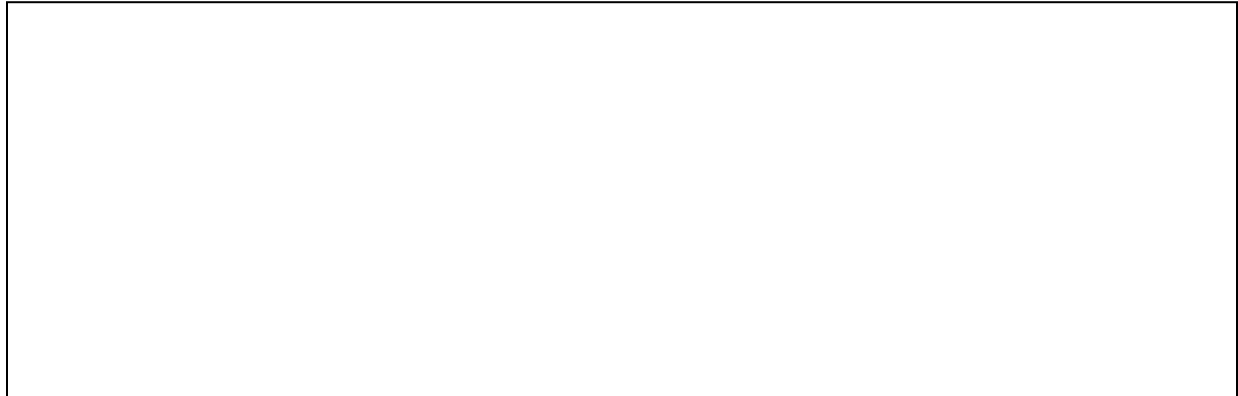


LANGUAGE ACQUISITION STAGE 1

PRE-PRODUCTION

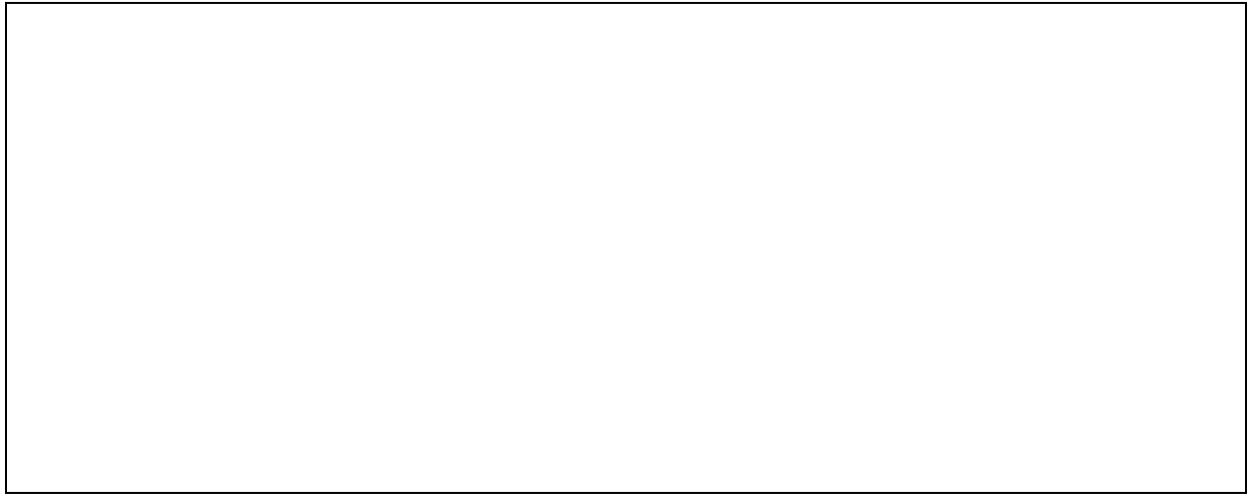
English language acquisition falls into five broad stages of development. It is important to remember, however, that it is a developmental continuum and no one stage is fixed in time, duration, or language skill level. Instead, the stages should be thought of as having fluid boundaries and overlapping skill levels, and should inform us about a student's general progression across the developmental continuum.



