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# College and Career Ready English Language Learners: Challenges, Strengths, and Strategies

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February 24, 2013

## Improving Outcomes for English Language Learners



### About AIR and EHDW

Established in 1946, American Institutes for Research (AIR) is an independent, nonpartisan, not-for-profit organization that conducts behavioral and social science research on important social issues and delivers technical assistance, both domestically and internationally, in the areas of education, health, and workforce productivity.

AIR's Education, Human Development, and the Workforce (EHDW) program focuses on improving teaching and learning to ensure that all students—particularly those facing historical disadvantages—have access to a high-quality, effective education. Our reputation is built on a solid foundation of providing high-quality services in research, analysis, technical assistance, assessment, and strategic planning to school districts, states, and the federal government as well as to industry, organizations, and foundations.

### About the English Language Learner Center and Staff

The English Language Learner Center at AIR is committed to reducing the achievement gap and improving outcomes for English language learners (ELLs) by connecting rigorous research to policy and practice.

Our ELL team is led by two nationally renowned experts, Diane August, Ph.D., and Jennifer O'Day, Ph.D., both of whom are distinguished researchers with deep expertise about ELLs. They are supported by skilled AIR team members who have worked with schools, districts, universities, nonprofits, and government agencies to improve outcomes for ELLs.

### For More Information

For additional information about the English Language Learner Center at AIR, please contact Diane August, Ph.D., Managing Director, by e-mail ([ELLCenter@air.org](mailto:ELLCenter@air.org)).

## Presentation Overview

- Challenges and strengths
- Guiding principles for helping ELLs meet new high standards across the content areas
- Enacting the principles to help ELLS meet the Common Core State Standards in Language Arts

## Challenges and Strengths

- Text is at the heart of the new standards
  - Texts will be indexed at higher levels (e.g. *A Secret Garden*, 4<sup>th</sup>; *Tom Sawyer*, middle grades).
  - ELLs learning in English have to master this content in their second language.
- ELLs have first language skills and knowledge to draw on

# Guiding Principles for Helping ELLs Meet New High Standards



# Considerations for ELLs

1. ELLs need to have access to cognitively challenging, grade-appropriate content so that they do not fall behind their English-speaking peers academically.
2. ELLs need additional support, because they are learning language and content concurrently.
3. ELLs most likely will need to acquire the foundational skills and knowledge that form the basis for grade-level content knowledge and skills.

# Considerations for ELLs

4. ELLs bring tremendous resources to learning in a second language, namely their first language knowledge and skills.
5. Within the ELL subgroup, individual students require differentiated instruction because of differences in their native and target language knowledge and skills.
  - ELLs at the beginning levels of English proficiency
  - Students who are orally proficient in English but lack literacy skills
  - ELLs with interrupted formal education

# Enacting the Principles to Help ELLS Meet the Common Core State Standards in Language Arts





# Case Study Text: Lincoln's Gettysburg Address



## The Gettysburg Address, 1863

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate—we can not consecrate—we can not hallow—this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

