

English Language Development (ELD) Guide



What is English Language Development (ELD)?

English Language Development (ELD) is instruction designed to help students who are learning English as an additional language. It focuses on **building vocabulary, grammar, listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills** – all within meaningful, real-world contexts.

English learners need both language input (what they hear and read) and output (what they say and write).

As a tutor, your role is to make learning clear, supportive, and interactive – not to be a language teacher, but a guide to understanding and communication.

Key Terminology

Term	Example
Scaffold	break down a paragraph into smaller sentences to read together
Comprehensible Input	use visuals or gestures to make new words clear
Modeling	“Watch how I use this sentence frame...”
Guided Practice	work together on a few examples before students try on their own
Independent Practice	have the student complete a short task solo, then discuss

How to Use This Guide

- Review foundational pages before working with students.
- Use “Strategies & Tools” pages during tutoring sessions.
- Refer to “Decision Guides” for real-time problem solving.



Stages of Language Development

Understanding Stages of Language Development

English learners progress through distinct stages as they build confidence and proficiency in speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Each stage requires different levels of support and patience from tutors. Recognizing where a student is helps you adjust your approach—when to model, when to prompt, and when to let them speak independently.





How to Identify a Student's Stage:

- Listen: Notice how much English the student uses spontaneously.
- Observe: Look for signs of understanding—do they follow directions, gesture, or respond non-verbally?
- Ask: Use simple prompts or yes/no questions to gauge comfort and comprehension.
- Adjust: Match your level of support to the student's readiness—more modeling early, more independence later.

I. Beginning - Silent Period (0–12 months)

Students may not speak much but are actively listening and processing.

-  Use visuals, gestures, modeling, and repetition.
-  Don't force speech; wait and encourage.

 Tutor Tip: Point to pictures, act out verbs, and label classroom items.



Stages of Language Development

II. Developing – Early Production

Students begin mixing English and home language.

- ✓ Celebrate attempts; gently model and expand responses.
- 🗣️ Create low-pressure opportunities for speaking.

📌 Tutor Tip: Ask yes/no or either/or questions (“Is this a dog or a cat?”)

III. Fluent – Speech Emergence to Fluency

Students communicate more independently.

- ✓ Offer structured talk opportunities (pair, group).
- 🧠 Encourage risk-taking and self-expression.

📌 Tutor Tip: Encourage full-sentence responses using sentence frames.

IV. Bridging – Expanding Language Proficiency

Students use a wide range of vocabulary and sentence structures, but may still need support with academic or abstract language.

- ✓ Encourage elaboration and use of academic vocabulary.
- 💬 Provide opportunities for extended speaking and writing.

📌 Tutor Tip: Prompt students to explain ideas fully, compare and contrast concepts, and justify answers using evidence or reasoning.

As students progress through these stages, the tutor’s role shifts—from modeling and providing structure to facilitating independent speaking, reasoning, and collaboration. Celebrate small gains, model curiosity, and provide space for students to practice new language without fear of mistakes.

Building Relationships and Cultural Awareness



Strong relationships and cultural awareness are essential for English learners to feel safe taking risks with language.

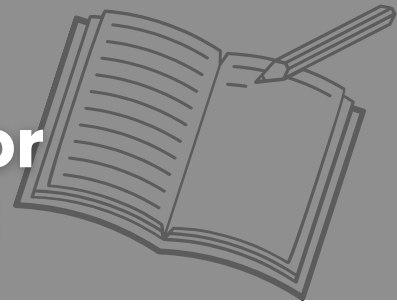
Students learn best when they feel respected, supported, and understood.

Use patience, empathy, and curiosity to build trust before focusing on correction or output.

If a student is:

- **New and mostly silent:**
 - Wait and give space for listening.
 - Use gestures, visuals, and reassurance instead of expecting immediate speech.
 - Recognize that silence often means the student is processing new information.
- **Attempting to speak:**
 - Encourage and repeat gently, expanding their words into full sentences.
 - Validate effort more than accuracy to build confidence.
- **Upset or unsafe:**
 - Interpret immediately; prioritize emotional safety before academic tasks.
 - Offer calm reassurance and check in privately if needed.
- **Confused by complex directions:**
 - Simplify instructions or model the task step-by-step.
 - Avoid translating every word—focus on meaning and demonstration.
- **In group talk:**
 - Wait and observe before stepping in; peer interaction builds authentic language use.
 - Pair new learners with patient, supportive peers when possible.

