

The ART of the Sentence for Multilingual Learners



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ABSTRACT: As schools intentionally plan to meet the needs of all learners, educators need practical approaches that support multilingual learners (MLs) in both language growth and academic success. Writing is often one of the most complex tasks for students learning a new language. This article introduces the ART of Teaching MLs: the ABLE, READY, TEACH Framework. The framework emphasizes identifying student strengths (Able), determining what students need next for language development (Ready), and implementing high-quality instructional practices (Teach). Using a student writing example, the article demonstrates how the framework helps educators analyze writing at the sentence level to make instructional decisions and support student learning. The ART of Teaching MLs framework models an asset-based approach that honors students' languages, strengths, and brilliance.

Keywords: sentence-level writing, language development, instructional decision-making, asset-based pedagogy, analyzing student evidence

1. Introduction

Multilingual learners enter classrooms with diverse linguistic strengths that serve as a powerful foundation for literacy and learning. As they engage in complex thinking and navigate new language simultaneously, writing becomes one of the most revealing and challenging tasks teachers can ask them to do. It also offers an opportunity to analyze student work and anchor instructional decisions in evidence of what students know, what they can do, and how their language is developing across content areas and settings.

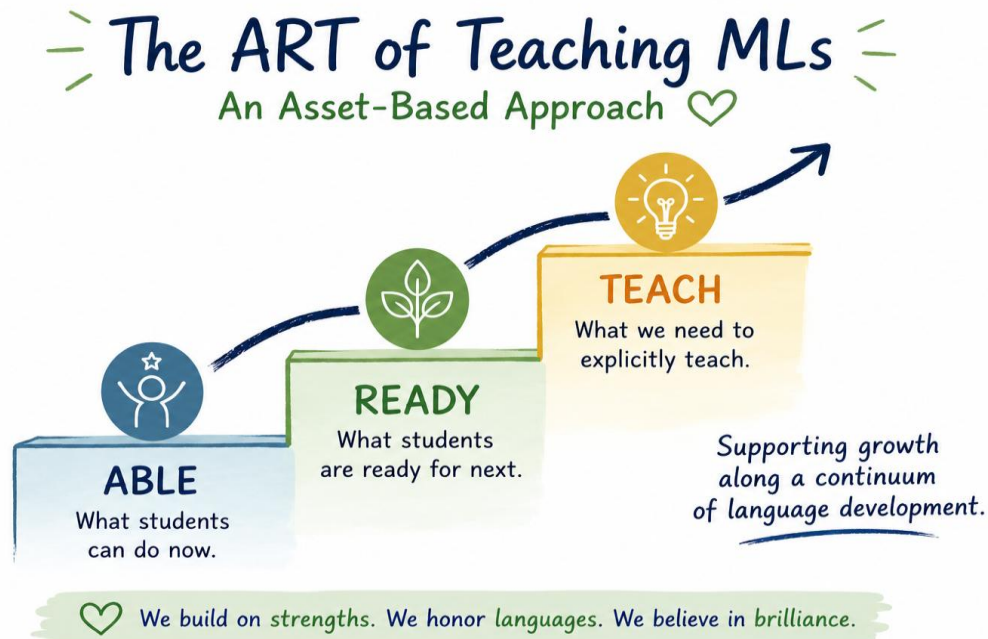
To respond effectively, teachers can examine writing across three interconnected levels of language: the word level, sentence level, and discourse level (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2014; Sedita, 2019; Staehr Fenner & Snyder, 2017). At the word level, students develop vocabulary, determine meaning, and use language to communicate precise ideas. At the sentence level, students learn how words and phrases work together to express increasingly complex ideas. At the discourse level, students develop and organize ideas across sentences, paragraphs, and larger texts for a specific purpose, task, and audience. Together, these levels provide a lens for understanding both the strengths multilingual learners bring and the instructional opportunities ahead to support academic language development.

