

Writing - Considerations for ELLs

Obstacles to becoming effective and fluent writers are many for ELLs:

- They must overcome their unfamiliarity with English syntax
- They must develop their vocabulary. ELLs typically need to develop larger repertoires of words and to learn more about the multiple meanings, connotations, and usages of the words that they already recognize and use
- In order to sound out and spell English words accurately, ELLs must surmount their unfamiliarity with the English sound system and learn to perceive "speech chunks" as strings of individual words
- They may already be accustomed to culturally different styles of writing and argumentation. ELL writing may appear vague, disorganized, or off-topic and yet it may actually conform to organizational styles favored by the ELL students' home cultures.

It is important to differentiate between ELLs' content knowledge and their writing proficiency. Although ELLs may achieve a high level of content knowledge, aspects of their writing (e.g., incomplete knowledge of idioms, vocabulary, and writing styles) can suggest a poor grasp of content. ELLs need opportunities to explain their writing to teachers and to obtain help in expressing their knowledge effectively.

Because writing in English is challenging for ELLs, their progress depends greatly on the learning environment and the scaffolding provided. When large writing tasks are subdivided into manageable steps, students experience greater success

Five Best Practices in Writing for English Language Learners

Include language and culture

- ❖ Affirming a student's native language and cultural heritage can have a direct effect on students' ability to learn by increasing motivation and encouraging risk-taking
- ❖ Incorporate student' home cultures in the classroom. Use folktales and legends from the countries of your ELL students
- ❖ Ask students to tell and/or write a story about their home countries or a story that comes from their own experiences. This can help build confidence and draw on prior knowledge

Using Culturally Relevant Texts and Materials

Culturally relevant texts and materials are ones that students can connect with, one that draw on their background and culture. They do this by connecting to students' lives, not just to their cultural heritage. They draw on students' experiences at home, in the community, and at school and contribute to the students' process of making meaning. The librarian as well as the ESL teacher can help you find these kinds of books. There is also a multicultural collection of books in the main ESL office at Mill Pond. See also the appendix.

Increase Comprehensive Input

The success of a piece of writing depends largely on the writer's vocabulary choices. In order to communicate effectively, writers need to know many words and to know those words well. See the ideas for vocabulary instruction in the reading section. Other ideas to build the ELLs repertoire:

- ❖ Make use of classroom word walls - you will probably also want to include words that were taught in previous grades.
- ❖ Make content word walls by connecting with the science, math, and social studies curricula as well as to cross-curricular themes (See Stephanie Harvey's video "Reading the World").
- ❖ Create word webs.
- ❖ Define words that students have asked for in their writing and post them.

- ❖ Supply ELL students with sentence frames:
- ❖ Other materials to make available at all time might be: bilingual dictionaries, visual dictionaries, labeled posters, and graphic organizers.
- ❖ reference and graphically display structural features e.g., beginning, middle, and end; setting and character; or cause and effect
- ❖ explicitly explain discourse markers that signal what follows, e.g., Once upon a time, but, since, because, for example
- ❖ supply students with rubrics

Model Thinking Skills

ELLs depend greatly on visual cues and contextual relationships.

Intensive teacher modeling helps to provide such cues and relationships

Model your composing processes by verbalizing your own explicit moment-to-moment account of your thinking processes, such as:

- ❖ Purpose
- ❖ Audience
- ❖ Genre
- ❖ vocabulary choice
- ❖ spelling
- ❖ rereading and evaluating out loud what you have written.

Provide Opportunities to Work with a Partner, a Small Group, and/or the Teacher

Writing becomes a social activity when the teacher and students brainstorm together, read their work to each other, and talk about each other's writing. When it is the focus of social interaction, writing is supported by oral language and interpersonal relationships. Students write for the audience of their classmates and are eager to hear what others have written.

