Language Acquisition Chart

This chart was designed to help teachers better understand the process of second language acquisition. Please use this chart as a resource for learning more about the way people learn a new language in general, not as an indicator of the way all students should progress. Since curriculum gets continuously more difficult in each grade, a student may move in and out of these stages and not necessarily progress linearly.

Many factors will influence how quickly students acquire a second language, including the following:

- Age and time of entry into second language learning environment
- Attitude and motivation to learn second language
- Personality and learning style
- Language abilities in first language
- Similarity of first and second language
- Previous educational background
- Physical and emotional health
- Parental involvement in student's education
- Natural talent or ear for learning second language
- Previous exposure to second language and culture
- Maintenance of first language skills
- Supportive learning environment
- Teachers' use of ESL methods and appropriate strategies
- Amount of acceptance towards new culture

Adapted from The English Connection Newsletter
## DPI Level 1 - Entering Stage

| Other Names | • Newcomer  
• Pre-Production  
• Silent Period Stage |
|------------|-----------------|
| Definition | • The student does not understand or speak English with the exception of a few isolated words or expressions  
• The student is listening and absorbing language  
• The student is adjusting to U.S. culture  
• 0-500 receptive word vocabulary |
| Typical Student Behaviors | • Has minimal receptive vocabulary and only comprehends key words  
• May not produce speech for many months  
• Will try to make sense out of messages  
• Is working to gain familiarity with the sounds, rhythm and patterns of English  
• Responds to commands  
• May participate in shared readings  
• Relies heavily on context and picture cues for comprehension  
• Student indicates comprehension non-verbally (pointing, nodding, etc.)  
ABLE TO: observe, locate, label, match, show, classify, categorize, |
| Teaching Strategies | • Use gestures, manipulatives, visuals, props, realia (real things)  
• Create climate of acceptance/respect that supports acculturation  
• Give one and two-step directions in English supported by modeling, visuals, demonstrations, etc.  
• Provide materials or support staff in student's first language  
• Use buddies and cooperative grouping  
• Provide safe opportunities for student to attempt language production (i.e. chants, songs and poems)  
• Display print to support oral language  
• Use hands-on activities  
• Repeat directions and vocabulary  
• Model directions for student  
• Modify your speech: speak softly, slowly, emphasize key words, and simplify grammar and vocabulary  
• Do not talk more loudly or out of context  
• Use physical response to check for understanding  
• Ask yes/no questions  
• Ask students to point/draw/show  
• Teach content area vocabulary  
• Label classroom items using both languages  
• Be animated and enthusiastic |
| Relative Time Line | • 0-6 months in K-12 U.S. School System  
• Often can be a whole calendar year |
## DPI Level 2 - Beginning Stage

| Other Names          | • Early Production  
|                     | • Beginning Level of Reading  
|                     | • Social Language Stage  
| Definition          | • The student understands and speaks conversational and academic English with hesitancy and difficulty  
|                     | • The student understands parts of lessons and directions  
|                     | • The student is at a pre-emergent or emergent level of reading and writing in English, significantly below grade level  
|                     | • The student communicates with one and two word utterances  
|                     | • Very limited comprehension and vocabulary  
|                     | • The student is still adjusting to U.S. culture  
| Typical Student Behaviors | • Produces words in isolation  
|                     | • Verbalizes key words  
|                     | • Responds with one/two word answers or short phrases  
|                     | • Mispronunciation and grammar errors common  
|                     | • Identifies people, places and objects  
|                     | • Able to repeat and listen with greater understanding  
|                     | **ABLE TO:** Name, recall, draw, list, record, point out, underline, organize  
| Teaching Strategies | **Continue Stage 1 Strategies PLUS:**  
|                     | • Simplify language/not content  
|                     | • Design lessons to motivate students to talk  
|                     | • Ask questions requiring simple responses, such as, yes/no?, who?, what?, which one?, how many?, etc.  
|                     | • Expose students to a variety of experiences with understandable texts, such as patterned or predictable books  
|                     | • Introduce interactive dialog journals  
|                     | • Introduce a student dictionary or word wall for new vocabulary words  
|                     | • Expand student responses by modeling more elaborated language. For example, if student says "boat," you could say, "yes, those sailors are on a boat."  
|                     | • Do not overly correct grammatical errors, but do model appropriate language  
|                     | • Use shared and paired reading to encourage oral production of speech  
| Relative Time Line  | • 6 months-2 years in K-12 U.S. School System  