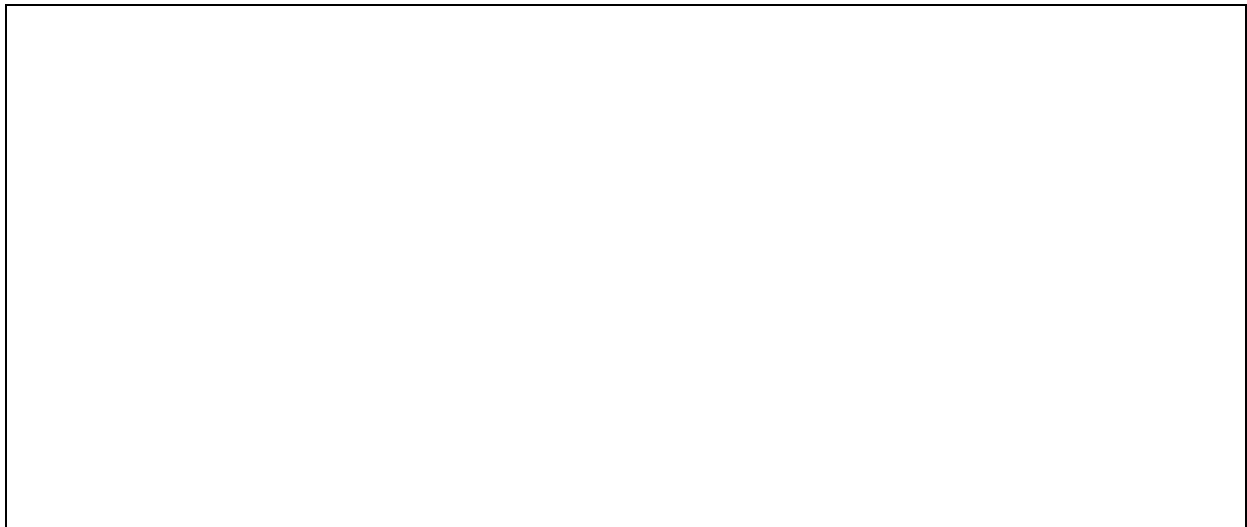
The first stage is commonly referred to as the “Pre-Production” stage, or silent period and lasts anywhere from 0 to 12 months. Think of a newborn baby in the first months of their life. They are in the receptive phase, actively listening to all sound (speech and other noise or sound) in their environment. They are not yet producing language but may be heard experimenting with their mouth and vocal chords to make sounds, or to mimic sounds they hear. A student in school who is in this initial stage of English development (regardless of their age and grade level) is also experiencing the pre-production stage and is actively listening and trying to connect what they hear to what they see and experience (sense-making). A baby does the same thing, relating what they hear (“Here comes your *bottle...*”) to the actions of the speaker who is giving the hungry child their bottle of formula to drink. Students who score a level 1 on the Washington English Language Proficiency Assessment (WELPA), are either in this stage or stage 2.



During stage one, oral communication in the target language takes a back seat to listening. There is not much happening verbally since the student is in the active receptive (pre-production) phase. Little or no comprehensible English is produced. The student may mumble English-like sounds, and may even attempt to echo when given a prompt. But don't assume that he or she is not learning or thinking. The student watches carefully during stage one, follows the lead of others, and predicts meaning from pictures, sounds, or gestures. Ninety to one hundred percent of the student's learning is from receptive input (teacher talk, other student talk, demonstrations...), in short—watching and listening. Reading and writing skills in the target language are not yet developed in stage one. The student may be able to imitate reading-like behavior (looking at the page, pictures, turning pages, etc.) in particular if they have already learned to read in another language; but generally cannot recognize written words in a book or word labels.