*twenty*

*a war  
between  
citizens of  
the same  
country*

*declare a  
place sacred*

*without  
accomplishing  
anything*

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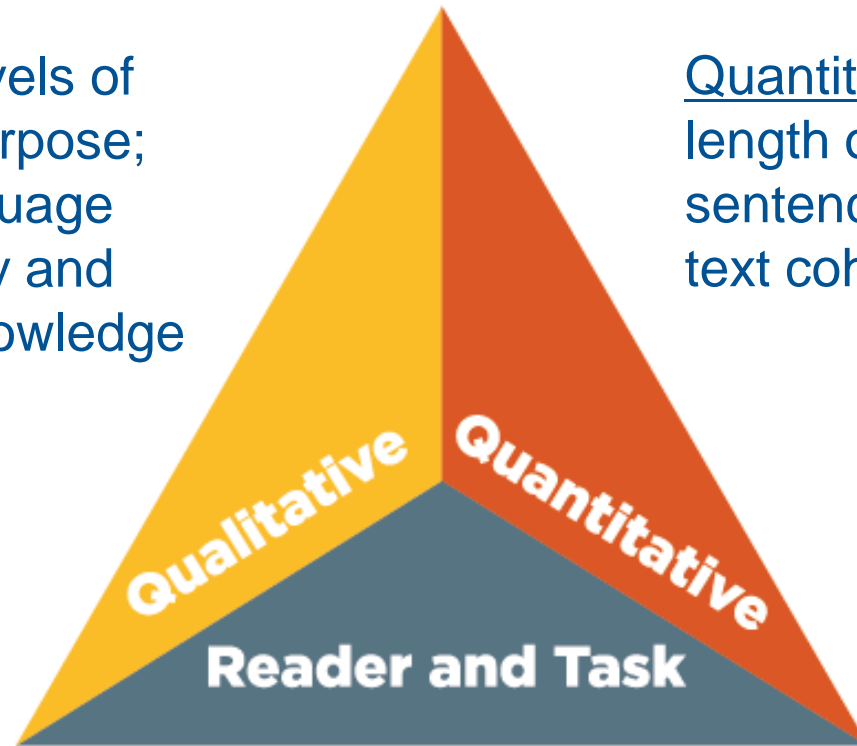
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*without  
accomplishing  
anything*

# 1. Make Grade-Appropriate Content and Skills Available to ELLs: Select Text

Qualitative: levels of meaning or purpose; structure; language conventionality and clarity; and knowledge demands

Quantitative: word length or frequency; sentence length; and text cohesion



Reader and Task: specific to particular readers (e.g., motivation, knowledge, and experiences) and to particular tasks (e.g., purpose and the complexity of the task)

# 1. Make Grade-Appropriate Content and Skills Available to ELLs: Select Text

## Quantitative Methods for Text Selection

- The Lexile framework (<https://lexile.com/>) has been used to measure the quantitative difficulty of many narrative texts, but not as many informational texts.
- For informational texts:
  - The AR BookFinder provides the ATOS book level (<http://www.arbookfind.com>)
  - The Questar Textbook Readability database provides the Degree of Reading Power score ([http://www.questarai.com/products/drpprogram/pages/t\\_extbook\\_readability.aspx](http://www.questarai.com/products/drpprogram/pages/t_extbook_readability.aspx))

# 1. Make Grade-Appropriate Content and Skills Available to ELLs: Select Text

Text	Lexile Level	Grade Band
<p>Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.</p> <p>Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.</p> <p>But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate—we can not consecrate—we can not hallow—this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.</p>	1500	11+

# 1. Make Grade-Appropriate Content and Skills Available to ELLs: Analyze Text

## Factors that Make Text Challenging

- Text with multiple levels of meaning
- Distortions in organization of text (e.g. time sequences)
- Sophisticated figurative language
- Significant use of variations to standard English
- Specialized or technical content knowledge assumed/required
- Limited use of text features and graphics to cue the reader
- Extensive and unfamiliar general and domain-specific vocabulary
- Use of language that is archaic

# 1. Make Grade-Appropriate Content and Skills Available to ELLs: Analyze Text

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Use of language that is archaic



# 1. Make Grade-Appropriate Content and Skills Available to ELLs: Consider Shifts

Shift 1	Balancing Informational & Literary Text	Students read a true balance of informational and literary texts.
Shift 2	Knowledge in the Disciplines	Students build knowledge about the world (domains/ content areas) through TEXT rather than the teacher or activities
Shift 3	Staircase of Complexity	Students read the central, grade appropriate text around which instruction is centered. Teachers are patient, create more time and space and support in the curriculum for close reading.
Shift 4	Text-based Answers	Students engage in rich and rigorous evidence based conversations about text.
Shift 5	Writing from Sources	Writing emphasizes use of evidence from sources to inform or make an argument.
Shift 6	Academic Vocabulary	Students constantly build the transferable vocabulary they need to access grade level complex texts. This can be done effectively by spiraling like content in increasingly complex texts.

