



Course Content

[AP® & ELECTIVES](#)
[CAREER & TECHNOLOGY](#)
[LANGUAGE ARTS](#)
[MATH](#)
[SCIENCE](#)
[SOCIAL STUDIES](#)
[WORLD LANGUAGES](#)
[Web Codes](#) [What is this?](#)

[SuccessNet® Login](#)

Technical Support
 1-800-234-5832
 M–Th: 8:00A.M.–Midnight EST
 F: 8:00A.M.–10:00P.M. EST



Language Arts Instruction and English Language Learners

 by [Dr. Kate Kinsella](#), [Dr. Colleen Shea Stump](#), and [Dr. Kevin Feldman](#)

[Introduction](#)

[Differential Preparation for Second-Language Schooling](#)
[Second-Language Literacy Development](#)
[Reading in a Second Language](#)
[Academic Language Development](#)
[Implications for English Language Arts Instruction](#)
[Instructional Considerations When Preparing Lessons to Support English Language Learners](#)

INTRODUCTION

The number of immigrant, migrant, and refugee students in the United States who have little knowledge of the English language is growing exponentially. In fact, students who are learning English as an additional language are the fastest-growing segment of the school-age population. While the number of English language learners (ELLs) nationwide has skyrocketed, their academic achievement trails behind that of their native English-speaking peers. National studies of English language learners have shown that they are likely to come from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds, attend low-income schools, and have parents with limited English proficiency. These students are also judged by their teachers to have weaker academic abilities, receive lower grades, and score well below their classmates on standardized tests of mathematics and reading.¹ Moreover, in a large-scale California study, secondary schools reported that even long-term resident ELLs entered high school with only fourth to sixth grade academic competencies.²

¹ Moss, M. and M. Puma. *Prospects: The congressionally mandated study of educational growth and opportunity*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, 1995.

² Minicucci, C. and L. Olsen. "Programs for secondary limited English proficiency Students: A California Study." *Focus*, Vol. 5. Washington, D.C.: National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education, 1992.

DIFFERENTIAL PREPARATION FOR SECOND-LANGUAGE SCHOOLING

Secondary-school curricula are based on assumptions about basic reading and writing skills and elementary subject matter foundations. However, the growing population of secondary English language learners is tremendously diverse, particularly with regard to their educational backgrounds. These students enter U.S. schools with varying degrees of curricular preparation and a vast range of language proficiencies, in English and their native language. At times, it may seem that the one thing these diverse students have in common is the need to accelerate their English language and literacy acquisition in order to participate more fully in their secondary schooling.

Although some have parents with impressive levels of formal education and professional job experiences, many come from less privileged families, challenged by limited functional literacy even in their native language. Newcomers from war-torn regions and rural areas of developing countries are apt to arrive severely under-schooled, with fragmented native language literacy training and weak subject matter foundations. These youths predictably require compassion, considerable time, and patient modeling simply to adjust to basic school routines and expectations before they can ever begin to concentrate on phonemic awareness lessons, let alone literary analysis.

On the other hand, more fortunate immigrant youths have benefited from rigorous and sustained elementary schooling in their native country and make the transition to American classrooms more effortlessly. Literate in their home language, these second-language learners have already internalized critical scripts for schooling and often function above equivalent grade levels in math or science. However, these traditionally educated newcomers still face a daunting transition to daily instruction in a language they have only begun to study, along with curriculum content, teaching practices, and skills that may not have been emphasized in their native schooling.

Our secondary schools also serve increasing numbers of students who have been raised and educated entirely in the United States but who speak a language other than English at home. These continuing English language learners were either born in the United States or arrived here as very small children. Many of these long-term U.S. residents are not literate in their home language and remain struggling

English readers well into the upper grades and beyond. They may demonstrate a comfortable handle on the social domain of both languages, but flounder with grade-level reading and writing tasks.

In summary, with regard to prior schooling, secondary English language learners tend to fall into one of three general and frequently overlapping categories:

1. Recent adolescent immigrants who have received continuous native language schooling prior to immigration to the U.S. and are prepared with relatively strong academic and study skills to apply to new subject matter
2. Language minority students continuing into secondary schools from U.S. elementary schools with insufficient English fluency and literacy to compete in challenging academic areas
3. Immigrant, refugee, and migrant students with sporadic or no prior schooling who consequently enter lacking basic literacy and elementary curricular foundations.

