

The CAPacity Gazette



October 2022

Dispatches from California Community Colleges Reforming Remediation

Because students have the capacity to succeed in challenging courses and we have the capacity to support them

This edition of the CAPacity Gazette focuses on strategies that boost transfer-level English completion for English learners who seek a college degree.



Overview

California community colleges are changing their approach to English learners (ELs) who seek a college degree, in large part because of landmark legislation ([AB 705 Irwin 2017](#)) that mandated placement and remediation reforms in math, English and English as a second language (ESL). Under AB 705, students should begin in coursework that gives them the best chance of making progress toward a degree. As a result of AB 705 and associated research into student outcomes, in fall 2019, nearly all students taking English for the first time enrolled in college composition, including, per state regulations, ELs with a U.S. high school diploma.

In California's community colleges, ELs are a diverse group with a variety of academic goals. For those who plan to earn a college degree (associate or baccalaureate), about half have graduated from a U.S. high school ([PACE 2022](#)). For ELs who are not U.S. high school graduates, the majority begin in ESL coursework. About 1/3 of ESL enrollees have a degree goal ([PPIC 2019](#)).

This publication focuses on strategies that boost TLE completion for ELs who seek a college degree. [English Learners and AB 705 Research](#) summarizes statewide studies that point to English and ESL placement policies and curricular structures that yield completion gains for ELs. [Statewide Scan of Models Supporting English Learners in College Composition](#) and [ESL Courses](#)

[Earning University Credit in Other General Education Areas](#) summarize the extent to which colleges are implementing new curricula aligned with this research. These articles include resources to help colleges design similar courses.

Three articles spotlight different versions of TLE composition for ELs: (1) [A Composition Course for English Learners Uses a Genre Approach](#), (2) [Two Corequisite Options Support English Learners in a Standard Composition Course](#), (3) [Pedagogy for English Learners Helps All Students in College Composition](#). A fourth provides a window into the integration of the humanities into ESL, [ESL Course Earns Humanities Credit at UC and CSU](#). These articles include links to classroom resources for supporting ELs and spotlight the experiences of two multilingual ELs, [Jeff Wang](#) and [Laith Khodr](#).

Underlying these curricular models is a belief that ELs can develop language skills within challenging, transferable academic courses—and that colleges can support students' language needs while enabling them to make progress on their educational goals. In [Across the False Divide: Case Studies of English Learners' Progress](#), two faculty with dual qualifications in English and ESL discuss how analyzing the writing of three ELs over time changed their view of the roles of the ESL and English departments in supporting language development.

Who is an English learner? In this publication, the term [English learners](#) (ELs) refers to students who come from homes where English is not the primary language and who need additional English language support to be successful in college.

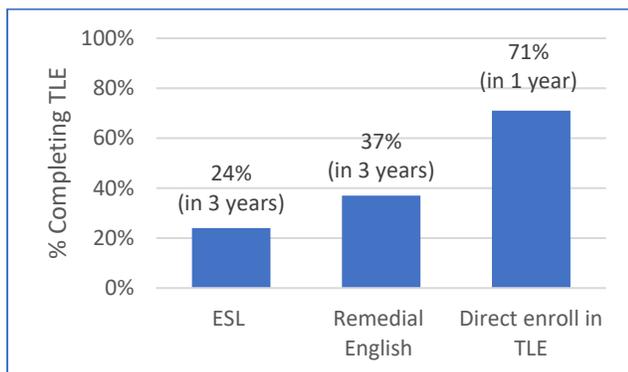
English Learners and AB 705 Research

[AB 705](#) (Irwin 2017) is historic legislation that transformed placement and remediation in California community colleges. The law requires colleges to place students based on high school grades and sets a standard of “maximizing the probability” that students enter and complete transferable college-level math and English within a year of their enrollment in the discipline. For students in credit-bearing English as a second language (ESL) programs, placement must be based on multiple measures, if high school grades are not available, and maximize completion of transfer-level English (TLE) composition within three years, instead of one.

Because placement policies differ across the 116 California community colleges, students with the same academic goals and similar academic backgrounds often have different educational trajectories depending on the college they attend. English learners (ELs) may start in ESL or English coursework at or below TLE. Research motivated by AB 705 seeks to determine the curricular pathways and starting points that give ELs the best chance of completing TLE composition in the specified timeframes.

English Learners with U.S. High School Diploma

Nearly half of degree-seeking ELs entering California community colleges are U.S. high school graduates. ELs with a U.S. high school diploma are more likely to complete TLE composition when they directly enroll in that course, or its equivalent, instead of taking prerequisite ESL or remedial English courses at the college ([MMAP 2020](#)).



TLE Completion for ELs with U.S. High School Diploma by Starting Point on Path to TLE Composition

This finding is true regardless of how many years students attended a U.S. high school before graduation. For example, consider ELs who started at a U.S. high school in the 12th grade and graduated. If they started in TLE composition at the community college, 81% completed that

course within 3 years, compared to 45% who began in remedial English and 30% who began in prerequisite ESL ([MMAP 2020](#)).

Those who enroll directly in TLE composition have higher completion regardless of high school GPA or how much of their high school coursework focused on English language development (ELD). Even ELs with the lowest high school GPAs (below 1.9) who remained in ELD courses throughout high school had better outcomes when they started in TLE composition than similar students who began in ESL coursework. In fact, students with the lowest high school GPAs who began in TLE composition had higher TLE completion rates than students with the highest GPAs (2.6 or greater) who began in ESL coursework, and this was true regardless of how many ELD courses they took in high school. These findings were consistent across race and ethnicity ([PACE 2022](#)).

