

ELL Strategies & Best Practices: Supporting Academic Writing & Discussion

Challenge: How can ELLs develop the language skills and confidence needed to be active participants in academic writing and discussions?

Academic writing and discussion develops critical thinking skills and deepens a student's understanding of content. For ELLs, academic discussion also builds listening and oral language skills while also promoting engagement through social interaction. If discussions are structured thoughtfully, ELLs will benefit from listening to their peers model grammatical forms, vocabulary, and discussion strategies. Providing opportunities for students to write their ideas prior to discussion allows students to practice applying new language forms and reduces anxiety ELLs may have when sharing ideas aloud.

Intervention: Use Actively Learn to provide language supports to strengthen writing and discussion.

Provide Scaffolds to Support Writing

Use the ["Extra Help"](#) function in notes and questions to give ELLs supports related to the topic and language objectives (e.g., word bank with academic vocabulary, sentence stem for arguing a claim). Gradually reduce supports over time as students begin to internalize how and when to use target language forms.

Create Opportunities for Discussion

Add notes and questions within a text that encourage students to share their ideas as they are reading. This allows ELLs to review written models from their English-proficient peers and prepare their thoughts prior to an oral discussion. After reading, provide opportunities for students to build on their written responses during pair, small group, or class discussions.

Thinking about using Actively Learn to support writing and discussion? Here are some ideas:

*Include sentence stems like the ones below in notes and questions to model language forms for students to use while writing. Also, display stems for students to reference during oral discussions.**

Sharing Perspectives

I think that _____.
I believe _____.
In my opinion, _____.
From my point of view/
perspective _____.

Comparing Ideas

I agree/disagree with _____'s idea.
I agree/disagree with (statement/
quote) because _____.
My idea/claim/opinion is similar
to/different from _____'s view.

Introducing Evidence

This evidence shows _____.
This detail reveals _____.
For example/instance, _____.
The author states _____.
The data show/prove _____.

* Sentence stems adapted from: Academic Language Handbook. (2011). *English 3D: Issues*. New York, NY: Scholastic.