



# Supporting English Learners Through the Writing Process

Scaffolding Writing Instruction

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# ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

This guide provides teachers with clear, practical guidance for supporting English Learners (ELs) through each stage of the writing process. It outlines how to create writing lessons that build both writing skills and language development, using approaches that reflect Louisiana’s Connectors for ELs and support students across all levels of English proficiency. The guide offers ideas for structuring writing instruction, organizing classroom spaces, incorporating mentor texts, and designing meaningful writing tasks using high-quality instructional materials. Teachers can use this guide to help ELs engage with writing confidently and successfully in any classroom setting.

## INTRODUCTION

Writing is a critical skill for all students, and it plays a vital role in the academic development of English Learners (ELs). Strong writing instruction helps ELs build both language proficiency and content knowledge. To ensure all students receive effective writing instruction, teachers must understand and apply grade-level writing standards, including those from the grade levels immediately above and below. This broader understanding ensures instructional decisions support long-term student growth rather than focusing only on short-term goals.

This section provides a clear overview of core writing standards expectations as well as key recommendations from the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) on effective writing instruction. These recommendations highlight essential practices such as providing daily time for writing, explicitly teaching the writing process, developing writing mechanics, and fostering a classroom community where writing is valued. When implemented thoughtfully, these strategies benefit all learners while offering targeted support for ELs at varying stages of language development.

## Review of Writing Standards

The standards should drive all instructional decisions. If you are not aware of what writing standards precede your grade level and what standards follow your grade level, you may be shortchanging your current students. Familiarize yourself with your grade level writing standards as well as those of the grade level below and above your current placement. This awareness is especially important when supporting English Learners (ELs), as writing growth for ELs often requires focused attention on both language development and grade-level writing expectations.

When reviewing writing standards, teachers should also consider how students’ English language proficiency levels impact their ability to meet grade-level writing outcomes. ELs at emerging or progressing proficiency may need scaffolds such as sentence frames, labeled visuals, or shared writing models to successfully engage in grade-level writing tasks. By aligning writing instruction to both writing standards and English language proficiency stages, teachers can ensure that all students receive appropriate support.

# Recommendations from the Institute of Education Sciences

In 2012, the IES released a practice guide on teaching elementary students to be effective writers. This practice guide included four clear recommendations for teachers to implement writing instruction in their classrooms.

## Recommendation One

Recommendation #1 is to provide daily time for writing instruction and practice for students: 30 minutes in kindergarten and 60 minutes beginning in first grade (IES, 2012). This recommended time includes students engaging in actual writing, not instructional time on writing. For ELs, this daily writing time is critical for reinforcing both language skills and content knowledge.

## Recommendation Two

Recommendation #2 is to teach students the writing process (planning, drafting, sharing, evaluation, revising, editing, and publishing) and various strategies needed to navigate the writing process. Writing strategies should be taught with explicit, direct instruction with a gradual release of responsibility from teacher to student (IES, 2012). The teacher begins by describing the strategy, its purpose, and then demonstrates or models the strategy. The teacher then guides students in using the strategy before encouraging them to use it independently (IES, 2012).

In addition to writing strategies, students need to be taught to write for a variety of purposes (describe, narrate, inform, persuade/analyze). This recommendation included understanding the purpose for writing, emulating features of writing using mentor texts, and teaching students techniques for writing effectively (IES, 2012). For ELs, connecting writing purposes to real-world contexts or content areas such as science and social studies can further support language and content integration.

## Recommendation Three

Recommendation #3 is focused on the conventions of writing, commonly called the mechanics of writing. This recommendation is to teach students to become fluent with handwriting, spelling, sentence construction, typing, and word processing through explicit instruction, modeling, and practice (IES, 2012). This is especially important for ELs, who may need intentional support with spelling patterns, grammar rules, and sentence structure specific to English. Teachers should provide consistent opportunities for ELs to apply conventions in context while also using visual supports and modeling to reinforce these skills.

## Recommendation Four

Recommendation #4 is to create within a classroom setting a community of writers by writing alongside students, providing choices for writing topics, encouraging collaboration among students, providing opportunities for students to give and receive feedback, and publishing and presenting student writing (IES, 2012). For ELs, this sense of community can also serve as a language-learning space, where peer

interaction, shared writing activities, and collaborative editing provide authentic opportunities to practice language skills while building writing proficiency.

These four key recommendations provide a framework of instruction for teachers on how to implement instructional strategies for improving writing. The use of the Writing Process, a structure for generating ideas through finished writing products, is helpful for all students, but especially benefits ELs. By applying these recommendations alongside an understanding of EL proficiency levels and scaffolding strategies, teachers can more effectively support diverse learners in building strong writing skills.