This article intentionally uses the term multilingual learners (MLs) to honor students' multiple languages and ways of communicating as assets rather than deficits. The role of educators is not to replace one language with another but to build on what students already know and can do across languages. This mindset shapes how teachers talk about students, collaborate with colleagues, and design learning experiences. It calls us to use student-first language, commit to an asset-based approach, and maintain a broad view of academic language. As Tonya Ward Singer (2025) reminds us, "Effective educators of MLs don't accept predictabilities of 'success or failure' correlating with any racial, ethnic, cultural, economic, or language factor. We maintain a firm belief in our students' brilliance and in our capacity to impact their success" (p. 4). Beliefs matter because they influence the instructional decisions teachers make every day.

Since language develops across all content areas, every educator shares responsibility for supporting MLs' writing. This article is intended for both ML teachers and specialists who may use it to guide professional development and collaboration as well as classroom teachers who may be newer to working with MLs. Meaningful impact requires all of us to work together, engage in ongoing collaboration, and bring multiple perspectives to better understand and support students.

In this article, the authors focus on the sentence level, where instruction can have an immediate impact on MLs' writing development. One of the authors, Brenda Daisy, created the ART of Teaching MLs: The ABLE, READY, TEACH Framework to support teachers with analyzing student writing and determining next instructional moves from an assets-based perspective (see Figure 1). This framework helps educators identify what students are ABLE to do, what they are READY for next, and what to explicitly TEACH to support growth along a continuum of language development.

Figure 1. The ART of Teaching MLs



Note: Image generated using ChatGPT by OpenAI and refined by authors (2026).

2. Common Challenges of Writing Instruction

When considering students' language development, teachers note that proficiency in writing is one of the last domains of language to fully develop. There are likely several reasons for this. Productive language builds on foundational oral language skills and carries a greater cognitive demand. The complex nature of writing has been referred to as the ultimate "mental juggling act" (Moats & Tolman, 2019, p. 326). It is a way to document thinking by showing the connection between ideas which requires a depth of understanding as well as the ability to express those ideas (Hochman & Wexler, 2017).

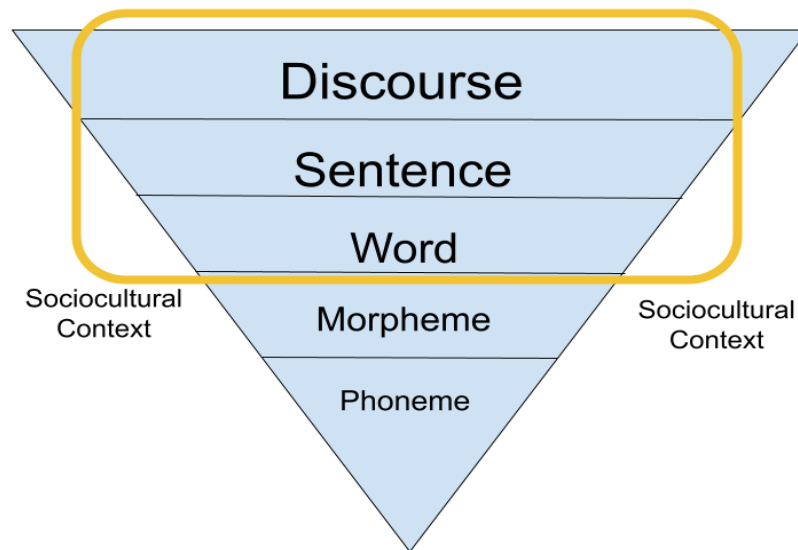
Another issue might be that student writing reflects oral language characteristics rather than following accepted academic writing conventions. In other words, students write like they talk, resulting in writing that is characterized by a narrow range of complexity, such as overreliance on pronouns rather than multi-word noun phrases, or simple sentences rather than more elaborated sentence variety containing compound and complex sentence structures. At the same time, students may rely on formulas or scaffolds such as sentence stems to approximate written academic structures.

