

Differentiation for English Learners

Over the past decade, the number of English Learners (ELs) has grown significantly across the United States. Roughly one in four students in California is identified as an EL. Regardless of their level of English language proficiency, these students are exposed to, and expected to succeed in, California Common Core-aligned instruction. ELs face major challenges as they work to acquire conversational skills and the academic language necessary to learn content in English. To ensure ELs achieve academic success, Amplify ELA incorporates differentiated access strategies, which guide the teacher to adjust instruction so that ELs may access content at the same pace as their English-proficient classmates. The goal of differentiated instruction is to present the same content in different ways and at different language levels, while maintaining academic rigor and high cognitive demand. Differentiated access strategies reduce the language demands of learning by modifying either the process (how content is being learned) or the product (how students show what they have learned), while keeping the content and goals of the learning the same. Amplify encourages teachers to use a wide variety of differentiation strategies to ensure ELs' success. Amplify focuses on four high-leverage strategies:

- **Differentiated Access Strategy 1:** Modified prompts
- **Differentiated Access Strategy 2:** Language production supports
- **Differentiated Access Strategy 3:** Reduced text-processing demands
- **Differentiated Access Strategy 4:** Alternative vocabulary exercises

Amplify's differentiated access strategies reduce linguistic barriers to mastering the core ELA lessons, and they are woven into the curriculum, making them easy to implement according to ELs' individual needs. They are marked explicitly with a + sign on the activity icon for student-facing material or "EL Tip," for teacher-facing material, alerting teachers to moments when ELs may need something different in order for them to reach the same learning objectives as their English-proficient peers.



Differentiated Access Strategy 1: Modified prompts**Teachers adjust the wording of questions and writing assignments to ensure they are comprehensible to ELs.**

ELs are capable of meeting the same academic challenges as their English-proficient peers. However, complex language can impede ELs' ability to understand what is asked of them. The goal of this strategy is to keep cognitive demand high while reducing linguistic barriers to comprehension: ELs do complex, challenging work, but explanations of what to do are stated in more transparent language.

Example 1: Poetry & Poe: Sub-unit 4, Lesson 2, Activity 6 (ALT: Emerging-Writing)

In this lesson, the teacher has the option of assigning ELs an alternative writing prompt. The original writing assignment asks students to consider three details from the first 18 lines of the poem that they would want to include if they were directing a movie version. The goal is to give the imaginary audience “a clear sense of what the narrator is feeling and experiencing.” In the alternative assignment, ELs are asked to consider directly what particular lines in the poem indicate what the narrator is feeling. The potentially confusing premise that they are movie directors is eliminated, and the assignment is stated in two short, clear sentences, giving ELs access to the core analytical goal: using textual evidence to infer a character’s feelings.

Example 2: Tom & Sherlock: Sub-unit 1, Lesson 5, Activities 4-6

In this lesson, students write about the ways Tom Sawyer is tricky and the character traits he exhibits when doing tricky things. The writing prompt asks students to find a moment when Tom shows his trickiness and to describe what is occurring. The goal is to push students to use descriptive language, going beyond simply repeating that Tom is tricky, while drawing on evidence from the text. This writing prompt is intentionally open-ended, allowing students to select a “tricky” moment to describe. Such open-ended prompts can be overwhelming for ELs. In the alternative writing assignment, ELs are guided in two ways. First, the modified prompt is very focused and clear, directing ELs to focus on one specific tricky incident, “Describe Tom’s whitewashing trick. Use evidence from the text.” Second, the modified prompt uses language production supports (Differentiated Access Strategy 3) to provide additional linguistic support and to guide and structure ELs’ writing:

In order to convince his friends to whitewashing the fence for him, Tom _____.

He convinces his friends by saying _____.

He convinces his friends by (include an action) _____.

The modified prompt also helps ELs focus their cognitive energies by specifically indicating the type of textual evidence they need to look for to support their description (e.g., a statement or an action). The supports provided by this modified prompt allow ELs to engage with the text in a meaningful way, while also allowing them to demonstrate their understanding of the material.

