



# SCAFFOLDS FOR A SHELTERED SECONDARY ENGLISH CLASSROOM

By Adrian Baylor

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**Abstract:** This article shares the experiences, tips, and passion of an English I teacher who teaches English language learners (ELLs) who have been in U.S. schools for at least one year. She provides information about various teaching strategies that have been effective in her classroom over the past few years. The article addresses student grouping, analyzing passages, scaffolding questions, and engaging students in note-taking. The author explains that these tools are effective for all students, but they are specifically designed to meet the needs of English language learners. She also includes specific examples of techniques she has used with her English I students along with ideas for using technology to promote student engagement.

**Keywords:** ELLs, English language learners, scaffolds, modifications, accommodations

ELLs, English language learners, are students who come from non-English-speaking homes, who are unable to communicate fluently or learn effectively in English, and who need modified instruction in their academic courses. They are rated through a Texas Education Agency (TEA) assessment called TELPAS, which tests their reading, writing, listening and speaking skills once a year. This assessment helps teachers and administrators monitor the progress of ELLs as they learn the English language (Texas Education Agency, 2017). Their TELPAS ratings can be classified as Beginner, Intermediate, Advanced, and Advanced

High. The goal is to help them progress to Advanced High in all four areas and prepare them to pass the English EOC assessments so they can be exited from the ESL program. Many of your students could be current or former ELLs. ELLs can also be long-term ELLs (or LTELLs) who were born in this country but still have not passed STAAR or achieved Advanced High on TELPAS. LTELLs also need and benefit from these accommodations.

## How You Can Identify ELLs?

Within their first couple of years in the country, ELLs are typically more distinguishable. However, as they spend more time in the United States, they begin to look and act like native-speaking students. They might even begin to appear apathetic. In reality, they are still struggling with some part of the English language, and it is impacting their ability to master your course content. The most effective strategies for determining if you have ELLs in your classroom are to use your School Management Software to find TELPAS levels for each student and to contact the student's counselor, ELL teacher (if applicable), or ELL coordinator at the district level. It is important for you to research your students' history. The number of years they have spent in U.S. schools and their TELPAS levels could surprise you. I have had students who communicate poorly in English but could comprehend grade-level material almost as well as the majority of my on-level students. If you are aware of your students' language level, you are more capable of selecting appropriate scaffolds for your ELL students.

## Teaching Strategies

During my six years of teaching ELL students through sheltered classes, I have adopted a toolkit of strategies that help produce growth in my English language learners' understanding of the course content and the English language in general.

## Grouping Strategies

Group collaboration is an important skill for any student. However, with English language learners, collaboration is especially important because it provides opportunities for these students to speak and listen to the English language—skills that do not get practiced without collaboration in English.

**Grouping 1: ELL with an ELL.** I will group my ELLs with another student who speaks their same language, if possible. Depending on how new my ELLs are to the U.S., I prefer to group them with another ELL who is around their same TELPAS levels. For example, I prefer to pair a beginner/intermediate Arabic-speaking student with another beginner/intermediate Arabic-speaking student.

**Grouping 2: ELL with a struggling learner.** If there is not another student who speaks the same language as one of my ELLs, I pair him or her with a student in the class who also struggles with the course content. Because this student also struggles with the content, he or she usually works through assignments at a slower pace and is more willing to struggle through the work with my ELL rather than leave him or her to figure it out. This strategy also provides great opportunities for my struggling, non-ELL to each the content, thereby strengthening his or her understanding.

**Grouping 3: Assimilated ELL.** As my ELLs become more independent and comfortable with the content, I slowly begin to move them away from ELL groupings and place them with other non-ELL students who can progress through assignments at a

similar level and pace. My goal is to foster more frequent interaction for my ELL students in English instead of their primary language, and this strategy helps nudge them towards that goal.

### Analyzing Passages


In English language arts courses, students spend a significant amount of time analyzing literature, and the following strategies have been effective for my English language learners.

