

Tips for the VET classroom

Introduction

Learners from a migration background often have a 'spiky' (uneven) profile, with their listening, speaking, reading and writing skills often at different levels. They may find listening to and reading technical information a challenge and their writing may be at a much lower level than their speaking and listening.

How can you support these learners to achieve success on their vocational course and, at the same time, ensure their language is adequate for the task?

Tips

1. Do a language audit of your course

- Look at the language used across the whole course, including the syllabus, course books and materials, delivery, assignments, presentations, assessment and work placements.
- Ask language teacher colleagues to help you identify which areas might be difficult for learners and to suggest strategies to make these more accessible.

2. Find out about your learners' language and educational background

- Ask your learners about the languages they speak and write and their previous education and qualifications. Consider how these may impact on their ability to cope with the course and what support you can provide.
- Include one or two individual language-based goals in their learning plan.

3. Make your worksheets and handouts learner-friendly

- Add headings and bullet points to highlight key messages.
- Include links, useful diagrams and visual illustrations.
- Write short, simple and clear instructions.

4. Be aware of the language you use

- Try to keep your language clear and simple, especially instructions. For example, instead of, 'Drop by on Friday', you could say, 'Come and see me on Friday'.

5. Teach strategies for learning vocabulary

- Encourage learners to record new key vocabulary, with translations, example sentences or definitions.
- Write key words on cards or categorise words using colour coding.

6. Make the most of learners' other language(s)

- Encourage learners to make notes in whatever language they prefer.
- Set up discussion groups for learners who share a language, so they can explore a topic in their language and then feedback to the class in the language of course.

7. Regularly check understanding

- Ask questions that require specific answers (e.g., 'Now you tell me how the process works'), rather than, 'Do you understand?'
- Ask learners to briefly summarise the key points.
- Encourage learners to buddy up with another learner who can support them.

8. Give support in academic writing

- Highlight the differences between formal and informal language.
- Point out that an academic writing style is formal and well structured.
- Direct learners to useful online guidance.

9. Give support in reading and research skills

- Encourage learners to first skim-read, scan for key information and find key words and sentences when reading longer texts.
- Reassure learners that they don't need to read and understand everything in order to get the meaning when detailed learning is not required.

10. Allow extra time

- Give your learners the time they need to make the most of your course, especially when discussing new or complex subjects.

Source: Adapted from Education and Training Foundation (no date), *Supporting ESOL Learners on Vocational Courses, Top Ten Tips*. London: ETF.