

Scaffolds to Support English Language Learners in Writing and Discussion

Sentence Frames/Starters

When to use sentence frames/starters

English Language Learners (ELLs) can benefit early on in their English development from sentence frames/starters to help them understand the type of content they are being asked to talk or write about. Sentence frames help students who are new to English by providing vocabulary and structure that they wouldn't be able to produce on their own. Sentence frames are particularly helpfulⁱ when writing about more linguistically complex ideas such as:

- Analysis/Prediction
- Explanation
- Cause and Effect

Sentence frames/starters help students understand what they should be analyzing within a text in order to complete a writing or discussion activity, and should be used as a scaffold with the aim of having students build toward the ability to analyze and write about content without the use of the frames. Teachers should differentiate sentence frames—offering some straightforward phrases that prompt the use of specific vocabulary for early ELLs, and offering other frames that are either more open-ended (thus reducing the level of scaffold) or prompting the students to make more complex connections to other concepts.

It is important that teachers not misuse or overuse sentence frames. Making the use of sentence frames mandatory for all students or using them too frequently can stunt students' creativity and lead to parroting of phrases rather than deeper thought. Once students are able to produce structured responses on their own, sentence frames should no longer be provided.ⁱⁱ

Students should understand how the sentences constructed through use of frames and starters are used to convey meaning, and eventually contribute to larger written work such as paragraphs and essays.ⁱⁱⁱ

Examples^{iv}

Analysis:

- I anticipate that _____ causes _____.
- I think that _____ will happen because _____.
- I think _____ might _____ because I know that _____.
- If _____ then _____.

Explanation:

- One reason _____ may occur is because _____.
- Another reason _____ may occur is because _____.
- At first I thought _____ but now I think _____ because _____.

- I like how the author uses _____ to show _____.
- I like/don't like _____ because _____.
- My opinion is _____ because _____.
- The most important message is _____ because _____.

Cause and Effect:

_____ is the most likely cause for _____.

When _____ happened then _____ to place as a result.

I think _____ was caused by _____ because _____.

The effects of _____ were _____.

The reason for _____ was _____.

_____ occurred, and consequently _____.

That wasn't caused by _____ because _____.

Additional Sentence Starters for Text-Based Analytical Writing^v

<p>Tapping Prior Knowledge This relates to... This reminds me of...</p> <p>Making Predictions I think... If _____, then...</p> <p>Summarizing The basic gist is... The key information is...</p> <p>Adopting an Alignment The character I most identify with is... I really got into the story when... I can relate to this author because...</p> <p>Forming Interpretations What this means to me is... I think this represents... The idea I am getting is...</p>	<p>Revising Meaning At first I thought _____, but now I think ... My latest thought about this is...</p> <p>Analyzing the Author's Craft I like how the author uses _____ to show... A golden line for me is... This word/phrase stands out for me because...</p> <p>Reflecting and Relating So the big idea is... A conclusion I am drawing is... This relates to my life because...</p> <p>Evaluating I like/don't like _____ because... The most important message is _____ because...</p>
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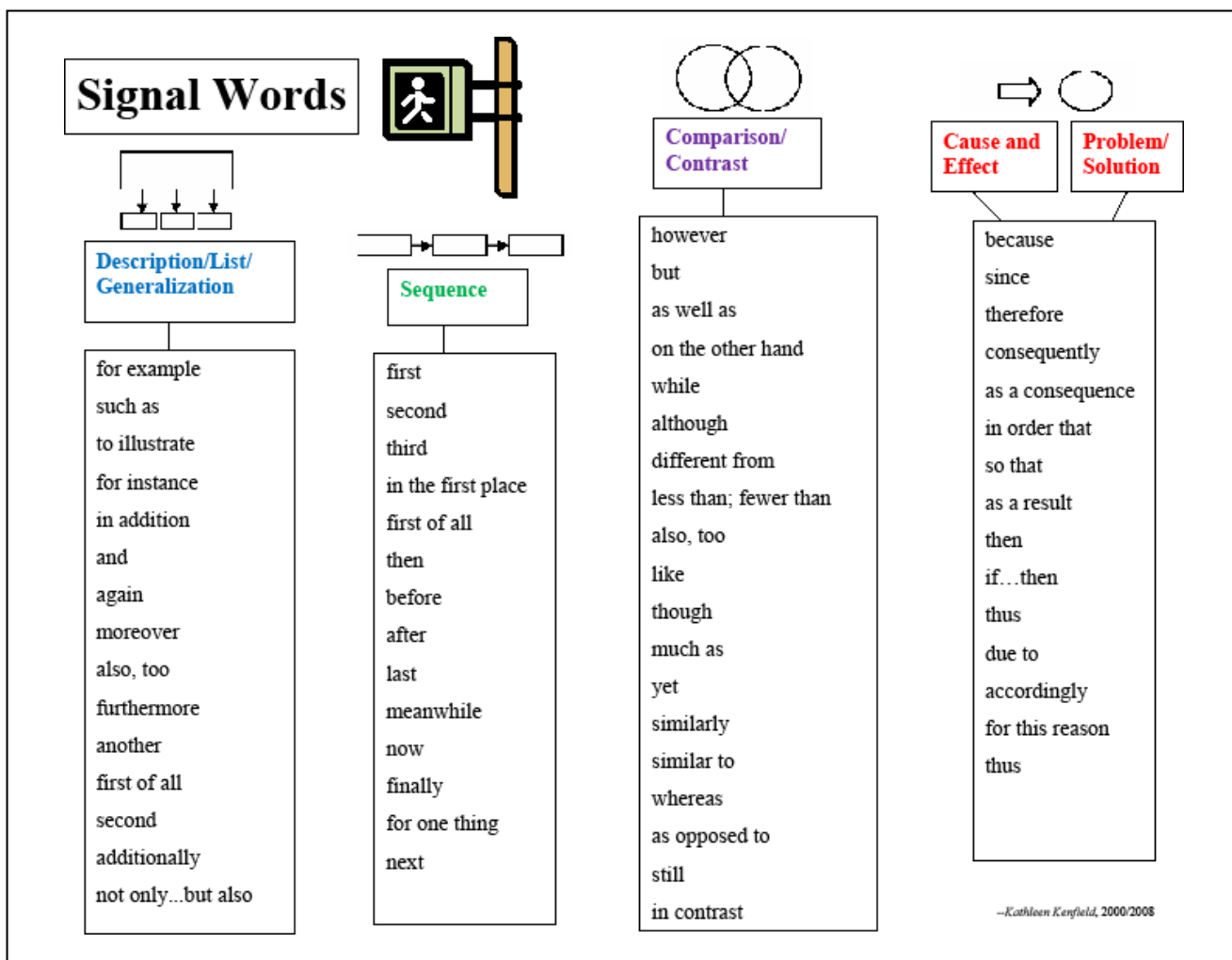
Signal Words

