

6 Ways to Ensure Your Ed Tech Is Optimizing Student Performance

by [Phil Rice](#)

In modern ESL classrooms, some students may feel like they are being made to learn two subjects, technology and English. This can lead to frustration and disillusionment if students feel that their English performance is overshadowed by their technology deficiencies.

This article focuses on how teachers can properly use technology in order to enhance, not diminish, student learning. Technology will not make you a better teacher; it will simply bring out your strengths and weaknesses in different ways. The problem is that many teachers who are relatively new to tech in the class think that implementation is enough. However, it is important to have some guidelines in choosing which technology to use and how often to use it in the ESL classroom.

Therefore, I want to focus on six ways that teachers can make technology a tool in their belts rather than a thorn in their sides.

1. Acquaint Yourself

The situation goes something like this: “Hey, I saw this awesome cartoon making tech at the conference yesterday. Let me give it to the students tomorrow, and they can do a writing assignment with it for the next day.” This should go without saying, but many times teachers will throw a new form of technology on their students without really being acquainted with it themselves. Then, when the students run into problems, have questions, or want to do new things with the tech, the teacher is clueless. Of course you don’t need to know everything about a certain type of tech before introducing it, but you should be beyond a novice. You should make sure that you can do everything that you are asking the students to do on a given program *before* you ask them to do it.

In addition, many education sites allow you to have a teacher/student view on the software. If this is not available, create your own student account so that you can see what the students see. In this way, you can anticipate problems they might have before they have them.

2. Start Small

When using any new technology, give students a practice assignment at first that only counts as a completion grade (pass or fail). This allows you to make sure that students are proficient enough with the software to complete assignments throughout the session. Also, don’t put all of your major assignments online right away. When you are just starting to use tech, a good rule of thumb is to hand out about 20% tech related assignments. Consequently, students will feel that they are passing or failing based on their English performance, not their tech performance.

3. Focus on the Content

Wisely choose technology by asking yourself four questions:

- Will this tech help my students' English to improve?
- Does this site give accurate instruction?
- What is the substance (or objective or outcome) of the site, and will it help my students advance or develop?
- Will this technology allow me to judge students' English proficiency as much or more than their tech proficiency?"

The purpose of using tech is not to justify its existence, or to see if students are computer literate. It is to improve their English by encouraging English outside of the classroom, increasing motivation, giving an audience, and increasing collaboration. If the use of a specific type of technology does not result in better performance or understanding of learning objectives, drop it.

4. Create Your Own Materials

How many times do teachers complain that the textbooks and materials that they are given are not sufficient to address the specific needs of students? With sites like [Quizlet](#), [ESL Video](#), [Edmodo](#), [Showme](#), [Educreations](#), [Classtools](#), [Schoology](#), and more, the teacher is able to cater more specifically to student needs in his or her classroom, and do it quickly.

One big complaint teachers have about materials development is time. It is much easier to just rely on a prepublished book than to make one's own materials. However, another benefit of technology is that once you make your tutorial, video, or so on, it's there forever. I have used tutorials that I made years ago continually, and students still find them helpful and suited to their specific needs. It is a good idea to revisit, and if needed, revise the content on these videos when assignments are altered or books are updated in order to harmonize with new content. So, in the end, creating my own materials actually saved me time by keeping me from repeating concepts over and over again. I am now able to just refer students to the tutorials online at our class blog/course website.

5. Create Models

You should not give a tech assignment to students until you have completed the assignment yourself. If I want them to create a blog, I need to create one first. If I want them to make a YouTube video, I need to do it first. By doing this, I am identifying with the students while creating an expectation of the product I want them to create.

Modeling is also very important in another way: for introducing technology. One of the greatest tools in tech right now is screencasting. It is basically making a narrated movie out of your computer screen. By using this technology, teachers can show students how to sign up for sites, create projects, learn new software, and so on. Best of all, it is usually free through sites like [Screenr](#), [Jing](#), and more. The video limit is generally about 5 minutes, but you can make as many videos as you want and get code to embed or a link for your videos very easily.

This method allows you to point students to the tutorial, rather than take hours every week physically standing in front of the students showing them how to make a slide presentation or sign up for a website.

Now, when a student tells me he or she couldn't complete a particular part of the assignment, I can simply say, "Did you watch the tutorial?"

6. Beware the Learning Curve!

How long did it take you to learn the tech? Multiply that number by two, and you'll probably be close to how long it will take your students to learn it, depending on their English proficiency and technological prowess. My rule is that if students can't learn the basics of new tech in about 30 minutes or less, I won't use it.

Some programs are great, but if they are too tough, students will become frustrated and fail to see the relevance and necessity of using them. Also, they will feel that they are being judged on their computer skills rather than English skills. Avoid these situations altogether by weighing a program's usefulness versus its user-friendliness.

Technology can be the ESL teacher's friend or enemy. It all matters how it is implemented and what programs are used. Sound teaching principles should always be the foundation of any technology implementation. Our job as teachers is to find programs and applications that help us to efficiently implement these sound principles in order to better foster student learning.

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