## UNDERSTANDING THE WRITING PROCESS

### Overview

A body of research (Institute of Educational Sciences (IES), 2012; International Literacy Association (ILA), 2020) recommends that students should write daily and, depending on age and skill development, for increasing amounts of time. For English Learners (ELs), this daily writing practice not only supports writing fluency but also provides essential opportunities to develop vocabulary, sentence structure, and content knowledge through authentic language use.

The writing process includes planning, drafting, revising, and editing; these processes are iterative and recurrent. These processes need to be modeled for students using a think-aloud approach (ILA, 2020). For ELs, modeling is especially critical, as it helps make both language structures and writing expectations clear. Teachers should explicitly demonstrate how to generate ideas, organize thoughts, and apply writing strategies in real time, using visuals, sentence frames, and bilingual supports as needed.

### Prewriting

This is the step that involves all types of preparation. Teachers explain the assignment and provide activities that allow students to access prior knowledge, build new knowledge, collect ideas, and the words that bring them to life, and help students to begin writing. For ELs, prewriting activities are particularly important as they build background knowledge, activate familiar vocabulary, and reduce language barriers that might prevent students from participating confidently in writing tasks. Teachers should provide scaffolds such as bilingual word banks, labeled visuals, or small-group discussions in the home language when appropriate.



**In a 2nd grade class, the teacher introduces a narrative assignment. She reads aloud, then leads a class brainstorm about places students visit with family. Students use thinking maps and draw their ideas before writing their first sentence.**

**Choose 3 prewriting strategies. How might you adapt each one to support ELs at different language proficiency levels in your classroom?**

Here is an expansive list of prewriting ideas:

- Brainstorming
- Talking, conversations, discussion, dialogue
- Reading a book
- Viewing a film, video
- Reading to children
- Building/accessing background knowledge
- Explicit instruction
- Thinking maps, mapping, webbing
- Drawing/illustrations
- Using experiences
- Questioning
- Observing
- 4 square

When using these strategies, teachers should adjust the level of support based on students' English proficiency levels. For example, emerging ELs may express ideas through drawings or oral discussion before moving to written words. At the same time, students at higher proficiency levels may be ready to use structured graphic organizers or write labeled lists. Across all stages, consistent teacher modeling and peer interaction help ELs engage in the prewriting process more effectively.

## Drafting

Rapid composing, first drafts, or first attempts at a narrative are essential parts of the writing process. At this stage, students focus on getting their ideas down on paper without worrying about perfect spelling, grammar, or organization. There should be a clear understanding that this product can be freely edited and revised later. For English Learners (ELs), this step provides a valuable opportunity to experiment with language and practice applying newly learned vocabulary and sentence structures in writing.

During drafting, teachers should emphasize that the goal is fluency — writing as much as possible without self-correction slowing the process. ELs may write using a combination of home language words, English



**During a 4th-grade class, students begin writing the first draft of an informational report. The teacher provides a model paragraph on the board and prompts students with sentence starts to help structure their ideas.**

**Select 3three drafting strategies from the list. How would you use each one to support ELs with varying levels of writing proficiency in your classroom?**



vocabulary, drawings, or phonetic spelling, depending on their language proficiency level. Encouraging students to express their thoughts without fear of mistakes builds writing stamina and confidence.

Here is an expansive list of drafting ideas that support all students, including ELs:

- Dialoging – talking about ideas before writing, especially helpful for ELs to rehearse sentences orally.
- Restating questions, writing answers to questions, and using sentence starters if needed.
- Grouping ideas, crafting ideas into sentences, and identifying topic sentences, with graphic organizers as scaffolds.
- Using appropriate or new vocabulary, supported by word walls or bilingual glossaries.
- Creating a beginning-middle-end using visual story maps.
- Adding main idea/topic sentence/supporting sentences/concluding sentences, modeled through shared writing.
- Expanding on a prewriting, sifting, sorting, and selecting the best ideas from prewriting notes.
- Listing key ideas in a sequence is helpful for both narrative and informational texts.
- Modeling, looking at previous examples, using textbook models, or anchor charts.
- Prompting with questions or visual aids to help ELs generate more content.
- Copying as an initial strategy for emerging ELs to build writing fluency.
- Journaling on familiar topics allows for informal writing practice.
- Sharing writing (interactive writing), building peer connections, and language practice.
- Outlining with sentence frames for ELs at developing and expanding proficiency levels.
- Webbing, using graphic organizers, and thinking maps with bilingual labels as appropriate.
- Using a rubric/checklist to guide writing, introduced with explicit modeling and examples.
- Organizing ideas; Listing [List-Group-Label] for categorizing information.
- Taking notes, preparing reports, and being supported by sentence stems for ELs.
- Free writing with encouragement to express ideas using all available language resources.

When applying these strategies with ELs, teachers should adjust expectations based on proficiency levels. Emerging ELs may focus on writing words, labels, or simple phrases, while expanding and bridging ELs may draft full paragraphs or multiple sentences using modeled sentence structures. Scaffolds such as sentence starters, vocabulary supports, and peer collaboration help make the drafting process accessible and productive for all learners.