**Vocabulary.** Write vocabulary terms for them to see as well as hear while you are speaking them aloud. Our words and letters sound different than theirs do. For example, “i” in English sounds like “e” in Spanish.

**Summaries or simplified texts.** If you are working through an assignment with a large amount of English text, assess the needs of your ELLs. Sometimes it is helpful to provide them with summaries in addition to the text or a simplified version of the text. You can often find these online on websites like Wikipedia, Shmoop®, or other educators’ webpages.

**Visual aids.** Add pictures. Your ELLs may actually understand what is taking place in a text if you provide a visual or a more simplistic corresponding example. The images help students connect the content with their background knowledge. Figure 1 is a brief example of a side-by-side arrangement of an original text and the simplified version, along with a visual aid.

Figure 1: A brief example of side-by-side simplified text.

Stanza Number	The Raven BY EDGAR ALLAN POE	“The Raven” Simplified and Paraphrased Version
1	 <p>Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary, Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore— While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping, As of some one gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door: “Tis some visitor,” I muttered, “tapping at my chamber door— Only this and nothing more.”</p>	<p>One night around midnight (12am), I was tired and thinking About a book of forgotten stories— While I was falling asleep, I heard a sound that sounded like someone knocking on my bedroom door: “It is a visitor,” I said, “knocking on my door— that’s all. Nothing else.”</p>
2	<p>Ah, distinctly I remember it was in the bleak December; And each separate dying ember wrought its ghost upon the floor. Eagerly I wished the morrow;—vainly I had sought to borrow From my books surcease of sorrow—sorrow for the lost Lenore— For the rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore— Nameless here for evermore.</p>	<p>I remember it was in December; And the fire was dying. I wished for tomorrow;—I was trying to find Comfort from my sadness from my books—my sadness over the lost Lenore— Sorrow for the rare and beautiful woman whom the angels name Lenore—who is not here anymore.</p>

### Scaffolds for Asking Questions

**Begin with the basics.** Start simple and use basic comprehension questions that you could go back and point to in the passage. Remember, if you have to talk to them about a question, it helps to provide a visual of where you are talking about. It also helps if you ask basic questions that they can connect with through their background knowledge.

**Leveled questions.** Work your way through leveled questions. Just because you have to start with comprehension questions doesn’t mean that is all your ELLs are capable of answering. They make inferences every day, just like your other native students. Create questions that work up to the inference you want them to make. Figure 2 presents an example of leveled questioning I use in my classroom.

Figure 2: An example of leveled questioning.

8. An **allusion** is where the author refers to something famous or well-known. What is the “bust of Pallas” speaker refers to in stanza 18? (Hint: check the footnotes for help, and you may use your phone.)

- What does the description of the “bust of Pallas” tell the reader about the raven in stanza 18?

**Sentence stems.** Sentence stems, or sentence frames, are extremely helpful for your ELLs. Their language may not translate into English the way we write it, so when you provide sentence frames, you are providing a model for how to write a grammatically correct sentence in addition to helping guide your ELL to answer the question. Sentence frames are also incredible useful for teaching an ELL how to write essays. Some examples of sentence stems are:

- Conflict can be \_\_\_\_\_ because ...
- On line \_\_\_\_, the author says, “\_\_\_\_\_.”
- This quote shows ...
- This is imagery because ...
- The speaker feels \_\_\_\_\_ because ...
- Problems in life ...

