

Writing, Grade K

EL

Writing is just one aspect of learning English; some children will be more comfortable learning to write in English than others. Reassure English learners that they are learning new skills with each piece they complete. Encourage them to take pride in their hard work. Taking work home and participating in class exhibitions can be especially important for English learners. Some English learners will come to kindergarten knowing different alphabet or character systems than those used in English; encourage these students to share what they know about other writing systems.

Language difficulties may prevent English learners from clearly writing their ideas; however, they may have strong ideas that they want to communicate. Encourage them to express themselves in oral or written form. In a safe environment that emphasizes good ideas rather than error-free English, students will continue to take risks with a second language. These risks are associated with more rapid language acquisition. In kindergarten, students can dictate their ideas and the teacher can be the transcriber.

As students get older, pair an English learner with a native English-speaking student. Have them discuss their plans for writing and help each other with their writing ideas. Sharing ideas provides English learners with confidence and a sense that their ideas are worthwhile.

At first, English learners may wish to draw or cut out pictures to express themselves. Encourage them to tell or write about their pictures. Once they are reading, they may be ready to write. One way to ease the students into writing is to have them write as a group following these steps:

1. Explain the subject of the piece of writing. Give examples to help the students start.
2. Each student may suggest a sentence, and the group can build a piece of writing together.
3. Depending on the capabilities of the students, take one of these approaches:
 - Have the students write the sentences on their papers.
 - Write the sentences on the board for the students to copy onto their papers.
 - Write the sentences on paper for the students. (You may wish to write in light pencil.) Later, or as homework, make photocopies, and have the students trace over the sentences with ink or colored pencils.
4. The piece of writing may be considered complete at this point, or the students can use what they write in class as a template and write their own pieces, changing words here and there. They can also illustrate the piece. These activities may be completed as homework.

Early on, it is important that students learn how to ask about anything they don't understand. As soon as possible, teach children to use the phrases, "What is _____?" and, "Please explain _____." Students learn the vocabulary they are curious about fastest. Encourage students to ask questions, and use questions as an opportunity to clarify.