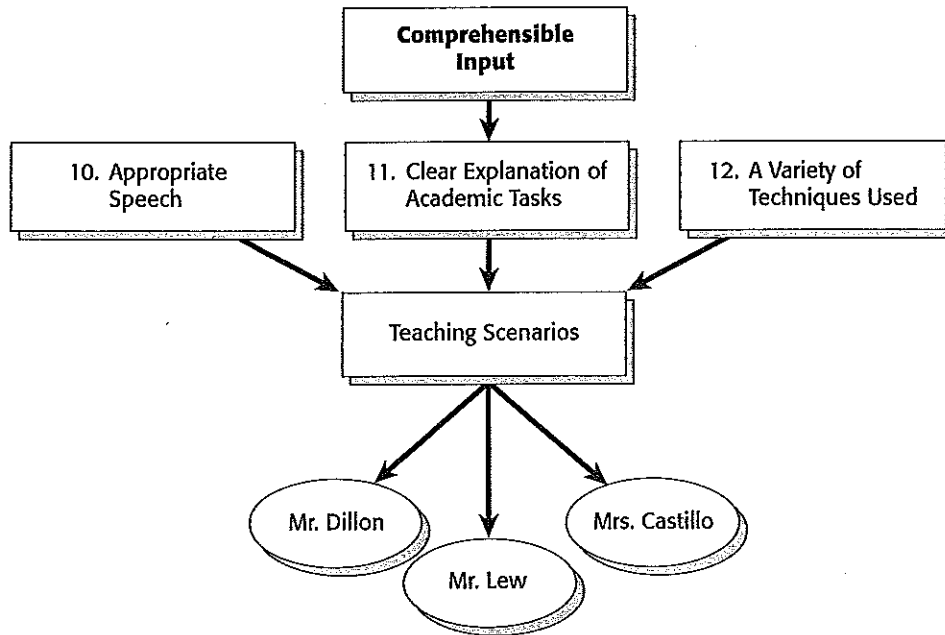


Comprehensible Input



Objectives

After reading, discussing, and engaging in activities related to this chapter, you will be able to meet the following content and language objectives.

Content Objectives

Explore techniques for presenting content information in ways that students comprehend

Review various ways to model and provide directions for academic tasks

Language Objectives

Discuss modifications to teacher speech that can increase student comprehension

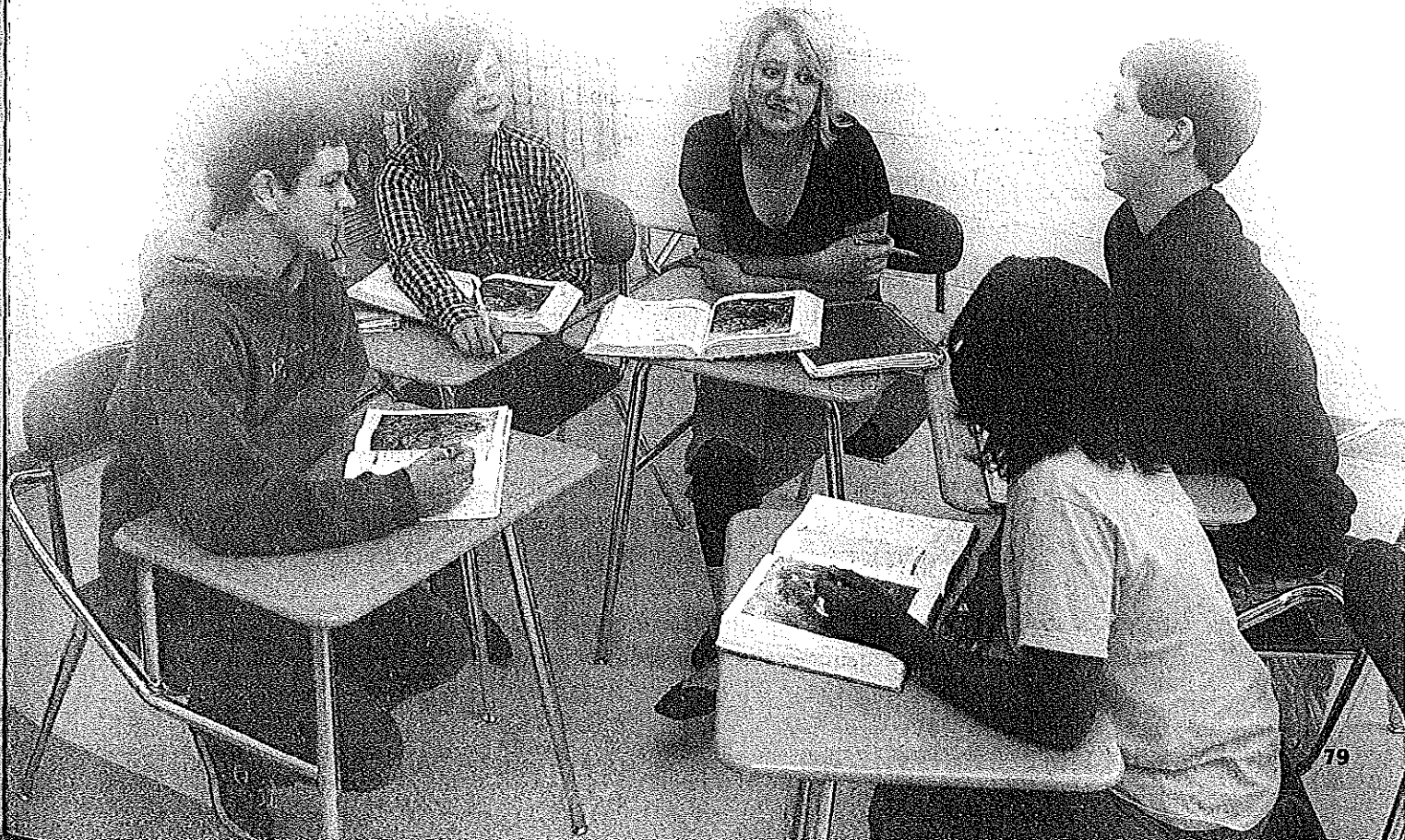
Write the steps needed for students to perform an academic task and have a partner perform each step

