

# English Language Learners (ELL)



## 9

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*In teaching students who are learning English as another language, the big picture is the same as it is for all students. Teach every student based on his or her developmental and language proficiency level and identify and address the needs of each student.*

English language learners have an immediate need to communicate with their English-speaking peers and teachers, and to do this they need to achieve fluency in the language. However, for most of these learners, basic interpersonal communication skills take about two-to-three years to develop, while academic language proficiency can take five-to-seven years. During that time, English language learners need additional support to access content while developing their language skills. This chapter provides information and strategies to help you support the learning of English language learners, as well as other students in the classroom, by differentiating instruction.

## Purposeful planning

Effective instruction for English language learners needs to both support achievement of grade-level learning outcomes and promote language acquisition. All teachers, in all subject areas, share the responsibility for language development, out of both necessity (because students need to learn English to learn content) and best practice (because students learn English more easily and fully within an authentic context). Providing such instruction begins with the planning described in *Chapter 2: Purposeful Planning*. As you work through this planning process, consider how the following ideas may affect your instruction.

- **Culture and communication are inextricably bound**  
English language learners are not only learning a new language they are learning a new culture. You can support English language learners by providing opportunities to learn the cultural beliefs and practices of their English peers within authentic communication contexts. At the same time, English language learners also need to know that their own language and culture are valued. Providing opportunities for students to use their home language maintains a valuable link to the family and community.
- **Students' emotional well-being can affect their learning**  
Providing a safe and welcoming environment for English language learners is essential to their success. English language learners need to know that they are contributing members of the class. They need to know that their ability, prior lived experiences, and areas of interest and expertise are recognized and valued in the classroom and school community. Taking time to learn an English language learner's name (some names are written surname first) and how to pronounce it, as well as learning a few words in the student's language, are important first steps in making the student feel welcome. Also, consider ways to reduce stress for

English language learners, particularly in contexts when they are expected to participate in discussion; e.g., keeping group sizes small, allowing students time to prepare their contribution.

- **All learners need the opportunity to work from their strengths**  
As with all students, English language learners are most motivated and engaged when they have opportunities to show their expertise, explore topics of interest and choose preferred learning modes. Experiencing success will increase student confidence and willingness to participate, which in turn promotes language development.

It also is important to promote continuing development of the student's home language. Allowing students opportunities to read, write and speak in their home language gives them better access to their existing expertise and skills and allows their ideas to flow. Translating into English afterwards helps students begin to see the connection between their first language(s) and English. As students enhance literacy skills in their first language, those skills will eventually transfer to English.

- **Context-specific social language usually develops more quickly than academic language**  
English language learners benefit from interactions with fluent English speakers. Through these interactions, they have the opportunity to negotiate meaning, communicate ideas and receive corrective feedback. Social acceptance is a motivator for learning a new language and can be fostered through a variety of activities and opportunities to interact with English-speaking students. For meaningful social interaction to occur, limit the amount of time that English language learners spend working in isolation with audio books or on the computer. Provide opportunities for students to work cooperatively in partners and small groups.

## Learner profiles

**L**ike all students, English language learners are each unique, with their own experiences, abilities, knowledge and learning preferences. However, their shared experience of learning English as a second or third language is an important and useful starting point for differentiating instruction. In addition to the common elements of learner profiles, it is important to include English language learners' current level of English language proficiency.



<b>Level 1</b>	At this level of proficiency students may: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- be self-conscious and confused</li><li>- smile hesitantly</li><li>- benefit from support of peer buddies</li><li>- observe surroundings carefully</li><li>- be silent for periods of the school day</li><li>- use one- or two-word utterances in English</li><li>- use pictures and gestures to support communication</li><li>- rely on first language</li><li>- read or write limited number of high-frequency utility words (e.g., exit, open, a bus #, etc.)</li><li>- need support for writing</li><li>- copy without understanding.</li></ul>
<b>Level 2</b>	At this level of proficiency students may: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- begin to understand social norms such as eye contact and personal space</li><li>- understand basic classroom activities with visual support</li><li>- increase confidence in familiar classroom situations</li><li>- respond to yes/no questions</li><li>- label and use pictures to communicate</li><li>- increase use of high-frequency utility words</li><li>- begin to compile words and phrases for daily living (e.g., food, clothing)</li><li>- know some subject-specific words and phrases</li><li>- name letters and know most corresponding sounds</li><li>- imitate and copy phrase and sentence patterns</li><li>- increase sight word vocabulary</li><li>- begin to write short sentences independently</li><li>- use some writing conventions such as capital letters and periods.</li></ul>
<b>Level 3</b>	At this level of proficiency students may: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- be confident enough to initiate conversations with English-speaking peers</li><li>- begin to act as buddies to others</li><li>- communicate competently in the classroom environment</li><li>- respond to basic questions using simple sentences</li><li>- use vocabulary competently for daily living</li><li>- increase subject-specific vocabulary</li><li>- experiment with synonyms and antonyms*</li><li>- write simple sentences with minimal errors</li><li>- experiment with longer sentences and basic paragraphs*</li><li>- begin writing for academic purposes*</li><li>- improve their use of writing conventions</li><li>- be more comfortable expanding friendships beyond peers who speak their first language</li><li>- understand most social conversations without support.</li></ul>

Level 4	<p>At this level of proficiency students may:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- adjust language depending on the communication context</li> <li>- be more comfortable expanding friendships beyond peers who speak their first language</li> <li>- understand most social conversations without support</li> <li>- understand most academic language with some support</li> <li>- contribute information on a variety of topics</li> <li>- respond to hypothetical questions</li> <li>- use subject-specific vocabulary in context</li> <li>- use specialized vocabulary associated with the subject area*</li> <li>- write a variety of texts independently*</li> <li>- experiment with sentence variety to develop personal style and voice*</li> <li>- use conventions more accurately.</li> </ul>
Level 5	<p>At this level of proficiency students may:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- be confident and competent when communicating with teachers and peers</li> <li>- use English language to self-advocate</li> <li>- use English confidently and competently for academic purposes and to solve problems</li> <li>- may fluently switch between their first language and English</li> <li>- have fluent speech, which may be influenced by first language</li> <li>- transfer subject-specific vocabulary to a variety of contexts*</li> <li>- understand humour and figurative language*</li> <li>- write a variety of well-organized and unified texts*</li> <li>- vary sentence structure and use complex sentences to achieve a variety of purposes*</li> <li>- establish voice and style in writing*</li> <li>- use conventions consistently and with minimal errors</li> <li>- select specific words to achieve purpose.</li> </ul>



\* Characteristics of students of junior/senior high age.

