Shape

This document outlines characteristics of instruction that is aligned to the Massachusetts definition of English as a Second Language (ESL). According to state guidance, ESL is its own subject matter and provides explicit, systematic, and sustained language instruction to promote English learners’ success at school and beyond. It is also a required component of all English Learner Education programs in Massachusetts.

Grounded on this definition, the Features of High-Quality ESL reflect best practices for teaching students identified as English learners [[1]](#endnote-1) and the Next Generation ESL Curriculum Theory of Action. The sections below define each feature and sample ways educators can put them in practice in the ESL classroom.

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| Culturally sustaining**High-Quality ESL is Asset-Based and Culturally Sustaining.** |
| It leverages students’ first languages, cultures, funds of knowledge, previous experiences and other assets or strengths and connects to students’ families, interests, individual abilities, goals, and future dreams[[2]](#endnote-2). It builds on what English learners can do and strengthens their identity, voice, sense of self, and self-efficacy. It promotes equity and social justice by positioning students (regardless of race, ethnic, cultural, or linguistic background) as active learners, apprentices to academic communities of learning[[3]](#endnote-3), and capable of challenging inequities through critical reflection[[4]](#endnote-4) and social action. It affirms and fosters students’ multicultural and multilinguistic practices as valuable contributions to the classroom, school, local, and global communities.[[5]](#endnote-5)  **Supporting Asset-Based and Culturally Sustaining ESL Instruction**   * Support students’ bi/multilingualism development (multilingual texts, connect to available bilingual opportunities, collaborate with parents, etc.) * Connect lesson, texts, tasks and topics to students’ cultures, languages, race, ethnicity, and lives; ensure materials provide “[windows and mirrors](https://chiefsforchange.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/CFC-HonoringOrigins-FINAL.pdf)”: reflecting students’ experiences and backgrounds positively and allowing for connections to their lives * Draw from students’ previous experiences, funds of knowledge, cultural and linguistic capital and wealth and support learning of language, academic concepts and practices, and identity (activate prior knowledge, highlight the value and usefulness of all linguistics and cultural practices students bring, teach when and how to use practices across social contexts and roles: at home, school, college/career, civic life, etc.) * Share power and decision making with students (provide choice and [multiple means of action and expression](https://udlguidelines.cast.org/action-expression), [co-create lessons with students](https://ncela.ed.gov/files/webinars/20201019-CultPractices-OELA-508.pdf), etc.) * Leverage students’ full linguistic resources (first language and English) through strategies like [translanguaging](https://www.cuny-nysieb.org/translanguaging-resources/translanguaging-guides/), code-switching, purposeful [primary language supports](https://achieve.lausd.net/cms/lib/CA01000043/Centricity/domain/22/el%20sel%20master%20plan/master%20plan%20toolkit/Chapt%204%20Primary%20Language%20Instruction%20Effective%20and%20Ineffective%20Language%20Support.pdf), etc. * Set high expectations for learning for all students, and provide supports by scaffolding up (rather than simplifying) * Use respectful, inclusive language and promote classroom interactions that affirm and value students’ cultural, linguistic, racial and ethnic identities (respectful use of pronouns and labels, affirming classroom norms and routines, discussions about students’ identities, etc.) * [Learn about individual students’ backgrounds](https://www.colorincolorado.org/article/learning-about-your-students-backgrounds) and experience and avoid overgeneralizing (parent interviews, intake questionaries, assignments, etc.) * Provide opportunities for students to develop critical perspectives about relevant issues they face (social justice, civic engagement, equity, civil rights, racism, discrimination, etc.) and take action to address inequities * Learn and teach “[below the surface](https://seidlitzblog.org/2020/12/07/culturally-responsive-pedagogy-moving-below-the-surface/)” aspects of [deep culture](http://www.paec.org/courses/esolcat3/elements.pdf) students need to make meaning and bridge home and school cultures (gestures, eye contact and other etiquette, conversation patterns, etc.) |
| A book with "A B C" written on the cover **High-Quality ESL is Language Driven.** |
