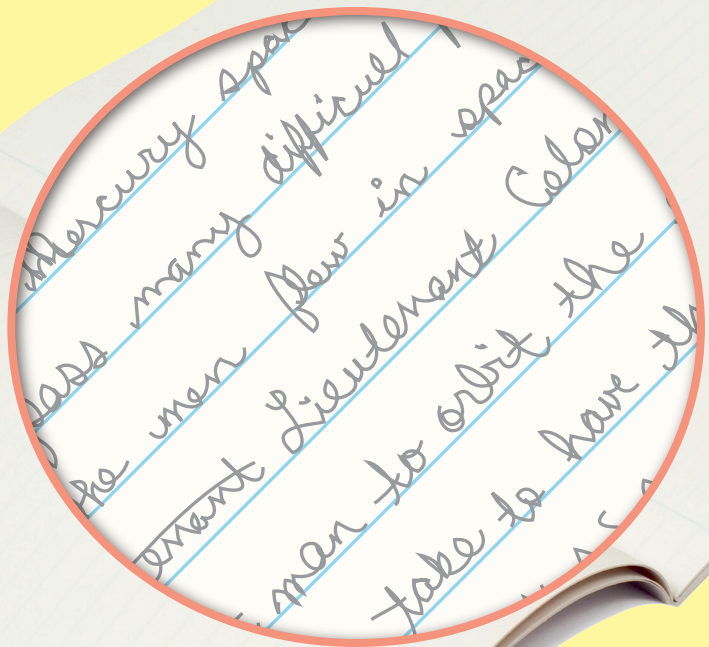


Finding *the writer* in Your Secondary English Language Learner



Contents

I.	Introduction.....	1
II.	Teaching Beginning English Language Learners to Write.....	5
	Starting with Lists.....	7
	The Language-Experience Approach.....	9
	Comic Strip Stories.....	13
	Using Dialogue Journals.....	19
	Celebrity Interviews.....	27
	Writing Informal Letters.....	37
	Creating Books Using “Imitatio”.....	43
III.	The Writing Workshop for Intermediate and Advanced ELLs.....	49
	<i>Guidelines and Procedures</i>	51
	<i>Mini-Lessons</i>	63
	Teaching the Writing Process.....	65
	How to Write an Essay.....	69
	Paragraphing.....	73
	Introductions.....	77
	Conclusions.....	81
	Roadmap to Understanding Discourse Patterns.....	83
	Using Transitions Effectively.....	93
	Adding Depth to Writing.....	97
	Writing with Voice.....	101
	Top Ten Sentence Problems.....	105
IV.	Glossary of Academic Vocabulary.....	107
V.	References.....	115

Introduction

English language learners are capable of much more than is generally expected of them. They are capable of writing in English, and they are capable of writing an essay that will receive a passing grade on a standardized test.

This manual outlines procedures for setting up and teaching a writing workshop for English language learners who will be required to write a long composition for a standardized test.

The lesson plans within the writing workshop focus on how to write the personal narrative essay. The personal narrative essay fulfills the requirements for the long composition on most standardized writing tests, as well as for college applications. It is also a relatively easy essay to learn to write because almost any topic can be chosen, and it can be organized in a variety of ways. It is a good choice for English language learners, since they will write about the topic they know the best—theirself.

There are many purposes for using the writing workshop format with English language learners, including the following:

- to encourage students to become enthusiastic, experienced writers
- to assist students in communicating their ideas clearly
- to enhance students' knowledge of the craft of writing
- to offer students opportunities to write for real audiences
- to build a collaborative learning environment

In addition to the writing workshop procedures, guidelines, and mini-lessons, there are many lessons geared toward the beginning English language learner who has not yet acquired the proficiency to participate in a writing workshop, and needs to work instead on writing fluency. There is also the Glossary of Academic Vocabulary used in the lessons.

A large volume of scientifically-based research about teaching writing for English language learners is available, and some of these resources are listed in the Reference section of this manual. This manual incorporates research findings into classroom instruction. This manual also draws from what the U.S. Department of Education calls professional wisdom, “the judgment that individuals acquire through experience” (Whitehurst, 2002). The foundation of solid professional wisdom can provide valuable insights into effective practice.