Scaffolding Strategies for Comprehensible Input



Scaffolding helps English learners move from heavy tutor support to confident, independent communication. The goal is to make language and tasks clear at first, then gradually remove supports as students build understanding.

How to Make Input Comprehensible

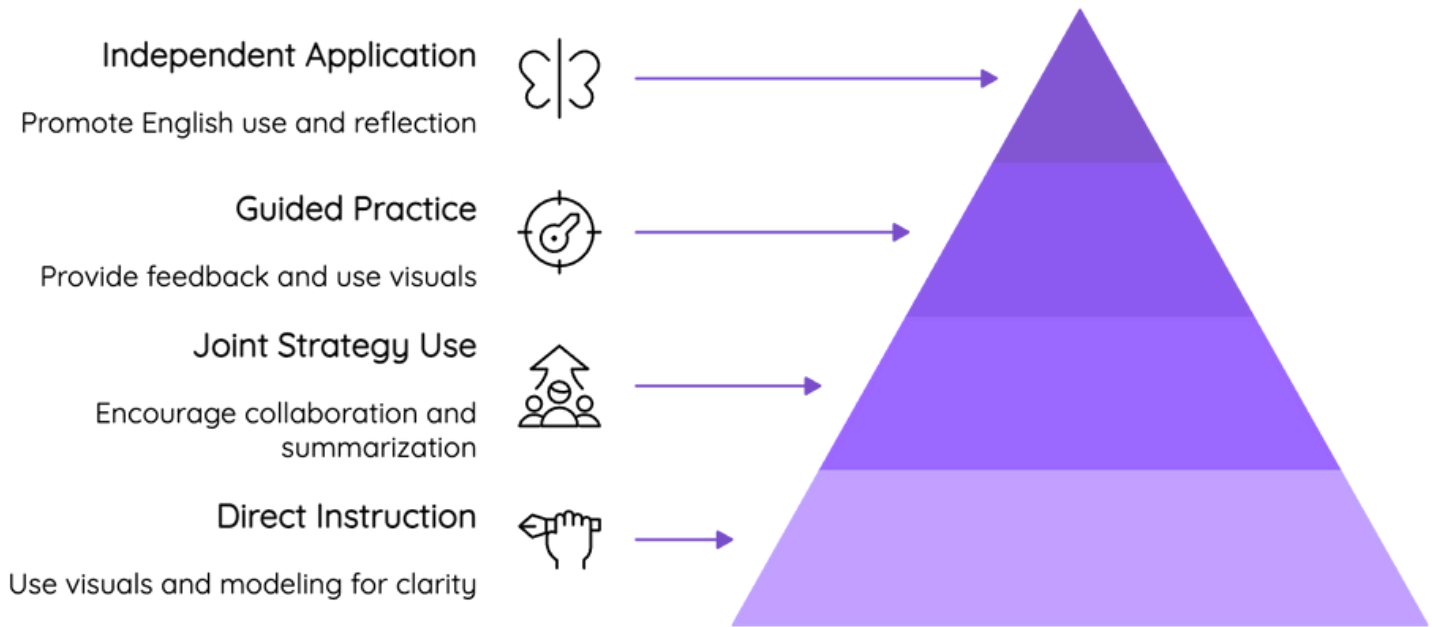
- Use gestures, visuals, and real objects to connect language to meaning.
- Speak slowly and clearly, using short, consistent phrases.
- Reinforce key vocabulary and model sentence patterns students can imitate.

Using the Scaffolding Pyramid

The scaffolding process isn't a fixed sequence—it's flexible support that adjusts to student readiness.

- Start with modeling when students are encountering new language or tasks.
- Move to collaboration by letting students explain, compare, or summarize ideas together.
- Guide students' practice through targeted feedback and prompts that push their thinking.
- Encourage independence by reducing prompts and allowing students to use English freely, while still affirming effort and accuracy.

Scaffolding Strategies for Comprehensible Input



📌 Tutor Tip: Think of scaffolding as a balance—too much support can limit independence, while too little can cause frustration. Adjust your level of help based on how confident and accurate the student feels.

Scaffolding creates a pathway from guided learning to confident, independent communication. As support decreases, students take greater ownership of language use—moving from observing and modeling to collaborating, practicing, and finally, expressing ideas on their own.

This gradual release of support mirrors the natural process of language growth: Tutors provide structure early on, then step back as students demonstrate readiness to communicate and think independently.



Speaking and Listening Routines

Speaking and listening routines help students practice academic language in structured, low-pressure ways. These strategies build confidence, comprehension, and communication skills that support success across all subjects.

