

# Build your strongest MTSS Tier 1: **A Tier 1 for Everyone**

## English Language Learners

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# Support for English Language Learners:

Helping ELLs benefit from Tier 1 instruction.

**English Language Learners (ELLs)** are the fastest demographic in U.S. public schools. This group of learners brings vastly diverse experiences, backgrounds, strengths, and challenges to the classroom.

Each English Learner has their own unique story. And in turn, each state, district, and school has their own approach to supporting their unique population of ELLs.

But the challenge every **English Learner shares is learning a new language** while also learning from **grade level content**. And when English Learners are included in general education classrooms, [educators often lack the resources, training, and time needed to help ELs \[1\]](#) engage with learning.

If English Learners don't feel like they belong or continue to fall behind their peers, they're [more likely to drop out \[2\]](#) of school. That's just one reason why **including English Language Learners** in your MTSS Tier 1 design is helpful, no matter what EL programming looks like in your school, state or district.

The guide linked below offers **simple strategies** and **resources** to help educators, administrators, and MTSS teams create learning environments where ELs:

- Feel a greater **sense of safety, belonging, and connection**
- Can gain **cultural context** and understanding from instruction
- Are able to add **richness** and **value** to their communities
- Have tools that help them **understand the general curriculum, build vocabulary, and boost language acquisition**, independently

**In this guide to supporting English Language Learners at Tier 1, we will:**

- Meet the ELL **expert** who helped to inform this guide
- Gain **five quick tips** for general classroom educators (for MTSS teams and administrators to consider building into Tier 1)
- Learn about **four considerations for EL Learners** for MTSS teams and administrators
- Discover additional **English Learner resources**

This guide is not intended to replace robust, targeted language programming and services for English Language Learners. It also doesn't cover all aspects of effective MTSS, like progress monitoring for ELs. But links to excellent resources that cover many of these components are included.

As with many of the strategies included in Texthelp's Tier 1 guides, you'll notice that many also help neurodivergent learners, or any learner.



#### MEET THE EXPERT:

## Sarah Elia

Sarah Elia is an English as a New Language Teacher at Saugerties Central School District in New York, as well as former president of New York State Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages.

"All my writing, I do to help me improve my work at the school," Sarah says, "Every day there's a new challenge and I think, How do I fix this?"

"I need to write it down, just like writing in a journal. It helps me and then I hope I'm helping my colleagues too, because I'm articulating what the issue is and how we can address it."

Sarah frequently works with SIFE students, or [Students with Interrupted Formal Education](#). [3] SIFE students only make up 10-20% of the English Language Learner population, but their challenges are complex.

"Many SIFE students aren't familiar with the expected behaviors for a school setting. They don't really know what formal interactions between a teacher and a student look like. They don't know how to follow along with notes," Sarah says.

"And of course, there's the language barrier. But then there's a lot of emotional issues too- they may have experienced parental loss or may not have a parent in this country. They may have to financially support themselves.

"When you have all these weights on you as a teenager, it's really hard to function successfully in the classroom. There

are massive hurdles to overcome before we even talk about how you're teaching them in the classroom.

"That's why teachers need to be flexible and empathetic, to be open to longer deadlines, offering more accommodations, and knowing their story. Sitting side by side with a student and reading to them, or listening to them while they read aloud; just providing this comfort for them so they can feel safe and at ease when they're learning. That's the most important thing."

"You'll find among all the students there's a percentage of students who have heavy backgrounds. It's not realistic to expect the teachers to learn all these backgrounds.

"It's hard to say, please listen to what this person's story is because we need to be empathetic to them. Teachers are often teachers because they have a natural empathy. But it's a lot. It's a heavy weight.

"So maybe at least just understand that if you have an English Language Learner, especially from a country that is below our level of standard of living, they probably have a background that we need to be empathetic toward."

EL-related articles by Sarah Elia:

- [The Administrator's Role in the Success of ELLs](#) at Edutopia [4]
- [Enhancing Collaboration Between Classroom Teachers and ELL Specialists](#) at Edutopia [5]
- [Four Ways to Engage Multilingual Learners with the Times](#) at the New York Times [6]
- [Welcoming Newly Arrived High School ELLs](#) at Edutopia [7]
- [Using Station Rotation in PD for Supporting English Language Learners](#) at Edutopia [8]
- [Highlighting World Languages in Elementary Schools](#) at Edutopia [9]

# Quick tips for general education classrooms.

Consider integrating these practices into Tier 1.