| It promotes the development ofEnglish language proficiency, or students’ ability to use English for academic, social, and instructional purposes across modes of communication (listening, reading, viewing, writing, speaking, representing).[[6]](#endnote-6) It draws on sound theories of language learning and leverages all the linguistic resources students possess to support development of discourse practices, grammatical structures, and vocabulary in English students need to become successful knowers and doers in academic contexts.[[7]](#endnote-7) It also cultivates ways of being, interacting, negotiating, and using language based on cultural and social roles in and out of school so English learners can be equal participants in society. |
| A balanced scale **High-Quality ESL is Balanced, Focused on Both Meaning and Form.** |
| It makes language visible and explicit, helping students learn how language is action: a set of tools they can use in different roles and for different purposes, audiences, topics, text types and across [dimensions of language](https://wida.wisc.edu/sites/default/files/resource/WIDA-ELD-Standards-Framework-2020.pdf) (discourse, sentence, and word/phrase levels). It ensures language functions, forms, and features are taught within rich, contextualized, meaningful circumstances[[8]](#endnote-8) by connecting to the language demands of content areas, college, career, as well as personal and civic life. It helps students learn the language needed for conceptual understanding and mastery of analytical practices required for academic achievement.  **Supporting Language Driven & Balanced ESL Instruction**   * Leverage knowledge of key language systems (phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, pragmatics) to plan instruction * Teach and provide opportunities to use academic, social, and instructional language (language to succeed in school subjects, language needed for social interactions at school and beyond, etc.) * Explicitly teach English language resources [(functions and features across dimensions of language](https://wida.wisc.edu/teach/standards/eld) - word/phrase, sentence, discourse) and how they are used to convey and make meaning * Model and provide opportunities to use English language resources based on communication purpose, audience, task, audience, social roles and identities, topic, cultures (home, school, professional, etc.) to promote [communicative](https://essentialsoflanguageteachingnet.wordpress.com/principles/teaching-goals-and-methods/goal-communicative-competence/) and [intercultural](https://essentialsoflanguageteachingnet.wordpress.com/principles/teaching-goals-and-methods/goal-communicative-competence/) competence * Identify academic language demands in grade-level standards, tasks, texts, and interactions with content area specialist teachers to prioritize [key language uses, functions, and features](https://wida.wisc.edu/sites/default/files/resource/WIDA-ELD-Standards-Framework-2020.pdf) to teach * Integrate intentional opportunities for engaging with and producing language across [modes of communication](https://wida.wisc.edu/sites/default/files/resource/WIDA-ELD-Standards-Framework-2020.pdf) (reading, writing, viewing, speaking, listening, representing) to reflect real-life language use * Expose students to different genres and text types (including [multimodal texts](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/discipline/english/literacy/readingviewing/Pages/litfocusmultimodal.aspx)), modeling and providing opportunities to produce them in ways that are appropriate to grade and developmental level * Connect instruction about how English works with students’ first language to promote transfer * Provide focused instructional time and use a variety of strategies to develop [oral language](https://www.brown.edu/academics/education-alliance/teaching-diverse-learners/about/oral-language) and [literacy](https://www.colorincolorado.org/article/reading-comprehension-skills-english-language-learners) * Explicitly teach literacy skills and strategies * Provide opportunities for students to analyze and evaluate how language resources can be used for different social, instructional, and academic purposes in different contexts * Incorporate strategies that [combine focus on meaning and form](https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/rl/cf/documents/elaeldfwchapter5.pdf) (deconstructing sentences in dense texts to identify sentence structures and how they contribute to meaning; unpacking expanded noun groups to help reading comprehension, etc.) |
| A head with visible gears **ESL is standards-based, rigorous, and integrated.** |