1. Think–Pair–Share

Students first think independently, then share ideas with a partner before speaking to the group.

Purpose: gives every student time to organize their thoughts and practice using complete sentences.

📌 Tutor Tip: Allow adequate “think time” before pairing students to respond.

2. Revoicing

The tutor restates a student’s idea in clear academic language and asks, “Did I get that right?”

Purpose: validates the student’s thinking and models strong phrasing without direct correction.

📌 Tutor Tip: Use this to reinforce key vocabulary and sentence structure naturally.

3. Sentence Starters

Provide frames to help students form complete thoughts. Encourage full responses rather than single-word answers.

For describing ideas:

- “I noticed that...”
- “One example is...”
- “The reason I think this is...”




Speaking and Listening Routines

For Comparing or Explaining:

- “This is similar to ___ because...”
- “It’s different from ___ because...”
- “I agree/disagree because...”

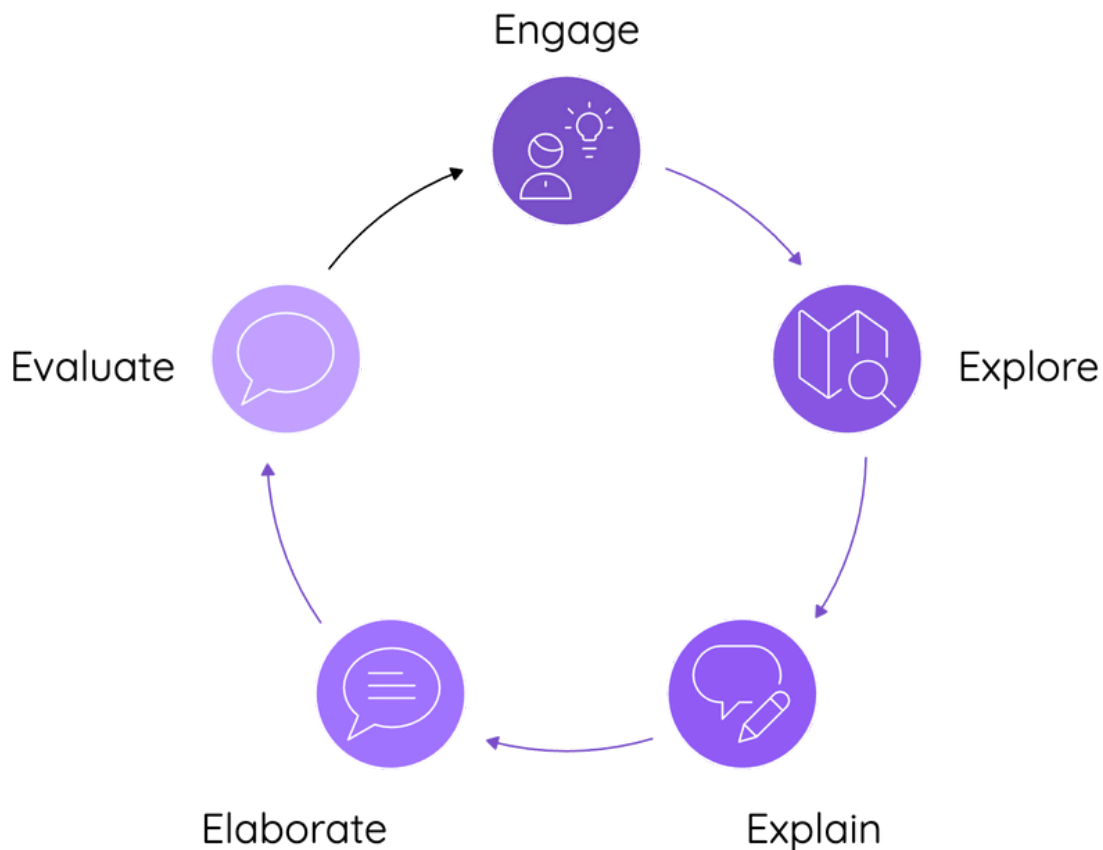
For Justifying Thinking:

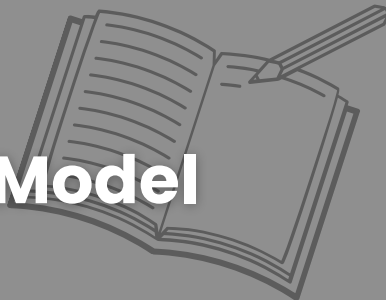
- “My evidence is...”
- “According to the text...”
- “Another reason is...”