#### **TIPS FOR SUPPORTING ELs:**

Provide sentence frames and model how to expand ideas using vocabulary ELs are familiar with. Allow ELs to draft using both English and their home language to support concept development before focusing on editing for English structure.

## Response/Revision

Response is the formative feedback any writer receives — either from themselves, a peer, or a teacher. Revision is the process of rethinking content based on observations from the writer or others. Both steps are essential to improving writing quality and helping English Learners (ELs) grow as writers. For ELs, response and revision provide critical opportunities to refine both their ideas and their use of English, supporting language development alongside writing skills.

Teachers should guide ELs through the response and revision process using clear, structured supports. Modeling how to revise writing aloud, providing sentence frames for peer feedback, and encouraging multiple drafts help ELs become more confident writers. It is important to emphasize that revision is about improving ideas and language, not simply fixing mistakes.



**During a middle school class, students exchange drafts and use a peer editing checklist to provide feedback focused on sentence clarity and vocabulary. The teacher circulates, offering mini-conferences to discuss specific revisions with each student.**

**Select two revision strategies from the list. How would you incorporate them in your classroom routine to help ELs strengthen their writing drafts?**

Here are ideas for response and revision that are targeted to ELs but beneficial for all students:

- Peer editing, teacher editing, group editing — use structured checklists and sentence frames for giving feedback.
- Editing marks explanation — introduce symbols gradually with visual aids or anchor charts.
- Reading aloud (to self, to peer); thinking about what's been written — this supports both self-monitoring and language fluency.
- Rewriting — encourage multiple drafts as part of the normal writing process.
- Journaling is an informal way to practice writing and revision skills.
- Using reference tools, dictionaries, and thesauruses provides bilingual dictionaries or glossaries when possible.
- Proofreading with checklist/rubric — make sure children are given a clear rubric from the start, with visuals or translated terms for ELs.
- Revisiting rubric — guide students through how to check their work using the rubric.
- TAG (Tell-Ask-Give suggestions) proofreading — structure peer feedback in this simple, easy-to-remember format.
- Mini-conferencing [for feedback ideas] — short one-on-one sessions with the teacher to clarify feedback.
- Student conference; whole group conference — use time to model revision strategies collectively.
- Whole class discussion — share examples of strong writing and revision choices.
- Sharing sessions: Teacher responds, partners respond, group responds — build classroom community around writing.
- Focused feedback, such as word choice, clarity, mechanics, and showing not telling — target one trait at a time, especially for ELs at emerging or developing levels.
- Modeling — demonstrate real-time editing and revising using shared writing.
- Using interactive writing tools, such as smart boards, engage students in group revision.



- Writing conferences using 6 Traits +1 — focus on specific traits aligned to individual writing goals.
- Using/revisiting rubrics helps students self-assess and set revision goals.

For ELs, it is essential to adjust revision expectations based on English proficiency levels. Emerging writers may focus on revising a single sentence or improving word choice with support, while more advanced ELs can revise for sentence fluency, organization, and voice. The revision process helps reinforce English language skills and encourages students to see writing as a flexible, ongoing process rather than a one-time task.

### TIPS FOR SUPPORTING ELS:

Provide sentence frames and vocabulary banks to support peer feedback conversations. Use bilingual rubrics when possible to clarify expectations.

## Final Product

Final drafting is the stage where students complete their writing by applying all the changes identified during response and revision. This step involves writing in the changes discussed — whether from peer feedback, teacher conferences, or self-reflection — and preparing a clean, polished version of the text. Students may revisit earlier steps in the writing process, such as planning, drafting, or revising, with greater independence or additional teacher support as needed.

For English Learners (ELs), this step provides an important opportunity to consolidate both writing skills and English language development. Teachers should encourage students to focus on producing a final product that reflects their best effort, using checklists and rubrics to guide this process. Rereading their writing is especially valuable for ELs as it reinforces language patterns, vocabulary, and writing conventions.

### Final Product Checklist

- ☒ Reread
- ☒ Revise
- ☒ Proofread
- ☒ Present



**In a 2nd grade class, students use a laminated final draft checklist with dry-erase markers to mark off each step as they prepare their polished writing for a class display.**

**Design a final product checklist tailored for your grade level. What 3-5 steps would you include to help ELs know their writing is ready to share?**

Here is a list of strategies teachers can use to support ELs in preparing a final draft:

- Rereading: Encourage ELs to read their writing aloud to themselves or to a peer to check for clarity and fluency.
- Making the revisions: Help students apply the specific changes identified during response and revision, focusing on both content and language accuracy.