| It is aligned to the WIDA English Language Development Standards Framework and the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. It integrates motivating and challenging instruction along with high levels of support.[[9]](#endnote-9) It includes purposeful tasks appropriate to students’ developmental/grade levels and content area standards[[10]](#endnote-10), promotes higher-order thinking[[11]](#endnote-11), and explicitly teaches students strategies for thinking (metacognitive) and for using language (metalinguistic) across the variety of academic, social, and instructional contexts and roles[[12]](#endnote-12) English learners navigate at school and beyond.  **Supporting Standards-Based, Rigorous, and Integrated ESL Instruction**   * Demonstrate high expectations for all students (learning outcomes represent at all levels of cognitive demand regardless for all ELs; developmentally and grade-level appropriate instruction; all students engage in the same tasks and objectives with appropriate support, etc.) * Develop unit goals and lesson objectives aligned to standards: WIDA English Language Development Standards Framework and Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks * Collaborate with content area and specialist teachers to ensure ESL instruction and curriculum provides an authentic context for meaningful and purposeful language use (connect to language demands in content and specialist instruction, integrate content topics, themes, and disciplinary practices, etc.) * Design learning activities that mirror the work of academic disciplines (explaining an article, interpreting historical artifacts, making a presentation, working a math problem, etc.) to help students produce, recognize and evaluate salient academic language features * Teach and model metacognitive and [metalinguistic](https://dantas-whitney.weebly.com/uploads/7/4/6/9/7469707/compressed_languageawareness_15-2-17_cr.pdf) strategies to support [rigor](https://www.edglossary.org/rigor/) * Structure classroom interactions and tasks to develop students’ cognitive skills alongside language learning (tasks at highest levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy, [Webb’s Depth of Knowledge](https://ellstudents.com/blogs/the-confianza-way/ensuring-rigor-for-english-learners-using-depth-of-knowledge), opportunities to “[think creatively, transform information, engage in inquiry-oriented activity, construct understandings](https://www.heinemann.com/shared/onlineresources/e01203/gibbons_sample.pdf)” and connect to life outside school, etc.) * Plan language teaching and learning around intellectually stimulating topics relevant to students’ lives, ages, backgrounds, and language development (school life in the US, academic content, civic engagement, college/career, social justice, interests and goals, etc.) * Ensure tasks and interactions are intellectually challenging and purposeful to promote meaningful engagement with key academic and [analytical](https://www.ccsso.org/sites/default/files/2017-11/ELPD%20Framework%20Booklet-Final%20for%20web.pdf) practices, conceptual understanding, and language competence |
| Speech bubbles **ESL is designed for authentic language interactions, dialogue, and collaboration.** |
| It providesample and extended opportunities for English learners to communicate in English and collaborate with other students and teachers in meaningful ways that reflect real-world language use. It promotes substantive conversations and sustained interactions around big ideas and topics that promote conceptual understanding[[13]](#endnote-13) connected to English learners’ interests, content areas, college and career preparation, social justice, equity, and civic life. It is carefully structured so English learners can discuss ideas, explore, and deepen their understanding of concepts, build on each other’s contributions, and make meaning together.  **Supporting Authentic Language Interactions, Dialogue & Collaboration in ESL Instruction**   * Teach, model and provide opportunities to apply strategies for understanding and using English in reciprocal interactions with others (leveraging prior knowledge, [conversation moves](https://jeffzwiers.org/tools), [metacognitive strategies](https://www.intechopen.com/books/metacognition-in-learning/teaching-with-and-for-metacognition-in-disciplinary-discussions), [norms and protocols](https://eleducation.org/resources/collaborative-culture-academic-talk) for interactions, etc.) * Ensure topics, questions, and ideas students explore are rich and relevant, drawing from their knowledge of the world and language skills * Provide ample opportunities to participate in [quality extended interactions](http://www.nysed.gov/bilingual-ed/topic-brief-2-quality-student-interactions-why-are-they-crucial-language-learning-and) where students use English purposefully (to gain and exchange information, to explore and refine ideas, to negotiate meaning, to persuade, to inform, etc.) * Develop a [class culture that positions students as active learners](https://www.aft.org/ae/fall2018/walqui_heritage), knowers, and researchers who are comfortable building ideas together and who value each others’ contributions (establish a culture of respect for all classroom community members, co-develop ground rules for engagement, incorporate interaction patterns drawing from students’ cultures, set discussion norms that prioritize representation of all voices, etc.) * Incorporate appropriate scaffolds and supports to ensure students at all English proficiency levels can meaningfully participate ([formulaic expressions](https://www.aft.org/ae/fall2018/walqui_heritage), appropriate wait time, comprehensible input, visual supports, effective teacher moves to promote accountable talk, etc.) * Carefully structure interactions to maximize student talk and language production (tasks that require interaction, strategic student pairing/grouping, designated student roles, etc.) * Use a variety of interactive learning strategies ([cooperative learning](https://www.kaganonline.com/free_articles/dr_spencer_kagan/281/Kagan-Structures-A-Miracle-of-Active-Engagement,1), role plays, barrier games, inquiry and project-based learning, debates, academic conversations, etc.) * Use a critical lens during dialogue and discussions to explore connections between topics and practices and promoting equity and social justice |
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| An org chart **ESL is planned and dynamic.** |
| It incorporates carefully planned units and lessons that strategically sequence instructional tasks, experiences, and assessments to develop English learners’ language proficiency and ability to engage with analytical practices coherently over time. It is also dynamic and responsive to students, flexibly incorporating original plans with just-in-time adjustments based on student progress.[[14]](#endnote-14) |
| Scaffolding **ESL is differentiated and scaffolded.** |
| It builds on and is tailored to students’ background knowledge, first language, literacy and previous educational experiences, and English language proficiency. It provides multiple means of engagement, representation, and expression.[[15]](#endnote-15) It is scaffolded based on individual students’ differences, strengths, and needs.[[16]](#endnote-16) This scaffolding is both planned for ahead of time and provided when students need it. It is also temporary, promoting student independence and autonomy by helping students learn how to do something slightly beyond their current level of competence or “zone of proximal development” so they can complete similar tasks alone in the future.[[17]](#endnote-17)  **Supporting Planned and Dynamic & Differentiated and Scaffolded ESL Instruction**   * Provide multimodal materials and a variety of [scaffolds](https://www.empoweringells.com/scaffolding-instruction/) (e.g., illustrations, diagrams, models, cooperative learning structures, home language) to support learning of concepts, analytical practices, and language * Use synonyms, paragraphing and [multiple means of representation](https://udlguidelines.cast.org/representation) to create “abundancy and redundancy” * Ensure texts and tasks are aligned to standards, [differentiating instruction](https://www.colorincolorado.org/article/differentiated-instruction-english-language-learners) to ensure it is within students’ Zone of Proximal Development ([high challenge/high support](https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ983556.pdf)) * Structure lessons to provide opportunities to engage in “[productive struggle](http://www.ascd.org/ascd-express/vol14/num11/productive-struggle-is-a-learners-sweet-spot.aspx)” (e.g., modeling, [gradual release of responsibility](https://dpi.wi.gov/ela/instruction/framework), teaching and learning cycle) * Present expectations for behavior, safety rules, and classroom procedures in multiple formats, using modeling, visuals and other scaffolds * Plan and sequence units and lessons to strategically build language development and autonomy over time (macro-scaffolding) * Adjust scaffolds in “real time” based on student progress and classroom interactions (micro scaffolding) * Use a [variety of scaffolds](https://www.empoweringells.com/scaffolding-instruction/) depending on the purpose of the lesson, students’ strengths and needs (modeling and exemplars of what students need to do, sensory experiences to contextualize learning, building background knowledge by pre-teaching vocabulary, unpacking texts, multimodal aids, glossaries, word walls, etc.) * Adjust and amplify your speech (pace, gestures, visual aids, etc.) to ensure instruction in comprehensible * Model complex language forms in supported ways to promote language development |
| A magnifying glass over a piece of paper **ESL is grounded on effective assessment practices.** |
| It incorporates multiple forms of assessment to gather evidence and evaluate students’ language development across [language dimensions and modes of communication](https://wida.wisc.edu/sites/default/files/resource/WIDA-ELD-Standards-Framework-2020.pdf) (interpretive and expressive). It is based on information about student progress towards established language goals gathered through ongoing formative assessment practices[[18]](#endnote-18) and analysis of student writing, work samples, and oral language production.[[19]](#endnote-19) It provides opportunities for both teachers and students to use information from diagnostic, formative, benchmark/interim, and summative assessments to keep learning moving forward. |