While many of the features of the SIOP® Model are indicators of effective instruction for all students, this component comprises some of the features that make SIOP® instruction different from “just good instruction.” An effective SIOP® teacher takes into account the unique characteristics of English learners. For these students, the teacher makes verbal communication more understandable by consciously attending to students’ linguistic needs. Making the message understandable for students is referred to as comprehensible input (Krashen, 1985). Comprehensible input techniques are essential to help English learners understand what the teacher is saying, and these techniques should be evident throughout the lesson.

Background

Students learning rigorous content material in a language they do not speak or understand completely require specialized teaching techniques to make the message understood. Effective SIOP® teachers understand that acquiring a new language takes time and is facilitated by many “clues” and appropriate speech. Comprehensible input is achieved when teachers pay attention to the unique linguistic needs of ELs and consistently incorporate these techniques into their daily teaching routines.

Comprehensible input is much more than simply showing pictures as visual clues during a lesson. It involves a conscious effort to make the lesson understandable through a variety of means. Communication is made more understandable through speech that is appropriate to students’ proficiency levels. The teacher enunciates and speaks more slowly, but in a natural way, for students who are beginning English speakers. More repetition may be needed for



beginners and, as students gain more proficiency in English, the teacher adjusts her speech for the students' levels. Teachers will increase students' understanding by using appropriate speech coupled with a variety of techniques that will make the content clear. We will discuss a number of ways to achieve comprehensible input in the next sections. In the scenarios that follow later in the chapter, you will see examples of teachers who use comprehensible input techniques to varying degrees of effectiveness. Further examples of comprehensible input techniques are seen in the classroom footage on the CD.



SIOP® FEATURE 10:

Speech Appropriate for Students' Proficiency Levels

For this feature, speech refers to (1) rate and enunciation and (2) complexity of speech. The first aspect addresses *how* the teacher speaks and the second aspect refers to *what* is said, such as level of vocabulary used, complexity of sentence structure, and use of idioms.

Students who are at the beginning levels of English proficiency benefit from teachers who slow down their rate of speech, use pauses, and enunciate clearly while speaking. As students become more comfortable with the language and acquire higher levels of proficiency, a slower rate isn't as necessary. In fact, for advanced and transitional students, teachers should use a rate of speech that is normal for a regular classroom. Effective SIOP® teachers adjust their rate of speech and enunciation to their students' levels of English proficiency.

Likewise, students will respond according to their proficiency level. The following example illustrates the variation in responses that may be expected when students at different levels of English proficiency are asked to describe the setting in a story:

- Beginning: "Cold day."
- Early Intermediate: "The day is cold and there is snow."
- Intermediate: "The day is very cold and heavy snow is falling."
- Advanced: "It is a cold, winter day and it is snowing more heavily than usual."
- Transitional: "The unusually heavy snow on the day the story takes place causes a number of problems for the characters."

SIOP® teachers carefully monitor the vocabulary and sentence structure they use with ELs in order to match the students' proficiency levels, especially with students at beginning levels of English proficiency.

Idioms—common sayings that cannot be translated exactly—create difficulty for students who are trying to make sense of a new language. Some common idioms include "below the belt" for unfair; "put one's foot down" meaning to be firm; "see eye to eye" for being in agreement; "get the hang of" meaning to become familiar with; and "get a person's back up" indicating to make someone annoyed. English learners are better served when teachers use language that is straightforward, clear, and accompanied by a visual representation.