The strategies presented throughout the rest of this chapter can be used to differentiate instruction and support English language learners as they move through these stages.

### English as a second language proficiency benchmarks

Alberta Education has developed proficiency benchmarks for English as a second language. The benchmarks provide:

- the foundation for developing a common understanding of English language proficiency levels and English as a second language programming needs across the province
- descriptions of the English language abilities that students typically demonstrate at each of the five proficiency levels: Kindergarten, grades 1–3, grades 4–6, grades 7–9 and grades 10–12.

The benchmarks help teachers:

- support the initial identification of language proficiency levels
- guide appropriate programming for English language learners

- monitor, track and report language progress
- plan for language instruction within everyday classroom situations
- communicate with students and parents about language acquisition and set appropriate language learning goals.

A PDF version of benchmarks is available at <http://education.alberta.ca/program/esl/resources.aspx>. An interactive online version of the benchmarks is available on the LearnAlberta.ca Web site. Type keyword “ESL.”

## Assessment

**E**ffective assessment strategies provide students with the opportunity to show what they know and can do. For English language learners, even more so than their classmates, this requires differentiating assessment through the use of supports and alternative assessment strategies. Assessment of English language learners should:

- remove language-related barriers as much as possible
- gather information from a variety of sources
- align with instructional practices used to teach the content
- document individual growth over time
- take into account student age and developmental level, grade level, learning preferences, language proficiency, cultural and educational backgrounds.

Sample assessment strategies that are often appropriate for English language learners include journals and learning logs, nonverbal communication strategies, and differentiated products.

### Journals and learning logs

Journals and learning logs serve as valuable tools for assessing growth in English language proficiency. They also are places where English language learners can access their background knowledge, make connections between old and new learning, and reflect on what they have learned. Journals and learning logs can be used to consolidate and represent knowledge and ideas in a variety of ways. Differentiate for English language learners by allowing them to record their ideas using their first language, English words and phrases and/or illustrations.

### Nonverbal communication strategies

Nonverbal assessment strategies are one way to allow English language learners to show what they know. Nonverbal assessment strategies allow students to give a physical or pictorial demonstration of their understanding. For example, teachers may have students:

- use gestures; e.g., respond to statements or scenarios with a thumbs up or thumbs down
- point to information or answers
- perform hands-on tasks; e.g., use manipulatives to demonstrate how to solve a math problem
- act out vocabulary, concepts or events

- produce drawings, models, graphs or charts
- manipulate visual information; e.g., place ready-made labels on a map, web or other graphic organizer.

Consider the following examples of differentiated products.

Grade and outcome	Typical product	Differentiated product
<p><b>Mathematics, Grade 1</b> <i>Pose oral questions in relation to the data gathered.</i></p>	<p>Gather and graph data and then pose questions to peers to test comprehension.</p>	<p>Create a pictorial graph to analyze a set of objects, then complete questions using stems or cloze provided by the teacher; e.g., ____ out of ____ blocks are red.</p>
<p><b>Language Arts, Grade 4</b> <i>Recognize how words and word combinations, such as word play, repetition and rhyme, influence or convey meaning.</i></p>	<p>Explore fun uses of language in picture books and poetry and practice playing with language in their own writing.</p>	<p>Complete some basic rhyme recognition activities; e.g., circle the rhyming words in a poem and then think of more rhyming words.</p>
<p><b>Science, Grade 8</b> <i>Select and integrate information from various print and electronic sources or from several parts of the same source; e.g., summarize information on a river basin.</i></p>	<p>Complete a written summary based on research in the library or computer laboratory.</p>	<p>Complete a cloze activity using facts from reading and their own science knowledge, then follow up by making a drawing or graphic representation of each fact.</p>
<p><b>Social Studies, Grade 7</b> <i>Recognize the positive and negative consequences of political decisions.</i></p>	<p>Complete a “cause-and-effect graphic organizer.”</p>	<p>Paste ready-made basic text with pictures into a “cause-and-effect graphic organizer.”</p>



## Supports

English language learners benefit from a variety of supports in order to learn new skills and concepts. These same types of supports can be used in assessment situations to support English language learners and allow them to best demonstrate understanding. Examples of supports that can be used when learning new content include:

- providing models
- adjusting language level of content
- providing study notes (with visuals)
- providing extra practice
- assigning a reader buddy or peer tutor.

Supports that can be made to assignments and also used in assessment situations include:

- adjusting the length of material or the types of questions to be answered
- providing extra time
- allowing for an oral or visual product versus a written product
- providing extra assistance to read the material.

English language learners should be working toward the same learning outcomes as their same-aged peers; finding ways to support this is a major goal of differentiated instruction. Consider the following ideas.

### Modified presentations

Aim to present new concepts in such a way that all students gain an appropriate degree of knowledge. This may include the following strategies.

- Begin instruction at the individual student's current level of functioning.
- Stand close to students who need extra help.
- Modify the pace of instruction.
- Give clear, simple directions.
- Speak at a slower pace, taking care to enunciate words.
- Write instructions, key ideas and vocabulary on the board with visuals to support understanding.
- Repeat and/or paraphrase concepts that are important or difficult, or ask students to do this.
- Demonstrate, model or act out instructions.
- Complete the first example with students.
- Ask students to retell and explain in their own words.
- Use different coloured chalk and pens to break up or categorize information.
- Break information and directions into small steps.
- Provide additional background information or context for learning activities.
- Provide additional time to preview materials or complete tasks.
- Use idioms carefully and explain them in simple terms.

