# Writing for Meaning:

## STRATEGIES FOR ELL WRITING ACROSS LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

TALE *Academy*

**MODULE 4 – SESSION 7**

# Writing for Meaning and ELLs

At some point in our education as teachers, we were all exposed to the four language domains of the English language arts curriculum: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. No matter what subject or grade level we teach, reading, writing, speaking, and listening are fundamental to understanding and demonstrating learning in the content areas. In Session 6, we examined how to bridge speaking and listening skills – regardless of home language – to meaningful content learning. **In this session, we will learn how to support ELLs in the writing process.**

Writing is frequently the language domain that is most challenging for students to develop, regardless of whether they are ELLs. Depending on their home languages – and whether or not they are literate in those languages – additional challenges for ELLs may include forming letters in a new script, writing in an opposing directionality, and learning new genres and organizational structures that can be cultural. Students who are not yet strong in their oral English may struggle with sound-symbol correspondence, choosing vocabulary, or forming grammatical sentences (Gibbons, 2015). It is important to evaluate ELL writing through a biliterate lens and scaffold their writing through tools such as mentor texts, brainstorming webs, paragraph frames, graphic organizers, word banks, think-pair-share interactions, and multimodal recomposition.

Throughout this module, we have emphasized the importance of centering grade-level content knowledge in the home language repertoires of ELLs. These strategies set high expectations while offering high levels of support. Requiring the use of only English limits ELLs who are just beginning to write in English or those who are multilingual and creative enough to want to express their ideas in multiple languages. As classroom teachers, we support ELLs in developing *both* their language development and grade-level ideas that deserve to be written.

## From English Composition to Recomposition

In his work on visual literacy, *I See What You Mean*, Steve Moline (2012) examines the concept of **recomposition**:

> Recomposing is simply reading information in one format and summarizing it in another format. For example, we might read a short biography of a famous person and summarize it as a timeline. This is recomposing paragraphs into a diagram. Or we could read a flowchart of an insect's life cycle and summarize it as a written recount or explanation. This is recomposing a diagram into a paragraph. (p. 29)
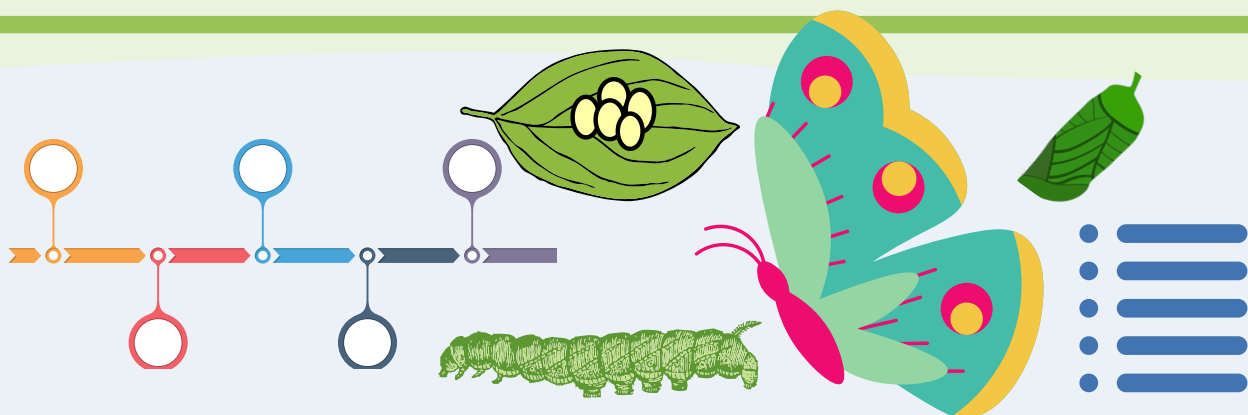
# Scaffolding Language

Recomposing provides students the space to "read," or process information, in one modality and then transform it into another format. Recomposing is a powerful concept that allows ELLs to develop grade-level ideas in multiple ways without the heavy demand of language production. This strategy is sometimes called From Text to Graphics and Back Again.

**Recomposing can be used in many ways to support ELLs in generating meaningful ideas while scaffolding language:**

## Use visuals to plan out ideas.

The visuals can be wordless or labeled in the home language, in English, or a combination. The visuals can be pictures, sketches, diagrams, outlines, or another graphic organizer (e.g., timeline, table, Venn diagram) based on a text.

## Recompose visuals into oral statements.

For example, students can first create a visual flowchart of an insect's life cycle based on a text and then recompose it by presenting it orally, using sentence stems. An ELL can present grade-level ideas visually and then recompose the visual into an oral retelling in the home language or in English. Students can also record their oral retellings using sentence stems.