Referencing the research, the California Community College Chancellor's Office instructed colleges in a November 2021 guidance [memo](#) to “place and ensure enrollment of English Language Learners who graduated from a U.S. high school (or the equivalent) directly into transfer-level English or an ESL equivalent transferable course.”

English Learners without U.S. High School Diploma

The majority of degree-seeking ELs who did not graduate from a U.S. high school begin in ESL coursework that earns elective or general education credit at the community college (credit ESL) ([MMAP 2019](#)). Per AB 705 mandates, they should begin in the course that gives them the best chance of completing TLE in 3 years.

Early statewide research showed that 94% of students beginning in an ESL equivalent to TLE composition completed that course in 3 years. For those beginning below TLE composition, there was a pattern of attrition in ESL course sequences that mirrored attrition previously observed in remedial English sequences. The lower a student started in the sequence, the lower their likelihood of completing TLE. For example, of those starting ESL one level below TLE, 60% complete TLE composition in 3 years compared to 47% starting 3 levels below and 35% starting 5 levels below. Researchers note that without more data on these students' academic backgrounds, it is difficult to determine if these outcomes are also due in part to differences in students' prior educational experiences and performance ([MMAP 2019](#)).

Beginning in fall 2022, California community colleges are in a 2-year process of verifying that their local ESL placement policies meet AB 705 standards for ELs who have not graduated from a U.S. high school.

In the meantime, some colleges are transforming their ESL programs based on research into ESL program design. A study by the Public Policy Institute of California found ESL students had higher 3-year TLE composition completion rates in programs with the following features ([PPIC 2019](#)):

- Shorter ESL sequences (3 or fewer courses) that culminate in TLE composition or its ESL equivalent
- ESL courses that count for transferable elective or general education credit
- Integrated skill development instead of teaching reading, writing, and speaking in separate ESL courses

For additional research on ELs, ESL and AB 705, see [Multiple Measures Project](#).

Statewide Scan of Models Supporting English Learners in College Composition

In California community colleges, nearly half of first-time degree-seeking English learners (ELs) are U.S. high school graduates, and the “maximize completion” standard of AB 705 requires colleges to place them into transfer-level English (TLE) composition.

English faculty may already use strategies within their mainstream composition classes to support ELs, but now many colleges are more intentionally tailoring college composition offerings for this population. Our [scan](#) of fall 2021 class schedules shows three models in use at 26 colleges.

Model Table with course information	Number of Colleges
New Versions of TLE Composition for ELs	14
EL Corequisite Support Courses for TLE Composition	6
Standard TLE Composition Sections Flagged for ELs	7

Across these models, ELs may be receiving similar support. In general, faculty with training in English language acquisition provide additional instruction and resources to develop ELs’ reading, writing, and language skills within the context of the composition course.

New Versions of Transfer-Level English Composition for English Learners

[College composition courses designed for ELs](#) satisfy the written communication requirement for the CSU baccalaureate degree ([CSU GE Area 2](#)), and all but one also satisfy the Intersegmental General Education Transfer Curriculum requirements for English Composition ([IGETC Area](#)

[1A](#)) and thus meet GE requirements in both the CSU and UC systems.

Two colleges offer these courses in the English department and 11 in an ESL department or the equivalent. Most are enhanced composition courses with slightly higher units and more contact hours than the college’s standard composition course. For example, [Cypress College](#) offers college composition courses in both the English and ESL departments, with enhanced versions for native speakers and for ELs that are 5 units instead of 4 units. The English department at [Mt. San Antonio College](#) offers a standard college composition course and a version for non-native English speakers, and both are 4 units.

In [A Composition Course for English Learners Uses a Genre Approach](#), Santa Rosa Junior College ESL faculty share their innovative approach to TLE composition for ELs.

Corequisite Support Courses for English Learners Attached to Transfer-Level Composition

Five colleges attach a [corequisite course for ELs](#) to specific sections of TLE composition, using a paired cohort model where the same instructor teaches both courses. At two colleges, the composition course and the corequisite are in the same department, either ESL or English. At 3 colleges, the standard English composition course has an ESL support course as a corequisite, for example [Foothill](#) and [Irvine Valley](#).

In [Two Corequisite Options Support English Learners in a Standard Composition Course](#) Irvine Valley College faculty compare their standard corequisite for college composition and their newer ESL corequisite.

Standard Composition Course Sections Flagged for English Learners

Seven colleges implemented a quick reform by simply flagging one or more sections of the standard TLE composition course in the class schedule with statements like, "This class provides support for students for whom English is a second language. All students are welcome."

[Pedagogy for English Learners Helps All Students in College Composition](#) gives a window into classrooms at two colleges that are flagging sections of standard TLE composition for ELs.

Important Endnote

Even with these tailored options, many ELs will still choose to enroll in the standard TLE composition course, and English faculty may need additional training to better serve them. According to Jose Cortes, an instructor of English and ESL at Solano College, "There is a population of ELs who will not enroll in a course labeled 'ESL' because of a perceived stigma, and intentional support from an English composition instructor will help support this population."

ESL Courses Earning University Credit in Other General Education Areas

At colleges that offer transferable ESL courses, degree-seeking ESL students are 16 percentage points more likely to complete transfer-level English (TLE) composition within three years when compared to colleges where ESL coursework is non-transferable ([PPIC 2019](#)).

Though this research includes courses that receive elective credit upon transfer, our scan of 2021-22 community college catalogs looked only for transferable courses that fulfill general education (GE) requirements. In this article, the focus is on advanced ESL courses that earn university GE credit in areas other than English composition.

Twenty colleges offer ESL courses that count for CSU GE in three areas other than written communication—most often in the humanities. Only five colleges have courses with Intersegmental General Education Transfer Curriculum (IGETC) certification in any area outside of English composition, and all are in the humanities. Courses with IGETC certification transfer to both the UC and CSU for GE credit.