 Tutor Tip: Model how to use one or two sentence starters before asking students to try. Repetition builds fluency.

4. Talk Moves (5E Model)

Use these prompts throughout a session to keep discussions meaningful and student-centered.





Talk Moves Aligned to the 5E Model

Talk Moves are adapted from the classroom discourse research of Sarah Michaels and Cathy O'Connor (Accountable Talk® / Talk Science Primer).

5E Phase	Purpose	Aligned Talk Moves
Engage	spark curiosity, connect to prior knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What makes you think that? • What do you notice? • Have you seen something like this before?
Explore	encourage investigation, multiple approaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you show me another way? • What strategy did you use? • Who can add on to that idea?
Explain	clarify understanding, use academic language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you put that in your own words? • What do you mean when you say...? • Where in the text/problem did you find evidence?
Elaborate	extend thinking, apply to new contexts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does that connect to what we read/solved? • What's another example of this? • Does anyone have a different perspective?
Evaluate	reflect on reasoning, assess learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you agree or disagree? Why? • What is the most important part of what you just shared? • Can you explain your steps from start to finish?

Tutor Tip:

Talk Moves don't belong in just one part of a session—use them throughout, but notice how certain prompts are especially powerful at different stages of the learning process.



Technology Tools and Translation

Technology tools are common classroom accommodations that support accessibility without replacing instruction.

Translation Technology

- **Bilingual Dictionaries or Word-to-Word Translation Tools:** Allow students to look up unfamiliar words in their first language without changing sentence meaning. This is a standard accommodation in classrooms and supports comprehension during lessons.
- **Google Translate:** conversation, text translation, and upload of student work
- **Microsoft Translator:** live captioning, real-time translation for parent/teacher engagement, and one-on-one translation

Note: Before using any of the resources above, it is recommended that you get permission from your school site/district.

Students expect feedback when they provide oral responses. ELLs require acknowledgment on both language use and task performance.

- **Recasting:**
 - Repeat what the student said, but in the correct form.
- **Explicit Correction:**
 - Repeat the student's words using rising intonation to signal an error.
- **Elicitation:**
 - Ask the student to self-correct without providing the answer.
- **Clarification Request:**
 - Ask for clarification when an utterance is unclear.
- **Repetition:**
 - Repeat the error verbatim to draw attention to it.
- **Metalinguistic Feedback:**
 - Give an explicit comment about the nature of the error without correcting it.




Practical Tools for Tutors

Effective tutoring for English learners relies on clear communication, consistent encouragement, and supportive structures that make learning feel achievable. The goal is to make every interaction an opportunity for comprehension and meaningful expression.

These supports help students access both the content and the language of instruction. Visuals and gestures turn abstract concepts into something students can see and understand before they're able to express it fully in English.

Visual & Language Support





- anchor charts, labeled visuals, and word banks
- bilingual glossaries or Google Translate (for clarification only)
- color-code or highlight key concepts

 Tutor Tip: Review visuals again after the activity to reinforce comprehension and retention.




Visual Cues for Clarification

Use these gestures, visuals, and supports to make meaning clear—especially during moments of confusion or new vocabulary introduction.

Gestures:

-  Point to your ear = Listen carefully.
-  Open palms = Show understanding or share.
-  Pretend to write = Write your answer or take notes.
-  Hand up = Pause / wait before answering.

Visual Supports:

-  Use pictures or drawings to illustrate new words.
-  Highlight or color-code key vocabulary.
-  Keep bilingual word banks or labeled visuals nearby.



Practical Tools for Tutors

Clarify Instructions

- “Let’s look at that sentence together.”
- “Can you show me what that means?”
- “What’s another way to say that?”

✦ Tutor Tip: Break directions into steps and repeat using consistent language.

Questioning and Modeling

- What do you think this is about?
- Why do you think this is the answer?
- How did you determine this?
- Use sentence frames (“I think... because...”).

✦ Tutor Tip: When students struggle to respond, model your thought process out loud—this helps them hear how academic reasoning sounds in English.

Encourage Language Use

- “Try it — it’s okay if it’s not perfect.”
- “That’s a great start — can we add one more detail?”

✦ Tutor Tip: Give every student time to think before responding, especially when forming new sentences.

Build Confidence

- “I can tell you’re thinking carefully.”
- “I like how you used that new word.”