## Recompose oral retellings/summaries into writing pieces.

Once students have used the visuals or graphics to orally tell about the subject, the information can be recomposed into written paragraphs. For example, a student can use the recording of their oral retelling of the visual flowchart of an insect's life cycle to make a written summary as a bilingual or English product.

**These examples demonstrate how recomposing can be used as a powerful strategy to support writing skills that also draws on the full linguistic repertoire of the student and allows for significant repetition of the content ideas in multiple formats and modalities.**

# Scaffolded Writing Process Across the Curriculum

**Let's explore a scenario that allows us to apply several writing scaffolds to support ELLs.**

Miguel is a bilingual student. His language arts teacher has asked the class to write a report about the causes and effects of deforestation, using as much English as possible. Let's look at how scaffolds can be used during the prewriting, drafting, revision, and editing stages of explanatory writing to support Miguel and other students.

*Be on the lookout for hyperlinks to resources that are web-based or portable across learning environments!*

## The Writing Process

PREWRITING    DRAFTING    REVISION

EDITING    PUBLICATION

## Scaffolding Prewriting

- The teacher tells the class that for the next 4-5 days, they will be learning about deforestation and writing an essay explaining the causes and effects of deforestation.
- The teacher creates a "forest walk" with pictures around the room or online.
- Students move about "the room" in small groups, discussing what they observe. Miguel is paired with students who speak English at intermediate and advanced fluency.
- Once the students have seen the causes and effects of deforestation, they share their observations, using bilingual dictionaries as necessary. The teacher creates an anchor chart or word wall with words and phrases about the subject in English, separating any terms related to the causes of deforestation (logging, forest fires) from effects (soil erosion, droughts) and also using general academic language that will help the students in their writing (as a result of...; due to...).
- The teacher shows a short video clip on deforestation, and the students take notes using a graphic organizer with columns for causes vs. effects. Students who are newcomers have access to a version of the graphic organizer with still images drawn from the video that they can label. Before showing the video, the teacher announces that the clip portrays six causes and six effects of deforestation and challenges them to find them all.
- After the students have seen the video once, the teacher lists the six causes and effects on the board with student help.
- The teacher pairs the students and asks the students to decide who will be Partner A and who will be Partner B.
- The teacher then plays the video clip for a second time on mute. Partner A uses the class anchor chart and his or her graphic organizer to act as the narrator of the video, explaining the causes and effects of deforestation. The teacher plays the video clip again on mute with Partner B acting as the narrator.

# Scaffolded Writing Process Across the Curriculum

## The Writing Process

PREWRITING → DRAFTING → REVISION → EDITING → PUBLICATION

## Scaffolding Drafting

- The teacher reviews a version of their writing rubric specifically for this assignment on cause and effect.
- The students read an explanatory mentor text on the causes and effects of pollution. They highlight words and phrases related to cause and effect (e.g., "sources include"), and the class discusses the organization of the text by rating it on their rubric.
- The teacher then models how to draft some of her ideas from the anchor chart and graphic organizer into an essay explaining the causes and effects of deforestation.
- The teacher establishes a translanguaging conference table or breakout room with a sign saying: "Aquí hablamos inglés y español" (We speak English and Spanish here).
- This is a space where Miguel can ask for help when writing his piece in English; he can invite peers and/or a teacher. Bilingual dictionaries are available.
- As needed, the teacher provides sentence stems or paragraph frames in English to students who need these models to begin and structure their writing.

## Scaffolding Revision

- The teacher models revising her own writing further with more details and using some of the terms and phrases in the anchor charts.
- The teacher reminds the students of their writing rubric. Students' reflections and teacher feedback include various translated language structures to improve writing.
- Miguel reads his work aloud with others or in small groups with the teacher to assess for clarity. Students can ask questions and provide bilingual support for ideas.

## Scaffolding Editing

- Based on an anchor chart and the writing rubric, students edit their writing for features such as punctuation, spelling, sentence types, and verb forms –particularly if these were prior language objectives.
- If students used bilingual tools (dictionaries, texts, peer discussions, etc.) to aid in their writing, their teacher asks them to fill out an exit ticket as a reflection on how it helped them in their writing process.

## Scaffolding Publication

**The Writing Process**

PREWRITING → DRAFTING → REVISION

EDITING → PUBLICATION

- Miguel is ready for the last step in the writing process, publication.
- He may have the option of adding visuals and diagrams or even re-translating into Spanish as time permits to analyze any differences.
- His family, teacher, and classmates can now read a digital version of his essay.

Next, let's explore two additional strategies for ELL writing across learning environments - sentences from boxes and round robin writing.

