ELSF English Language Arts Best Practices, Must Haves, and Pitfalls

At ELSF we know that English learners (ELs) are capable of accessing and excelling at grade-level content learning alongside their peers. High quality instructional materials (HQIM) play an integral role in constructing and driving learning experiences that ensure that all students are equally able to excel in school contexts. Our mission is to increase the supply and quality of learning materials that provide ELs with equitable access to the content, skills, and language needed to unleash their immense potential.

The leading experts in education for ELs, alongside school-based practitioners around the country, have created essential Guidelines that provide a roadmap for creating or improving HQIMs inclusive of ELs' rich assets and learning needs. The table below is an abbreviated version that outlines the "Must Haves" and common "Pitfalls" within ELSF's *Guidelines for Improving English Language Arts Materials for English Learners* (the Guidelines). This easy-to-navigate visual can be used as a starting point by curriculum creators or users to clarify must-haves within those Guidelines.

Hyperlinks to resources are provided in the digital version of this table to illustrate what these suggestions look like in practice. If you are viewing a printed copy of the table, you can find these resources on elsuccessforum.org under the heading *Explore the Resources*.

The caveats included in the Pitfalls section of this table were selected due to the frequency with which they were observed by EL Experts in reviewing materials. This section describes common pitfalls to avoid when implementing the Guidelines or engaging in curriculum development or improvement with ELs in mind.

If you have clarifying questions while reading the table below, ELSF recommends reviewing the Guidelines at elsuccessform.org/guidelines, referring to our Glossary of terms at elsuccessforum.org/resources/glossary, and/or reaching out to opportunities@elsuccessforum.org.

Table 1. ELSF English Language Arts Best Practices, Must–Have Strategies, and Common Pitfalls

Best Practices _Fundamentals of Quality Curricula for ELs_	**Must-Have Strategies** _Supporting the Fundamentals_	**Common Pitfalls** _Implementation Challenges_
Integrate Oral Language	• Provides materials to support productive academic discussions (See: Talk Moves). • Uses a shared text for writing activities so students can develop meaning together (See: Heart to Heart). • Provides multiple opportunities and appropriate scaffolds to support oral language engagement for students across multiple language proficiency levels (See: Bounce Cards, Rumors). • Supports ongoing evidence-based reasoning through conversation activities.	• Do not assume that oral language development is natural or occurs at the same pace for all ELs. ELD must be explicitly taught and monitored. • Do not assume that teachers know how to teach and implement or guide effective oral language routines or academic discussions. • Encourage students to use home language strategically for meaning making, without enabling students to avoid speaking English.
Build Rigor Across Content and Language	• Clearly articulates and provides materials to assess the daily content-language objectives (Analyzing Content and Language Demands; Texts/Tasks Language Demand Chart). • Selects grade-level texts and embeds multiple close reads to promote deep understanding of grade-level content. Provides explicit guidance on scientifically supported reading strategies (See: Do Leveled Readers Help or Hurt?). • Provides focused language study to support all language modalities. Includes explicit guidance for teachers on how to teach syntax and sentence-level analyses of complex text (See: Sentence Fluency for ELs). • Builds background knowledge to support text comprehension (See: Wide Angle Reading). • Go deep, not broad: spirals concepts, skills, language. Builds in multiple strategies for meaning-making and multiple exposures to texts and concepts (See: Spiraling).	• Developers (as well as teachers) may need training on creating content-specific language objectives with a focus on ELs. • A common misconception is that ELs should be given easier content. Do not expect lower cognitive capacity from ELs, and do not rely on fill-in-the-blank templates or formulaic guidelines as scaffolds. Still include complex grade-level content like researching, comparing text types, or analyzing author's purpose and literary devices. • Do not assume that teachers know how to teach reading. Foundational reading instruction is not always embedded in teacher credentialing programs.

Target Learner Awareness	• Provides continuous formative assessments across language modalities (See: Assessment of Writing and Language, Formative Assessment Considerations). • Includes metacognitive opportunities for students to monitor their language, and engages students in data-driven goal setting. • Includes and compares multiple texts/genres in a unit of study to support students in differentiating between features & text types. • When teaching vocabulary, focuses on Tier II and Tier III words. Includes illustrations or visual displays as well as multiple contextual exposures. Creates opportunities to assess and monitor student progress on vocabulary.	• Do not assume student learning and growth. Provide guidance on how teachers can support students' metacognitive awareness and measurement of their own progress. • In materials and rubrics, do not emphasize the mode of a writing task (ie. compare & contrast) so much as the purpose. • Do not simplify vocabulary for ELs or select vocabulary words simply because they are "academic." Select Tier II and Tier III words and word parts (ie. roots, suffixes) that support interdisciplinary understandings.
Leverage Student Assets	• Chooses texts with diverse perspectives, engaging topics, and cultural relevance. • Materials should guide educators on how to incorporate students' cultural knowledge & interest into instruction. • Materials should highlight multilingualism as an asset for reading and speaking (See: Translanguaging, Strategic Grouping, Bounce Cards in Spanish).	• Avoid assumptions about student background knowledge. Provide instruction on how educators can use diagnostics and school resources to learn about students' home language, prior schooling, etc. • Do not stifle students' use of their home language when they are engaged in meaning-making.