## 2. Provide Additional Support for ELLs

- ELLs need additional support because they are learning language and content at the same time.
- Additional support is a legal obligation (Lau v. Nichols).
- Methods:
  - Scaffold instruction so it is comprehensible.
  - Develop academic language associated with key subject areas.

## 2. Provide Additional Support for ELLs

***Scaffolding Example*** –Students engage in activities to build background knowledge about the Gettysburg Address prior to reading it.

- Watch a video clip of an actor playing Abraham Lincoln deliver the Gettysburg Address.
- Read about the Gettysburg Address.
- Watch a video clip about Abraham Lincoln.
- **Do an interactive reading about the Civil War.**
- Do an interactive reading about the Declaration of Independence (“*a new nation*”).

## 2. Provide Additional Support for ELLs

*Guiding Question: What caused the start of the U.S. Civil War?*

The U.S. Civil War was a war that occurred, or happened, from 1861 to 1865. The war was between 25 Northern States (called “The Union”) and 11 Southern States (called “The Confederacy”). The war started when the Confederacy succeeded, or left the country. They succeeded, or left, because Abraham Lincoln had been *elected* president. Lincoln did not believe in the right to own slaves. The Confederacy surrendered, or lost, in 1865 and the war ended. After the war, *slavery* was outlawed or not permitted throughout the country.

*elect* –to  
choose  
someone by  
voting

*slavery* –  
when one  
person owns  
another  
person



*The Battle of Gettysburg during the U.S. Civil War.*

*(Image –Library of Congress)*

## 2. Provide Additional Support for ELLs

**Scaffolding Example** –Students engage in interactive reading of the Gettysburg Address and have access to glossed vocabulary; students answer lower-the-level questions and have access to sentence frames that can be adapted for different levels of language proficiency.

Four *score* and seven years ago our fathers *brought forth* on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

*score* –twenty

*bring forth* –  
create

## 2. Provide Additional Support for ELLs

Four *score* and seven years ago our fathers *brought forth* on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

*score* –twenty

*bring forth* –  
create

1. What does Lincoln mean by “four score and seven years ago”?  
*Four score and seven years ago means 87 years ago.*

2. What does Lincoln mean by “our fathers”?  
*By “our fathers” Lincoln means the men who founded the United States.*

3. What nation was brought forth or created four score and seven years before the Gettysburg address?  
*The United States was brought forth or created.*

## 2. Provide Additional Support for ELLs

Four *score* and seven years ago our fathers *brought forth* on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

*score* –twenty

*bring forth* –  
create

4. The new nation was conceived in liberty. What does the phrase “conceived in liberty” mean?

“*Conceived in liberty*” means that it was created to be free.

5. The nation was “dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal” What does the proposition or idea “all men are created equal” mean?

“*All men are created equal*” means that everyone has the same rights and freedoms.

## 2. Provide Additional Support for ELLs

**Academic Language Example** –Students receive direct instruction in key/high frequency vocabulary.

### conceive



1. To *conceive* is to form an idea.  
[*The nation was conceived as a place of liberty.*]
2. En español “conceive” quiere decir formar concepto de.
3. Now, let’s look at a picture that demonstrates the word *conceive*. This man *conceived* a plan for a new house, and then he drew the design for the house.
4. Turn to your partner and *conceive* a plan for how you will spend the weekend.

### conceive



5. To *conceive* can also mean to bring something to life.
6. En español “conceive” también quiere decir concebir.
7. Turn to your partner and talk about why this picture demonstrates the word *conceive*.



## 2. Provide Additional Support for ELLs

**Academic Language Example** –Students engage in a functional analysis of the text to help them unpack complex sentences.

