



Provide regular, structured opportunities to develop written language skills



As English learners progress from grade 1 to graduation, they are increasingly required to demonstrate the ability to respond to informational texts through writing. The purpose of this recommendation is to provide educators with guidance on how to support English learners in mastering these writing requirements.

How to carry out the recommendation

1. Provide writing assignments that are anchored in content and focused on developing academic language as well as writing skills.
2. For all writing assignments, provide language-based supports to facilitate students' entry into, and continued development of, writing.
3. Use small groups or pairs to provide opportunities for students to work and talk together on varied aspects of writing.
4. Assess students' writing periodically to identify instructional needs and provide positive, constructive feedback in response.

Potential roadblocks

1. English learners make errors on numerous aspects of writing, making it difficult to determine what to focus feedback on.
2. When giving students extended time for a writing project, there may be concern about the limited amount of writing that students produce.
3. The design and implementation of meaningful collaborative activities can be a challenge.

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Reference: Baker, S., Lesaux, N., Jayanthi, M., Dimino, J., Proctor, C. P., Morris, J., . . . Newman-Gonchar, R. (2014). *Teaching academic content and literacy to English learners in elementary and middle school* (NCEE 2014-4012). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance (NCEE), Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/PracticeGuide/19>



How to carry out the recommendation

1. Provide writing assignments that are anchored in content and focused on developing academic language as well as writing skills.

Teachers should have students focus on writing assignments that align with the content covered in class instruction. Writing assignments should have targeted learning objectives around English language development and academic vocabulary.

Explicit writing instruction and consistent instructional routines should be used to support students in generating their ideas and guiding their writing. For more on providing instructional supports see the next entry, as well as page 49 in the practice guide referenced on the first page of this document.

2. For all writing assignments, provide language-based supports to facilitate students' entry into, and continued development of, writing.

Provide students with language-based supports such as graphic organizers to enable them to work on writing assignments using academic language conventions. Without support, students' writing will likely default to topics, vocabulary, and grammatical conventions that do not reflect academic writing.

Additionally, students will need explicit instruction in moving from the graphic organizer to constructing complete sentences and paragraphs. Sample support tools can be found on pages 50–51 of the practice guide.

3. Use small groups or pairs to provide opportunities for students to work and talk together on varied aspects of writing.

To aid in written language skill development, experts recommend grouping students to work on tasks together. Doing so allows students to engage in critical thinking and collaborative discussion with their peers. Listening and speaking about text and content will likely benefit students' writing skills and language development. Each phase of the writing process provides different opportunities for discussions and feedback.

4. Assess students' writing periodically to identify instructional needs and provide positive, constructive feedback in response.

Teachers should continually assess students' work to identify what to focus on during classroom instruction. Experts suggest that formative assessments, such as student writing samples, aid in identifying common needs in the classroom. Using the information gathered from these writing samples, teachers should provide corrective feedback, targeted support, and opportunities to develop writing goals with students. Experts also recommend that the feedback focus on the lesson's instructional objectives. For example, if the lesson's objective is subject-predicate agreement, teachers should give feedback only on that aspect of writing.

Additionally, experts recommend using a formal writing rubric, ideally aligned to state standards. Doing so will enable teachers to gather information about the chosen instructional focus. If a rubric is to be used to grade the assignment, best practice suggests reviewing the rubric with students when introducing the writing assignment.

Potential roadblocks and how to address them

Roadblock	Suggested Approach
<i>English learners make errors on numerous aspects of writing, making it difficult to determine what to focus feedback on.</i>	Experts suggest that it is not necessary to provide feedback on all aspects of the writing process for each assignment. Rather, focus on the aspects that align with the targeted learning objectives. Additionally, feedback always leads to opportunities for support, practice, and additional feedback. Teachers can group students with similar needs and create minilessons to support students in applying the specific feedback given. For example, if feedback is given on subject-verb agreement to a small group of students, those students should be grouped to receive additional support followed by opportunities to practice and apply what they have learned.
<i>When giving students extended time for a writing project, there may be concern about the limited amount of writing that students produce.</i>	Experts suggest that it is not about the length of writing completed but rather the quality of the work produced. The writing process rather than the final product should be emphasized. Teachers can support all students through the writing process by requiring and providing feedback on outlines and planning documents in addition to the final writing product.
<i>The design and implementation of meaningful collaborative activities can be a challenge.</i>	It is recommended that teachers create heterogeneous pairs or groups of students based on different levels of language proficiency so students who are more proficient act as models for students still developing language proficiency. Collaborative activities should be structured, monitored, and short to prevent students from deviating to casual conversation. Peer activities should provide opportunities for students to talk through their ideas rather than obtaining technical feedback from peers.



For more information on the research evidence and references to support this recommendation, or for more detailed explanation from the What Works Clearinghouse committee who developed this recommendation, please refer to the practice guide cited at the bottom of the first page of this document.