Paraphrasing and repetition are useful practices that enhance understanding. English learners may require repeated exposures to a word in order to hear it accurately since they



To see an example of appropriate speech, please view the corresponding video clip (Chapter 4, Module 1) on the accompanying CD.

often lack the auditory acuity to decipher sounds of English words. Then they need to see and hear the words used repeatedly, preferably in a variety of ways. Brain research tells us that repetition strengthens connections in the brain (Jensen, 2005).

Cognates are often useful in promoting comprehension for students whose native language has a Latin base. For example, using “calculate the mass/volume ratio” (*calcular* in Spanish) may be easier for some students to understand than “figure out the mass/volume ratio.” (See Vogt & Echevarria, 2008 for more examples of cognates.)

SIOP[®] teachers also use simple sentence structures like subject–verb–object with beginning students and reduce or eliminate embedded clauses. For example, in a high school history class, the teacher may use the following sentence structure that is difficult to understand: “By breaking the rules of diplomatic convention and by embarking on his own, he was, he knew, risking ridicule and, in the event that things went sour, disgrace.” It might be better stated as, “He decided to break the rules of diplomatic convention and embark on his own. He knew that he may be ridiculed for it and be disgraced if things went badly.”

Using appropriate speech patterns and terms that are easier for ELs to understand contribute to comprehensible input.



SIOP[®] FEATURE 11: Clear Explanation of Academic Tasks



To see an example of clear instructions, please view the corresponding video clip (Chapter 4, Module 1) on the accompanying CD.

English learners at all levels (and native English speakers) perform better in academic situations when the teacher gives clear instructions for assignments and activities. The more practice students have with the types of tasks found in content classes, the better they will perform in class and the better prepared they will be when they exit the language support program. It is critical for ELs to have instructions presented in a step-by-step manner, preferably modeled or demonstrated for them. Ideally, a finished product such as a business letter, a research report, or a graphic organizer is shown to students so that they know what the task entails. Oral directions should always be accompanied by written ones so ELs can refer back to them at a later point in time as they complete the assignment or task. Students with auditory processing difficulties also require clear, straightforward instructions written for them to see.

According to case study data collected from ELs in sheltered classes (Echevarria, 1998), middle school students were asked what their teachers do that makes learning easier or more difficult. The following are some student comments:

- “She doesn’t explain it too good. I don’t understand the words she’s saying because I don’t even know what they mean.”
- “She talks too fast. I don’t understand the directions.”
- “He talks too fast. Not patient.”
- “It helps when he comes close to my desk and explains stuff in the order that I have to do it.”

These students’ comments illustrate the importance of providing a clear explanation of teachers’ expectations for lessons, including delineating the steps of academic tasks. This point cannot be overstated. In our observations of classes, many “behavior

problems” are often the result of students not being sure what they are supposed to do. A cursory oral explanation of an assignment can leave many students without a clue as to what to do to get started. The teacher, frustrated with all the chatter, scolds students, exhorting them to get to work. However, students do not know *how* to get to work and oftentimes do not know how to articulate that fact to the teacher.

In the area of writing, students need to be shown very specifically—and have opportunities to practice what has been clearly explained—the essential elements of good writing. Showing students what constitutes good writing, explaining it clearly, and providing opportunities to practice will result in improved writing (Schmoker, 2001). For intermediate and advanced speakers, focused lessons on “voice” or “word choice” may be appropriate while beginning speakers benefit from models of complete sentences using adjectives or forming a question.



SIOP® FEATURE 12:

A Variety of Techniques Used to Make Content Concepts Clear

Effective SIOP® teachers make content concepts clear and understandable for English learners through the use of a variety of techniques that make content comprehensible. We have observed some teachers who teach the same way for English learners as they do for native English speakers, except that they use pictures for ELs. We believe that the actual teaching techniques a teacher uses have a greater impact on student achievement than having a lot of pictures illustrating content concepts. High-quality SIOP® lessons offer students a variety of ways for making the content accessible to them. Although it might be impossible for teachers to present a variety of interesting hands-on lessons that include visuals to illustrate every concept and idea in the curriculum each period of every day, there does need to be sufficient planning to incorporate such techniques and activities throughout the week’s lessons.

Some techniques include:



Use gestures, body language, pictures, and objects to accompany speech. For example, when saying, “We’re going to learn about the three forms of water,” the teacher holds up three fingers. Showing one finger she says, “One form is liquid,” and shows a glass of water. Holding up two fingers she says, “the second form is ice,” and shows an ice cube. Holding up three fingers she says, “and the third form is steam,” and shows a picture of a steaming cup of coffee. These simple gestures and visual aids assist students in organizing and making sense of information that is presented verbally.



To see an example of effective techniques please view the corresponding video clip (Chapter 4, Module 1) on the accompanying CD.