Each lesson plan provides a note to the teacher with a rationale for the lesson, a list of materials, academic vocabulary words that must be pre-taught before the lesson, and, in many cases, graphic organizers. The teaching strategies included are varied and differentiated to meet the needs of all students, including English language learners. Region 4 presents this manual in the hope that it will support and assist teachers as they strive to teach writing to students in ESL, ESOL, and English classrooms.

...The Language-Experience Approach...
Level: Beginning

Note to Teacher
In the language-experience approach (LEA), the student provides the text by dictating stories aloud, which the teacher records verbatim. This creates a text that is not only age-appropriate and high-interest, but also purposeful. LEA is one of the most frequently recommended strategies for beginning second language learners (Dixon & Hessel, 1983). It is an excellent way to develop oral, reading, and writing proficiencies at the same time. For beginning students, it is best to do the activity as a whole group.

Materials
⇒ Notebook paper or student journals
⇒ Overhead transparency

Academic Vocabulary

activity	clean-up	complicated
experience	expression	interesting
material	meaning	pantomime
participant	phrase	prose
sentence	step	story
summarize	summary	together
topic	transition	vocabulary

Activities

1. The first step in the language-experience approach is to choose a writing topic. The LEA story topic can be anything, but it should be an experience that all of the students had together (such as a story read aloud to them, an activity they participated in during class, or a field trip they attended), one that is interesting enough for them to have something to say. Avoid topics that are too complicated.
2. The best way to introduce the strategy is to plan an activity together. Explain the activity to the students. It can be something as simple as making ice cream sandwiches. Beforehand, make a list of the concepts and vocabulary to be emphasized. With the students, make a list of all the materials needed for the activity. Also, decide who will be the participants in the activity.
3. Begin the activity by introducing its vocabulary words on the board or word wall. Using pantomime and facial expressions, explain the word meanings, and show the students the materials that correspond to the words.
4. As the activity progresses, ask the students questions, modeling transition words such as “first,” “second,” “third,” “next,” and “last.” Use questions

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Writing Features of English Language Learners According to Proficiency Level

Proficiency Levels	Beginning	Intermediate
FLUENCY		
Composition Level	Has little or no ability to address grade-appropriate writing tasks.	Has a limited ability to address grade-appropriate writing tasks.
Communication Level	Writing may be extremely difficult to decipher, even for those who are accustomed to the writing of ELLs.	Some writing may be understood only by those who are accustomed to the writing of ELLs. Parts of the writing may be difficult to understand even for those who are used to ELL writing. Has difficulty expressing abstract ideas.
Vocabulary	Uses high-frequency words/phrases.	Uses high-frequency words.
FORM		
Structure	Writes in short, simple sentences.	Writes simple but original messages consisting of short, simple sentences.
Development	Labels, lists, and copies. Writes short, simple sentences or paragraphs based primarily on recently practiced, memorized, or highly familiar material.	Text is loosely connected, with limited or repetitive use of cohesive devices. Uses repetition of ideas and gives undetailed descriptions, explanations, and narrations. Has difficulty expressing abstract ideas.
CORRECTNESS		
Verb Tense Usage	Uses present tense primarily.	Uses present tense with some accuracy. Uses simple future and past tenses inconsistently or with inaccuracies.
Primary Language Features	Has frequent primary language features.	May have frequent primary language features.
Second Language Acquisition Errors	Has frequent errors associated with second language acquisition.	May have errors associated with second language acquisition.

Adapted from Texas Education Agency. (2007). *Texas observation protocol*. Austin, TX: Author.