SECOND-LANGUAGE LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

Statistics on the academic achievement of English language learners demonstrate a dire need for informed attention devoted to literacy, the cornerstone of all academic abilities. Nonetheless, given the extreme variability in these students' educational histories, they must be offered different pathways to eventual academic success. One approach to literacy instruction will not fit all English language learners. However, the instructional practices outlined in this chapter and throughout this manual should greatly assist them in participating more fully in a heterogeneous secondary Language Arts classroom.

Those with significant gaps in their elementary educational backgrounds will require a thoughtful and sustained literacy intervention program, complemented by a substantive and protracted English language development program. Their acute and compelling academic needs cannot be accommodated solely within the confines of the general education Language Arts classroom, an after-school tutorial, or a reading intervention program.

Similarly, literate and academically prepared newcomers will still need a viable English language development program to enable them to transfer the knowledge and skills they acquired in their native language schooling to the curricula they are studying in the United States. Literate adolescents who are virtual beginners in English will also benefit from a separate reading support class, to help them readily acquire the basic phonology, morphology, and syntax of English, and to more efficiently transfer the reading skills they have already mastered in their native language. Students who can already read relatively fluently in their first language will make an easier transition to English decoding than bilingual classmates who are nonreaders. These literate second-language learners will therefore need to move more rapidly than struggling ELL readers, from initial skill-building lessons that focus on decoding, word recognition, and pronunciation to explicit instruction in comprehension strategies such as prediction, questioning, and summarizing that will help them deal more productively with the reading demands of content-area classrooms.

READING IN A SECOND LANGUAGE

Research findings suggest that reading processes in a second language are not significantly different from those in a first language.³ For example, both rely on the reader's background knowledge regarding the topic and text structure to construct meaning, and both make use of cueing systems (graphic, syntactic, phonological, semantic) to allow the reader to predict and confirm meaning.

While literacy processes in first and second languages may be quite similar, two crucial areas of difference must be addressed. First, initial reading and writing in English will be slower and more painstaking for second-language learners because of their lack of overall fluency. The second-language learner is often in the process of acquiring basic oral language while simultaneously developing literacy skills in English. Limited proficiency in a second language can cause a proficient reader in the native language to revert to poor reading strategies, such as reading word by word. Also, some students may not even have the native language literacy skills to transfer concepts about print and strategies to the second language.

Secondly, ELL students are likely to have less prior knowledge and relevant vocabulary to process new information while reading academic English assignments. Furthermore, readers' background knowledge is often culture-bound and may not match the content needed for a given reading text. ELL students with a limited range of personal and educational experiences on a reading topic will therefore have little to draw upon to construct meaning from a selection even if they are able to accurately decode.

³ Grabe, W. "Current developments in second language reading." *TESOL Quarterly* (1991), 375-406.

ACADEMIC LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

Many adolescent ELL students come to school with sufficient social language for everyday classroom interactions yet are severely lacking in the academic English foundations to tackle a poem or follow the instructions on a standardized test. This is because academic vocabulary is primarily developed through school-based

reading and repeated exposure during content-based classroom activities.

The average native English-speaking student enters elementary school with an internalized understanding of the syntax and phonology of English, plus a working vocabulary of several thousand words. This vocabulary base is enhanced each year through new school experiences and reinforced in home and community settings. In striking contrast, the language minority student enters U.S. schooling with a tenuous grasp of the phonology and syntax of the English language, a scant working English vocabulary, and rare opportunities for practice and expansion of this knowledge outside the classroom. As a consequence, they must develop content-specific language and literacy skills along with conceptual foundations, all the while competing with native English-speaking classmates who may also be challenged by grade-level Language Arts curricula, but who at least operate from a relatively firm foundation in basic academic English and years of exposure to high-frequency social English vocabulary.

IMPLICATIONS FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS INSTRUCTION

A number of implications for instruction can be drawn from these descriptions of the academic language and literacy challenges of ELL students. Novice English readers will require extensive and dynamic instructional "front-loading" in order to effectively grapple with challenging literacy tasks. Teachers all too often concentrate their energies on the damage-control phase, when it becomes clear that students either failed to comprehend or felt too overwhelmed to even try to tackle a reading task. Explaining critical concepts and language after the fact does little to engender reader confidence or competence for the next task. The students may walk away with a better grasp of the plot development in *The Joy Luck Club* but have no sense of how to proceed with the next chapter. Instead, conscientious literacy mentors essentially "teach the text backwards" by devoting far more instructional time to the preparation and guidance phases of lessons. Since a second-language reader may be approaching an assignment with impoverished background knowledge and weak English vocabulary, it makes sense to concentrate on classroom activities that build strong conceptual and linguistic foundations, guide them into the text organization, model appropriate comprehension strategies, and provide a clear purpose for reading. This responsible preparation will in turn help to create the kind of nurturing affective and cognitive arena that communicates high expectations for their literacy development and encourages them to persist and take risks.

