MSS Instructional Materials Analysis

Improving Linguistic Clarity for Our Diverse Learners

This is a short "cheat sheet" from Young et al (2014) that you can reference when creating future materials, keeping linguistic accessibility in mind. The MSS workshop will address all 11 points with examples and give time for questions.

11 Categories of Linguistic Modification

1. **Remove Empty Context**: In cases where a context has been tacked onto a task, remove the context and set the task directly.

2. **Refine Context:** This refers to either making a context more explicit or restating) the item in a more accessible context.

3. **Simplify Vocabulary:** Identify challenging words not related to the content being assessed and replace them with more accessible words.

4. **Unpack**: Present complex ideas in a series of simple steps, following logical and/or chronological order as closely as possible.

5. **Make Item Stem Concise**: Reduce wordiness and ensure that the stem of the item sets the task as clearly as possible.

6. **Make Options Concise**: Reduce wordiness in options (often by relocating information into the body of the item).

7. **Reduce If Clause**: Convert complex sentences with an if clause and a result clause to two simple sentences.

8. **Simplify Verb Forms**: Change passive voice to active voice, and change past, future, or conditional tense to present tense.

9. **Reduce Wordiness**: Eliminate extraneous words or otherwise simplify and hone language used.

10. **Add Emphasis to Key Words**: Use underlining to draw students' attention to the word(s) that highlight the task being set.

11. **Graphic Representation:** Revise or simplify the artwork or graphics associated with an item. This includes eliminating a graphic that does not help students understand the task in the item.

Practice Identifying and Modifying

The workshop will also give you the opportunity to apply some of the concepts learned and discuss the reasons for our answers to the following samples:

1. Which of the following statements would be most difficult for most EAL learners to understand? Why?

    a. The college will not put up with negative thinking.
    b. The college will not tolerate negative thinking.
    c. The college will not accept negative thinking.

2. Which word in the following sentence would MOST likely impede an EAL learner's comprehension of this information: *"The discharge from the wound had the consistency of custard."*

    a. discharge   b. consistency   c. custard

3. Which feedback example(s) do you think would be the LEAST problematic for EAL students?

    a. I think you should consider refining your thesis statement.
    b. Your thesis statement needs revision. The controlling idea is not developed.
    c. You might want to revise your thesis.

4. Modify these instructions in the space below:

    In each of the following questions, you will select any answers that apply to the questions. There may be more than one correct answer that applies. Select ALL the correct answers and be sure NOT to select any answers that do not apply. The total for each question is calculated as correct selections minus incorrect selections.

5. Modify this exam question in the space below:

    You have discovered fossil bones from the right lower limb of a possible Australopithecine. What anatomical traits would you assess to determine if your fossil is an Australopithecine, how would you expect them to look if the specimen was an Australopithecine and how do these traits aid Australopithecine locomotion?

Suggested answers will be provided in the workshop slides and will be posted on our website here.

Reference

Young, J. W., King, T. C., Hauck, M. C., Ginsburgh, M., Kotloff, L., Cabrera, J., & Cavalie, C. (2014). Improving content assessment for English language learners: Studies of the linguistic modification of test items: Improving content assessment for English language learners. ETS Research Report Series, 2014(2), 1–79. https://doi.org/10.1002/ets2.12023