Student output may also be influenced by factors such as background knowledge and instructional practices. Students are often told to write, not *taught* to write. Beyond the lack of explicit instruction, MLs may not have robust experience reading the types of writing that they are expected to produce. Finally, teachers may not focus the necessary amount of explicit instruction on grammar and the structure of language – due in part to their own level of knowledge or (dis)comfort in explicitly teaching language. Those who do include "grammar" in their instruction may take a prescriptive or corrective approach, rather than one that is generative and contextualized. Finally, it is easier to notice student "mistakes" in grammar, which appear on the surface, rather than the underlying syntax. Perhaps this is a function of the complexity and time-intensive nature of analyzing and acting on evidence from student writing.

Pedagogical approaches to writing have evolved from a focus on technical aspects like syntax or even length and structure requirements (e.g., five paragraph essay) to consideration of power dynamics reflected within the sociocultural context. Rather than simply reading mentor texts out loud as models and then telling kids to write, frameworks like Sedita's (2019) Writing Rope emphasize the various components of proficient writing: critical thinking, syntax, text structure, writing craft, and transcription. The genre approach of Systemic Functional Linguistics emphasizes teaching students how to construct texts through examining mentor texts and making thoughtful choices in organization and sentence structures (Brisk, 2015; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

Research shows MLs need explicit vocabulary development (word level), instruction in syntactical structures (sentence level), and genre conventions (discourse). Staehr Fenner and Snyder (2017) situate these levels of language within the sociocultural context as it has an overarching effect on how language is used (see Figure 2). Yet when focusing on language in a lesson, most teachers default to vocabulary instruction. Teaching vocabulary is necessary for language development but not sufficient. Students need both the "bricks" of vocabulary as well as the "mortar" of syntax to construct something that stands as a whole (discourse) (Dutro & Moran, 2003). It takes time to look at student writing with a "language lens" that goes beyond vocabulary and examines the underlying patterns of sentences in order to instruct students toward writing more complex and nuanced sentences.

Figure 2. Word, Sentence, Discourse Levels



Note: Adapted from Diane Staehr Fenner & Sydney Snyder (2017), *Unlocking English Learners' Potential*.

3. Language Proficiency Levels

One way to have a better understanding of what students can do, and consequently what they are ready to learn next, is by being aware of their language proficiency level. Federal law requires an annual assessment of language proficiency for all identified EL (English Learners) in K-12 school districts in the United States. All three authors work for K-12 school districts in ELPA21 states (Iowa and Nebraska); for that reason, tools from that assessment consortium are referenced here. Each assessment consortium takes a slightly different approach in how they delineate levels and descriptors for English language proficiency (ELP) scores. However, all consortia report scores by language domains: listening, reading, speaking, and writing. A student's scores on the domains lead to an overall proficiency level. For ELPA21, domain scores of 1s and 2s equal emerging, scores of 4s and 5s equal proficient, and every other combination of scores (mostly 2s, 3s, and 4s with a possible 5 or 1 mixed in) equal progressing (Regents of the University of California, 2025).

Once a student's ELP scores are known, looking at their score on the writing domain from the most recent assessment gives educators a helpful starting point. The next instructional steps become clearer based on the progression of language development. Educators might be tempted to think that writing scores of 1s or 2s suggest a focus on instruction at the word level while scores of 4s or 5s would equate to the discourse level. However, the sentence level is a critical building block in improving any student's writing score. Whether it is putting together a few words in the correct order to convey meaning or generating a complex sentence that shows the relationship of two ideas, *all* MLs can benefit from explicit writing instruction at the sentence level.

Sometimes student scores from the annual ELP assessment may be "old" and not reflective of how a student is currently performing. Expecting growth and anticipating changes in performance levels aligns with an asset-based approach. It is also one reason formative assessment is such a critical tool for educators as up-to-date data about MLs leads to targeted instruction.

4. Formative Assessment

Formative assessment bridges the gap between annual ELP assessments by providing ongoing evidence of students' language development throughout the school year. "Formative Assessment is a deliberate process used by teachers of MLs and ML students during instruction that provides actionable feedback used to adjust ongoing language and content instruction aimed at improving students' attainment" (Regents of the University of California, 2023). The continuous process, involving both teachers and students, can take multiple forms: long-cycle, medium-cycle, and short-cycle. Long-cycle assessments, such as annual achievement testing or unit tests, can cover learning over the course of a unit, a semester, or a school year. Medium-cycle assessments, such as quizzes, drafts, or short responses, can occur within units or anywhere from one to four weeks. However, the most impactful for MLs are short-cycle formative assessments, which occur minute-by-minute, within, and between lessons and allow for immediate feedback and instructional adjustment. This frequent assessment is crucial for ML given the dynamic nature of developing language and content simultaneously.

