

# DO YOUR MATERIALS MEET ENGLISH LEARNERS' NEEDS?

BY CRYSTAL GONZALES AND RENAE SKARIN

**T**here is substantial evidence documenting the impact of high-quality, educative learning materials on teacher practices and student learning, yet this evidence has not translated widely into more equitable learning opportunities for all students.

English learners tend to have less access to intellectually rich, grade-level content and instructional materials. With most English learners receiving instruction for math and English language arts alongside their non-English learner peers, it can no longer be the norm to simplify the content or rely on supplemental materials targeting English learners. Instructional materials must be well-designed to serve all students.

What do materials that do this well look like, and how do you know if yours measure up?

The English Learners Success Forum, an organization working to enhance instructional materials to address the linguistic and cultural needs of English learners, convened national English learner experts, field-leading content providers, and educators to examine how to integrate English learner supports in English language arts and math materials.

Advisory groups developed a set of guidelines for each content area, vetted them with K-12 educators to ensure they are practical and understandable for those with limited English learner instructional knowledge, and refined them based on pilot testing with content providers.

Using the tools on pp. 62-70, educators and education leaders can reflect on current teaching practices, learning environments, and instructional materials. Through reflection and discussion, we can understand how and why current approaches may not be producing the kinds of results we want for English learner students and begin to change those practices.

These tools are intended for those developing, procuring, or using instructional materials and for those who want to create better learning conditions and academic outcomes for English learners. Educators may complete these inventories independently or in discussion with colleagues.

One option is to form a lesson study collaborative or professional learning community to examine the evidence-based strategies in the tools and work together to surface answers, examples, and evidence for each question about whether and how those practices are in place in your schools or district. You can then build on this discussion to identify materials or practices that needed to be refined or overhauled.

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## GUIDELINES INVENTORIES: INSTRUCTIONS

### Preparation

1. Decide on the English language arts or math learning materials to inventory. If you are looking at multiple grade levels, select one to begin. You might start with the area in which your English learner students are not meeting grade-level standards.
2. Review the curriculum structure, learning framework, guidance documents for English learners, lesson plans, and other resources that could illuminate whether supports are or aren't embedded in lessons and across the curriculum.

### Completing the inventories

3. While reviewing the learning materials, assign a numerical score for each question and note evidence for your responses. Complete this step with teachers and other colleagues to include multiple perspectives.
4. Use the scores and evidence for each area of focus to reflect on strengths and areas where materials need improvement. Start with the area of greatest need to focus your initial improvements. Focus improvement efforts on areas of greatest need.

### Follow-up

5. To guide efforts to refine your learning materials and improve instructional practice, explore the resources at [www.elsuccessforum.org](http://www.elsuccessforum.org). Identify strategies that promote English learners' deep content knowledge and complex thinking as well as language skills.
6. As you and your colleagues try new strategies in the classroom, document results and use them to inform further curricular improvements.

# ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS GUIDELINES INVENTORY

For the questions below, consider the extent to which the English language arts instructional materials under review currently meet English learners' needs and how you would explain your answers using specific examples from these materials. Choose the answer that best reflects your rating of that support aspect based on the evidence you find.

## AREA OF FOCUS I:

### INTERDEPENDENCE OF ORAL LANGUAGE, DISCIPLINARY WRITING, AND TEXT ENGAGEMENT

1. How often and how effectively do the oral language development activities guide students to engage with grade-level appropriate content, disciplinary practices, and subject matter?

Instructional materials rating	1. Never/nonexistent	2. Infrequently/limited effectiveness	3. Sometimes/somewhat effective	4. Often/substantially effective	5. Consistently/highly effectively
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NOTES ON 1:

2. How often and how effectively do writing activities incorporate discussions with peers and teachers as an integral part of the writing process?

Instructional materials rating	1. Never/nonexistent	2. Infrequently/limited effectiveness	3. Sometimes/somewhat effective	4. Often/substantially effective	5. Consistently/highly effectively
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NOTES ON 2:

3. How often and how effectively do the instructional materials provide interactive oral language development activities to support students in engaging with grade-level texts?

