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Activities for Newcomers

by Judie Haynes

When brand new English language learners first enter your school, it can be overwhelming for the teachers responsible for their instruction. It's hard to know what to do first. Here are some activity-based tips to get you started.

You've got brand new students just entering the school. They speak little or no English. You feel a sense of panic. What do you do first?

Determine whether your students know the Roman alphabet. If not, you need to allow time for plenty of practice. Those students who do know the Roman alphabet may not know or be able to read in cursive. In some cultures, however, students are taught to write in cursive first.

2. Ask bilingual parents to help newcomers during those first weeks. Go to [parent volunteers](#) to find out how to get help. Appoint buddies to work with your new students.

3. Make up a packet of beginning activities. [Newcomer Programs](#) are a source of reproducible materials. This will help you supply students with plenty of productive work. Introduce colors, numbers, shapes, number words, body parts, and survival vocabulary. Once your students know their color words they can do a variety of activities.

4. Next, start with the school environment. Students make flash cards of the items they see in their classroom. [Buddies](#) can provide them with plenty of help.

- o To introduce the classroom vocabulary to

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new students, point to the object or picture and say each word in English.

- o Have students repeat each word after you if they are verbal. (It's normal for a student to have a silent period, and this should be respected.)
- o Ask students to point to each item as you name it.
- o For those students who are ready to speak, indicate an item and ask, "What is this?" Students who are literate in native language can use the school words as a basis for reading and writing activities in English.
- o Have students write a sentence for each card using a frame that you provide. "This is a _____".
- o You may wish to provide students with a folder for keeping their work together. Organizing them in this way will enable them to more easily refer to the cards during other activities.

5. Provide students with a second set of cards. Have them use the cards to make flash cards, concentration games and sorting activities.

6. If students are ready to speak, provide a model question /answer conversation starter. For example on the classroom pages, begin with " Is there a chair in the room?" and progress to " Is there a book or a pencil on the desk?"

7.When students know the names of ten small items in your classroom, play this game:

- o Put six to ten items on a table and cover them with a cloth. Items may include a pen, pencil, eraser, marker, crayon, rubber band, stapler, ruler, scissors, book, paper, etc.
- o Give the students a few minutes to look at the items. (The length of time will depend on the age and ability of the students.)
- o Have students cover their eyes while you remove one item.

- o Allow students to guess what was removed. The student who guesses correctly, gets to remove the next item.

8.For a short time each day, have your students practice their English using a computer program or a book with cassette tape. Do not overdo this as students need to interact with peers in order to learn English.

9. Make a picture dictionary. To make a picture dictionary, staple sheets of construction paper together and have students cut pictures out of magazines. Use categories which complement your curriculum (for example, a Healthy Foods section to go with your health unit on nutrition). Encourage students to add to their Dictionary whenever possible. This is an excellent cooperative learning activity that mainstream students can share in.

10.Make a vocabulary poster. To make a vocabulary poster have students work in cooperative groups. Have each group of students cut pictures from magazines and label them to create large posters of categories of common vocabulary words. Categories might be food, clothing, body parts, colors, animals, playground scenes, family groups, classroom, street scenes, house and furniture, or transportation. Display the posters in your classroom.

11.Read to your newcomers every day. This reading must be accompanied by pictures, gestures, dramatic voice to convey meaning. What great practice this is for mainstream first and second graders who are learning to read themselves.

Related Links[Newcomers in the School Community](#)

In the Spring my district always welcomes newcomers to the United States into our E.S.L. program. Finding activities for these new students is a challenge. Combine your students' natural interest in environmental print with a tour of the neighborhood for this thematic unit.

[Help Your Newcomers Develop Pride in Their Heritage](#)

Do you know how to use the diversity in your classroom to help your newcomers develop pride in their native languages and cultures? Try some of these ideas.

[Establishing an Atmosphere of Acceptance](#)

Discover how you can alleviate many newcomers' fears by creating an atmosphere of acceptance and welcome in all of your classes.


[Pair Your Newcomers with Buddies](#)

Assign a buddy or a cross-grade tutor to your English language learner and watch them both blossom. Buddies gain in self esteem and your ELLs will feel welcome in your class

[Sensitize Your Mainstream Students](#)

You want your newcomers to be accepted on the playground and on the school bus. Sensitize mainstream students to the challenges that new learners of English face.

Resource Picks

 [Usborne's Animated First Thousand Words](#)

With this CD-ROM from Scholastic, students can click on a picture, hear the words, and see how they are written in 35 scenes from everyday life. Originally designed to help young native speakers of English learn to read, this program is a great beginning vocabulary builder. You can buy it from Educational Resources, 1-800-624-2926 or you can find it online by going to [Usborne Books At Home](#).

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