One especially valuable form of short-cycle formative assessment is on-demand writing (or prompt writing), which provides a snapshot of what students can independently produce during instruction. Unlike final drafts which are often highly scaffolded, process-oriented pieces that benefit from feedback and revision over time, on-demand writing allows teachers to analyze student language use in the moment and make immediate instructional decisions based on what students are able to do independently. Additionally, this allows for teachers to assess what students are able to produce without outside resources such as AI. For MLs, this process is critical because it supports informed decision-making about academic language, content access, instructional scaffolds, and feedback, ensuring access to growth-oriented feedback in the moment.

In writing, formative assessment helps us understand what students can currently produce at the word, sentence, and discourse levels. Teachers use this evidence to adjust instruction and facilitate language development by supporting more precise word choice, increased sentence complexity, and more cohesive and organized discourse. Formative assessments become the bridge between what students are ABLE to do now and what they are READY to do next, guiding intentional TEACHing that accelerates both language and writing development.

5. The ART of Teaching MLs: The ABLE, READY, TEACH Framework

The ABLE, READY, TEACH Framework is a set of formative assessment tools for productive language. It offers educators a structured way to analyze student evidence from an assets perspective and plan instruction that capitalizes on their strengths and growth areas.

5.1. Step One: What are students ABLE to do?

In order to provide effective feedback and deliver effective instruction, teachers need to understand what students are able to do relative to the sentence-level target as well as the next step in learning. In the professional contexts of the authors, the ELPA21 Proficiency Level Descriptors, or PLDs, (Regents of the University of California, 2020) are a valuable tool to clarify where students are on the language progression.

There are other tools from states, researchers, and national consortia which can also help teachers identify where students are working along a learning continuum and select the next target. But first, in order to analyze what students are *able* to do with sentences, teachers have to see sentences differently. The example below, which is a composite example based on an on-demand writing prompt, will be used to illustrate the shift toward seeing sentences with a language lens.

Figure 3. Student Evidence Sample

<i>Prompt:</i> What did you do over spring break? Tell what you did. Include at least three details about activities and people. Include a beginning, middle, and an end.
<i>Student evidence:</i> <i>for spring break i went to my dads house and i played with his dog and we went for a walk and we played catch and we went to the park and we took him to the vet and we got him a haircut and his name is mookie</i>

If teachers were asked, “What do we think *most teachers* see when they look at this writing sample?” they might respond with the following:

- No capital letters
- No periods
- Run-on sentences
- And, and, and...That’s how my kids write
- They’re writing like they talk

These observations, while true, take a deficit view. Likewise, if feedback flows from these observations, teachers are likely to provide corrective feedback, like “look at your capitalization” and “find where to put periods.” When instruction is focused on translating meaning, feedback like this focuses on surface characteristics (transcription) and does little to advance the student’s academic language at the sentence level. While foundational skills are essential to “fluent and accurate” encoding (Moats & Tolman, 2019), that area of focus is outside the scope of this article. This work centers on translation of ideas, rather than transcription, at the level of syntax.

Thinking through the “levels of language,” word, sentence, and discourse, helps teachers create and communicate clear learning intentions and success criteria including language objectives (Echevarria, Frey, Fisher, 2016). At the discourse level, the student was prompted to write a retell and include a beginning, middle, and end. In lessons focused on success criteria of answering a prompt appropriately and organizing material logically, teachers might give corrective feedback on the organization of ideas: *You ended with a new piece of information – the name of the dog. Our goal is to include details in the middle, and write an ending that matches the beginning. Where else could you tell the dog’s name?* And teachers might choose to do this prior to addressing the level of the sentence.