- Use visuals, including maps, graphs and charts.
- Provide many examples. Look for examples that will be clear and relevant to students.
- Check for understanding on a regular basis.
- Teach important vocabulary. Identify common words that can appear in a variety of contexts (such as “left” in mathematics as in “after you subtract  $x$ , how many are *left*?”).

### **Differentiated products**

Differentiating the product means varying the type and complexity of the products that students create to demonstrate their learning. For example, graphic organizers are a useful way to assess student understanding without requiring extensive writing. Parts of the organizers can be completed in the student’s first language or with illustrations. Allowing students choices for demonstrating their knowledge also can accommodate differing student abilities, interests and learning preferences.

### **Reading supports**

It is essential to provide English language learners of all ages with reading supports to clarify and interpret written content. The ability to access content within their grade-level range and to be more independent readers contributes significantly to their success. Examples of reading supports include:

- partner reading
- guided reading in small groups
- recordings; e.g., books on tape, podcasts
- text-to-speech software
- bilingual dictionaries and software translation tools.

### **Nonlinguistic representations**

Students create meaning through not only the spoken and written word but many other channels of communication. English language learners, in particular, require nonlinguistic representations, including hands-on experiences, demonstrations, real objects, body language, manipulatives and physical models, to supplement the verbal information they are receiving. English language learners can use nonlinguistic representations to explore concepts. For example, using base-ten blocks in math, puzzles in social studies or building blocks in science. They also can use these modes to represent their knowledge. For example, after reading a story or novel in English language arts, students can create a drawing of the setting, a character or the conflict to demonstrate their understanding without having to reply only in words.

Using a variety of nonlinguistic representations allows English language learners to form mental images related to what they are learning and to elaborate on their knowledge. They can then access the information and connect it to prior experience and new learning. Nonlinguistic representation also can include artistic activities such as dance, mime, drawing, painting, masks and other art forms.



Artistic activities can be powerful modes of communication and allow students to use abstract, creative and other levels of thinking, even if knowledge of English is limited.

### Advance organizers

Advance organizers help students make sense of new information they will be learning by focusing on, organizing and connecting important ideas.

- “**Expository organizers**” use a combination of words and visuals to provide students with a description of the new content they will be learning.
- “**Narrative organizers**” introduce new content about a story.
- “**Skimming strategies**” such as Survey, Question, Read, Recite, Review or SQ3R are a way for students to preview texts. This strategy is best taught through direct instruction, modelling and guided practice of each step. A textbook chapter organizer that combines pictures and words is another way to engage English language learners in the process of skimming.

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### Graphic organizers

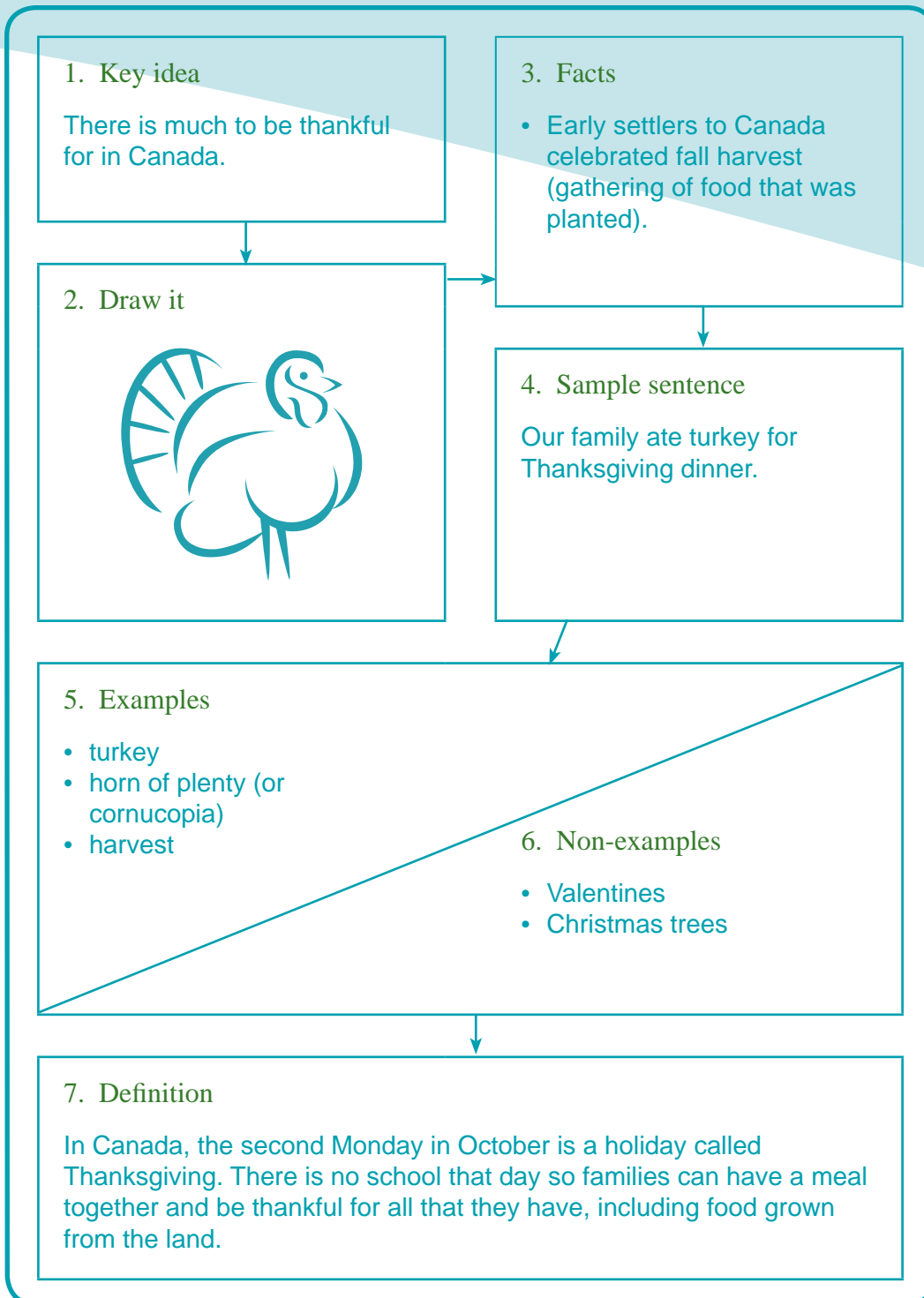
Graphic organizers such as “K-W-L charts”, “P-M-I charts”, “mind maps” and others can be used across grades and subject areas to support English language learners in developing a deeper understanding of key concepts or ideas. Organizers allow English language learners to draw on prior experience and knowledge, form connections, and see relationships among ideas, while limiting the amount of text students have to deal with. Graphic organizer also provide a constant visual reference so students can focus on comprehension and language development rather than memory.