GE Transfer for ESL Courses Fall 2021 Table with course information	Number of Colleges
CSU GE Area A1 Oral Communication	3
CSU GE Area A3 Critical Thinking	1
CSU GE Area C2 Humanities	11
CSU GE Area C2 and IGETC Area 3B Humanities	5

In a CAP [webinar](#), community college ESL faculty shared examples of rejection and

persistence in trying to obtain IGETC certification in the Humanities for ESL courses. The IGETC Area 3B criteria for the humanities state, "Advanced foreign language and ESL courses (which do not have a principal focus on skills acquisition) may be approved if they include substantial literary or cultural aspects," yet few colleges have secured this option for their ESL students.

A report by an [ESL Taskforce](#), consisting of professors from all three of California's public higher education systems, highlights inequitable treatment of ESL courses in IGETC evaluations relative to foreign language courses. "Many advanced ESL courses contain a rigor and depth of content which demand of ELs a level of cultural and linguistic engagement that far exceeds course expectations for native English speakers in elementary or intermediate foreign language courses," which earn humanities credit.

The report also notes inconsistent IGETC review of advanced ESL courses. "Submissions of credit ESL courses for fulfillment of transfer GE have resulted in approvals at some colleges and denials at other colleges despite having substantially similar course outlines."

The report recommends that "advanced-level ESL courses be systematically reviewed to assess whether they should be accepted as fulfilling requirements for Humanities Areas C2 and 3B or other general education requirements."

In [ESL Course Earns Humanities Credit at UC and CSU](#), Palomar College ESL professors provide a window into the state's first ESL course that transferred to the UC and CSU in the humanities. See also [Tips for Navigating the IGETC approval Process](#).

A Composition Course for English Learners Uses a Genre Approach

For many teachers, the purpose of transfer-level English (TLE) composition is to prepare students to write in other college courses and in their careers. Yet most students will rarely, if ever, need to write the MLA-style essays that are the mainstay of many TLE composition curricula. To better serve students' future writing needs, Santa Rosa Junior College (SRJC) ESL professors Bitá Bookman and Jessica Pardoe co-developed a genre based TLE composition course intended primarily for English learners (ELs).

According to Bookman, "The focus is on analyzing genres and learning the tools to succeed in any genre that students may come across at college or at work." Pardoe explains, "Multilingual students don't necessarily have the literacy experiences with English that would allow them to intuit from the readings how to write in those genres, which is why [research](#) shows that the genre approach is more effective for these students."

In ESL 10, SRJC's UC- and CSU-approved composition course for multilingual students, Bookman first introduces the concept of genre through music and film. "Students recognize how different country music songs or different horror movies share common elements, but there is also creativity and variety within a genre. They are able to transfer that knowledge to their understanding of different genres of writing, starting with things like op-eds and complaint letters," says Bookman.

In Bookman's course, the first essay requires students to find and analyze three to five samples of both an academic genre and a workplace genre, such as research articles, summary-response papers, memos, meeting notes, and college or professional emails. Students are encouraged to select genres that mean something to them personally or professionally. "For instance, students who are nurses find case studies, and they observe how that genre is used within their workplace." Bookman notes that "genres go beyond textual elements. They also reflect ideological elements of the community that uses that genre. For example, nursing students discover why case studies do not tend to use pathos as a rhetorical appeal, or why APA is used rather than MLA. The point is that textual features are connected to values or ideologies." Their second paper analyzes two examples of a genre to show how genres allow for flexibility

depending on the context/audience. The third essay critiques a genre. Students have chosen to critique the five-paragraph essay, syllabi, cosmetic labels, resumes, film reviews, menus, user manuals, and more. Says Pardoe, "They're apprentices in their fields, and this approach develops their eye to look toward what are the conventions of their discipline or field, the language it uses, and how they need to behave in this discipline or field."

So far, the approach is working. SRJC [data](#) show similar or higher success rates for students taking composition for multilingual students (69%; n=99) compared to success for all students taking mainstream composition (58%; n= 2,436). In composition for multilingual students, 2/3 of the students were Latino (n=66) and 67% successfully completed the course. This compares favorably to mainstream composition, where Latino students were less than half of the population and just 52% succeeded in the course.

"We are capitalizing on their strengths. High-level critical analysis of things they're unfamiliar with is something they do all the time as multilingual students." — ESL professor Jessica Pardoe

For language support, Bookman meets with students one-on-one, provides lessons on academic vocabulary and sentence structures, and gives two rounds of feedback for each essay. On the first draft, she focuses on ideas and organization, and on the second, she focuses on sentence-level issues. Students keep track of their language errors and write a reflection letter at the end that explains how their writing has improved. The college also has a tutoring center just for ESL students, and Pardoe requires students to meet with an ESL tutor to review their writing for clarity, sentence structure, and organization.

While the course description states that the class is for ELs, Pardoe says, "Anyone can enroll, and we don't question their language background." According to Bookman, some ELs who weren't successful in mainstream composition succeed in composition for multilingual students, but not because it's easier; in fact, she says students in her class "far exceed" the writing requirement for [TLE composition](#).

The difference is that in ESL 106, “The instructor is trained to work with ESL students. Our students say native speakers speak too fast and don’t always include language learners in the conversation, whereas ESL teachers love to pause to allow students to formulate their thoughts and words,” says Pardoe. “ESL teachers have sensitivity to Western themes versus assuming they’ll get the references, and we do some pre-teaching about pauses and silence in American culture. And our pedagogical approach is different and could help some students learn better.” Bookman notes that the class is also capped at 25 versus 30 for mainstream composition. “With fewer students, we can devote that time to work with English learners individually.”