However, for this exercise, the success criteria focus only on developing academic language at the sentence level. To do so successfully, teachers must look beyond the surface, taking an “x-ray” of language structures, to first identify what students are able to do at the sentence level of language in order to advance their syntax. Teachers might use tools like the PLDs (Regents of the University of California,

2020) from ELP Standard 10 for grade 3, which correspond to Common Core standards L.3.1 and L.3.3 (see Figure 3) or the Student Evidence Analysis Tool (see Table 1).

Table 1. Example Progression of an English Language Proficiency Standard

Grade 3: Standard 10					
ELP.2-3.10.	By the end of each English language proficiency level, an ELL can ...				
	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
An ELL can... make accurate use of standard English to communicate in grade-appropriate speech and writing.	With support (including context and visual aids), • understand and use a small number of frequently occurring nouns and verbs • respond to simple questions.	with support (including visual aids and modeled sentences), • recognize and use some frequently occurring collective nouns (e.g. group) • recognize and use some frequently occurring verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and conjunctions • produce simple sentences in response to prompts.	with support (including modeled sentences), • use some collective nouns • use the past tense of some frequently occurring irregular verbs • use some frequently occurring adjectives, adverbs, and conjunctions • produce and expand simple and some compound sentences.	• use collective nouns • use the past tense of frequently occurring irregular verbs • use an increasing number of adjectives, adverbs, and conjunctions • produce and expand simple, compound, and (at Grade 3) a few complex sentences.	• use collective and commonly occurring abstract nouns (e.g. childhood) • use the past tense of frequently occurring irregular verbs • use coordinating and commonly used subordinating conjunctions, adjectives, and adverbs • produce and expand simple, compound, and (at Grade 3) some complex sentences.
Note: Content reproduced from English Language Proficiency Standards (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2014); formatting recreated by the author.					

Table 2. Student Evidence Analysis Tool

ELP Productive Language (Speaking/Writing) Student Evidence Analysis Tool Sentence Level Only			
	Emerging <i>Using an emerging set of strategies with prompting and support (including context and visual aids)</i>	Progressing <i>Using a developing set of strategies with support (including modeled sentences, context, and visuals)</i>	Proficient <i>Using a wide variety of strategies with increasingly independent control and ease</i>
Sentence Level ELP 10	Contains phrases and short, simple sentences	Contains simple, compound, and expandable sentences	Contains a variety of sentence lengths (simple, compound, and complex)
	Includes a minimal number of grammatical structures (simple prepositions, adjectives, or conjunctions) to provide detail	Shows developing complexity that begins to use grammatical structures (prepositional phrases, adjectives, conjunctions, etc.) to provide detail	Contains a range of grammatical structures (noun phrases/abstract nouns, a variety of verb tenses, conjunctions, adverbs, compound adjectives) to expand sentences with detail
	Some amount of sentences may be copied or closely adapted from models	A small amount of text may be copied or adapted at the sentence level	A minimal amount of text may be copied or adapted at the sentence level
<i>Note: Adapted from WIDA (2007), Staehr Fenner & Snyder (2017). Modified to include the ELP Standards: At A Glance (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2014).</i>			

As teachers review these tools, which are intended to be used as a continuum of potential success criteria rather than “rubrics,” note that they describe grammatical structures that characterize different stages of language development at the sentence level. This descriptive view of grammar contrasts from a more traditional view; teachers may perceive grammar instruction as focusing on a set of prescriptive “rules” which students sometimes “break” (e.g., don’t end a sentence with a preposition, don’t split an infinitive, never use a double-negative). With that prescriptive mindset, teachers may focus on correcting what they see as grammatical “errors.” With language learners, this may have the paradoxical effect of stunting the development of their syntax as they may stick to simple sentences in order to avoid making “mistakes.”

Rather, the authors invite educators to expand their understanding of grammar to be able to take that mental “x-ray” of the underlying patterns of academic language. Structures matter. In order to convey ideas and relationships such as cause and effect, sequence, problem/solution, academic writers need command of a range of sentence types. This involves (re)familiarizing teachers with grammatical terms such as simple, compound, and complex sentences. Likewise, in order to provide examples, evidence, and details, students must command structures like prepositional phrases, conjunctions, and adverbials.