Using graphic organizers to teach new concepts is an effective way to engage students in discussions and have them learn the essential vocabulary in a meaningful context. At the beginning of a unit of study, give students a graphic organizer with main ideas included and ask them to add to the organizer as new information is gathered. Alternatively, at the beginning of a new topic, students can use their background knowledge and experience to organize what they already know about a topic and record it using words and/or pictures. Use this information to identify areas of strength and interest, as well as misconceptions related to the topic, and to plan learning activities with this information in mind.

Graphic organizers also can be used to summarize discussions, review key information and plan writing assignments and other projects.

The following sample idea builder shows how English language learners can complete graphic organizers using a combination of words and pictures. For more examples of graphic organizers to use with English language learners, see *English as a Second Language: Guide to Implementation, Kindergarten to Grade 9*, at [http://education.alberta.ca/teachers/com/English language/resources.aspx](http://education.alberta.ca/teachers/com/English%20language/resources.aspx).

## Idea Builder<sup>1</sup>



1. Form reproduced with permission from Edmonton Public Schools, *Thinking Tools for Kids: Practical Organizers* (Edmonton, AB: Resource Development Services, Edmonton Public Schools, 1999), p. 178.

Students need to be explicitly taught how to interpret graphic organizers, as well as how and why to use different organizers. Consider the following tips.

- Use graphic organizers to plan and introduce your lessons.
- Choose organizers that best represent the ideas or texts under study.
- Show examples of new organizers, and describe their purpose and form within the context of the lesson.
- Use easy and familiar material to model how to use organizers.
- Model organizers on the board, overhead or chart paper, using a “think-aloud” format.
- Give students opportunities to practice using the format with easy material, coaching them at various points in the process.
- Share final products, discuss what worked and what did not, and give students an opportunity to revise information.
- Provide students with many opportunities to practice using graphic organizers.
- Use graphic organizers with a range of topics and issues.
- Encourage students to evaluate which organizers work best in which learning situations.

### Record keeping

Keeping track of the supports successfully used with English language learners provides valuable information to next year’s teachers. Knowing what works for each student, and in which situations or courses, can support consistency, transfer of skills and a smooth transition from one year to the next. A sample record-keeping system follows.

Assessment supports for \_\_\_\_\_

Assessment Support (check each subject in which the accommodation is used)	Language Arts	Math	Social Studies	Science
Extra time				
Modified or adjusted questions				
Bilingual dictionary or word list				
Text-to-speech software				
Word processor with spell check				
Oral or visual presentation versions				
Reading buddies/peer tutors				
Exemplars, models and templates				

## Meaningful and respectful activities

It is important to recognize that language ability is only one facet of a student's abilities. English language learners need the same opportunities for challenging, engaging, developmentally appropriate activities as other students. The activities you choose and how you differentiate these activities should communicate to students that they are capable of:

- becoming bilingual and biliterate
- using higher-order thinking
- using creative and imaginative thinking
- creating literature and art
- generating new knowledge
- thinking about and finding solutions to problems.<sup>2</sup>

Consider the following starting points.

### Authentic contexts

Language acquisition requires the opportunity to use language in a way that is expressive, functional, personally relevant and representative of the way language is used in everyday settings. As you plan for instruction, seek ways to embed language instruction within authentic subject-area content and group interactions.

### Relevant connections

It is important to use a variety of ways to activate students' background knowledge and to help them link what they are learning in English to that prior knowledge. For example, students may not have studied the influence of the new immigration on Canadian society, but they may have experienced the influence of another culture in their homeland and be able to talk about that.

English language learners benefit from opportunities to connect their prior lived experience to the things they are learning and the texts they are reading. For example, students studying Eva Ibbotson's *Journey to the River Sea* in Grade 8 English language arts have an opportunity to connect their own journey to Canada with Maia's journey to Brazil.

Provide English language learners with opportunities to use their first language, words and images to represent their connections. Double entry journals offer one framework in which to organize student connections between the text they are reading and their own experiences.

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2. Adapted with permission from Jim Cummins, "Teaching and Learning in Multilingual Ontario" (webcast), *Curriculum Services Canada*, December 7, 2005, <http://www.curriculum.org/secretariat/december7.shtml> (Accessed January 2008), 52:40–54:12.

## Areas of interest

Tapping into student interests is a key aspect of differentiating instruction. Helping English language learners connect learning to their areas of interest offers another way to build vocabulary and oral fluency in English. Focusing on areas of interest encourages motivation and purpose for learning correct grammatical form and new vocabulary.

## “Silent periods” and “time outs from English”

Part of being respectful is not requiring new English language learners to speak before they are ready. Allow for a silent period during which these students will begin to acquire language by listening and understanding English. If possible, continue to allow periods of “time out from English” during which the English language learner can spend time talking with other students who share their native language. This provides an opportunity for them to ask questions and process what is going on in the classroom.

## Differentiated resources

An integral component of differentiated instruction for English language learners is providing resources at varying reading levels. These resources can include a variety of text types, such as news articles, picture books, journal entries and web pages. Making a variety of resources available allows for differentiation and choice for all students, including English language learners. Providing English language learners with content-specific material at a level they can read successfully allows them to gain information and key vocabulary that may provide the scaffolding necessary for them to read a more challenging text. If possible, provide books in the first language of the English language learner to further support learning and making connections to the English content.

