

A How-to Guide for Teachers:

Using the ELSF Guidelines to Improve Planning Practices for Teachers and Learning Experiences for English Learners

What challenges do teachers of ELs experience?

While the English learner (EL) student population continues to grow, many teachers across the U.S. feel unprepared to meet high expectations for rigor and discourse in increasingly diverse classrooms. Teachers' challenges span from understanding ELs' linguistic and academic needs, to finding quality instructional materials to meet those needs, along with preparing supports suitable for disciplinary knowledge and language development at the same time. Although the CCR Standards place emphasis on discourse and language skills, few teachers understand pathways for disciplinary and language integration.

What are the ELSF Guidelines?

The English Learners Success Forum (ELSF) Guidelines were created in response to the urgent issue of lack of content materials inclusive of ALL students, particularly ELs, who are the fastest growing student population in the United States. The guidelines were developed in consultation with over 60 EL experts, practitioners, and staff of K-12 organizations all providing valuable perspectives about quality content materials and instruction inclusive of ELs. The ELSF Guidelines incorporated current evidence-based research emphasizing content-language integration and guidance to provide grade-level access for ELs to engage in content learning and meet the demands of college-and-career-ready (CCR) standards.

The ELSF Guidelines for [Math](#) and [ELA](#) offer a framework of essential Focus Areas (see the table below) and guidelines for developing Math and ELA materials inclusive of ELs and integrating practices equitable for ELs. By using these guidelines, teachers will gain both practical ideas for enhancing instruction for ELs as well as a greater understanding of the rationale behind the guidelines which allows their instruction to become more grounded and sustainable over time.

Mathematics	ELA
1. Interdependence of Mathematical Content, Practices, and Language	1. Interdependence of Oral Language, Disciplinary Writing, and Text Engagement
2. Scaffolding and Supports for Simultaneous Development	2. Sustained Language and Content Support
3. Mathematical Rigor Through Language	3. Learner Awareness (Metacognitive Strategies)
4. Leveraging Students' Assets	4. Leveraging Students' Assets
5. Assessment of Mathematical Content, Practices, and Language	5. Formative Assessment

Purpose: To Evaluate and Select Materials

ELSF Guidelines and Specifications help teachers develop a critical eye for evaluating instructional materials to meet the academic needs of ELs. When selecting instructional



materials teachers can use the following questions which are based on ELSF Guidelines:

- How do materials integrate language and content area learning goals?
- Do materials include ample opportunities for students to use language in different modalities (listening, speaking, reading, writing)?
- Do materials:
 - (1) guide teachers on how to execute tasks and facilitate discussions,
 - (2) use scaffolds and strategies, and
 - (3) offer the rationale?
- Do materials include assessment tools and rubrics for capturing ELs' language and content knowledge over time?

Purpose: To Develop Units and Plan Lessons

ELSF Guidelines offer guidance for teachers in numerous aspects of planning and preparation. When used as a regular reference tool, ELSF Guidelines help teachers improve planning and/or co-planning practices by becoming:

- *Deliberate* in choosing instructional materials with high expectations for ALL
- *Intentional* in blending language and content learning opportunities
- *Explicit* in establishing language and content learning goals and targets
- *Strategic* in incorporating ELs' backgrounds and experiences to benefit ALL students
- *Proactive* in anticipating and addressing potential language challenges
- *Skilled* in facilitating meaningful classroom discussions and engaging ELs of varied language skills
- *Prepared* for creating units that offer opportunities to develop and refine language and content skills over time

Purpose: To Prepare Scaffolding and Supports

ELSF Guidelines offer practical suggestions and ways to integrate scaffolding and supports for simultaneous development of language and disciplinary skills. For example, the guidelines offer explicit directions for providing individualized support and small group instruction. The guidelines also guide teachers on how to integrate multi-sensory modalities for student interaction. In addition, the guidelines provide guidance for embedding strategies for the development of metacognition.

Purpose: To Grow Professionally in Advocacy for ELs

Whether individually, with a colleague, or in a group, the guidelines offer multiple topics for professional learning. When using the guidelines for planning and teaching or developing materials, teachers gain professional knowledge, sharpen their teaching tools, and become agents of change in their classrooms, schools, and districts. Developing a deeper understanding of ELs and their backgrounds helps teachers view ELs and diversity as an asset to the whole school community. Explicit integration of language and content learning opportunities reinforces the benefits of an integrated approach across disciplines and across departments. Learning new ways of amplifying (as opposed to simplifying) complex language structures leads to discoveries of ELs as capable individuals with much potential.

If you are a teacher and are reading this, go ahead, get started!

Start small! Move steadily! Celebrate big!