Provide a model of a process, task, or assignment. For example, as the teacher discusses the process of water taking on the form of ice, she shows or draws a model of the process as it is being described. When students are later instructed to record conditions under which the change in ice from a solid to a liquid is accelerated or slowed, the teacher shows an observation sheet that is divided into three columns on the overhead projector. The teacher has a number of pictures (e.g., lamp, sun, and

refrigerator), which depict various conditions such as heat and cold. She demonstrates the first condition, heat, with a picture of the sun. She models how students will describe the condition in the first column (e.g., heats). Then she asks students what effect the sun, or heat, has on ice. They answer and in the second column she records how the ice changed (e.g., melted), and in the third column she indicates if the process was accelerated or slowed by the condition (e.g., accelerated). Providing a model as the students are taken through the task verbally eliminates ambiguity and gives the message in more than one way. Students are then able to complete the rest of the worksheet.



Preview material for optimal learning. When students' attention is focused on the specific information they will be responsible for learning in the lesson, students are able to prepare themselves for the information that is coming, making it more comprehensible for them. Further, they have an opportunity to access prior knowledge and make the connections that they will need to understand the lesson.



Allow alternative forms for expressing their understanding of information and concepts. Often ELs have learned the lesson's information but have difficulty expressing their understanding in English, either orally or in writing. Hands-on activities can be used to reinforce the concepts and information presented, with a reduced linguistic demand on these students. In a high school science class, students demonstrated their understanding of concepts such as hydroplaning by drawing a sketch of a car on a wet road, labeling the drawing to show their knowledge.



Use multimedia and other technologies in lessons. Teachers may use overhead transparencies, PowerPoint slides, or relevant Web sites as supplements to a presentation. In so doing, they not only provide more visual support but also model the use of the technology.



Provide repeated exposures to words, concepts, and skills. English learners are learning through a new language, and in order for the input to be comprehensible, they need repetition. However, excessive practice of a single word or skill can become monotonous and defeat the purpose. Jensen (2005) discusses a process for introducing material repeatedly in a variety of ways. He suggests introducing terms and skills well in advance of learning the material (pre-exposure); explicitly previewing the topic at the start of the lesson; exposing students to the target information (priming); reviewing the material minutes after students have learned it; and allowing students to revise or reconstruct information hours, days, or weeks after the lesson to revisit the learning. Research indicates that teachers ought to provide students with the specifics of what they need to learn—the key details of the unit—and then find ways to expose students to the details multiple times (Marzano, 2001).



Use sentence strips. This common technique can be used in a variety of ways at all grade levels. In reading/language arts, students can review events in a story by writing each event on a sentence strip, then sequencing the strips to retell the story. This technique can be applied in science to sequence steps in an experiment or in math to sequence the steps for problem solving.



For teenagers, be succinct. Their frontal lobes may not effectively store many ideas at once, so the amount of input should be limited. Instructions should be straightforward and given one at a time. Also, teenagers need concrete, realistic models. They benefit from using hands-on working models and having an opportunity to think through explanations in discussions (Jensen, 2005).



Use graphic organizers effectively. New ideas and concepts presented in a new language can be overwhelming for English learners. Graphic organizers (GOs) take the information, vocabulary, or concept and make it more understandable by showing the key points graphically. To paraphrase the saying “a picture is worth a thousand words,” a graphic organizer can capture and simplify a teacher’s many potentially confusing words. While GOs are used commonly in school, they are most effective when they match the task and lead to attaining the lesson’s objectives. So if the task is learning definitions, then the GO would be:

	is a		that	
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Some GOs may be simple, such as a problem/solution chart or a web with vocabulary definitions. For older students, especially those with learning challenges, some more elaborate GOs such as a Course-Planning Organizer or a Concept Diagram have improved student performance (Deshler & Schumaker, 2006). See Vogt & Echevarria (2008) for many SIOP®-appropriate graphic organizers.



Audiotape texts for comprehension. A taped version of the text not only allows for multiple opportunities to hear the text, but the reader who records the tape can modify it to proficiency levels. The same passage may be read more slowly with clear enunciation for beginning speakers, or synonyms may be substituted for difficult words.

Unit: Buoyancy (Ninth Grade)

The following lessons take place in an urban high school where English learners make up 35 percent of the school population. In the classrooms described, all the students are beginning to advanced-beginning speakers of English, and they have varying levels of literacy in their native languages.

Ninth-grade teachers Mr. Dillon, Mr. Lew, and Mrs. Castillo are all teaching a unit on *buoyancy*, the ability to float. The science standard that each of the three teachers is teaching requires that students understand why some objects float while others sink. In

addition, they review the concepts of *mass*, which is a quantity of matter of nonspecific shape, and *volume*, which is the capacity of a three-dimensional object. The goal is for students to understand that an object will float as long as the mass doesn’t exceed the object’s capacity, or volume. Students have calculated mass/volume ratios previous to this unit, although the application of these concepts to buoyancy is new. You will see in the scenarios that the teachers have their own way of helping students understand that an object’s ability to float is based on its mass/volume ratio.