Considering again the student evidence in Table 1, what is the student “Able” to do with written language? With an assets-view, an orientation toward descriptive (rather than prescriptive) grammar instruction, and

a focus on the next level of the learning progression, teachers are now able to take an “x-ray” of the student’s language at the sentence level. The three-column graphic organizer below is used to support teachers with applying the ART of Teaching MLs framework.

Table 3. The ART of Teaching MLs: ABLE Graphic Organizer

ABLE <i>What is the student able to do with written language?</i>	READY <i>What is the student ready to do next? What’s the most beneficial next step?</i>	TEACH <i>How will we teach them? What instructional strategies will be used?</i>
• Produce complete clauses (subject + verb + idea) • Use pronouns correctly • Use simple noun phrases with articles and possessives • Use simple verb phrases in past tense to express actions/states • Apply word order consistently with English syntax • Use prepositions phrases to add detail • Connect ideas with the frequently-used conjunction “and”		

When teachers look below the surface, they are able to lift something deeper about sentences than capital letters and periods. Again, these conventions and foundational skills have a time and place during instruction in encoding. However, by slowing down and taking an assets approach, teachers can look closely at the student evidence to reveal what the student is ABLE to do. This is crucial because teachers must know what micro-linguistic features students have mastered in order to know what they are READY to do next. That is how to strategically move academic language learning forward.

5.2. Step Two: What are students READY to do next?

With an understanding of what the student is able to do, consider the next logical step: what students are READY to do. The ELPA21 PLDs (Regents of the University of California, 2020) Standard 10 or the sentence-level language analysis tool can be used to examine the sentence-level progression and identify the next likely step along the continuum. Table 4 below provides examples of what students might be READY to do next.

Table 4. The ART of Teaching MLs: ABLE & READY Graphic Organizer

ABLE <i>What is the student able to do with written language?</i>	READY <i>What is the student ready to do next? What's the most beneficial next step?</i>	TEACH <i>How will we teach them? What instructional strategies will be used?</i>
• Produce complete clauses (subject + verb + idea) • Use pronouns correctly • Use simple noun phrases with articles and possessives • Use simple verb phrases in past tense to express actions/states • Apply word order consistently with English syntax • Use prepositions phrases to add detail • Connect ideas with the frequently-used conjunction “and”	• Separate ideas into simple and compound sentences (with sentence boundaries) • Use a wider range of coordinating conjunctions (and, but, so) • Include simple dependent clauses (because, when, after) • Expand noun phrases with additional detail • Use a wider variety of prepositions • Vary the beginnings of sentences with adverbials of time and place (For spring break, At the park, After that...)	

This list derives from current strengths and outlines the next step in learning. Rather than leaping to a new system, teachers are helping the student put one foot in front of the other along the continuum of language development. Then teachers select the next “right” learning. Teachers can review this list and choose what to teach and when. The highest leverage moves might be the following:

- Separate ideas into simple and compound sentences (with sentence boundaries)
- Use a wider range of coordinating conjunctions (and, but, so)
- Vary the beginnings of sentences with adverbials of time and place (For spring break, At the park, After that...)

To clarify the intended learning, it is incredibly helpful, especially as teachers are learning to see sentences with a language lens, to create an exemplar (Figure 4) of what the new paragraph could look like.

Figure 4. Example of figure

Prompt: What did you do over spring break? Tell what you did. Include at least three details about activities and people. Include a beginning, middle, and an end.
Anticipated Student Response: <i>For spring break, I went to my dad's house. When I was there, I played with his dog, and we went for a walk. After that, we took his dog to the park, but it was a little cold. So we played catch for a little while, and then we took the dog to the vet. Later, we got him a haircut...</i>

Now that there is clarity about the target, as well as what success actually looks like, teachers are ready to decide how to TEACH the student in order to achieve success.