Example 3: Biography & Literature: Sub-unit 1, Lesson 1, Activities 9-13

In the original prompt, students are asked to use evidence from the focal text to respond to the question, “What does Isaacson mean when he calls Franklin ‘the founding father who winks at us’ (1)?” In the alternative version of this writing assignment, the same task is offered with greater structure: ELs respond to three separate questions, prompting them to (1) briefly answer the original question, (2) choose among three text quotations to justify the answer, and (3) explain the significance of the chosen pieces of evidence. This broken-down version of the prompt makes the requirements for a successful answer more transparent. Together, these modifications tear down language barriers and enable ELs to perform the same cognitive work as their English-proficient peers.

Example 4: Reading the Novel: Sub-unit 1, Lesson 4, Activity 6 (ALT: Expanding-Writing)

In the original prompt, students are asked to use evidence from the focal text to analyze M.C. Higgins’ feelings toward his father. The original prompt is: “M.C. feels both a ‘sullen anger at his father and an abiding admiration at the same time.’ Based on your reading, does M.C. think his father is his opponent or his ally? Make sure you cite textual evidence to support your answer.”

In the alternative version of this writing assignment, ELs are asked directly if M.C. thinks his father is helpful or harmful. The potentially confusing language of opponent and ally are eliminated, allowing ELs to focus less on figuring out the question and more on answering it.

Differentiated Access Strategy 2: Language production supports**Teachers provide sentence frames and word banks to enable ELs to produce linguistically complex writing and speech.**

All people can comprehend more language than they can produce. Even adults know what it’s like to understand a word that they have never used themselves, or to be unable to imitate an accent that they can perfectly comprehend. ELs are no different: they may understand very well what is asked of them but be unsure of how to convey their understanding. Word banks and sentence frames help eliminate linguistic barriers to ELs showing what they know. Students can use these linguistic scaffolds to produce writing and speech beyond what they could have done independently, giving the teacher a better sense of where their true understanding is.

Example 1: Tom & Sherlock: Sub-unit 1, Lesson 8, Activities 3-7

For this alternative writing activity, ELs are initially provided with the original, linguistically complex prompt: “Describe the way Tom acts in response to Aunt Polly’s accusation and explain what his response shows about him.” Students then are given three simple, focal questions and corresponding sentence frames to help them structure a complete answer:

1. Why does Aunt Polly accuse Tom?
2. How does Tom respond?
3. What does Tom's response show you about him?
 - Aunt Polly accuses Tom because _____.
 - Tom responds to Aunt Polly's accusation by _____.
 - This shows me that Tom is _____.

Through the sentence frames, ELs are enabled to clearly respond to each part of the prompt. They are also seeing what well-formed sentences look like, including how to use part of the question in their response. This practice will help them produce similar writing with more independence later on.

Example 2: Brain Science: Sub-unit 1, Lesson 11, Activity 1, Card 1-EL TIP

In this activity, students are asked to demonstrate their understanding of two competing theories of the brain each held by a group of 19th-century scientists, the Phrenologists and Whole Brainers. Students are asked to list the character traits of each theory and then to illustrate both theories, showing two facts for each theory. Added support is provided for ELs through the activity's EL Tip. The EL Tip suggests that the teacher develop a list of strengths and weaknesses of each theory for students to reference as they work. Word banks such as the one suggested in this EL Tip effectively support ELs in readily accessing and producing challenging academic terminology as they complete classroom activities and assignments.

Example 3: Biography & Literature: Sub-unit 1, Lesson 3, Activity 8

This alternative prompt uses the original question, "Why did Franklin create Silence Dogood to express his ideas?", but offers ELs two possible sentence frames to begin their response: "Franklin created Silence Dogood to share his ideas because..." or "Silence Dogood shares Franklin's ideas for him because...". By giving ELs multiple production options, the alternative assignment enables them to take increasing ownership over their use of English, while still allowing them to produce more than they could have on their own.

Example 4: Reading the Novel: Sub-unit 1, Lesson 7, Activity 1

In this activity students discuss with a partner what they noted about M.C. Higgins when they read Chapter 5. Students work with their partners to make connections and/or contrasts between selected passages. Teachers may direct their ELs to a page that offers a list of sentence starters to facilitate these partner discussions:

Two places that connect in the text are _____ and _____.