Instructional materials rating	1. Never/nonexistent	2. Infrequently/limited effectiveness	3. Sometimes/somewhat effective	4. Often/substantially effective	5. Consistently/highly effectively
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NOTES ON 3:

Source: English Learners Success Forum, [www.elsuccessforum.org](http://www.elsuccessforum.org)

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## ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS GUIDELINES INVENTORY, CONTINUED

### AREA OF FOCUS II: SUSTAINED LANGUAGE AND CONTENT SUPPORT

4. How often and how effectively are opportunities for students to use language practices, analytical skills, and conceptual understandings organized into an intentional progression within a unit and/or curriculum?

Instructional materials rating	1. Never/ nonexistent	2. Infrequently/ limited effectiveness	3. Sometimes/ somewhat effective	4. Often/ substantially effective	5. Consistently/ highly effectively
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NOTES ON 4:

5. How often are students afforded opportunities to learn language through prolonged exposure and negotiation of content and ideas in the target language? How are these opportunities scaffolded as needed?

Instructional materials rating	1. Never/ nonexistent	2. Infrequently/ limited effectiveness	3. Sometimes/ somewhat effective	4. Often/ substantially effective	5. Consistently/ highly effectively
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NOTES ON 5:

6. How often and how effectively are tasks and scaffolds designed to build *increasing* understanding of an *appropriately complex grade-level text* for the grade level?

Instructional materials rating	1. Never/ nonexistent	2. Infrequently/ limited effectiveness	3. Sometimes/ somewhat effective	4. Often/ substantially effective	5. Consistently/ highly effectively
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NOTES ON 6:

7. Do the instructional materials provide students with opportunities to engage in purposeful writing activities that build a nexus of college- and career-ready skills? Are those activities organized into an intentional progression?

Instructional materials rating	1. Nonexistent opportunities	2. Limited opportunities/ limited evidence of an intentional progression	3. Some opportunities/ some evidence of an intentional progression	4. Substantial opportunities/ substantial evidence of an intentional progression	5. Consistent opportunities/ consistent evidence of an intentional progression
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NOTES ON 7:

Source: English Learners Success Forum, [www.elsuccessforum.org](http://www.elsuccessforum.org)

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS GUIDELINES INVENTORY, CONTINUED

**AREA OF FOCUS III:  
LEARNER AWARENESS (METACOGNITIVE STRATEGIES)**

8. Are high-quality strategies used to encourage students to reflect metacognitively on their own learning?

Instructional materials rating	1. Nonexistent	2. Limited strategies	3. Some strategies	4. Substantial strategies	5. Consistent and high-quality strategies
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NOTES ON 8:

9. Are teachers guided to support students in examining and progressively improving on their communication practices?

Instructional materials rating	1. Nonexistent	2. Limited guidance	3. Some guidance	4. Substantial guidance	5. Consistent and high-quality guidance
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NOTES ON 9:

**AREA OF FOCUS IV:  
LEVERAGING STUDENTS' ASSETS**

10. Are materials structured to reflect an asset-based model of teaching and learning? Are teachers provided guidance for instructional practices that reflect that perspective?

Instructional materials rating	1. Never/nonexistent	2. Infrequently/limited guidance	3. Sometimes/some guidance	4. Often/substantial guidance	5. Consistently/consistent guidance
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NOTES ON 10:

11. Are there consistent opportunities to connect disciplinary learning with students' interests and lived experiences?

Instructional materials rating	1. Nonexistent	2. Limited guidance	3. Some guidance	4. Substantial guidance	5. Consistent and high-quality guidance
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NOTES ON 11:

Source: English Learners Success Forum, [www.elsuccessforum.org](http://www.elsuccessforum.org)

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## ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS GUIDELINES INVENTORY, CONTINUED

12. How often and how effectively are teachers guided to use students' home language as a resource?

Instructional materials rating	1. Never/ nonexistent	2. Infrequently/ limited effectiveness	3. Sometimes/ somewhat effective	4. Often/ substantially effective	5. Consistently/ highly effectively
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NOTES ON 12:

13. How often and how effectively are strategies offered to promote student independence, agency, and autonomy?

Instructional materials rating	1. Never/ nonexistent	2. Infrequently/ limited effectiveness	3. Sometimes/ somewhat effective	4. Often/ substantially effective	5. Consistently/ highly effectively
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NOTES ON 13:

### AREA OF FOCUS V: FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

14. Do teachers receive guidance to formatively assess language proficiency and content understandings in order to generate feedback and make instructional decisions?