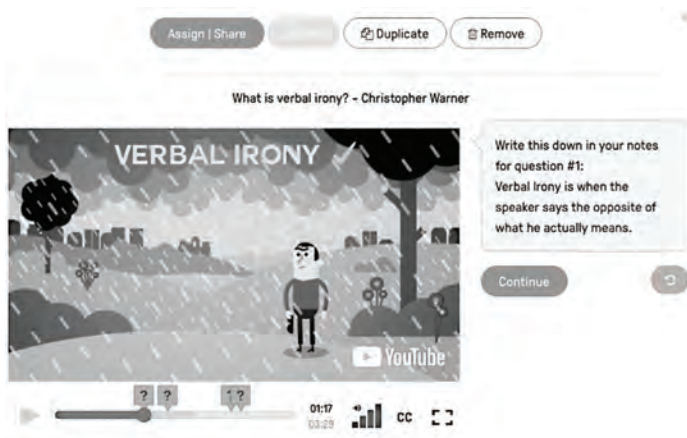
### Note-Taking

Taking notes can be challenging in any class. As students progress through their secondary education levels, notes can become even more difficult because of the pressure for college preparedness. As grade levels increase, teachers provide more content for students at a quicker pace. Unfortunately, our English language learners are simultaneously trying to keep up with the rest of the class, trying to translate and process what they are hearing, and trying to transcribe that information into their notes. There are three primary ways I deliver notes to my students.

**Fill in the blank notes.** Fill in the blank notes are helpful for ELLs because, depending where they fall on the TELPAS spectrum, they may not understand a large amount of English to be able to take notes on their own. With fill-in-the-blank notes, students have the opportunity to try to guess the answers to the blanks either independently or with a peer. In addition, I try to have a conversation with my students while I’m giving these notes in order to help them process the information. These conversations allow the students to attempt to fill in the blanks before I do as well.

**Edpuzzle notes.** Last year, I began using the website Edpuzzle to deliver class notes. Edpuzzle allows the teacher to select a video for the students to watch. As the students are watching the video, the teacher can add various multiple choice or open-ended response questions. The teacher can also add comments. As my students are watching the videos, the video will stop whenever a question or comment that I have created pops up. I provide a handout for my students to update as they follow along with the video. The comments that I input into the videos tell the students exactly what to write in their notes handout and where to write it. These notes are typically open-ended or Cornell format, and the students have to write more information in complete sentences. Because the video stops while the students are following the instructions, they don’t miss valuable information while trying to write a more extensive response. Edpuzzle is a terrific tool for ELLs because, depending on the video you choose, it provides audio for the ELL to hear the English language, pictures to go along with the content, and a visual of the vocabulary terms students need to learn. Because ELLs often hear a word differently than the way we say or spell it, having a visual is more effective. Figure 3 is a snapshot of some of the Edpuzzle notes my students use. My instructions are in the blue bubble on the right of the picture. The students are not allowed to skip ahead in the video until they click continue.

Figure 3: An example of Edpuzzle notes.



**Chunk and chew.** Because they are ELLs, they are translating everything you teach them into their language so they can understand it. They then have to re-translate it back into English in order to show you they understand it. You can help support this process if you chunk your lesson into small, manageable pieces. Let the students engage with one piece before you pile on more information. One way I use “chunk and chew” is by giving my students a section of notes. I then have them “chew” on the lesson by talking about that section or working through examples that pertain to only that section.

### Final Thoughts

As I conclude, I leave you with some final thoughts that I have picked up along my journey of instructing English language learners.

- Remember you are scaffolding content for them. As their English develops, remove the scaffolds. It is okay to let them struggle a bit. Don't just offer them answers. Many are incredibly motivated and can handle the challenges. You can hold them to deadlines to as their English grows rather than providing unlimited time. As you get to know them, you can judge their needs just as you do with your other students.
- Just because they tell you they understand it doesn't mean they actually do. ELLs will often nod, say “yes,” and smile when you ask if they understand. Ask questions that allow them to communicate their learning to you—and to themselves.
- Be mindful of their emotional and mental status. If you see an ELL put his head down, he is probably overwhelmed. Encourage him and look for ways to help scaffold an assignment. Although he is capable of the work, remember he has been decoding the English language all day and could be exhausted. Depending on where they are from, some of your ELLs don't talk to another person all day because of their language barriers. Smile at them, pat them on the shoulder, and use nonverbal cues of encouragement they can understand.

These strategies don't benefit only your English language learners—they are effective tools for reaching your other students as well. If you are working with an ELL, you are going to love them. Their strong work ethic shines through as does their deep caring for being successful

### References

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