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

WHO (Actor): \_\_\_\_\_

WHAT HAPPENED (Action): \_\_\_\_\_

WHAT (Recipient): \_\_\_\_\_

DESCRIPTOR (Detail): *conceived in liberty*

DESCRIPTOR (Detail): *dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal*

WHERE: \_\_\_\_\_

WHEN: \_\_\_\_\_

## 2. Provide Additional Support for ELLs

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

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DESCRIPTOR (Detail):

DESCRIPTOR (Detail):

WHERE (Detail):

WHEN (Detail):

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WHAT (Recipient): **a new nation**

DESCRIPTOR (Detail): **conceived in Liberty**

DESCRIPTOR (Detail):

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WHERE (Detail): on this continent

WHEN (Detail):



## 2. Provide Additional Support for ELLs

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WHO (Actor): **our fathers**

WHAT HAPPENED (Action): **brought forth**

WHAT (Recipient): **a new nation**

DESCRIPTOR (Detail): **conceived in Liberty**

DESCRIPTOR (Detail): dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal

WHERE (Detail): on this continent

WHEN (Detail): four score and seven years ago

### 3. Develop ELL's Foundational Skills

- ELLs have varied levels of first and second language proficiency and content area knowledge.
- It is crucial to ensure that ELLs acquire skills and knowledge that are precursor to those at grade-level.
- Process:
  - Vertically align skills and knowledge for each anchor standard to determine the precursor skills and knowledge that need development.
  - Assess ELLs' precursor knowledge and skills.
  - Develop these skills and knowledge with the goal of moving towards grade level standards.

## 3. Develop ELL's Foundational Skills

**CCSS Reading Standards, Grades 2-7:** Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

- RI 2.1.2 Identify the main topic of a multiparagraph text as well as the focus of specific paragraphs within the text.
- RI 3.1.2 Determine the main idea of a text; recount the key details and explain how they support the main idea.
- RI 4.1.2 Determine the main idea of a text and explain how it is supported by key details; summarize the text.
- RI 5.1.2 Determine two or more main ideas of a text and explain how they are supported by key details; summarize the text.
- RI 6.1.2 Determine a central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.
- RI 7.1.2 Determine two or more central ideas in a text and analyze their development over the course of the text; provide an objective summary of the text.

## 4. Recognize that First Language Skills and Knowledge Are a Resource

- Bilingualism is a valuable asset in itself.
- Students transfer knowledge and skills from one language to another, and as such the first language is a valuable resource for learning a second language.
- To help students acquire English, craft lessons that build on these skills and this knowledge.
- Help students acquire strategies that enable them to bootstrap on their previous knowledge and skills.

## 4. Recognize that First Language Skills and Knowledge Are a Resource

**L1 Example** –Students read the Gettysburg Address with a partner in English or in Spanish. After reading, they note one thing they learned and one thing they would like to understand better.

(1) Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

(1) Hace ochenta y siete años, nuestros padres crearon en este continente una nueva nación, concebida bajo el signo de la libertad y consagrada al principio de que todos los hombres son iguales.

## 4. Recognize that First Language Skills and Knowledge Are a Resource

**L1 Example** –Students have access to background information in their first language.

El Discurso de Gettysburg es un discurso pronunciado por el Presidente Abraham Lincoln y es uno de los más conocidos en la historia de los Estados Unidos. Fue pronunciado durante la Guerra Civil Norteamericana, en la tarde del jueves 19 de noviembre de 1863. Lincoln pronunció su discurso en el conmemorativo Cementerio Nacional de los Soldados en Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, en honor a los hombres que murieron durante la Batalla de Gettysburg.

## 4. Recognize that First Language Skills and Knowledge Are a Resource

**Strategies Example** –Students learn to use cognate knowledge to increase comprehension.

- A cognate is a word that sounds and looks alike in two languages and has a similar meaning.
- English and Spanish have many cognates.
- Let's review the meaning for the English words, continent, nation, liberty, and pie.
- Look at the Spanish words. Talk to your bilingual partner or use a bilingual dictionary to find the meanings of the Spanish words. Do you think these words are cognates? Why or why not?

