Using Graphic Organizers to Promote Students’ Academic Language Production

In the content-based English classroom, students study difficult concepts. Oftentimes, however, there is little opportunity for students to talk or write about these concepts. Instead, students sit passively in their seats.

This presentation will:

• introduce the graphic organizer as a tool to help students understand difficult concepts and produce related, meaningful academic English
• explore how to effectively integrate graphic organizers into their instruction as part of student-centered speaking and writing activities
• examine strategies that help students become more engaged and capable of effectively speaking and writing about content-area concepts
Eric Wenninger is a language education consultant specializing in content-based English instructional techniques. He served two years as a U.S. Department of State English Language Fellow in Vietnam, where he taught professional English skills to government officials and mentored English teachers.

Eric received his Master of Education degree in Second Languages and Cultures Education from the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. His professional interests include working with multi-level classes, designing and delivering content-based English instruction, and blending technology with teaching.
1. How do you help your students understand difficult concepts and vocabulary in your classroom?

2. What percentage of your class time is devoted to students actively practicing speaking or writing?
“Street art is a form of artwork that is displayed in a community on its surrounding buildings, streets, trains, and other publicly viewed surfaces. Many instances...make a public statement about the society that the artist lives within. The work has moved from the beginnings of graffiti and vandalism to new modes where artists work to bring messages, or just simple beauty, to an audience.”

-Wikipedia
Street Art

- Displayed on a community surface
- Publicly viewed
- Make a public statement

Visuals Support Us
Essential Question

How do we get students to speak and write about challenging academic topics in a non-native language?

**ANSWER**

Make it *visual* and provide *opportunities for practice*. 
1. We will discuss challenges that go along with students learning academic language in a content-based English classroom.

2. We will discuss how teachers can use graphic organizers to scaffold their instruction of English learners.

3. We will discuss speaking and writing activities that teachers can use with graphic organizers to help students produce academic language in the classroom.
Academic Language – **High** Cognitive Demand

Social Language – **Low** Cognitive Demand

Context - **Embedded**

Face-to-face conversation  

Explain a demonstration

Defend an argument

Context - **Reduced**

Phone conversation

**SCAFFOLDING**

*Cummins (1979)*
Graphic Organizers

“A graphic organizer is a **visual aid** that helps language learners understand important **ideas** and their **relationship** to one another. It can also help students learn key **academic vocabulary** and **grammar** so that they can **engage** with each other about **content area topics**.”
Which graphic organizers have you used in class? Why?
Graphic Organizers Are Flexible

**Ability levels** – from beginner to advanced

**Content areas** – all learning environments

**Language skills** – reading, writing, listening, and speaking

**Lesson phases** – from introducing content topics and skills to assessing them
Scaffolding

- Begin with the *end in mind*
- Write *content* and *language objectives*

ALL teacher ➔

1. Planning phase
1. Planning phase

- **MODEL**

2. Input phase

- **Scaffolding**
  - Give students a *lecture*
  - Show students a *video* (TED Talk or YouTube)
  - Have students do a *reading*
Scaffolding

Students must DO something!

- **Guided** practice and application
- **Independent** practice and application
1. Planning phase

2. Input phase

3. Guided practice phase

4. Output phase

Scaffolding

- Students *produce* something
- Student *work is assessed* in some way
THEMATIC UNITS
# FOCUS #1 – THEMATIC UNITS

**END GOAL:** *Students can differentiate between places/activities in their neighborhood and in their community.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content Objectives</th>
<th>Language Objectives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Identify <em>places</em> in their <em>neighborhood</em>.</td>
<td>1. Use neighborhood and community vocabulary (<em>verbs</em> and <em>nouns</em>).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Identify <em>places</em> in their <em>community</em>.</td>
<td>2. Differentiate between <em>first person</em> and <em>third person</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Describe <em>activities</em> they do in their neighborhood and community.</td>
<td>3. Compare themselves with a classmate.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
My street