Writing Features of English Language Learners According to Proficiency Level

Proficiency Levels	Advanced	Advanced High
FLUENCY		
Composition Level	Has the ability to address grade-appropriate writing tasks with support.	Has the ability to address grade-appropriate writing tasks with minimal support.
Communication Level	Writing is usually understood by those who are not accustomed to the writing of ELLs. Quality or quantity of writing declines when abstract ideas are expressed, academic demands are high, or low-frequency vocabulary is required.	Writing is easily understood by those who are not accustomed to the writing of ELLs. Quality or quantity of writing declines occasionally when writing about academically complex or abstract ideas.
Vocabulary	Uses basic verbs, tenses, grammar features, and sentence patterns.	Writes at a level nearly comparable to the writing of native English-speaking peers, with respect to clarity and precision of expression.
FORM		
Structure	Writes with an emerging grade-appropriate vocabulary.	Writes at a level nearly comparable to the writing of native English-speaking peers, with respect to clarity and precision of expression
Development	Uses a variety of common cohesive devices, although some redundancy may occur. Develops narrations, explanations, and descriptions in some detail with emerging clarity.	Writes at a level nearly comparable to the writing of native English-speaking peers, with respect to clarity and precision of expression, with occasional difficulty with naturalness of phrasing and expression.
CORRECTNESS		
Verb Tense Usage	Has a partial grasp of more complex verbs, tenses, grammar features, and sentence patterns.	Has occasional difficulty with naturalness of phrasing and expression.
Primary Language Features	Has occasional primary language features.	Has occasional primary language features.
Second Language Acquisition Errors	Has occasional second language acquisition errors.	Has minor errors associated with second language acquisition.

Adapted from Texas Education Agency. (2007). *Texas observation protocol*. Austin, TX: Author.

...Using Dialogue Journals...

Level: Beginning

Note to Teacher

A dialogue journal is a written dialogue between a student and the teacher. Students should be allowed to write freely, and the teacher should respond naturally. There are many advantages to dialogue journals. They reinforce skills and teach vocabulary by modeling correct language and conventions. Since students write more frequently, their writing improves. Most important, the journals encourage a relationship between teacher and student, and motivate students to write, and to think reflectively about their writing.

Materials

- ↻ Student journals (composition books or spiral notebooks), one per student
- ↻ The First Questions handout, one half-sheet per student
- ↻ Magazines and markers, optional
- ↻ Glue sticks
- ↻ Mini Composition Book handout, one per student if desired

Academic Vocabulary

brainstorm	composition	dialogue
error	format	journal
maximum	minimum	note
notebook	phrase	topic

Activities

1. Provide a **journal** for each student. **Composition** books are preferred, but spiral **notebooks** or any other form of bound paper will do. If desired, students can decorate the notebook covers with markers or collages made with magazine pictures and words to identify their journal.
2. Ask the students, “Do you ever pass **notes** in class? **Dialogue** journals are like passing notes between us, but the notes are written in the composition book.” Tell students that they can write about anything they wish—and that you will write back to them.
3. Give each student the First Questions handout or write the questions on the board.
 1. How often do you write in English?
 2. What do you like to write?
 3. What is most difficult about writing for you?
 4. What would you like to work on in this journal?

5. What **topics** are most interesting to you?
 6. What makes a good writer?
 7. How can I help you become a better writer?
 8. What are your personal goals for this class?
4. Have the students either paste the handout on the first page of their notebooks or copy the questions down. Discuss possible answers to the questions and write vocabulary words on the board that students may need to use while answering the questions. Allow time for the students to write their answers in their journals.
 5. Explain to students what the **format** of the journals will be. Here are some possible guidelines.
 - They are welcome to write in any color pen or pencil (however, yellow, gold, and silver are difficult to see). They can use more than one color if they like and illustrate what they write as well. It is their journal, and they can personalize it as they like.
 - There will be a **minimum** number of sentences required per entry, but no **maximum** specified. (For beginners, a minimum of two to four sentences per entry is recommended.)
 - Students could be asked to write their entries in informal letter format, with a salutation and a closing. The teacher then responds in the same format. In this case, students would need to **brainstorm** lists of salutations and closings and write them on a page in their journals for reference.
 6. With the students, brainstorm a list of topics they would like to write about and write them on the board. Have the students copy the topics into their journals. These are some typical topics that secondary students may choose:

Sports	Music	Likes
Dislikes	Foods	School
Teachers	Family Members	Friends
Problems	Work	Movies
 7. Dialogue journals can be used at any time during the class period, but they work well as a bell-ringer activity at the beginning of class. Students can get their journals themselves and begin writing before the bell rings. They will know they have an allotted amount of time to write, such as 10 to 15 minutes. Teachers can choose to have journal-writing every day, or several times a week. At least twice a week is recommended.
 8. When responding to journals, consider the following suggestions.
 - Avoid cursory comments such as “Interesting,” or “Nice entry.” Write more substantive responses, using complete sentences, that create a conversation with the student.