Both instructors want multilingual students to have different options for taking TLE composition. Pardoe says, “When I teach the ESL course that is one level below transfer, I always present both options to students: mainstream composition and ESL composition. Before ESL 10, we saw a lot of students in ESL courses who didn’t continue to transfer-level composition. We just want to encourage more English language learners to go on to complete transfer-level composition in either path.”

Hear more from Bitia Bookman in the [CAP webinar Classroom Strategies to Support ESL Students in College Composition](#).

Two Corequisite Options Support English Learners in a Standard Composition Course

After the pandemic forced everyone into remote learning, Irvine Valley College (IVC) professors Rebecca Beck (ESL) and Summer Serpas (English) made a pledge: They would develop a curriculum with the theme of human connection and use it with both English learners (ELs) and English-proficient students in transfer-level English (TLE) composition with corequisite support.

Beck teaches IVC’s [ESL designated](#) corequisite course, and Serpas teaches the [mainstream](#) one. Both are two-unit support courses paired with a section of [TLE composition](#) taught by the same instructor. In the transfer-level course, they both use the [curriculum they built](#) together, with the same books, essay prompts, and assignments. They also use many of the same corequisite support course materials, but Beck integrates more intensive and structured language support for her students.

This collaboration, which began as a way to support one another during remote learning, resulted in a deeper understanding of the differences and similarities between EL-designated and mainstream TLE.

The key takeaways:

- The same rigorous TLE composition curriculum can be used successfully with ELs in the mainstream and ESL-specific sections.
- Integrated reading and writing support that allows instructors to assess and address students’ individual needs is necessary in the mainstream and ESL versions.

- Both courses provide language support. Beck uses more intentional whole class and small group activities focused on language acquisition, as well as individualized language support. Serpas mainly works individually with ELs on language issues in the context of her standard assignments.

“This collaboration has showed me that there is a significant overlap in how teachers can support English learners in mainstream English courses and ESL-specific ones.”
— English professor Summer Serpas

Students come from a wide range of proficiency levels and language backgrounds, particularly in Beck’s course. Serpas estimates that a third of the students in her mainstream course are non-native English speakers, and some need significant language support. Except for two or three of her students who shifted over to Beck’s course when Serpas suggested it, Serpas says the mainstream course is well-suited to support language learners that have chosen to take it.

Success in the courses has been high, averaging around 73% for both teachers. When asked to reflect on their curriculum and pedagogy, Serpas and Beck identified 4 areas in their course design that contribute to their students’ success.

Engaging Course Theme The two teachers credit their course theme and the way that they sequence assignments as helping students feel

confident enough to do the work. “Once students read the first book by Brené Brown, they’re all in and want to know more about the concept of belonging. Then when we bring in the more challenging texts, they’re more willing to invest in them,” says Serpas. Beck says the human connection theme has been particularly impactful for ELs: “They’ve felt left out because they couldn’t speak English or spoke with an accent. The human connection framework becomes a springboard to speaking about being a linguistic outsider. It allows them to bring linguistic issues front and center in a validating way.”

Serpas underscores another important advantage of a themed course: “Going deep with one topic helps students build expertise in that topic, so by the end of the course when they are creating their own projects, they are really knowledgeable in these different areas of human connection.” For ELs, one topic instead of many can also lighten the linguistic load of navigating new vocabulary and concepts.

Reading Support Serpas provides feedback on [reading logs](#) that require students to interact in meaningful ways with the texts in an ongoing written conversation between student and teacher. She notes, “If I tell them, *Refocus on this idea, or I think you misunderstood this part of the chapter*, they can learn from my feedback before it’s time to write their essays. This helps everybody and can be especially helpful for students who are struggling with the language.” Beck uses many of the same reading activities in her course, but she also provides more targeted reading support for ELs by drawing from her instructional toolbox of ESL strategies. For example, she uses images to help students understand Brown’s analogy between facing one’s own inner landscape (a drawing of a head filled with words describing thoughts and emotions) and “braving the wilderness” (a picture of nature).

Writing Support Both instructors follow a scaffolded approach that starts with an assignment that helps students [unpack](#) essay prompts. Serpas has also adopted a [strategy](#) developed by Sacramento City College professor Jesus Limón Guzman that provides opportunities for students to see how current and former students approached assignments. Serpas offers extra credit to students who are willing to post drafts. She then publicly comments on these so that struggling students can learn from both the drafts and the feedback. In addition, she shares a

model essay from a previous semester and has students annotate what the student did well in the essay and explain what they learned from it as writers. Serpas says, “English learners clearly benefit from these models since, in addition to using the samples as structural models, looking at things like organization and transitions, they can also see the language other students are using to discuss the subject.” When students are drafting their essays, Beck also creates vocabulary [lists](#), which include grammar terminology and examples of how they might want to use the words when composing. This supports vocabulary development and more complex sentence construction.

Serpas and Beck also provide individualized writing support during in-class writing time or via one-on-one conferences. “That’s where I mostly address language issues,” Serpas says. Online, Beck says her students can opt to work in a Zoom breakout room with the teacher, the embedded tutor, or by themselves in the “I’m behind, don’t bother me” room. Beck emphasizes that students also need individualized time with her because “not all language learners are at the same proficiency levels, so the instructor needs to offer language support that ranges from the most basic instruction in grammar to the most advanced work in contrastive rhetoric.” In face-to-face classes, Serpas has students bring in their completed draft and edit it during class just before submitting it: “It allows me to address ELs’ and others’ needs individually, right when they need it.”

“The goal isn’t to teach them how to use 12 verb tenses perfectly. It’s to teach them what they need to communicate.”