Instructional materials rating	1. Nonexistent	2. Limited guidance	3. Some guidance	4. Substantial guidance	5. Consistent and high-quality guidance
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NOTES ON 14:

### SCORING AND NEXT STEPS

If you rated the support aspects at mostly 4 and 5, then you are off to a good start. Consider more robust ways of supporting English learners in your context. With effective implementation, these materials can affect English learner student English language arts outcomes positively and create more equitable learning conditions.

The support aspects rated 3 or below are places to further explore in the materials improvement process. Visit [www.elsuccessforum.org/resources](http://www.elsuccessforum.org/resources) for links to activities, strategies, and other resources that may be helpful in the materials improvement process.

Source: English Learners Success Forum, [www.elsuccessforum.org](http://www.elsuccessforum.org)

## MATHEMATICS GUIDELINES INVENTORY

For the questions below, consider the extent to which the mathematics instructional materials under review currently meet English learners' needs and how you would explain your answers using specific examples from these materials. Choose the answer that best reflects your rating of that support aspect based on the evidence you find.

### AREA OF FOCUS I: INTERDEPENDENCE OF MATHEMATICAL CONTENT, PRACTICES, AND LANGUAGE

1. Do the instructional materials afford regular opportunities for students to revisit and revise their *language* and *mathematical thinking*?

Instructional materials rating	1. Nonexistent opportunities	2. Limited opportunities	3. Some opportunities	4. Substantial opportunities	5. Consistent and high-quality opportunities
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NOTES ON 1:

2. Are mathematics **and** language goals organized into an intentional progression in the instructional materials?

Instructional materials rating	1. Nonexistent progression	2. Limited evidence of intentional progression	3. Some evidence of intentional progression	4. Substantial evidence of intentional progression	5. Consistent evidence of intentional progression
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NOTES ON 2:

3. Do the instructional materials guide students consistently and strategically to communicate (speak, listen, read, and write) about mathematics? And for specific purposes?

Instructional materials rating	1. Nonexistent guidance	2. Limited guidance/ limited evidence of a specific academic purpose	3. Some guidance/ some evidence of a specific academic purpose	4. Substantial guidance/ substantial evidence of specific academic purposes	5. Consistent and strategic guidance/ consistent evidence of clear academic purposes
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NOTES ON 3:

Source: English Learners Success Forum, [www.elsuccessforum.org](http://www.elsuccessforum.org)

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## MATHEMATICS GUIDELINES INVENTORY, CONTINUED

### AREA OF FOCUS II: SCAFFOLDING AND SUPPORTS FOR SIMULTANEOUS DEVELOPMENT

4. Do the instructional materials show evidence of asking students to produce, interpret, and make connections between various mathematical representations?

Instructional materials rating	1. Nonexistent evidence	2. Limited evidence	3. Some evidence	4. Substantial evidence	5. Consistent and high-quality evidence
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NOTES ON 4:

5. How often do the instructional materials guide configuration of students in whole-group, small-group, pairs, and individual work? How are teachers guided to strategically use that time to support English learners?

Instructional materials rating	1. Nonexistent guidance	2. Limited guidance	3. Some guidance	4. Substantial guidance	5. Consistent and high-quality guidance
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NOTES ON 5:

6. Do the instructional materials provide teachers with guidance to anticipate and manage relevant language demands and opportunities?