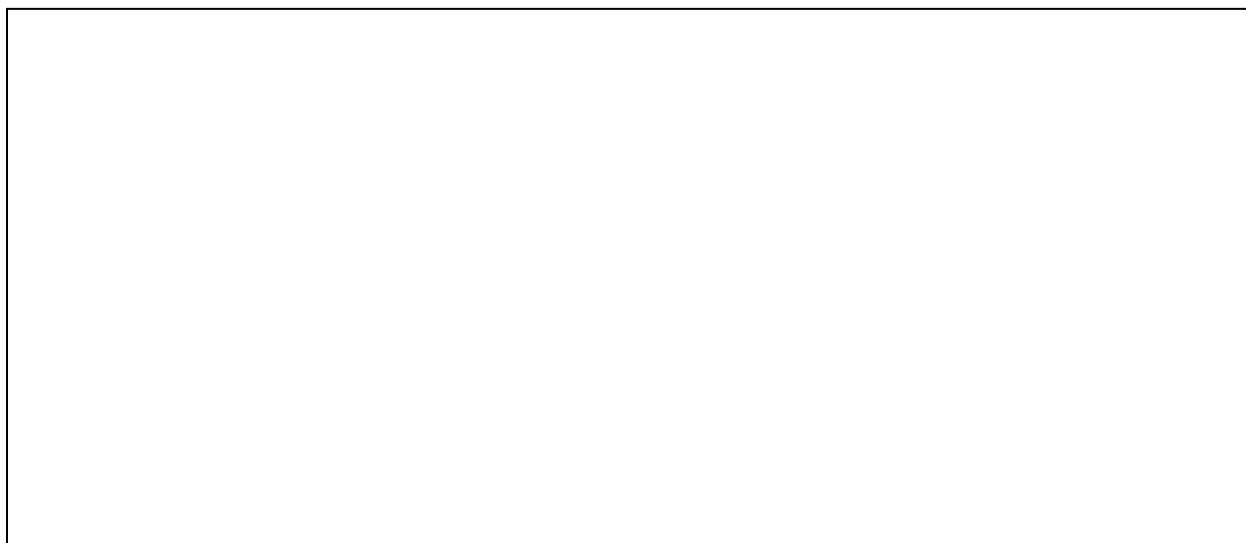
It is not uncommon for teachers with students in stage one to feel helpless and frustrated. The common misperception is that the student does not understand any of the lesson, and is not able to perform most or all of the lesson activities. However, there are many strategies that a teacher can utilize that will not only support the student's learning, but will also give teachers assessment feedback to monitor the student's mastery of lesson concepts as well as their English language development.



So, what can teachers do? It is critical at stage one to utilize a high degree of visuals to support comprehension. All learning input must include visual support through the use of body language and gestures, the use of realia or props, photos, video clips, drawings, maps, labels with icons, etc. Start with a concrete representation (the real three dimensional object) since it will produce a greater degree of understanding than other two dimensional renderings such as photos, or the more abstract representations of drawings or sketches. Support the understanding of classroom processes (i.e., Science investigation, or a team task) by modeling. Written instructions can be accompanied with visual graphics that aid comprehension. Repetition and patterning of information also helps a great deal at this stage.



At all stages of language acquisition students are able to think, but are not always able to demonstrate their understanding in English. Teachers must think deeply about what the student can do at this stage, and be intentional about their question prompts. A teacher can assess a stage one student's understanding by asking them to respond non-verbally. There are many ways to prompt for non-verbal responses including selecting a picture from a group that represents a particular object or idea, sorting pictures to retell information, reproduce a pattern with manipulatives, pointing to an answer, or acting out a response.



Since A good teacher will challenge and assess cognition beyond the knowledge and comprehension levels into application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation. It is possible to do this even for students at the pre-production level of language development with intentional prompts that require a non-verbal response.

Here are some examples at stage one:

EVALUATION: Teacher mismatches animal with its environment and asks **“Is this the right environment?”** (Student nods yes or no.) **“Find the right environment.”** (Student points or selects environment card.)

SYNTHESIS: **“Point to the animals that live in the soil.”** (Student points.)

ANALYSIS: **“Show me an animal that cannot live in the forest.”** (Student chooses a card.)

APPLICATION: **“Show me what would happen if we put the fish in the desert.”** (Student acts it out.)

COMPREHENSION: **“Show me where a deer lives.”** **“Show me where a fish lives.”** (Student points.)

KNOWLEDGE: **“Where is the racoon?”** (Student points to racoon.)