INSTRUCTIONAL CONSIDERATIONS WHEN PREPARING LESSONS TO SUPPORT ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

All of the lesson-planning principles and instructional practices detailed throughout this teacher reference will support ELL students in making strides in their second-language literacy development and in becoming vibrant members of the classroom community of learners. Following are some additional reminders of ways in which you can support ELL students at various stages of your lesson planning to deal more productively with the reading and writing demands of English Language Arts curricula.

Phase 1: Preteach

- Pull out a manageable number of key concepts.
- Identify vocabulary most critical to talking and learning about the central concepts. Don't attempt to cover all of the vocabulary words you anticipate they will not know. Do more than provide synonyms and definitions. Introduce the essential words in more meaningful contexts, through simple sentences drawing on familiar issues, people, scenarios, and vocabulary. Guide students in articulating the meanings of essential terms through these familiar contexts and hold them responsible for writing the definitions in their own words.
- Present key words when they occur within the context of the reading selection or activity. Make the words as concrete as possible by linking each to an object, photo, drawing, or movement.
- Post the new essential vocabulary in a prominent place in the classroom to create a word bank of organized lesson terminology.
- Examine your lesson to see what types of language functions students will need to participate in various activities. For example, if they are being asked to make predictions about upcoming paragraph content in an essay based on transition words (e.g., therefore, in addition, consequently), students will need to be taught some basic sentence patterns and verbs to express opinions (e.g., "I predict that..."; "Based on this transition word, I conclude that..."). If being asked to agree or disagree with the arguments in a persuasive article, students will need to learn some sentence patterns and verbs to convey agreement or disagreement (e.g., "I don't agree with the author's argument that adolescents don't have a work ethic because...").
- Engage students in prereading activities that spark their curiosity and involve them in all four language modes.
- Assess students' prior knowledge related to key concepts through participation structures and collaborative group discussions with realia (e.g., photographs, objects) serving as a visual trigger.
- Utilize realia and visuals needed to make the concepts less abstract.
- Use multimedia presentations such as CD-ROMs and videos to familiarize students with the plot, characters, and themes of a narrative text prior to reading, but don't use it as a replacement for reading.
- Provide a written and oral synopsis of the key content prior to actually asking

students to read a selection if the sentence structures and vocabulary are particularly demanding.

- Use graphic organizers and semantic maps to help students grasp the central content in an accessible manner prior to reading.
- Lead a quick text prereading, or "text tour," focusing student attention on illustrations, chapter title and subtopics, boldfaced words, summary sections, and connection of chapter to theme, previous chapters, activities, and concepts.
- When possible, build in opportunities for "narrow reading," allowing students to read more than one selection on the same topic, to build concept and vocabulary recognition that will support their reading more fluently and confidently.

Phase 2: Teach

- Clearly establish a reading purpose for students prior to assigning a manageable amount of text.
- Describe and model strategies for navigating different kinds of text. Provide a convincing rationale for each new strategy and regularly review both the purpose and process.
- Familiarize students with a manageable tool kit of reading comprehension and study strategies, and continue practicing these selective strategies. In this way, students end the school year with a viable approach rather than sporadic practice with a confusing array of new reading behaviors.
- Introduce a new strategy using a text that isn't too difficult in order to build credibility for the strategy and ensure student success. Otherwise, if a selection is too difficult and the strategy fails to deliver for students, they will have little faith in experimenting with the new strategy on future texts.
- Whenever possible, get students physically involved with the page, using highlighters, sticky notes, and a small piece of cardboard or heavy construction paper to focus and guide their reading from one paragraph or column to the next.
- Alternate between teacher-facilitated and student-dominated reading activities.
- Do "think-aloud" reading to model your cognitive and metacognitive strategies and thought processes.
- Assign brief amounts of text at a time, and alternate between oral, paired, and silent reading.
- Guide students through the process of reading and comprehending a passage by reading aloud to them and assisting them in identifying the text organization and establishing a clear reading purpose.
- Allow students to read a passage while listening to an audiotape recorded by a classmate, cross-age tutor, or parent volunteer.
- Have students engage in "repeated readings" of the same brief passage to build word recognition, fluency, and reading rate.
- Provide some form of study guide in order to focus their reading on the critical content and prevent them from getting bogged down with nonessential details and unfamiliar vocabulary. A partially completed outline or graphic organizer is more task-based and manageable than a list of questions to answer, which often results in simple scanning for content without really reading and comprehending material.
- Demonstrate your note-taking process and provide models of effective study notes for students to emulate.