The techniques we suggest in the SIOP® are critical for providing meaningful, understandable lessons to students learning English, including adapting the content to students' proficiency levels (Chapter 2); highlighting key vocabulary (Chapter 3); using scaffolding techniques and providing opportunities for students to use strategies (Chapter 5); and providing activities that allow students to apply newly acquired content and language knowledge (Chapter 7).

Teaching Scenarios

Mr. Dillon

Mr. Dillon began the lesson by having students open their science texts to the chapter on buoyancy. He told them that in this unit they would learn what makes objects buoyant. He gave a five-minute oral introduction to the concepts behind buoyancy, discussing the fact that if the object's mass exceeds its volume, then it will sink. Mr. Dillon used his normal, somewhat rapid manner, the same speaking style he used with all his classes. He then directed the students' attention to 13 vocabulary terms written on the board and told the class to copy each word, look up the definition in the glossary, and copy the definition onto their papers. After students looked up vocabulary words in the glossary, Mr. Dillon asked them to put the papers in their homework folders. He told them that they needed to take the words home, and their homework assignment was to use each word in a sentence. He emphasized that students needed to complete their homework since he had been frustrated by low homework response rates in this class.

Then Mr. Dillon turned to the science text, telling students to open their books to the beginning of the chapter. He proceeded to lecture from the text, asking students questions to stimulate a class discussion. Most students were reluctant to speak up. After lecturing on the material in the first five pages of the text, Mr. Dillon gave students a worksheet about buoyancy. He told them they could work in pairs or alone, calculating the mass/volume ratio of the objects shown on the worksheet. He said, "You remember how to calculate mass/volume ratios? First you determine the volume of the object, and then you take the mass and divide it by the volume. Okay, just calculate the ratios for each object shown on the worksheet, and when you finish, you may begin doing your homework."

After the class completed the worksheet for calculating mass/volume ratios, Mr. Dillon went over the answers as a whole group. He began by demonstrating how to calculate the first problem. He wrote the numbers on the overhead and went through the process. When he finished he said, "If you got the same answer as I did, raise your hand." About half of the students raised their hands. Mr. Dillon determined that he needed to demonstrate a few more problems so that more students would understand the process. He continued with the next three problems, asking students what they did differently.

Finally, he told the class to work in pairs to review their work, checking the final problems against the process he demonstrated.

On the SIOP® form in Figure 4.1, rate Mr. Dillon's lesson on each of the Comprehensible Input features.

FIGURE 4.1 *Comprehensible Input Component of the SIOP® Model: Mr. Dillon's Lesson*

	4	3	2	1	0
10. Speech appropriate for students' proficiency level (e.g., slower rate, enunciation, and simple sentence structure for beginners)			Speech sometimes inappropriate for students' proficiency level		Speech inappropriate for students' proficiency level
11. Clear explanation of academic tasks			Unclear explanation of academic tasks		No explanation of academic tasks
12. A variety of techniques used to make content concepts clear (e.g., modeling, visuals, hands-on activities, demonstrations, gestures, body language)			Some techniques used to make content concepts clear		No techniques used to make content concepts clear

Mr. Lew

As Mr. Lew began the lesson, he drew students' attention to the objective written on the board and told students that the purpose of the unit was to understand why some objects float and others sink. As he said the word "float," he pointed at an orange floating in the aquarium at the front of the room, and as he said the word "sink," he dropped a peeled orange into the water, which sank to the bottom. Then he repeated while pointing at the corresponding object, "Some things float and others sink." He went on to tell the students that at the end of the unit they would be able to calculate and predict whether something has buoyancy. The words "float," "sink," "calculate," "predict," and "buoyant" were written in the Word Bank for students to see. The word list included content vocabulary (buoyant, float, and sink) as well as functional language (calculate and predict). Since many of Mr. Lew's students were recent immigrants and had gaps in their educational backgrounds, Mr. Lew was careful to make sure students not only knew the meaning of content vocabulary, but also knew the meaning of words associated with academic tasks, such as predict and calculate.

Throughout the lesson, Mr. Lew used language structures and vocabulary that he believed the students could understand at their level of proficiency. He spoke slowly, often contextualizing vocabulary words, and enunciated clearly. Also, he avoided the use of idioms, and when he sensed that students did not understand him, he paraphrased to convey the meaning more clearly. He repeated important words frequently and wrote them for students to see.