5.3. Step Three: How will we TEACH them what they need to know?

After looking closely at what one student is able to do with language and what the next possible learning might entail, teachers need to determine the best teaching (engagement) strategies. This work involves holding back corrective feedback and instead deconstructing and reconstructing the language that students are using. This contrasts from grammar instruction that is focused on labels, terms, and error correction. Instead, the term “applied grammar” refers to grammar instruction that is contextualized within reading and writing tasks and focused on how language structures are used to communicate meaning (Pusey, 2026). This approach is consistent with the principles of Task-Based Language Teaching (Ellis, 2003) which positions meaningful communication as the primary driver of language learning. Within authentic tasks, teachers intentionally draw students’ attention to language patterns that support increasingly precise communication. Teachers use students’ own sentences, or similar sentences drawn from classroom texts, content, or tasks, to expand students’ repertoire of sentence patterns. In this way, grammar becomes a tool for making meaning rather than an end in itself. The ART framework applies this principle by providing teachers with a systematic process for identifying what students are ABLE to do with language and what they are READY to do next, then selecting instructional routines that support language development.

Table 5. The ART of Teaching MLs: ABLE, READY & TEACH Graphic Organizer

ABLE <i>What is the student able to do with written language?</i>	READY <i>What is the student ready to do next? What's the most beneficial next step?</i>	TEACH <i>How will we teach them? What instructional strategies will be used?</i>
• Produce complete clauses (subject + verb + idea) • Use pronouns correctly • Use simple noun phrases with articles and possessives	• Separate ideas into simple and compound sentences (with sentence boundaries) • Use a wider range of coordinating conjunctions (and, but, so)	• T-Chart: Who/What Does What • And/But/So • Sentence Combining • Sentence Expansion • Say it, Write It

• Use simple verb phrases in past tense to express actions/states • Apply word order consistently with English syntax • Use prepositions phrases to add detail • Connect ideas with the frequently-used conjunction “and”	• Include simple dependent clauses (because, when, after) • Expand noun phrases with additional detail • Use a wider variety of prepositions • Vary the beginnings of sentences with adverbials of time and place (For spring break, At the park, After that...)	
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5.3.1. Sentence Boundaries

To help the student identify sentence boundaries, teachers might use a t-chart like the following:

Who or what...	does what?
i i we	went to my dad’s house played with his dog went for a walk

For the sample paragraph, teachers could use one of the student’s paragraphs or a similar set of sentences that the teacher develops or chooses. Instructionally, teachers can tell students that they are looking for the “who and the do” as recommended by LETRS (Moats & Tolman, 2019). As teachers model with an anchor chart, students can record their notes on the t-chart. Then, using gradual release, students can practice with several more independent clauses. It is important to note that students do not need to know the phrase “independent clause” at this time. Teachers can refer to this as a complete thought including a “who or what” and a “does what.”

Once students have several examples of independent clauses mapped out on their graphic organizer, they might benefit from a mini-lesson on sentence boundaries (which could include capital letters and periods). Through modeling, perhaps on lined paper, teachers can demonstrate how to write thoughts with appropriate sentence boundaries, one after the other, in paragraph form. Students can rewrite their own paragraph, this time with appropriate sentence boundaries.

5.3.2. Using Conjunctions to Create Compound Sentences

A next instructional move might involve expanding the number of conjunctions that students use. If the targets are “and,” “but,” and “so,” teachers can provide a mini-lesson on the purpose of the conjunctions: “and” connects ideas, “but” contrasts ideas, and “so” connects one action (or a cause) with a subsequent

action (an effect). Then, teachers can introduce the strategy of sentence combining by using oral language to practice connecting familiar statements prior to writing (Say it, Write it):

Original Sentences: “It was raining.” “We had to stay inside for recess.” (and, but, so)

Student-produced (oral) target: “It was raining, so we had to stay inside for recess.”

The transition to combining written sentences also involves mini-lessons in correct punctuation for compound sentences. Again, students can use oral language first.

I can use “and, but, so” to connect ideas orally		
Sentence 1	Sentence 2	Combined sentence

Then, students can practice sentence combining activities in writing. A practice page could look something like this:

1. It was raining. We had to stay inside. (and, but, so)

2. I went to my dad’s house. We played with his dog. (and, but, so)

5.3.3. Using 5WH to Expand Sentences with Details

The 5WH strategy, also called “Sentence Stretch,” invites students to ask questions of themselves as if they were a reader in order to fill in details that a reader might wonder about while reading. The aim is to add their own description and details by asking themselves answerable questions using question words (who, what, where, when, why, and how).