- Using checklists and rubrics: Provide tools that outline expectations for spelling, grammar, punctuation, and usage. Visual rubrics or translated checklists can help ELs at emerging or developing proficiency levels.
- Proofreading: Guide students in checking for small errors such as punctuation, capitalization, and spacing — important conventions that contribute to clear writing.
- Asking: “Am I ready to present?” Prompt students to reflect on whether their writing is complete and ready to share with others.
- Deciding form of final product: Allow students to choose or be guided in how their writing will be shared — whether as a handwritten draft, typed document, illustrated page, or published classroom display.
- Reading it aloud (to self or others): Reading the final draft aloud helps ELs practice fluency, identify remaining errors, and build confidence in sharing their writing.

By providing clear structures and consistent support during this final stage, teachers help ELs take ownership of their work and develop writing habits that contribute to long-term academic growth.

#### TIPS FOR SUPPORTING ELS:

Provide sentence frames or language supports for ELs when presenting their final products orally. Practice reading aloud in small groups before whole-class sharing.

## Presenting and Evaluating Student Writing

Once students complete their final draft, it is important to provide opportunities for them to share and reflect on their work. Presenting writing helps reinforce the idea that writing is purposeful and meant to be read by an audience. For English Learners (ELs), seeing their work displayed or shared builds confidence and provides additional language learning opportunities through exposure to their peers' writing.

Presentation refers to how students share their finished writing products with others. Teachers can choose from various methods depending on classroom resources and student needs. Below are several ways students might present their work:

- Publishing: Turning student writing into a class book, digital document, or printed booklet helps students see their work in a finished format.
- Displaying or Posting: Displaying student writing in hallways, classrooms, or on bulletin boards makes writing visible and celebrated. For ELs, this also provides valuable opportunities to read each other's work and learn new vocabulary.

### Final Product Checklist

- ☒ Reread
- ☒ Revise
- ☒ Proofread
- ☒ Present

- Illustrating: Allowing students to add drawings or illustrations to accompany their writing can help ELs express ideas visually and add meaning to their text. This is especially useful for students at emerging English proficiency levels.



**In a middle school EL classroom, students' final writing pieces are displayed on a classroom bulletin board alongside self-created illustrations. Students use a simplified rubric to self-evaluate before turning in their work.**

Evaluation refers to how teachers assign credit or provide feedback on writing. While the form of evaluation may vary depending on grade level and instructional purpose, it is important to use clear criteria that reflect the goals of the writing task.

Common evaluation methods include:

- Using rubrics that align with specific writing traits such as ideas, organization, word choice, and conventions.
- Assigning point values or letter grades based on rubric performance.
- Providing formative feedback focused on strengths and areas for growth rather than only assigning a final grade.

For ELs, rubrics and evaluation tools should be communicated and, when possible, supported by visuals or translated into students' home languages. Teachers are encouraged to focus evaluation on both content development and language progress, recognizing the additional effort ELs apply when writing in a second language.

#### **TIPS FOR SUPPORTING ELS:**

Create a class publishing wall or virtual gallery for final writing pieces. Think about how you'll provide EL-friendly feedback options like checklists or short sentence stems for peer comments.

## **Stages of Writing Development**

When supporting English Learners (ELs) through writing development, it is helpful to recognize a continuum of writing behaviors that reflect both language growth and understanding of written English conventions. Writing development is not linear, and ELs may show different characteristics across stages depending on their language proficiency, exposure to print, and writing experiences in both English and their home language.

It is important to note that an EL's progression through these writing development levels is influenced by their stage of English language proficiency. As defined by language acquisition standards, students may range from entering to emerging, progressing, or proficient stages of English development. ELs at the earliest stages of language proficiency typically engage more in drawing, labeling, and simple word writing, while those at higher proficiency stages demonstrate expanded sentence structures, increased vocabulary, and use of English writing conventions with greater independence.

### **Level 1 – Emerging**

At this level, ELs may engage in uncontrolled or unidentifiable scribbling. These early marks represent an important first step in exploring writing tools and beginning to express ideas visually.

### **Level 2 – Pictorial**

At this level, ELs often imitate writing through drawing. Their pictures may become somewhat recognizable, and they may verbally describe what they have drawn, using either English or their home language to communicate meaning.

### **Level 3 – Precommunicative**

By this level, ELs begin writing to convey a message. They may attempt to read their writing aloud, using letter-like forms or random strings of letters. At this stage, ELs might print their name or write familiar words they have memorized, showing early awareness of written English.

### **Level 4 – Semiphonetic**

ELs demonstrate a growing understanding of sound-symbol relationships. They may correctly use some letters to represent sounds, often capturing beginning sounds in words. Writing typically flows left to right, though letter reversals and approximations are common.

### **Level 5 – Phonetic**

At this stage, ELs more consistently represent both beginning and ending consonant sounds and correctly spell some high-frequency words within sentences. They begin including vowels, although these may not always be accurate. ELs are often able to produce one or more sentences, showing clearer structure and intentionality in their writing.

### **Level 6 – Transitional**

ELs correctly spell many high-frequency words within sentences and begin using vowels in most syllables, even if not all are correct. Simple punctuation, such as periods and question marks, may start to appear. Writing shows increased readability and structure, with clearer sentence boundaries and emerging grammatical features.