English Word	English Meaning	Spanish Word	Spanish Meaning
continent	<i>one of the earth's seven largest areas of land</i>	continente	
nation	<i>a country of people</i>	nación	
liberty	<i>the right to be free</i>	liberidad	
pie	<i>a cooked food with fruit or meat</i>	pie	

## 4. Recognize that First Language Skills and Knowledge Are a Resource

Now we are engaged in a great **civil** war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so **conceived** and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war. We have come to dedicate a **portion** of that field, as a **final** resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

English Word	English Meaning	Spanish Word
civil	having to do with the activities of citizens	civil
conceived	to form an idea or bring something to life	concebido
portion	a part of a whole	porción
final	to be at the end of something; the last	final



## 5. Meet the Needs of Every Student in a Classroom

- Assess student's first and second language knowledge and skills and monitor progress.
  - Assess in L1 for students with L1 education.
- Develop lessons that provide necessary support for ELLs with different levels of proficiency.
- Address other special learning needs:
  - Ensure students have access to Tier 2 and 3 interventions if necessary.
  - Develop lessons and activities for students who would benefit from coursework that exceeds grade-level expectations.

## 5. Meet the Needs of Every Student in a Classroom: Example of Differentiation

### Word Bank

produced

conceived

Declaration of Independence

eighty-seven

equal

United States

liberty

idea

dedicated

\_\_\_\_\_ years before the Gettysburg address, the  
\_\_\_\_\_ was signed. The signing  
\_\_\_\_\_ a new nation called the \_\_\_\_\_. The  
nation was \_\_\_\_\_ in \_\_\_\_\_ or created without  
force. The nation was \_\_\_\_\_ to the \_\_\_\_\_ that  
all men are created \_\_\_\_\_.

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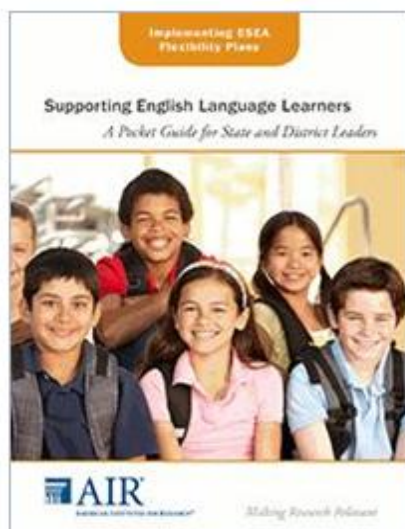
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## New Guide Helps Leaders and Practitioners Improve Instruction for English Language Learners

The need to serve English language learners (ELLs) has never been more pressing, as their numbers increase and their achievement continues to be poor compared to their English-proficient peers. State and district leaders need high-quality research and information to improve instruction for ELLs and promote student learning.

**File:** English Language Learner Pocket Guide (PDF)



*Supporting English Language Learners: A Pocket Guide for State and District Leaders* summarizes the ELL-relevant information presented in 34 approved applications for Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) flexibility waivers and suggests promising practices and policies to address these students' needs. The guide, developed by the Center for English Language Learners at AIR, is designed for state and district leaders who play a key role in ensuring that all students—including ELLs—graduate from high school well prepared for college and careers.

This Pocket Guide is the first of three developed to help state and local policymakers and practitioners implement ESEA flexibility plans approved by the U.S. Department of Education. The guide's authors reviewed the approved plans to identify policies relevant to ELLs. The guide includes:

- Requirements for each principle related to ELLs in the flexibility waivers
- Descriptions of how the plans addressed ELLs
- Considerations for research-based enhancements to current policy and practice
- Examples of state and district innovations for ELLs related to the waiver provisions



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