## 1 Loop in the EL Specialist with these simple actions.

- **Add your student's EL specialist to your Google Classroom or LMS** so they can track grades and assignments and offer the right support.
- **Ask the EL specialist if there's anything you should know about the student.** Background information can help you connect with the student and understand their individual needs.
- **Ask the EL specialist for strategies or resources** that can help you reach your EL learners.

## 2 Connect with your EL Learners one-on-one through reading.

Build connections and trust with your EL Learners by sitting with them while they read aloud, or reading aloud to them.

This helps to create a learning environment where they feel safe and seen, in addition to giving their language acquisition and literacy a boost.

### Supporting research:

- Supraba, A. (2020, June 5). [The implementation of reading aloud in developing students' speaking skill. IDEAS: Journal on English Language Teaching and Learning, Linguistics and Literature.](#) [10]

## 3 Link to a supplemental video or text to give cultural context and build background knowledge.

Many EL Learners may not have the necessary contextual or background information that other learners have gained simply by living in the United States.

Sarah suggests using a very simple, short children's video to offer this background knowledge. Linking to supplemental videos within assignments can be a simple way to support ELLs.

**This practice also helps learners with autism**, as well as learners from low-income families, who may also need additional background knowledge to make content connections.

### Supporting Research

- Neuman, S. B. (n.d.). [Building Background Knowledge. Reading Teacher](#), 68 (2), 145-148. [11]

## 4 Use visuals to supplement instruction.

Including visuals in your instruction is a great way to build understanding in all learners, but particularly EL Learners, who benefit from the universal language of visual representations.

**This practice also helps learners with autism** who may also need additional context in order to make content connections.

### Supporting research:

- Halwani, N. [Visual Aids and Multimedia in Second Language Acquisition. English Language Teaching](#), 10(6). [12]

## 5 Use entrance and exit tickets.

Entrance and exit tickets are completed at the beginning or end of a lesson, and can help build connections between educators and English Learners. These quick written check-ins give learners a way to show what they know, and feel safe asking about what they don't know. They can also be an opportunity for learners to make content connections and give teachers insight into their understanding and progress.

The written format means that both learners and educators can use translation tools to communicate and open up a regular channel of communication.

- **Entrance tickets:** A short writing exercise done at the beginning of class. Prompts or questions can include simply asking about a student's day, assessing students' prior knowledge, or a fun exercise related to instruction.
- **Exit tickets:** A short writing exercise done at the end of class. Prompts or questions can include reflecting on the content material, relating the content material to something personal for the student, checking for understanding, or offering the space to ask questions.

### Supporting Research

- Jeyaraj, J S. [Entrance/Exit Slips and Learner Autonomy. LangLit: An International Peer Reviewed Open Access Journal](#), 2(3), 62-66. [13]

# Considerations for administrators and MTSS Teams:

## 1 Create regular professional development opportunities that considers English Language Learners, like:

- How to use translation supports, like Google Translate or [\\*Co:Writer](#), [14] for reading, writing, and translating.
- Opportunities for educators to understand what school is like for EL Learners, and how to best support them.

Sarah shared how she did this in her district in her Edutopia article, [Using Station Rotation in PD for Supporting English Language Learners](#). [8]

- [Culturally responsive teaching practices](#) [15] that value English Language Learners as integral members of the school community with much to contribute to the classroom.

## 2 Group EL learners together in general education classrooms so they feel safe.

“When I say grouping, I mean in the same general education classroom, not necessarily all sitting together,” Sarah says, [“Grouping is not necessarily good or bad for academic outcomes](#). [16] It’s just that they can benefit from the support of multilingual peers.”

“In many schools that don’t have a bilingual program, you find these kids in classes alone. I’m not in all the science classes. I’m not in all the history classes, math classes, so in those cases, in a way, the students are alone.”

## 3 Invite an EL specialist to join your MTSS team.

According to a survey conducted by Texthelp [17] in July of 2023, only 18% of respondents said that their school or district MTSS teams had ELL specialist representation.

Building your MTSS Team to represent as many disciplines as possible will help create systems that meet the needs of all learners.

An EL Specialist can offer MTSS teams insight into a districts’ unique ELL community, review instruction and intervention from a multilingual lens, and make suggestions for including English Learners and their families in the school community.

## 4 \*Consider literacy tools to help ELLs translate, read, and write independently, as well as gain language and fluency skills.

[Read&Write](#) [18] is a literacy support toolbar that travels with students across digital work environments like Microsoft Word, Google Docs, Google Classroom and Canvas.

English Language Learners can access the features listed below by clicking the associated visual icon on the toolbar.