Phase 3: Assess

- Prepare both text-based and experientially based questions, which lead students from simply getting the gist of a selection to establishing a personal connection to the lesson content.
- Build in task-based and authentic assessment during every lesson to ensure that ELL students are actually developing greater proficiency with new content and strategies. Quick-writes, drawings, oral and written summaries, and collaborative tasks are generally more productive indicators of lesson comprehension than a closing question/answer session.
- Provide safe opportunities for students to alert you to any learning challenges they are experiencing. Have them submit anonymous written questions (formulated either independently or with a partner) about confusing lesson content and process and then follow up on these points of confusion at the end of class or in the subsequent class session.
- Ask students to end the class session by writing 3–5 outcome statements about their experience in the day's lesson, expressing both new understandings and needs for clarification.
- Make sure that assessment mirrors the lesson objectives. For example, if you are teaching students how to preread expository text, it isn't relevant to assess using comprehension questions. A more authentic assessment of their ability to apply this strategy would be to provide them with a photocopy of an expository selection and ask them to highlight and label the parts one would read during the actual prereading process. It would be relevant, however, to ask them to identify two reasons for engaging in a text prereading before tackling the entire selection.
- Build in opportunities for students to demonstrate their understandings of texts that draw upon different language and literacy skills: formal and informal writing assignments, posters, small-group tasks, oral presentations, and so on.
- Don't assign tasks to ELLs that require little or no reading or lesson

comprehension. For example, don't allow them to simply draw a picture while other students are writing a paragraph. Instead, make sure that you have adequately scaffolded the task and equipped them with a writing frame and model to guide them through the process. While one might argue that this is multimodal and tapping into multiple intelligences, it is actually conveying expectations for their development of academic competence in English.

- Make sure that students understand your assessment criteria in advance. Whenever possible, provide models of student work for them to emulate, along with a non-model that fails to meet the specified assessment criteria. Do not provide exemplars that are clearly outside of their developmental range. While this may be an enriching reading task, it will not serve as a viable model. Save student work that can later serve as a model for ELLs with different levels of academic preparation.
- Develop accessible and relevant rubrics for various tasks and products that are customized to the task rather than generic assessment tools. Introduce a rubric in tandem with exemplars of successful and less productive work to help them internalize the assessment criteria. Guide students in identifying the ways in which sample work does or does not meet established grading criteria.

Phase 4: Extend

- Consider ways in which students can transfer knowledge and skills gleaned from one assignment/lesson to a subsequent lesson.
- Build in opportunities for students to read a more detailed or challenging selection on the same topic in order to allow them to apply familiar concepts and vocabulary and stretch their literacy muscles.
- Recycle pre- and post-reading tasks regularly, so students can become more familiar with the task process and improve their performance. If they are assailed with curricular novelty, ELLs never have the opportunity to refine their skills and demonstrate improved competence. For example, if you ask them to identify a personality trait of an essential character in a story, then support this observation with relevant details in an expository paragraph. It would make sense to have them write an identical paragraph about another character in the near future.
- Discuss with students ways in which they can apply new vocabulary and language strategies outside of the classroom.
- Praise students' efforts to experiment with new language in class, both in writing and in speaking.
- Demonstrate the applicability of new reading and writing strategies to real-world literacy tasks. Bring in potentially more engaging reading selections that will pique their interest and provide a more compelling rationale for applying a new strategic repertoire. Design periodic writing tasks for an authentic audience other than the teacher: another class, fellow classmates, and so on.

Copyright ©2010 Pearson Education, Inc. or its affiliates. All Rights Reserved.

[Privacy Policy](#) [Terms of Use](#) [Rights and Permissions](#)

*Advanced Placement, Advanced Placement Program, and AP are registered trademarks of the College Board, which was not involved in the production of, and does not endorse, this product.