- Ask questions about what the student wrote, such as, “What did you THINK about that? How did that make you FEEL?”
- Try to match the length of the response to the length of the student’s entry.
- Model correct language in response to the student’s entry. For example, if the student writes, “I like go see movie,” the teacher could respond, “I like to go see movies, too. What is your favorite?”
- It is the teacher’s choice whether or not to make corrections in the journal. Usually it is not recommended, in order to help the student feel less inhibited in their writing. However, if there are many **errors** that keep recurring, one way to address them is to underline the word or **phrase**, whether it is misspelled or used incorrectly, and then to spell or use it correctly in the response and underline it in the response as well. (Obviously, this is ineffective if there are too many words underlined, so use this strategy sparingly.)
- Refrain from offering an opinion or judging the student. Many English language learners will write about topics that may seem inappropriate for journals, such as violence or death. It is important not to reprimand students or judge them for their thoughts or feelings. At the same time, remind them that it will be necessary to take action if they write about abuse or illegal activities of any kind, or use profanity.

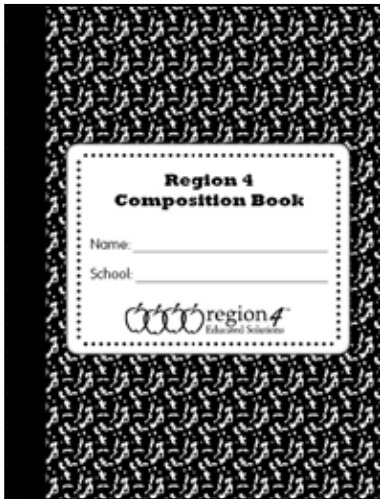
Practical Ideas for Managing Dialogue Journals

- Collect journals in an organized way, such as from one class per day.
- Or, don’t collect them! Studies have shown that students benefit from writing in journals regularly, even if the teacher doesn’t respond (but then they are not dialogue journals—just journals).
- Have a set time for journal writing.
- Before journal writing, focus the class with a mini-lesson about a specific language feature.
- Let students share their journals with each other and respond to them if they like.
- Vary or limit the first questions.
- Write at least twice a week.
- Keep journals in a locked filebox to ensure privacy.
- Copy “Error” sentences from journal entries on sticky notes while responding. Place the notes in the lesson-plan book, and use the sentences for grammar mini-lessons or warm-ups the next day. Do not reveal the authors’ names.
- To adapt journal-writing for newcomer students who have not yet learned any English, the teacher can allow the student to draw a picture and label it instead of writing sentences, or to draw a series of pictures in comic-strip fashion. The teacher then writes a sentence about the picture, which the student copies.

Advantages of Dialogue Journals

- The teacher and the student have a record of the student's growth in written English.
- The students receive immediate feedback on their learning.
- The writing is authentic.
- Students learn the importance of conventions through their teacher's modeled responses.
- Students learn to think and write reflectively, and to express their feelings through their writing.

Materials Notes: The Advantages of Composition Books



- ↻ Students cannot tear out the pages.
- ↻ The bindings are stronger than those on spiral notebooks.
- ↻ There is no wire to get caught on things or tangled with another notebook.
- ↻ Students can write their names on the edge of the book, opposite the spine.
- ↻ The notebooks can be stacked because they lie flat (with students' names visible along the edge).
- ↻ They are more like BOOKS, so students take their journal writing more seriously!

Note: A Mini Composition Book handout has been included for use if desired. One lined page has been provided, but the teacher may make as many copies as needed.

The First Questions

1. How often do you write in English?
2. What do you like to write?
3. What is most difficult about writing for you?
4. What would you like to work on in this journal?
5. What topics are most interesting to you?
6. What makes a good writer?
7. How can I help you become a better writer?
8. What are your personal goals for this class?

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6. What makes a good writer?
7. How can I help you become a better writer?
8. What are your personal goals for this class?

Composition Book

Name: _____

School: _____