### Read&Write Supports for ELLs:

- [Create automatic vocabulary](#) lists [19] that include definitions and visuals for each word. When you come across unfamiliar words while reading, highlight them to save them for later. Then, automatically create a separate doc with all the highlighted words and a definition, a picture definition, and a column for their own notes with one click.
- [Translate with the translator tool](#) [20] for single words in over 90 languages. It can read aloud the words in many languages as well.
- [Check written work for spelling and grammar errors](#). [21] This “Check It” feature works together with the translator feature to help ELLs edit their work.
- [Specialized word prediction](#) [22] can help ELLs who spell phonetically with their writing.
- [Use Read&Write in multiple languages](#) [23] by changing the language settings, making learners able to work in their primary language.
- [The Dictionary and Picture Dictionary](#) [24] define unfamiliar words in a text with a single click, with either a definition or a visual.
- [Text-to-Speech with highlighting](#) [25] is a bimodal presentation of language that helps build both reading skills and language acquisition.
- [The Screenshot Reader](#) [26] is able to read text aloud from PDFs and photos.
- Voice Notes 27 allow language learners to add spoken notes in their preferred language to their work, to help them study or to come back to later.
- [Practice Reading Aloud](#) [28] helps language learners practice reading independently, and also share that practice with their teachers for feedback.
- [Rewordify](#) [29] automatically locates complex words in a text, and changes them into simpler words. Learners can click the word, which Rewordify italicizes, to change back and forth between the simple and more complex word, helping to build vocabulary.

[Co:Writer](#) [30] is a specialized writing support toolbar that, like Read&Write, travels with students across digital environments like Microsoft Word, Google Docs, Google Classroom and Canvas.



English Language Learners can access the features listed below by clicking the associated visual icon on the toolbar.

#### Co:Writer Supports for ELLs:

- [Speech-to-Text that translates spoken language into English writing](#) [31] so ELLs can speak in their primary language to write in English.
- [Automatically translate writing in another language into English.](#) [32]
- [Prompt on-topic English vocabulary](#) [33] with word prediction that's tailored to selected themes.

If your team is interested in learning more about how Read&Write and Co:Writer can support English Language Learners in your state, district, or school, [get in touch with a Texthelper](#) [34] who'd love to show your team the tools.

\*This recommendation is from the publisher of this resource, Texthelp, and not Sarah Elia.

#### Resources:

- [National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition English Learner Toolkit](#) offers ten chapters of guidance, from identifying ELLs to communicating with families. [35]
- [Multitiered System of Supports for English Learners](#) covers evidence-based instruction and intervention for ELLs. [36]
- [ESL/ELL Education: Interactive Websites for Learning](#) from the University of Wisconsin-Madison has an incredible list of resources for ELL Learners. [37]
- [Tankhuynh.com](#) is a website and blog full of helpful, actionable content for educators looking for resources to support multilingual learners. [38]
- [English Language Learner Resource Collection](#) from the New York State Education Department was compiled in 2020, but remains relevant. [39]
- [Helpful Online Resources for Teaching ELLs](#) by Laurel Schwartz at Edutopia. [40]