— ESL professor Rebecca Beck

Other Types of Support Beck also uses two types of small groups for additional linguistic and academic support. “Students catalog their errors and work in small groups with the embedded tutor to go over language points with other students who have their same issues.” She also creates small social support groups, which she calls [moai](#)—a reference to Okinawan social support groups introduced in one of the [course texts](#). “These groups give students a safe space to communicate in English and help each other academically.” Serpas checks in with students

individually through a weekly survey, allowing her to provide targeted support as needed.

Hear more from Rebecca Beck in the [CAP webinar](#) *Classroom Strategies to Support ESL Students in College Composition*.

Irvine Valley College Student Jeff (Tianqi) Wang

Transfer-level English (TLE) composition was the only class IVC student Jeff Wang had ever dropped. That's why Wang—who hails from China and speaks Mandarin, English, and Shanghainese—was nervous when he enrolled in Summer Serpas' online TLE composition and corequisite support course in spring 2021. "But Professor Serpas broke things down and built the assignments in a way that improves your confidence," Wang says. "The first paper is always the hardest, so she spent more time on that than the rest."

"Reading and writing are always hard, especially for non-native speakers," Wang says. "I'd have to translate words into my own language, so I spent more time reading the book than the local students." Wang says he also struggled with grammar. "As a non-native speaker, the way we think and write sentences is structured differently than English." Wang received support for these challenges by going to the Writing Center and the Student Success Center, but also directly from Professor Serpas. He says, "Professor Serpas did something different than all other professors. For every assignment we do it on Google Docs and she leaves a comment next to my answers. She spends the time to read what I wrote. She's respecting the time and effort students make." Wang also says he would meet with Serpas during office hours and have conversations to help improve his writing.

Wang says the corequisite course helped him, but he thinks it's only helpful for students in need. "You get more help, but it's more time in class. I have friends who are fine taking college English without it." For himself, Wang says, "The supporting class helped. It wasn't extra work but going deeper into college English material so we can understand it at a higher level. I'd save my questions for the support class. *Should I do this, or should I do like this in my essay?*"

Since he took the class during COVID, entirely online, Wang says he was at his house "24/7 without talking to anyone. So, it wasn't just writing support but having other people to talk to during the hardest time of social isolation." He says, "Professor Serpas was so positive, and she helped us all stay mentally healthy during that time. It was hard, but we worked through it together."

Since completing Serpas' course, Wang says he doesn't have the same stress level in his other classes. "I learned a lot of knowledge, but also time management and how to manage stress," he says. Wang, who is finishing up his science prerequisites in preparation for transferring to a university as a nursing student, believes that being multilingual and fluent in English will help him when he transfers and later when he cares for patients from different language backgrounds.



"The supporting class helped. It wasn't extra work but going deeper into college English material so we can understand it at a higher level."

Pedagogy for English Learners Helps All Students in College Composition

In 2013, Berkeley City College conducted a focus group with English learners (ELs) who had taken mainstream transfer-level English (TLE) composition. According to Gabe Winer, chair of the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) department, “The students said their composition teachers had done a good job teaching them writing, but they wished they’d had more help with reading and more practice speaking and presenting in class.” Winer subsequently helped create, and now teaches, a section of TLE composition that is earmarked for English language learners in the course schedule but open to any student.

“It’s the same as any transfer-level composition course, but students get support with academic grammar and vocabulary and lots of opportunities to speak in small groups in class, which arguably, should be happening for everyone.” —ESOL professor Gabe Winer

Winer uses [Socratic seminars](#) to help students learn and practice the rhetorical moves, language, and norms of academic discussions. Explicit instructions demystify these conventions. For example, Winer directs students to “watch each other’s cues, and try to take turns naturally.” [Handouts](#) describe “class discussion language patterns,” such as “connect comments to previous comments, and use people’s names as much as possible.” Sentence frames help students structure and word their thoughts, such as, “I agree with [peer or author name] that ___, and I would add that ___,” or “I think [author] gets to that in paragraph 8 where she says ___,” or “This is similar to [author]’s description of ___.” With clear expectations and explicit scaffolding, ELs more confidently participate in group discussions about course readings, and this also benefits other students who are new to academic conversations.

Santa Barbara City ESL department chair Marit Ter Mate-Martinsen also teaches a section of TLE composition that is flagged for ELs. Like Winer, Ter Mate-Martinsen intentionally scaffolds and demystifies parts of the reading and writing process that are often left unexamined in more traditional composition courses.

Everything is broken down, demonstrated, and practiced in small parts. For example, what analysis is and how to do it; what evidence is and how to use it. There is also frequent built-in review where students reflect on their progress.

“It’s very empowering for English learners to learn that there is a hidden structure to things.”—ESL professor Marit Ter Mate-Martinsen

Instructions for assignments break down prompts, include helpful sentence frames, and provide models. For [example](#), in a discussion board assignment, students are asked to respond to a quote they chose. Additional instructions clarify what is meant by *respond to*: “what is the significance of this quote, what conclusions can you draw, what does the quote imply or suggest, what example can I give to illustrate the point I am trying to make?” There are suggested phrases for introducing the quote and for responding to the quote and a fully fleshed out example.

Each week students complete two discussion posts and 2 to 4 low-stakes assessments that build strategies, self-editing skills, and metacognitive routines.

Ter Mate-Martinsen also uses many strategies common in composition instruction, but there is a nuanced awareness of the needs of ELs. For example, many instructors who teach online provide a video [overview](#) of the work for the week. In her videos, Ter Mate-Martinsen gives a description of upcoming assignments with commentary that gives context, connects ideas, and normalizes struggle in a reassuring way. For instance, in describing a TED Talk by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie that is part of the week’s assignments, she says, “Depending on your educational background or language background, this is not an easy TED Talk, but it is rich with so many examples and ideas. I suggest that you focus on one or two big ideas. Don’t try to understand everything right away.” She shares that she has listened to this talk many times and that is part of the process.

