Strategies to Scaffold Rank & Reason
for English Learner (EL) Students

When utilizing Rank & Reason use these strategies with your EL students.

Front Loading

By frontloading the concepts and information before the lessons, EL students will be able to participate more fully in the whole class lesson.

Meet with EL students to:
- activate their background knowledge.
- frontload the question and the key essential vocabulary with respect to the question.
- frontload the terms to be ranked.

For example:

In ranking the best habits of a good friend, understanding habit(s) is essential but students need to also understand the concepts being ranked.

A lesson might focus on the root words of each choice: reliability/reliable, openness/open, loyalty/loyal, etc. and what they would mean with respect to the specific context: friendship.

Vocabulary lessons that are taught in a context are most effective.

Checking for Understanding

Monitor and check in with EL students to make sure they understand the task several times while they complete the Rank & Reason.

You might ask questions about or observe their ranking discussions. Give feedback to confirm they are on the right track or clarify the task if students show confusion.

Think-Pair-Share (TPS)

Strategically match students to discuss information important to the ranking before discussing as a whole class. To start TPS, be sure to give students 30 to 60 seconds to mentally formulate their response.

Keep in mind, these children are translating in their head. This takes thinking time and if the time is not provided, EL students give up and become passive participants.
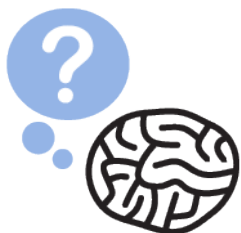
Pair Up Square Up

After TPS, partners work together on their rankings and reasons, they find another TPS pair to make a "square" or "square up". Together they share their ideas and synthesize or create a consensus from the two pairs.

This strategy gives EL students the opportunity to share again in a small, less intimidating environment thus giving them another chance to rehearse their response, and build confidence before sharing with the class as a whole.

Alternate Ranking

We suggest Alternate Ranking to create pairs for TPS. Make a list of your students, with the most advanced student at the top and the lowest student at the bottom. Put the second top student on the second line and put second from the bottom student above the lowest student. Continue this procedure "alternating" between the top of the list and bottom of the list until the class is ranked.

Then cut the list in half. Match the second half with the top half so the student who is at the top of the second half is matched with the top student of the class.

You might further refine pairs by avoiding pairing shy students with talkers or taking discipline issues into account. The object is to match students so they will all interact with the ranking question and choices to be able to come to a consensus on their rankings.

Model, Model, Model

EL students need explicit examples to clarify the task and the language expected to be used in the Rank & Reason.

We suggest teachers model Rank & Reasons the first few times, depending on the age of the students.

Fishbowl conversations (two students or a teacher and student demonstrate the discussion for Rank & Reason while the class observes) are an excellent way to model so that students understand expectations.

Sentence Stems
(For EL Students at the Early Intermediate or Expanding Level or Higher)

Sentence stems help EL students to articulate their ideas using academic language.

Note: We would expect EL students at the Beginning or Emerging level of English Language development, at any grade level, to respond with one or two words or simple sentences.

We suggest making anchor charts or a graphic organizer with sentence stems to display in the classroom so students have easy access to the sentence prompts during discussions.

It is essential that the teacher models how the responses would be used, perhaps using Fishbowl conversations.

A word of caution: it is important teachers do not over emphasize the students' use of the sentence stems. Students should not be bogged down with the sentence stems during their discussions inhibiting students' ability to complete the task.

NextLesson

Rank & Reason Sentence Stem Examples

Teachers should adapt the following stems to fit the specific Rank & Reason.

Grades K-2 TPS or whole class response stems:
- I think .....because......
- In my opinion ....because
- We think....because.....
- In our opinion .... because

Grades 3-5 TPS or Whole Class Response stems:
- I think ......should be .....(first,next, etc) because......
- It seems to me that.....should be ......(first, next, etc) because.....
- From my point of view, I think ......should be .... because......
- I disagree with you that........should be .... because.....
- My partner and I believe .... should be .... because
- In our opinion..........should be .... because......
- We decided .... should be.....(first, next,) because......

Grades 6-12 TPS or Whole Class Response Stems:
- From my/our perspective I/we think that..........should be ....because.........
- In my/our opinion ...... should be in the ....position......because
- I agree with you that ...... should ....(go before, come after, etc) but/because......
- I'm not sure I understand what you mean. Can you explain/elaborate/clarify what you mean?
- .... should have top priority because.........
- That's a valid point but.......
- I/We feel strongly that.......should be .... because.....

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