### **Level 7 – Conventional**

By this level, ELs correctly spell most high-frequency words and use a broader range of vocabulary, including phonetically spelled advanced words. Sentence structures become more complex and varied, with appropriate capitalization at the beginning of sentences, consistent use of lowercase letters, and correct spacing between words.

## Level 8 – Advanced

ELs demonstrate control over a rich body of written vocabulary. They accurately apply advanced print conventions — such as quotation marks, commas, and apostrophes — and organize their writing into appropriate paragraphs. Writing at this stage reflects both linguistic maturity and the ability to apply written English conventions in an organized, cohesive manner.

Throughout this continuum, teachers play a key role in modeling writing, providing structured opportunities for practice, and offering feedback that recognizes both language development and writing progress. It is expected that ELs at early stages of English proficiency will require more targeted scaffolds, visuals, and language supports, while those at higher proficiency stages can take on more independent writing tasks with increasing complexity and fewer supports.

# CLASSROOM SUPPORTS FOR EL WRITING DEVELOPMENT

To support ELs in developing strong writing skills, it is essential to provide consistent exposure to language structures, literacy tools, and print materials throughout the classroom environment. One key practice is using writing connectors — transition words and phrases — that help ELs organize their ideas more clearly. Examples of common connectors include: first, next, then, finally; because, so, but; for example, in conclusion.

Teachers should model the use of these connectors during writing instruction and encourage students to incorporate them into their sentences and paragraphs as their language proficiency grows. Louisiana’s Connectors for English Learners provide clear guidance on how ELs can demonstrate writing progress across different stages of language acquisition. These Connectors outline expectations such as writing simple sentences, using familiar sentence frames, applying high-frequency words, and organizing ideas using basic text structures.

A literacy-rich environment surrounds ELs with opportunities to see, hear, and use language in meaningful ways. This includes making books, word walls, sentence frames, and vocabulary charts easily accessible throughout the classroom. Reading and writing materials should be visible and used regularly during both structured lessons and independent activities.

Labeling classroom items in both English and the students’ home languages further supports literacy development and reinforces vocabulary learning. In addition, a print-rich environment reinforces the connection between spoken and written language. Teachers can display charts, posters, anchor texts, and student work that highlight key writing skills. Sentence starters, punctuation reminders, and high-frequency word lists should be posted in areas where writing takes place. These supports help ELs see models of writing conventions while encouraging independent practice.

To give ELs consistent opportunities to apply writing skills, teachers should incorporate writing prompts into daily or weekly routines. Writing prompts should be connected to high-quality instructional materials that align with grade-level content across all subjects. By linking writing opportunities to content areas such as English language arts, math, science, and social studies, students practice expressing academic knowledge while developing language skills.

It is important to provide visual support alongside writing prompts — such as pictures, labeled diagrams, sentence frames, or word banks — and allow students to respond in a combination of drawing, words, and sentences depending on their stage of writing development.

## STRATEGIES FOR CREATING A LITERACY-RICH ENVIRONMENT

Creating a literacy-rich environment begins with intentionally organizing the classroom space to make books, writing materials, and collaboration areas easily accessible to all students, including English Learners (ELs). Teachers should reflect on the following key considerations when setting up their classrooms:

- Are books readily available and accessible to students?
- Is there a consistent method for students to engage in conversation during instruction?
- How can students access writing materials or computers?
- Are writing tools available in a designated writing center?
- Is there a clear area set aside for small-group work?
- Is there a defined space for writing conferences?

Educators are encouraged to assess their classroom space regularly. Books and text resources should be located in places where students can independently access them whenever possible. Providing opportunities for students to select books and writing tools reinforces responsibility and self-direction. While students may bring their own writing materials from home, it is important to have resources available for those who may not.

A writing center stocked with paper, writing instruments, and simple art supplies — such as crayons or markers for illustrating — helps support both structured and independent writing practice. This writing center does not need to take up a large amount of space; it can be as simple as a shelf, a small table, or even a windowsill ledge.

In addition to writing tools, having a designated space for writing conferences sends students a clear message that writing is a process that involves discussion, feedback, and sharing. Whether it is a separate table, a specific chair near the teacher's desk, or a dedicated small-group area, this space helps establish routines for peer conferences and one-on-one writing support. Some teachers may even incorporate an “author's chair,” a special seat reserved for students to share their writing with the class or a small group. This practice reinforces the value of student voice and promotes a collaborative writing culture.



By thoughtfully organizing classroom spaces to prioritize reading, writing, and conversation, teachers create an environment where ELs and all students are supported in developing strong literacy skills.