As the lesson progressed, the students were told to complete an activity while working in small groups. Mr. Lew was very explicit in his instructions. As he gave students instructions orally, he wrote each step on the overhead projector. He said, "First, you will get into your assigned groups and prepare to perform the role that has been assigned to you. Second, you will make shapes out of aluminum foil and try to get them to float (he put a small aluminum foil boat on the water and it floated). Third, you will calculate the object's volume (the students already know how to do this) and write it on the worksheet, and fourth, you will determine the maximum mass the boat will hold before it sinks. Finally, you will calculate the mass/volume ratio. You will write all of these numbers on the worksheet." Then Mr. Lew told the students to watch as he demonstrated. He took a piece of aluminum foil and shaped it into a long, narrow boat. He pointed to #2 on the transparency. Then he took the boat, filled its interior space with water, and then poured the water from the boat into a measuring cup to calculate the volume. He wrote the amount on the worksheet. Mr. Lew went on to determine the maximum mass and the mass/volume ratio, writing each step on the overhead as he made the calculations. He told the students that they must make at least five different boat shapes during the experiment. He wrote the number 5 next to step #2 on the overhead.

After Mr. Lew showed students the steps for calculating mass/volume ratios described above, he gave students thirty seconds to get into their assigned group, get their items organized for the experiments, and begin working. Mr. Lew circulated through the classroom, supervising the students and answering their questions. After about five minutes, Mr. Lew determined that all the groups except one were clear about their assignment. To clarify for the other group, Mr. Lew drew that group's attention to another group that was doing well. He asked one student to stand and explain the steps of what they were doing. As the student talked, Mr. Lew pointed to the step-by-step instructions on the overhead projector. When the student finished explaining, Mr. Lew asked a volunteer from the confused group to explain what they were going to do.

After all groups had calculated at least five boats' mass/volume ratios, Mr. Lew showed a table on the overhead with columns for mass and volume figures. He asked students to pool their data by selecting two boats per group and reporting their mass and volume. A representative from each group wrote their figures in the appropriate columns on the overhead transparency. Then Mr. Lew told the class that they would use these data to construct a graph, plotting the maximum mass held by the boat on the y-axis and the boat's volume on the x-axis. Each student then plotted the mass-to-volume ratios on their individual graphs. At the end of the lesson, Mr. Lew asked the students to look at the objective written on the board and asked each student to write on his or her paper why some objects float and others sink.

On the SIOP[®] form in Figure 4.2, rate Mr. Lew's lesson on each of the Comprehensible Input features.

Mrs. Castillo

As is her practice, Mrs. Castillo wrote the objective, "Find the mass/volume ratio for objects that float," on the board. She began the lesson by discussing the fact that some things float and others sink, giving examples of objects that float, such as a large ship, and others that sink, such as a small coin. Then she asked the class if they knew what

FIGURE 4.2 *Comprehensible Input Component of the SIOP® Model: Mr. Lew's Lesson*

	4	3	2	1	0	NA
10. Speech appropriate for students' proficiency level (e.g., slower rate, enunciation, and simple sentence structure for beginners)			Speech sometimes inappropriate for students' proficiency level		Speech inappropriate for students' proficiency level	
11. Clear explanation of academic tasks			Unclear explanation of academic tasks		No explanation of academic tasks	
12. A variety of techniques used to make content concepts clear (e.g., modeling, visuals, hands-on activities, demonstrations, gestures, body language)			Some techniques used to make content concepts clear		No techniques used to make content concepts clear	

makes some objects float and others sink. A few students guessed, but nobody was able to give an accurate explanation. During the discussion, Mrs. Castillo's rate of speech was normal for her speech style, with a mix of both simple and slightly complex sentences. When the discussion was completed, she noticed that some of the students still seemed confused.

Mrs. Castillo told the students to read the first three pages of their text to themselves and stated that they would discuss it when they'd finished. After the students indicated that they were done reading, Mrs. Castillo asked students if there were any words in the text they did not know. Several students called out unfamiliar words, and the teacher wrote them on the overhead. Then she assigned students at each table a word to look up in the glossary. After several minutes, she asked the students what they had found. Only about half of the words were included in the glossary, since the other words were not science terms per se, but words such as "therefore" and "principle." Mrs. Castillo orally gave students the definitions of those words that were not in the glossary and then summarized the information the students had read in the text. As she talked, she occasionally spoke rapidly, using long, detail-laden sentences in her summary. When she noticed that students were not paying attention, she slowed her rate of speech to make it understandable and to regain students' interest.

Mrs. Castillo continued the lesson following the same format as described previously. She asked students to read a portion of the text, paused to clarify unknown vocabulary, and summarized the part of the text students read. When they completed the chapter,

FIGURE 4.3 *Comprehensible Input Component of the SIOP® Model: Mrs. Castillo's Lesson*

	4	3	2	1	0
10. Speech appropriate for students' proficiency level (e.g., slower rate, enunciation, and simple sentence structure for beginners)			Speech sometimes inappropriate for students' proficiency level		Speech inappropriate for students' proficiency level
11. Clear explanation of academic tasks			Unclear explanation of academic tasks somewhat clear		No explanation of academic tasks
12. A variety of techniques used to make content concepts clear (e.g., modeling, visuals, hands-on activities, demonstrations, gestures, body language)			Some techniques used to make content concepts clear		No techniques used to make content concepts clear

Mrs. Castillo selected several end-of-chapter questions for students to answer. She let students work in pairs or groups to complete the questions, and then the class discussed the answers together.