[Freewriting](#) is another ubiquitous strategy that Ter Mate-Martinsen tailors in ways that help ELs. Weekly freewriting assignments are used to review course material, synthesize readings, apply course concepts to everyday life, and prepare for an

essay. Freewriting may particularly help ELs because they can explore their ideas without concerns about proper use of language or rhetorical constructs. This extended use of freewriting complements the more heavily scaffolded support students receive for all parts of essay writing.

Ter Mate-Martinsen also uses short, upbeat, and encouraging instructional videos throughout the course which benefit ELs and native speakers alike who may want to hit pause and replay explanations. Her use of images or infographics to illustrate terms or cultural references also makes the course more accessible to ELs.

Scaffolding essay assignments around a central theme is another conventional composition teaching strategy that Ter Mate-Martinsen uses to intentionally support ELs. For example, in the second essay, students write about stereotypes, and in the third essay, they choose a related subtopic, such as how to combat stereotypes of Latinos in social media. Every week in response to a reading, students identify a passage that is relevant to their chosen topic and post a summary with an analysis of that passage which can eventually be used in their essay. "Once they have a base understanding of the topic," Ter Mate-Martinsen says, "they use library databases

and Google sources to develop additional paragraphs for their essays." All students benefit from this careful sequencing and the many opportunities for feedback, but it also helps ELs by relieving them of the need to develop a whole new vocabulary base for each essay and giving them time to work on language issues prior to submitting their final paper.

Even though the section is flagged for ELs, many native speakers still enroll, which these instructors see as a benefit. Ter Mate-Martinsen says, "The native English speakers in the course said they hadn't learned all of these academic things in high school, so the demystification helped them too." Winer says, "Because many of the ESOL students had already attended universities in other countries or taken a previous ESOL class that focused on reading and writing, they helped U.S. native speakers who were in their first semester of college with the rigorous reading and writing demands of the course, while the U.S. students helped to fill in the cultural background.

The materials for Ter Mate-Martinsen's transfer-level English composition course for multilingual students are available on [Canvas Commons](#).

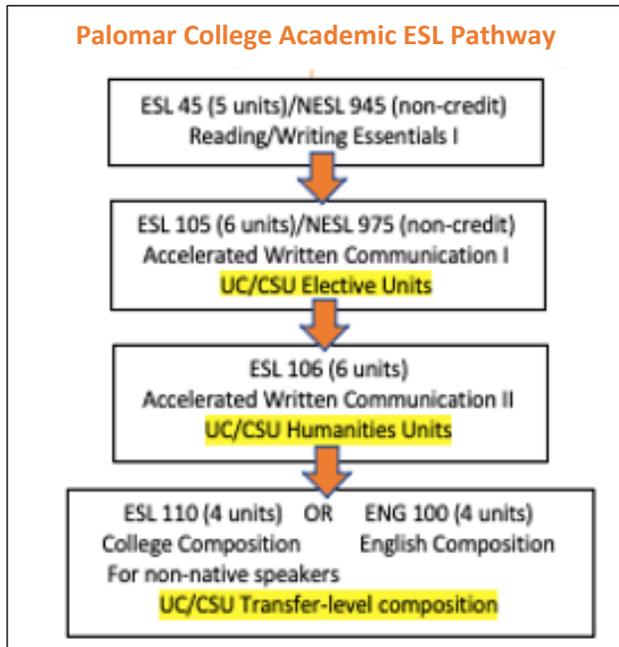
Compilation of Strategies to Support English Learners in College Composition

- Individual conferences with the teacher or embedded tutor
- Supportive feedback with links for grammar errors or how to notice and use linguistic structures
- Small-group conferences with the teacher or embedded tutor to cover language issues
- Pre-reading lists of difficult passages and phrases students might struggle with
- [Reading logs](#) and just-in-time reading support to help with understanding difficult passages
- [Activities](#) to help unpack writing prompts
- [Peer models](#) of essay assignments
- Public teacher [feedback](#) on volunteer students' drafts
- Pre-draft [lists](#) of vocabulary and writing structures students might want to use in their essays
- Academic [sentence frames](#)
- "Language detective" [activities](#) to help students find and analyze vocabulary and [sentence structures](#) to use in writing for different disciplines
- In-class time to draft and edit with instructor or embedded tutor feedback
- Peer feedback
- Multiple drafts with instructor feedback on content draft and then on language draft
- Relevant themes (e.g., [human connection](#); discrimination and bias, including [accent bias](#))
- [Genre analysis](#)
- Scaffolded assignments
- Peer groups or [moai](#) for academic support

See CAP's 2021 [webinar](#) for another deep dive into how ESL-trained faculty are using these and other strategies to support ELs in TLE composition.

ESL Course Earns Humanities Credit at CSU and UC

In fall 2021, Palomar College was one of 5 community colleges in California with an advanced ESL course ([ESL106](#)) that counts for humanities credit in both CSU and UC (CSU GE Area C2, IGETC Area 3B). In addition, the course serves as a bridge to transfer-level English (TLE) composition.



The ESL 106 course outline blends the humanities with reading and writing for non-native speakers of English. The course objectives include “develop academic vocabulary” and “edit and revise writing,” as well as “analyze and interpret a wide variety of texts” and “use critical thinking skills to analyze and draw from culturally diverse experiences, readings, and discussions to inform essay writing.”

Palomar College ESL professor Heather Hosaka teaches ESL 106. In her course, students read about the experiences of a diverse group of people living in the U.S.—young Black men, the undocumented, and Japanese internment camp survivors—as well as international issues, such as apartheid and oppression in South Africa. Authors hail from India, South Africa, the U.S., and the Philippines, and students research and write about the causes and effects of racism in these countries and their own.