To help English language learners choose appropriate reading materials, teach strategies for selecting a book that is at their reading level. The five-finger rule is one way to test whether a book is the right level of difficulty for reading independently. Students read the first page of the book. Whenever they come to a word they do not know or are unsure of, they put up one finger. If all five fingers are up by the end of the page, the book is probably too challenging to be read independently at this point.

Look for opportunities to plan and share resources with other teachers who teach the same subject. Work together to find or create resources, or divide the core units for the year and then create and share resources. Examples of ways to simplify resources include:

- reducing the amount of text
- increasing the number of explanatory graphics such as pictures
- changing a paragraph to a diagram or chart.

## Note-taking strategies

Note taking requires students to synthesize information and record it in their own words and, in turn, increases their understanding of the information. A variety of different note-taking formats may be used, depending on the task and the student.

- **“Webs” or “mind maps”** allow students to represent information using both words and pictures, making them a good starting point for English language learners.
- **“Informal outlines”** are more structured notes that organize information into main ideas and related details.
- **“Split page notes”** are one way to combine both the outline and visual representation in an organized way. This format allows students to record the main ideas and related details, together with a visual representation of the information.

To teach note-taking strategies, begin by providing English language learners with teacher-prepared notes as a model of good note taking. Have them engage with the information by finding or creating graphics to illustrate the notes. Ask students to add to and revise the notes as new information is learned, providing guidance and feedback as needed. As students improve their language fluency, move to teacher-prepared notes in a cloze format with key words missing, eventually progressing to student-created notes. Include space on a note-taking organizer for students to record a summary of the information and questions they have, providing further opportunities for them to consider and respond to the new information.

## Flexible learning groups

**A**s with other students in the class, English language learners will benefit most when you use a variety of criteria for organizing groups. Consider the following points for grouping students.

- Organize small groups containing both English language and native English speakers, to increase the opportunity for peer tutoring and support. This kind of grouping assists English language learners in negotiating meaning while presenting natural opportunities for English-speaking peers to scaffold language development. Assign roles and tasks for group members.
- Consider grouping English language learners who have the same first language as one group when it is necessary to clarify content and discuss concepts at a deeper level.
- Keep learning groups small when possible. Small groups of three or four increase the amount of talk time for each student and allow the English language learner to feel more comfortable contributing to the discussion.
- Use cooperative learning groups intermittently. Varying instruction to include explicit instruction and structured application gives English language learners time to practice skills and processes independently.

The following sample strategies support comprehension and language development within flexible grouping structures, including partner work, independent work and working in small groups.

### **“Say something” strategy**

“Say something” is a partner reading strategy in which English language learners practise both reading text material aloud and responding to material that is read to them.

Partner 1 – reads a short section of text material

Partner 2 – says something about what Partner 1 read; for example:

- summary of the ideas
- a question about the material
- a prediction of what will come next

Partner 2 – reads the next short section of text material

Partner 1 – says something about what Partner 2 read.

### **“Do now” activities**

Establish activities that students are expected to do immediately upon entering the classroom. “Do now” can be used across grades to reinforce self-directed behaviour and provide natural opportunities for individuals or small groups of students to do targeted learning activities. Examples of “do now” activities include:

- reading
- journaling
- drawing
- problem-solving activities
- vocabulary activities.

“Do now” activities provide English language learners with an opportunity to focus on skill development. They also can provide the teacher with time to work with an individual or a small group of English language learners while the other students are working independently.

### **Learning centres**

Learning centres are organized, self-contained collections of resources and materials that complement curricular topics. English language learners can use learning centres to work on language skills and to engage in social interaction with their peers. Examples of learning centres include:

- skills-based games; e.g., spelling, basic math facts, matching
- content review; e.g., crossword puzzles, flash cards
- manipulatives; e.g., fraction puzzles, models.

### **Cooperative learning**

Cooperative learning groups foster language acquisition by creating authentic and supportive opportunities for English language learners to use language and

interact with fluent English speakers. They provide a motivating, developmentally appropriate and feedback-rich context. Students working in cooperative learning groups naturally adjust their language to make sure other group members can understand them. There is a common goal to be achieved and doing so requires students to negotiate meaning.

Given the less formal, more expressive use of language in the cooperative group, English language learners have an opportunity to use language that they are comfortable with. They also receive more feedback. In a typical 20-minute, whole-class interaction, a student may have one feedback opportunity. In a 20-minute cooperative interaction, a student may receive as many as six feedback opportunities, all of them in a natural context that reduces self-consciousness and anxiety. In this way, they are supported in moving beyond the language they can use independently to using more complex and challenging forms. Finally, in cooperative learning groups, English language learners hear the same information discussed using a variety of phrases. This improves understanding and allows students to move the learning from short-term comprehension to long-term acquisition.

### ***Think-pair-share***

“Think-pair-share” is a cooperative learning strategy that provides opportunities for students to participate, learn from others and make connections. In “think-pair-share”, you pose a topic or question. Students think about the question on their own for a given amount of time (usually one-to-three minutes), and then discuss their thoughts in pairs. Finally, each pair has an opportunity to share their answers with the whole class.

### ***Literature circles***

A “literature circle” is a student-centred reading activity that can be used at any grade level. Small groups of four-to-six students are organized based on book choice, with different groups reading different books. Forming groups based on text choice allows for shared interests and varied achievement and ability levels. Each member is assigned a role (e.g., illustrator, questioner, recorder, etc.), which helps guide the group in a discussion of the book they are all reading. Students then share their thoughts, concerns and understanding about the novel. Literature circles:

- allow English language learners various entry points into the discussion based on the roles they are assigned (for example, the illustrator role offers students the opportunity to contribute nonverbally, while still giving them the option to describe what they draw or explain how it connects to the text)
- foster and deepen reading comprehension, motivation and interest
- encourage English language learners to use English to inform, describe, explain, clarify, generalize, synthesize, and compare and contrast
- provide supportive opportunities to practise the planning, modelling and

- scaffolding required during conversation
- offer a wide range of literature options, differing in readability, interest, genre and content, as well as opportunities to tie-in directly with content and vocabulary from other curricular areas
- allow for the use of supports such as audio books, reading with a partner, choral reading, reading at home and re-reading to improve fluency and, in turn, comprehension.