# Sentences from Boxes

For newcomers or writers in the early grades, sentences from boxes (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2013) is a strategy that allows students to generate sentences orally by making connections across boxes with content ideas and then write sentences with the support of the boxes. See if you can do this example in French based on the well-known fairy tale of Cinderella. Before you begin, read through each column and see which words might be cognates - words that may look alike, sound alike, and have the same meaning in French and English. Then, draw lines to connect the sentences. **See if you can do at least one sentence that creates meaning based on the story of *Cendrillon*.**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Au début | Cendrillon | fait | tout le royaume au bal. |
| 2. Ensuite | le prince 👑 | invite ✉️ | sa pantoufle et quittant le bal. 👠 |
| 3. Puis | la fée 🧚 | vit | la citrouille 🎃 en calèche et les souris 🐁 en cocher. |
| 4. Alors | la cloche 🕰️ | danse 🕺 | avec le prince au bal. |
| 5. Après | le couple 💑 | cherche | avec sa belle-mère et ses deux demi-soeurs. |
| 6. Mais | le prince 👑 | sonne 🔔 | minuit 🕐 et Cendrillon doit rentrer. |
| 7. Enfin | elle | perd | heureusement jusqu'à la fin de leur vie. 💕 |
| | | change | toutes les tâches de la maison. 🧹 |
| | | | partout pour retrouver Cendrillon. |

Example:  *Au début, Cendrillon vit avec sa belle-mère et ses deux demi-soeurs.*
*At first, Cinderella lives with her stepmother and her two stepsisters.*

*Were you able to make a sentence or two by connecting the boxes? A paragraph? What other scaffolds helped? Now see if you can use the support above and write out the sentences. If you have knowledge of French, feel free to add additional details from the story to complete your summary. And even if the grammar or spelling is not perfect, you are displaying knowledge of the content and perhaps learning to write a summary.*

**In the example above, there are some structured suggestions to the order of the sequencing terms. Other versions can be more open-ended. Additional pictures or a visual word bank can also be helpful. This format can also be done online with the randomizer offered by Flippity, which uses Google Sheets to form activities.**

# Round Robin Writing

Round robin writing (Echevarría et al., 2016) is an interactive writing activity. Below are instructions and a sample version of this activity based on a class reading of _Letter from a Birmingham Jail_ by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

1. Create three worksheets with writing prompts, quotations, or other questions that will elicit writing related to your content area. On each worksheet, include three different boxes for student responses, and label them A, B, and C.
2. Have students form groups of three. You may structure groups according to language backgrounds or other criteria of your choice.
3. Hand out the worksheets and have students decide who will start with which worksheet.
4. All students respond in the box labeled A for 5-10 minutes.
5. Tell students to switch papers and read the original prompt or question, their peer's response, and then add their own ideas in Box B to respond to both their fellow student and the prompt.
6. After 5-10 minutes, repeat the same procedure and have students respond in Box C.
7. Once students have responded to all three prompts or questions, have students exchange papers to read all of their peers' responses to each item.
8. Have students discuss their answers.

**Online variation**: You can set up this activity on Google Docs, Jamboard, or any discussion thread. The activity can be done asynchronously, as well. Students should return to provide feedback on their peers' responses.

**Prompt:** 1
Tension is necessary for growth, as long as it is nonviolent and constructive.

A:

B:

C:

**Prompt:** 2
I am willing to protest peacefully for the causes I believe in.

A:

B:

C:

**Prompt:** 3
I am willing to go to jail for the causes I believe in.

A:

B:

C:

# Now It's Your Turn!

In your workbook, you will identify a writing task that you plan to use in the near future. Using what you've learned, you will consider the scaffolds you can use to support your ELLs with the writing task.

# Works Cited

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# About Us

**The TALE Academy**

The TALE Academy is a series of virtual learning experiences available to all New York State educators and offers a rich array of resources on topics related to teaching across learning environments (TALE). The TALE Academy is built upon the work New York State educators carried out during emergency remote teaching (ERT) throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and extends it toward the future. TALE invites educators to think beyond online learning to consider a broader perspective on teaching and learning that encompasses teaching across multiple environments (in-person, remote, and hybrid).

**The Teaching in Remote/Hybrid Learning Environments (TRLE) Project**

The TALE Academy is part of a broader New York State Education Department (NYSED) initiative known as Teaching in Remote/Hybrid Learning Environments (TRLE). In July 2020, NYSED was awarded funding through the United States Department of Education's Education Stabilization Fund-Rethink K-12 Education Models Grant to implement TRLE – a three-year project to build the capacity of teachers and educational leaders to effectively implement remote/hybrid learning for all students. Launched in the depths of the pandemic, the first phase of the TRLE project focused on getting resources to the field through partnerships with Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) and school districts across the state. The second phase, which began in February 2022, focused on aggregating lessons learned and emerging teaching and learning strategies to address a broader field of practice: teaching across learning environments.

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