They connect because _____.

Did you find a place in the text that connects to mine?

What might we share with the class?

Sentence frames help ELs to produce more clear, formal, and linguistically complex speech.

Example 5: Tom & Sherlock: Sub-unit 1, Lesson 1, Activity 5, Card 2

In this activity students are discussing Tom Sawyer's character traits. Amplify ELA provides a word bank of possible character traits to help EL students describe what Tom is like and participate in the class discussion.

Examples of character traits:

- Sneaky
- Kind
- Shy
- Tricky
- Mischievous
- Clumsy
- Disobedient
- Happy
- Funny
- Honest
- Liar
- Smart
- Angry
- Clever
- Obedient
- Proud

Differentiated Access Strategy 3: Reduced text-processing demands

Teachers (1) highlight portions of text for ELs to focus in on, and (2) pre-select key vocabulary for ELs to look for.

Reducing text-processing demands makes content accessible to ELs. Often, ELs are confronted with material that is beyond their independent reading levels and must use it to answer a question or study an idea. If they must wade through an entire text word by word, they may become exhausted and discouraged, and could miss the most important parts of the passage entirely. By reducing the amount of text, providing basic definitions of unknown words, or highlighting a certain area of text to focus in on, teachers ensure that ELs have less language to decipher and can attend to the content. These practices reduce unnecessary complexity, but still require ELs to engage with challenging concepts and skills appropriate to their grade level.

Example 1: The Greeks: Sub-unit 2, Lesson 2, Activity 1, Card 1, EL TIP

In this lesson, the class is asked to look at a section of *The Odyssey* and analyze why the Cyclops should welcome the Achaeans. The teacher can direct ELs to focus only on paragraphs 23 and 24 as they search for evidence. This allows ELs to zoom in to the necessary, relevant information and answer the questions based on evidence in the text, without overloading them with excess language demands.

Example 2: Red Scarf Girl & Narrative: Sub-unit 3, Lesson 4, Activity 3 (ALT-Writing Prompt)

In this lesson, the class is asked to look at a portion of the text and write a description of the emotions they think the character feels. The teacher directs ELs to look for specific terms or phrases within the passage, like “That poor guy” and, “but I’d just die if somebody cut my pants open in front of everybody like that.” By providing these key words, along with sentence frames to initiate writing, ELs can more easily locate evidence and turn their attention to the real task: producing quality descriptions of a character’s feelings.

Differentiated Access Strategy 4: Alternative vocabulary exercises

Teachers ensure their ELs complete daily vocabulary practice targeted to their level of English proficiency. More advanced ELs may do the mainstream vocabulary work; ELs with less English knowledge may use the Word Match vocabulary game.

While all students in Amplify classrooms work on vocabulary every day, the core ELA lessons also include alternative vocabulary work specifically for ELs. Like the mainstream vocabulary words, the words chosen for ELs to study are essential to understanding the passage and will appear in many texts students encounter in the future, but are likely to already be familiar to non-ELs and unfamiliar to ELs.

Example: Red Scarf Girl & Narrative: Sub-unit 1–Vocabulary, Lesson 1, Activity 1, Word Match App

The Word Match app appears throughout Amplify vocabulary lessons and targets beginner and intermediate ELs. Through this app, ELs learn five words from the text of that day’s lesson. Learning occurs as ELs experience four additional methods for understanding essential vocabulary: pictures, example sentences, Spanish translations, and simple English definitions. These multiple expressions of meaning give ELs many opportunities to deepen their grasp of new words, and allows Spanish-speaking ELs (the largest group of ELs in the U.S.), to make use of their home-language skills. The EL vocabulary exercises are also followed with immediate practice opportunities to reinforce the words’ meanings. In this lesson, ELs learn about more common words such as *leader*, *blackboard*, and *scent* as they navigate at their own pace through the Word Match app activities. The interactive and highly visual activities included in the Word Match app move beyond memorization to support ELs’ deeper learning of key vocabulary and their meaning.