**Supporting Effective Assessment in ESL Instruction**

* Collect language development data from multiple sources ([needs assessment](https://www.cal.org/caela/tools/program_development/elltoolkit/Part2-5NeedsAssessment&LearnerSelf-Evaluation.pdf), formative assessment, standardized language tests, end-of-unit assessments, formal and [informal](https://www.colorincolorado.org/article/using-informal-assessments-english-language-learners), etc.) and [modes of communication](https://wida.wisc.edu/sites/default/files/resource/WIDA-ELD-Standards-Framework-2020.pdf) (speaking, listening, writing, etc.)
* Match assessment tasks to language being assessed, instructional practice, and established goals and success criteria; design tasks based on purpose ([*as*, *for*, and *of* learning](https://resources.corwin.com/sites/default/files/resource_1.5.pdf))
* Ensure assessments provide opportunities for all learners to demonstrate what they know and can do (differentiated tasks, [multiple means](https://udlguidelines.cast.org/) of representation and expression, etc.)
* Ensure assessment tasks measure intended goals (i.e., is reliable and valid, based on [language development progressions](https://wida.wisc.edu/sites/default/files/resource/WIDA-ELD-Standards-Framework-2020.pdf)), [are fair and bias-free](https://www.middleweb.com/41421/how-we-can-fairly-assess-english-learners/), and will provide useful data

* Design rigorous assessment tasks responsive to students (calibrated to English language proficiency level, age, and English language proficiency level; considering prior knowledge and skills, comprehensible, with enough time to complete, etc.)
* Employ a variety of [formative assessment strategies](https://www.gettingsmart.com/2016/04/supporting-ells-with-formative-assessments/) to gather and use data to adjust and/or plan future instruction
* Incorporate standardized test [accommodations](https://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/accessibility/) into classroom assessment so students learn how to use then effectively
* Develop a [growth mindset](https://fs.blog/2015/03/carol-dweck-mindset/) classroom culture that values gathering and using assessment data to advance learning (explain purpose and contexts of assessments, discuss/co-develop success criteria with students, give choices for demonstrated learning, provide opportunities for peer and [self-assessment](http://www.ccsenet.org/journal/index.php/elt/article/view/0/41108), etc.)
* Regularly share information about students’ language development progress with their parents/families in ways they understand and with ideas for home support; collaborate with parents/families to develop individual language development goals
* Provide effective [corrective feedback](https://edtechbooks.org/language_acquisition/effective_ell_appropriate_feedback) (focused first on communication and meaning making, then on target language forms; actionable at a level students can understand and use; connected to goals and success criteria and including ideas for next steps to improve, in a timely way; not overcorrecting or embarrassing, etc.
* Include measures of discrete language skills (recognition of specific phonemes, etc.) when appropriate

ESL teachers need systemic support at the school, district, and state levels to be able to bring these features to life in their classrooms. This type of support is also needed to ensure English learners to receive the type of learning experiences that lead to equitable outcomes. Systemic conditions that support English learner’s success and effective ESL instruction as outlined in the [Massachusetts Vision for English Learner Education and Blueprint for English Learner Success](https://www.doe.mass.edu/ele/blueprint/) include:

1. A culture of shared responsibility and collaboration on behalf of English learners’ success and English learner family engagement,
2. Ongoing support for teachers to grow in their practice as effective educators of English learners,
3. Structures and practices that provide English learners meaningful access to high-quality instruction and comprehensive supports throughout the day, and
4. Experiences that help English learners thrive in school and beyond (college, career, civic life, etc.).

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