## STRATEGIES FOR CREATING A PRINT-RICH ENVIRONMENT

Classroom libraries of all sizes provide valuable opportunities for students to engage with books as mentor texts. Even a small, thoughtfully curated collection can serve as a powerful tool for supporting English Learners (ELs) in developing writing skills. Books offer clear models that students can study and emulate, helping them observe how authors use specific writing features such as word choice, spacing, punctuation, capitalization, tense, and dialogue.

For ELs, consistent access to books strengthens both reading and writing development. Having a range of texts available in the classroom allows students to reference language patterns and structures as they write. Classroom libraries also complement school library collections by keeping materials within easy reach throughout the day.

In addition to books, labeling common classroom objects in both English and students' home languages further supports language development. Labels serve a dual purpose: they help ELs learn vocabulary and provide visual references for accurate spelling. For example, a label on a chair may show the word in English alongside its translation in the home languages represented in the classroom. Labeling also offers native English speakers exposure to words in other languages, fostering a more inclusive and language-aware learning environment. Both classroom libraries and labeling practices contribute to creating a literacy-rich space where students can regularly see, hear, and use language in meaningful ways.

## WRITING PROMPTS AND INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

### Shared Writing

In shared writing, the teacher and students compose text together, with both contributing their thoughts and ideas to the process, while the teacher acts as scribe, writing the text as it is composed. Similar to writing aloud, shared writing can cover a wide variety of forms, purposes, and genres.

During shared writing, the teacher transcribes the entire text while engaging students in a rich discussion about how the text should be composed.

Shared writing is taught to small groups or a whole class in briskly paced, 5- to 20-minute lessons. Plan lessons for types of writing that present particular challenges to your students.

- First, develop and extend children's background and language knowledge on a topic or experience of interest.

- Establish a purpose for the writing and an intellectually engaging opportunity for students to apply new learning. Students might write a letter to a local newspaper or write directions for a new game they have developed.
- Write the entire text yourself in front of students (using chart paper or a document viewer) while requesting input from students regarding aspects of the writing where they most need to expand their expertise. Consider, for example, whether your students need to focus attention on paragraph structure, word choice, or sentence expansion.
- During the writing process, model processes are needed by your students. Have a small whiteboard available, for example, to demonstrate to students how to say a word slowly and write sounds heard into "sound boxes" (Clay, 2006) before writing a phonetically regular word into the text for them. For older students, begin with a root word and demonstrate how to add prefixes or suffixes to a new word.
- Demonstrate in-the-moment revision during shared writing as necessary to construct a strong draft. Reread the text to students from time to time to discuss what needs to be written next or to monitor whether or not the text conveys information. Add a word using a caret, for example, or delete unneeded text.
- Do not deliberately make errors during shared writing. Model the immediate construction of a high-quality draft.
- Read the completed text to students. Take a few minutes to have students orally summarize what has been learned about writing during this session.
- Post the text in an accessible spot in the classroom and provide opportunities for students to read or use the text multiple times over the next several days or weeks.

## Guided Writing

Small-group, guided writing lessons are taught in four steps for students who are in need of extra support. Students learn how to communicate information of interest, stimulated by discussion of a shared text. Students learn three strategies for writing: (1) engaging in writing with fluent, sustained attention, (2) writing informative titles, and (3) adding enough information to communicate clearly.

Guided writing lessons are taught in four steps:

1. Brief shared experience and discussion
2. Discussion of strategic behavior for writing
3. Time to write a new text each day with immediate teacher guidance
4. Sharing

For ELs, guided writing lessons are intervention lessons with a tight focus on improving each child's ability to use a small, specific set of cognitive strategies. They do not take the place of whole-class instruction. Your students should have ample opportunities in other contexts to write longer texts over an extended timeframe, discuss mentor texts with you and their peers, and observe your modeling of good writing behavior during whole-class lessons. Be direct and clear in the information you give to students during

guided writing lessons and encourage active participation. Focus your instruction on strategic behavior for writing rather than on the accuracy and correctness of the writing product alone.

Guided writing lessons usually occur while other students are writing independently and can be adapted to any topic.

- Teachers should provide explicit instruction targeting students' abilities to produce brief but complete writing products fluently and confidently, resulting in each student's improved drafts over time.
- Writing instruction must provide students with scaffolded opportunities to use oral conversation about a topic as direct support for their own writing and to use a set of specific strategies for independent writing.
- Writing instruction should include explicit instruction during students' writing. Teachers "step in" to model and prompt and "step back" to encourage students to make decisions and solve problems about their writing.
- Assessment practices should show teachers which ideas, concepts, principles, and skills need to be taught to which students and for how long.

### **Brief Shared Experience and Discussion**

Once your class has settled into an independent activity, gather two to six students who need extra support at a table. Explain to them that first, you will discuss interesting information, and that they will then each write a story.

Engage in a rich discussion with your students about a text or section of a text (10 minutes). Stimulate this discussion by reading aloud and discussing pages. Be sure that every student has opportunities to talk about this information, enabling them to develop an expanded language base for this specific topic.