Hosaka also weaves personal testimonies into the curriculum. For example, as students learn about systemic racism, they watch a video where professors and counselors at the college share

their experiences with discrimination. Hosaka also shares her father-in-law’s childhood experiences in a Japanese internment camp. She says, “A lot of students don’t know about that part of U.S. history, and studying this with them as they prepare to write their essays is really powerful.”

Palomar ESL professor Nicole Siminski, who also teaches ESL 106, created a [unit](#) on accent bias. Hosaka uses this material, too. “Many of our students have shame about their accents,” Hosaka says, “or they think that accent means poor pronunciation. Exploring this topic helps many to realize that accents can be part of their personality and are beautiful.” When asked to write an open letter advocating for a change at Palomar, one student wrote to the college president, whose parents had come through the ESL program. The student shared her excitement that the college was being led by someone with a nonstandard accent.

The course serves a wide range of students, including international students who have been in the U.S. for just a few weeks and students who have progressed through Palomar’s academic ESL pathway.

Siminski says her initial course survey shows that at the beginning of the semester, ESL 106 students generally lack confidence in academic discourse: speaking in class, writing a research paper, and/or understanding college texts. “They might want to take biology or a counseling course, but they’re nervous about what kind of writing and reading they’ll be doing in these classes.” To build students’ confidence, Siminski uses scaffolded assignments, such as an annotated bibliography that students build in layers, starting with summaries of articles and then adding a response, an evaluation, and finally a synthesis. “That assignment is a living document, so they’re constantly adjusting and adding to it,” she says. An embedded tutor meets with students before or after class, and both Siminski and Hosaka say these tutors are a key to enabling students to succeed in the rigorous, 6-unit class.

To support students’ language development, Siminski teaches students to be “language detectives.” She says, “Instead of giving prescriptive grammar rules, I ask them to pull out grammar patterns from what they’re reading. I’ll ask them, ‘*Why did the author choose to use a semicolon here?*’ Then I ask them to take their

own ideas and use a semicolon to produce a similar effect. They start noticing the patterns, and when we do paraphrasing, I ask them to duplicate [sentence patterns](#) that they've seen in the reading." Siminski explains to students, "Academic English looks different in biology than it does in sociology, so it's up to you to analyze samples of writing in your future classes, to pull out and learn the language necessary for whatever field you go into." According to Siminski, "Students appreciate learning these strategies and that they can do them autonomously. They like

building their own banks of [sentence frames](#) that matter to them."

For Hosaka, the combination of ESL and humanities content means that students "learn the skills they need to write for their college courses and careers. But what I really love about the class is the topics that we cover. It's really exciting to go on that journey with them and to see students' minds open." Siminski feels the same. "It's my favorite class and the most rewarding. The students grow so much in this class."

Palomar College ESL Student Laith Khodr

In 2019, when the 17-year-old Laith Khodr got to the United States from Syria, he spoke French and Arabic but no English. Despite becoming homeless shortly after his arrival, he graduated high school with a 3.7 GPA, and in 2021, he enrolled at Palomar College. As a U.S. high school graduate, Khodr was eligible to begin in transfer-level English (TLE) composition but elected to enroll in ESL coursework below that level. Fortunately, Palomar's ESL program provides transferable credit for each of the three ESL courses Khodr ended up taking. This meant he could work on his English while progressing toward his long-term goal of earning an MA in international business.

In fall 2021, Khodr took Palomar's ESL 106, an advanced ESL course that serves as a bridge into TLE composition and counts for general education credit in the humanities at both CSU and UC. He enrolled in an online section with ESL Professor Nicole Siminski. He says Siminski "genuinely wanted to know what I've been through and how to help me make a difference in the world."

He also says the topics from the humanities "make this class special: how ESL students are judged as unintelligent and not striving, what is implicit bias, what is explicit bias. The topics were all about the problems that we face every single day." Says Khodr, "You walk into the class and walk out with something you didn't know the first time."

Beyond the topics, Khodr says ESL 106 was "the most helpful" of his college courses, giving him the language and research skills to earn an A in a speech class and the confidence to represent Palomar's EOPS program on a recent 75-person Zoom call. Khodr says he still uses practices he learned in the class, like not letting unfamiliar words trip him up in reading or conversation. "Sometimes the professor would ask us to say five things we got from the chapter. Now I read fifteen minutes a day, and I practice that on paper some days. Another day, I summarize."

Says Khodr, "A closed mouth does not get fed. No matter how smart I am or what knowledge I have, I can't even ask the right questions or emphasize my perspective if I can't express myself in English." He says, "It's a misconception that after my last ESL course, it means I'm done. I'm still not perfect at English or writing. That's what motivates me to read more, to write more. But there's a huge difference between having no idea how to write an essay and writing an essay of 2,000 words with five sources. I've come a long way, but it's not the end of the journey. It's just the beginning."

When asked if other colleges should provide GE credit for ESL courses, Khodr says, "Our students deserve to be able to have that knowledge and experience to be able to speak up for themselves and about things they care about. The only way to give our students the confidence is to offer ESL courses for transfer credit. Students need the credit to transfer and don't tend to enroll if the classes aren't for credit. When ESL courses count, students can get the knowledge, experience, and confidence, and at the same time keep moving forward and keep building their dreams."



Tips for Navigating the IGETC Approval Process

Before submitting courses for IGETC review,

- Closely examine the [IGETC Standards](#) and integrate elements of the target general education (GE) area throughout the course outline.
- Avoid or minimize learning objectives and content that are explicitly described as not meeting standards. For example, ESL courses that count for IGETC Area 3 for humanities cannot have language skills acquisition as a principal focus and cannot be English composition courses.