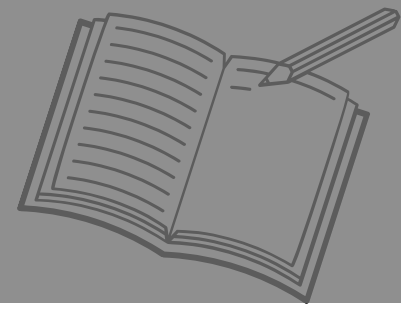
✦ Tutor Tip: Encouragement builds willingness to take risks with language—a key step toward fluency.



Feedback

- Praise effort and risk-taking, not just correctness.
- Rephrase errors naturally without direct correction.
- Provide clear, simple directions.

Situation	What Tutor Can Do	What to Avoid
Student doesn't respond	Use visuals and give wait time.	repeating louder or faster
Student mixes languages	Encourage, model English phrase.	correcting mid-sentence
Student confused by text	Break into chunks, use gestures.	reading everything for them
Student gives one-word answers	Praise effort, then prompt for expansion ("Can you tell me more?"). Use sentence starters to build longer responses.	accepting one-word answers without follow-up
Student misunderstands directions	Demonstrate one example and have them try again. Re-check comprehension with "Show me" or "Tell me what to do first."	over-explaining or translating everything directly
Student looks disengaged	Ask a quick, low-pressure question related to the topic ("What do you notice?"). Use movement or visuals to re-engage.	calling out or assuming disinterest
Student dominates discussion	Acknowledge their contribution, then invite peers ("Let's hear another idea"). Use turn-taking prompts.	ignoring quieter students or cutting them off abruptly
Student anxious about speaking	Provide think time, sentence frames, or pair-sharing before group discussion. Praise attempts over accuracy.	forcing immediate or public responses



Final Reminders

Silence doesn't mean confusion — it often means the student is processing new language. Give time and space for understanding to naturally develop.

Remember that English learners may:

- Feel anxious about speaking or writing incorrectly.
- Experience hesitation due to past experiences where mistakes were criticized or misunderstood.

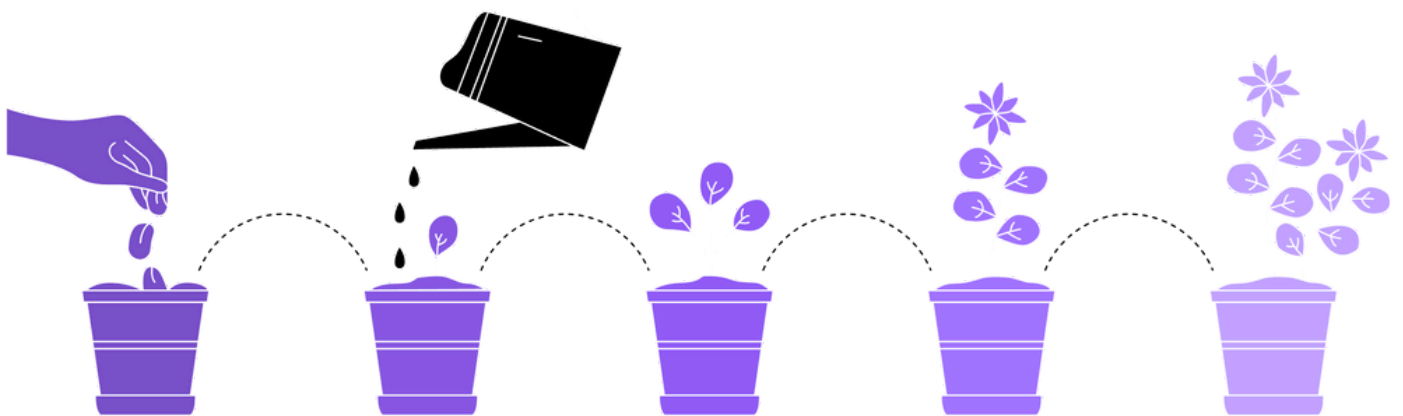
Create a judge-free zone where effort is always encouraged, and peer support is the only acceptable response to mistakes. Pause, wait, encourage, and trust the process. Confidence grows from safety, not correction alone.

Reflect After Each Session

Take a moment to think about:

- one time you chose to wait before helping
- one time you decided to step in
- What helped the student most?

From Anxious to Confident English Learner



Anxious
Learner

Fear of mistakes and
criticism

Create Safe
Space

Judge-free zone with
peer support

Pause and
Wait

Allow time for
processing new
language

Encourage
Effort

Recognize and
value all attempts

Confident
Communicator

Meaning visible,
repeatable, and
safe