When to use signal words

Like sentence frames/starters, signal words can support students who are new to English in understanding what to include in a written response, and how to phrase their response in a way that conveys meaning to the reader or listener. Part of that meaning may be conveyed through commonly used “signal words.”

Signal words may be printed as a resource for students or displayed in a classroom for easy reference during writing and discussion. Students should be supplied with signal words with the goal of eventually being able to convey concepts like comparison/contrast, cause/effect, etc., without support.

Examples^{vi}:



Word Banks

When to use word banks

It is critical for English Language Learners, and indeed for all students, to be given the opportunity to use newly acquired vocabulary in the context of written and oral work. Doing so will allow them to reinforce meanings and actively practice using vocabulary in context.

To support this work, teachers may create a word bank of terms students are required to use in a given assignment or which are central to the understanding of a given text. The word bank may consist solely of the words themselves, or it can take the form of a student-friendly glossary to which students can refer to remind themselves of definitions. For students who are newer to English, a visual glossary may be provided, or, if time allows, students can create their own glossary containing both written and visual definitions.

ⁱ Staehr Fenner, Diane. *Advocating English Language Learners: A Guide for Educators*. Corwin. 2014

ⁱⁱ Echevarria, Jane. *Are Language Frames Good for English Learners?*. <http://www.janaechevarria.com/?p=191>. 2016.

ⁱⁱⁱ Institute for Education Sciences. *Teaching Academic Content and Literacy to English Learners in Elementary and Middle School*. 2014. https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/PracticeGuide/english_learners_pg_040114.pdf

^{iv} Examples are reproduced and adapted from:

- Staehr Fenner, Diane. *Advocating English Language Learners: A Guide for Educators*. Corwin. 2014
- Read, Write, Think. *Cause and Effect Questioning Frames*. http://www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/lesson_images/lesson965/questioning.pdf. 2006.
- Connecticut Accountability for Learning Initiative. *Effective Tier I Instruction For English Language Learners: Supplemental Materials Packet*. (2010).
- Institute for Education Sciences. *Teaching Academic Content and Literacy to English Learners in Elementary and Middle School*. https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/PracticeGuide/english_learners_pg_040114.pdf. 2014.

^v Institute for Education Sciences. *Teaching Academic Content and Literacy to English Learners in Elementary and Middle School*. https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/PracticeGuide/english_learners_pg_040114.pdf. 2014.

^{vi} Connecticut Accountability for Learning Initiative. *Effective Tier I Instruction For English Language Learners: Supplemental Materials Packet*. 2010.