Palomar's ESL department chair Tracy Fung also suggests

- Connecting with ESL departments at other colleges who are engaged in this type of work.
- Working closely with the local curriculum committee and articulation officer.

If your course is rejected, your college can appeal the decision or resubmit a revised course outline as part of the next round of IGETC submissions.

Once the course has IGETC approval, it counts for both UC and CSU GE credit. At that point, Fung recommends informing college counselors and local high schools that the course earns transferable GE credit. She also encourages ESL faculty to collaborate on curriculum and to participate in professional development before teaching the course.

Across the False Divide: Case Studies of English Learners' Progress

By Melissa Reeves and Jose Cortes

Guest authors, Melissa Reeves and Jose Cortes, are leaders in CAP's work to support English learners.

With AB 705 propelling more English learners (ELs) into transfer-level English (TLE) composition, some ESL and English teachers question these students' readiness for the course. But as faculty who teach both English and ESL courses, we get to see our ESL students' writing continue to grow as they move from ESL and into TLE composition. From this vantage point, we came to see a false divide between ESL and English programs.

Several years ago, we asked three of our ESL students if we could gather samples of their writing as they moved from pre-transfer-level ESL courses into TLE composition and beyond. Closely examining these students' writing over time affirmed for us that language acquisition is continuous, incremental, and context-specific. They did not need near-perfect English to be successful in TLE composition or other advanced coursework. Like their native speaker counterparts, our former ESL students still had areas for growth in their writing, but their language skills continued to develop within challenging, transferable academic courses.

Case Studies

Han was born in Vietnam, immigrated to the U.S. with her family as a teenager, and graduated

from a California high school. Under post-AB 705 placement practices, U.S. high school graduates like Han entering college today have direct access to TLE composition, but at the time Han began in our advanced ESL course before taking TLE composition and a second TLE course that met critical thinking requirements for transfer.

[Han's writing samples](#) show incremental growth in her use of rhetorical strategies. From the beginning in the advanced ESL course, Han integrates a quote, summarizes the author's position, and argues an opposing perspective, though surface-level errors impact the clarity of her writing. In TLE composition, she shows a blossoming understanding of academic essay structure by using intentional rhetorical strategies, such as hooking her reader and using personal experience in order to build context for the topic of her essay. In the subsequent critical thinking course, she exhibits stronger analysis and more rhetorical control: providing a compelling context for readers, using a text from her own outside research to counter a prevailing mindset, and presenting a counterargument in her thesis. Her language skills also grew to meet the demands of increasingly sophisticated tasks. Some teachers might see Han's early surface-level errors as evidence that she "wasn't ready" for TLE composition. But to us, her growth showed that she could have risen to the challenge of TLE

composition a semester sooner had that been the policy at the time.

In our ESL courses, we also meet immigrants like Titawan, an adult learner from Thailand with two children who came to our college to pursue a degree in nursing. In [Titawan's writing samples](#) we see the development of her ability to incorporate information from outside texts. In an ESL assignment, we recognize that Titawan is drawing inspiration from Malcolm Gladwell's "10,000-hour rule" in her analysis of her golf skills, but she does not directly reference Gladwell or his ideas. In her first essay for TLE composition, she now cites her source. In her final essay she integrates an outside source to inform her thesis statement, and she provides detailed context for her topic, establishes a sense of urgency, and demonstrates that this topic is worthy of her reader's attention. In Titawan's writing we see how the rich life experiences of adult immigrants often provide schemata for advanced reading comprehension, while the language and rhetorical tools to express the full complexity of their arguments take more time to bloom.

We see this same dynamic in the [written work of Haleena](#), an adult immigrant from Afghanistan. At each stage of her development as a writer, she shows an ability to construct a text-based argument alongside incremental progress with language and rhetorical control. In an essay written halfway through the advanced ESL course, Haleena expresses a clear central idea about the importance of balancing laws with personal freedoms. She develops this idea with examples of her own and from the text, but at this stage, she does not fully explain the relationships between her claims and the supporting evidence. However, in TLE composition the next semester, Haleena uses transitional phrases and repetition to help readers follow her ideas, and her writing shows fewer surface errors. She draws a powerful connection between Greek

mythology and present-day Afghanistan, examining the personal devastation wrought by forced marriage. Haleena again draws on personal experience in her moving account of motherhood in a piece she wrote a year later for her critical thinking class. At this stage, her writing demonstrates continued growth in her control of rhetorical elements and language. Here her use of discipline-specific vocabulary is an example of how students learn such vocabulary just-in-time when they need it.

Conclusion

As English and ESL teachers, we often did not think about the college-level courses our students are taking in other disciplines, courses that require reading and writing skills. Even with their imperfect English, as they were taking ESL and English courses, these ELs were also successfully completing courses in physics and chemistry (Han), child development and nutrition (Titawan), and math and business (Haleena). They also passed courses in public speaking, film, and music. Altogether, these three ELs earned Cs or higher in 45 of the 49 courses they took, with As or Bs in the vast majority (38) of their classes. And within a year of the last writing sample shown in this study, Haleena had completed an associate degree in business administration.

Seeing our former ESL students succeed in transferable English courses and in other disciplines, we no longer think an ESL or English course or program should try to equip ELs with all of the English they will need for every situation — an impossible expectation. Instead, we now aim to help students achieve English that is *good enough* to be understood within the current writing situation and to give them tools for continuing to grow their language skills in college and beyond.

See Melissa Reeves and Jose Cortes present "Across the False Divide" as a [CAP webinar](#).

This issue of the CAPacity Gazette was inspired by CAP's ESL webinar series in 2021-2022, led by Melissa Reeve and Jose Cortes. They authored "Across the False Divide" and served as reviewers and content experts for this publication. Leslie Henson conducted interviews and authored the rest of the articles.



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