### **Discussion of Strategic Behavior for Writing**

Allow students to orally rehearse a sentence they might write (5 minutes). Tell students that one of the best ways to write more is to choose a very interesting idea about which to write. Summarize the previous discussion clearly and directly, and ask your students to start thinking about what they will write: "We learned how ..... Now think about which part you want to write about. CALL ON A STUDENT, tell us what your first sentence will be."

Model the sentences volunteered by students and have the full group rehearse one or two of these sentences aloud.

### **Time to Write a New Text**

Students are now ready to write their brief but complete stories (10 minutes). Before handing out paper (or journals) and pencils, remind students that if they get stuck, they can reread what they have already

written to think about what to write next. Students should write their own stories as independently as possible.

Support individual writing during this time by monitoring students' engagement and success. "Lean in" when someone needs assistance and provide feed forward (not feedback to correct errors) for the writer, such as: "your information about ..... is very interesting. What can you tell your readers next?" Every student should be actively writing the entire time (e.g., thinking about their ideas, writing ideas down, rereading their writing so far, and consulting with you or a peer).

## **Sharing**

After about 10 minutes of sustained, independent writing, ask students to finish the last portion of their writing. Ask each student to read their first (or favorite) sentence to the group and discuss how he or she chose a truly interesting fact about bats about which to write (5 minutes).

Collect each of these stories, or students' journals, for adding to the writing folder/portfolio or for assessment.

# **WRITING PROMPTS AND INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES**

The Six Traits of Writing — ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, and conventions — offer a structured approach to writing instruction that helps English Learners (ELs) develop essential skills while building English language proficiency. For ELs, this framework makes writing expectations clear and manageable, providing consistent focus for both language development and academic writing tasks. Below is an overview of each trait with examples of how it can be applied in EL instruction.

## **Ideas**

The Ideas trait focuses on developing clear and focused content in writing. ELs benefit from targeted support in generating and expanding ideas. Teachers can provide structured brainstorming using graphic organizers, picture supports, and sentence frames to help ELs organize thoughts before writing. Modeling how to add details to a basic idea helps ELs create more meaningful and complete texts. For example, teachers might guide ELs in building an ideas list tied to a class text or real-world topic, using visuals and sentence starters to help ELs contribute and elaborate on their responses.

## **Organization**

Organization refers to arranging ideas logically, with clear beginnings, middles, and ends. ELs need explicit instruction in text structure through the use of visual tools like paragraph frames, story maps, or anchor charts. Teachers can support ELs in structuring both narrative and informational texts by modeling how to sequence events or organize information. For instance, teachers can write a sample paragraph on

chart paper while highlighting how transition words and sentence starters help signal structure. This allows ELs to see writing patterns applied in real time.

## **Voice**

Voice focuses on the writer's unique perspective and style. For ELs, developing voice involves encouraging them to write about familiar topics and personal experiences, helping them express their thoughts in English while maintaining their individuality. Teachers can use culturally responsive prompts tied to content learning, allowing ELs to connect personal knowledge to academic writing. Providing sentence starters and shared writing models gives ELs the support needed to build confidence in sharing their own voice in writing tasks.

## **Word Choice**

The Word Choice trait emphasizes using precise and descriptive vocabulary. ELs require frequent exposure to both conversational and academic language. Teachers can introduce new vocabulary through bilingual word banks, visual aids, and structured sentence frames that encourage ELs to try new words in their writing. For example, building a word wall specifically for vivid adjectives or transition phrases allows ELs to reference these terms as they write. Teachers can also model revising simple sentences by replacing general words with more specific or engaging vocabulary.

## **Sentence Fluency**

Sentence Fluency focuses on writing varied, readable sentences. ELs often begin with basic sentence structures and need support expanding those into more complex forms. Teachers can model how to combine short sentences using connectors like "because," "so," or "after," and use shared reading or choral reading to build fluency. Structured sentence-building activities, such as using sentence strips or fill-in-the-blank sentence starters, can help ELs internalize patterns while practicing different sentence lengths and structures.

## **Conventions**

Conventions cover grammar, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization. For ELs, learning English writing conventions requires intentional scaffolding. Teachers can model editing through shared writing, use visual reminders like punctuation charts, and provide editing checklists appropriate for EL proficiency levels. Interactive writing can also serve as an opportunity to demonstrate editing and revising strategies, helping ELs understand how to identify and correct common errors as part of the writing process.

By focusing on one or two traits at a time, teachers can scaffold writing instruction for ELs in a way that builds both skill and confidence. Integrating the Six Traits framework alongside language development strategies ensures that ELs not only improve their writing abilities but also make meaningful progress in English language proficiency across academic subjects.