To do this, teachers can provide a simple sentence that is characteristic of the student’s writing: *We played with his dog.* Teachers can ask any of the 5WH questions (who, what, where, when, why, and how) orally and, using shared writing, can model how a sentence can be stretched to include more description and detail.

Where?	in the backyard
When or for how long?	For about an hour
Who	my cousin and I
What type of cousin?	My younger cousin and I
What type of dog?	New

Expanded sentence: My younger cousin and I played with my dad's new dog in the back yard for about an hour.

Students can write the sentences while the teacher is leading the shared writing/modeling activity to ensure engagement and attention to the sentence-level form. Teachers can later gradually release students to practice expanding their own sentences by asking themselves any of the 5WH sentences. This can be practiced and scaffolded with anchor charts, games, or manipulatives (question words on spinners or on cards, for example).

Ultimately, students can develop the same paragraph that was originally written in order to embed familiarity with the task and practice new sentence-level skills in ways that are integrated with their previous knowledge and strengths.

6. Conclusion

Multilingual learners bring many strengths to the classroom. At the same time, their skills with communication might not yet extend to academic writing, especially at the sentence level. In the early stages of language development, learners benefit from explicit instruction in different linguistic contexts and purposes, as well as practice moving between oral and written language. Disciplinary discourse demands complex and detailed sentence structures to communicate ideas. Teachers may focus language instruction on vocabulary, or support discourse with graphic organizers.

This article contends that instruction at the sentence level can move students' academic language forward in meaningful ways. In order to do that, teachers need to view sentences with a language lens, examine what students are able to do with syntax, consider what they might be ready to do next, and determine how to teach them. This is the ART of Teaching Multilingual Learners Framework.

The benefits of explicit instruction and targeted practice at the sentence level are many. Carefully designed instruction in the area of syntax can help bridge the gap between the input of vocabulary instruction and the targeted output – that is, stringing vocabulary words meaningfully into complex, complete ideas. For MLs, this is crucial and leads to more equitable access to participation in disciplinary discourse in both speaking and writing. Further, student engagement is enhanced through increased opportunities to respond. When teachers see more student output in the form of evidence, they have more chances to monitor language development and provide the kind of specific, meaningful feedback that moves learning forward. Finally, sentence-level strategies such as those described above are low-prep and high-utility. They can be layered within existing curriculum and materials across content areas; nothing special is needed – just teacher knowledge and skill.

6.1. Call to Action

To help students develop sentence-level language, teachers need training in the characteristics of academic language beyond vocabulary. The process of learning to look at syntax with a language lens takes time and practice. Crucially, taking students from their current level of language development to the next requires that teachers focus on assets. This shift in mindset must be developed intentionally and practiced in structured ways over time. Teachers must have opportunities to analyze and name what students are able to do at the sentence level, use tools to identify the next step, and strategically match

instructional strategies to the learning outcome. For this to happen, teachers need job-embedded and high-quality training in high-leverage instructional practices. But strategies are not enough. Teachers need to practice first identifying intended learning *then* match the strategy to the intention. Most importantly, teachers need structured time to examine the student evidence that results from the strategy. Students already bring rich language to the classrooms that teachers can work with in order to help them create complex and nuanced sentences - if they honor that language, build on their strengths, and believe in brilliance.

The Authors

Brenda Daisy serves as an ESOL Coordinator in Iowa for West Des Moines Community Schools and an adjunct professor at Drake University's School of Education where she focuses on multilingual learner instruction, curriculum design, and professional learning for educators. She loves both the art and the science of teaching multilingual learners.

Shaeley Santiago is a former secondary EL teacher, instructional coach, and now EL coordinator for Ames Community School District in Ames, Iowa. She is passionate about advocating for multilingual learners and partnering with teachers to improve student outcomes.

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