My neighborhood

My community

My house

My street

My ___________
Think-Pair-Share

1. What do you have in your neighborhood?
2. Where do you go in your community?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Neighborhood</th>
<th>Community</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eric</td>
<td>• an airport                • school      • grocery store  • my work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angela</td>
<td>• a gas station     • grocery store   • volunteer center • school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mai</td>
<td>• restaurant               • school      •            •</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fazliddin</td>
<td>•            •            •</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Writing Extension**

In my neighborhood, I have a park and a school. **Mai has a gas station and a restaurant.**
Limitations
**Focus #2 – CONTENT AREAS**

**END GOAL:** *Students can use scientific language to explain why people on the Earth experience seasons.*

<table>
<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Demonstrate that the Earth is <strong>tilted</strong> and <strong>revolves</strong> around the sun.</td>
<td>1. Use <strong>scientific vocabulary</strong> related to Earth’s position (axis, tilted, hemisphere, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Explain Earth’s position relative to the <strong>season experienced</strong> in the northern and southern hemispheres.</td>
<td>2. Use <strong>prepositions</strong> to explain Earth’s position (towards, away from)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• Begins to tilt **away from** the sun
• Northern hemisphere = **fall**

• **Tilted away from** the sun
• Northern hemisphere = **winter**

• Begins to tilt **towards** the sun
• Northern hemisphere = **summer**

• **Tilted towards** the sun
Sorting

- Winter
- Spring
- Fall
- Summer

- Fall
- Winter
- Spring
- Summer
When the Earth’s axis is tilted away from the sun, then we have winter...

**Talking Frames**

When ________________ the sun, then ________________
• Students draw the diagram and label it.

• Students explain the diagram in the space below.

When the Earth’s axis is tilted towards the sun, it is summer in the northern hemisphere.
Limitations

- Inaccuracies
- Degree of complexity
**Focus #3 – HIGHER ED**

**END GOAL:** *Students can defend and argument with evidence and reasoning in an organized way.*

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<tr>
<th><strong>Content Objectives</strong></th>
<th><strong>Language Objectives</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Take a <em>position</em> on an argument.</td>
<td>1. Provide <em>coherent organization</em> of ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Defend their position through providing <em>evidence</em> and <em>reasoning</em>.</td>
<td>2. Use appropriate <em>transition</em> words.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Graffiti

Group 1

VANDALISM

Claim:
Reason 1:  Reason 2:
Evidence:  Evidence:
Counterclaim:  Refutation:
Closing Statement:

Group 2

ART

Claim:
Reason 1:  Reason 2:
Evidence:  Evidence:
Counterclaim:  Refutation:
Closing Statement:
Street art is positive for communities

**Claim:**

**Reason 1:**
Educates people on important issues

**Evidence:**
Often contains a social message

**Counterclaim:**
Property values will go down

**Refutation:**
Actually brings in more tourism

**Reason 2:**
Makes spaces more attractive

**Evidence:**
Instead of dull walls, you get beautiful paintings

**Closing Statement:**
Street art is positive for communities
Steps
1. Presents claim in opening statement
3. States reasons and evidence
6. Gives counter
8. Gives closing statement

Steps
2. Presents claim in opening statement
4. Gives counter
5. States reasons and evidence
7. Gives closing statement
Argumentative Writing

Options

- Students can turn their debate position into a persuasive essay.
- Students can take a position on a new topic.
Limitations

3rd option

Claim:

Reason 1:

Evidence:

Counterclaim:

Closing Statement:

ADVERTISE
Start with an end goal and find/design graphic organizers that help your students get there.

Incorporate graphic organizers throughout your lessons as a scaffold for all language skills.

Give your students time to practice speaking and writing in class.
Thank you!

Questions?

Twitter - @erwenninger
References


• Gonzalez, Jennifer (2018). *To Learn, Students Need to DO Something*. Cult of Pedagogy

• Gonzalez, Jennifer (2014). *When We All Teach Text Structures, Everyone Wins*. Cult of Pedagogy

• Wise, Mark and Cooper, Carol (2019). *Increasing the Value of Graphic Organizers*. Edutopia
Thank you!

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