On the SIOP® form in Figure 4.3, rate Mrs. Castillo's lesson on each of the Comprehensible Input features.

Discussion of Lessons

10. *Speech Appropriate for Students' Proficiency Level (Rate and Complexity)*

Mr. Dillon: 0

Mr. Lew: 4

Mrs. Castillo: 2

As you can see in the lesson descriptions, the teachers varied in their attention to the unique language needs of the English learners in their classes.

Mr. Dillon seemed unaware that his students would understand more if he adjusted his oral presentation to accommodate the proficiency levels of English learners in his class. He lectured about new, complex concepts without regard to his rate of speech or complexity of speech, variables that impact ELs' ability to comprehend information in class. Also, copying definitions for new terms and creating original sentences are inordinately difficult tasks for ELs. Unwittingly, Mr. Dillon set the students up for failure and then was frustrated by the low number of completed homework assignments. While he

believed students chose not to complete assignments, in reality they *could not* complete the type of assignment he gave.

Mr. Dillon did not discuss the lesson content or the class or homework assignments in any meaningful or understandable way for ELs. He thought that discussing the material in the chapter and asking questions during his lecture would make the concepts clear for his students, but the type of language he used did little to facilitate learning for them. His efforts were lost on the English learners who needed richer, comprehensible development of the lesson's concepts to understand the text or lecture. The few students who participated in the discussion gave Mr. Dillon the inaccurate impression that the class was following along.

Mr. Lew was the most attuned to the benefit of modulating his speech to make himself understood by the students. He slowed his rate of speech and enunciated clearly when he addressed beginning speakers; he adjusted his speech for the other, more proficient speakers of English. He used a natural speaking voice but paid attention to his rate of speed and enunciation. Further, Mr. Lew adjusted the level of vocabulary and complexity of the sentences he used so that students could understand. Since most students were beginning English speakers, he selected words that were appropriate to their proficiency level. Although the science book highlighted nearly fifteen terms for the unit on buoyancy, Mr. Lew learned from experience that it is better for his students to learn a smaller number of vocabulary words thoroughly than to give superficial treatment to dozens of content-associated vocabulary words. His students will be able to use and apply the selected words and their concepts since they have a complete understanding of their meaning.

Mrs. Castillo's rate of speech and enunciation vacillated between that used with native speakers and a rate that her students could understand. She didn't consistently adjust her speech (rate or complexity) to the variety of proficiency levels in the class. She was aware that her EL students needed extra attention in understanding the language, but she only addressed their needs by asking for unfamiliar vocabulary. She could have paraphrased, using simpler sentence structure, and she could have used synonyms for words that appeared too difficult for students to understand.

11. *Clear Explanation of Academic Tasks*

Mr. Dillon: 1

Mr. Lew: 4

Mrs. Castillo: 1

Making your expectations crystal clear to students is one of the most important aspects of teaching, and when working with English learners, explicit, step-by-step directions can be critical to a lesson's success. It is difficult for almost any student to remember directions given only orally, and oral directions may be incomprehensible to many English learners. A lesson is sure to get off to a rocky start if students don't understand what they are expected to do. Written procedures provide students with a guide.

As an experienced teacher, Mr. Lew understood the value of being explicit in what he wanted the students to do. He walked them through each step of the buoyancy experiment, demonstrating what they were expected to do. When a group hadn't gotten started, he had other students model the steps of the assignment for the class, drawing

their attention again to the instructions on the overhead. The effort that Mr. Lew put into making sure students knew what to do contributed to the success of the lesson and enhanced learning.

Mrs. Castillo, on the other hand, did not explain to the students what was expected during the lesson, although the expectation was implied by the format she used: read material, discuss unknown terms, summarize material. Since Mrs. Castillo followed the same format whenever the class read from the text, the students knew what was expected, however uninteresting the format made the class.

Mr. Dillon had a tendency to be unclear about his expectations but then blamed the students for not completing work. It is obvious that he doesn't understand the importance of making sure students are given explicit instructions at their level of understanding. First, he made unsubstantiated assumptions about the students' knowledge and ability to complete tasks. He said, "You remember how to calculate mass/volume ratios? ... Okay, just calculate the ratios for each object" and left them to work independently. Some students did not know how to calculate the ratios but were left on their own.

Second, while he did demonstrate how to calculate ratios, Mr. Dillon should have done that kind of demonstration *before* asking students to do it independently. Teaching is more effective when a good model is demonstrated prior to the exercise, rather than a post hoc review of student work, correcting their mistakes after completion. The process of explaining the assignment *after* students completed the worksheet was particularly confusing for the English learners in his class who struggled to make sense of the assignment only to find out that they had calculated most of the problems incorrectly.