## Creating Writing Lesson Plans

Effective writing lessons for English Learners (ELs) require thoughtful planning that addresses both writing skills and language development. High-quality writing instruction incorporates strategies that are appropriate for each student's English language proficiency level, content needs, and writing goals. Teachers should intentionally design lessons that scaffold writing tasks, integrate language supports, and provide repeated opportunities for ELs to engage with written language in meaningful ways. This work is further strengthened when writing lessons are developed using high-quality instructional materials (HQIM) that provide rigorous, content-aligned resources while offering built-in language supports and opportunities for differentiation.

When creating writing lesson plans, it is important to incorporate explicit modeling, shared writing, and guided writing practices. Teachers should demonstrate each step of the writing process — from brainstorming and organizing ideas to drafting, revising, and editing — while using clear language and visual supports. Structured tools such as graphic organizers, sentence frames, and word banks allow ELs to build confidence as they apply new writing skills. Lessons should also include structured opportunities for peer interaction, such as turn-and-talk or peer editing, which help ELs practice language in authentic, collaborative settings. Teachers should draw from HQIM that align with state standards, ensuring writing tasks remain anchored to grade-level expectations while offering adaptations that meet EL students' language needs.

Scaffolding is a key consideration when designing writing lessons for ELs. Emerging proficiency students may benefit from drawing, labeling, or writing short phrases using sentence frames, while expanding and bridging, students may be ready to compose full paragraphs and essays. Teachers should adjust the level of support provided according to the language development stage of each learner, gradually reducing scaffolds as students gain independence. HQIM resources often include leveled texts, writing exemplars, and language development strategies that can guide these scaffolds while maintaining instructional rigor.

## Responding to Narrative Texts and Informational Texts

Using mentor texts — both narrative and informational — is a high-impact practice that supports ELs in developing writing skills aligned to grade-level expectations. Mentor texts allow students to observe how authors organize content, use language features, and apply writing conventions. Teachers should select texts that are culturally relevant, age-appropriate, and reflective of the community they serve. Lessons should guide ELs in analyzing text structures and language patterns before applying similar strategies in their writing. High-quality instructional materials often provide these mentor texts along with writing prompts, rubrics, and language supports designed specifically for ELs.

For narrative writing lessons, teachers can focus on helping ELs identify story elements such as characters, setting, events, and resolution. Visual tools like story maps and sequencing charts are particularly helpful for ELs as they plan their writing. Teachers can model how to structure a narrative using shared writing, provide sentence starters for key parts of the story, and supply word banks with



transition words like first, next, then, and finally. HQIM resources frequently include ready-to-use graphic organizers and planning tools that can be directly incorporated into writing instruction.

For informational writing, lesson plans should emphasize structures such as headings, labels, facts, and topic-specific vocabulary. Teachers can use informational mentor texts tied to high-quality instructional materials (HQIM) in content areas like science or social studies, reinforcing both language and content knowledge. Sentence frames and visual glossaries support ELs in producing clear, organized informational writing. Using HQIM ensures that writing tasks connect to content-area standards while providing ELs with consistent exposure to academic language and structured writing supports.

Across both types of writing, teachers must consider the English proficiency levels of their EL students. Emerging ELs might focus on writing key vocabulary words or single sentences with support, while developing ELs work toward writing full paragraphs using modeled structures. Expanding and bridging ELs can take on more independent writing tasks, using complex sentences, academic vocabulary, and varied text structures introduced through mentor texts. High-quality instructional materials often provide tiered supports aligned to these proficiency stages, helping teachers deliver appropriately challenging and supportive writing instruction for all ELs.

When thoughtfully planned, writing lessons for ELs can effectively build both writing proficiency and English language development. Teachers can ensure lessons remain purposeful and inclusive by integrating language scaffolds, content connections, high-quality instructional materials, and culturally responsive mentor texts into daily writing instruction.

## CONCLUSION

Supporting English Learners (ELs) in developing strong writing skills requires planning, consistent modeling, and thoughtful scaffolding. This guide provides teachers with a practical framework for structuring writing instruction that builds both language proficiency and writing ability. By aligning lesson plans to grade-level writing standards, integrating the writing process, and incorporating high-quality instructional materials, educators can ensure that all ELs — regardless of their English proficiency level — receive the support they need to write with confidence and clarity.

Across all stages of the writing process, from prewriting through final publishing, teachers play a central role in creating an environment where ELs feel empowered to express their ideas. Classroom structures such as shared and guided writing, the use of mentor texts, and structured opportunities for peer feedback help ELs engage in authentic, purposeful writing tasks. By establishing literacy- and print-rich classroom environments and using tools like sentence frames, rubrics, and graphic organizers, teachers can provide ELs with consistent, visible support throughout their writing journey.

Ultimately, the goal is to ensure that every English Learner has the opportunity to grow as a writer while building the language skills necessary for long-term academic success. This guide is designed to serve as a resource for teachers at all experience levels, offering strategies that can be adapted across grade

levels and classroom contexts. When teachers intentionally integrate language supports into writing instruction, ELs can fully participate in classroom writing tasks, contributing their voices, experiences, and ideas as valued members of the learning community.

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