## Scaffolded instruction

Once you know a student's current stage of language development, it is possible to work at a level *between* what the student is capable of at the moment and the point you want the student to reach next. By modelling correct grammar or pronunciation, asking challenging questions or providing direct instruction, you can scaffold the language development of English language learners. For example, if a student is using nonverbal communication, such as pointing and circling responses, scaffolding occurs when that student is supported in his or her attempts to answer yes/no questions, give one word responses or complete a sentence starter.

Simple sentence starters, like the examples below, are a good way to scaffold English language learners in moving toward the next level of English language fluency.

- I live in ...
- I am in Grade ...
- At recess, I like to ...
- My new friends are ...

## Language experience approach

A “language experience approach” uses dictated language of students to create a learning context to explore reading and writing.

For example:

1. The teacher creates an opportunity for students to recount personal experiences.
2. The teacher records the students' stories word-for-word.
3. The teacher and students review the word-for-word transcripts focusing on vocabulary and syntax, and revise content as needed.
4. The students copy the revised stories and draw pictures to illustrate the content.
5. The students revisit these revised stories for both instruction and independent reading.

The language experience approach creates opportunities for students to experience what it is like to express themselves with enhanced clarity.

## Tiered assignments

Tiered assignments are made up of different sections, or alternate assignments that allow students to address the same content but with different levels of support, challenge and complexity. For example, instead of answering questions in complete sentences, some students complete a cloze activity. Tiered assignments offer English language learners an entry point into the content being learned and an opportunity to successfully demonstrate their understanding of that content.

## Tiered questions

Tiered questions are meant to allow all students the opportunity to be successful responders. The questions should be based on the language stages of various students in the class and phrased to maximize the ways students can respond. A progression of tiered questions may look like the following.<sup>3</sup>

Language stage	Sample type of question
Level 1: Pre-production	Show me ... Point to ... Circle the ...
Level 2: Early Production	Yes/no Either/or One- or two-word answers Lists Labels
Level 3: Speech Emergence	Why ...? How ...? Explain ... Phrase or short sentence answers
Level 4: Intermediate Fluency	What would happen if ...? Why do you think ...?
Level 5: Advanced Fluency	Decide if ... Retell ...

Choosing the right level of questions requires an understanding of an individual student's current level of language proficiency. Decide which level a particular student can respond to successfully and plan the questions to be asked accordingly. Ask questions frequently throughout the learning activity, maximizing the English language learner's opportunity to respond and, in turn, gain confidence. Wait at least six to 10 seconds after asking the question to give students sufficient time to formulate their response and to think about how they are going to say it in English.

3. Chart adapted from Jane D. Hill and Kathleen M. Flynn, *Classroom Instruction that works with English Language Learners* (Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2006), p. 15. © by Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL). Adapted with permission.

## Frequent feedback

Timely, relevant, corrective feedback is an important way to help English language learners move to the next stage of language development. Modelling correct English is some of the most valuable feedback English language learners receive. Formative feedback about how the English language learner is progressing in using correct grammar and pronunciation is more effective than providing a numerical mark reflecting correctness. As English language learners develop their language skills, they can begin to reflect on and assess their own progress in both academic and language learning. Rubrics provide one way for this to happen as rubrics outline expectations and allow English language learners to assess their performance against these expectations.

## Language and literacy instruction

As well as the language instruction provided to the class as a whole, English language learners also need strategies, tools and supports specific to their individual language and literacy needs.

### “Word banks” and “word walls”


Creating “word banks” or “word walls” of frequently used or subject-specific vocabulary provides English language learners with an easy-to-access reference. When possible, pair words with a related picture. Create a word wall to reflect the English language learner’s developing vocabulary. Post the words in a way that allows them to be removed for reference or reorganization. Organizing word banks and word walls by topic (e.g., trees and forests, fractions, Renaissance Europe) helps students understand the relationships between and among words and ideas.

Use the word wall as part of regular language learning activities. For example, add a word whenever a student asks for the meaning of an unfamiliar word or seeks a word to help express himself or herself. Organize and reorganize the wall based on instructional focus (e.g., organize by spelling pattern, phonemes, rhyme, meaning, usage) over time.

Create portable word pockets (by creating an extra copy of each word posted on the word wall) and storing the words in an envelop or pouch under the appropriate heading. The words are then available for students to take for sorting activities or to use for spelling reference during writing activities.

### Bilingual dictionaries

An English/home language dictionary is an important tool for English language learners to access when reading and writing in a variety of contexts. Student-created bilingual dictionaries allow English language learners to draw on their first language and prior experience to connect background knowledge with new learning.

English	Español
Computer 	la Computadora

### Vocabulary and key concepts

Direct vocabulary instruction, including word analysis and instruction of essential vocabulary, improves reading comprehension for English language learners (Carlo et al. 2004; McLaughlin et al. 2000). Select key vocabulary related to the topics being studied and provide opportunities to teach that vocabulary and to use the vocabulary in a variety of contexts in order to deepen student understanding of the word meanings.

Teach student strategies for dealing with unfamiliar vocabulary in the texts they are reading. One such strategy is “read around.”<sup>4</sup>

1. Skip the word and read to the end of the sentence.
2. Go back and read the whole sentence again.
3. Look at the beginning of the word for letter-sound clues.
4. Think, “What word would fit here?”
5. Try out the word in the sentence: Does the word *sound* right? Does this word make *sense*? Does this word match the *letter clues*?
6. Look at the picture for a clue.
7. Ask someone.