## Resources

- [1] [www.scholarworks.waldenu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=7336&context=dissertations](http://www.scholarworks.waldenu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=7336&context=dissertations)
- [2] [https://www.fordham.edu/media/review/content-assets/migrated/pdfs/jadu-single-folder-pdfs/Factors\\_That\\_Challenge\\_English\\_Learners\\_and\\_Increase\\_Their\\_Dropout\\_Rates.pdf](https://www.fordham.edu/media/review/content-assets/migrated/pdfs/jadu-single-folder-pdfs/Factors_That_Challenge_English_Learners_and_Increase_Their_Dropout_Rates.pdf)
- [3] [www.aft.org/ae/spring2020/custodio\\_oloughlin](http://www.aft.org/ae/spring2020/custodio_oloughlin)
- [4] [www.edutopia.org/article/how-school-leaders-can-support-english-learners/](http://www.edutopia.org/article/how-school-leaders-can-support-english-learners/)
- [5] [www.edutopia.org/article/working-english-language-learning-specialists-school](http://www.edutopia.org/article/working-english-language-learning-specialists-school)
- [6] [www.nytimes.com/2023/11/15/learning/lesson-plans/ways-to-engage-multilingual-learners.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/15/learning/lesson-plans/ways-to-engage-multilingual-learners.html)
- [7] [www.edutopia.org/article/welcome-high-school-ell-students](http://www.edutopia.org/article/welcome-high-school-ell-students)
- [8] [www.edutopia.org/article/professional-development-teaching-english-learners](http://www.edutopia.org/article/professional-development-teaching-english-learners)
- [9] [www.edutopia.org/article/introducing-world-languages-elementary-school](http://www.edutopia.org/article/introducing-world-languages-elementary-school)
- [10] [www.ejournal.iainpalopo.ac.id/index.php/ideas/article/view/1319](http://www.ejournal.iainpalopo.ac.id/index.php/ideas/article/view/1319)
- [11] [www.eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1040830](http://www.eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1040830)
- [12] [www.files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1143525.pdf](http://www.files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1143525.pdf)
- [13] [www.dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3486737](http://www.dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3486737)
- [14] [www.academy.texthelp.com/cowriter/translate-speech-to-english/](http://www.academy.texthelp.com/cowriter/translate-speech-to-english/)
- [15] [www.understood.org/en/articles/what-is-culturally-responsive-teaching](https://www.understood.org/en/articles/what-is-culturally-responsive-teaching) <https://phys.org/news/2023-10-grouping-english-learners-classrooms-yields.html>
- [16] <https://phys.org/news/2023-10-grouping-english-learners-classrooms-yields.html>
- [17] <https://www.texthelp.com/resources/blog/mtss-how-schools-states-and-districts-do-it/>
- [18] [www.academy.texthelp.com/read-and-write-education/introduction/](http://www.academy.texthelp.com/read-and-write-education/introduction/)
- [19] [www.academy.texthelp.com/read-and-write-education/vocabulary/](http://www.academy.texthelp.com/read-and-write-education/vocabulary/)
- [20] [www.academy.texthelp.com/read-and-write-education/translator/](http://www.academy.texthelp.com/read-and-write-education/translator/)
- [21] [www.academy.texthelp.com/read-and-write-education/check-it/](http://www.academy.texthelp.com/read-and-write-education/check-it/)
- [22] [www.academy.texthelp.com/read-and-write-education/prediction/](http://www.academy.texthelp.com/read-and-write-education/prediction/)
- [23] [www.academy.texthelp.com/read-and-write-education/using-multiple-languages/](http://www.academy.texthelp.com/read-and-write-education/using-multiple-languages/)
- [24] [www.academy.texthelp.com/read-and-write-education/dictionary-picture-dictionary/](http://www.academy.texthelp.com/read-and-write-education/dictionary-picture-dictionary/)
- [25] [www.academy.texthelp.com/read-and-write-education/text-to-speech/](http://www.academy.texthelp.com/read-and-write-education/text-to-speech/)
- [26] [www.academy.texthelp.com/read-and-write-education/screenshot-reader/](http://www.academy.texthelp.com/read-and-write-education/screenshot-reader/)
- [27] [www.academy.texthelp.com/read-and-write-education/voice-notes/](http://www.academy.texthelp.com/read-and-write-education/voice-notes/)
- [28] [www.academy.texthelp.com/read-and-write-education/practice-reading-aloud/](http://www.academy.texthelp.com/read-and-write-education/practice-reading-aloud/)
- [29] [www.academy.texthelp.com/read-and-write-education/rewordify/](http://www.academy.texthelp.com/read-and-write-education/rewordify/)
- [30] [www.academy.texthelp.com/cowriter/introduction/](http://www.academy.texthelp.com/cowriter/introduction/)
- [31] [www.academy.texthelp.com/cowriter/translate-speech-to-english/](http://www.academy.texthelp.com/cowriter/translate-speech-to-english/)
- [32] [www.academy.texthelp.com/cowriter/translate-writing-to-english/](http://www.academy.texthelp.com/cowriter/translate-writing-to-english/)
- [33] [www.academy.texthelp.com/cowriter/topics-for-vocabulary-support/](http://www.academy.texthelp.com/cowriter/topics-for-vocabulary-support/)
- [34] <https://www.texthelp.com/education/book-a-meeting/>
- [35] [www.ncela.ed.gov/educator-support/toolkits/english-learner-toolkit](http://www.ncela.ed.gov/educator-support/toolkits/english-learner-toolkit)
- [36] [www.mtss4els.org/](http://www.mtss4els.org/)
- [37] [www.researchguides.library.wisc.edu/c.php?q=177873&p=1169756](http://www.researchguides.library.wisc.edu/c.php?q=177873&p=1169756)
- [38] [www.tankhuynh.com/](http://www.tankhuynh.com/)
- [39] [www.nysed.gov/sites/default/files/programs/bilingual-ed/resource-collection-for-ells-2020-05-24.pdf](http://www.nysed.gov/sites/default/files/programs/bilingual-ed/resource-collection-for-ells-2020-05-24.pdf)
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