

## Contrasting Possible Explanations for Typical Academic Difficulties Encountered by ELL

Observable Behavior	Possible ELL Explanations (Observed in English)	Possible Disability Explanations
Omits words or adds words to a sentence; forgets names of things that he or she knows has to describe them	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Word not in English (L2) vocabulary yet</li> <li>• Word/concept not learned in home language (L1)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited vocabulary due to poor oral comprehension and lack of opportunity to use vocabulary</li> <li>• Memory limitations</li> <li>• Word retrieval problems</li> </ul>
Becomes distracted easily	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is not getting comprehensible input in English</li> <li>• Is not getting visual/concrete support for material in English</li> <li>• Student may be exhausted from having to function in English all day</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor oral comprehension due to lack of lexical development or grammatical mastery</li> <li>• ADHD</li> <li>• ADD</li> </ul>
Has trouble following directions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not enough English proficiency to understand what is being said</li> <li>• No demonstration or context given for directions/procedure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can't process the entire set of directions with sufficient speed</li> <li>• Distractibility</li> <li>• Memory limitations</li> <li>• Not able to understand the temporal or spatial concepts</li> </ul>
Can do rote arithmetic on paper but has difficulty with math word problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In word problems the computation is embedded in language that the ELL may not have acquired yet</li> <li>• Numerals may be unfamiliar to ELLs across linguistic and cultural context</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Processing</li> <li>• Abstract reasoning</li> <li>• Lack of generalization</li> <li>• Can't retain concepts while performing the processes</li> </ul>
Avoids writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Writing in L2 takes longer to develop, (developing after listening, speaking, reading)</li> <li>• Afraid to make mistakes on paper</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fine motor difficulty</li> <li>• Grammatical and lexical limitations that negatively affect clarity, topic expansion, and/or voice</li> <li>• Has difficulty expanding and/or controlling ideas</li> <li>• Frustration from over-correction</li> <li>• Expressive language difficulties</li> </ul>

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Doesn't transfer learning from one lesson to another; has to relearn each concept from scratch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May be in the early stages of learning English</li> <li>• English was learned orally with no context to make it meaningful</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Memory limitations</li> <li>• Comprehension difficulties</li> <li>• Poor ability to create inclusive conceptual categories to generalize learning</li> </ul>
Very literal – misses inferences, subtleties, nuances, and innuendoes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has yet to acquire enough L2 to express/represent abstract concepts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Abstract reasoning difficulties</li> <li>• Comprehension difficulties</li> </ul>
Often understands concepts but can't indicate understanding in written symbolic form with paper and pencil or through multiple choice test	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not enough proficiency in English, making writing difficult; multiple choice test require high levels of academic English proficiency</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficulty expressing and organizing thoughts on paper</li> </ul>
Learns from watching, not listening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In early stages of English development and depends on visual context to understand</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Oral comprehension difficulties</li> <li>• distractibility</li> </ul>
Can't categorize, classify, or summarize	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May not understand the topic of study because of limited English proficiency</li> <li>• Does not understand the directions in English and needs the task to be modeled</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organizational issues</li> <li>• Executive functioning problem</li> </ul>
Can't retell a story in sequence or summarize	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May understand story but may not have enough expressive language to retell</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organizational issues</li> <li>• Poor lexical cohesion</li> <li>• Experiential coherence problems</li> <li>• Comprehension difficulties</li> </ul>
Low frustration tolerance; gives up easily or explodes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Doesn't understand content because of low proficiency in English</li> <li>• Tired of having to function in English</li> <li>• Is conscious of constantly making mistakes in English and doesn't feel successful</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stigmatized</li> <li>• Poor affective/emotional control</li> <li>• Doesn't understand</li> <li>• Student conscious of falling behind</li> </ul>