### Cloze

“Cloze” activities involve the omission of letters in words or words in sentences where students have to figure out what letters or words are missing. Cloze activities promote sense-making skills and reflection on the rules of language. They also are a great tool for reinforcing content-area learning in a way that reinforces the related language. Cloze passages can be differentiated to meet the language-level needs of various English language learners in the class.

To create a “**letter-level cloze**”, select high-frequency words from students’ oral vocabulary, classroom word walls or from reading material and reproduce them with key letters missing. Begin by following a consistent pattern; e.g., remove the short vowel sound from single-syllable words, remove the ending consonant.

4. Adapted with permission from Dana Antayá-Moore and Catherine M. Walker, *Smart Learning: Strategies for Parents, Teachers and Kids* (Edmonton, AB: Smart Learning, 1996), p. 16.

Students should know what word they are trying to make either because it has been vocalized or because it is within a familiar context; e.g., a sentence from a story. As students become more adept, focus on English words that are easily confused; e.g., “then” and “than.” This strategy works well as part of a “mystery message” written on the board each morning as a “do now” activity.

“**Word prints**” are spatial representations of missing letters that can help students progress from letter-level to word-level cloze activities. Word prints are sets of boxes that represent the shape of each letter and, together, represent the shape of the word. Word prints allow students to become familiar with using visual strategies to assist with spelling. Small square boxes that “sit on the line” represent vowels and squat consonants, rectangular boxes that “hang below the line” represent descending consonants, and rectangular boxes that “stand tall” represent ascending consonants.

To create “**word-level cloze**” activities, select sentences from student reading or language-experience stories (short pieces of writing dictated by the student) and reproduce them with key words missing. Begin by following a consistent pattern; e.g., remove adjectives. Students should be able to use the context of the sentence to figure out a word that makes sense. Early on, it is advisable to provide students with a bank of possible words to choose from and to have no distracters (words that will not be used) in it.

“**Cloze passages**” also can be used to model question-answer techniques and to summarize information learned. In both cases, it is important to ensure the cloze passage has direct correlations to original text or learned material; for example, that information is presented in the same order and the same vocabulary is used.

### **Guided writing**

Students should be taught to write in a variety of forms, especially those that may be needed in later life, such as letters and expository text. Assist English language learners in developing an effective and repeatable process they can use to create each form. Within that process, provide them with strategies to ensure that they consistently apply the rules of language, including grammar.

Begin with language experience stories where students write about personal experiences or topics of interest. Then, have them branch out into new and more creative topics, such as writing in response to reading. By working through the process of planning, drafting, revising and editing, you can address vocabulary and grammar concerns specific to each student within the context of real writing. This is especially important for students with limited instruction in writing in their first language.

## Correction and revision

Initially, all students need to get their intended message down on paper without being overly concerned about mechanics. Teacher-student conferencing during several rewritings then can help the student communicate more clearly in developing a product that can be a source of pride. With English language learners, it is important to limit the focus of error correction to one or two points at each stage of the revision process. Too much correction will be overwhelming and students will not retain explanations. Once the organization and intent of the writing is clear, attention can be given to grammar, especially verb tenses, which take a long time to master. Selecting the most appropriate vocabulary may be the next priority, followed by refining the use of articles and prepositions. Spelling errors can be left until the final stages. It may be helpful to explain this process to older students so they understand that they will be gradually correcting and revising errors.

Most of students' explicit learning about grammar and spelling arises from writing-conferencing time. This also is the best time to point out the positive aspects of each student's work.

When marking errors in written work, differentiate the level of support based on English language proficiency. The support strategies below move from much support to minimal support.

1. Circle or underline each error and write the correction symbol above it.
2. Highlight the error without supplying the symbol.
3. Write only the symbol in the margin of any line with this error.
4. Put only a check in the margin indicating that there is an error of some sort.<sup>5</sup>

## Spelling

Spelling is best taught within the context of real writing tasks. Students who are older and already know the rules of their first language also may benefit from direct instruction in the general rules of English spelling along with related strategies.

Individualized spelling lists can be pulled from:

- students' personal lists of spelling words
- words that students are using in their daily writing
- content words that are being used in different subject areas
- a teacher-written passage that includes many examples of a specific spelling pattern or rule
- high-frequency word lists.

5. Adapted from Susan Earle-Carlin, "Providing Language Feedback in Writing 39," *Program in Academic English/English Language, University of California, Irvine*, n.d., [https://eee.uci.edu/programs/English language/feedback.html](https://eee.uci.edu/programs/English%20language/feedback.html) (Accessed June 2009).

### ***Invented spelling***

Asking a beginning English language learner to use “sounding out” as a strategy to find the spelling of a word is often very frustrating, because a sound in the student’s first language may not have a corresponding sound in English. It takes time for students to learn to hear the difference, so that they can eventually use sounding out as a spelling strategy.

English language learners can use invented or temporary spelling approximations quite successfully with some initial support from the teacher and their peers. It may be necessary to work closely with students during several writing sessions, including scribing dictated stories, so that they understand the process and trust that their invented symbols and spelling are accepted.

Students may be encouraged to use a straight line or a wiggly line when there are whole words or parts of words that they cannot spell, or they can be encouraged to write one letter for a sound they can hear. They also may want to write the word in their first language or use drawings or symbols.

### ***Spelling folders***

Make and laminate individual folding cards. Inside each card, students write words they are having difficulty with, then practice with the “look-say-cover-write-check” strategy.

### ***Must spell lists***

Have individualized “must spell” lists for each student. Posted on the desk, this list of eight to 10 high-frequency words are words that the student is responsible for spelling correctly in his or her daily writing. A must spell list might include a list of high-frequency words students tend to use in their writing, such as:

about	are	because	been	does
felt	from	girl	heard	here
just	know	like	little	looked
make	next	now	our	said
saw	there	they	their	write

### ***Best try***

When English language learners ask how to spell a word, encourage them to give it their best try to spell the word on their own. This “best try” approach encourages ownership for learning and active problem solving. If the spelling attempt is incorrect, the best try allows the adult editor to see the approximate spelling and comment on the parts of the word that are correct. It also may give clues about the writer’s specific spelling difficulties, and common patterns that are causing problems may become obvious. When giving the correct spelling, write it down and spell it out loud;

e.g., student writes “ntelligent”  
teacher writes “intelligent.”