Instructional materials rating	1. Nonexistent guidance	2. Limited guidance	3. Some guidance	4. Substantial guidance	5. Consistent and high-quality guidance
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NOTES ON 6:

### AREA OF FOCUS III: MATHEMATICAL RIGOR THROUGH LANGUAGE

7. Do the instructional materials afford students opportunities to engage in purposeful uses of mathematical practices? How are teachers guided in supporting them?

Instructional materials rating	1. Nonexistent opportunities and guidance	2. Limited opportunities and guidance	3. Some engagement opportunities and guidance	4. Substantial engagement opportunities and guidance	5. Consistent and high-quality engagement opportunities and guidance
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NOTES ON 7:

Source: English Learners Success Forum, [www.elsuccessforum.org](http://www.elsuccessforum.org)

MATHEMATICS GUIDELINES INVENTORY, CONTINUED

8. Do the instructional materials offer strategies consistently to maintain productive mathematical struggle for English learners?					
Instructional materials rating	1. Nonexistent	2. Limited strategies offered	3. Some strategies offered	4. Substantial strategies offered	5. Consistent and high-quality strategies offered
NOTES ON 8:					

9. Are teachers supported well in cultivating and facilitating meaningful mathematical discussions between students in the instructional materials?					
Instructional materials rating	1. Nonexistent	2. Limited support	3. Some support	4. Substantial support	5. Consistent and high-quality support
NOTES ON 9:					

AREA OF FOCUS IV:  
LEVERAGING STUDENTS' ASSETS

10. Is guidance provided to use contexts for connecting mathematics to students' lived experiences?					
Instructional materials rating	1. Nonexistent	2. Limited guidance	3. Some guidance	4. Substantial guidance	5. Consistent and high-quality guidance
NOTES ON 10:					

11. Are resources provided to challenge teachers to reflect on their own values and beliefs in regard to language and learning?					
Instructional materials rating	1. Nonexistent	2. Limited opportunities to reflect	3. Some opportunities to reflect	4. Substantial opportunities to reflect	5. Consistent and high-quality opportunities to reflect
NOTES ON 11:					

Source: English Learners Success Forum, [www.elsuccessforum.org](http://www.elsuccessforum.org)

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## MATHEMATICS GUIDELINES INVENTORY, CONTINUED

12. How often and how effectively are activities structured to encourage students to use their existing language tool kits to participate (rather than use prerequisite language as a barrier to getting started)?					
Instructional materials rating	1. Never/nonexistent	2. Infrequently/limited effectiveness	3. Sometimes/somewhat effective	4. Often/substantially effective	5. Consistently/highly effectively
NOTES ON 12:					

AREA OF FOCUS V: ASSESSMENT OF MATHEMATICAL CONTENT, PRACTICES, AND LANGUAGE					
13. Are models provided of students engaged in mathematical practices? How varied are the examples of language proficiency in those models?					
Instructional materials rating	1. Nonexistent models	2. Limited models/limited variety	3. Some models/some variety	4. Substantial models/substantial variety	5. Consistent and high-quality models/consistent variety
NOTES ON 13:					

14. Are assessments structured to capture students' growth and progress with both mathematics and language?					
Instructional materials rating	1. Nonexistent evidence	2. Limited evidence	3. Some evidence	4. Substantial evidence	5. Consistent and high-quality evidence
NOTES ON 14:					

15. Are teachers guided to use quality formative assessment of both mathematics and language to make instructional decisions?					
Instructional materials rating	1. Nonexistent guidance	2. Limited guidance	3. Some guidance	4. Substantial guidance	5. Consistent and high-quality guidance
NOTES ON 15:					

SCORING AND NEXT STEPS					
<p>If you rated the support aspects at mostly 4 and 5, then you are off to a good start. Consider more robust ways of supporting English learners in your context. With effective implementation, these materials can affect English learner student mathematics outcomes positively and create more equitable learning conditions.</p> <p>The support aspects rated 3 or below are places to further explore in the materials improvement process. Visit <a href="http://www.elsuccessforum.org/resources">www.elsuccessforum.org/resources</a> for links to activities, strategies, and other resources that may be helpful in the materials improvement process.</p>					

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