Third, Mr. Dillon did not make his expectations—for in-class assignments and for homework—clear by modeling and discussing what students were to do. He should have provided a step-by-step explanation of the academic tasks he asked the students to complete.

12. *A Variety of Techniques Used*

Mr. Dillon: 2

Mr. Lew: 4

Mrs. Castillo: 0

Concepts become understandable when teachers use a variety of techniques, including modeling, demonstrations, visuals, and body language. Throughout his lesson, Mr. Lew did an excellent job of providing visuals through the use of the tanks and aluminum foil, as well as by using the overhead projector. Not only did he write the vocabulary and assignment for students to see, he consistently referred back to the visual information. In addition to providing a clear explanation of the assignment, this technique teaches students to use visual clues to gain understanding.

Also, Mr. Lew used graphing and writing effectively to review the concepts of the lesson. Notice that these academic tasks came after students were already familiar with the lesson's concepts, which increased the likelihood that students would be able to successfully complete the academic tasks.

Finally, students were able to apply their knowledge through the hands-on activity, making the concepts of mass, volume, and buoyancy tangible, and thus more understandable. Measuring a boat's actual volume and determining maximum mass by adding to the mass by hand makes the concepts come alive for students. Compare the benefit of this hands-on activity to the other scenarios where the students simply went

through a paper-and-pencil task. Surely those students learned and remembered less about buoyancy and mass-to-volume ratios than did the students in Mr. Lew's class.

Mrs. Castillo is a compassionate teacher who is concerned about the academic success of the English learners in her class. Her effort to help ELs included clarifying unknown vocabulary (in a somewhat random fashion), paraphrasing or summarizing the chapter (done orally, without visuals or other contextual clues), reducing the number of end-of-chapter questions (done independently by students) and having the students work together in answering questions (with no systematic checks for understanding). Although she had good intentions and wanted her students to understand the concept of buoyancy, Mrs. Castillo did not use the kinds of techniques that facilitate conceptual understanding for these students.

The atmosphere in Mrs. Castillo's classroom was warm and nonthreatening for ELs. She chatted with students throughout the class and showed genuine interest in their well-being. Although it is clear that she enjoys working with students from diverse cultural backgrounds, she needs to develop effective techniques and strategies to further students' learning. The lesson was presented almost entirely orally, which was difficult for the beginning English speakers in her class to follow. Having students read a portion of the text followed by her summary was a good idea, except that there were no techniques used to ensure students understood the text, which was likely too difficult for them to read independently. Also, she did not teach them the necessary skills so that eventually they could read texts on their own. The summary was given orally, which makes it likely that beginning English speakers got little understanding from it. Mrs. Castillo should have had a more structured approach to reading the text and discussing the concepts therein. Finally, she should have adjusted the number of questions students had to answer according to their ability level. The students worked diligently on the assignment because they liked Mrs. Castillo and wanted to please her, but they needed assistance in making the information meaningful—assistance beyond that which Mrs. Castillo provided.

Mr. Dillon attempted to use a number of techniques to make concepts clear, such as using the text as a basis for discussion, providing a worksheet that showed different-size boats and other objects, and some demonstration of the calculations. Also, he let students work in pairs to calculate the mass-to-volume ratios. However, Mr. Dillon should have used more visuals, modeled what he expected from the students *before* he asked them to work independently, and provided a hands-on activity for this lesson. Some lessons, like this one, lend themselves easily to hands-on activities, but Mr. Dillon did not take advantage of the opportunity.

Summary

Although ELs learn in many of the same ways as fluent English-speaking students (August & Shanahan, 2006), they do require special accommodations to make instruction understandable. Effective SIOP[®] teachers constantly modulate and adjust their speech when teaching English learners to ensure that the content is comprehensible. Concepts are taught using a variety of techniques, including modeling, gestures, hands-on activities, and demonstrations, so that students understand and learn the content material. Finally, effective SIOP[®] teachers provide explanations of academic tasks in ways that make clear what students are expected to accomplish and that promote student success.

Discussion Questions

1. Have you recently been in a situation where you were not an “insider,” and therefore you didn’t understand what was being said? Compare that situation and your feelings about it to the way language is used in classrooms where there are English learners. As a teacher, what can you do to make sure all students are able to follow a lecture or discussion?
2. Many times in classrooms, discipline problems can be attributed to students not knowing what they’re supposed to be doing. What are some ways that a teacher can avoid having students confused about accomplishing academic tasks?
3. If you have traveled in another country, or if you are an English learner, reflect on difficulties you had in understanding others. What are some techniques people used to try to communicate with you? What are some techniques you can use in the classroom?
4. Using the SIOP® lesson you have been developing, add to it so that the Comprehensible Input features in the lesson are enhanced.