## DPI Level 3 - Developing Stage

| Other Names | Intermediate/Speech Emergence  
| Short phrases/Simple sentences  
| Social Language |
| Definition | The student understands and speaks conventional and academic English with decreasing hesitancy and difficulty  
| The student is post-emergent, developing reading comprehension and writing skills in English  
| The student possesses some English literacy skills that allow the student to demonstrate academic knowledge in content areas with assistance  
| The student still makes grammatical, word order and usage errors and is still limited in vocabulary development and comprehension of texts and spoken English  
| Up to 7,000 receptive/active word vocabulary |
| Typical Student Behaviors | Will speak with less hesitation and demonstrate increased understanding  
| Produces longer phrases or sentences with grammatical inaccuracy  
| Uses newly acquired receptive vocabulary to experiment with English  
| Participates more fully in discussions, including those with academic content  
| Functions at a social level  
| Depends heavily on context  
| Studies "big ideas" and key concepts in content areas  
| Engages in independent reading based on oral fluency and prior experiences with print, still uses limited vocabulary  
| Demonstrates comprehension by responding orally and in written form (charts, graphs, diagrams)  
| ABLE TO: tell, describe, restate, compare, summarize, question, map, dramatize |
| Teaching Strategies | **Continue Stage 1 and 2 Strategies PLUS:**  
| List and review instructions step by step  
| Build on student's prior knowledge  
| Incorporate more reading and writing  
| Explicitly teach writing skills  
| Ask students to describe personal experiences  
| Focus on communication in meaningful contexts, where students can express themselves in speech and print  
| Use semantic mapping and content webbing to develop vocabulary  
| Provide content-area texts, newspapers, trade books, magazines, etc. that are rich in visuals to promote conceptual development  
| Encourage drama, art, music and other forms of creative expression to represent meaning  
| Use performance based assessments  
| Ask open-ended questions that stimulate language production |
| Relative Time Line | 1-3 years in K-12 U.S. School System |
## DPI Level 4 - Expanding Stage

| Other Names                      | • High/Advanced Intermediate  
|                                 | • Academic Language Stage     |
| Definition                      | • The student understand and speaks conversational English without apparent difficulty, but understands and speaks academic English with some hesitancy  
|                                 | • The student continues to acquire reading and writing skills in content areas needed to achieve grade level expectations with assistance  
|                                 | • The student can communicate thoughts more completely, can participate in every day conversations without highly contextualized support  
|                                 | • Up to 12,000 receptive/active word vocabulary |
| Typical Student Behaviors       | • Engages in and produces connected English speech  
|                                 | • Shows good comprehension  
|                                 | • Demonstrates increased levels of accuracy and correctness  
|                                 | • Uses expanded vocabulary and higher-order language usage (persuade, evaluate, etc.)  
|                                 | • Reads a wider range of narrative genre and content texts with increasing comprehension  
|                                 | • Makes complex grammatical errors  
|                                 | • Functions fairly well with academic concepts  
|                                 | • Conducts research projects  
|                                 | • Still needs support for complex language and concepts  
|                                 | Able to: Imagine, create, appraise, contrast, predict, express, report, estimate, evaluate, explain |
| Teaching Strategies             | Continue Stage 1-3 Strategies PLUS:  
|                                 | • Introduce more academic language and vocabulary both oral and written  
|                                 | • Ask questions soliciting opinions, judgement, explanation (more why and how questions)  
|                                 | • Have students brainstorm, list, web, use graphic organizers  
|                                 | • Structure group discussions  
|                                 | • Guide use of reference materials  
|                                 | • Facilitate more advanced literature studies  
|                                 | • Provide for a variety of realistic writing experiences  
|                                 | • Publish student-authored stories, newsletter, bulletins, etc. |
| Relative Time Line              | • 3-5 years in K-12 U.S. School System |
### DPI Level 5 - Bridging Stage

| Other Names | • Advanced  
| • Near Fluent  
| • Academic Language Stage |
| Definition | • The student understands and speaks conversational and academic English well  
| • The student is near proficient in reading, writing, and content area skills needed to meet grade level expectations  
| • The student requires occasional support  
| • Beyond 12,000 receptive/active word vocabulary |
| Typical Student Behaviors | • Has advanced skills in cognitive/academic language  
| • Participates on an academic level with age/grade peers  
| • Maintains two-way advanced conversations around academic content  
| • Uses more complex grammatical structures  
| • Demonstrates comprehension in decontextualized situations  
| • Uses enriched vocabulary  
| • Produces language comparable to native English speakers peers  
| • Able to: relate, infer, hypothesize, outline, revise, suppose, verify, rewrite, assess, justify, critique, summarize, illustrate, judge, demonstrate |
| Teaching Strategies | Continue Stage 1-4 Strategies PLUS:  
| • Incorporate note-taking skills  
| • Teach study skills  
| • Teach test-taking skills  
| • Demonstrate how to verify answers (oral and written)  
| • Expand figurative language (idioms)  
| • Continue on-going language development through integrated language arts and content-area activities |
| Relative Time Line | • 5-7 years in K-12 U.S. School System |

### DPI Level 6 - Full English Proficiency

| Definition | • The student was formerly limited-English proficient and is now fully English proficient.  
| • The student reads, writes, speaks and comprehends English within academic classroom settings |

*Adapted from various sources, including information from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, definitions pulled from Wisconsin DPI*