## Technology for learning

Technology for learning can provide English language learners with support in reading, writing, clarifying and interpreting written content, and enable them to better access content that is within their grade and language proficiency level range. When choosing and implementing technology, consider students current comfort and skill level with technology, and whether support may be needed.

### Technology for Learning for English Language Learners

#### Multiple Means of **Representation** (acquiring knowledge and information)

<b>Audio supports</b>	Audio tools (e.g., digital books, talking books, e-books, books on tape, music CDs, radio, sound files, podcasts, telephone) allow English language learners to practise listening to a wide range of voices and to develop an ear for the language. It also can provide opportunities for the student to replay and review content.
<b>Video supports</b>	Video tools (e.g., television broadcasts, movies, video files, documentaries) allow English language learners to experience speakers with different styles of nonverbal communication. Video images give context to the audio, making it easier to decipher meaning.
<b>Transcripts and captions</b>	Transcripts, captions and audiovisual descriptions provide access to content for students with limited English because they are able to read along for better understanding or further clarification.
<b>Text-to-speech software</b>	Text-to-speech software programs, such as <i>Read, Write &amp; Gold</i> , read text and often include other assistive features such as word prediction and dictionaries. Some text-to-speech software programs have built-in scanning functions to convert print into a digital format. Students are supported by having the text highlighted as they listen to it being read. Other supports often built into text-to-speech software programs include speech feedback, screen reading, a phonetic spell checker, word prediction, a thesaurus, study skills and research tools.

**Graphic supports**

Content can be presented with picture symbols to support reading development. *Boardmaker* is a communication and learning tool containing over 4500 picture communication symbols (PCS). It is a tool teachers can use to enhance the language and learning process for students of all levels. This software enables the creation of printed, symbol-based educational materials with PCS and other pictures and graphics in 42 languages.

**Multiple Means of Expression (demonstrating what they know)****Word processing**

Word-processing tools allow English language learners to create organized, easy-to-read documents. Word-processing tools help writers focus on:

- generating and clarifying meaning
- managing ideas and information
- structuring texts in a variety of ways
- revising, editing and improving style
- targeting presentations for particular needs and audiences.

Some word-processing programs provide additional supports, such as customized word or sentence banks. Some provide the opportunity for teachers to add graphic supports to these banks.

These programs allow students to see and hear words and phrases prior to choosing them for their writing. These supports may allow students to use vocabulary at a complex level.

**Blogs**

Blogs allow students to share their thoughts and ideas and meet and interact with people around the world, exposing them to authentic uses of the language.

**Spell checkers**

Several tools that can help English language learners, who have difficulty spelling, include hand-held devices and software applications or features within writing software programs.

Some programs with spell checking offer additional supports such as:

- homonym support
- talking spell checkers
- spell checkers linked to a dictionary
- phonetic-based spell checkers.

Multiple Means of **Expression** (demonstrating what they know) (continued)

**Word prediction**

Sometimes students know what they want to write but have difficulty forming the words or thinking of new words to use. Word prediction programs are used with word processors to provide an efficient way to produce written work. These programs predict what words users intend to write, based on the first letters typed, rules of English grammar and frequency of use. Rather than typing a whole word, users can type the first letter or first few letters and choose from a list of predictions.

Other features of these programs may include spell checking as students type and spoken feedback.

**Visual organizers**

Software applications allow students to organize information in a variety of ways. Students can add interests and further information, and convey meaning with fewer words, by incorporating graphics, charts and diagrams.

Technology can play an important role in making connections for understanding. For example, graphic organizers constructed with *Inspiration* serve as a visual tool to help students see the relationships among concepts and how they connect to one another.

Visualization allows students to become active researchers and comprehend abstract concepts. One of the advantages of using technology is the opportunity to provide visual context.

**Electronic dictionaries**

Electronic dictionaries are written especially for English language learners. The two types are online dictionaries (with helpful illustrative sentences and extensive definition entries) and pocket automatic bilingual dictionaries that are completely portable.

Some electronic dictionaries reference grammar, pronunciation and common errors and allow students to:

- click on a word or phrase to have it repeated
- see related pictures or video clips
- read related texts.

Electronic dictionaries are faster to use than print dictionaries and also have helpful features, such as cross-referencing and word and spelling games.



Multiple Means of **Engagement** (tapping into interests and preferences)

<b>World Wide Web</b>	The World Wide Web allows students to access culturally relevant information, such as stories translated from students' first languages and news articles related to cultures. For example, <i>Bookbox.com</i> offers children's digital books in more than 21 languages. Download of stories are available for purchase and can be previewed for free online. Some Web site content may not be appropriate or may be at reading levels that are too advanced. Teachers should follow the Internet protocols of their schools and need to be selective when choosing web content for their students. Text-to-speech software can support students using Web sites.
<b>E-mail pen pals</b>	Students can practise their writing and communication skills with e-mail pen pals. Several Web sites help to connect students and support use of this medium.
<b>Multimedia</b>	Using digital photos and video editing programs, students can create multimedia projects. When students are engaged in activities like these they are constructing their own knowledge, with the teacher acting as a facilitator.  Software that provides an avenue for artistic expression (e.g., drawing programs, music-creation programs, graphic-design programs) also may be helpful in supporting students with diverse learning preferences.

For more information and strategies for teaching English language learners, see:

- *English as a Second Language: Guide to Implementation, Kindergarten to Grade 9* (2007), [http://education.alberta.ca/media/507659/English\\_languagekto9gi.pdf](http://education.alberta.ca/media/507659/English_languagekto9gi.pdf)
- Chapter 6 of the language and culture 9-year program guides to implementation for grades 4, 5 and 6; e.g., *Spanish Language and Culture 9-year Program Guide to Implementation, Grades 4–5–6* (2008), <http://education.alberta.ca/teachers/program/interlang/spanish/spanlc4to6.aspx>.