentence starters and frames to build understanding of sentence structure
- Teach simple targeted grammar
- Use dual language word-banks
- Allow home language for brainstorming and drafting text

3 Expanding

Listening and Speaking:
- Pre-teach content specific vocabulary and begin to use it in structured academic discussions, with support
- Provide multiple cross-curricular opportunities and ways to hear and use target vocabulary
- Small group conversation practice with peers
- Allow home language use to access and navigate content
- Continue grammar instruction
- Introduce figurative language and idioms

Reading
- Introduce texts with more academic language
  - Teach cognates, prefixes, suffixes and root words.
  - Adapt and abridge texts
- Use read-alouds to practice fluence, voice and expression.

Writing
- Provide opportunities to proof-read and edit
- Introduce more verb tenses

4 Consolidating

Listening and Speaking:
- Continue to scaffold vocabulary instruction
- Use targeted phrases, stems and frames to speak like 'experts'
- Confirm student's prior knowledge of content topics
- Encourage student choice in how they demonstrate understanding and vary lesson delivery
- Ask open ended questions, encouraging full sentences, and allowing for grammatical errors

Reading
- Use materials that connect content with diverse student experiences
  - Access prior knowledge
  - Provide opportunities for sharing, discussion, and response to a variety of texts to develop deeper comprehension

Writing
- Teach paragraph writing and structure
- Teach topic sentences
- Encourage writing for a variety of purposes
- Teach how to brainstorm and organize ideas prior to writing

5 Bridging

Listening and Speaking:
- Encourage the use of academic language with clear language targets
- Practice expressing opinions and exploring different points of view
- Use a variety of multimodal sources to engage students and elicit analysis and response
- Use targeted, timely, and oral feedback

Reading
- Teach advanced academic vocabulary from a variety of genres
  - Encourage public speaking and the use of their 'public voice'
  - Practice skills of summarizing and paraphrasing

Writing
- Provide exemplars and outlines for multi-paragraph essays
- Encourage more complex sentence structure, and vocabulary, and all verb tenses with little to no support

The time it takes to reach fluency in English varies.
Social language is learned before academic language.

Social Language = BICS (1-3 years)
Everyday language needed for daily social interactions and to understand classroom routines.

Academic Language = CALP (5-7 years) The language students need to think critically, understand and learn new concepts, cognitively process complex academic material, and communicate in academic contexts.

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For strategies, clarification, examples or resources, see the school's ELL teacher.

Adapted by A. Galac and L. Kovacik: Krashen and Terrell (1983); Resilient Educator https://resilienteducator.com/classroom-resources/five-stages-of-second-language-acquisition/
Province of BC ELL Standards https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/kindergarten-to-grade-12/teach/pdfs/ell/ell-standards-full.pdf.