

Guidance for “Student Learning Objectives” For English Language Learners (ELLs)

The guidance document for creating “Student Learning Objectives (SLOs)” for ELLs provides information regarding the development, assessment usage and assessment interpretation when teachers, including ESL and bilingual teachers create SLOs for the English language learners (ELLs). Due to language barriers and diverse proficiency levels, ELL students’ growth may be incorrectly targeted, assessed and interpreted.

Overview:

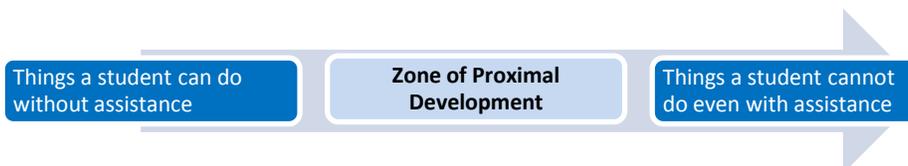
Teachers will be developing SLOs for all students. Teachers, including ELL and bilingual education teachers, who manage their own classrooms, are required to complete SLOs. Bilingual and ELL teachers who serve as support or resource teachers may participate in the collaborative or team goal setting and/or peer review processes.

However, English language learners (ELLs) will require a different approach given the limitation of formative assessments, validity and reliability of such assessments for this language group of students. Additionally, given the academic nature of the SLOs, this group of students will have **ACADEMIC** goals, not language goals. When assessing academic content, teachers will have to pay attention to the following considerations and/or implications:

1. Assessment appropriateness: which assessments reduce language demands but rather measure content?
2. Program models: how are the ELLs currently receiving services?
3. Result interpretation: are the results valid, reliable and informative?
4. Although these are academic goals, what are the language supports needed to achieve the goals?
5. Are assessments in the language of instruction being utilized?

Guidelines for writing SLOs for ELL students:

SLOs for ELL students should be rigorous and attainable. There are many ways to conceptualize rigor. One way is conceptualize Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) model which describes the range between a task that can be completed without instructional guidance (independently) and a task that cannot be completed, even with guidance. The most effective instruction aims at the space within this zone because it provides challenge that causes students to learn without frustrating them by being completely inaccessible. Since a language barrier exists at the heart of ELL learning, goals should aim at the ZPD--the zone of both rigor and attainability.



Teachers should ensure:

- content targets for ELLs are informed by students’ language comprehension and communication skills
- you are writing academic goals, not language proficiency growth goals

- growth trajectories reflect appropriate gains for students, based on identified starting points or benchmark levels.

Special Considerations:

When setting SLOs for ELLs, teachers will need to consider the role language development has in the learning process by considering the following:

- Developing English language proficiency takes a student on average five to seven years. ELLs are in the process of learning academic language and content simultaneously.
- The process of learning language may vary from one student to another.
- The progression or continuum of English language development is not necessarily linear in nature.
- Learning a language is distinct from learning academic content and although the tasks are highly correlated, the means for measuring gains in English language proficiency along a language development continuum differ from the ways academic content is acquired and measured.
- Social and cultural context plays a significant role in language acquisition and the general development process.
- Language development is based on the principle of amplifying and expanding a student's language exposure and use.

Assessment Considerations:

These considerations have implications for the assessment instruments used in the implementation of SLOs for this target population:

- ELLs are required to make gains in English Language Proficiency. The ACCESS for ELLs® is the required state assessment for measuring a student's growth in English Language proficiency. The assessment is not intended to measure students' knowledge or growth of academic content.
- When using a standardized assessment as an evaluation tool for measuring student growth learning goal or outcome, this tool should be:
 - ✓ Appropriate for the ELLs within the given context
 - ✓ A valid and reliable measure
 - ✓ Appropriately norm-referenced for an ELL (is the student's gains consistent with those expected of other English learners)
 - ✓ Be able to communicate fairness and lacks bias
 - ✓ Support the language acquisition process by being rigorous and attainable, yet sufficiently broad in score. (For example, an SLO that is focused on a literacy skill such as developing reading fluency may be achievable and measurable but does not aid a student in progressing along the language continual or support the higher cognitive demands of the common core as a SLO focused on summarizing or comprehension)

Finally, if formative assessments designed around classroom instructions are to be used in developing the SLOs, the following questions should be taken into account:

- a) What are the language supports needed to achieve the academic content goals?
- b) Program models: how are the ELLs currently receiving services?
- c) Are your assessments in the instructional language of the content?